

TWENTY ESSEX

Wellbeing and Mental Health

14 October 2026

The Bar Council's 'Barrister Working Lives Survey' 2021

- 3,479 respondents
- 37% reported **feeling down or in low spirits**, 26% indicated they had low levels of psychological wellbeing
- 68% reported very high levels of **perfectionism**, which includes **dwelling on mistakes** and being **critical** of oneself
- Female barristers were significantly more likely than male ones to report a lower level of overall wellbeing
- Reported levels of wellbeing **increased with age**, with the oldest age group (65+) reporting significantly **higher wellbeing** than all younger age groups

The Barrister Wellbeing Scale

- Predicts perceived wellbeing in the legal profession

- 4 components:

    - Psychological Wellbeing
    - Perfectionism
    - Workload Management
    - Supporting Work Environment

The Australian perspective

- *"The particular set of stressors faced by barristers often results in a private fear they will unravel in some way"*

- Barristers often display the following characteristics:
  - Independence
  - Perfectionism
  - Self-criticism
  - Achievement-orientation
  - Highly developed rational thinking skills

- Protective at work, but likely harmful to wellbeing unchecked, especially if they persist outside of the work environment

Some characteristics / features of the profession

- Attention to detail / perfectionism seen as positive attributes
- Isolating (whether in peak periods or not)
- Periodically stressful / all-consuming, sometimes for sustained amounts of time
- High levels of responsibility
- Can be subject to very public criticism
- Adversarial / contentious
- Highly competitive work arena – hard to show physical or mental vulnerability, reduced collegiate support
- ”Responsiveness” often a sought-after characteristic

Selected risk and protective factors concerning quality of mental health

Risk Factors

- Social isolation / loneliness
- Severe or long-term stress
- Drug and alcohol misuse

Protective Factors

- Healthy diet
- Exercise
- Subjective sense of self-sufficiency
- Good peer relationships / social networks
- Economic / financial security

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

- December 2023 report from the Bar Council, based on data from the Working Lives Survey 2023 date (that report has not yet been published)

- 44% had personally experienced bullying or harassment at work (25% in 2021)
- 24% observed bullying or harassment at work (21% in 2021)
- Criminal and family practitioners more likely to be affected (43% v 37%)
- 32% less than 3 years' call, 44% 3-7 years' call, 34% 8 to 17 years' call
- 41% female v 19% male; 43% BAME v 27% white
- 40% under 34, 31% 35-54, 23% 55-64, 14% over 65

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

- What type of conduct?
  - 62% ridicule or demeaning language
  - 60% misuse of power or position
  - 31% overbearing supervision or undermining of work

- Person responsible:
  - 53% member of the judiciary
  - 31% more senior barrister

Some resources

- Wellbeing at the Bar https://www.wellbeingatthebar.org.uk/

- Wellness for Law http://www.wellnessforlawuk.org/
  - Mental Health Training (CPD accredited)
    - http://www.wellnessforlawuk.org/mental-health-training/

- MIND https://www.mind.org.uk/

- Law Care https://www.lawcare.org.uk/

- http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/QUTLawRw/2014/8.html

  (Bernadette Healy article)