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Université de
Sherbrooke

The first comprehensive national study on wellness in the legal profession is published

**For Immediate Release
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Findings from the first comprehensive national study of its kind paint an alarming picture of the wellness of Canadian legal professionals. Legal professionals in all areas of practice and in all jurisdictions suffer from significantly high levels of psychological distress, depression, anxiety, burnout and suicidal ideation, with those in the early years of practice experiencing some of the highest rates of distress.

The report on ***The National Study on the Psychological Health Determinants of Legal Professionals in Canada*** is now available. Undertaken by a research team at the Université de Sherbrooke led by Dr. Nathalie Cadieux, with funding from the Federation of Law Societies of Canada and the Canadian Bar Association, the study fills a critical gap in the knowledge about the mental health of legal professionals.

“The report is a wake-up call for the profession and the regulators,” said Nicolas Plourde, President of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. “The findings are extremely troubling, but the study provides us with information we need for all the stakeholders – employers, regulators and legal professionals themselves - to make evidence-based decisions about policies and practices that will help,” Mr. Plourde added.

“The data in this comprehensive report sheds a bright light on the heavy toll that our daily work takes on legal professionals and their loved ones,” said Steeves Bujold, President of the Canadian Bar Association. “As a member of the LGBTQ2S+ community, I am extremely saddened by the high rates of stress, anxiety, burnout and depression experienced by this community. We should all be concerned by this data as well as the impact on women, young lawyers, lawyers with disabilities, Indigenous lawyers and other racialized legal professionals. I look forward to further dialogue within our community on this important topic as we strive to transform the way in which we conduct business and create environments that help remove the stigma around mental health.”

Nathalie Cadieux, Ph.D, CRHA, Associate Professor and Principal Researcher with the Université de Sherbrooke's Business School, said that in any field, the first step towards improvement is measurement. “Without rigorous measurement of health issues, and of the stressors that cause them, we will be unable to take sustainable action to support the health of legal professionals. I am proud to say that by mobilizing the Canadian legal community and my team, we have taken this first step together”.

The data analyzed in the report comes from a national survey on the wellness of legal professionals in Canada. More than 7,300 legal professionals from all jurisdictions - lawyers, Quebec notaries, Ontario paralegals and articling students - participated in the survey.

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The report analyzes the data from the survey and sets out findings on the prevalence of health indicators including psychological distress/perceived stress, depression and anxiety, burnout and suicidal ideation and the impact of factors such as work setting, billable hours, technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, incivility, compassion fatigue, work culture and the regulatory framework on the wellbeing of legal professionals.

Key findings from the study include:

- More than half of all respondents reported experiencing psychological distress and burnout. Those rates are even higher for professionals living with a disability, articling students, lawyers aged 26-35, legal professionals with less than 10 years of experience, legal professionals identifying as members of LGBTQ2S+ community, and women.
- The billable hours model has a highly negative impact on mental health, but the emotional demands of clients is the risk factor with the most significant impact.
- Work–life conflict is a critical stressor and is associated with a significantly lower level of commitment to the profession and a substantially higher level of intention to leave the profession.
- Legal professionals living with a disability and from minority groups experience higher levels of mental health concerns.
- Alcohol and drug use among legal professionals are at a worrying level; and
- The key skills to build resilience and shield legal professionals from stressors are the abilities to psychologically detach from work and to set limits.

The research team will be providing recommendations later this fall on specific actions that can be taken to support wellness of legal professionals in Canada. They will also be starting on Phase II of the study, which will involve qualitative interviews with legal professionals to explore differences by province and territory. Phase II is expected to conclude in 2024.

FAQs about the national wellness project have also been published.

The Federation of Law Societies of Canada is the national association of the 14 law societies mandated by the provinces and territories to regulate Canada’s 134,390 lawyers, Quebec’s 4,200 notaries and Ontario’s 10,000 licensed paralegals in the public interest.

The Canadian Bar Association is dedicated to support the rule of law and improvement in the law and the administration of justice. Some 37,000 lawyers, notaries in Quebec, law teachers and law students from across Canada are members.

The Université de Sherbrooke is a large public French-speaking institution in Quebec. Professor Nathalie Cadieux Ph.D, CRHA, is an Associate Professor and Principal Investigator at the Université de Sherbrooke’s Business School within the Department of Management and Human Resources Management. The Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Université de Sherbrooke, approved this research project and monitored it for compliance.

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