



TOPE ADEBAYO LP



International **Men's** Day

MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK-LIFE
IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY

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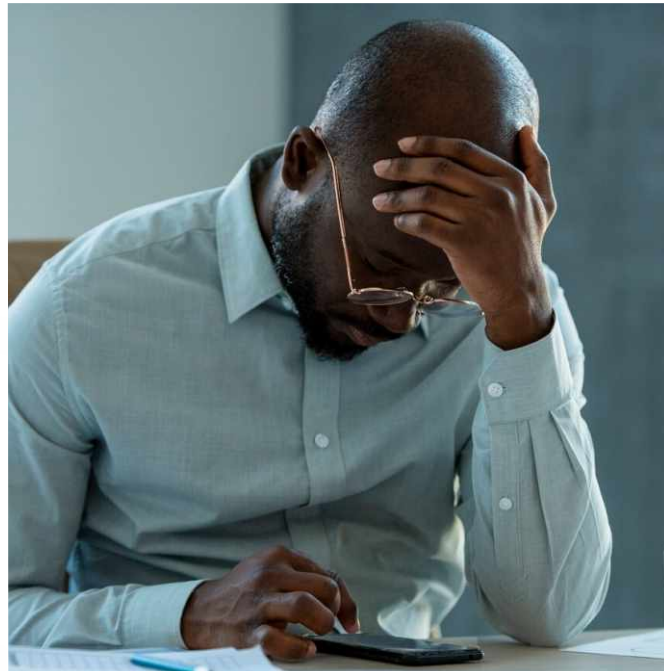
INTRODUCTION

International Men's Day (IMD), celebrated on 19th November each year, is an opportunity to recognize the contributions and challenges of men across the globe. The theme for this year's IMD is "Men's Health Champions" which centers on the promotion of men's mental health, a critical issue that has often been neglected. Men face unique societal pressures that can significantly impact their emotional well-being, particularly those working in high-pressure fields like law, where balancing professional and personal demands is a common struggle.

The legal industry, known for its intense workloads, high expectations, and competitive atmosphere, is notorious for placing immense pressure on its professionals. For men, these challenges can be compounded by traditional gender norms that emphasize strength, stoicism, and success, which may discourage them from seeking help. This article explores the mental health challenges men face in the legal sector, the impact of work-life imbalance, and possible solutions to promote a healthier and more supportive work environment.

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH: A SILENT CRISIS

Men's mental health is often overshadowed by societal expectations that men should be resilient, unemotional, and capable of handling stress without seeking help. These expectations can lead to men internalizing struggles, potentially resulting in burnout, anxiety,



depression, or substance abuse. Despite recent progress in reducing the stigma around mental health, men are still significantly less likely to seek therapy or counseling compared to women.

Statistics reveal the gravity of the issue. A 2021 report indicates that men are three to four times more likely to die by suicide than women.¹

¹ Daniel De Vise, "More women attempt suicide. More men die by suicide" <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/4009420-more-women-attempt-suicide-more-men-die-by-suicide/> accessed on 18th October 2024.

INTERNATIONAL MEN'S DAY - MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK-LIFE IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY



While women are more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety, men are often underdiagnosed because their emotional distress tends to manifest as anger, irritability, or risk-taking behaviors rather than sadness.² This disparity highlights a gap in mental health support for men, particularly in industries where stress is a constant companion, such as law.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The legal industry is a notoriously high-stress field, with long working hours, high client demands, and constant pressure to perform at exceptional levels. Lawyers frequently deal with emotionally charged cases, ethical dilemmas, and immense workloads that can lead to exhaustion and chronic stress. For many, the pressure to win cases or meet clients' expectations comes at the expense of their mental health. Legal work often involves adversarial environments, reinforcing traditional masculine ideals of toughness and aggression. As a result, male lawyers may feel uncomfortable acknowledging struggles with anxiety, depression, or burnout, fearing it could be perceived as weakness or incompetence.



A study by the American Bar Association (ABA) revealed alarming levels of mental health issues within the legal community. It found that 28% of lawyers reported symptoms of depression, 19% experienced symptoms of anxiety, and 11.4% of lawyers had suicidal thoughts.³ In addition, many lawyers struggle with substance abuse, often turning to alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism for the immense pressures they face. For male lawyers, these statistics reflect an alarming reality, as they are more likely to suffer in silence due to societal expectations around masculinity.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE: THE ELUSIVE IDEAL IN LAW

Work-life balance is challenging in many professions, but the legal industry is particularly notorious in this regard. Lawyers frequently work 40-60 hours per week, with an expectation of constant availability for clients, partners, and senior colleagues. The resulting lack of personal time can have a devastating effect on mental health, as it reduces the opportunity for stress relief, family interactions, and social activities that provide emotional support.

² Jarrod B Call & Kevin Shafer, "Gendered Manifestations of Depression and Help Seeking Among Men," <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5734537/#bibr8-1557988315623993> accessed on 18th October 2024.

³ New study on lawyer well-being reveals serious concerns for legal profession <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/publications/youraba/2017/december-2017/secretcy-and-fear-of-stigma-among-the-barriers-to-lawyer-well-being/> accessed on 18th October 2024.



For men, achieving a healthy work-life balance in law can be particularly challenging due to the added pressure of fulfilling traditional gender roles as breadwinners.

Remote work, in particular, has had a mixed impact on male lawyers. While some appreciate the flexibility, others report that the lack of clear boundaries has increased working hours.⁴

Many male lawyers may feel compelled to work longer hours and take on more responsibilities to meet financial expectations and support their families.

Without the physical separation between the office and home, many find themselves working longer days, which can exacerbate mental health issues and strain relationships with family members.

This pressure is exacerbated by a workplace culture that often equates long hours with dedication and success.

While some law firms have started implementing flexible work policies or mental health initiatives, many male lawyers feel reluctant to take advantage of these programs for fear of being seen as less committed. This creates a cycle where men continue to overwork themselves, leading to burnout and further mental health struggles.



THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY AND REMOTE WORK

The rise of technology has also played a role in complicating the work-life balance for legal professionals. While digital tools and remote work options offer flexibility, they also make it harder to disconnect from work. The ability to check emails, answer client inquiries, and attend virtual meetings at any time of the day blurs the line between professional and personal life. For 'men-in-law', this often means that even when they are physically at home, they remain mentally at work, making it difficult to recharge.

ADDRESSING THE ISSUES OF MEN'S HEALTH IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY

While the challenges facing men's mental health and work-life balance in the legal industry are significant, steps can be taken to create a healthier environment. Law firms, legal institutions, and individual lawyers can all promote mental well-being and foster a work culture that prioritizes balance over burnout.

⁴The Future of Work: How Law Firms Can Adapt to Remote Work <https://www.owenreed.co.uk/workplace-culture/how-law-firms-adapt-remote-work/> accessed on 18th October 2024.



1

REDUCING STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

Law firms should actively promote mental health awareness through seminars, workshops, and open discussions about the mental health challenges inherent in legal work. Creating a culture where vulnerability is accepted and encouraged can help break down the barriers that prevent men from seeking support.

3

PROVIDING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Counseling services, employee assistance programs (EAPs), and peer support networks, should be made readily available to all legal professionals. Law Firms can partner with mental health organizations to provide confidential therapy services tailored to the unique pressures of legal work. Offering mental health check-ins and ensuring that these services are easily accessible will help male lawyers feel more comfortable seeking help when they need it.

2

IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORK POLICIES

Recognizing the importance of work-life balance, law firms can implement policies that allow employees to maintain a healthier relationship with work. Flexible work hours, part-time or reduced hours, and encouraging vacation time can help. Men should be encouraged to take advantage of these policies without fear of judgment or professional repercussions.

4

PROMOTING HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Law Firms should focus on creating healthier work environments that prioritize well-being. This could include setting realistic expectations for billable hours, encouraging regular breaks, and discouraging after-hours communication except in emergencies. By fostering a culture that values well-being as much as productivity, Law Firms can help alleviate some of the pressures that contribute to mental health struggles.



NORMALIZING MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION

5

It is essential to normalize conversations about mental health among male lawyers. Senior male figures in Law Firms can serve as role models by openly discussing their own experiences with stress, burnout, or therapy. This can help dismantle the idea that mental health challenges are incompatible with professional success.

CONCLUSION

This year's International Men's Day theme offers a timely opportunity to reflect on the mental health challenges faced by men, particularly those working in high-pressure industries like law. The legal profession demands long hours, high performance, and emotional resilience. But without adequate support, these demands can severely impact mental health. For male lawyers, societal expectations of masculinity can exacerbate these challenges, making it even harder to seek help or achieve a healthy work-life balance.

By fostering a culture of openness, reducing stigma, and prioritizing mental health resources, the legal industry can create an environment where men feel empowered to take care of their mental well-being. In doing so, they will not only improve the lives of individual lawyers but also enhance the overall health and productivity of the legal profession.

MEET THE AUTHORS



AKINBOBOLA AKINLUYI
ASSOCIATE



NNAMDI EZEKWEM
ASSOCIATE

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For further enquiries, log onto www.topeadebayolp.com

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TOPE ADEBAYO LP

3rd Floor, The Phoenix, 31 Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way, Ikeja Lagos, Nigeria.

p: +234 708 869 9174; +234 813 532 1156

e: info@topeadebayolp.com

w: www.topeadebayolp.com

