

LAWYERS AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

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THE MODERN WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT IS FAST-PACED, DEMANDING AND PROGRESSIVELY UNCERTAIN. BANKRUPTCIES, MERGERS AND REDUNDANCIES ALL ADD TO THE PRESSURES THAT TODAY'S EMPLOYEES HAVE TO FACE. AND AT THE HEART OF THE CAREERS MOST OFTEN CITED AS BEING AMONG THE MOST STRESSFUL, LIES THE PRACTICE OF LAW.

As one of the world's oldest professions, law has long been respected as a highly prestigious and, in many ways, rewarding career path. Despite this, evidence suggests that a considerable number of lawyers are still unhappy at work.

It's no secret that a happy workforce makes for a productive workforce. And with research into workplace wellbeing, satisfaction and general happiness at an all-time high, the pursuit of happiness is something that employees, in all industries, pursue with increasing fervour. But it seems that for many lawyers this pursuit is futile, as the profession has a worrying rate of exhaustion, depression and even suicide.

But what defines happiness for lawyers? And is it truly achievable?

One certainty lies in the fact that when asked about what makes them happy at work, lawyers list a range of contributing factors. And, as the marketplace increasingly adapts, so too does the definition of happiness in this space.

In aid of World Mental Health Day on 10 October, agile-working pioneer Keystone Law has published its findings from a survey of 300 legal professionals from top 50 to 100 UK firms, with the aim of raising awareness of the pressures they face at work – as well as highlighting key components for change.

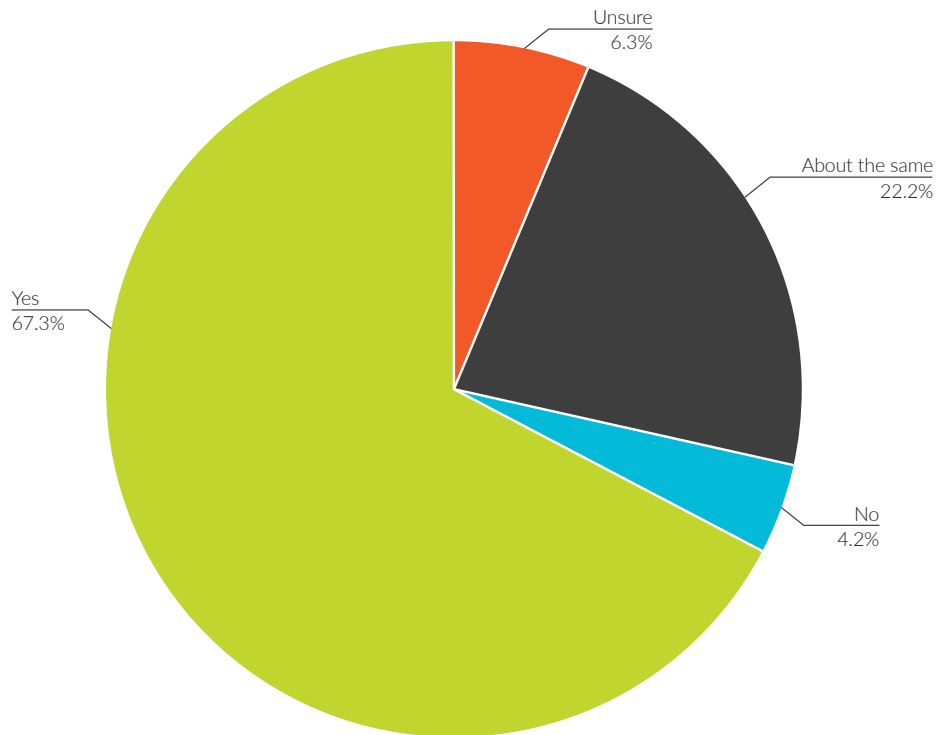
DEFINING STRESS



THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF “STRESS” CAN BE DEFINED AS THE BODY’S RESPONSE TO EITHER PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL PRESSURE. STRESS RESPONSES ARE PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS THAT HELP TO RE-ESTABLISH BALANCE. MUCH OF THE TIME, THE BODY IS WELL-EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH STRESS. BUT, IF THE CONDITION IS CHRONIC, IT CAN LEAD TO A NUMBER OF OTHER HARMFUL MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AS WELL AS PHYSICAL PROBLEMS INCLUDING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART DISORDERS.

STRESS AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

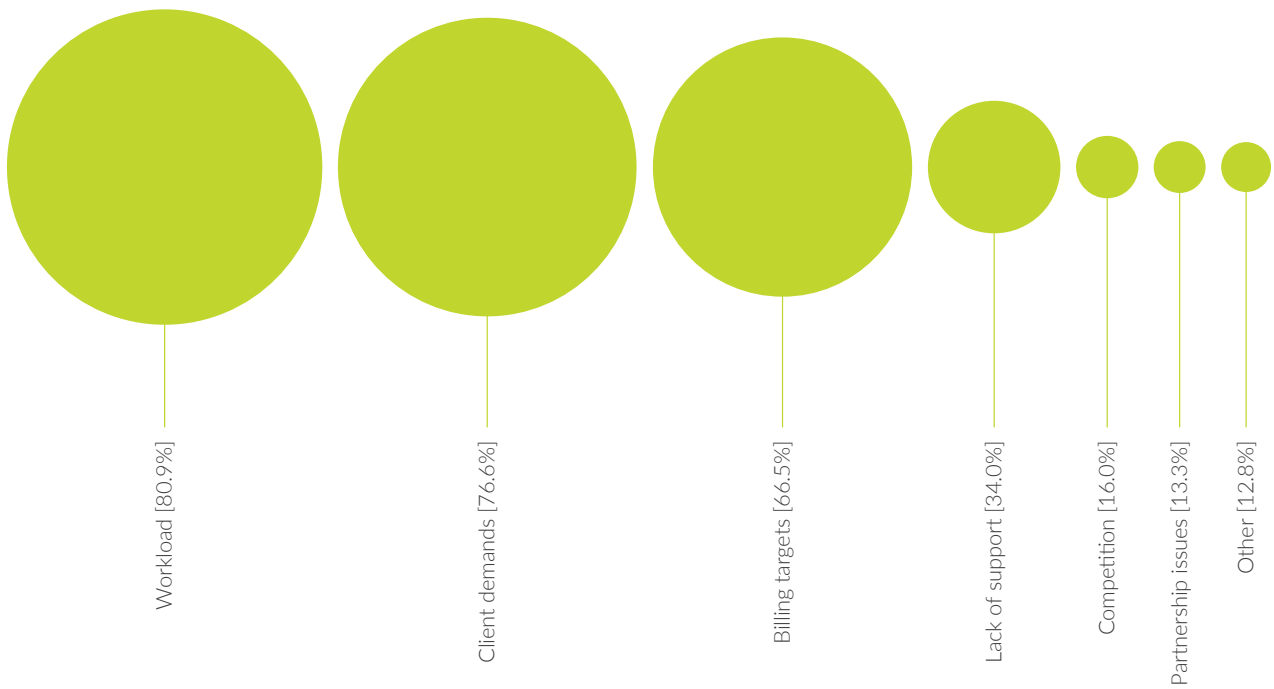
IS WORKING AS A LAWYER MORE STRESSFUL THAN OTHER PROFESSIONS?



While around 20% of the population experience a mental health problem every year, a number of existing studies have shown that legal professionals suffer at twice that rate.¹ With long hours often applauded and recent reports of some firms threatening to block employees out of their computers if they haven't racked up enough billable hours, it comes as no surprise that almost 70% of surveyed lawyers agree that their job is more stressful than other professions.

CAUSES

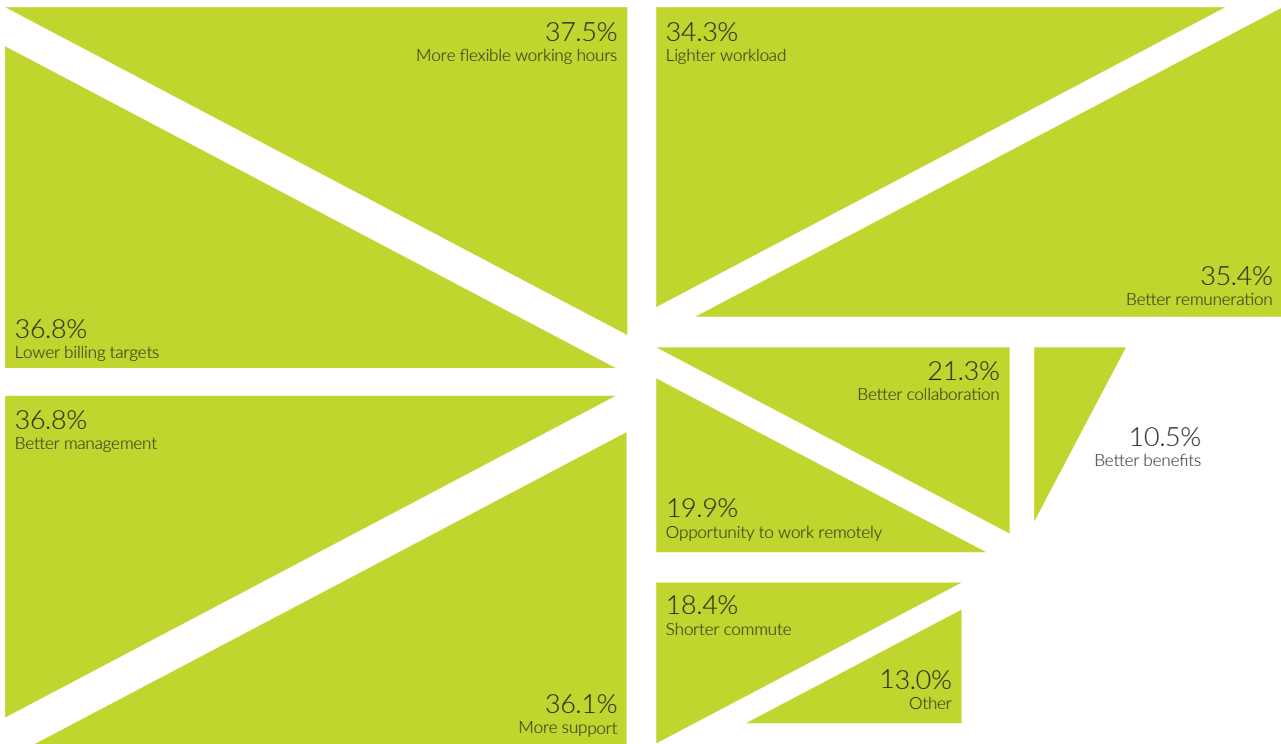
WHAT CAUSES THIS STRESS?



It's no secret that the cause of workplace stress is multifaceted. And Keystone Law's research has indicated six key industry factors that have the most profound impact, when it comes to stress, on UK lawyers. With each surveyed lawyer selecting three key causes, 81% of participants named workload as a leading cause, while 77% identified client demands as a top contributor and 67% mentioned high billing targets. Meanwhile, lack of firm support, partnership politics, and competition also garnered mentions as leading causes of stress.

FLEXIBILITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR JOB AS A LAWYER MORE ENJOYABLE AND LESS STRESSFUL?



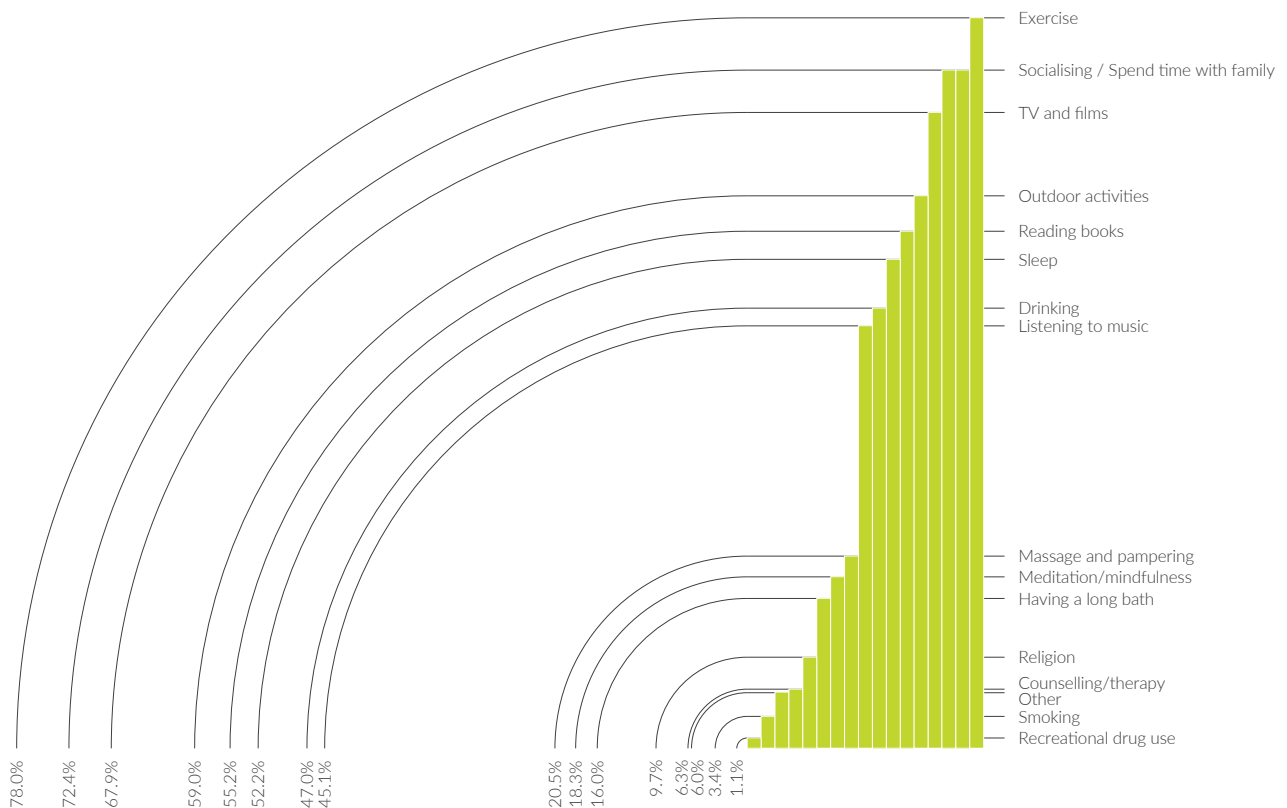
While around 50%² of the working population now desire greater flexibility around their hours and work location, achieving a healthy work-life balance in the legal profession remains somewhat of a struggle. Thirty-eight per cent of surveyed lawyers cited greater flexibility as something they wanted more of in their career.

The combination of the tech-savvy lawyer and increasing technological integration is forcing firms to rethink the way they do things. Younger lawyers, in particular, simply expect more from their employer, as well as more time to spend doing other things that they enjoy. Nearly 40% of lawyers said that they desired a better level of management as well as support to ease the burden.

The expectation of more is also mirrored by the seismic shift in perceptions of flexible working. Often viewed, historically, as a way of simply having a lazy day, the umbrella term now symbolises a movement that encompasses a host of different possibilities. From providing greater autonomy over hours and location, to term-time working and even job sharing, flexible working has been credited with boosting productivity levels, reducing stress and creating higher levels of employee satisfaction.

STRESS BUSTING

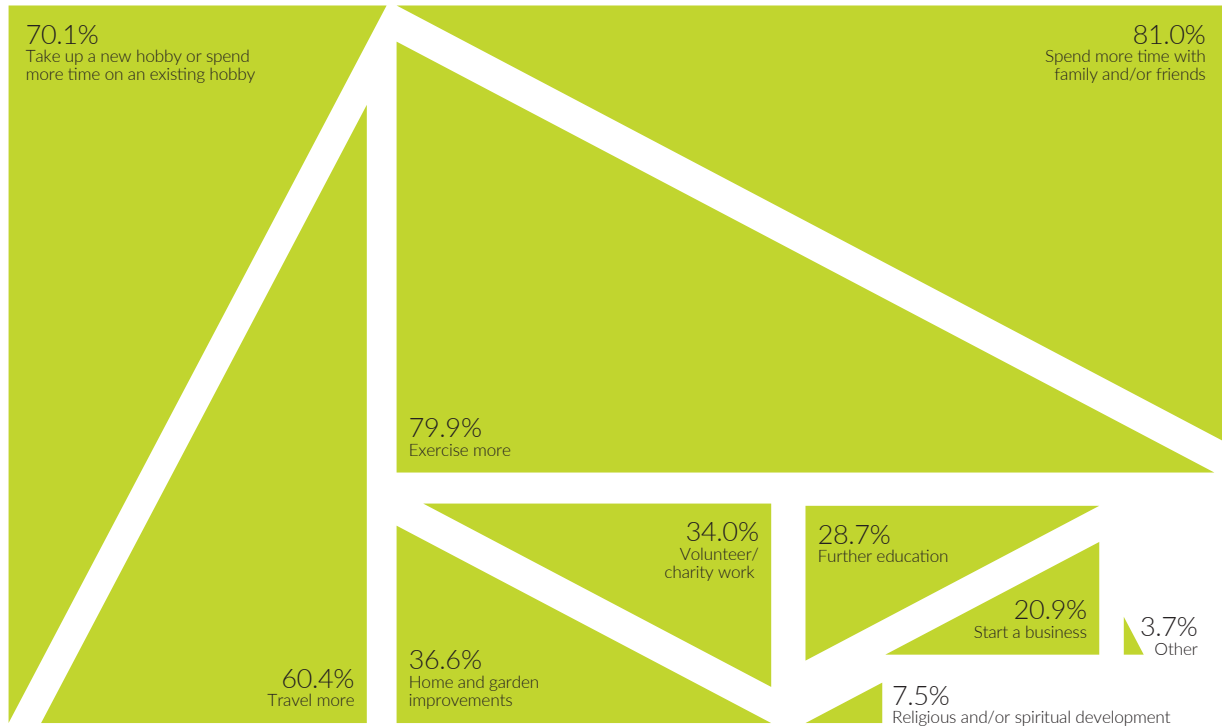
WHAT TAKES YOUR MIND OFF WORK AND RELIEVES STRESS?



Despite many leading firms offering top-notch programmes for lawyers, the fear of being seen as a failure, just by admitting to being under stress, often lurks in the shadows, particularly for trainees or associates who are keen to make their mark. Over the past few years Magic Circle firms such as Clifford Chance have introduced new initiatives focusing on the psychological stability of junior lawyers. But there is still a long way to go, particularly as so many still seem to ignore the problem of stress among partners – who, according to Keystone Law’s COO William Robins, “have never been so highly skilled, nor under so much pressure. They run the firm, the team, the client relationships and fee-earn. It’s an impressive juggling act.”

Nearly 80% of lawyers said that exercise was one of the most effective methods of taking their mind off work and combatting stress. Meanwhile over 70% said that socialising or spending time with family helped to relax them.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAD MORE TIME?

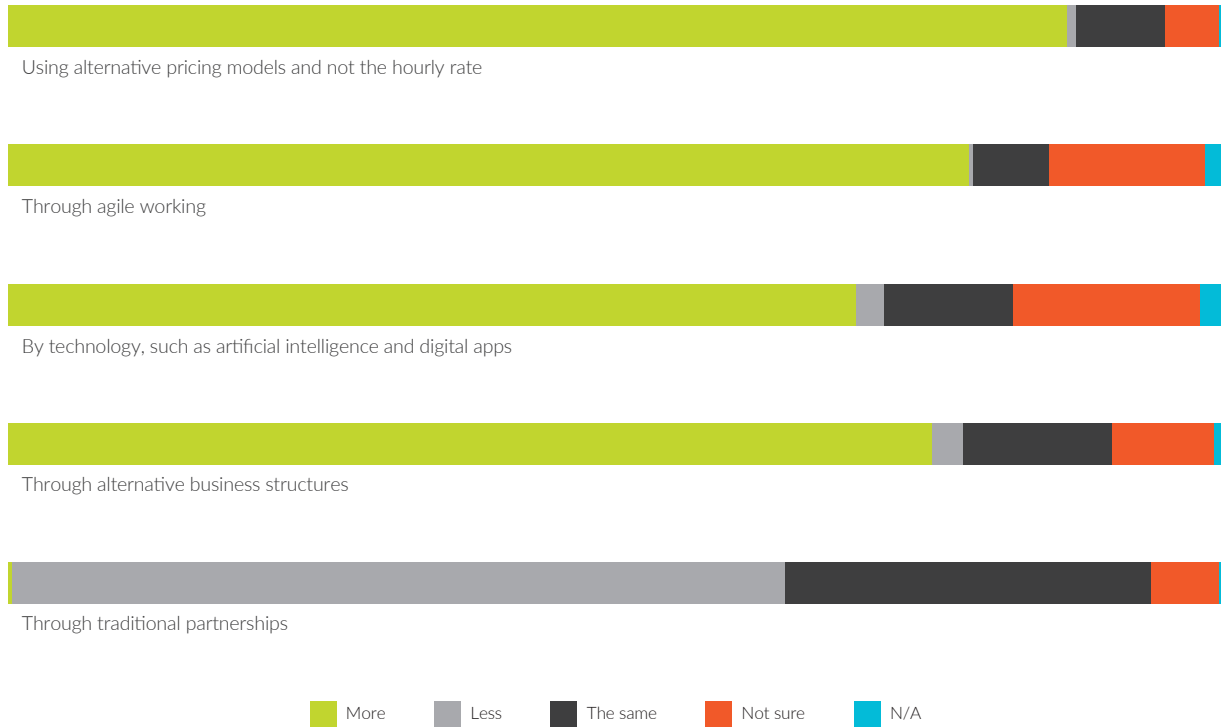


Aside from spending quality time with family and exercise, 70% of lawyers said they wish they had more time to spend on hobbies, while 61% of lawyers said that they would travel more if they had the time.

But with the UK now awash with new market entrants, competition in the industry is at its highest, placing more pressure on partners and forcing many to work around 40–70% more than their contracted hours.³ Consequently, many firms are offering fewer and fewer opportunities for their employees to enjoy life outside of law.

FACING THE FUTURE

IN TEN YEARS' TIME HOW DO YOU SEE LEGAL SERVICES BEING DELIVERED?



We live in a constantly changing world that is showing no signs of slowing down. As a result, the things of yesteryear that counted for everything may no longer count for anything. Following a severe economic downturn, one thing we can be certain of is that innovation holds the real key for survival. To stand out from the white noise, firms must be flexible and responsive to the needs of their clients and, equally, their employees.

Survey after survey has already been done on why so many lawyers feel stressed and overwhelmed. Now it's time to focus on how to prevent it. Despite lawyers being described as a breed that wears time-honoured traditions as badges of honour, it's clear that more and more are waking up to the idea of change.

Sixty-four per cent of surveyed lawyers, agreed that the traditional partnership model should feature much less, while 77% said that, despite undergoing constant debate, alternative business structures would play a bigger role in the provision of legal services.

The biggest pro response came in regard to banning the billable hour, with 87% saying that they envisaged a timesheet-free future.

The incorporation of artificial intelligence also garnered significant support with 70% of lawyers agreeing that it would be a significant feature in years to come.

LAW FIRMS AS CHANGE AGENTS

WITH MORE ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS APPEARING BY THE DAY, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE LEGAL REVOLUTION IS HERE TO STAY, WITH POSITIVE STEPS BEING TAKEN TO INNOVATE AND ADAPT FOR THE BETTER. BUT THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE. FIRMS MUST EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE AN AGENT FOR CHANGE AND REAP THE REWARDS OF A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER WORKFORCE.

ABOUT KEYSTONE LAW

Keystone Law is the UK's legal pioneer for agile working. Set up in 2002, the firm was created by a group of lawyers who realised that the legal market was ready for something new.

Using technology and modern working practices to drive productivity and deliver results – Keystone is structured differently, operates differently and thinks differently. Creativity, passion and innovation form the very foundations of its DNA.

Believing that happy lawyers equal happy clients, Keystone enables lawyers to work flexibly, choosing whichever option best ensures optimal client service. In addition, by removing the burden of management and admin tasks, Keystone enables lawyers to focus solely on doing what they do best practising law.

Today, the firm has developed from a start-up into the leading law firm of its kind – with over 200 experienced lawyers, 40 support staff and many thousands of clients.

Keystone Law commissioned this study, into lawyer wellbeing and the future of the profession, with the aim of raising awareness of the pressures faced by the industry's practitioners – as well as highlighting the benefits of greater flexibility in the world of law. The results are based on the results of a survey of 300 legal professionals working in the top 50-100 law firms across the UK.

Keystone Law offers a more flexible way of working for experienced lawyers. To find out more visit www.lawsetfree.com

1 <http://www.lawyerswithdepression.com/articles/how-stress-and-anxiety-become-depression-2/>
2 <http://blogs.lexisnexis.co.uk/futureoflaw/2015/09/why-your-firm-should-embrace-flexible-working/>
3 <http://www.legalcheek.com/2015/04/5-bad-things-about-being-a-city-lawyer-that-nobody-tells-you-about/>

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