



Navigating Perfectionism, Stigma, and Shame


A Lawyer-Therapist's Perspective on Staying Well in Trauma-Exposed Work


Doron Gold
BA, JD, MSW, RSW, CPCC
TEND Associate



1


Who Am I?

Law School Graduation
June 1994 



2

Our Goals for Today...



- Let's talk about lawyers, their mental health struggles, and solutions.
- How do we stay well when bearing witness to suffering?
- What is the impact of hearing, seeing, and reading about trauma daily, particularly on legal professionals?
- What are their personal risk factors for secondary traumatic stress and empathic strain?
- What strategies can we use to take stock, reduce trauma exposure, and reset?

3



Justice Patrick Lesage

Former Chief Justice of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice

Image Source: https://professionallyspeaking.ont.ca/december_2011/gn/

4

The Lawyer Personality

The Good Stuff:

- Intelligent
- Persistent
- Autonomous
- Problem solvers/helpers/fixers

The Not-So-Good Stuff:

- Self-judging and shameful
- Isolating
- Perfectionistic
- Reluctant to seek help when needed



5

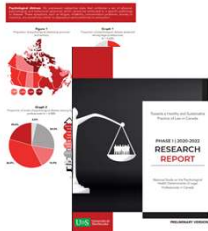
The Impact

National Study on the Mental Health of the Legal Profession in Canada found:

Psychological Distress

Overall, **59.4%** of legal professionals experience psychological distress.

- Groups experiencing the highest levels of distress:
- Women legal professionals - 63.7%
- Legal professionals with fewer than 10 years' experience - 70.8%
- Legal professionals living with a disability - 74.3%
- Legal professionals who identify as LGBTQ2S+ - 69.3%



Calderon, N., Calderon, J., Givira, M., Fournier, P. L., Caya, O., Gagnon, M., & Gauthier, J. (2022). Towards a healthy and sustainable practice of law in Canada: National study on the psychological health determinants of legal professionals in Canada, phase 1 (2020-2022).

6

The Impact

Depression

Overall, **28.6%** of legal professionals experience "moderate to severe" depression disorder.
General public (measured in late 2020) **15%**.

Groups experiencing the highest levels of depression:

- Legal professionals with fewer than 10 years' experience – 36.4%
- Indigenous legal professionals – 33.3%
- Legal professionals working in the education sector – 31.4%

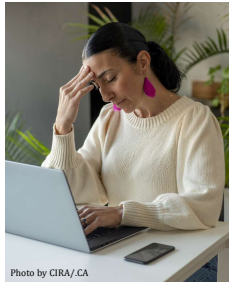


Photo by CIRA/.CA

Cadieux, N., Cadieux, J., Gouin, M., Fournier, P. L., Caya, O., Gingues, M., & Gahuziere, J. (2022). Towards a healthy and sustainable practice of law in Canada: National study on the psychological health determinants of legal professionals in Canada, phase I (2020–2022).

7

The Impact

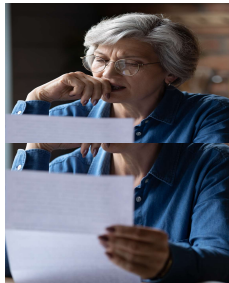
Anxiety

Overall, **35.7%** of legal professionals experience anxiety disorder.

General public (measured in late 2020) 13%.

Groups experiencing the highest levels of anxiety:

- Legal professionals with fewer than 15 years' experience – 45.2%.
- Women legal professionals – 42.6%
- Legal professionals in private practice – 36.8%



Cadieux, N., Cadieux, J., Gouin, M., Fournier, P. L., Caya, O., Gingues, M., & Gahumire, J. (2022). Towards a healthy and sustainable practice of law in Canada: National study on the psychological health determinants of legal professionals in Canada, phase I (2020-2022).

8

The Impact

Suicidal Ideation

Overall, **24.1%** of legal professionals reported having had suicidal thoughts during their practice.

11.8% of Canadians reported having suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives.

In 2016, **11.5%** of US lawyers reported having had suicidal thoughts during their careers.



Cadieux, N., Cadieux, J., Gouin, M., Fournier, P. L., Caya, O., Gingues, M., & Gahuzire, J. (2022). Towards a healthy and sustainable practice of law in Canada: National study on the psychological health determinants of legal professionals in Canada, phase I (2020–2022).

9

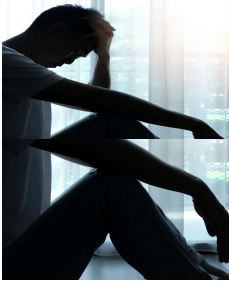
The Impact

Burnout

Overall, **55.9%** of legal professionals experienced moderate to severe burnout.

Groups experiencing the highest levels of burnout:

- Women legal professionals under 40: 67.4%
- Legal professionals living with a disability: 69.8%
- Legal professionals identifying as LGBTQ2S+: 62.7%
- Legal Professionals in Nunavut: 81.2%



Calloux, N., Cadieux, J., Gauthier, M., Fournier, P. L., Goy, O., Giguère, M., & Gauthier, J. (2022). Towards a healthy and sustainable practice of law in Canada: National study on the psychological health determinants of legal professionals in Canada, phase 1 (2020-2022).

10



Using the term
burnout
as an umbrella
term is a **mistake**

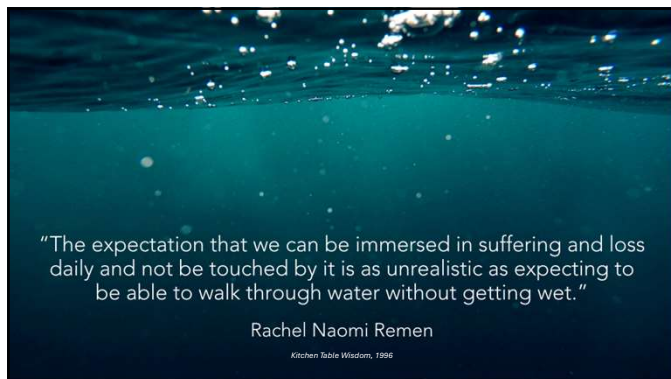


11



What is the sweet spot between
caring **too much** and **not at all**?

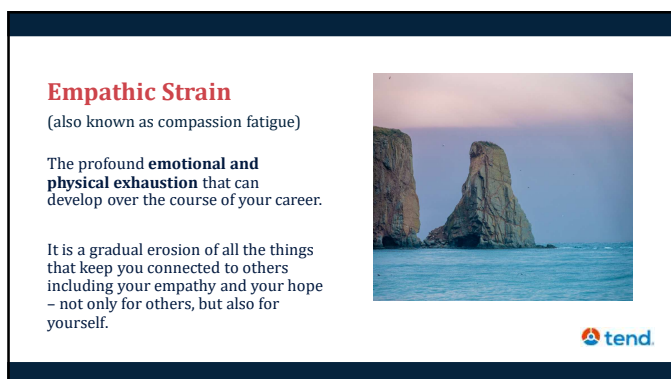
12



13



14



15



We prefer *Empathic Strain*


COMPASSION FATIGUE

Some experts believe that compassion fatigue is a misnomer because it is not fatiguing to extend compassion to others.⁷

<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/media/twczkhen/recognizing-the-signs-of-burnout-and-compassion-fatigue.pdf>


16

Empathy	Compassion
The capacity to share the feelings of others.	Concern for another's suffering accompanied by a motivation to alleviate that suffering
"Feeling with"	"How can I help?"



Singer, T. & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). Empathy and compassion. *Current Biology*, 24(18), R875-R878. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2014.06.054>

17

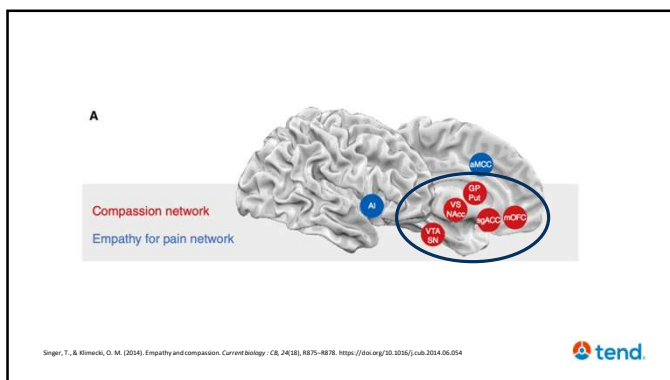


Compassion is **a verb.**

18



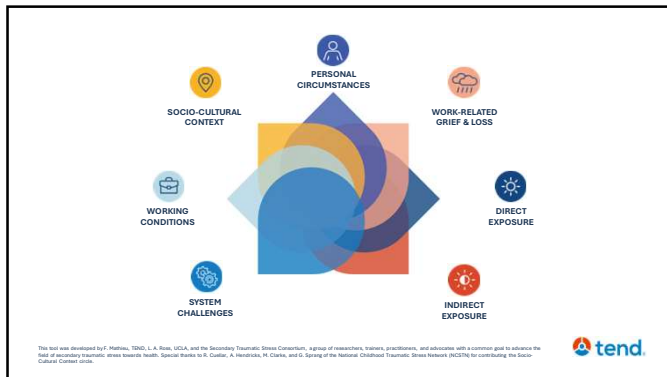
19



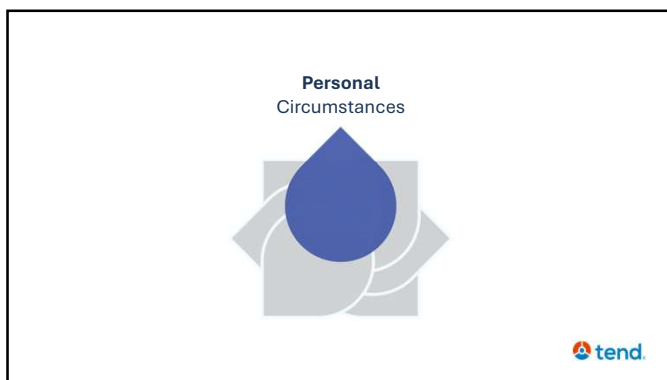
20



21



22




23

Contributing Factors

Personal Circumstances

- Caregiving demands.
- Navigating a challenging family crisis.
- Mental or physical health challenges.



24

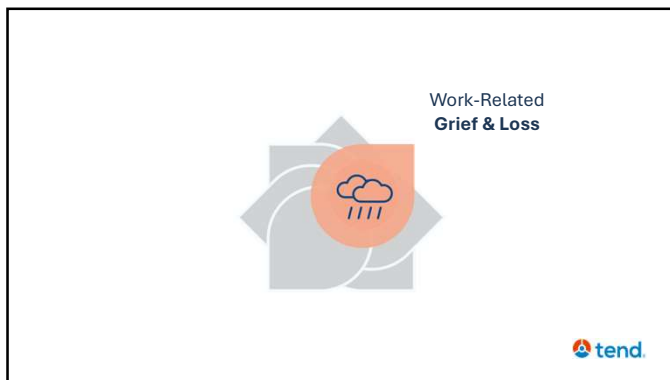


Incivility

And

Dehumanization

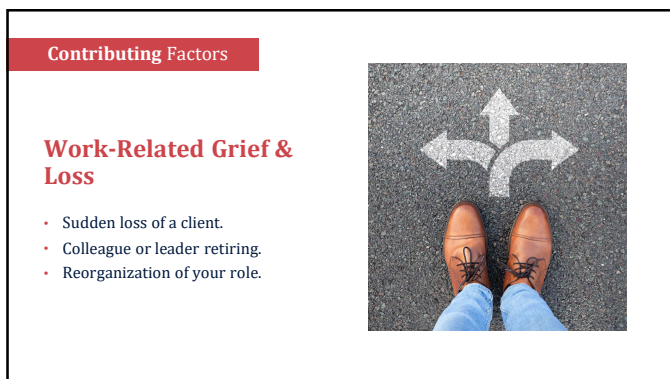
25



Work-Related
Grief & Loss

tend.

26

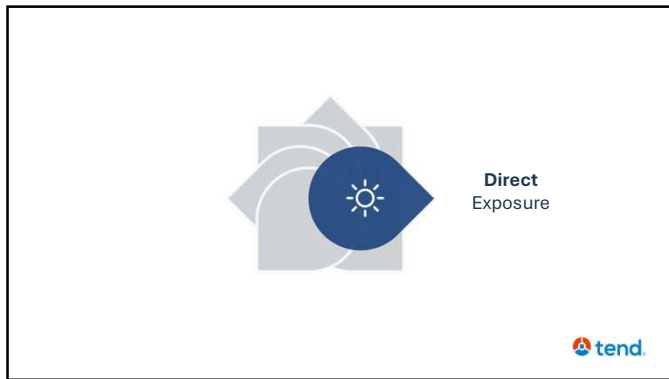


Contributing Factors

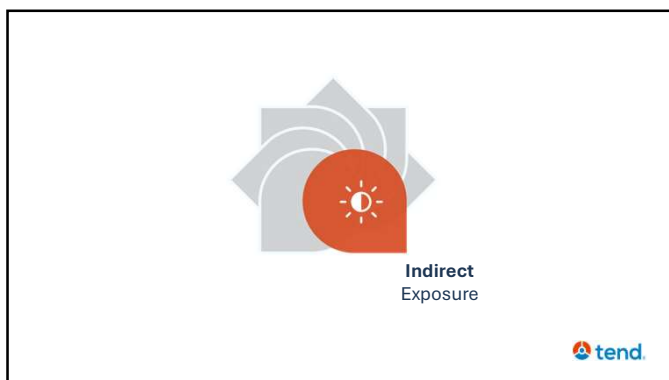
Work-Related Grief & Loss

- Sudden loss of a client.
- Colleague or leader retiring.
- Reorganization of your role.

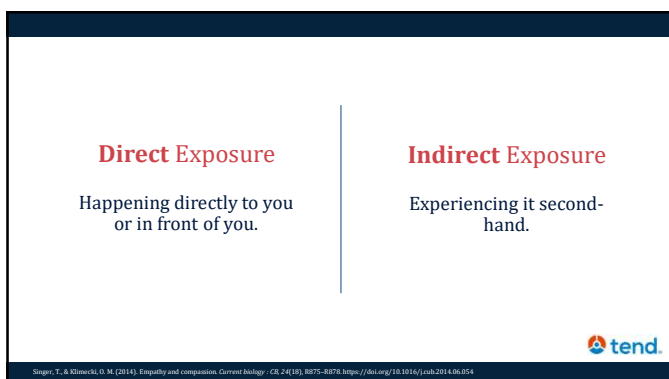
27



28



29




30


Secondary Traumatic Stress

(also known as vicarious traumatization)

The experience of being traumatized by **second-hand trauma exposure**.


These experiences are often those that haunt you or seem to "hitch a ride with you" after hearing, seeing, or reading about them.

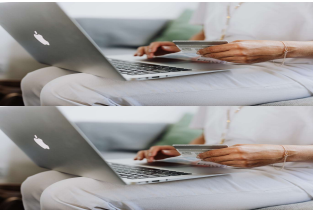





Secondary Traumatic Stress Consortium, <https://www.stsconsortium.com/what-is-sts>

31







32



System
Challenges

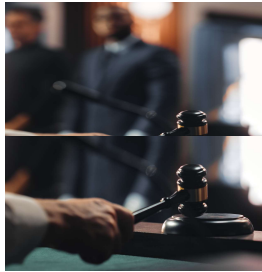


33

Contributing Factors

System Challenges

- Barriers to service like frustrating court staff.
- Unreasonable judges.
- Self-represented opposing party.
- Unjust or frustration policies or procedures.



34

Moral Distress

Inconsistencies between a helpers' beliefs and their actions in practice.

When policies or routines conflict with beliefs about service provision.



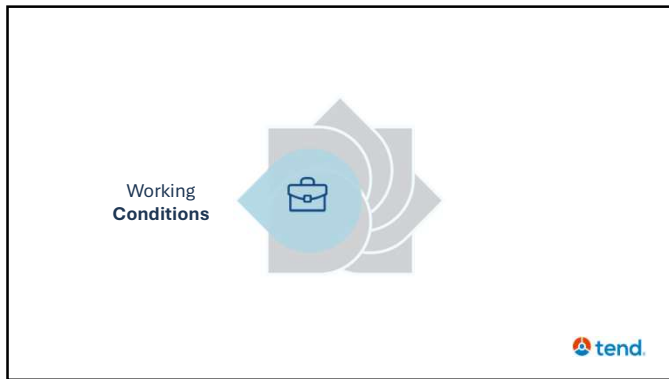
(Baylis, 2000; Mitchell, 2000)

35



Moral distress can happen when we know what the “right thing” to do is – **but we are unable to act on it.**

36



37

Contributing Factors

Working Conditions

- Unmanageable workloads.
- Low compensation.
- Lack of flexible schedules.
- Quality of relationships with supervisors and peers.

38



39

Contributing Factors

Socio-Cultural Context

- Current crisis or cultural shift.
- Being asked to do things outside of your scope of work due to your race, language, or identity, e.g., Tokenism.
- Lack of representation.
- DEI misinterpretations.



40

Fatigue, strain, and “wear & tear” can **amplify**



41

Step #2
Assess Where
You Are



42



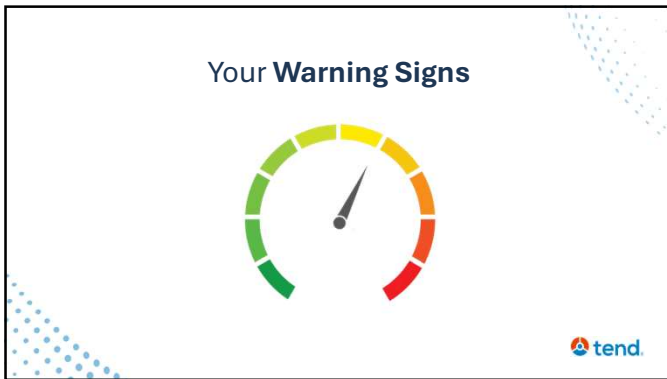
43



44



45




46

Warning Signs

Physical Signs

- Headaches
- Heartburn
- Body pain
- General malaise

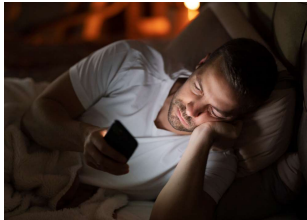


47

Warning Signs

Behavioural Signs

- Out-of-control shopping, eating, gambling, etc.
- Doomscrolling
- Binge watching



48

Warning Signs

**Psychological /
Emotional Signs**

- Anger
- Irritability
- Numbing out
- Cynicism



49

What are your **big three**
warning signs?

50

How do your **loved ones**
know when you're in
the yellow zone?

How can they help?




Photo by CJRA/CA

51

How do your **colleagues** know when you're in the yellow zone?

How can they help?



52



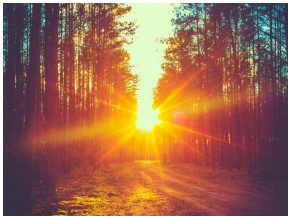
Step #4
Examine Your Rituals



53

Start of the Day

- What am I grateful for?
- What can I let go of?
- What is my intention today?



54

End of the Day

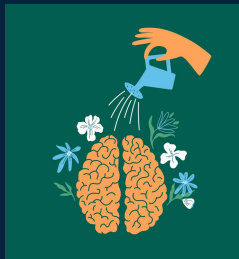
- What went well today and how did I contribute?
- What did not go so well and how can I let it be?
- Where do I need to focus my attention now to be more present as I transition home?



55

Other Suggestions

- Sleep Hygiene
- News/Social Media Diet
- Radical Self-Compassion
- Serenity Prayer
- Boundaries – Learning to say “No”
- Peer support/mentorship
- Leader vulnerability and kindness



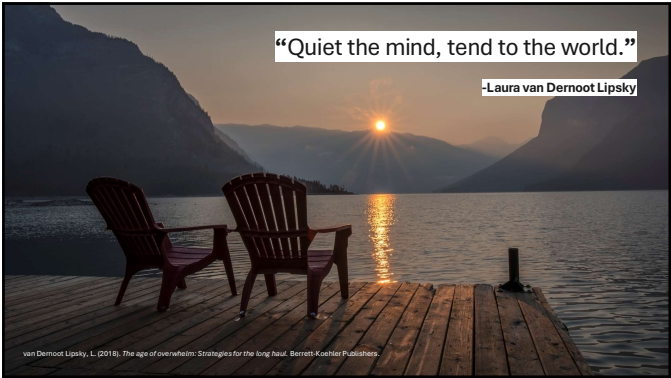
56

Key Takeaways from Today...

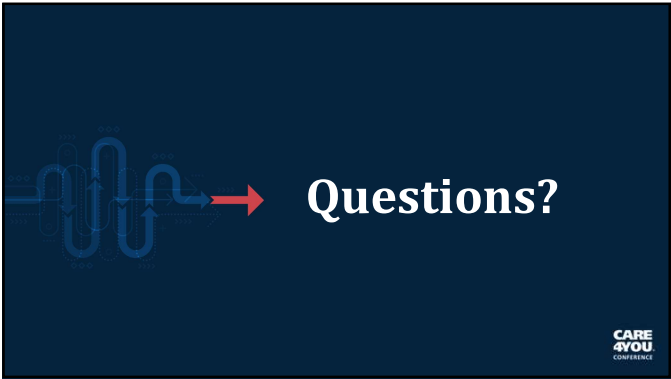
- Recognize your contributing factors.
- Identify your warning signs.
- Let your loved ones and colleagues know what we need.
- Understand the impact of wear and tear.
- Social support, breaks, and flexibility!



57



58



59
