



Bloomberg Law

2021 Attorney Workload and Hours Survey Analysis



Attorneys are faced with certain work-related stressors across corporate and law-firm settings due, in part, to the pressures of Covid-19. In fact, 72% of respondents to the **Bloomberg Law Attorney Workload and Hours Survey** reported difficulties in disconnecting from work. This comes as no surprise as office and home became synonymous through remote work.

This complimentary report discusses these survey findings - based on responses from 1,554 lawyers - for insights on:

- Hours worked as a percentage of billable hours
- Factors that contribute to lawyer satisfaction and dissatisfaction
- Steps employers can take to address concerns

To participate in other Bloomberg Law surveys, please [click here](#).

ANALYSIS:

Hours Data Show the Sweet Spot for Lawyer Satisfaction

By Linda Ouyang and Jacquelyn Palmer
Research and Data Analysts, Bloomberg Law

March 11, 2021

Bloomberg Law's Attorney Workload and Hours Survey asked 1,554 lawyers how much they work, how much of that work they bill, how satisfied they are with their jobs, and how they are doing in terms of their personal well-being. Using the results of this survey, we are now able to profile the satisfied lawyer—and a surprising amount of lawyers are, in fact, satisfied at work!

Furthermore, while in-house lawyers report being more satisfied in their jobs than their law firm counterparts, more than half of law firm lawyers still report a satisfaction level of 7 or more on a scale of 0-10.

Lawyers Eat Up to 50 Percent of Hours They Work

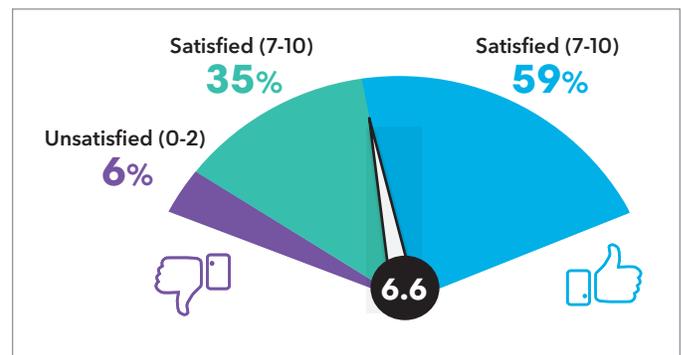
It's true. Lawyers work a *lot* of hours, and we have the numbers to back it up.

We've all heard horror stories of people working more than 100 hours in a week, and our results confirm this crushing reality. One-fifth of law firm lawyers report billing over 80 hours in their busiest week, and most of those that bill more than 80 hours actually work more than 100 hours in that same week.

But lawyers aren't confined to one bad week per year. Respondents report working an average of 53 hours per week, with law firm lawyers working slightly more hours on average (54 hours) than in-house lawyers (51 hours). Junior and mid-level lawyers are working and billing more hours than senior lawyers, but senior lawyers experience the largest gap between hours billed and hours worked, working nearly 50% more hours than they bill.

Ingredients to a Satisfied Lawyer

Despite the long hours, 59% of respondents report an overall job satisfaction of 7 or higher. But what does a satisfied lawyer look like?



Our results indicate that respondents who report higher job satisfaction scores are more likely to:

- have more years in practice;
- work in-house; and
- not currently be experiencing burnout.

However, matching one or all of these factors does not guarantee job satisfaction.

The Scoop on Mental Health

Even satisfied lawyers can struggle with mental health issues. When asked about how work-related issues have impacted them this past year, across the board, lawyers most often report experiencing disrupted sleep and anxiety. But these issues are reported less often by respondents with higher job satisfaction scores.

Not Just a Single Serving

Bloomberg Law will continue to collect responses to the Attorney Workload and Hours Survey throughout the year on a quarterly basis. Quarterly data will help us tap into the hours that lawyers are putting into their jobs, overall job satisfaction, and how these factors interact with general well-being. Keep an eye out for our next round of data collection in April and forthcoming in-depth analyses on survey results. So, tell us ... *how are you?*

ANALYSIS:

Survey Data Exposes Roots of Attorney Dissatisfaction

By Linda Ouyang
Research and Data Analyst, Bloomberg Law

March 17, 2021

Long hours, burnout, and compounding stress from the Covid-19 pandemic may all have a hand in low job satisfaction among attorneys, according to results released this month from Bloomberg Law's [Attorney Workload and Hours Survey](#).

The results of the survey of 1,554 law firm and in-house attorneys show defining differences between the 6% of respondents reporting the lowest job satisfaction scores (0 to 2 on a 0-10 scale) and the majority (59%), who rate their job satisfaction in the 7-to-10 range.

Overworked and Burnt Out

Unsatisfied attorneys are working longer hours than satisfied ones. In-house attorneys with the lowest satisfaction scores are working an average of 60.9 hours per week. That's 11 hours more than in-house attorneys with high satisfaction scores. In law firms, the most unsatisfied attorneys are working 57.8 hours per week, about four hours more per week on average than the most satisfied ones.

The most unsatisfied attorneys also report experiencing job burnout more frequently. While more than eight out of 10 attorneys have experienced burnout at some point, those who say they are most unsatisfied say they feel burnt out 74% of the time, on average—more than twice as frequently as the most satisfied attorneys.

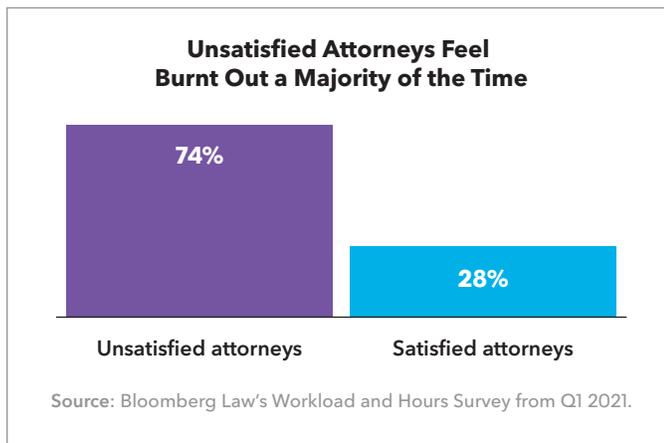
Well-Being Threatened by Pandemic

The pandemic has, not surprisingly, had negative impacts on attorney well-being.

More than one-third of the most unsatisfied attorneys (39%) report a major decrease in their well-being as a result of the pandemic, and 71% report a reduction in work-life balance. But among the most satisfied attorneys, only 7% report a major decrease in their well-being, and 39% report a reduction in work-life balance.

Bloomberg Law has resources available for free on our In Focus: Lawyer Well-Being [page](#), including links to assistance programs, if you are currently experiencing hardship.

Bloomberg Law subscribers can find related content on our [Surveys, Reports & Data Analysis](#), [In Focus: Lawyer Well-Being](#), and [In Focus: Lawyer Development](#) pages.



ANALYSIS:

Lawyers Struggle to Disconnect, But Employers Can Help

By Francis Boustany
Legal Analyst, Bloomberg Law

March 25, 2021

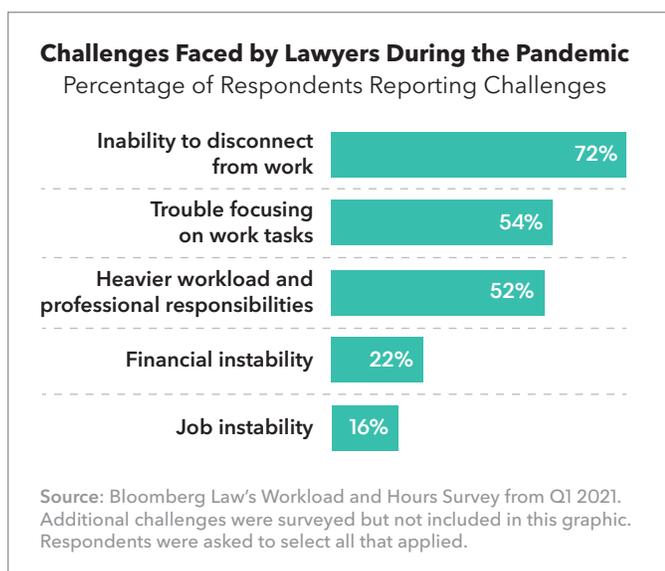
For lawyers, [long workdays](#) are the rule, not the exception. But when the days are over and the hours are billed, can lawyers ever really leave work at work?

Despite the pandemic and the personal responsibilities and distractions that come with it, many lawyers still find it difficult to step away from work when the day is done. Organizations can help by adopting policies and practices that encourage putting down the phone, stepping away from the computer, and enjoying some time to disconnect.

The (Seemingly) Never-Ending Workday

Nearly three-quarters of the 1,554 lawyers responding to Bloomberg Law's [Workload and Hours Survey](#) say they have faced challenges disconnecting from work during the pandemic. This is understandable, considering how many lawyers are working from home, which can lead to extended hours and an indistinct boundary between when work ends and personal time begins.

Lawyers may also be reluctant to disconnect from work for any period of time due to travel safety concerns, or because they perhaps feel chained to their professional obligations. This behavior erodes work-life balance and provides for continuous long days without much reprieve.



New Challenges, Fewer Boundaries

Other challenges may contribute to lawyers' inability to disconnect. Since the pandemic began, many lawyers say, they have faced challenges such as difficulty focusing on work tasks, heavier workloads, financial instability, and job instability. Any single one of these stressors could result in an environment where lawyers do not feel comfortable disconnecting from work for any meaningful amount of time.

A lawyer who has more work to do or has trouble focusing on their current workload will naturally work more, keeping them connected for longer each day. Moreover, if a lawyer fears their job or financial situation is insecure, they may feel the need to be responsive around the clock to preserve whatever job security that they do have in this legal environment. These factors can result in a situation where lawyers feel they must always be available.

'Unplug Time' at Orrick

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP recently implemented an "Unplug Time" policy, which represents a step that can be taken to improve employees' well-being and help to prevent burnout.

I spoke to [Orrick](#) about the new policy, which offers partners, counsel, associates, and staff a true week off work with the expectation that those who partake will unplug and enjoy a week without email, zoom, or calls.

Notably, the 40 hours taken under this policy will be creditable time for team members who have timekeeping requirements and can be taken as a block or broken up. Teams will work together to ensure administrative coverage.

Simple Solutions Can Help

Law firms and corporations can take small steps to address concerns that leave the lawyers they employ unable to disconnect from work.

Simple things can make a big impact. Here are some things management can do to help.

- **Engage in model behaviors** that lawyers can emulate, such as taking time off to promote the idea that lawyers are free to do so as well.

- Consider **counting time off toward billable hour requirements**, which will encourage lawyers to take a guilt-free break from their jobs.
- Encourage lawyers to disconnect after hours by **sending only time-sensitive emails after work** and scheduling all nonessential communications to go out in the morning.
- **Be more transparent** about the organization's financial standing, allowing lawyers to make realistic assessments of their job security.
- **Remind lawyers that they are valued** by the organization.
- **Provide special bonuses** from time to time.

It is unlikely that the problem of failing to disconnect will ever disappear altogether, but using techniques such as these, employers can alleviate some of the stressors that fuel lawyers to remain constantly connected.

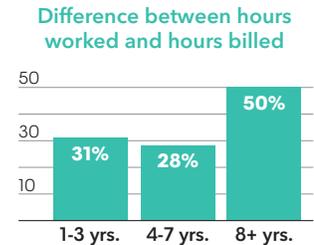
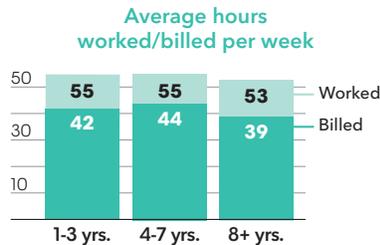
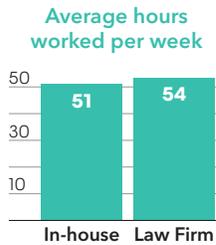
Bloomberg Law subscribers can find related content on our [In Focus: Lawyer Well-Being](#) page, [In Focus: Legal Operations](#) page, and [In Focus: Lawyer Development](#) page.

Attorney Workload and Hours Survey (2021 Q1)

Bloomberg Law’s Attorney Workload and Hours Survey (2021 Q1) asked 1,554 lawyers how much they work, how much of that work they bill, how satisfied they are with their jobs, and how they are doing in terms of their personal well-being.

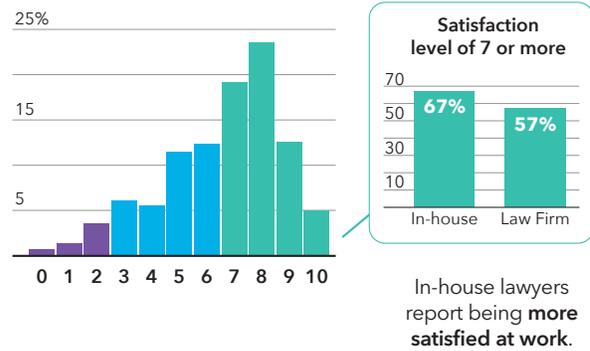
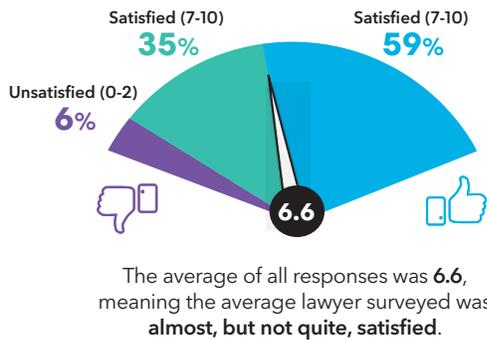
Workload/Hours

Overall, lawyers worked an average of **53 hours per week**. For billable hours attorneys, almost 1 in 5 report billing more than 80 hours in their busiest week.



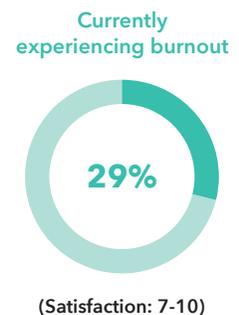
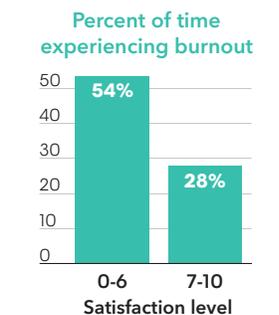
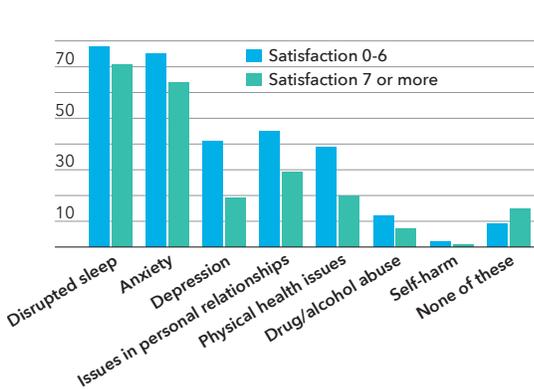
Job Satisfaction

59% of lawyers chose 7 or higher when asked to rate their job satisfaction on a scale from zero to ten. **64% of lawyers with 8+ years** in practice report an overall job satisfaction of 7 or higher. For lawyers with fewer years of experience that drops to 52%.



Mental Health

When asked about work-related issues, lawyers most frequently reported disrupted sleep and anxiety—regardless of the respondents’ job satisfaction overall.



METHODOLOGY: Bloomberg Law fielded this survey anonymously online for two weeks in January 2021. DEMOGRAPHICS: Of the 1,554 attorneys who responded to this survey, 69% work for a law firm and 31% work for an in-house legal department. Attorneys represent organizations of various sizes, from 1 attorney up to more than 500 attorneys. Attorneys were grouped for analysis by their years in practice, with 16% practicing 1-3 years, 23% practicing for 4-7 years, and 61% practicing 8 years or more.