

# Work-related distress in the New Zealand legal profession

## Anonymous survey participant information sheet for lawyers

### An Invitation

Your participation in this anonymous survey 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.

### 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 anonymous survey are to:

- Understand prevalence of work-related distress experienced by New Zealand lawyers and judges as a result of indirect trauma.
- 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 anonymous survey will be used to form education and policy reform 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 this anonymous survey because you are a member of the New Zealand Law Society (who are supporting the recruitment of lawyers). The criteria for participation in the survey is holding a current practicing certificate.

### How long will it take to participate?

The survey will take 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

### How long will I have to consider this invitation?

The survey will be live for the next 4 weeks. You can complete it at any time during this period.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

You can participate in the anonymous survey online at [lawindistress.co.nz](http://lawindistress.co.nz). Completion of this survey indicates your consent to take part in the 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. You are able to withdraw from the study and stop completing the survey at any time. However, due to the nature of an anonymous survey, we are unable to remove any information you provide once the survey has been completed.

### What will happen in this research?

You will be asked to complete the anonymous survey online using Qualtrics survey software – a link to this is available at [lawindistress.co.nz](http://lawindistress.co.nz). It will take 15 – 20 minutes to complete.

The survey will include 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. 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. The survey will also collect some demographic information about you (such as your age, gender and ethnicity) and your work history. These details will be anonymous (not connected to your name or contact details) and our findings will be generalised so that no individual participant can be identified.

At the end of the survey, you will be given the opportunity to leave us with your contact details so that we can contact you for a follow-up interview.

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 will 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?**

Your responses are anonymous. We will not know how you responded during the survey. We hope that this anonymity helps to mitigate any discomfort associated with answering these questions. 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 professionals.

**As a member of the Law Society, you are able to 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?**

Your survey responses will be anonymous. They will not be linked to any personal details such as your name or email address. If you choose to give your contact details at the end of the survey so that you can be contacted for a follow-up interview, these details will not be linked to any of your survey responses.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You can access the summary of results from our project website [lawindistress.co.nz](http://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](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: +64 21 886 882 or [georgina@lawindistress.co.nz](mailto:georgina@lawindistress.co.nz)

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto: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: +64 21 886 882 or [georgina@lawindistress.co.nz](mailto:georgina@lawindistress.co.nz)

Katey Thom: +64 21 995 825 or [katey.thom@aut.ac.nz](mailto:katey.thom@aut.ac.nz)

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