

Attorneys and Mental Health: Let's Talk About It

Sponsored by 3M

Faculty

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This workshop will take a deep look at the stigmatization that attorneys experience when they struggle with mental illness, and work toward a better understanding of how members of the legal community - including law students - can address their mental health appropriately without being stigmatized for doing so. Members of the LGBTQ+ legal community who face mental health challenges know that it can be even harder to "come out" as having mental illness as it is to come out as LGBTQ+. The panel will explore how the lessons that this community has learned about bias - both unconscious and intentional - and about micro- and macro-aggressions can also be applied to the mental health arena; we will also discuss the ways in which LGBTQ+ attorneys with intersectional identities are at higher risk of not having the support they need for mental health challenges, and also face higher penalties for admitting those challenges. We will discuss the vicarious trauma that so many lawyers suffer, and how that particularly impacts members of the LGBTQ+ community who advocate full-time for other LGBTQ+ people. The panel will address both the practical and the ethical issues that arise when attorneys sublimate their mental health issues, and will suggest ways that everyone can work toward destigmatizing mental health challenges for the end goals of being healthier, happier, and better advocates for our clients.

CLE Materials

I. Attorney Well-Being - and Lack Thereof - in the Profession, and Coping strategies

A. Generally

1. [Research, Reports, and News on Well-Being in the Profession](#)
Here's the research/data/news page I update with over 200 links to articles on lawyer well-being issues, including a section on law students and a section on intersection of DEI.
2. [December 2020: Pep Talks For Sad Lawyers With Your Buddy | by Andy I. | Medium](#)
This article by panelist Andy Izenon provides a window onto mental health during the pandemic.
3. [Depression to Dedication: How Chief Justice Gants Saved My Life and Catalyzed Ongoing Advocacy for Mental Health in the Legal Profession](#)
This article by panelist Gavin Alexander provides background information as to how the Massachusetts Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being was created
4. <http://us.practicallaw.tr.com/w-035-2603>
This Q&A with panelist Gavin Alexander gives an overview of the mental health issues facing members of the legal profession, and some strategies for coping.
5. <https://www.sustainablestrategiespllc.com/healthy-law>

This article by queer attorney and sustainability expert Nicole DeNamur provides advice for law firms, schools, and other employers for how to help attorney well-being by creating a healthier workspace.

B. Law Students

1. [Law Student Well-Being](#)

This site, developed by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's Standing Committee on Lawyer Wellbeing, addresses law student wellbeing both from the perspective of the student and from that of legal educators.

2. [Are Questions About Mental Health on Bar Applications Harming Law Students?](#)

This article by Law.com explores the harm done to law students by Bar Exam questions about mental health and treatment, which can stigmatize the seeking of treatment and make it harder for students to get the help they need.

C. Attorneys of Color

1. This article, written by lawyers of color, addresses the harm done to and active exclusion of lawyers of color by the legal system, and articulates avenues through which harm is addressed/change can be made to better support lawyers of color. [For Lawyers of Color, Collective Liberation Looks Like Mental Health Care | #site_title](#)

2. This Toolkit provides mental health strategies designed for and by BIPOC, QTBIOPC individuals, and communities that disproportionately suffer mental health harm, including in the legal profession. [MHA BIPOC Mental Health Toolkit](#)

3. This 2021 article highlights that lawyers of color have been affected most acutely by the detrimental approach to mental health permeating the legal profession. [Lawyer Well-Being is Falling as of Early 2021, Attorneys of Color Are Suffering the Most](#)

II. Vicarious Trauma

A. The following article addresses the issue of vicarious trauma - defined as "harmful changes that occur in professionals' views of themselves, others, and the world, as a result of exposure to the graphic and/or traumatic material of their clients." The panel will be discussing how exposure to vicarious trauma, particularly that inflicted upon clients because of their LGBTQ+ identity, impacts their LGBTQ+ lawyers.

https://www.mnbar.org/resources/publications/bench-bar/articles/2022/06/01/hiding-in-plain-sight?fbclid=IwAR20dXmVE31uCY7_jZRtnVJiCDKESltiOh6rlyXPgmpsS3gNPgtSIT4e_Ro

B. This article discusses vicarious trauma for prosecutors in particular. [Trauma for the tough-minded prosecutor](#)

III. Drug and Alcohol Abuse Within the Legal Community

A. Generally

1. This 2022 article addresses depression and prescription drug abuse in lawyers, as a means of looking into how and why attorneys become addicted. [Addiction & Substance Abuse in Lawyers: Statistics to Know](#)

2. This 2016 report surveyed 12,825 licensed, employed attorneys and assessed their alcohol and drug usage, as well as their symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. [The Prevalence of Substance Use and Other Mental Health Concerns Among American Attorneys](#)

3. This 2019 Study on Lawyer Impairment provided the basis for the American Bar Association's recommendations regarding addressing alcohol abuse in the legal community.

[Study on Lawyer Impairment](#)

B. LGBTQ+ Attorneys and substance abuse

This article interviews several members of the National LGBTQ+ Bar about how they grappled with mental health struggles and substance abuse/recovery. [Diversity and Well-Being: Lawyers Share Mental Health Struggles](#)