

Will meditation help stressed-out lawyers?

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Western cognitive psychologist John Paul Minda, a Brain and Mind Institute member, is collaborating with San Francisco-based lawyer and author Jenna Cho on a project designed to investigate the relationship between mindfulness meditation and well-being in lawyers. Credit: Paul Mayne // Western News

Research has demonstrated several positive physiological and psychological impacts of mindfulness training and meditation, including

reduced stress, anxiety and depression, improved control over attention and enhanced working memory. However, do these same findings hold true for those people working in the highest stress fields?

For one group of professionals, a Western researcher is trying to find out.

Western cognitive psychologist John Paul Minda is collaborating with San Francisco-based lawyer and author Jenna Cho on a project designed to investigate the relationship between [mindfulness training](#) and the well-being of attorneys.

"We're hoping to uncover whether or not there are specific things in relation to lawyers," said Minda, a member of the Brain and Mind Institute. "The specific kinds of stress attorneys deal with is something research really hasn't done. We just don't know because this is a relatively new venture. This is definitely exploratory work which will allow us to generate a more specific and targeted hypothesis."

The study will rely on an eight-week mindfulness program, currently under way, designed by Cho and Karen Gifford from their book, *The Anxious Lawyer*. Cho, a partner at JC Law Group PC, a bankruptcy law firm in San Francisco, said to be able to focus and think clearly under stress and connect in a productive way with others is key to her job.

"As a lawyer, stress is always constant in my life. What's unfortunate is, we don't teach the tools for managing and working with the stress – not in law school or during law practice. The end result is lawyers suffer in silence," Cho said, adding some lawyers will brag about their stress, as more stress equals more success. "I know from personal experience how powerful mindfulness and meditation can be in helping reduce and recognize the early signs of stressful situations. It helps you not get so emotionally involved with the stressful stimulus itself."

"While there have been a lot of studies done on the effectiveness of mindfulness and meditation, it hasn't been studied in this context – does mindfulness and meditation help the stresses of lawyers?"

Minda will be looking at pre- and post-assessment of the lawyers to see if the kind of law being practiced relates to success.

"I'm extremely excited about what we'll find with the study because you don't know what different subgroups you may hit," he said, adding he expects to find a reduction in self-reported anxiety and greater satisfaction within the workplace. "There may be differences with defence attorneys, bankruptcy attorneys, corporate attorneys."

Cho hopes the study will produce positive impacts for lawyers by creating data showing practicing mindfulness and meditation can be useful.

"We live in a more connected world, where there's no sign of decreased demands, each of us needs a full toolbox with tools to help us manage the demands," Cho said. "It feels important to create a space where people can feel comfortable sharing their struggles with stress, anxiety, depression, and other issues. These issues are not just an individual issue but rather a systemic issue."

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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