

STUDY OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF QUÉBEC LAWYERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Study Summary: Highlights



Barreau
du Québec



UNIVERSITÉ DE
SHERBROOKE

Background

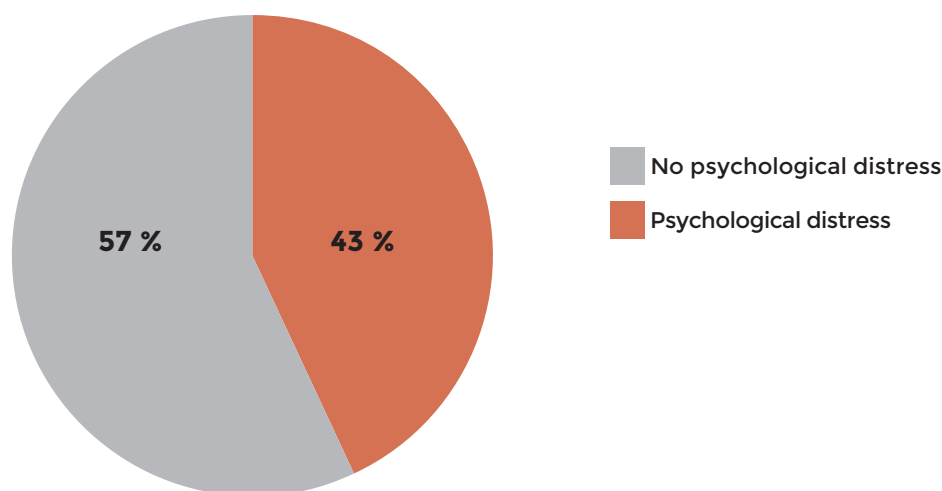
Since May 2015, the Barreau du Québec has been collaborating with Nathalie Cadieux, Senior Scholar and Associate Professor at Sherbrooke University's Department of Human Resources Management, to conduct research on factors affecting the mental health of Barreau members in the workplace. This research is the most extensive study ever conducted in Québec among lawyers, with over 2,500 participating. The survey consisted of nearly 150 questions focusing on three health indicators: psychological distress, burnout and well-being.

Highlights

1. Psychological Distress

Workplace psychological distress must be interpreted as an unpleasant subjective state not associated with a specific pathology. It is defined instead as a combination of symptoms similar to both a burnout and depression, ranging from fatigue to irritability, to anxiety, difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, etc. This does not necessarily mean that the person is ill. Distress is an early warning sign indicating that a person is having trouble dealing with stress factors they are exposed to.

**Proportion of Psychological Distress vs Absence of Psychological Distress
Among Participating Lawyers**

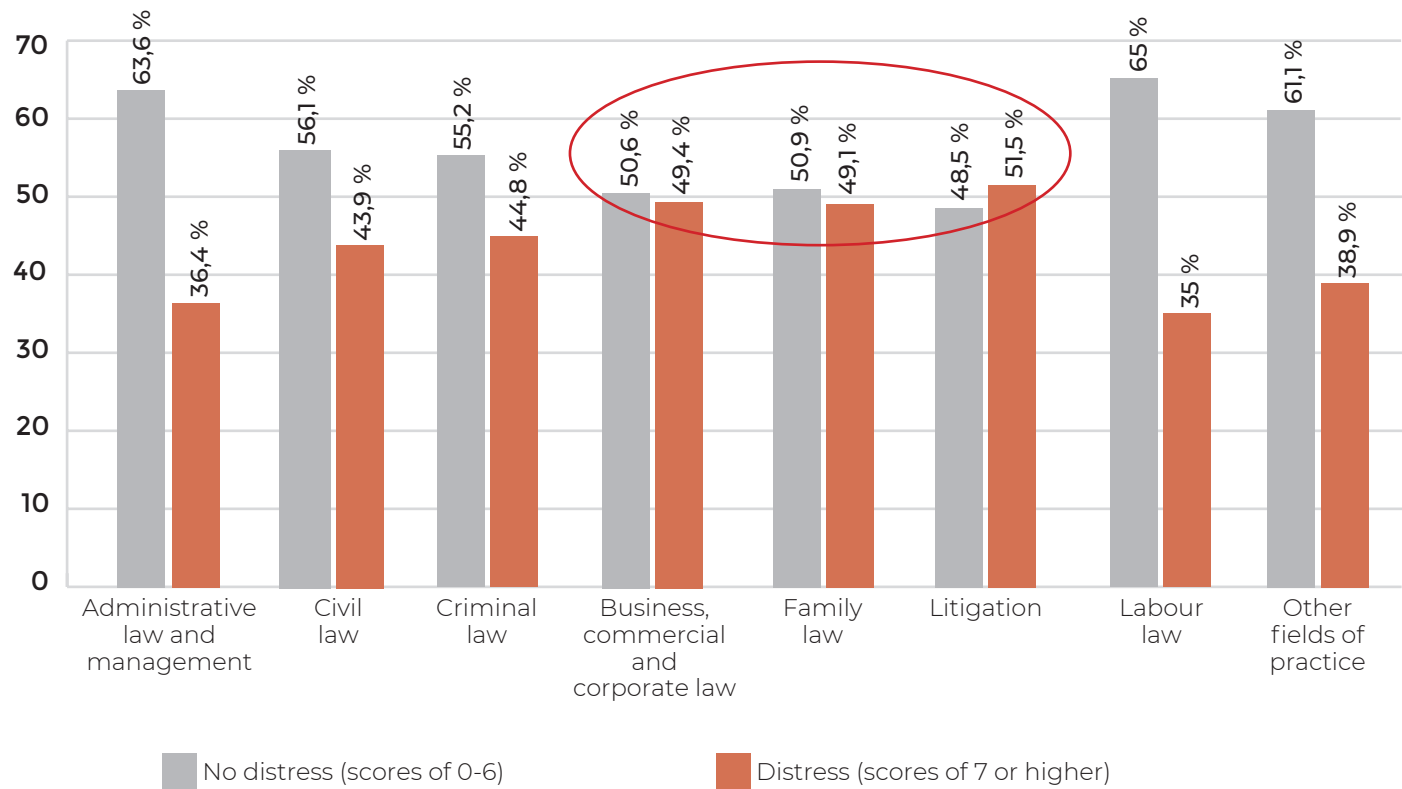


The proportion of psychological distress is higher among women (44.2%) than among men (39%). However, there is a proportionally higher number of young men experiencing severe distress.

Proportions of distress are significantly higher among lawyers who have been practising for ten years or less (49.9%) than among more experienced lawyers (36.7%).

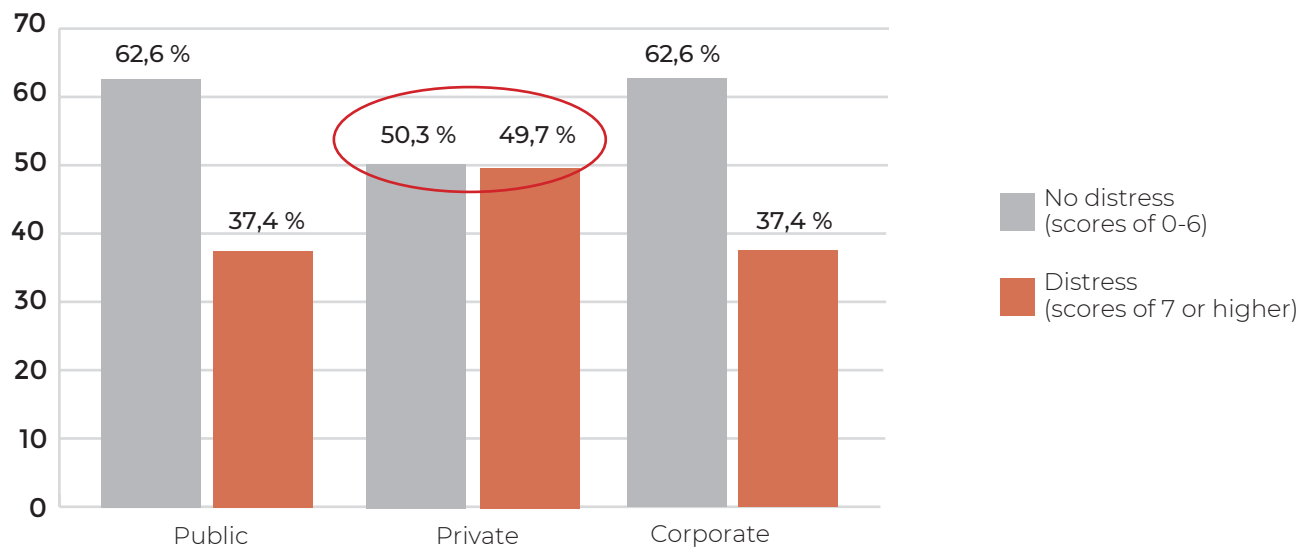
Proportions of Psychological Distress Observed by Field of Practice

Lawyers practising in the fields of business, commercial and corporate law, family law and litigation are those most exposed to psychological distress, with proportions close to 50% in these fields, compared to other fields.



Proportions of Psychological Distress Observed by Business Sector

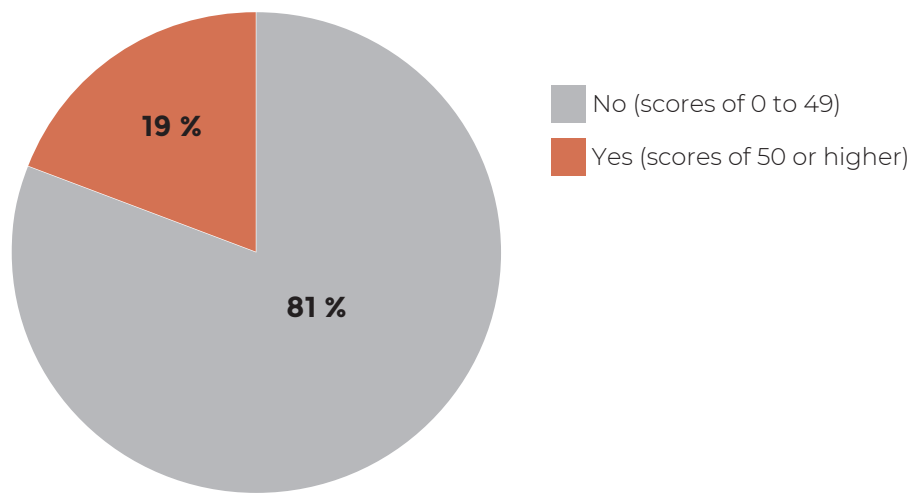
The proportion of psychological distress also appears to be higher in the private sector than in either the public sector or corporate sector.



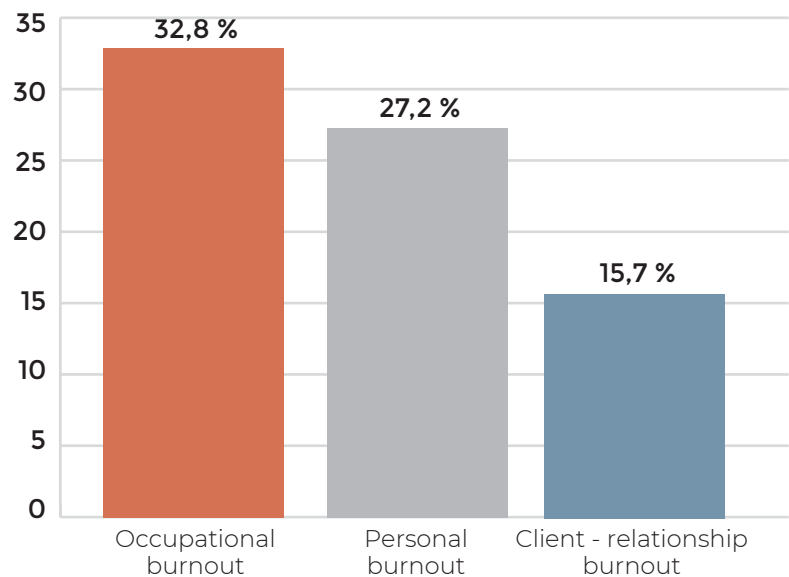
2. Burnout

Burnout as measured in the study refers to a state of fatigue and physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from individual (personal burnout), organizational (occupational burnout) and relationship (relationship burnout) spheres. Occupational burnout is shown to be the most prevalent.

Proportions of Burnout Observed in the Overall Sample



Proportions of Personal, Occupational and Relationship Burnout

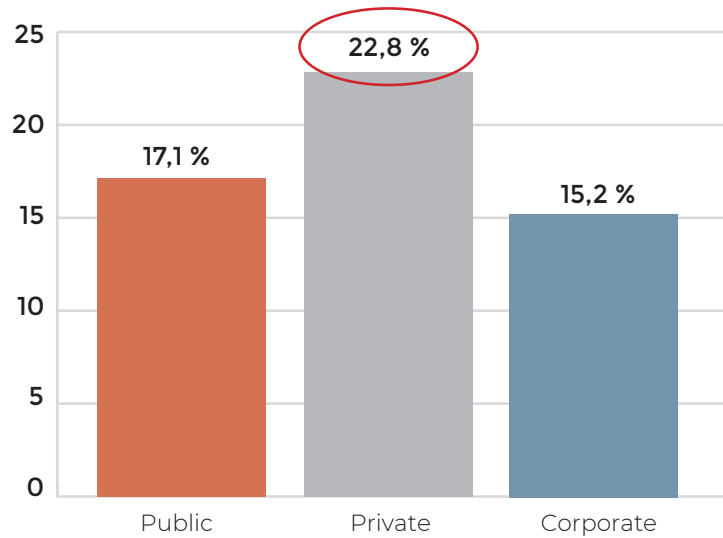


Young members who have been practising for 10 years or less are proportionally more affected by burnout (22.4%) as compared to their fellow lawyers with over 10 years of experience (16.5%).

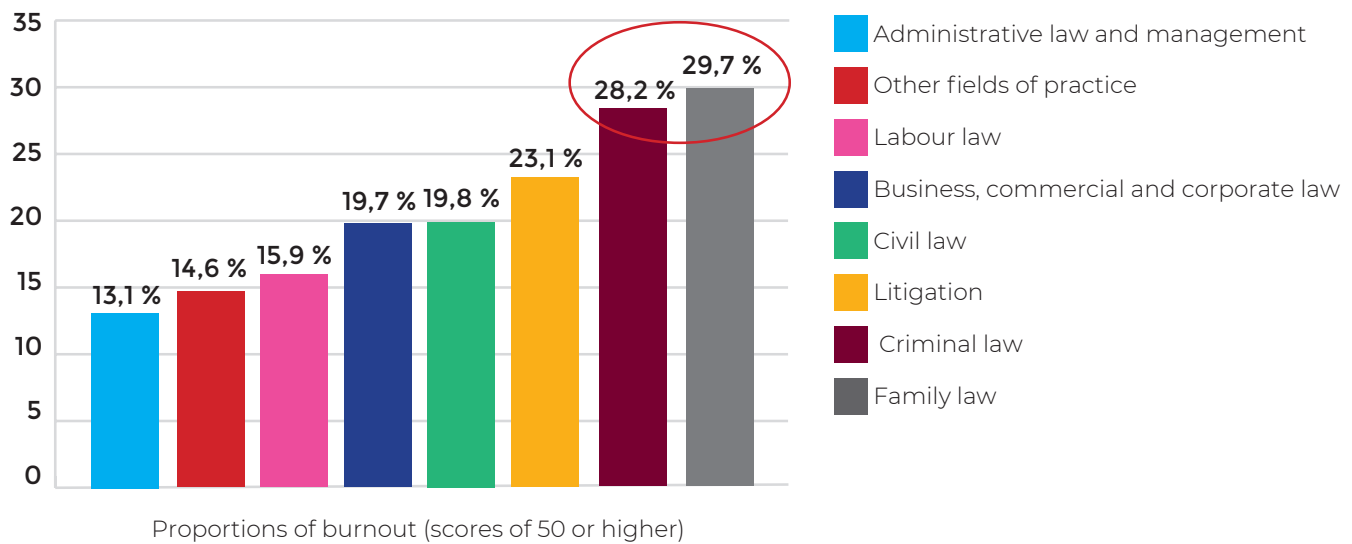
The findings are similar among women (20.7%) compared to men (15.9%).

The private sector is the one most exposed to burnout, as well as those in the fields of family law, criminal law and litigation.

Proportions of Burnout Observed by Business Sector



Proportions of Burnout Observed by Field of Practice

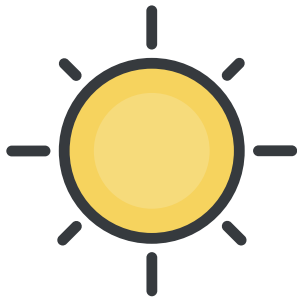


3. Well-being

Well-being should not be perceived as the opposite of psychological distress. Some people can experience severe distress, but can also experience a sense of well-being in their work. These two concepts complement each other in understanding mental health in the workplace. Well-being has an emotional and cognitive dimension and is measured in terms of three main aspects: peace of mind, work commitment and social harmony.

Young lawyers with 10 years of practice or less experience the lowest levels of well-being. Similarly, lawyers in private practice, litigators and lawyers in the field of family law are showing the lowest averages in terms of well-being.

High or low level of well-being?



Men with more than 10 years
of practice

Corporate lawyers

Labour law

No more, no less

Public vs private

Sole practitioners
vs "others"



Young lawyers with less
than 10 years of practice and
women

Lawyers in a law firm

Litigation

Family law

4. Risk Factors or Protective Factors

We have found that certain factors are more likely to significantly increase psychological distress, burnout and well-being while others significantly reduce them.

Psychological Distress

Significantly increase psychological distress

- Stress factors associated with a regulated profession
- Technology
- Job insecurity
- Emotional demands
- Work-family conflicts
- External locus of control*
- Smoking

Significantly reduce psychological distress

- Career opportunities
- Age
- Compatibility of personal values with the organization's values
- Self-esteem

Burnout

Significantly increase burnout

- Stress factors associated with a regulated profession
- Technology
- Quantitative work overload
- Qualitative work overload
- Emotional demands
- Having to reach a billable hours target
- Work-family conflicts
- Being in a relationship
- Being a woman
- External locus of control*

Significantly reduce burnout

- Good relations with clients
- Career opportunities
- Use of skills
- Age
- Compatibility of personal values with the organization's values
- Self-esteem

Well-being

Significantly increase well-being

- Good relations with clients
- Recognition at work
- Career opportunities
- Job insecurity
- Quantitative work overload
- Social support outside work
- Age
- Compatibility of personal values with the organization's values
- Self-esteem

Significantly reduce well-being

- Technology
- Emotional demands
- Having to reach a billable hours target
- Lack of resources at work
- Work-family conflicts
- External locus of control*

*The control centre refers to how an individual believes that they have control over important events in their life. More specifically, individuals with an external locus of control believe that events in their life happen by chance, luck or coincidence, i.e. that they are caused by external forces beyond their control.

Action Plan

This study's findings will have a significant impact on the development of the legal profession and the mental health of members of the Barreau du Québec.

It should be noted that the Barreau has already deployed resources to meet the needs of its members and encourage them to turn to programs and services provided to the legal community, such as the Barreau's member assistance program (PAMBA), on-line training dealing with stress and burnout, a work-life balance guide and practice coaching visits in the early stages of a lawyer's career.

But following up on this report, the Barreau du Québec is carefully considering other possible actions and has already taken the following measures to address some of the issues:

- A working group has been created to propose concrete actions likely to improve the situation.
- Contribution to the PAMBA assistance program will increase significantly, from \$26 to \$35, as of the next annual membership payment.
- Free on-line training has been developed and will be accessible to members as of next fall.