



Lawyers rank highest on 'loneliness scale,' study finds

By [Debra Cassens Weiss](#)



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Law practice may be the loneliest profession.

Lawyers outranked other professionals on a “loneliness scale” in a survey of more than 1,600 workers, the [Washington Post](#) reports.

Sixty-one percent of lawyers ranked above average on the loneliness scale, compared to 57 percent of engineers, 55 percent of research scientists, 51 percent of workers in food preparation and serving, and 45 percent of workers in education and library services.

The study found that higher education may be a contributing factor. Graduate degree holders were more lonely and had less workplace support than people with only undergraduate or high school degrees.

Holders of professional degrees in law and medicine were the loneliest—25 percent lonelier than people with bachelor’s degrees, and 20 percent lonelier than those with PhDs. “The solitude of the ivory tower seems to be a real phenomenon,” the study authors write for the [Harvard Business Review](#).

The [loneliness scale](#), from the University of California at Los Angeles, measures feelings of loneliness by asking people to indicate how often they experience the feelings described in 20 different statements. The statements include:

- I have nobody to talk to.
- I feel as if nobody really understands me.
- I feel left out.
- No one really knows me well.
- I feel isolated from others.
- It is difficult for me to make friends.
- I feel shut out and excluded by others.

The study was conducted partly by Gabriella Rosen Kellerman, a psychiatrist and chief innovation officer for workplace consulting firm BetterUp. She told the Post that she has been hearing that loneliness was a mounting concern for employers, who worry about high turnover and sick days among lonely workers.

Lonely workers in Kellerman’s study reported less job satisfaction, fewer promotions and more frequent job changes.

The Post cites another study conducted partly by University of Pennsylvania management professor Sigal Barsade. The study found that employees who report more feelings of isolation tend to receive more critical reviews from their supervisors.

“When you’re lonely, you start to lose your social skills,” Barsade said. “You overshare or undershare. You’re hypervigilant to social threat. You’re less collaborative.”

The Post also spoke with Buffalo lawyer Daniel Lukasik, who started the Lawyers with Depression website. He noted that technology makes it possible to do research without going to libraries, a place where lawyers once took the time to banter with others.

“What that translates to is: You’re working all the time,” Lukasik told the Post. “You get to the point where you’re too exhausted to socialize.”

Houston-area lawyer Scott Rothenberg tells the ABA Journal that loneliness and isolation may be a root cause of many lawyer issues. “There are these disparate problems like depression and suicide and substance abuse, in many respects tied together,” he says.

Even lawyers working in big firms may feel isolated in a “cubicle-ized” culture, says Rothenberg, a member of the Texas bar’s board of directors. Social isolation may be even a bigger problem for the “silver tsunami” of older lawyers, he says.

He points to online groups such as Texas Lawyers Lounge as a digital-era way to create community for lawyers and “a sense that we’re in this together.”