

# Are GPs more stressed than the Lawyers?

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GP wellbeing and stress are well documented in literature both here in Australia and overseas. There is a direct relationship between patient care and GP wellbeing.

Stress is a state of internal arousal in response to the external challenges (stressors). We tend to perform better when we are under stress up to an optimal level. Beyond this level, performance tends to deteriorate, resulting in "pathological stress". Peak performance under stress is also variable from person to person indicating different persons may perceive stress differently.

Holmes & Masuda devised a Scale of Life Events (stressors) in 1972. They concluded that life events lower bodily resistance, due to dysfunctional adaptation to stress by the individuals.

Using the GHQ-12, Schattner and Coman in 1998 showed that work was the major stressor in GPs' lives. 53% of the GPs had considered leaving general practice because of occupational stress. 12.8% of the GPs had scores indicative of severe psychiatric disturbance.

The main stressors at work are high workload, poor remuneration, medico-legal-political issues, and patients' demand. The suicide rate is higher than the general population. There is higher incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, marital difficulties and divorce, burnout, anxiety and depression.

Doctors as a professional group are perceived as a privileged group by society. This relatively high job status masks a disadvantaged group that has no occupational health support. Their working lives are often filled with long hours at the expense of their families and social lives.

In Australia, there has never been any direct comparison between doctors and other similar professions. Are GPs more stressed than other professional groups? Lawyers are chosen for comparison with GPs because of their similar status, income and occupational stress.

In my research, it was found that there is no significant difference in professional stress between GPs and lawyers. However, what may be of significance for lawyers is that they are more likely to be in solo practice whereas GPs tend to be in group practices. The response rate for lawyers was much lower. More research is needed in the future to compare other professional groups and explore any support mechanism for different groups and its members.