

# Lawyers ASSISTANCE

By Dr. Angela White-Bazile, Esq.

SUFFERING IN SILENCE: "WHAT ABOUT ME"

The statistics are alarming:

- ▶ 21% of lawyers qualify as problem drinkers. That is more than triple the rate for the general population (6%) and nearly double the rate for other highly educated professionals (12%).

- ▶ 28% struggle with depression.

- ▶ 19% have symptoms of anxiety.

- ▶ 25% to 30% of lawyers facing disciplinary charges suffer from some type of addiction or mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

The American Bar Association's 2020 Profile of the Profession concluded that lawyers have been, and still are, more susceptible to alcohol use, substance use and mental issues compared to the general population and other highly educated professionals.

In general, emotional and mental pain is often viewed as less significant than physical pain. It is easier to say "my back hurts" than to say "my heart or spirit is broken." Stigma surrounding mental health and shame is real and causes many to suffer in silence.

Our profession, though rewarding, involves an excruciating workload in high-pressure, competitive and stressful workplaces. The demanding and long hours affect our physical, emotional and mental well-being. We help clients through the most difficult times of their lives and we are expected to be strong for others even when we feel empty.

If we take a minute to notice those around us, we realize that we do not know the battles others face. We do not recognize our peers who fake a smile at a social event while having suicidal thoughts. Do you see when a judge is having a good time and a sea of emotions suddenly rushes over her? Do you appreciate the senior partner who makes others happy when he is not?

On a personal level, how do you cope when one moment you are happy and the next you want to give up on everything?

What about when you want to cry your heart out but the tears will not flow? How often do you text, "I'm okay," when you do not know what to do? Do you text "I'm busy" when you have not left the house in days? Do you go to work, do your job and then go home and fall apart?

Are you tired of being the burned-out, depressed, judgmental version of yourself? Are you tired of lashing out uncontrollably? Has your drinking, smoking, shopping, eating disorder or gambling gotten out of control because you do not want to cope with your emotions in a healthy way?

Do you feel broken, miserable, lost and alone? As a society, we are disconnected, and that disconnection promotes loneliness and keeping things inside. Masking your emotions is lying to your family, friends, coworkers, boss and yourself.

Who can you be honest with and express how hard it is to hold everything in — the fear, anger, sadness, frustration, insecurities and so much more? Have you tried talking to your spouse, a family member or colleague and that person failed to recognize the severity of your cry for help and now you feel trapped and confused?

JLAP's purpose is to let you know that your experiences matter and are real, even when others deny them. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Acknowledging that everything is not okay embodies bravery, courage and determination. It can be hard to ask for help, but it can often make a huge difference to know that you are not alone and that someone is willing to listen and offer support.

Too many judges, lawyers, law students and legal professionals are suffering, and the impact on the profession and the public is too significant to ignore. Check on one another, no matter how well put together the other person seems.

One can look fine on the outside, while on the inside, the mind is a constant battleground and thoughts are running wild.

We all need someone to check on us as mental illness does not discriminate. Sometimes we need someone to simply be there, not to fix anything or do anything in particular, but to let us feel supported, cared about and seen.

Do not hesitate to reach out for professional help if you or someone you love or know may be struggling. You do not have to suffer in silence. No more pretending to be okay. No more ignoring your mental health and well-being. Ignoring harmful patterns will not only ruin your career but can ruin your entire life.

To learn more or seek confidential, non-disciplinary help in standing up for your needs and breaking the cycles of substance abuse or addiction, contact the professional clinical staff at JLAP at (985)778-0571, email [jlap@louisianajlap.com](mailto:jlap@louisianajlap.com), or visit our website at: [www.louisianajlap.com](http://www.louisianajlap.com). The call costs nothing but could make a huge difference.

We are a CONFIDENTIAL Safe Haven of Healing committed to fostering healthy and competent lawyers, judges, law students and legal professionals.

## FOOTNOTE

1. "ABA Profile of the Legal Profession 2020," American Bar Association, [www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf).

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