

Work-related distress in the New Zealand legal profession

Interview participant information sheet for lawyers

An Invitation

We would like to invite you to participate in our research study focusing on work-related distress in the New Zealand legal profession. Your participation in an interview will help us understand how lawyers are impacted by indirect trauma. Indirect trauma in the legal context refers to the cumulative effects of exposure to clients' trauma and/or to traumatic material relating to legal proceedings and representation. We want to help your voice be heard and to hear your ideas for how legal professionals can best be supported.

About us

We are an interdisciplinary research team with members who have worked in the legal profession and academics from AUT, including: Georgina Patel (nee Woods-Child) (lead researcher), Dr Katey Thom (Faculty of Law), Professor Brian McKenna (Faculty of Health Sciences), Associate Professor Nick Garrett (Biostatistician), Madeline Hayward (PhD candidate), Professor Kate Diesfeld (Faculty of Health Sciences) and Associate Professor Khylee Quince (Faculty of Law).

What is the purpose of this research?

The aims of the interviews are to:

- Identify risk-mitigation strategies lawyers are currently engaging and explore how effective they consider them to be.
- Assess the profession's receptiveness to alternative risk-mitigation strategies.

The findings from the interviews will be used to form education and policy reforms recommendations and inform further research to test intervention strategies, as well as academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been invited to participate in an interview because you indicated an interest via the sign up form on our website. You can participate if hold a current practicing certificate.

How long will it take to participate?

The interview will take 45-90 minutes to complete.

How long will I have to consider this invitation?

The interview sign up will be live for 4 weeks. You can sign up any time during this period.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice). Whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. If you decide you want to take part, you will be required to sign a consent form. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be offered a choice to remove your data but once the study is completed it may not be possible to remove information you have provided.

What will happen in this research?

You will be asked to take part in one interview lasting 45 – 90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted either via phone or video call from a location of your choice.

The interview includes questions about your mental and physical wellbeing, how indirect trauma may have impacted you, and the adequacy of your training for work with traumatic material. We will also focus on strategies you use to mitigate the risks of indirect trauma and your thoughts on what we could be doing more widely to support legal professionals.

For the purposes of this research, 'indirect trauma' includes: vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress and the separate, but related, concept of burnout. We refer to 'distress' holistically, encompassing: psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual and social wellbeing.

We will use the data we collect to draw conclusions about the impact of indirect trauma on legal professionals. We will make comparisons between different practice areas, between lawyers and judges and where possible to overseas research.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There may be questions about your mental health, addictive behaviours, and work-related issues. It is possible you may experience discomfort or embarrassment answering these questions.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You do not have to answer a question if it makes you feel uncomfortable. If any distress does arise for you during the survey or at any point afterwards, we encourage you to seek follow-up support that is open to legal professions.

As a member of the Law Society, you can access up to 6 fully funded counselling sessions through Vitae. To talk to a counsellor:

1. Freephone 0508 664 981
2. Complete the online referral form: <https://www.vitae.co.nz/contact/counselling-form/>
3. Download the Vitae NZ app from the App Store or Google Play.

Below are also support services provided by the Law Society for workplace harassment and other sensitive work-related matters including ethical dilemmas and workplace issues.

1. **LawCare free phone line: 0800 0800 28**
This is a phone line that operates Monday – Friday and has been set up to provide support and guidance for those that have suffered from workplace harassment.
2. **National Friends Panel members who deal with sensitive matters**
<https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/professional-practice/practising-well/national-friends-panel/>

Alternatively, there are a number of free helplines you can utilise:

1737 – text or call any time for support from a trained counsellor
Lifeline – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
Healthline – 0800 611 116
Samaritans – 0800 726 666

What are the benefits?

This research stands to shed light on indirect trauma and other mental health concerns among New Zealand legal professionals. These findings will raise awareness of these experiences in New Zealand and additionally contribute to an international research base on this topic. This work will inform the

development of support structures and other initiatives to mitigate the mental health risks for legal professionals. Ultimately, we hope that this research will help lawyers and judges be supported in their own mental health and to act in their best capacity for the people they serve.

How will my privacy be protected?

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed, you will be offered the opportunity to review your transcript. The information you provide will remain confidential to the research team, and your name or other personal details that may expose your identity will not be used in public reporting of findings.

Who will be conducting the interviews?

The lead researcher (Georgina Patel – nee Woods-Child) will be the primary interviewer for this research. If you would prefer, for whatever reason, another member of the research team to be the first point of contact or to conduct the interview this can be arranged. Please feel free to contact Dr Katey Thom (contact details below) if you would prefer to make alternative arrangements.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You can access the summary of results from our project website lawindistress.co.nz. In addition, we plan to hold a dissemination hui and details of this will be made available on our website, through social media and advertised in Lawpoints.

Research funding

This research has received significant partial funding from the New Zealand Law Foundation. The details of this can be viewed at: https://www.lawfoundation.org.nz/?page_id=65

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the lead researcher, Georgina Patel: 021 886 882 or georgina@lawindistress.co.nz
Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Georgina Patel - 021 886 882 or georgina@lawindistress.co.nz
Katey Thom, +64 21 995 825 or katey.thom@aut.ac.nz

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 16 December 2021
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