Survey of Law Student Well-Being

The Study

In the spring of 2014, fifteen law schools around the country participated in the Survey of Law Student Well-Being (SLSWB), designed to examine alcohol, drug and mental health issues among law students.

The study was administered with a grant from the ABA Enterprise Fund, sponsored by the ABA Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs, Law Student Division, Solo, Small Firm and General Practice Division, Young Lawyers Division and Commission on Disability Rights, as well as with support from the Dave Nee Foundation.

The December 2015 issue of the Bar Examiner included a preview of the results.

A more comprehensive report of the findings was published in the Autumn 2016 issue of the Journal of Legal Education.

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The Findings

Over half of the respondents reported drinking enough to get drunk at least once in the prior 30 days. 43% reported binge drinking at least once in the prior two weeks and 22% reported binge drinking two or more times in the prior two weeks.

Over 14% of respondents reported use of some prescription drug without a prescription in the prior 12 months. Use of marijuana and cocaine appears to have increased since a 1991 survey.

17% of respondents screened positive for depression. 23% of respondents screened positive for mild to moderate anxiety and 14% for severe anxiety. Of the 21% who have been diagnosed with anxiety, nearly one-third were diagnosed during law school.

Help-Seeking Attitudes

The survey also gathered information regarding the respondents' attitudes toward seeking help for alcohol, drug, or mental health issues.

Respondents indicated that they were much more likely to seek help from a health professional than a dean of students or a state Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP).

Only 4% of respondents indicated that they had ever used a health professional for issues associated with alcohol or drugs.

42% of respondents indicated that they had thought they needed help for emotional or mental health problems in the past year, however, only about half had actually received counseling.

Discouraging Factors - alcohol and drugs

1. Potential threat to bar admission (53%)
2. Potential threat to job or academic status (62%)
3. Social stigma (43%)
4. Concerns about privacy (43%)
5. Financial reasons (41%)
6. The belief that they could handle the problem themselves (39%)
7. Not having the time (36%)

Discouraging Factors - mental health

1. Potential threat to job or academic status (48%)
2. Social stigma (47%)
3. Financial reasons (also 47%)
4. Potential threat to bar admission (45%)
5. The belief that they could handle the problem themselves (36%)
6. Not having the time (34%)
7. Concerns about privacy (30%)