

ABA, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation release first national study on attorney substance use, mental health concerns

CHICAGO, Feb. 3, 2016 – A new, landmark [study](#) conducted by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation and the American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs reveals substantial and widespread levels of problem drinking and other behavioral health problems in the U.S. legal profession.

Posted online this week in the Journal of Addiction Medicine, the study reports that 21 percent of licensed, employed attorneys qualify as problem drinkers, 28 percent struggle with some level of depression and 19 percent demonstrate symptoms of anxiety. The study found that younger attorneys in the first 10 years of practice exhibit the highest incidence of these problems. The print edition of the journal will be available in mid-February.

The findings of the national study, the most comprehensive ever, represent a reversal of previous research that indicated rates of problem drinking increased as individuals spent more time in the legal profession. When focusing solely on the volume and frequency of alcohol consumed, more than 1 in 3 practicing attorneys are problem drinkers, the study found.

Attorney and clinician Patrick R. Krill, Hazelden's architect of the project and lead author of the study, said the findings are a call to action.

"This long-overdue study clearly validates the widely held but empirically undersupported view that our profession faces truly significant challenges related to attorney well-being," Krill said. "Any way you look at it, this data is very alarming, and paints the picture of an unsustainable professional culture that's harming too many people. Attorney impairment poses risks to the struggling individuals themselves and to our communities, government, economy and society. The stakes are too high for inaction."

Linda Albert, a co-author of the study and representative of the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs, said there are countless ways this data will benefit the profession. "While the numbers themselves are disheartening, the instructive value of the information is enormous and tells us that the problem is best approached from a systems perspective. All sectors of the profession will benefit from reading, understanding and utilizing this important study, and now we can better develop strategies for preventing and addressing substance use problems and mental health concerns in this population."

The study compared attorneys with other professionals, including doctors, and determined that lawyers experience alcohol use disorders at a far higher rate than other professional populations, as well as mental health distress that is more significant. The study also found that the most common barriers for attorneys to seek help were fear of others finding out and general concerns about confidentiality.

"This new research demonstrates how the pressures felt by many lawyers manifest in health risks," ABA President Paulette Brown said. "These ground-breaking findings provide an important guide as the ABA commission works with lawyer assistance programs nationally to address the mental health risks and needs of lawyers."

The collaborative research project marks the first nationwide attempt to capture such data about the legal profession. Approximately 15,000 attorneys from 19 states and across all regions of the country participated in the study.

The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction. It is the nation's largest nonprofit treatment provider, with a legacy that began in 1949 and includes the 1982 founding of the Betty Ford Center. With 16 sites in California, Minnesota, Oregon, Illinois, New York, Florida, Massachusetts, Colorado and Texas, the Foundation offers prevention and recovery solutions nationwide and across the entire continuum of care for youth and adults. It includes a specialized program for legal professionals, the largest recovery publishing house in the country, a

fully-accredited graduate school of addiction studies, an addiction research center, an education arm for medical professionals and a unique children's program, and is the nation's leader in advocacy and policy for treatment and recovery. Learn more at www.hazeldenbettyford.org.

The American Bar Association, with more than 400,000 members, is one of the largest voluntary professional membership organizations in the world. As the national voice of the legal profession, the ABA works to improve the administration of justice, promotes programs that assist lawyers and judges in their work, accredits law schools, provides continuing legal education, and works to build public understanding around the world of the importance of the rule of law. View our [privacy statement](#) on line. Follow the latest ABA news at www.americanbar.org/news and on Twitter [@ABANews](#).

The ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs has the mandate to educate the legal profession concerning alcoholism, chemical dependencies, stress, depression and other emotional health issues, and assist and support all bar associations and lawyer assistance programs in developing and maintaining methods of providing effective solutions for recovery. Learn more at http://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance.html.

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