

Attorneys at Law, Work-Life Balance : A Qualitative Research Study

Scarlet M. Ditoro, Supervised by Professor Angela Rulffes

Background

- Work-life balance is hard to attain as an attorney as they are expected to be available and perform at all hours to obtain billable hours for a law firm. The advancement of smart watches and cell phones has caused the boundary of work hours to be hours of the night and day, leaving minimal time for family or personal activities. (Mehta, How Five Lawyers Manage Work-Life Balance Amid Remote Work)
- High Performing Attorneys are known for having a code of silence regarding substance abuse issues, it is simply common (Zimmerman, The Lawyer, The Addict).
- 75% of practicing attorneys when surveyed skipped over an entire section about drug use. The reason for skipping this section is unclear but the survey was given by the American Bar Association, attorneys could potentially be fearful leading to avoidance (Zimmerman, The Lawyer, The Addict).
- Alcohol has been reported as the most widely abused substance, followed by prescription drugs (ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs)

Data

- 12,825 licensed attorneys across 19 states were surveyed in 2016 (A.B.A & Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 2016)
- 3,419 attorneys answered question regarding drug use from those survey above
- 75% of attorneys skipped drug use section
- Alcohol is the most commonly abused substance followed by prescription drugs
- 68% of law firms reported increase in remote work within the year of 2019-2020 (PR Newswire, 2019)
- Intervention in the form of education has been shown to reduce risky drinking over a 12 month period (J Stud Alcohol Drugs, 2014)

Purpose

- Policies and regulations that promote work-life balance have been shown to help attorneys' mental health. Factors include flexible scales and working remotely. (PR Newswire, 2019)
- Many attorneys do not address their struggle due to fear of the impact on careers. There is a stigma around mental health in the legal field (Zimmerman, The Lawyer, The Addict)
- Attorneys currently have little to no boundaries regarding client availability 24/7. This has been stated to lead to anxiety and burnout which can in turn start self-medication or substance abuse. (Mehta, How Five Lawyers Manage Work-Life Balance Amid Remote Work)
- Peer Support groups as well as mental health checks can be implemented to help attorneys achieve work-life balance and be aware of warning signs of addiction before it becomes abuse. (ABA, Well- Being Template for Legal Employers)

Methodology

- The account helps develop an understanding of the real-life impact of substance abuse in the legal field and points out the lack of education provided in the system as well as the consequences of substance abuse. (Zimmerman, 2017)
- Explaining how these struggles can impact personal life such as family dynamics and the difference in genders.
- This study includes critical analysis stemming from qualitative research.
- Data has been collected from various surveys, articles, American Bar Association surveys, and studies regarding mental health and attorney
- Attorneys are facing high stress levels but are disregarding mental health concerns. Some research has proposed firms mandate a yearly mental health seminar to give attorney health practicing tools. Those tools include time management, stress management, and boundary setting.
- Goal to promote work-life balance for practicing attorneys with health-promoting activities

Implications

- Research Post Covid – Attorneys' home drinking
- There is no new literature and we need updates after COVID-19.
- Not mandatory only a recommendation by the American Bar Association regarding educational information for substance abuse

Recommendations

- Mandated and regulated mental health and substance abuse education
- Proactive policies and Boundaries established for workplace
- Promotion of flexible work schedules and billable hours

References

- Anker, J., & Krill, P. R. (n.d.). *Stress, drink, leave: An examination of gender-specific risk factors for mental health problems and attrition among licensed attorneys.*
- American Bar Association. (2019, January). *Study on lawyer impairment: The prevalence of substance use and other mental health concerns among American attorneys.*
- Kohtz, R. T. (2020). *Work-life balance as a working lawyer mom.* American Bar Association.
 - Karpf, B. M. (n.d.). *Resolve to set boundaries this year.* Family Advocate (Family Law).
- Krill, P. R. (n.d.). *People, professionals and profit centers: The connection between lawyer wellbeing and employer values.*
- Mehta, R. (2020, October 18). *How five lawyers manage work-life balance amid remote work.*
- Policy Committee of the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs (CoLAP). (2019). *Well-being template for legal employers.*
- PR Newswire. (2019). *Flexible scheduling, telecommuting best perks to help lawyers improve work-life balance, survey reveals.*
 - Zimmerman, E. (n.d.). *The lawyer, the addict.*