

## Don't Burn Out! Self-Care and Wellbeing

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### Introduction

In 2009, the Brain and Mind Research Institute (the BMRI), in conjunction with the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation, completed a comprehensive study of the incidence of mental health problems amongst law students and the legal profession.<sup>1</sup> These findings were consistent with prior research in the United States,<sup>2</sup> and verified problems mental health professionals had been observing in their clinical work over many years and that prominent legal professionals had begun to identify<sup>3</sup> – Australian law students and legal practitioners were experiencing alarming rates of depression, psychological distress, and forms of substance abuse.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent studies have repeatedly found that, compared to other professions, lawyers are more likely to have experienced symptoms of depression and anxiety, and less likely to have been formally diagnosed.<sup>5</sup>

- 1 Norm Kelk, Georgina Luscombe, Sharon Medlow and Ian Hickie, *Courting the Blues: Attitudes Towards Depression in Australian Law Students and Lawyers* (Brain and Mind Research Institute, 2009).
- 2 See Council of Australian Law Deans, *Promoting Law Student Well-Being Good Practice Guidelines for Law Schools* (CALD, September 2014).
- 3 For example, The Hon Michael Kirby, 'Judicial Stress Revisited', Paper delivered to the Supreme Court and Federal Court Judges' Conference, Brisbane, 31 January 1997; A Mascarenhas, 'Lawyers most prone to depression: study', SMH, 23 April 2007 <[www.smh.com.au/news/national/lawyers-most-prone-to-depression-study/2007/04/23/1177180569491.html](http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/lawyers-most-prone-to-depression-study/2007/04/23/1177180569491.html)>; LP Vrklevski and J Franklin, 'Vicarious Trauma: The Impact on Solicitors of Exposure to Traumatic Material' (2008) 14(1) *Traumatology* 106-118.
- 4 Kelk et al, above n 1.
- 5 CALD, above n 2, 3; John Briton, 'Lawyers, Emotional Distress and Regulation', Paper delivered to the Bar Association of Queensland Annual Conference, 2009, <[www.lsc.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/106197/lawyers-emotional-distress-and-regulation.pdf](http://www.lsc.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/106197/lawyers-emotional-distress-and-regulation.pdf)>; C Kendall (The Law Society of Western Australia, 2011), <<http://lawsocietywa.asn.au/visageimages/multimedia/News/Report%20of%20PDD%20Ad%20Hoc%20Cttee%20FINAL%20Public%20Release%2016%20May%202011.pdf>>; Samantha Woodhill, 'Wellbeing and resilience: Research shows high level of stress and alcohol abuse in the law' (2016) 38(5) *Bulletin* (Law Society of South Australia) 35.

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