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# Solo Attorney Well-Being Trends Report

2025





# Executive Summary

The topic of attorney well-being has garnered deserved attention, conversation, research, and action in legal circles since the release of the 2017 landmark report *The Path to Well-Being in Law: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change* by the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being. Yet despite 49% of lawyers in private practice being solo practitioners, relatively little research or attention has focused specifically on America's solo community.

As the nation's preeminent malpractice insurer of solo practitioners, ALPS cares deeply about solo practitioners and embarked on a survey of nearly 300 solo policyholders to establish benchmark data to assess the nexus between solos and their respective professional satisfaction.

## **The results may surprise you. Even bring a ray of hope.**

In an era in which most survey data involving attorney well-being highlights notably high levels of stress, depression, substance abuse, anxiety and suicidal ideations, our findings uncovered an impressive 74% of solo practitioners either satisfied or very satisfied in their current professional life. In fact, only 9% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life as a solo.

Why? At their core, 66% of solo practitioners note the most valuable benefit of operating as a solo is the flexible work / life balance it affords, easily outpacing other considerations. Emerging insights and anecdotal evidence from the ALPS survey paint a compelling picture of a professional journey as a solo, one that is closely aligned with personal fulfillment and enjoyment.

Findings revealed solo practitioners reported high levels of happiness and professional satisfaction. Unlike counterparts in larger firms, solo lawyers cite autonomy over their schedules, control over the types of matters they accept and the ability to build a practice aligned with their personal values as key drivers of contentment. While challenges such as administrative burdens, burnout and income variability remain, the overarching sentiment was clear: the flexibility inherent in solo practice enables a rewarding and personally meaningful career.

What do these findings mean for the future of legal as changes emerge in law firm dynamics and demographics? In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the legal profession experienced a notable shift, with more lawyers than ever reconsidering traditional career paths historically centered around Big Law in favor of careers in solo practice, in-house counsel, government attorney positions or even JD+ opportunities to leverage law degrees in pursuit of careers in business.

The pandemic acted as a catalyst, prompting many to re-evaluate their professional priorities and seek greater autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance—even at the expense of higher earnings. Emerging data underscores this trend: lawyers are demonstrating unprecedented levels of mobility, with lateral moves, career pivots, and departures from established firms or even the departure from law itself occurring at markedly higher rates.

The growing transiency within legal also reflects a broader cultural shift, as practitioners increasingly are prone to prioritize personal well-being and professional alignment over the perceived security of conventional firm structures. And for those willing to embark on that shift, survey data reflects greater personal and professional satisfaction in their work as attorneys.

## Key Findings

**32%**

Only 32% of respondents often or always feel stress due to work as a solo practitioner.

**44%**

44% of solo practitioners reported having experienced the clinical definition of occupational burnout.

**3.8**

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "Poor work-life balance" and 5 being "Optimal work-life balance", respondents averaged a favorable 3.8 level.

**87%**

Compared to contemporaries, 87% of solo respondents rated their physical health as either Good (30%), Very Good (37%) or Excellent (20%), with an impressive 52% responding as having engaged in physical exercise daily.

**3.96**

Conventional wisdom holds that solos can be prone to loneliness. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being "Not at all lonely", respondents reported a collective score of 3.96, indicating most do not feel lonely.

**20%**

Top stressors for solo practitioners vary, with top contenders being Workload (20%), Inconsistent Cash Flow (14%), Time Management (14%), Administrative Tasks (13%) and Managing Clients (10%).

**76%**

76% of respondents, barring retirement or unforeseen health circumstances, would envision continuing as a solo practitioner three years from now (with another 15% as maybe).

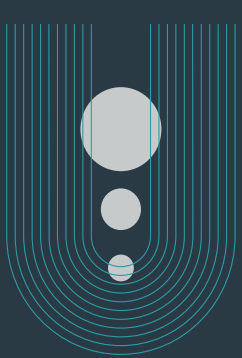
**62%**

Solo practitioners also felt more inclined to take a break from their practice on vacation or otherwise disconnect from work. 62% reported having taken vacations at least twice a year.

**91%**

91% of respondents, when asked about their satisfaction with their current professional life, responded as either Very Satisfied (26%), Satisfied (48%) or Neutral (16%).



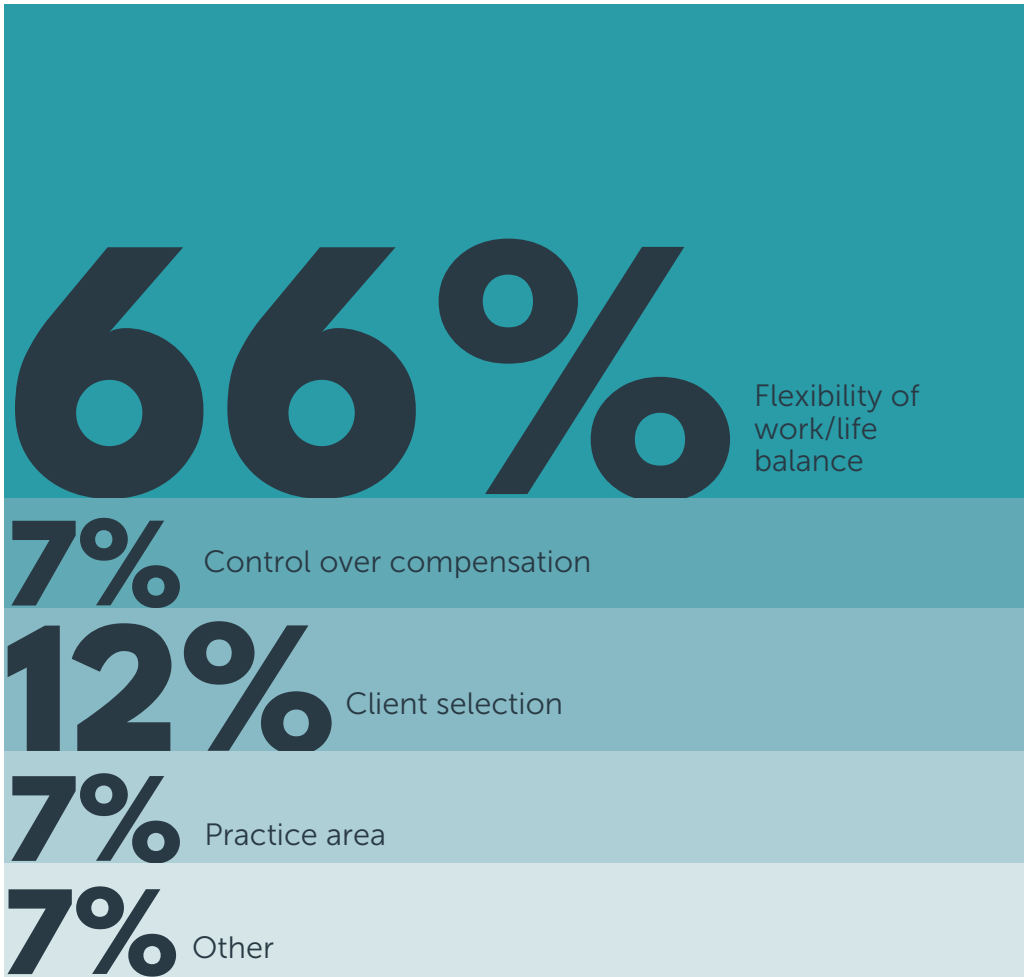


# Realities of Being a Solo

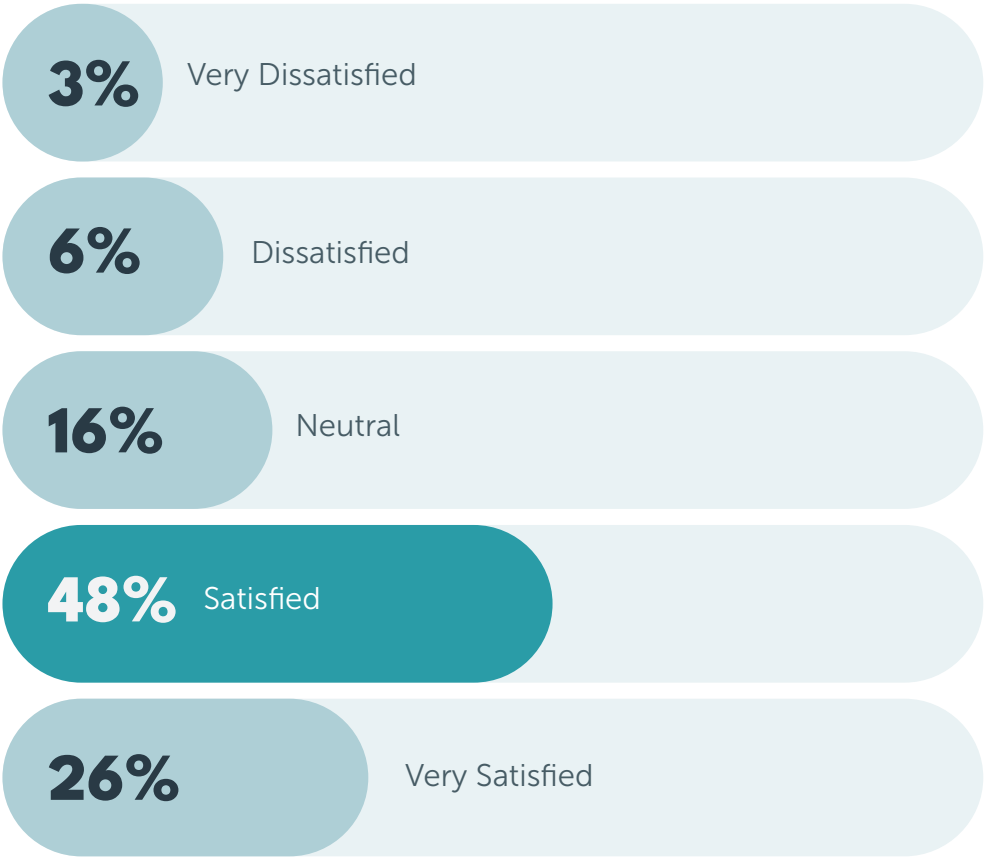
Solo practice presents both challenges and rewards, requiring careful navigation to maintain well-being and professional fulfillment. While the demands of the profession can disrupt wellness, many solo practitioners maintain a

positive perspective, with a strong majority expressing satisfaction in their careers. This sentiment underscores the appeal of autonomy and flexibility, which are key benefits of working independently.

If you could only choose one, what is the most valuable benefit of operating your own solo practice?



Overall, how satisfied are you with your current professional life?



However, not all practitioners experience the same level of stability. Many respondents identified gaps in support, citing a need for better client management solutions, more affordable technology, and increased access to peer networks. Additionally, administrative burdens and limited mental health resources remain significant concerns for some. These findings highlight the ongoing necessity of structured support systems to help solo attorneys manage their workload effectively and reduce stress.

For those considering solo practice, experienced professionals emphasize the importance of financial prudence, mentorship, and ethical client selection.

Establishing a strong network of peers and maintaining disciplined work habits were frequently cited as essential strategies for long-term success.

While independence offers many advantages, overextending oneself can lead to burnout, making it crucial to strike a balance between ambition and sustainability. Solo practitioners acknowledge that long-term success requires not just ambition, but also strategic support, community connections, and sustainable work habits.

# Professional Stressors for Solos & Work-Life Balance

Stability is a crucial factor in maintaining a balanced and fulfilling professional life. Many established solo practitioners report having a stable client base and a consistent financial flow, which contributes to overall well-being and security. This stability allows them to focus on their work without the added stress of financial uncertainty.

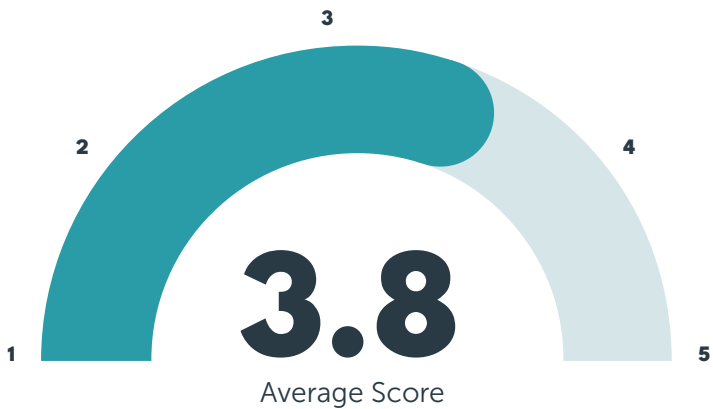
However, a notable percentage of solo attorneys struggle with achieving this

stability. Challenges such as staffing limitations, securing new clients, and managing client expectations can create ongoing difficulties, impacting both professional comfort and long-term sustainability. While the majority surveyed enjoy a favorable position, these obstacles highlight the importance of strategic planning, strong client relationships, and efficient business management in ensuring long-term success.

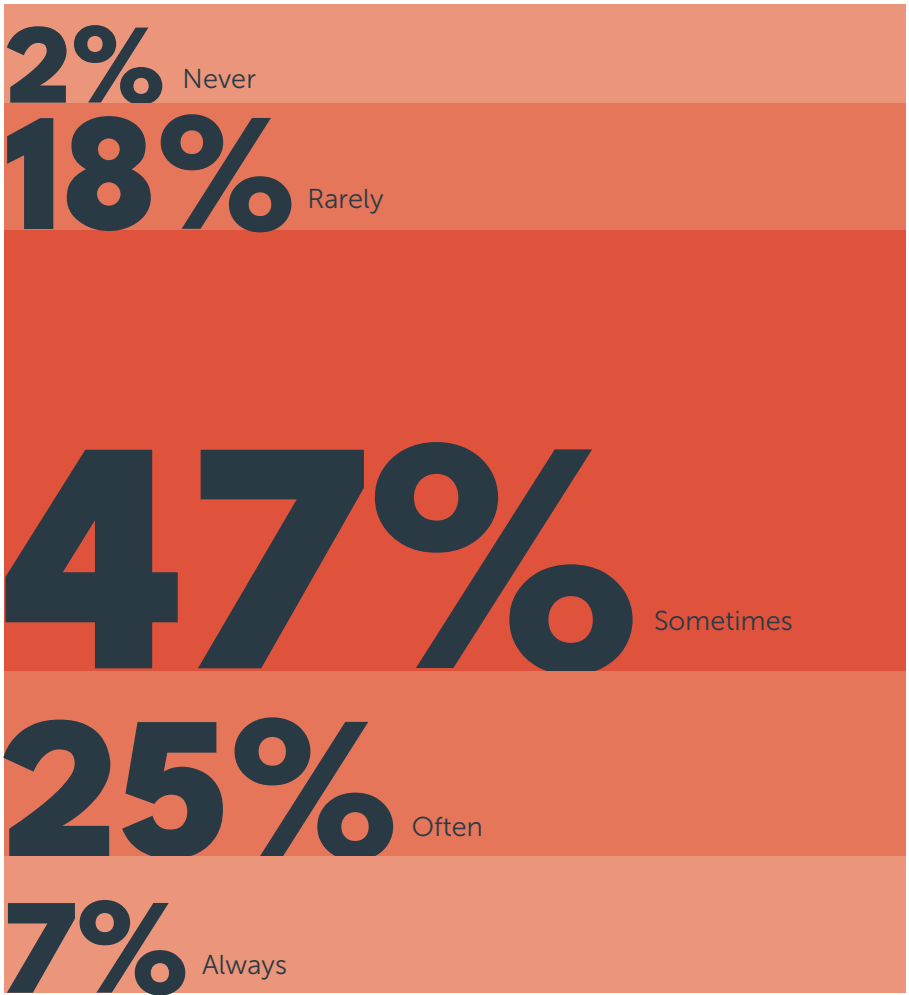
## How challenging do you find managing client expectations?



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Poor work-life balance” and 5 being “Optimal work-life balance,” how would you rate your work-life balance?



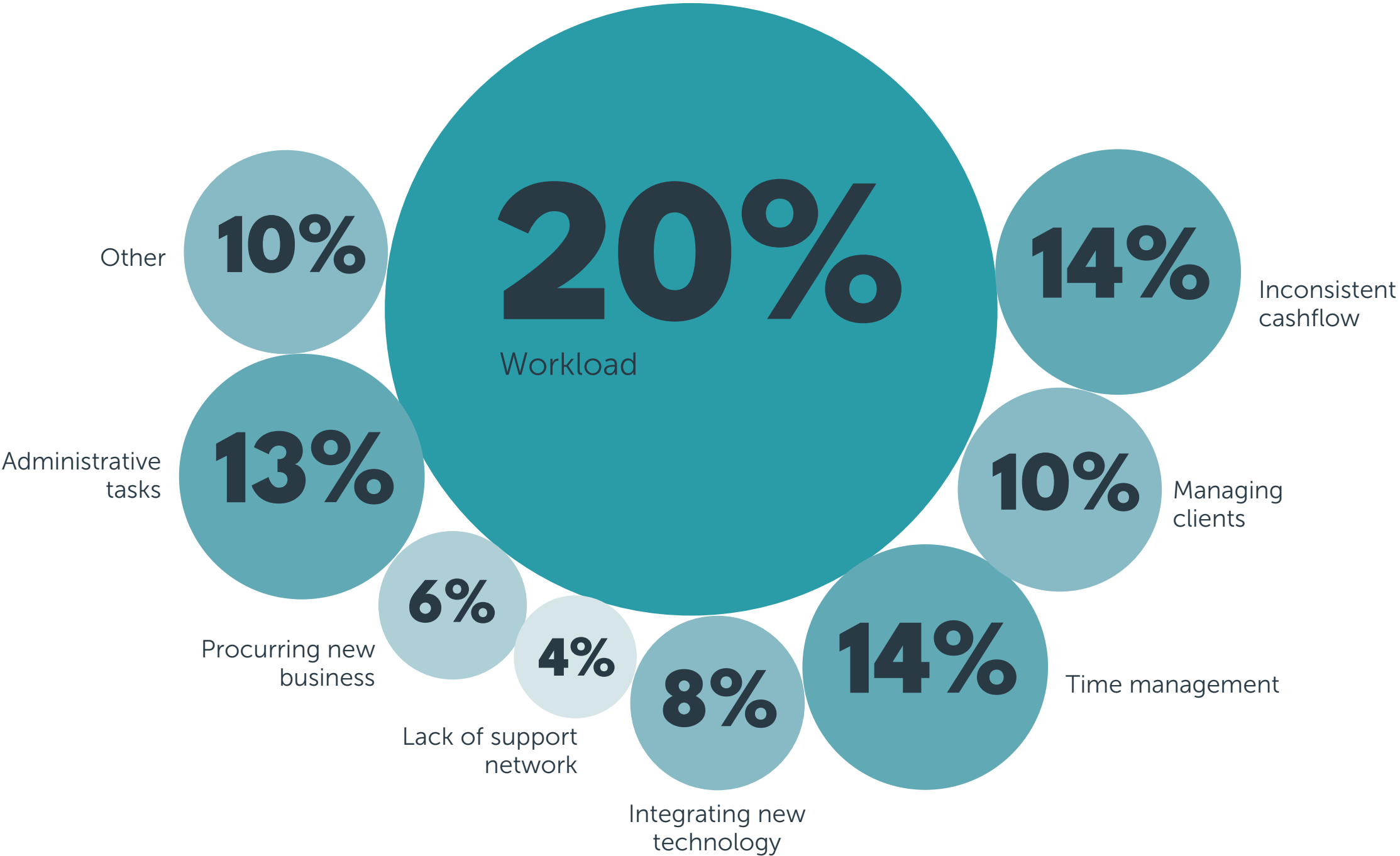
## How often do you feel stressed due to work?



# Professional Stressors for Solos & Work-Life Balance

Managing stress and maintaining work-life balance can be challenging, yet many individuals actively take steps to mitigate these pressures. Data suggests a strong correlation between work-life balance and time management, indicating that those who effectively manage their time are more likely to maintain a healthier division between their professional and personal lives. Prioritizing structured schedules, setting boundaries, and optimizing workflow efficiency can serve as key strategies in enhancing both productivity and overall well-being.

Which of these options causes the most stress to you as a solo practitioner? Please select one.

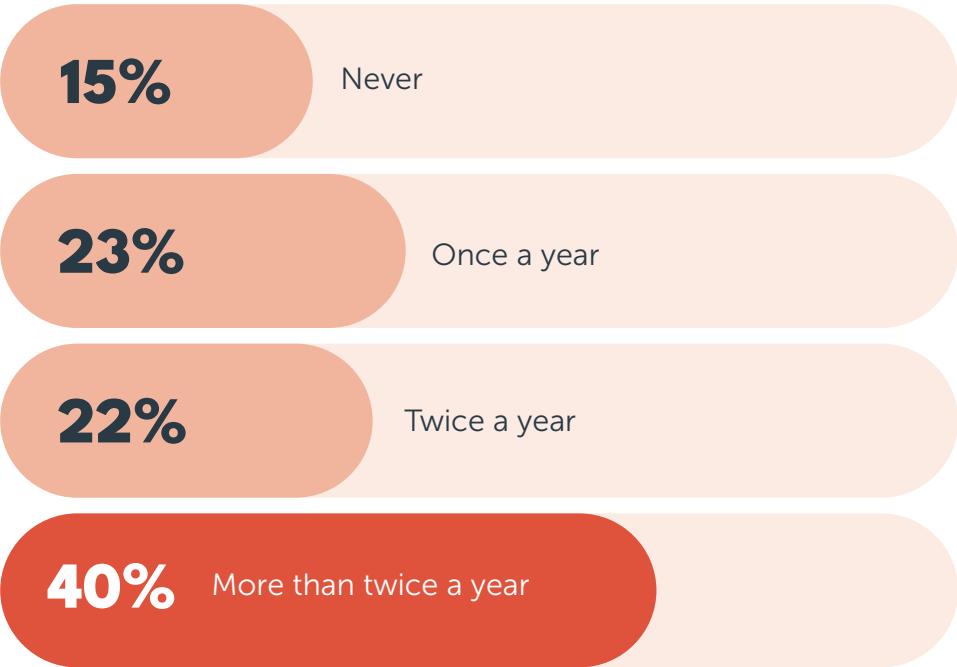


# Professional Stressors for Solos & Work-Life Balance

A significant 85% of respondents report using vacations or disconnecting from work as a primary method of stress relief. Establishing clear boundaries between professional and personal time has been

shown to greatly enhance overall well-being. Additionally, many emphasize the role of exercise and social activities in reducing stress and improving mental and physical health.

**In an average year, how often do you take vacations, disconnected from work?**



Despite these efforts, some solo practitioners still struggle to achieve balance due to the demands of their practice, highlighting the persistent challenge of maintaining wellness in high-pressure environments. To prevent occupational burnout and enhance

quality of life, it is essential to adopt healthy outlets that promote relaxation, personal fulfillment, and long-term sustainability in both work and daily life.

# Support Outside Work

Beyond the workplace, various opportunities exist to improve mental well-being, yet whether individuals take advantage of these resources remains a personal choice. Mental health services, for example, have been shown to reduce stress and support rational decision-making. However, only 22% of individuals surveyed reported seeking professional help, with an additional 11% of those surveyed expressing a desire to do so. This gap suggests a potential stigma surrounding mental health support, where individuals may recognize the need for help but hesitate to seek it out. Interestingly, the percentage of people receiving mental health assistance closely

aligns with those who reported experiencing loneliness, indicating a connection between social isolation and the decision to seek support. Additionally, many survey participants emphasize the importance of setting boundaries to maintain a healthy work-life balance. As one attorney advised, “You should turn your email off during evenings and weekends” This small act helps reinforce boundaries. By prioritizing time outside of work, individuals can improve their overall mental health and well-being, reducing stress and preventing burnout.

**On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “Extremely lonely” and 5 being “Not at all lonely,” how often do you feel lonely in your practice as a solo practitioner?**



Have you ever experienced occupational burnout as a solo practitioner? Occupational burnout is characterized as chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, or a mismatch between the challenges of work and a person’s mental and physical resources.



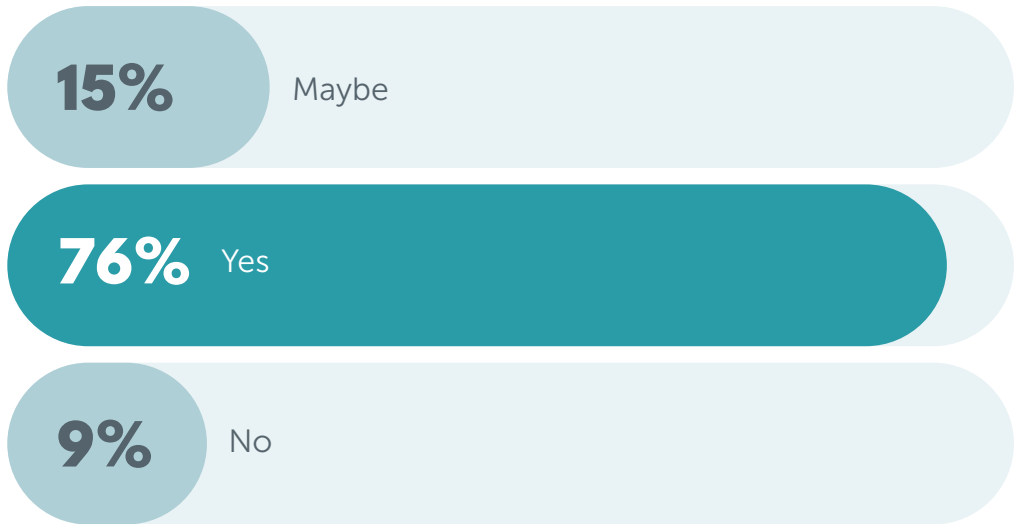
With most respondents working nearly full-time, stress management remains a key focus, and individuals employ a variety of strategies to maintain balance. Common methods include exercise, structured routines, meditation, time away from work, and social connections, with many emphasizing the importance of consistency in these practices. Additionally, several participants highlighted the role of gratitude and maintaining a positive outlook, noting that engaging in hobbies and community activities significantly helps alleviate stress.

**Is there any advice you would offer to a new solo?**

“Seek mental health treatment if your work substantially affects your life. Find an attorney colleague for questions. Your most-effective marketing is how you treat clients and your competence as an attorney, not necessarily social media, online advertising, or networking.”

Continued Career Satisfaction as a Solo

Barring retirement or unforeseen health circumstances, would you envision continuing as a solo practitioner three years from now?



What reason would you cite for leaving solo practice in the next three years?





# Continued Career Satisfaction as a Solo

Please provide any additional comments or suggestions regarding your well-being as a solo legal practitioner.

“Remember that you practice law primarily to serve each client’s best interests and provide better outcomes, not primarily to ‘get rich.’ If you do the first, your practice will grow, and the income will follow.”

Despite the challenges associated with stress, it is reassuring to find that the majority of solo practitioners are satisfied with their careers. Many express a strong commitment to their profession and have no plans to leave the practice of law, citing various personal and professional reasons for their continued dedication. Of the 9% who indicated they would consider leaving their solo practice, most cited leaving due to the practice of law itself. Notably no respondents said they would move to a larger firm.

# Support at Work: Staffing, Workload, and the Importance of Support for Solo Practitioners

The data on staffing and full-time work underscores the diverse needs of solo practitioners, shaped by their unique business models. Notably, 38% of solo attorneys have support staff, with an average of one full-time employee. This finding highlights that a significant portion of solo practitioners are managing heavy workloads with minimal assistance, potentially setting them up for overwork and burnout.

To navigate these challenges, many attorneys emphasize the importance of establishing better workplace support systems. Key strategies include learning to say “no” to excessive demands, maintaining control over their schedules, and setting clear boundaries with clients through effective communication. Those who do employ staff stress the value of having a reliable support team to help manage administrative and operational tasks.

Despite these ongoing challenges, the majority of solo practitioners report having functional support systems. However, perspectives on available resources and professional well-being vary. Many respondents express a need for improved client management strategies, access to affordable technology, and stronger peer support networks. Others highlight the necessity of administrative assistance and mental health resources, while some feel adequately supported. Overall, the data reflects a clear acknowledgment of the

What resources or support do you feel would improve your well-being as a solo practitioner?

“Honestly, if more people talked about it. I don’t believe I’m alone in having difficulty managing work stress, but I feel very alone. It seems like everyone else is doing okay & would judge me because I’m not. I think normalizing discussing the mental health challenges inherent in a high stress job (more than a CLE once a year) would help many people.”

demands solo practitioners face, reinforcing the critical role of community, structured support, and resource accessibility in reducing stress and improving job satisfaction.

# Physical Health: The Link Between Stress, Physical Health, and Intentional Wellness Practices

## What methods do you use to manage stress?

“Exercise helps a lot. I also keep work hours between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. so I have time to unwind. I do not take client calls or respond to emails after 6:00 p.m. unless it is a critical situation that is time sensitive. Taking time with friends and family also helps.”

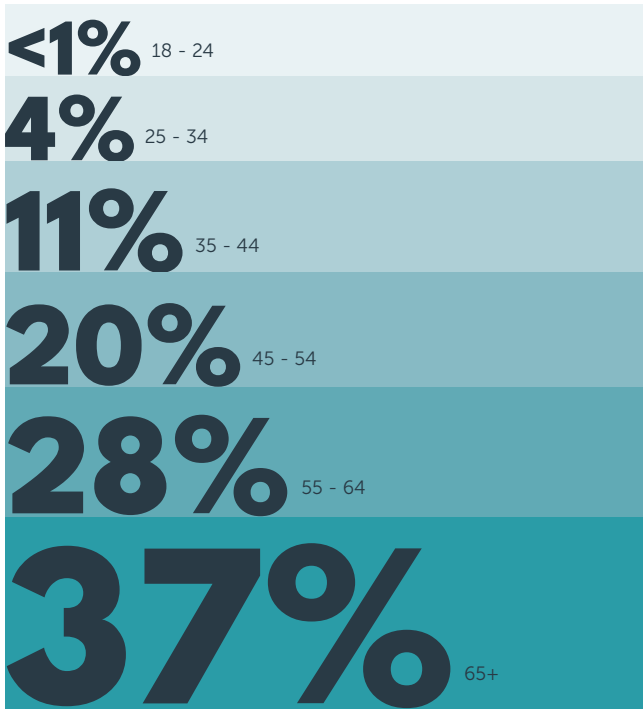
Stress is a well-documented factor that can negatively impact both mental and physical health, with work-related stress being a common challenge for many professionals. However, solo practitioners appear to be bucking this trend, reporting excellent physical health despite the demands of their work. Their success in maintaining well-being is largely attributed to proactive health strategies, including daily exercise, consistent sleep patterns of 7-8 hours, and intentional stress management techniques.

A significant finding highlights that 80% of solo practitioners take intentional breaks, reinforcing the importance of structured recovery periods. These deliberate pauses, combined with their commitment to physical wellness, suggest a strong correlation between stress management, mental well-being, and overall health. By actively addressing stress through exercise, rest, and mindful breaks, solo practitioners may be mitigating the adverse effects typically associated with high workloads, offering valuable insights into sustainable work-life balance strategies.

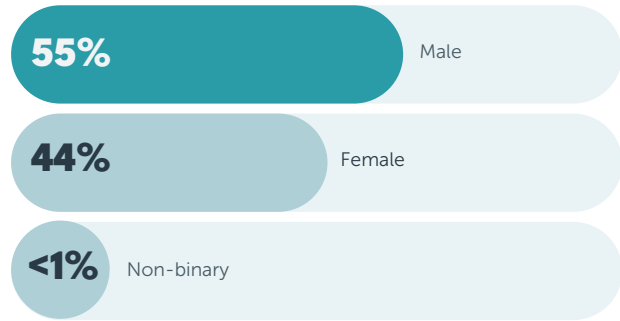
# Appendix: Respondent Demographics

ALPS conducted this survey from September 26, 2024 to December 12, 2024 with email outreach to our solo policyholder email subscriber base of over 6,700. This survey report represents aggregated and anonymized data from 289 participants. No individual responses are identified or attributed to specific participants. The data is intended for general analytical use and may be used for research, statistical analysis, or other purposes. Participation was voluntary.

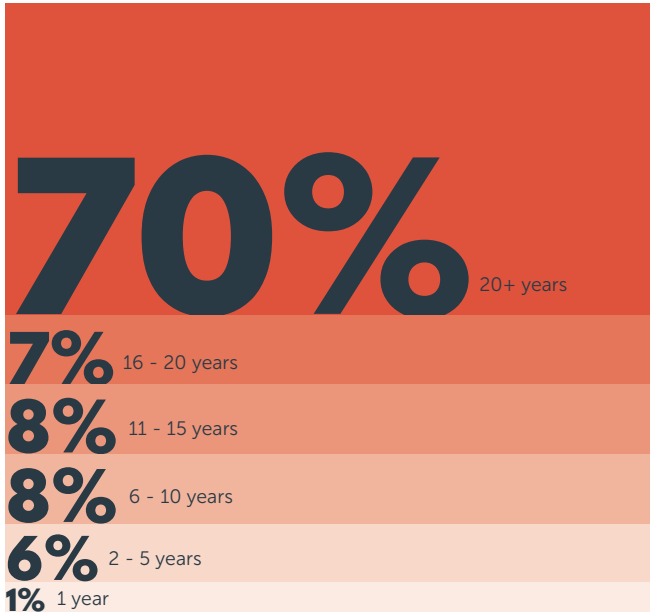
## Age:



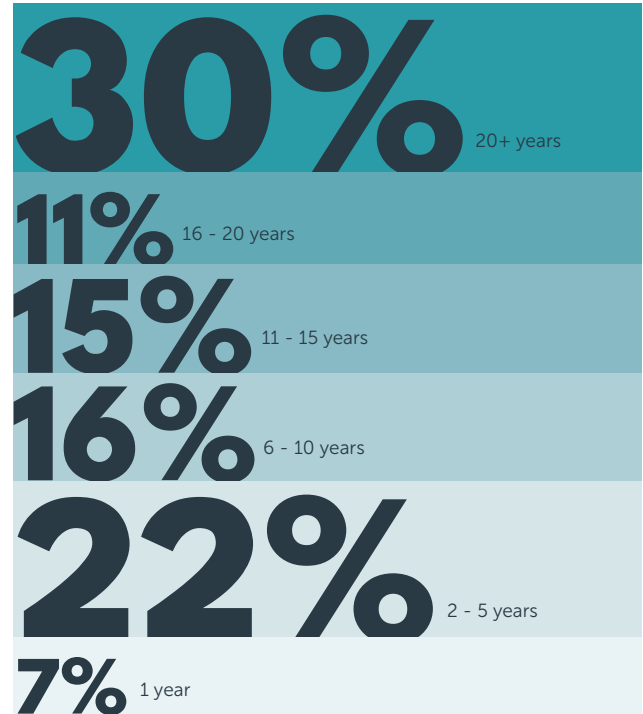
## Gender:



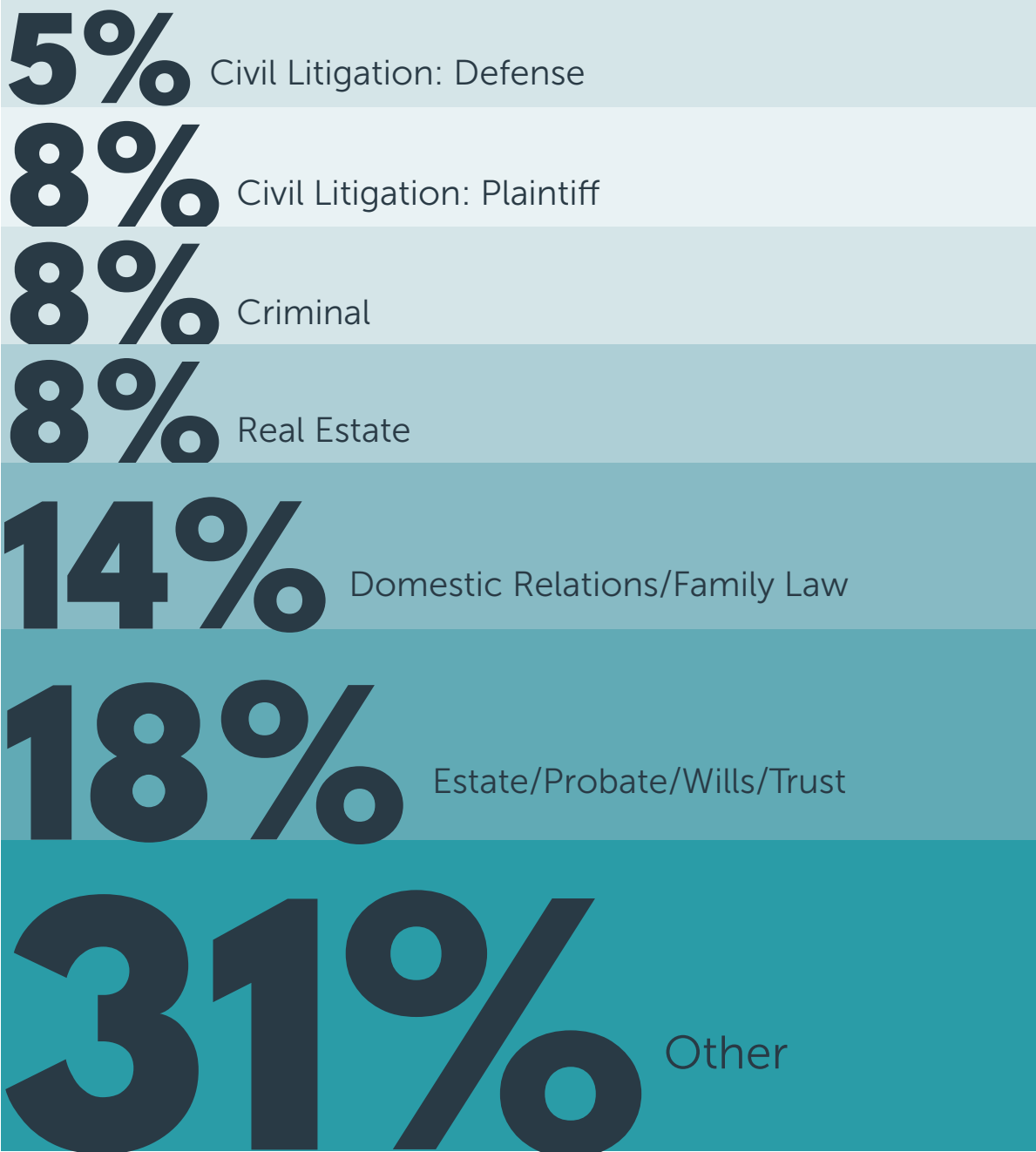
How long have you been practicing law?



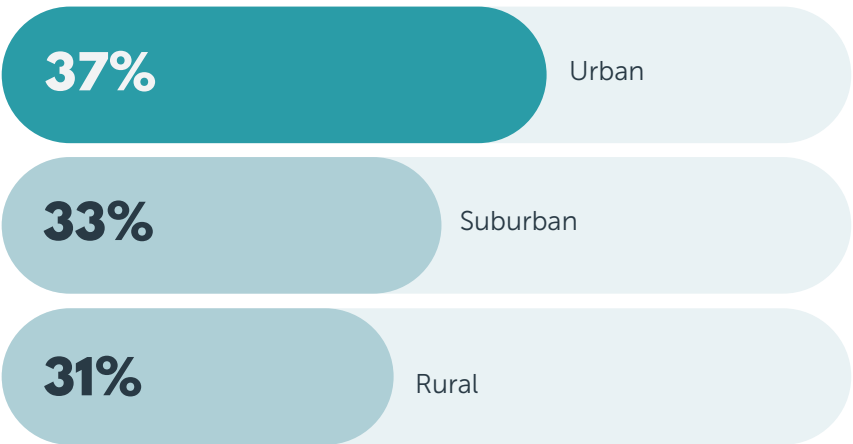
How many years have you been practicing as a solo attorney?



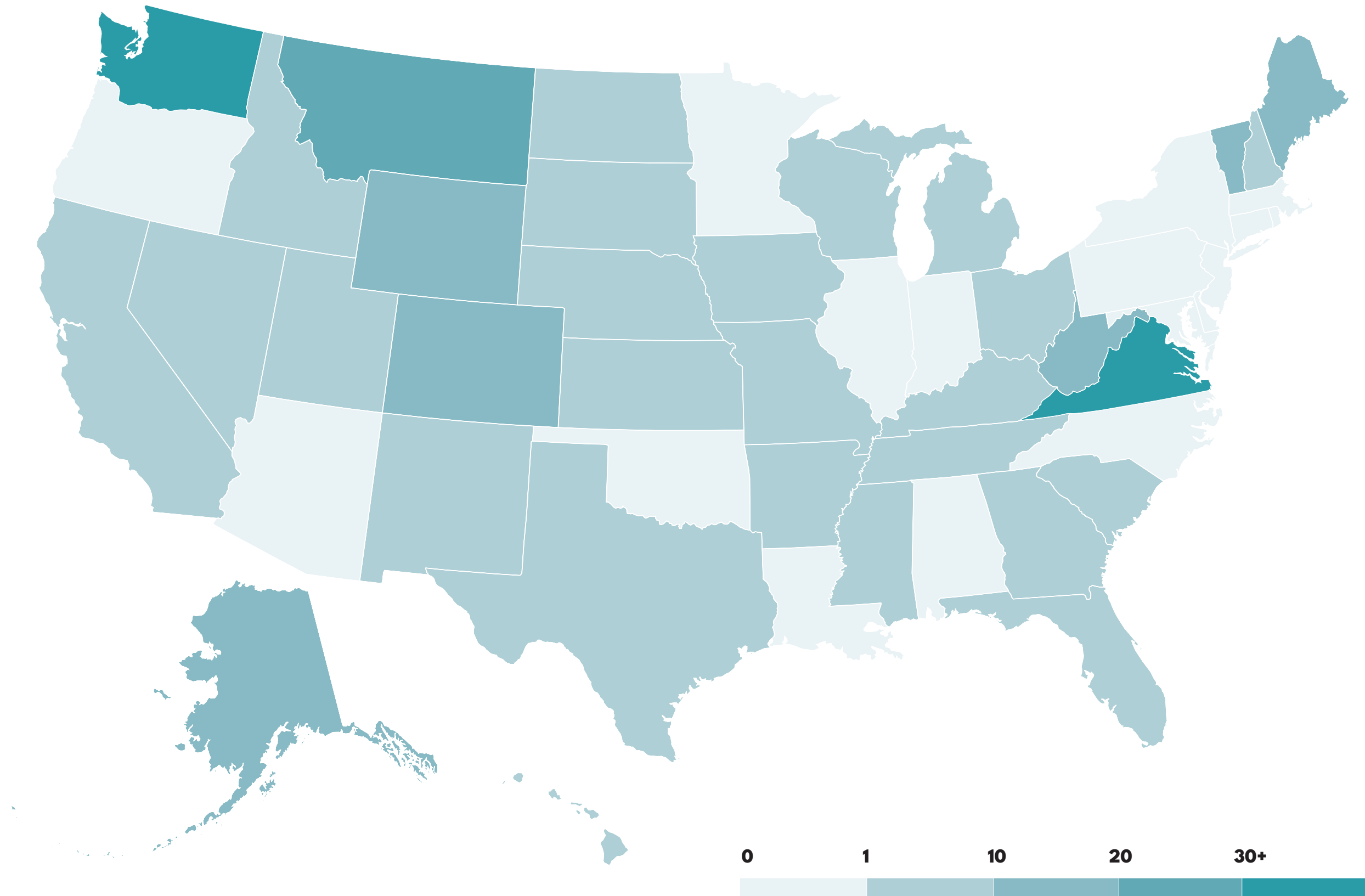
What is your primary area of practice?



Which best describes your practice location?



### Geographic Distribution of Respondents



# Why is ALPS committed to the solo and small firm community?

Founded by lawyers for lawyers in 1988, ALPS is the nation's leader in insurance for solo and small law firms. In fact, almost 75% of our policyholders are solo attorneys so we are committed to understanding the challenges of solo practitioners and how we can contribute to solo and small firm success. We know many lawyers find it difficult to navigate insurance and find what they need to protect their firm. ALPS has invested in making it easy for attorneys to obtain coverage so they can focus on what they do best—helping people. In addition to taking some of the back-office burden off of solo firms, we also listen to lawyers. Because we are endorsed by more state bars than any other carrier, we are able to better respond to concerns of the profession. We also engage in direct outreach with our policyholders, as evidenced by our commitment to lawyer well-being. ALPS strives to know more about the lawyers we serve so that we can support the continued growth and success of their firms.

If you would like to learn more about ALPS Insurance, please visit us at **[alpsinsurance.com](https://alpsinsurance.com)**.

Law firm insurance made easy.

