



The Law Society

Resilience and wellbeing survey report

Junior Lawyers Division



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www.lawsociety.org.uk

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Introduction

As Council Member for the Law Society of England and Wales representing junior lawyers, I am keen to support junior lawyers experiencing negative stress and mental ill-health in the profession. To ascertain the extent of these issues in the profession, the junior lawyers division (**JLD**) undertook an initial survey of its membership in February 2017. The JLD represents legal practice course (**LPC**) students (including paralegals who have undertaken their LPC), trainee solicitors and solicitors with up to five years' post qualification experience (**PQE**). Membership of the JLD is free and automatic for those who fall within these groups. The JLD's membership is currently approximately 70,000.

The 2017 JLD Resilience and Wellbeing survey received 214 responses and the resulting findings raised some extremely concerning questions. The survey received excellent coverage and traction, being the first ever survey, conducted in the UK, addressing the resilience and wellbeing of junior lawyers. The results of the survey were launched in a [report](#) at the 2017 JLD conference which took place at the Law Society and were accompanied by a session on “stress in the legal profession: a new approach” by Chetna Bhatt of Being Lawyers. Following this, Chetna and I recorded a webinar on the same topic which aired live during mental health awareness week.

The 2017 survey found that more than 90% of respondents had experienced stress in their role with 26% of those respondents experiencing severe/extreme levels of stress. More than 25% of respondents stated that they had experienced a mental health problem in the last month (whether formally diagnosed or not).

Because of the concerning statistics in the 2017 survey about junior lawyers with mental ill-health issues not knowing where to turn to at work, or elsewhere if they had any issues, I pledged to write guidance for employers on how best to support the resilience and wellbeing of their employees. With the support of Nick Bloy of Wellbeing Republic, the JLD's [employer guidance](#) was launched on Time to Talk Day in February 2018.

The intention and hope for the guidance is that it will encourage organisations to adopt a more proactive and inclusive approach to mental health. The guidance is split into three core pillars: (1) education/training, (2) support and (3) culture. Although the guidance was prepared with junior lawyers in mind, its contents are equally applicable for senior lawyers and partners, as well as business services staff. The JLD guidance is also transferrable across a range of industries and sectors.

In March 2018, Nick Bloy and I hosted a roundtable event with City law firms to discuss the employer guidance and find out what law firms are doing internally to support their employees. The event was very well attended by firms from across the City of London and we had representatives join us from the Law Society, the Solicitors Regulation Authority and LawCare. The JLD hopes to run a further roundtable on the guidance later this year.

This year's survey was open for the duration of January and February 2018 and was published through the JLD's social media channels. The survey's results have been released at the JLD's 2018 annual conference. The 2018 survey received 959 responses (compared to 214 last year).

The 2018 survey found that more than 90% of respondents had experienced stress in their role with 26% of those respondents experiencing severe/extreme levels of stress (the same as last year's survey). More than 38% of respondents stated that they had experienced a mental health problem in the last month (whether formally diagnosed or not). This is an increase of more than 13% from last year's survey.

It is therefore clear that negative stress and mental ill-health continue to adversely affect junior lawyers in the profession. There is real value in investing time and resource to improve employees' mental wellbeing and mental health. The legal profession is at risk of losing some of its best talent if employers do not begin to embrace their employees' wellbeing as a key asset for their business. By supporting employees and providing them with the necessary tools and resources to succeed, employers can reduce absences, reduce the risk of mistakes, increase productivity and create organisations which attract and retain the best talent.

The legal profession still has a long way to go to alleviate the stigma relating to mental ill-health. The JLD hopes that the work it is doing will help to reduce the stigma and encourage organisations to foster good mental health.

The JLD is extremely grateful for all the support it has received from organisations that have sent the survey to their junior lawyers. The JLD hopes to run the survey again next year and to continue its work to support junior lawyers experiencing negative stress and mental ill-health in the workplace.

Kayleigh Leonie
Law Society Council Member



Executive Summary

During January and February 2018, 959 members of the Junior Lawyers Division responded to an online survey about resilience and wellbeing.

One-fifth of respondents (20%) reported regularly feeling unable to cope because of stress in the last month prior to the survey, an increase on the 15% reported in 2017. The proportion reporting either 'regularly' or 'occasionally' feeling unable to cope has remained stable (55% in 2017 and 54% in 2018).

Over half of women (55%) and nearly half of men (42%) feel like they are regularly or occasionally unable to cope.

Trainees appear better supported than 0-5 years PQE solicitors and LPC students (58% of 0-5 years PQE solicitors felt unable to cope regularly or occasionally compared to 47% of trainees)

Over one-third (35%) of respondents had regularly felt stress (defined here as being under too much emotional or mental pressure), in the last month prior to the survey because of work, slightly down from the 39% reported in 2017.

The same proportion of respondents in both the 2017 and 2018 surveys reported experiencing either severe or extreme levels of stress (26%). The proportion of men regularly reporting either 'severe' or 'extreme' levels of stress increased from 20% in 2017 to 26% in the 2018 survey.

Only 4% of respondents experienced no negative stress in the previous month

A high proportion of respondents reporting severe (61%) or 'extreme' (84%) levels of stress also reported regularly feeling unable to cope.

High workload (67%) and client demands and expectations (57%) were the most commonly selected causes of stress. In the 2017 survey client demands and expectations was the fourth most frequently cited response (48%).

Most frequently mentioned, as a result of work related stress, were experiences of problems with family life and relationships.

More than two-fifths, (40%) of respondents looked for another job as a result of the stress experienced at work in the past month

Exercise and taking time away from the desk were the most frequently mentioned strategies or mechanisms used to deal with stress at work.

Almost two-fifths (38%) of respondents reported experiencing a mental health problem (whether formally diagnosed or not) in the last month, an increase on the 26% reported in 2017. The largest change was in relation to trainees – 19% of trainees in 2017 reported experiencing a mental health problem, compared to 39% in 2018.

Two-fifths (40%) of respondents worked for organisations which offered help, guidance and support in relation to mental health. A similar proportion (39%) of respondents did not know about provision, suggesting that existing employer schemes could be better promoted.

The majority of respondents thought their employer could do more to provide help, guidance and support in relation stress at work (83%) and to mental health at work (80%). Even those working for employers with some provision indicated that more could be done.

A quarter of respondents work with vulnerable clients (vulnerable by virtue of age, mental or physical health difficulty, as a result of being in custody, through lack of capacity, through experience of trauma, or who are vulnerable for any other reason). A higher proportion of this group reported that they had 'regularly' felt unable to cope and/or had 'regularly' experienced stress because of work over the last month, compared to those not working with this client group. Those working with vulnerable clients were less likely to report working for employers offering help, guidance and support in relation to mental health issues.

Profile of respondents

Question 1

Please confirm which category of JLD member you fall into

Answer	2017 (n=214)	n (2018)	2018 (n=959)
LPC students (including paralegals)	14.0%	92	9.6%
Trainee solicitors	32.2%	361	37.6%
Solicitors with up to five years' post qualified experience	53.7%	506	52.8%
Total	100%	959	100.0%

Question 2

Please confirm your gender

Answer	2017 (n=214)	n (2018)	2018 (n=959)
Female	72.9%	701	73.1%
Male	26.6%	246	25.7%
Non-binary/third gender	-	-	-
Prefer to self-define	na	2	0.2%
Prefer not to say	0.5%	10	1%
Total	100.0%	959	100.0%

Question 3

Please confirm what type of organisation you work for

Answer	2017 (n=214)	n (2018)	2018 (n=959)
Private practice	90.7%	878	91.6%
In-house	5.1%	53	5.5%
Government	2.3%	17	1.8%
Third sector	0.9%	5	0.5%
Other (please specify)	0.4%	6	0.6%
Total	100.0%	959	100.0%

Question 4 (new question to 2018)
Which region do you work in?

Answer	2017	n (2018)	% (n=959)
The City of London	-	279	29.1
Greater London	-	54	5.6
North East	-	27	2.8
North West	-	109	11.4
East	-	17	1.8
Midlands	-	111	11.6
South East	-	95	9.9
South West	-	85	8.9
Yorkshire	-	152	15.8
Wales	-	17	1.8
Outside England and Wales	-	10	1.0
Unknown	-	3	0.3
Total	-	959	100.0

Question 5 (new question to 2018)

As part of your job, do you work for vulnerable clients?

Vulnerable by virtue of age, mental or physical health difficulty, as a result of being in custody, through lack of capacity, through experience of trauma, or who are vulnerable for any other reason.

Answer	2017	n (2018)	% (n=959)
Yes	-	244	25.4
No	-	706	73.6
Unknown	-	9	0.9
Total	-	959	100.0

A third of LPC students (including those working as paralegals) work for vulnerable clients, compared to 24.9% of trainee solicitors and 24.8% of solicitors with 0-5 years PQE.

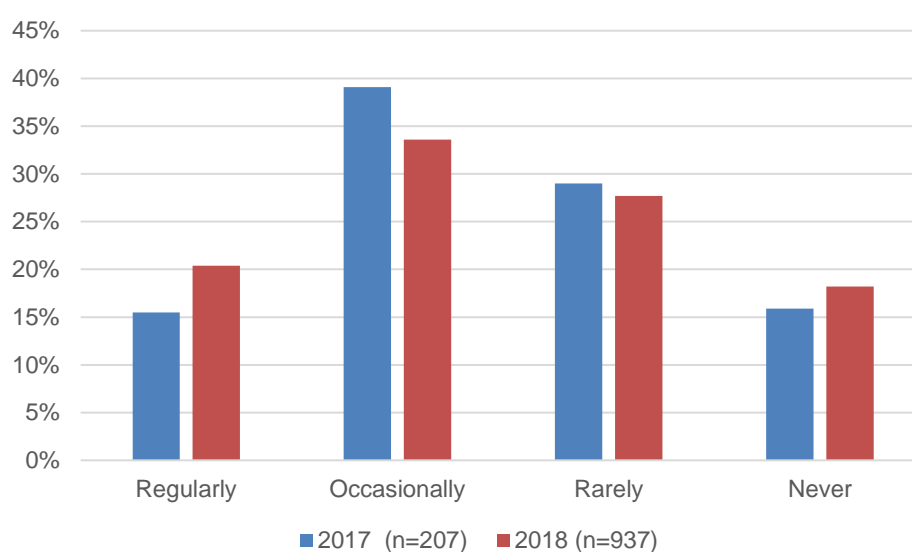
27% of women work with vulnerable clients compared to just 9.3% of men.

STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Question 6

How often in the last month have you felt unable to cope as a result of stress?

Answers	2017 (n=207)	2018 (n=937)
Regularly	15.5%	20.4%
Occasionally	39.1%	33.6%
Rarely	29.0%	27.7%
Never	15.9%	18.2%



	Male (n=238)	Female (n=688)	LPC (n=90)	Trainee (n=353)	0-5 PQE (n=494)
Regularly	13.4%	22.4%	21.1%	16.7%	22.9%
Occasionally	30.7%	34.7%	35.6%	30.3%	35.6%
Rarely	24.4%	29.1%	30.0%	28.9%	26.5%
Never	31.5%	13.8%	13.3%	24.1%	15.0%

20% of respondents in 2018 reported regularly feeling unable to cope as a result of stress, compared to 15.5% of respondents in the 2017 survey.

A higher proportion of women than men reported being either 'regularly' or 'occasionally' unable to cope as a result of stress. However, the proportion of male respondents reporting regularly feeling unable to cope had increased from 5.3% in 2017 to 13.4% in 2018.

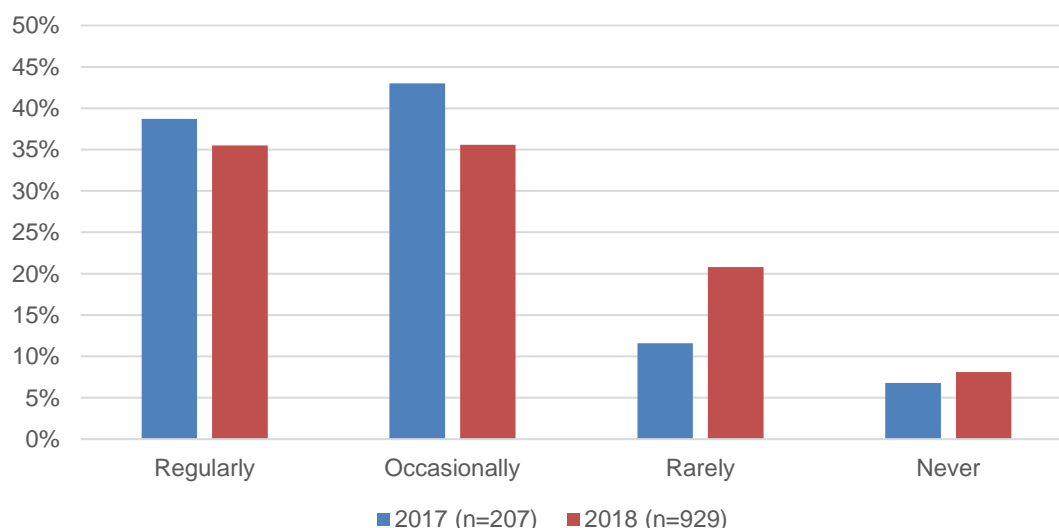
A quarter of respondents working with vulnerable clients as part of their job reported 'regularly' feeling unable to cope, compared to 18.7% of those not working with this client group

Question 7

How often in the last month have you felt stressed (defined as being under too much emotional or mental pressure) as a result of work?

Answers	2017 (n=207)	2018 (n=929)
Regularly	38.7%	35.5%
Occasionally	43.0%	35.6%
Rarely	11.6%	20.8%
Never	6.8%	8.1%

The proportion of respondents reporting feeling stressed as a result of work appears to have declined on 2017 figures – 82% of respondents to the 2017 survey reported either regularly or occasionally feeling stressed within the last month compared to 71% in 2018.



	Male (n=234)	Female (n=684)	LPC (n=89)	Trainee (n=351)	0-5 PQE (n=489)
Regularly	29.1%	37.3%	36.0%	27.6%	41.1%
Occasionally	34.6%	36.1%	36.0%	34.8%	36.2%
Rarely	23.9%	20.0%	20.2%	25.9%	17.2%
Never	12.4%	6.6%	7.9%	11.7%	5.5%

Men were less likely to report regular feelings of stress (29.1%), compared to women (37.3%) and to men in the 2017 survey (37.5%).

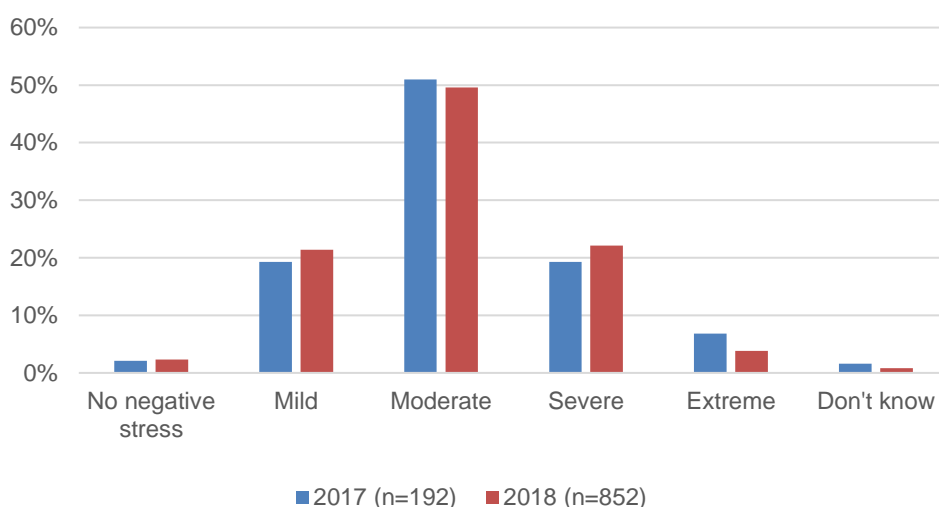
Over two-fifths (42.5%) of respondents working for vulnerable clients reported 'regularly' feeling stressed as result of work, compared to 33% of those not working with this clients group.

Question 8

If so, how would you describe the level of stress?

Answer	2017 (n=192)	2018 (n=852)
No negative stress	2.1%	2.3%
Mild	19.3%	21.4%
Moderate	51.0%	49.6%
Severe	19.3%	22.1%
Extreme	6.8%	3.8%
Don't know	1.6%	0.8%

Of those reporting work related stress, the same proportion of respondents reported either severe or extreme levels of stress (26%) compared to the 2017 survey (26%). The 29.2% of qualified solicitors with 0-5 years PQE experiencing high levels of stress is above the 19% of PC holders reporting severe or extreme levels of stress across the wider solicitor profession during the last year (PC Holder Survey 2017).



	Male (n=204)	Female (n=638)	LPC (n=81)	Trainee (n=309)	0-5 PQE (n=462)
No negative stress	1.5%	2.7%	1.2%	3.9%	1.5%
Mild	24.0%	20.8%	25.9%	25.2%	18.0%
Moderate	48.0%	50.3%	45.7%	49.2%	50.6%
Severe	23.0%	21.2%	24.7%	18.1%	24.2%
Extreme	2.9%	4.1%	2.5%	2.3%	5.0%
Don't know	0.5%	0.9%	0.0%	1.3%	0.6%

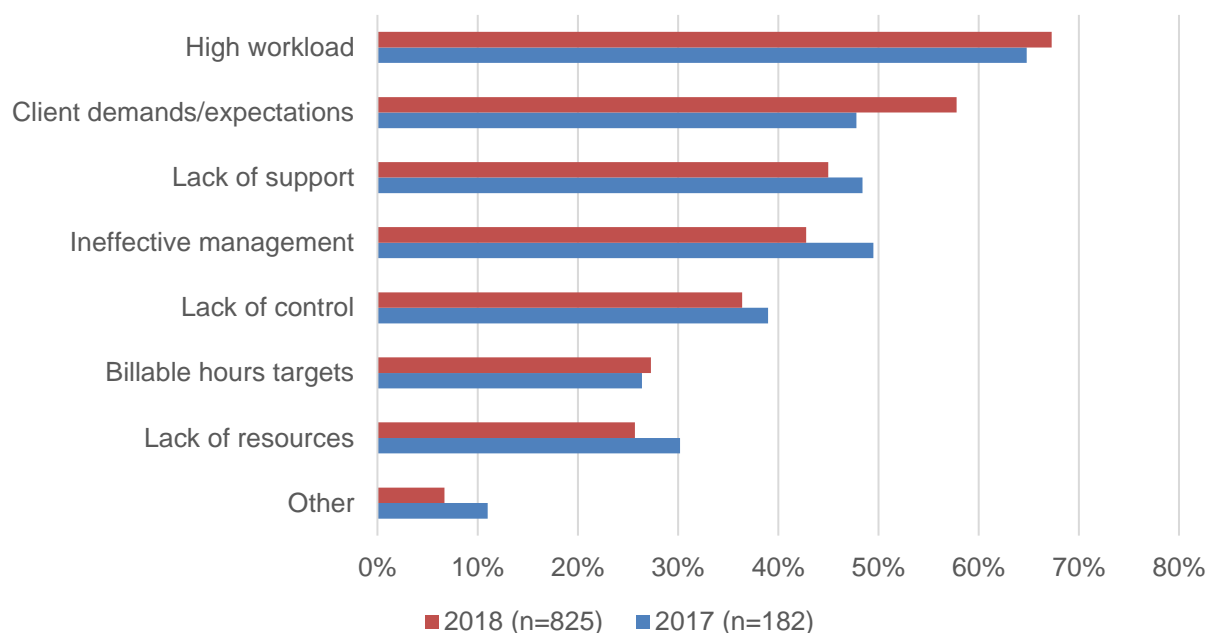
The proportion of men reporting severe or extreme levels of stress has increased from 20% in 2017 to 26% in 2018.

Question 9

If so, what do you consider to be the cause of the stress at work you experience?

Answer	2017 (n=182)	2018 (n=825)
High workload	64.8%	67.3%
Client demands/expectations	47.8%	57.8%
Lack of support	48.4%	45.0%
Ineffective management	49.5%	42.8%
Lack of control	39.0%	36.4%
Billable hours targets	26.4%	27.3%
Lack of resources	30.2%	25.7%
Other	11.0%	6.7%

Of those experiencing stress, the most frequently mentioned cause was high workload, the same as in the 2017 survey. The largest difference between the 2017 and 2018 responses was in relation to client demands/expectations – the fourth most common response in 2017 (47.8%), moving to second in 2018 (57.8%).



Top two answers	Answer 1	Answer 2
Overall (2018)	High workload	Client demands/expectations
Overall (2017)	High workload	Ineffective management
Male	High workload	Client demands/expectations
Female	High workload	Client demands/expectations
LPC students (including paralegals)	High workload	Client demands/expectations
Trainee solicitors	High workload	Lack of support
Solicitors with up to five years' post qualified experience	High workload	Client demands/expectations
Those experiencing severe or extreme level of stress	High workload	Lack of support

Other causes of stress

- Clients behaviour (vulnerability/aggressive/emotional aspects of cases) including dealing with litigants in person.
- Lack of management / poor management - lack of feedback, micromanagement, rudeness of supervisor, pressure from supervisor.
- Unsupportive work colleagues - unrealistic expectations, keeping everyone happy, lack of appreciation / recognition, lack of pastoral care.
- Own expectations – self-imposed pressure to meet certain standards.
- Long working hours – expectation to stay late, high levels of unpaid overtime, uncertainty of hours, working hours on top of out-of-hours police station call-outs.
- Lack of experience - lack of familiarity with tasks, new to area of work.
- Money (debt/low wages) - unpaid overtime, unpaid bills, low trainee wage.
- Lack of staff – including both solicitors and support staff.
- Lack of time - no time to address issues in personal life, poor work-life balance.
- Deadlines and poor allocation of work.
- Lack of training and development - *"no job training and opportunities for development", "judgement for promotion"*.
- Bullying.
- Fear of making mistakes / *"the unknowns"*.
- Sexual harassment.
- Job insecurities - *"Not knowing if your hard work will pay off and lead to securing a job at the end of the TC"*.
- Prejudice against minorities.

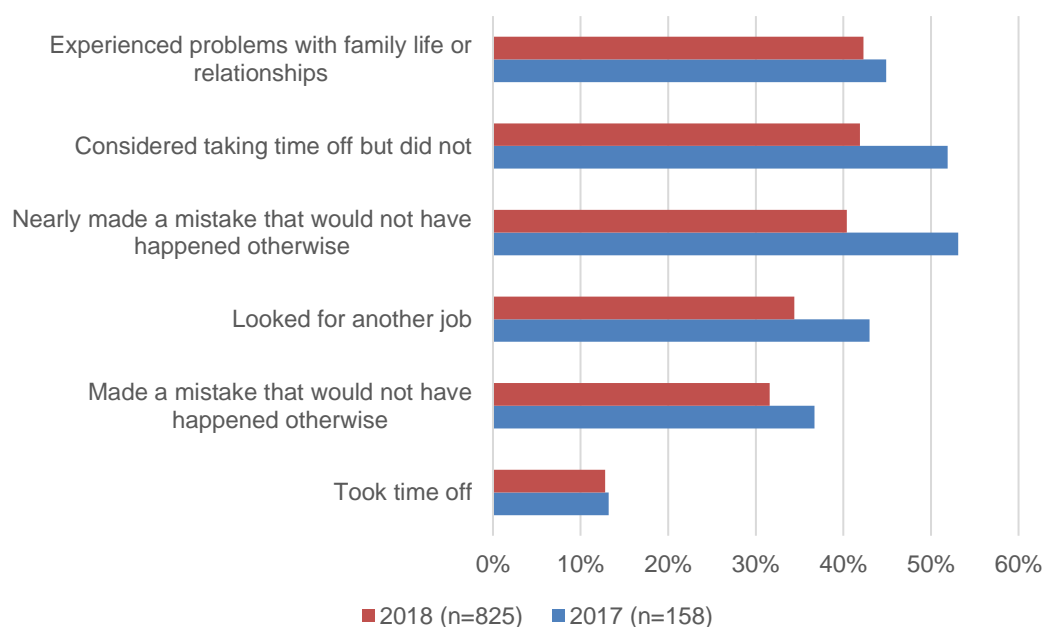
Question 10

In the last month, have you experienced any of the below situations as a result of work-related stress?

Answer	2017 (n=158)	2018 (n=825)
Experienced problems with family life or relationships	44.9%	42.3%
Considered taking time off but did not	51.9%	41.9%
Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	53.1%	40.4%
Looked for another job	43.0%	34.4%
Made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	36.7%	31.6%
Took time off	13.2%	12.8%
Other (specified)	-	4.2%

Other situations, caused by stress included the following:

- Illness – anxiety, feeling physically sick, breaking down, chest pains
- Seeking medical help - being signed off, given medication
- Emotional upset and fatigue – negative depressed thoughts, self-harm
- Disrupted sleep
- Considered leaving the profession, moved jobs
- Considered or attempted suicide
- Slower getting work done, eye for detail not as strong



In 2017, stress was most commonly linked to 'nearly making a mistake that would not have happened otherwise'. In the 2018 survey, those with work-related stress were more likely to report this leading to problems with family life and relationships.

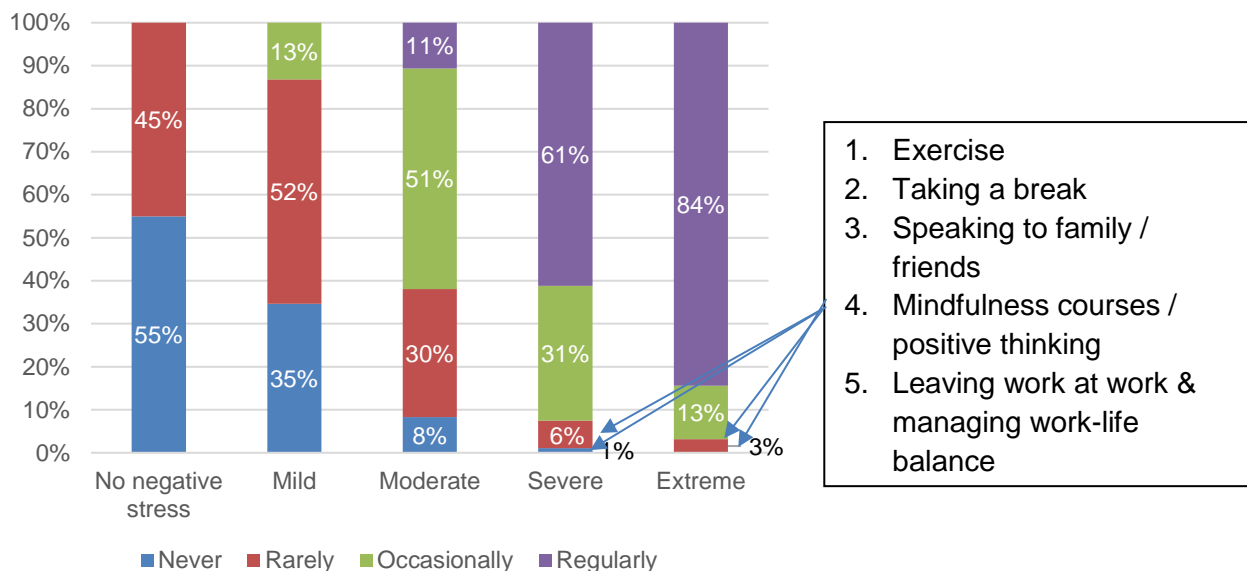
Top two answers	Answer 1	Answer 2
Overall (2018)	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
Overall (2017)	Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	Considered taking time off but did not
Male	Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	Experienced problems with family life or relationships
Female	Considered taking time off but did not	Experienced problems with family life or relationships
LPC students (including paralegals)	Considered taking time off but did not	Looked for a new job
Trainee solicitors	Considered taking time off but did not	Experienced problems with family life or relationships
Solicitors with up to five years' post qualified experience	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not = Looked for another job
Those experiencing severe or extreme level of stress	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not

Question 11

What strategies or mechanisms do you have in place to manager or reduce your stress levels?

- Exercising – walking, running, yoga, pilates, sport, gym, fitness classes
- Taking time out – taking regular breaks away from desk, taking regular leave, taking a lunch break, lunchtime walks
- Speaking to friends and family
- Focusing, planning and prioritising work
- Mindfulness courses / positive thinking
- Speaking to line manager / senior members of staff
- Leaving work at work
- Taking part in hobbies and other non-work-related activities
- Talking to colleagues
- Consuming alcohol
- Counselling / behavioural cognitive therapy
- Changing diet / healthy living
- Working longer hours to get the job done
- Getting enough sleep
- Faith / prayer

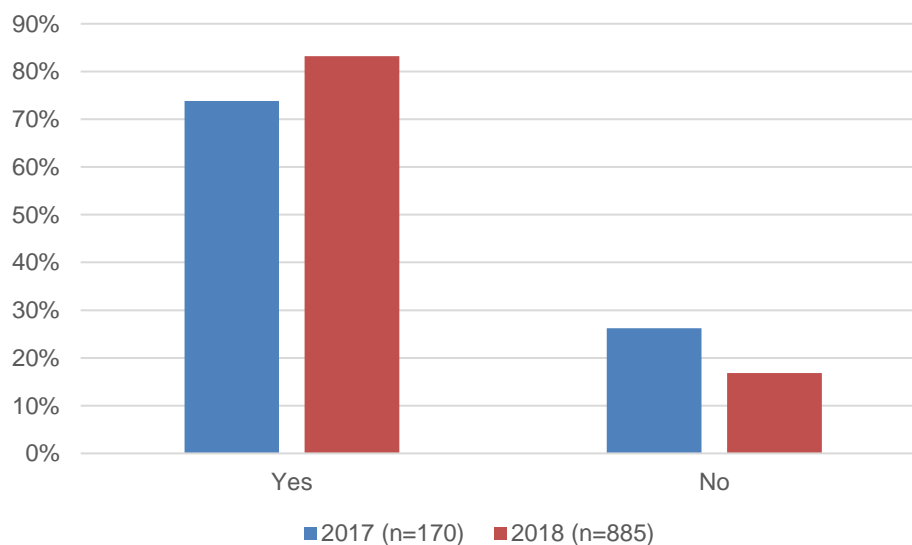
Those respondents reporting experiencing severe or extreme levels of stress over the last month, but either never, rarely, or occasionally had felt unable to cope were most likely to report the following strategies.



Question 12

Do you think your organisation could do more to provide help/guidance/support to employees in relation to stress at work?

Answer	2017 (n=170)	2018 (n=885)
Yes	73.8%	83.2%
No	26.2%	16.8%



MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Question 13

Within the last month, have you experienced a mental health problem (whether formally diagnosed or not)?

Answers	2017 (n=172)	2018 (n=879)
Yes	25.7%	38.5%
No	74.3%	61.5%

Answers	Male (n=216)	Female (n=655)	LPC (n=80)	Trainee (n=332)	0-5 PQE (n=467)
Yes	29.2%	41.5%	37.5%	38.9%	38.3%
No	70.8%	58.5%	62.5%	61.1%	61.7%

Overall, the proportion of respondents experiencing a mental health problem (whether formally diagnosed or not), within the last month had increased on 2017 figures. The largest change was in the proportion of trainees - from 19% of trainees in 2017 to 38.9% in 2018.

Over two-fifths (44%) of those working with vulnerable clients reported experiencing a mental health problem over the last month, compare to 36.4% of those not working with this client group.

Question 14

Was your employer aware that you were experiencing a mental health problem?

Answers	2017 (n=45)	2018 (n=341)
Yes	23.9%	17.9%
No	76.0%	82.1%

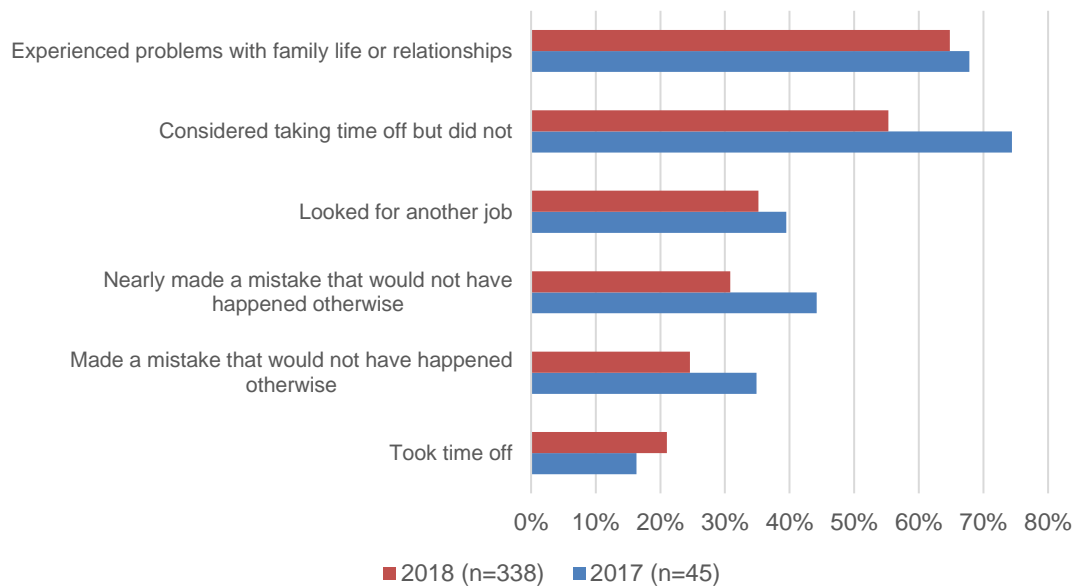
	Male (n=64)	Female (n=274)	LPC (n=30)	Trainee (n=182)	0-5 PQE (n=129)
Yes	17.2%	18.2%	20.0%	10.9%	22.5%
No	81.8%	81.8%	80.0%	89.1%	77.5%

Almost one-fifth of respondents experiencing a mental health problem reported that their employer was aware. Whilst no men in the 2017 survey had disclosed their problem to their employer in 2017 – in the current survey a similar proportion of men and women had made employers aware. A smaller proportion of trainees and 0-5 PQE solicitors had made their employer aware compared to the 2017 survey.

Question 15

In the last month, have you experienced any of the below situations as a result of your mental health problem?

Answer	2017 (n=45)	2018 (n=338)
Experienced problems with family life or relationships	67.8%	64.8%
Considered taking time off but did not	74.4%	55.3%
Looked for another job	39.5%	35.2%
Nearly made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	44.2%	30.8%
Made a mistake that would not have happened otherwise	34.9%	24.6%
Took time off	16.3%	21.0%



	Most commonly cited	
	Answer 1	Answer 2
Overall (2018)	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
Overall (2017)	Considered taking time off but did not	Experienced problems with family life or relationships
Male	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
Female	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
LPC students (including paralegals)	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
Trainee solicitors	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not
Solicitors with up to five years' post qualified experience	Experienced problems with family life or relationships	Considered taking time off but did not

Question 16

Does your organisation provide any help/guidance/support to employees in relation to mental health at work?

Answer	2017 (n=45) with mental health problem	2018 (n=338) with mental health problem	2018 (n=872) full sample
Yes	26.1%	35.2%	37.2%
No	39.1%	33.5%	23.7%
Don't know	34.8%	31.1%	39.1%

A smaller proportion of respondents working for vulnerable clients worked for employers providing help, guidance or support to employees in relation to mental health at work – 22.8% compared to 42.5% not working with this client group.

Almost two-fifths (39%) of respondents in 2018 did not know if their employer provided any help, guidance or support to employees, suggesting that existing employer schemes could be better promoted where they are available.

Question 17

Do you think your organisation could do more to provide help/guidance/support to employees in relation to mental health at work?

Answer	2017 (n=171)	2018 (n=323)
Yes	50.4%	80.2%
No	49.6%	19.8%

A higher proportion of respondents in the 2018 survey thought their organisation could do more to provide help, guidance and support to employees in relation to mental health at work. 70% of respondents who had earlier reported their employer currently provided support, thought the organisation could do more.

Question 18

Do you know of any organisation that are there to help you if you want to discuss stress at work or any other mental health issues?

Answer	2017 (n=171)	2018 (n=324)
Yes	50.3%	65.7%
No	49.7%	34.3%

In 2018, a higher proportion of respondents were aware of organisations that could help compared to 2017 findings. LPC students and those having experienced severe or extreme levels of stress were less likely to be aware compared to other groups.

	Male (n=170)	Female (n=481)	LPC (n=63)	Trainee (n=247)	0-5 PQE (n=346)	Mental health problem (n=118)	Severe /extreme stress (n=220)
Yes	60.0%	68.0%	54.0%	66.0%	67.6%	67.3%	57.6%
No	40.0%	32.0%	46.0%	34.0%	32.4%	32.7%	42.4%

Support and advice

www.lawcare.org.uk

A charity that supports and promotes good mental health and wellbeing in the legal community, provides resources and a confidential helpline (0800 279 6888)

www.sba.org.uk

Charity that helps solicitors in serious financial need as a result of illness, accident, redundancy or other adversity (020 8675 6440)

www.mind.org.uk

Mental health charity

www.samaritans.org

Support for depressed individuals, in particular those considering suicide

www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk

Aims to help create a society in which people with mental health problems enjoy equal chances in life

www.neweconomics.org

Practical advice about wellbeing

www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Guidelines for managing stress at work

www.depressionalliance.org

Information and support on depression

www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk

Mental health information for employers

www.rethink.org

De-stigmatising mental illness

www.ias.org.uk

Education charity providing advice on alcohol consumption

www.downyourdrink.org.uk

Advice on alcohol consumption

www.time-to-change.org.uk

De-stigmatising mental illness

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Mental health charity