



## Medicolegal perspectives: Navigating mental and physical health self-care practices and legal competency for lawyers

Kimberly Morton Cuthrell

Department of Research, American University of Anguilla School of Medicine, United States

### Abstract

Legal professionals have a range of understudied psychological stressors that can compromise self-care and competency. Similar to medical professionals, legal professionals are not excluded from risk factors associated with mental, physical, and emotional impairments. Many professionals succumb to suicidal ideation, nonsuicidal self-injury, trauma, eating disorders, alcohol and substance use, and gambling. In the pursuit of providing justice and working long hours with sleep deprivation, many legal professionals minimize self-care and self-awareness necessities. Self-awareness of imbalances requires recognizing internal and external warning signs, symptoms, and triggers of psychological strains that deteriorate mental well-being. Feelings of shame and embarrassment, including stigma and isolation, discourage some professionals from seeking help, along with concerns of repercussions on legal licenses and professional image. Failure to obtain needed treatment underscores the consequences of psychological effects and the exacerbation of mental and physical conditions. Though lawyer assistance programs offer resources to safeguard the legal profession, self-care and wellness practices should be of utmost importance to help reduce vulnerability and susceptibility to ailments. This article describes self-care, self-management, and psychological resilience practices that lawyers can undertake to foster mental, physical, and emotional well-being while striving to achieve a quality of life with competency, lawyering processes, and trauma-informed legal strategies to balance the complex demands of the legal profession.

**Keywords:** Self-care, legal competency, psychological resilience, mental health, physical health, suicide, nonsuicidal self-injury

### Introduction

The U.S. legal profession is a distinguished discipline vital for our government, society, infrastructures, and economy. The well-being of legal professionals is of great importance and is dependent on internal and external factors that improve or impair mental and physical health balance. Similar to medical doctors, disciplining an impaired lawyer brings into question the professional's fitness to perform standard work worthy of public trust, public protection, and integrity of the profession. Since medical doctors often make life or death decisions under considerable pressure with limited time to react and legal professionals (judges/lawyers) make decisions that play significant roles in the life, death, or freedom of individuals, these professionals must have healthy mental and physical well-being absent of psychological disturbances. In terms of legal professionals, high levels of psychological stress create imbalances resulting from overseeing multiple caseloads with minimal resources, rigorous legal procedures, deadlines, working long hours, managing highly profiled dangerous cases, handling trauma-involved cases, occupational stress, burnout, and limited supports. The inability to manage multiple stressors can lead to judgment errors, careless mistakes, poor decision-making skills, vulnerability to misconduct, and ethical issues for medical and legal professionals.

The legal profession is rewarding yet challenging when striving to promote justice to help clients while trying to balance self-care, legal competency, and well-being. The legal profession requires a greater magnitude of seamless functionality of mental balance, emotional energy, time management, and physical endurance, and therefore, it is vital to normalize self-care strategies as acceptable practices

beneficial for everyone. As law firms thrive in their overall performance, empirical evidence suggests that the mental health of legal professionals at some firms is on the brink of collapse. A nationwide study of over 12,000 lawyers revealed a significant increase in the prevalence of mental health conditions and substance use, surpassing the general population <sup>[1]</sup>. There are gender-specific risk factors associated with psychological impediments that contribute to individuals departing from the legal profession. Research shows that one-quarter of all women in a study contemplated leaving the legal profession due to mental health concerns and work-family conflict, compared to 17% of men who reported mental health concerns and that work overcommitment was the number one predictor of leaving for men <sup>[2]</sup>. Since legal professionals' work has a direct or indirect role in the lives of others, they must maintain healthy mental and physical well-being to advocate for the best interests of others.

Standalone root causes of psychological stressors that lead to diminished self-care and competency should be avoided because mental and physical health imbalances extend beyond feeling stressed, burnout, overwhelmed, isolated, worried, and fatigued. The mere feeling of being pressured to balance many demands while struggling to incorporate self-care strategies in daily practices can contribute to complex psychological strains. Though many legal professionals learn in law school about the laborious expectations of the legal field and potential risk factors associated with impaired mental and physical effects, the lack of self-care practices perpetuates diminishing effects on one's well-being during the actual practice of law. There is great responsibility required to handle complex cases with the expectations to strive to fulfill client/patient satisfaction,

maintain professionalism, uphold ethical standards, and adhere to competency standards. The magnitude of such demands and personal perfectionist characteristics, including workplace stressors and competition, and the inability to manage psychological stressors create great concerns surrounding the devastatingly high rates of suicidal ideation. The prevalence of suicidal ideation among lawyers in the United States is estimated to be higher compared to adults in the general population [3]. The critical nature and demand of the legal profession coupled with the given rates of suicidal ideation signify the necessity to implement measures to counter psychological stress and burdens while improving understanding of self-care practices.

Existing lawyer assistance programs aim to provide mental and emotional support assistance to lawyers. Some legal professionals may foresee that several programs offered may contribute to adverse effects on their legal license, highlight competency issues, or overshadow professional reputation which may heighten the level of reluctance to seek treatment. Failure to seek needed services, whether through a lawyer assistance program or with a private clinical professional (e.g., psychiatrist, mental health therapist, or addiction specialist) leads to a cycle of self-sabotaging behaviors, serves as an injustice to society, creates a lack of public trust, and discredits the legal profession. Client-centered psychological support and psychotherapy coupled with medication and preventive care may be necessary to ameliorate some mental and physical health conditions. Routine self-care strategies should also be implemented to maximize an individual's full potential to achieve mental and physical well-being balance.

### Self-Care Practices

Self-care encompasses activities and practices that individuals engage in regularly to manage stress and enhance their mental, physical, and emotional health and well-being. Self-care is a priority, and while individuals are encouraged to participate in routine wellness practices, there is no single approach that fits everyone. Self-care can include but is not limited to, resting, taking a relaxing bath, reading, implementing stress management, balancing mental and emotional stressors, and engaging in various healthy activities. Though self-care requires routine activities, implementing self-awareness, self-management, and self-control is necessary to maintain safeguards to regulate stress and achieve an optimal quality of life. For lawyers, whose profession involves high stress, long hours, demanding clients, and intense workloads in high-stake environments, self-care is essential. Self-care helps prevent burnout, improves mental health, and ensures lawyers can perform their duties effectively and sustainably [4]. Engaging in self-care practices allows lawyers to maintain a healthy work-life balance, manage stress effectively, and sustain long-term career satisfaction. There is no doubt that the legal profession requires adapting the necessary skills to perform in stressful environments, work long hours, and cope with demanding clients. Long-term endurance of such factors, among others, contributes to burnout, mental and physical health complications, and even addiction to alcohol, substance disorders, and gambling. The existing literature asserts a need to further explore the prevalence of lawyers and law students engaging in gambling [5]. Innovative research may shed light on gambling addictions and compulsive behaviors given the lavish lifestyles and

financial burdens some legal and medical professionals encounter, including other professions.

### Self-Awareness and Psychological Resilience

The concept and definition of self-care is a complex one, with a variety of definitions and descriptions proposed by authors and organizations. Self-care can be defined as an individual's ability to care for oneself to achieve, maintain, and promote the optimization of overall health and well-being, mediated by self-control, self-reliance, and self-awareness. Self-care is labeled as an active decision-making process, which drives individuals to effectively and actively engage in their personal care [6]. The selection and implementation of effective self-care strategies are beneficial to promoting coping and psychological resilience. Self-care strategies are described as strategies employed for promoting holistic well-being, identifying unique and satisfactory personal factors, and recognizing contribution to work [7].

### Coping Strategies with Mindfulness

The different self-care strategies that can be adopted by working professionals include coping strategies and simple strategies. The latter includes daily exercise, meditation, and deep breathing. Coping strategies comprise mindfulness interventions, participation in employee assistance programs, and resiliency programs [8]. While the practice of law is a fulfilling experience, the legal profession is equally demanding and is associated with significant stressors. Lawyers have paramount duties towards their clients, the administration of justice, and the court, increasing the likelihood of exposure to high-pressure situations and emotionally charged clients. Self-care is rather a necessity and professional virtue for lawyers, being considered a significant component of a positive professional legal identity [9].

There are several self-care practice activities that lawyers can utilize to cope with the evolving pressures of the legal profession to maintain physical, psychological, and emotional well-being.

### Self-Care Activities

- **Mental Health Self-Care:** Engaging in activities that stimulate the mind, such as reading, puzzles, drawing, sewing, crocheting, journaling, meditation, mindfulness activities, or learning new skills. Mental self-care includes seeking therapy or counseling when needed. Mental self-care involves practicing relaxation, psychological resilience, and stress management concepts which help to manage stress, increase focus, and restore balance. Elimination of substance use (illicit drugs), avoidance of alcohol and caffeine overuse, prevention of medication misuse, and management of addictions (gambling, sex, etc.) are essential to overall mental health and well-being. Regular mental stimulation and learning new things can keep the mind sharp and agile with functionality. Maintaining work-life balance is also essential for mental wellness.
- **Emotional Intelligence Self-Care:** Self-regulation strategies can be implemented before or after the development of emotional responses. Emotional self-

care involves developing emotional intelligence, maintaining healthy relationships, setting boundaries, controlling emotional reactions, managing urges/impulses, and expressing emotions healthily. Practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques can also be beneficial. Emotional self-care involves recognizing and managing feelings and reactions to situations which can help reduce feelings of stress, burnout, and fatigue.

- **Physical Health Self-Care:** Physical activity helps reduce stress, improve mood, and maintain physical health balance. Exercise can include activities such, but is not limited to, running/jogging, swimming, weight lifting, yoga, daily walks, sports, or other physical events. Adequate sleep is essential for cognitive function and emotional self-regulation. Taking medication as prescribed is vital for one's physical health. Consuming a balanced/healthy diet ensures that the body gets the necessary nutrients to function optimally, which in turn supports mental health. Staying hydrated is essential for optimal physical health. Active movement helps maintain proper circulation throughout the body. Recognizing when rest, sleep, or support are needed is essential to overall physical self-care.
- **Physical Appearance Self-Care:** Maintaining appropriate hygiene helps prevent the accumulation of some bacteria, fungi, and parasites. Daily self-grooming is important to help boost self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive self-perceptions. Self-grooming includes, but is not exclusive to, combing hair, shaving, bathing/showering, usage of body fragrances/colognes/deodorant, brushing teeth, moderate sunlight exposure, fingernail/toenail proper maintenance, proper attire/clothing, and other factors deemed necessary to maintain or improve physical appearance self-care practices.
- **Problem-Solving Self-Care:** There are three key steps to promote problem-solving self-care: identifying; addressing; and resolving. Identifying a problem early on is essential to determine the best course of action to take to manage the problem. Addressing a problem requires more than noticing that a problem exists. It requires determining whether or not there are internal or external factors that may hinder one's ability to approach the problem with intellectual and emotional intelligence. Resolving a problem early on is key to preventing the escalation of factors. To do so, consideration must be geared toward having the mental and physical agility to resolve a problem with minimal exertion on one's well-being as well as recognizing when to avoid accepting more responsibilities and duties that an individual can handle.
- **Social Health Self-Care:** Social engagement is important to help develop and promote interactive skills with others. Establishing social networks creates collective efforts with others, support systems, and mutual teamwork that help reduce stress and increase a sense of belongingness.
- **Spiritual Health Self-Care:** Spiritual health self-care practices are not limited to a specific belief, faith, religion, value, or spiritual channel. Developing spiritual health self-care balance can consist of concepts that encourage individuals to connect their inner self to a higher being or ritual practices. Other concepts can consist of prayer, meditation, mindfulness, acts of gratitude, self-acceptance, or activities that help individuals develop a deeper meaning or understanding of self-care and balance.
- **Financial Health Self-Care:** Financial wellness and self-care are essential to maintaining a standard of living and psychological balance. Planning expenses, managing debt, saving, investing, and anticipating financial emergencies are proactive measures to become financially responsible while ensuring financial wellness. Irresponsible financial spending can result in an individual exceeding financial resources. Focusing on financial gains at the sake of minimizing self-care and sleep quality can lead to psychological and physical health problems. However, managing financial stressors and obligations can help an individual to reduce the likelihood of engaging in financial risk-taking behaviors to restore finances such as but not limited to gambling addictions, financial fraud, mismanagement of finances, and other financial improper transactions.
- **Environmental Health Self-Care:** Maintaining a safe, clean, and healthy home living environment contributes to positive self-care efforts. Removing piled-up items, clutters of objects (e.g., cans, trash, unclean clothes, cleaning supply bottles, etc.), and proper storage of food products help to potentially eliminate insects, rodents, hazardous materials, and poor mental and physical health conditions. Engaging in environmental health practices such as discarding trash and useless items, recycling, and proper storage of objects helps to improve an individual's self-care as well as overall mental and physical health balance.
- **Continuous Engagement Self-Care:** There is a need to ensure continuous self-care efforts to maintain ongoing mental and physical well-being. Continued efforts also help improve quality of life. By engaging in routine self-care, there is an increased ability to ensure constant self-awareness to detect internal and external changes, symptoms, and imbalances that may compromise mental and physical well-being. Recognizing personal limitations and consistently holding firm to them helps to reduce burnout, stress, and overextending self. Continuously taking care of yourself first demonstrates accountability, self-management, and self-awareness. By being aware of potential issues early on, individuals become more equipped to proactively engage in self-care concepts to reduce or eliminate the issue, or professionals seek treatment to maximize their quality of life.

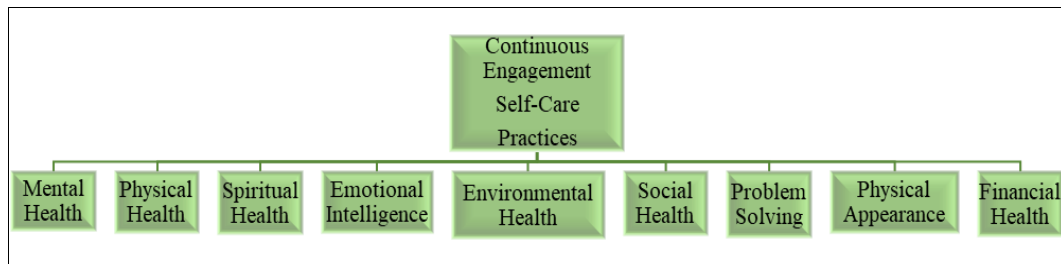


Fig 1: Self-Care Balance

### Legal Competency

Legal competency is a vital aspect of being a lawyer, ensuring proper representation of the client and maintenance of the integrity of the legal system. Legal competency refers to a lawyer's ability to understand and perform required duties effectively and efficiently. Legal competency includes a comprehensive understanding of legal principles, staying updated with the latest laws and regulations, and applying legal knowledge to represent clients' best interests. Competent lawyers must possess strong analytical, communication, and ethical decision-making skills<sup>[10]</sup>. They should continually seek professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and stay updated with legal developments. Competency can be defined as an individual's ability to effectively participate in legal proceedings and the determination of competence is made entirely by the judge<sup>[11]</sup>. Furthermore, legal competency is defined with respect to the minimal sufficiency of an individual<sup>[12]</sup>, and competency encompasses an array of skills and knowledge for efficient legal practices and navigation through the legal system.

### Lawyering Processes and Skills

Competency standards encompass a lawyer's ability to effectively utilize problem-solving skills, apply legal analysis, implement critical thinking, work with legal materials, and conduct research. Lawyers must also apply lawyering skills by having a solid understanding of how to perform factual investigations, use communication skills, conduct negotiation, apply dispute resolution skills, ensure organization and management of legal work, and recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas in legal practice. While lawyering skills are essential, self-care is utmost imperative to help establish and maintain competency. Self-care is one of the many behavioral competencies that lawyers must acquire and maintain in legal practice. Practicing daily routine self-care concepts restores mental and physical well-being balance that should be coupled with other skill sets to maximize performance. Other skill sets include client-focused practice, diligence and focus on details, management of client expectations, good judgment, positive attitude, people skills, and self-awareness<sup>[13]</sup>.

There is a full range of essential lawyering processes required in the legal profession. Lawyering is a rigorous process, shaped by a broad scope of legal, ethical, and competency standards. Cross-cultural competencies, coupled with knowledge about legal doctrine, procedures, and implications are essential for lawyers to demonstrate minimum lawyering competency. Strong legal research skills are a fundamental lawyering process for lawyers to exemplify legal competency. Legal research competency is pivotal to effective analysis of legal issues, determination of relevant case law, and remaining informed on legal

developments in specific practice areas<sup>[14]</sup>. Beyond meeting the threshold of minimum competency and demonstrating legal intellectual capabilities, lawyers require the acquisition of specific skill sets to gain a competitive edge in the legal marketplace and master the art of legal persuasion to navigate a variety of legal processes. Specific skill sets include conflict resolution, negotiation, cultural competency, self-evaluation, and collaboration<sup>[15]</sup>.

### Self-Care Management

Legal competencies incorporated with self-care management practices should be recognized as a promising measure to cultivate and promote zealous lawyers. A lack of sufficient knowledge for proper self-care management can lead to consequential effects on mental and physical health balance and legal competency. Legal professionals must consider their self-care as a priority and eradicate stigma about mental health and substance use treatment by seeking needed services to ensure continuous well-being and legal competency. Self-awareness and feedback from friends, family members, and colleagues are vital for early detection of mental and physical impairments. Mentoring and feedback are also important, yet rarely and inexplicitly discussed, approaches to ensure legal competency amongst lawyers<sup>[16]</sup>. Incorporating ongoing self-care practices can contribute to healthy psychological endurance through complex cases to reduce stress, irritability, and fatigue. Securing work-life balance further enhances legal competency and effective legal practice<sup>[17]</sup>.

### Resource Implications for the Legal Profession

Lawyer assistance programs play a significant role in ensuring the maintenance of lawyers' well-being and legal competency. Lawyer assistance programs consist of lawyers, law students, mental health professionals, and judges, to encourage help-seeking behaviors and positive outcomes at both individual and professional levels<sup>[18]</sup>. The programs strive to ultimately optimize outcomes for both legal practices and clients. Many programs offer resources to help facilitate lawyers to maintain and improve their mental and physical health, combat burnout as well as offer early interventions and prevention referral resources for mental health and/or substance use factors before these issues become catastrophic to the legal practice<sup>[19-20]</sup>. Lawyers should utilize lawyer assistance programs along with self-care practices to maintain healthy physical, emotional, and mental lifestyles.

Bar associations and lawyer assistance programs are vital in educating law students and legal professionals about the importance of maximizing well-being, managing personal satisfaction, and fulfilling happiness. Their recommendations also promote practicing mindfulness and personal resilience to cope with work-related stressors.

While the lawyer assistance programs offer some free evaluations to those who seek help, they tend to refer lawyers to further evaluation and treatment centers, which are often costly, giving rise to potential and existing conflicts between seeking treatment or not. Moreover, the poor mental health of lawyers can be mislabeled or equated to incompetence, which poses significant harm to lawyers and discourages them from seeking treatment. Though there is no empirical evidence that substance use and other mental health disorders are leading causes of malpractice suits and ethical disciplinary actions against attorneys <sup>[21]</sup>, the dissemination of inaccurate claims can contribute to mental health stigma resulting in lawyers' reluctance to seek treatment. While there may be controversial views about a lawyer's voluntary or involuntary act to seek mental health support and treatment, the primary focus should be geared toward helping the lawyer restore and maintain psychological resilience. Lawyer assistance programs and physician assistance should also be offered to legal professionals for physicians to monitor them and help attain recovery. The recommendations by the National Task Force 2017 report direct the responsible authorities to make the legal profession more focused on well-being and ensure that the justice system is both fair and competent <sup>[22]</sup>.

### Positive Perspectives

Lawyers may seek treatment due to several positive perspectives. Bar associations and lawyer assistance programs offer confidential support and resources for lawyers facing mental health or substance use issues. Utilizing resources may contribute to:

- **Providing Specialized Help:** Individualized tailored supports are offered by professionals knowledgeable about the legal profession's unique pressures. Programs are designed to address the specific challenges that lawyers face, such as high stress, ethical dilemmas, and the intensity of legal work.
- **Ensuring Confidentiality:** Services are provided according to confidential requirements/laws to protect the privacy of participants, ensuring that lawyers can seek help without fear of disclosure of information.
- **Improving Well-Being:** Resources are offered to address issues early to prevent them from affecting professional competency and personal health. Early intervention can prevent more severe mental and physical health issues and support lawyers in maintaining their professional obligations.
- **Sustaining Careers:** Support long-term career sustainability by managing stress and preventing burnout <sup>[4]</sup>. By providing resources and support, programs help lawyers manage their workload and stress levels, contributing to a more sustainable and fulfilling career.

### Negative Perspectives

Lawyers may be reluctant to seek treatment due to several potential negative perspectives.

- **Stigma:** Some lawyers may fear being perceived as weak or incompetent <sup>[23]</sup>. The legal profession often values toughness and resilience, which can discourage lawyers from admitting they need help.

- **Confidentiality Concerns:** Some lawyers may worry about their issues becoming known to colleagues or clients. Though confidentiality is a cornerstone of the legal profession enforced by laws, some lawyers may still fear that seeking treatment could compromise their privacy or professional reputation.
- **Professional Repercussions:** Anxiety about potential negative impacts on their career or reputation may concern some lawyers. Lawyers may worry that admitting to mental health or substance use factors could affect their job prospects, client trust, or legal standing within the community.
- **Time Constraints:** The demanding nature of some lawyers' work may leave little time for treatment. Lawyers often work long hours and may struggle to find time for regular therapy sessions or other forms of treatment. Prioritizing needed treatment is of utmost importance and allocation of time must be considered.
- **Cultural Factors:** There is a culture of self-reliance and high expectations within the legal profession <sup>[23]</sup>. The legal field often fosters a culture of individualism, perfectionism, and high performance, where seeking help may be seen as a sign of weakness rather than a necessary step towards health and well-being.

### Prevalence of Perceived Repercussions, Stigma, and Barriers

The high stakes and pressure of the profession along with the cultural stigmatization of mental health issues can lead to higher rates of mental and physical health impairments, alcohol and substance use, and emotional distress. Some legal professionals and law students are relatively reluctant to acquire help and address the issues due to fear of stigma, embarrassment, and diminished professional reputation. There is a need for the legal profession to create an environment that welcomes mental health topics, supports, and open discussions. Legal professionals have an ethical duty to ensure their mental and physical well-being. The code of ethics makes it mandatory for professionals to ensure self-care practices, as part of their ethical duty <sup>[24]</sup>. Many contributing factors hinder individuals from seeking help, even though the code of ethics mandates it to eliminate self-destruction and competency issues. Factors associated with stress, over-commitment, and secondary or vicarious trauma constitute professional impairments, which challenge competence in the legal practice. Law firms should consider implementing trauma-informed policies, practices, and supervision strategies and assist lawyers in recognizing the value of self-care <sup>[25]</sup>. Furthermore, validating self-care can produce lawyers equipped with the coping mechanisms necessary to help reduce or eliminate the psychological effects of stressful events, shaped by emotional turmoil, mental breakdown, and negative self-perceptions. Therefore, law schools and law firms must focus on generating emotionally competent professionals besides being intellectually competent to thrive within the community <sup>[26]</sup>.

There are several factors underlying the discouragement of lawyers and law students from seeking help that are rooted in stigmatization. These include potential threats to admission to the bar, potential threats to the job status or academic status, social stigma, financial reasons, time

constraints, concerns related to privacy, and believing that the lawyers or law students can handle the problem themselves [27]. The social and professional stigma forces some lawyers to experience embarrassment if their peers know about them seeking professional help for mental health issues, posing a threat to their well-being.

### Mental Health, Substance Use, and Burnout

Lawyers are not immune to biopsychosocial or neuropsychological effects that expose them to psychological, mental, and emotional deficits, resulting in a decline in well-being. For many professionals, seeking mental health treatment can be a humbling experience but it is necessary to maintain mental stability. Before entering the legal profession, lawyers were more likely vulnerable to some stressors. The egregious effects of handling complex or long-term dangerous cases intensify the vulnerability and susceptibility to mental, emotional, and physical circumstances. Unmanaged stressors and trauma-related reactions associated with work-related factors can adversely affect self-care. Complicated and lingering thoughts of childhood or adulthood experiences (positive or negative) can also impair mental and physical well-being, including stressful professional or personal circumstances, environmental factors, medical complications, financial constraints, career factors, and psychiatric co-occurring conditions.

### Mental Health / Behavioral Health

The culture of the legal profession contributes significantly to the mental health and well-being of lawyers. Psychological factors associated with lawyering processes are largely influenced by the high rates of exposure to trauma-involved cases. The mental health, often termed behavioral health, and well-being of lawyers are vital for daily functionality to perform lawyering processes. Even a slight deviation from mental or emotional health stability is significant enough to alter a lawyer's ability to think critically and analyze issues if the lawyer lacks psychological resilience to quickly restore mental or emotional deficits to prevent a declination in competency. Exposure to victims of domestic abuse, crime, human trafficking, immigration-related trauma, sexual and physical assaults, and witnessing the long-term effects of distress on clients are additional factors that affect the mental health of lawyers and other professionals. Notably, the lack of supervision and higher number of caseloads increase the susceptibility of lawyers to mental health issues [28]. Lawyers have an increased risk of developing myriads of mental and physical health conditions from stressors. Psychological stressors are often associated with high stakes at work, long working hours, demanding clients, exposure to trauma, moral and ethical dilemmas, long-term emotional investment in the client, stigma around mental and emotional health, competitive environment, and a hostile environment that does not encourage display of vulnerability or help-seeking behaviors contribute to jeopardizing the mental health of lawyers [4, 23, 25, 29].

There are several mental health and psychological factors that need recognition to foster the importance of mental health awareness and the necessity of self-care practices.

- **Suicidal Ideation:** Approximately 8.5% of 13,000 lawyers randomly selected from a large sample of practicing lawyers endorsed suicidal ideation [23].

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Approximately 34% of attorneys experience PTSD symptoms, especially those handling trauma-related cases [30].
- **Depression:** Around 28% of nearly 13,000 lawyers surveyed reported experiencing symptoms of depression [23].
- **Anxiety:** Approximately 19% of 13,000 lawyers surveyed revealed having anxiety [23].
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** The estimated prevalence of ADHD among lawyers is around 12% [30].
- **Gambling Addictions:** About 2% of lawyers reported having gambling addictions [30].

### Substance Use and Alcohol Use

Attorneys addicted to illicit substances and alcohol are more likely to experience professional dissatisfaction and malaise [31-32]. Impaired lawyer well-being and mental health problems may compromise the ability of the attorneys to offer legal representation with diligence and legal competence. Poor health and well-being of the lawyers have negative consequences for the clients, legal employers, and society as a whole [22]. Affected lawyers may also be considered less productive in their legal practice due to the effects of burnout. The claims about the productivity and performance of lawyers with mental health issues and substance abuse disorders may be flawed by methodological biases [21]. There is no doubt that substance use can dismantle the attorney-client relationship, quality of representation to clients, and administration of justice.

Substance use addiction and dependency affect all segments of our society. Besides illicit drugs used for a stress-free getaway, even legal and medical experts, like the general population, are at risk of resorting to chronic use of opioids following surgical procedures, particularly in those with preoperative depression or post-traumatic stress disorder [32-33]. To lower risk factors, individuals must be screened for psychiatric conditions before prescribing or administering opioids because surgical procedures, dental procedures, chronic pain conditions, and other medical and psychiatric factors may be the gateway to opioid addiction. Opioid addiction and dependency create complicated endeavors requiring medical and legal professionals to establish a medicolegal approach to address the opioid crisis addiction, recommend regulatory medical and legal systemic measures, and enforcement actions against those who overlook the detrimental opioid effects on our society. Besides, lawyers who are tolerant or naïve to opioids have tangible risks of substance use comprising of persistent opioid utilization. Therefore, the lawyers should collaborate with the healthcare providers in opting for opioid-sparing perioperative interventions to reduce the risk of substance use [34].

Substance use affects the legal profession. Supreme courts, grievance committees, and bar association disciplinary counsel have long wrestled with the appropriate severity of sanctions to impose on lawyers who have engaged in professional misconduct while under the influence of addictive substances such as alcohol, prescription medication, and illegal drugs [32]. A study revealed:

- **Alcohol Use Problems:** Approximately 21% of 13,000 lawyers surveyed had alcohol use problems <sup>[23]</sup>.
- **Substance Use (Drug Problems):** About 11% of lawyers surveyed reported having problems with drug use <sup>[23]</sup>.
- **Cannabis:** Approximately 10% of 13,000 lawyers surveyed use cannabis <sup>[30]</sup>.
- **Misuse of Prescription Pills:** Around 11% of 13,000 lawyers surveyed misuse prescription drugs <sup>[23]</sup>.

**Burnout and Lack of Engagement**

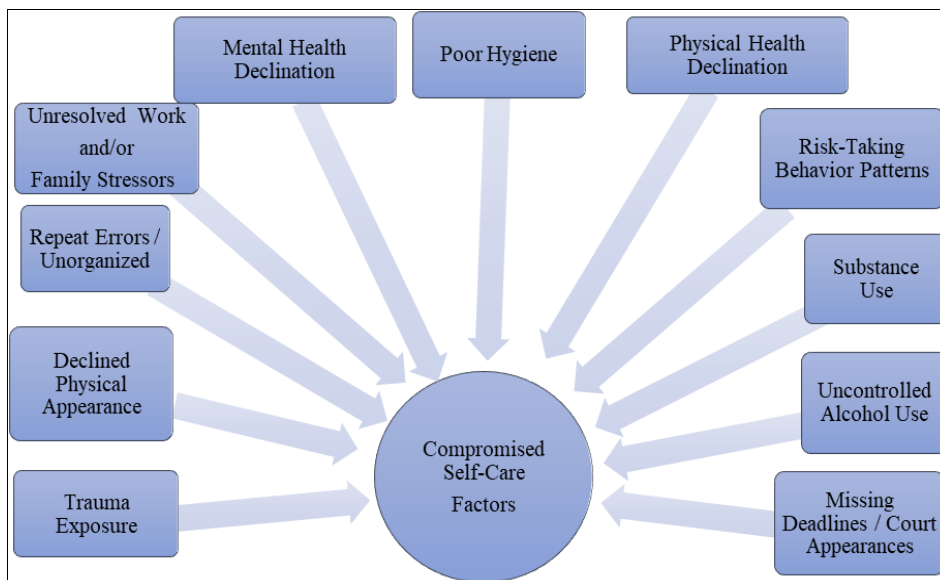
Burnout and lack of engagement of attorneys in their professional practice are different constructs but inversely related to one another. Burnout is independently associated with a greater degree of substance abuse <sup>[35]</sup>. Lawyer assistance programs, law firms, and other associated authorities are responsible for initiating public awareness campaigns and educating legal professionals about overcoming stigma and treating substance abuse disorders <sup>[21]</sup>. The attorneys can also resort to community self-help groups and outpatient and inpatient programs offered by professional healthcare providers to seek help. Moreover, psychotherapy and/or effective medication management is a crucial measure for reduction in the use of burnout to prevent resorting to substance use. Interesting to note, that cost-related non-adherence and medication self-management are believed to have a negative association with psychological symptoms and substance abuse <sup>[36]</sup>.

**Self-Care and Psychological Resilience**

Lawyers are required to have considerable levels of psychological resilience to navigate through distressful situations. Though there is a broad range of terms to define psychological resilience, an acceptable understanding is that psychological resilience is the ability to be flexible to adjust to professional and personal stressors by learning to use stress management while implementing coping mechanisms to bounce back from a challenging situation. Psychological resilience can be affected when self-care is compromised by negative internal and external factors that weaken a lawyer’s mental and physical process and psychological constraints. Indicators of negative psychological health and holistic well-being of lawyers include higher rates of anxiety and depression, increased use of alcohol and illicit substances, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious trauma <sup>[21, 23]</sup>.

Lawyers are prone to experiencing intense professional and personal distress from exposure to trauma-related cases <sup>[25, 28, 37]</sup>. Both preparation and legal representation phases of legal proceedings expose lawyers to victim impact statements and testimonies, disturbing graphical medical content as evidence material, and distressing audio and visual material. Lawyers from various practice areas are at relatively greater risk of complex stress and burnout that can deplete psychological resilience, resulting in declined competence. Additionally, lawyers also exhibit significantly high levels of secondary trauma exposures, in the background of lack of adequate training and support system, particularly for lawyers engaging with traumatized clients <sup>[25]</sup>.

Enhancing legal competency with self-care and self-awareness requires self-awareness to determine when an internalized imbalance exists. Factors that compromise self-care and psychological resilience should be considered to deter impairing competency.



**Fig 2:** Compromised Self-Care Factors

**Work-Related Trauma Exposures**

Lawyers exposed to traumatic materials and psychologically distressing experiences may develop work-related psychological conditions. One of the psychological conditions is work-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The prevalence of work-related PTSD ranges between 10.4%-17.5% for lawyers exposed to trauma-related cases with the underlying risk factors including the

number of years at the job, longer duration working on cases associated with trauma, perceived work-life balance and quality of life, self-care practices, and interpersonal relationships <sup>[38]</sup>. Legal professionals have an increased risk of exposure to secondary trauma from interacting with traumatized clients, witnesses, and violent/aggressive offenders. Repeat exposures to traumatized clients comprise a significant part of the role of lawyers, attorneys, solicitors,

and judges, resulting from comparatively high prevalence, predictors, and correlations of secondary trauma (gender, work experience, personal trauma, and level of exposure <sup>[39]</sup>).

### **Trauma-Informed Legal Practices**

Promoting trauma-informed legal practices within law firms is critical to demonstrate consideration of and efforts to protect the mental well-being of legal professionals, resulting in the production of healthier and competent lawyers to provide quality legal services to clients. Legal professionals must recognize that working with traumatized clients may cause harmful secondary outcomes on overall well-being. Though lawyers have intellectual endurances, there is a need to enhance understanding of the benefits of mental, physical, and emotional, endurances because mental health vulnerabilities can have disproportionate outcomes on the effectiveness of services and competency. Exposure to indirect trauma also results in the development of compassion fatigue, which further contributes to additional psychological risks <sup>[25, 37]</sup>. The benefit of seeking necessary services early helps reduce the exacerbating effects of psychological strains on an individual's well-being. Trauma-informed legal practices are integral to self-care practices among lawyers, which may help to counterbalance the effects of a client's traumatic experiences <sup>[29]</sup>.

### **Eating Disorders in the Legal Profession**

A large pool of studies and research-based evidence suggests a strong relationship between mental and physical health conditions with unhealthy eating habits. Psychological distress also has a positive association with maladaptive eating behaviors among legal professionals and law students, which leads to weight and shape issues that further perpetuate impaired mental and physical health conditions. Among law students, eating habits are influenced by the social norms of the law campus. The eating habits of law students and lawyers are also significantly affected by media, parental influences, and peer pressure <sup>[40]</sup>. Maladaptive eating habits are highly likely associated with intense levels of stress, increasing the risk of an eating disorder. Eating disorders often begin before entering law school and continue to exacerbate thereafter, further compromising self-care and well-being when practicing law due to many legal professionals working long hours resulting in progressive poor eating patterns.

Eating disorders within the legal profession are concerning. Many lawyers fail to seek help through a lawyer's assistant program, become reluctant to consult with mental health professionals, or confide in their peers. There are several barriers, imposed and perceived, that may hinder lawyers from getting prompt and adequate support for their overall eating disorder. One of the factors that drive this behavior is the lack of provision of meaningful feedback by the employers at the legal firm to make the employees feel valued at work which can contribute to over or under-eating. Secondly, some lawyers are less likely to seek professional help due to confidentiality issues, self-criticism, and the fear of disclosing their eating condition to their co-workers and employers, though their gradual or drastic weight fluctuation may be evident to others. Lawyers may also be fearful of negative repercussions on their careers and imposed threats on their professional image. The mental health stigma at work further propagates the "sink or swim" mentality among legal professionals, which requires prompt and effective destigmatization <sup>[1, 3, 14]</sup>.

### **Eating Disorder and Suicide Ideation**

Among other occupations, lawyers also exhibit the risk of contemplating suicide or having suicidal ideation associated with eating disorders. Research shows that a study of lawyers reported having a positive correlation with an eating disorder whereby 9% indicated that they had engaged in self-harm and 6% reported seriously thinking about suicide <sup>[22]</sup>. Elevated suicide risk is associated with the high prevalence rates of mental health conditions, stress, loneliness, and work-specific hazards <sup>[3]</sup>. There is a higher propensity for suicidal ideation for lawyers in certain legal practice areas than others because some lawyers are exposed to more work stressors that are consistent with an increased risk of suicide <sup>[41]</sup>. For instance, some lawyers deal with high-stake cases that are associated with severe consequences for their clients as well as encounter prolonged case outcomes that are daunting and stressful. The mental and physical health strains of some cases can deteriorate self-care efforts and diminish well-being, resulting in increased or decreased food intake to cope with the myriads of pressures and demands. Moreover, the demanding nature of working long hours and long-term relationships with the client can result in burnout and mental health issues <sup>[42]</sup>.

### **Self-Management & Self-Improvement Approaches**

The importance of lawyer competency has been widely recognized in the legal profession. Implementing self-management approaches is vital to the success or lack thereof of a lawyer's ability to be aware of and develop internal mechanisms to achieve a quality of life and maintain competency. Taking proactive initiatives to be self-aware of one's mental and physical changes or impairments and being inspired to take action by seeking professional services help to maintain or restore balance are paramount to maximizing wellness.

### **Emotional Self-Regulation for Stress Management**

Lawyers are emotional regulators, and their emotional dissonance can be significantly affected by exhaustion and mental distress. This is largely associated with the greater quantity and quality of demands imposed on the legal profession. Self-management of emotions is a key strategy to implement which contributes to improved emotional self-care regulation and stress reduction, as part of mindfulness. Mindfulness-based stress reduction decreases stress levels and improves emotional intelligence while maintaining or enhancing intellectual competency. Appropriate emotional self-regulation strategy is dependent on the intensity of specific emotions and the existing emotional intensity <sup>[43]</sup>. Moreover, the coping strategies for lawyers frequently exposed to secondary trauma are emotion-focused practices, which aid in the avoidance of negative emotions and engage in help-seeking behaviors <sup>[28]</sup>.

### **Psychological Distancing**

A psychologically healthy approach that legal professionals can employ to counter work-related stress is psychological distancing. This form of cognitive reappraisal is associated with adaptive physical and psychological health outcomes while being self-aware of sources that affect self-care efforts. Psychological distancing works by creating spatial and temporal distancing wherein individuals systematically change their behaviors and reactions consistent with changes in mental abstraction <sup>[44]</sup>. Psychological distancing

allows individuals to adjust their way of thinking about a situation, from a distressful thought to a proactive thinking process, to implement coping mechanisms to manage a situation which helps to reduce the effects of stress. Countering the debilitating effects of stress by learning a new skill or taking up a new hobby while incorporating psychological distancing can contribute to the development of effective stress management. Healthily diverting stress strengthens the ability to de-stress while increasing competency [45].

**Cognitive Restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring is another strategy to combat stress among legal professionals. This approach aids in the identification of stress-provoking risk factors, which are associated with excessively negative appraisals. The restructuring of cognitive processes allows more balanced thinking and encourages individuals to consider alternative interpretations of situations [46]. Cognitive restructuring helps create balance and forecast potential solutions and outcomes that are less demanding, resulting in reserved mental and physical agility. Cognitive restructuring is associated with greater work engagement and work-related satisfaction despite a greater magnitude of job demands [47].

**Physical Activity and Social Connectivity**

Psychological stress can be alleviated with greater physical activity. While exercise contributes to decreased levels of perceived stress, there are gender-based differences in the outcomes of physical activity [48]. Empirical evidence suggests that exercise aids in coping with stress and also promotes improvement in depressive and anxious symptoms [49]. Legal attorneys and law students have been reported to use exercise for effective stress management. The types of exercises performed by legal attorneys and law students include walking, swimming, dancing, yoga, weightlifting, and cycling. Studies, however, highlighted that the reliance of these professionals on exercise for stress management reduces with age [50]. Incorporating physical activity with

social connectedness may increase commitment to continue to engage in self-care and stress management approaches with others. Interacting with others with like-minded interests in certain wellness activities may yield improvements in the management of stress and its outcomes. Though the quantity and quality of social relationships may increase or decrease psychological distress, healthy social connections, and optimism aid in combating stress and maintaining a competent legal practice [50].

**Work-Life Balance**

Work-life balance is integral to almost every profession. Work-life conflicts can arise from workplace challenges that contribute to depression, use of illicit substances, and psychological distress. The existing social and business imperatives for improving the balance between work and personal life are more focused on higher profits and client services instead of focusing on the welfare of legal professionals [51]. Some legal professionals have a strong association with marital adjustment, caring for younger children or aging parents, career challenges, or personal dissatisfactions that offset work-life balance. Law firms and legal professionals would benefit from formulating workplace counseling programs for improving emotional stability, and mental health, maintaining workplace and personal life balance, and interpersonal connections, which influence the ability of legal professionals to function and be efficient and productive at work [52]. Law firm stakeholders should ensure manageable work hours allocations, promote teamwork, implement wellness strategies, and identify events to prevent burnout in attorneys. The legal profession should advocate for the utilization of a mental health day that lawyers can use which is beneficial to ensure work-life balance, reduce stress, and potentially prevent incidences of mental health and substance use conditions. There are several beneficial self-care and well-being approaches.



**Fig 3: Self-Care and Well-Being Approaches**

### Self-Discipline & Competency

One of the many hallmarks of self-care is the art of self-discipline. Self-care interconnects self-discipline and self-improvement. The term self-discipline can be used interchangeably with self-control. Indulging in healthy and safe activities that result in mental and physical health balance is beneficial to achieving self-discipline. Learning self-discipline concepts such as how to implement self-control of behaviors, reactions, urges, and intrusive thoughts can help individuals manage impulsive and harmful actions. Actions, whether beneficial or harmful, start with a thought. When individuals act on their thoughts, internal and external factors dictate the outcomes of their thoughts. Moreover, combining self-discipline with fairness and open-mindedness can help individuals to recognize personal bias, stigma, prejudice, discrimination, hate, insensitive, and negative viewpoints. Self-discipline can also compel individuals to recognize the value of and respect for cultural differences to eradicate close-mindedness and harmful viewpoints. Some viewpoints and actions can contribute to mental health issues within an individual, family, or community and deter individuals from seeking help. Lack of self-discipline and reckless regard for consequences, coupled with poor impulse control and abuse of inherent power, can result in unethical, illegal, and misconduct acts, including sanctions. Unrestrained discretion and impaired self-discipline can adversely affect how professionals interact with and perceive their clients which can violate the public's trust and underscore a lawyer's credibility and competency.

Lawyers' behaviors derive from their principles and values, the norms of professionalism, the professional conduct rules, and the common law<sup>[56]</sup>. Single or sporadic episodes of self-discipline or the lack thereof are ineffective in consistently impelling individuals to treat others civilly. Lawyers must demonstrate continuous healthy behaviors reflective of effective self-regulation and self-transformation beneficial for the best interest of the public. A lack of self-discipline can arise when unfulfilled psychological needs are unmet which undoubtedly can affect competency and underscore lawyering processes. Unwell legal professionals must seek help, and self-discipline is essential to help individuals avoid self-sabotaging behaviors. Lawyers must practice routine self-discipline and self-care methods to help improve mental and physical well-being, cultivate interpersonal skills, decrease conflicts with others, and advance sound judgment and decision-making capabilities. Furthermore, self-discipline can increase emotional intelligence, encourage self-acceptance of life-long learning, inspire healthy relationships with others, and improve self-accountability to establish and maintain competency.

### Ethical Boundaries and Professional Responsibility

The legal profession is a demanding yet rewarding field. Lawyers must provide clients with competent and relevant legal advice. While lawyers strive to provide client-centered legal advice and effective communication, lawyers must consider the benefits and risks of interacting with clients. Establishing and maintaining boundaries from the initial interaction with clients is essential. Lawyers have an ethical duty not only to render high-quality legal services but also to uphold ethical boundaries and competence standards. There is a notion that legal ethics control the actions of attorneys, judges, and other legal professionals<sup>[57]</sup>.

Adherence to ethical boundaries is fundamental to reducing stress factors, setting clear expectations, and contributing to the longevity of mental and physical well-being. Not only are regulatory ethics necessary to self-regulate the legal profession, but lawyers must also exercise self-regulation of personal ethics (strong personalities) to promote interdisciplinary teamwork, maintain effective relationships with clients, and they must implement necessary steps to uphold ethical boundaries and safeguard self-care efforts by assessing factors that pose problems when interacting with clients. Unhealthy factors and actions displayed by a client can compromise self-care, decompensate boundaries, affect competency, and hinder work-life balance for a lawyer if not promptly and properly addressed.

Legal professionals face various challenges and require active interaction with various interest groups and clients, making communication skills and interpersonal relations key factors for successful work<sup>[58]</sup>. Lawyers are bound by legal ethics, ethical boundaries, and professional responsibilities. There are various situations that question whether legal statutes, ethical guidelines, or both govern a situation with consideration of whether or not a decision outcome will support or harm the public's best interest. Beyond the code of ethics and different Model Rules of Professional Responsibility, lawyers must utilize the value of common sense to determine what is right and wrong by using practical wisdom. Though lawyers also must consider ethical values and principles, lawyers can be exposed to ethical dilemmas by interacting with others.

### Ethical Dilemmas and Scenarios

There are no checkpoints or quality control measures that lawyers can implement to avoid every ethical risk. However, there are potential ethical scenarios to consider. For instance, various factors can pose conflicts and challenges for ethical boundaries when interacting with clients such as, but is not exclusive to a) failure to detect risks or barriers during the consultation; b) failure to detect or address unrealistic demands of a client; c) permitting overly-contacts (emails/telephone calls/text messages) by a prospective client or actual client before or after being retained; d) failure or delay of a client to respond to urgent matters; e) failure to identify conflict of interests before or while representing a case; f) a client's demands for after-hours correspondences; g) a client's unannounced appearance to the law firm requesting a meeting; h) repeat requests for case updates within short time periods; i) a client's failure to disclose pertinent information for a case or providing inaccurate/untruthful information; j) a client's unauthorized access or misuse of a lawyer's personal contact information (cell phone, home address, etc.); k) a client's intentional act to engage in similar community/social activities with a lawyer; l) a client's request for on-the-spot case information in public settings; m) a client's interest to friend a lawyer on social media; n) a client's unauthorized/unannounced invitation of a third party to a meeting with a lawyer; o) a client recommending that a lawyer uses unhelpful information from a third party; p) improper/unethical relationships with a client; q) a client's lack of understanding of what constitutes an emergency situation; r) a client's non-compliance of the law firm's communication policy; s) a client's request for financial advancements from a pending lawsuit; t) unhealthy or distracting behaviors that impede legal representation

efforts without the possibility of prompt resolution; u) a client's acts that interferes with the lawyer's legal strategy for a case; v) a client's unreasonable demands or requests for a quick case outcome/resolution or decision even in the midst of risk factors; and w) other actions that result in a lawyer having impaired judgement, decision-making, or ethical consideration that challenges the integrity of the legal profession.

### **Minimizing Risks Associated with Ethical Factors**

Legal professionals can minimize risks of ethical boundary violations by implementing proactive decision-making strategies to determine early on when an issue may become problematic. Even in the evolving development of artificial intelligence, lawyers may face even more complex ethical dilemmas that may require vast changes to systematic approaches within the legal profession. Lawyers can avoid consequential effects on self-care and competency by being observant of clients' verbal/non-verbal cues, attentive to discrepancies in communication exchange or documents, and conscientious to detect early signs of clients' fluctuating behaviors and actions. Lawyers must also be aware of their viewpoints about their clients and how their clients' positive and negative reactions affect them to avoid ethical perimeters of countertransference and transference.

### **Medicolegal Approach to Suicide and Nonsuicidal Self-Injury Prevention**

Medicolegal perspectives may yield promising resolutions to address suicide and nonsuicidal self-injury within the legal and medical professions, including the general population, and promote self-care initiatives to deter intrusive thoughts that result in self-harm and declined competency. Nonsuicidal self-injury is the direct self-destruction of one's own body tissue by cutting, burning oneself, or other harmful self-inflicted acts in the absence of suicidal intent resulting in intentional self-harm by the individual rather than accidental<sup>[49]</sup>, whereas with suicide an individual deliberately intends to end one's own life. While there is a notable connection between self-inflicted cutting and borderline personality disorder, research asserts that nonsuicidal self-injury can occur without a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder<sup>[50]</sup>. Since legal and medical professionals are instrumental in their respective scope of practice and frequently interface with the public, they should serve as joint catalysts to promote mental health awareness to eradicate stigma, encourage seeking professional help, and advocate for social change. The joint approach does not have to be from a defensive medicine, forensic, or litigation stance, as commonly considered when referring to medicolegal factors, but instead from a combined legal and medical (medicolegal) risk management perspective for the betterment of all levels of society, including individuals, families, communities, and various professions because suicide is a complex public health problem.

### **Legal and Medical Implications**

Lawyers must have a vested interest in their self-care. Establishing and maintaining a rapport with a primary care provider can help facilitate access to routine wellness screenings. Primary care providers play a significant role in helping individuals identify mental and physical health factors that may diminish their quality of life and

competency. Primary care providers are resourceful in evaluating an individual's personal/professional stressors and recognizing clinical factors that may adversely affect professional judgment. Since many people have a primary care provider, detecting early risk factors associated with suicidal ideation and nonsuicidal self-injury is critical, and primary care providers may be key sources to screen individuals for risk factors. Moreover, suicide rates among physicians are higher than in the general population, and literature affirms that suicide is the third leading cause of death among attorneys<sup>[22]</sup>. Given the distressing reality that suicide is widely prevalent, everyone, including primary care providers/doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, should be screened for suicide ideation and nonsuicidal self-injuries. Research shows that primary care is a critical point of contact because 77% of individuals who contemplated suicide saw their primary care provider within the year prior to their death and 45% within the month prior<sup>[52]</sup>. Furthermore, research shows that 17.2% of adolescents, 13.4% of young adults, and 5.5% of adults have engaged in nonsuicidal self-injury with an average onset of 15 years old<sup>[53]</sup>. Although individuals engage in nonsuicidal self-injury with no intent to commit suicide, the likelihood of suicide occurring is possible depending upon the depth and location of the self-harming physical cuts on one's body. Self-harming behaviors may consist of but are not limited to acts of cutting, pinching, biting, pulling hair, inserting objects under or scratching the skin, hitting oneself with objects, and burning oneself. Though it may be perceived that primary care providers routinely screen individuals for suicide, including self-harming behaviors, there is a chance that someone contemplating suicide is not screened. Therefore, legal implications with feedback from medical experts, as a joint effort, may be required to mandate suicide and nonsuicidal self-injury screenings during physicals and wellness checks for everyone.

### **Situational Awareness**

There is no expectation for lawyers to have the same medical knowledge as a doctor or vice versa, but having some knowledge or situational awareness is valuable. Situational awareness is a person's understanding of what is happening in a situation<sup>[54]</sup>. By having some insights, even without in-depth medical knowledge, lawyers can pinpoint some psychosocial and psychological stressors within their profession that may contribute to an individual succumbing to suicide or nonsuicidal self-injury behaviors. Balancing the demands of the profession while striving to maintain ethical compliance, undoubtedly, can impose some mental, physical, and emotional challenges for lawyers. Though some challenges are inevitable, suicide should never be considered, instead individuals must seek professional help when suicidal ideation or self-abusive thoughts arise. Lawyers must recognize that to be a good lawyer, one must be a healthy lawyer<sup>[21]</sup>, meaning lawyers' mental, physical, and emotional health must be a priority and balance to ensure competency. Hence, the American Bar Association is committed to improving mental health in the profession<sup>[50]</sup>. Therefore, lawyers must take healthy initiatives to safeguard their well-being and utilize available resources while taking proactive measures to avoid situations that challenge their integrity, competency, character, or moral standards to be deemed fit for the legal community and worthy to be part of the distinguished profession.

## Conclusion

This article paints a multifaceted picture of self-care practices necessary for legal professionals. While some readily prioritize mental and physical well-being, others struggle to balance demanding schedules with personal needs that compromise competency. Regardless of individualized approaches to achieve self-care, mental and physical health necessities speak volumes: self-care is not a luxury, but a crucial factor in lawyers' well-being, professional effectiveness, competency, and ethical practice. Factors that compromise competency such as alcohol and substance use, mental illnesses, suicidal ideation, nonsuicidal self-injury, and complex physical health stressors, not only affect lawyers and their family members personally but also threaten the integrity and ethics of the legal profession. The effectiveness of multidimensional self-care interventions incorporated with elements of mindfulness, physical activity, social support, and time management are vital for the legal profession to reduce the risks of dismantling the U.S. legal system. Encouraging these practices is not merely about individual benefit; it signifies a paradigm shift within the legal profession to promote self-care, destigmatize mental health treatment, and increase programs geared toward optimizing mental and physical well-being. By prioritizing lawyers' well-being, the U.S. legal profession fosters a healthier, more sustainable legal system capable of serving clients, upholding public trust, and orchestrating effective systematic measures for our government, society, economy, and infrastructures. Law firms, bar associations, and legal education institutions can champion self-care by implementing flexible work arrangements, forming partnerships with mental and physical health organizations, promoting mindfulness programs, and normalizing open discussions about mental and physical health factors to ensure broad measures to encourage improved self-care and maintenance of competency.

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