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### Asylum Attorney Burnout (Model Survey and Additional Survey Responses)

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**Asylum Attorney Burnout (Model Survey and Additional Survey Responses)**  
**Professors Lindsay M. Harris & Hillary Mellinger**  
**February 2020**

**This is the survey as distributed to participants between February and May 2020.**

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*You are eligible to take this survey as long as you are:*

1. *A licensed attorney, admitted to the bar in any jurisdiction*
2. *You do not work for the U.S. government or any other government*
3. *You practice immigration law primarily, and some of your practice includes asylum cases*
4. *You consent to the survey*

*Responses to this survey are anonymous. In order to potentially track responses over time (a future survey years from now, for example), we ask you to share two pieces of information to help us to create an identifying tag for you – the last name of your favorite teacher and the sum of the last 4 digits of your social security number.*

1. Favorite childhood teacher's last name:
2. Sum of the last 4 digits of your social security number
3. Please share your age
  - a. 20-29
  - b. 30-39
  - c. 40-49
  - d. 50-59
  - e. 60-69
  - f. 70-79
  - g. 80+
4. Please share your gender identity
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to disclose
  - d. Other
5. Please share your racial/ethnic identity:
  - a. White/Caucasian
  - b. Black/African American
  - c. Middle Eastern/North African
  - d. Asian
  - e. LatinX/Hispanic
  - f. Native American
  - g. Pacific Islander
  - h. Mixed race
  - i. Prefer not to disclose
  - j. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please share your primary place of employment
  - a. Solo practitioner
  - b. Small firm (2-5 attorneys)
  - c. Medium firm (5-9 attorneys)
  - d. Larger firm (10+ attorneys)
  - e. Non-profit organization
  - f. Volunteer (not paid)
  - g. Academic institution
  
7. How many part-time or full-time support staff do you have in your office working with *you* (paralegals, staff assistants, office managers, legal interns, etc):
  - a. None
  - b. 1
  - c. 2-3
  - d. 4-5
  - e. 5+
  
8. What percentage of your practice constitutes asylum cases?
  - a. Less than 10%
  - b. 10-30%
  - c. 31-50%
  - d. 51-75%
  - e. 76% +
  
9. How many individual asylum cases do you currently have on your docket?
  - a. Less than 5
  - b. 5-10
  - c. 11-20
  - d. 21-30
  - e. 31-40
  - f. 41-50
  - g. 51-60
  - h. 61+
  
10. What percentage of your cases are affirmative asylum cases (before the asylum office)?
  - a. Less than 10%
  - b. 10-30%
  - c. 31-50%
  - d. 51-75%
  - e. 76% +
  
11. What percentage of your cases are defensive (in court) asylum cases?
  - a. Less than 10%
  - b. 10-30%
  - c. 31-50%
  - d. 51-75%
  - e. 76% +
  
12. What percentage of your asylum clients are detained the majority of the time in which you provide representation?

- a. Less than 10%
  - b. 10-30%
  - c. 31-50%
  - d. 51-75%
  - e. 76% +
13. Where are the majority of your asylum clients from?
- a. Central America
  - b. South America
  - c. Sub-Saharan Africa
  - d. Middle East
  - e. Asia
  - f. Europe
  - g. No one particular region
14. In which jurisdiction do you primarily practice?
- a. 1<sup>st</sup> Cir.
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cir.
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup> Cir.
  - d. 4<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - e. 5<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - f. 6<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - g. 7<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - h. 8<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - i. 9<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - j. 10<sup>th</sup> Cir.
  - k. 11<sup>th</sup> Cir.
15. Are you a member of any of the following organizations?
- a. American Immigration Lawyers Association
  - b. Federal Bar Association
  - c. National Lawyers Guild
  - d. Facebook Groups (AMIGAs, Nerdy Immigration Lawyers, Cool Immigration Lawyers, CAMI589, Asylum Attorneys R Us, etc)
16. How many hours do you estimate you work per week?
- a. Less than 30
  - b. 30-40
  - c. 40-50
  - d. 50-60
  - e. 60-70
  - f. 70+

## **Copenhagen Burnout Inventory**

### *Personal Burnout Questions*

17. How often do you feel tired?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat

- d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
18. How often are you physically exhausted?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
19. How often are you emotionally exhausted?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
20. How often do you think “I can’t take it anymore”?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
21. How often do you feel worn out?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
22. How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree

*Work-related Burnout*

23. Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
24. Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat

- d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
25. Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
26. Do you have enough energy for family and friends during leisure time?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
27. Is your work emotionally exhausting?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
28. Does your work frustrate you?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
29. Do you feel burnout because of your work?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree

*Client-related burnout*

30. Do you find it hard to work with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
31. Does it drain your energy to work with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat

- d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
32. Do you find it frustrating to work with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
33. Do you feel that you give more than you get back when you work with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
34. Are you tired of working with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree
35. Do you sometimes wonder how long you will be able to continue working with clients?
- a. Always, or to a very high degree
  - b. Often, or to a high degree
  - c. Sometimes, or somewhat
  - d. Seldom or to a low degree
  - e. Never, almost never, or to a very low degree

### **Secondary Traumatic Stress Questions**

#### *Intrusion*

36. My heart starts pounding when I think about my work
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
37. It seems as if I am reliving the trauma(s) experienced by the asylum applicants
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
38. Reminders of my work with asylum applicants upset me
- a. Never

- b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
39. I think about my work with asylum applicants when I don't intend to
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
40. I have disturbing dreams about asylum applicants
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often

*Avoidance*

41. I feel emotionally numb
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
42. I feel discouraged about the future
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
43. I have little interest in being around others
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
44. I am less active than usual
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
45. I avoid people, places, or things that remind me of my work with asylum applicants
- a. Never



- b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
46. I want to avoid working with some asylum applicants
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
47. I notice gaps in my memory about asylum applicants' cases
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often

*Arousal*

48. I have trouble sleeping
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
49. I feel jumpy
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
50. I have trouble concentrating
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
51. I am easily annoyed
- a. Never
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Occasionally
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
52. I expect something bad to happen
- a. Never

- b. Rarely
- c. Occasionally
- d. Often
- e. Very often

*Final Open-Ended Question:*

46. Is there anything else you would like to share about the challenges of your job as an immigration/asylum attorney?

**National Asylum Attorney Survey 2020**  
**Professors Lindsay M. Harris & Hillary Mellinger**  
**Open-Ended Responses**

*These are the responses to the final open ended survey questions. They are unedited, other to redact any potentially identifying information.*

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In understanding my trauma a little more, this article identifies that I witnessed and was responsible for documenting torture by my own government as a part of my daily job, but at least as part of weekly trips to detention centers in [state] and border clinics in [city] in July, 2018, December, 2018, February 2019, May 2019, and July 2019. It wasn't until I read these articles that I felt justified in opening up my colleagues. As if admitting it was to show my weakness and meant I should turn in my bar card. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/5dmw5x/doctors-have-a-name-for-separating-kids-from-their-parents-at-the-border-its-torture?fbclid=IwAR19WVYw9qch-fXXdMfiwTyv4cuSuyv5GZG1h2DIpDvjtc0rnHaNohg2aBE](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/5dmw5x/doctors-have-a-name-for-separating-kids-from-their-parents-at-the-border-its-torture?fbclid=IwAR19WVYw9qch-fXXdMfiwTyv4cuSuyv5GZG1h2DIpDvjtc0rnHaNohg2aBE)

The constant changes in the law is very stressful. You often feel like you won't succeed.

The ever changing policies create more fear and burden on advocates as well. I feel constantly worried that I will miss something changing that will affect my clients.

If Trump is reelected, I would seriously consider a career change.

My clients are almost universally awesome. Changes in policy and the degradation [sic] of the asylum process are far more problematic for my mental and emotional well-being.

It is hardly ever the actual work of preparing cases alongside clients that is stressful. Tedious, taxing, but not stressful. It is how they are received by the picayune asylum office, the indifferent opposing counsel, and the testy judges that accounts for the stress.

The pay is low, given the complexity of the law in the field, however there is no work I'd rather be doing because I'm helping incredibly deserving clients, so many kind, wonderful people.

I'm solo except for the non-profit where I volunteer. It is so, so hard not to have someone to turn to, no office support, etc. I love my clients and love helping them. I hate the system.

Many asylum cases have the same vicarious trauma risk as other victim based cases which are the majority of our practice.

Being in a detention center for a full work day is draining because of the staff and lack of access to food and technology

Doing removal defense for 5+ years, and detained work 3+ of those, had left me exhausted and I often wonder whether I will be able to pursue this long term or if I'll burn out.

I am taking this survey in the context of a well-staffed non-profit which has exceptional support staff who feel empowered. Additionally the culture is such that attys help each other out, collaborate, cover masters, brainstorm. In my previous job working with asylum attorneys my remote site was chronically understaffed with no legal support staff and a fear-based environment. I took substantial time away from immigration direct representation because I realized how badly I was burnt out. The reasons I was burnt out though were much more to do with toxic management than working with clients. In a supportive setting (like I've often had) there is nothing that is more fulfilling to me than work with detained immigrants. Also helps that I am now in a relatively civil EOIR jurisdiction where it is possible to communicate with DHS and the judges are willing to listen to our arguments.

The frequent changes in law make me feel as if my grip on my professional knowledge is always uncertain. Leads to an imposter feeling every new week.

frustration of not being able to advise clients of timing, future and give professional prediction

The constant legal changes under this administration add significantly to an already stressful job.

It's much much more stressful under the current administration

This week I thought I may have to stop doing this work

Q53 [referring to the survey question that asks "I expect something bad to happen" and then provides a scale of responses] depends on whether the bad thing is to my clients, in which case, the answer is "very often."

It is more the Government's crackdown on asylum than working with my clients that I find to be particularly dispiriting.

Within the past two months I have been diagnosed with pneumonia two times. My doctor told me today: it is stress. I found it fascinating in doing this survey how much I still love working my clients, and preparing their cases. However, this current administration has made it absolute hell. HELL. The asylum office has become an interrogation center at times - all bets are off - it depends on which AO you get. And now [city] has implements it's VTC - video cam courts - which I fondly refer to as "kangaroo courts" because that is exactly what they are. I choose my cases carefully. I don't take what I think is a "dog." The FAMU docket however has wiped me out. I refuse to take on any new VTC cases. I am not practicing law - I am handing my clients over to the devil. Sorry, my stress level is to the max. There is no more asylum law - it has been gutted, eviscerated and when I go to court with certain judges (I can think of five specific ones) I am throwing my clients to the wolves. I simply cannot do this any more. My retirement date is carved in stone.

A constant paralyzing feeling of complete impotence always surrounds me.

The decrease in likelihood of success compared to prior years is very depressing and frustrating. I used to believe that a well-screened case + a good lawyer = a good outcome. I now believe the philosophy/ orientation of the adjudicator is determinative. Facts matter less and good cases too often lose. There is a growing sense of futility.

I have been doing this continuously since 1985, and these are the most difficult times.

In addition to the above I find it alienating in the sense that I feel nobody I talk to can understand the work unless [t]hey are also doing it.

I'm trying to quit practicing immigration law because of the trauma I've experienced. As a solo attorney with no money, this is fraught with difficulty including the possibility of bar complaints or losing my license in the process.

I started being an attorney under the trump administration, and I may end my career under the trump administration. I do not enjoy being an immigration attorney and I do not feel that I am making a difference. We are losing, and losing fast.

Low pay, constant law changes

Feelings of guilt about not being able to do more

While client work is rewarding, working with pro bono attorneys can be very stressful as their demands on my time can be unreasonable and they do not realize I have my own caseload in addition to managing a pro bono program.

Every day it seems like there is a new horrible case or change in the law. It's so hard to want to brief yourself on some terror in the system until you absolutely have to. I think "oh, I'll wait until the ICH briefing to see if X shitty case is still good law." My clients are literally tortured sometimes and it's still not a "winnable" case because of nexus & the assumption of relocation. Or a bullshit credibility finding. It's always been hard work, but this seems impossible & personally destructive.

Vicarious trauma is very real.

A good supportive environment in a nonprofit would go a long way to feeling less burnt out.

The biggest frustration is the lack of communication with government agencies: USCIS, ICE and EOIR. We used to have liaison meetings and there was information sharing that made practice easier. Now there is total blockage of all information.

Sense of futility: that time put in and quality of work net no benefit

The constant shift in the law is a huge trigger to my anxiety

Most of my frustrations are with the court and administration, less frustration with clients. Also noting that my caseload is significantly lower now than in recent months but because I'm supervising 3 staff attorneys and their caseloads.

He's taken away every single tool we have to fight on behalf of our clients. I feel like a doctor forced to stand by with my hands tied and just watch a patient die. I can't watch the news about family separation or children in cafes without weeping.

Injustice is exhausting

No. [Referring to "No Comment" in response to the question prompt].

I'm planning to limit the asylum cases I take.

It is often overwhelmingly hopeless or filled with anxiety these days.

i occasionally daydream about inflicting violence on ICE attorneys.

The "luck of the draw" factor with Judges is ridiculous.

It is very stressful and all consuming, but I'm committed to serving this deserving population.

My MPP clients are all desperate and beg me to help them get out of [country].

As a survivor of abuse myself, I find that my "primary" and "secondary" traumas meld. The questions about "do you avoid people and places related to your work with asylum seekers" is difficult, because in fact I avoid things that remind me of my personal trauma, but all of those responses are endlessly amplified by my experience working with asylum seekers. People DON'T UNDERSTAND just how difficult this work is--not even my colleagues who do immigration but barely do asylum work. It's a nightmare. People's lives are in our hands and we have to walk into court for masters or other hearings and see people who we know, if deported, will likely be killed or tortured. Then the court CLEARLY doesn't care about our clients. I see staff throwing my 800+ page submissions and busting the binders, then saying they'll fix it later (they don't, then the documents are lost and causes more stress for us in the long run).

A couple times a year I have a case that deeply affects me in the sense of nightmares, heart palpitations and other physical symptoms, etc. The rest of the time it's just exhaustion, feeling hopeless, trouble concentrating etc.

The immigration judges and government counsel are the large part of my irritation and frustration.

It was a lot worse/more frustrating to work in the [x] circuit. I'm enjoying being in the [x] circuit!

I am [information redacted to protect respondent's identity]. Trying to practice asylum law in a court that is falling apart while already exhausted because of my health situation is really

freaking hard. I am not taking any new defensive asylum cases in the future but it will be another two-three years before I complete all of the cases on my calendar and I have no idea how in the heck I am going to do that and parent. ALSO. I have some intergenerational trauma that pops up, grandmother was a refugee who fled here in 1940, I feel enormous guilt for saying no to asylum cases since my family was lucky enough to be able to flee here instead of dying in the camps.

Someone has to do it

Family & Friends are disappointed with our career choice; constant negative rhetoric about immigrants is draining; feeling uncomfortable telling people my job

I have practiced since the Clinton Administration-never has it been so awful for immigrants-in every aspect of immigration law-not just asylum based applications.

I still love my job but it gets harder and harder every year. 2019 was especially [the respondent's comment ends here].

It is not so much the harm they fled that eats at me, as the harm they suffer here. The unjust arrests, horrendous detention conditions and the callous and cruel systems we have put in place to just beat these people down. My clients human rights are violated in so many ways that there are not enough attorney hours in the entire bar to even attempt to vindicate every wrong done to them here in our supposed land of the free.

I have been practicing with a license for 5 years now. I just moved back to a non-profit one year ago where I now focus more on working with survivors of trafficking in removal proceedings and who are detained. For 2-3 years before I had my own practice working exclusively with asylum seekers. I have never had legal assistants or support in 5 years. My energy has become noticeably lower as of 2019 where I now cry randomly and often, and I feel very little motivation to complete work on my cases, especially with how much more cumbersome everything has become in the last 3 years.

I don't have "disturbing" dreams but I have anxiety dreams. Dreams where I have to do something or get somewhere and I just can't seem to manage to do it. I attribute it to my work.

It often feels like there is no way to win in defensive asylum even when clients have good claims.



I am in a better place than I was several months ago. I was hospitalized for a month with severe depression with psychotic features, and then in a partial hospitalization program for another month. I am on medication, see a therapist and am in group therapy. One of the root causes of my depression is my work with asylum seekers. I am back at work, trying to practice what I preach about self-care.

The uncertainty and constant flux in legal standards and precedents is disconcerting and discouraging.

For me, current challenges have less to do with the secondary trauma and more to do with the unpredictable, chaotic, and cruel changes in administration policy. It's just a lot harder to do the job now.

When it gets busy everything gets worse, but at the moment I am not in a time crunch and things feel manageable.

No

we need more help dealing with secondary trauma.

I used to rep detained and non-detained adults. That was anxiety inducing so I moved to non-profit work with kids in detention thinking it would be easier. It is less anxiety producing because I'm not responsible for helping a person completely avoid deportation, but the level of trauma these kids have endured is astronomical and so the emotional toil it is taking on me is actually higher than my previous job. The point being: there is no way to participate in the immigration system as a defense attorney without being affected by secondary trauma. The stories, the experiences are all horrific. What our govt is doing to children and their parents is horrific. Witnessing it is horrific.

Hope is dwindling

The constant changes/updates in immigration policy under the current administration are exhausting and detract significantly from client work. It feels impossible to keep up with everything at times. I also feel like it's impossible to express how devastating, dangerous, illegal, immoral, and unnecessary this administration's changes to asylum policy are to non-immigration/asylum attorneys, and I find this inability deeply frustrating.

I primarily work on cases for unaccompanied minors, victims of domestic violence and other serious crimes, refugees, and the LGBTQ community--many are not asylum, but involve traumatic experiences in order to be eligible to apply. Also, I find when I am face to face with client--it is often energizing and gives me some motivation. What's draining is delving deep into the details of their cases, often when I'm alone and trying to make my arguments, complete their applications or prep for trial or interviews. When I'm with the client conversing, it gives me more energy to keep working on their case.

It is very challenging and is taking a mental toll on me and my colleagues. I feel like I need a therapist just to get through the day. The work itself is draining and is a lot of pressure, any small mistake can have severe consequences. I am pretty sure I have vicarious trauma from all the clients' stories of persecution, and having to hear them over and over again as we draft affidavits and prepare for interviews or individual hearings is emotionally exhausting.

i went into this work with eyes wide open

As a manager, helping my team deal with their traumas about working with asylees and survivors of trauma is one of the biggest issues I have at work. It is very hard to help others who are going through this secondary trauma in this field. With the current president of the US, it has gotten even worse. Emotional management is becoming a real issue in my practice.

The constant changes are a huge challenge, never knowing how to respond to them for long.

At this time we are being persecuted by our own govt just like our clients are--that lack of safety is a huge burnout factor

That clients do not always value my contribution or help in their cases

I often feel complicit in perpetuating the good immigrant/bad immigrant narrative when I'm preparing a client case. Our laws are terrible and so limiting and oftentimes my biggest frustration is having to neatly package my clients' stories into this very awful binary.

Getting paid for asylum, running a firm, and having a decent standard of living is nearly impossible.

Workload is too high. I think at the root, for non-profits at least, this comes down to how the work is funded and the metrics we have to meet.

Being an immigration/asylum attorney right now is exhausting and demoralizing, given the Trump Administration's systematic war on immigrants and asylum-seekers. We are barraged with new policies and case law seemingly every week that cause us to have to scramble to re-frame our cases, come up with new strategies on the fly, and absorb new rules that are increasingly punitive towards our clients and at odds with decades of established case law. We bear witness to the erosion of due process and humanitarian consideration and how it has a direct impact on the lives of our immigrant clients and their families. As a lawyer, it is a huge responsibility to be in charge of someone's immigration case, and essentially their only hope for safety and security. Now it feels like the deck is stacked against us, no matter how hard we work. This situation is definitely taking its toll on me personally in terms of emotional exhaustion and burnout.

The weight of the fact that if you lose your client's case, they will be sent to their persecution/death has lead [sic] to waking me up in the middle of the night, thinking of something I should have already done for a case, constantly thinking about what I should be doing on their case to make sure they get the protection they need. It's a huge weight to hold, especially when there are derivative children attached. And lately the cases I've taken had good case law at the time, and by the time it comes to the ICH, there is no law to support their claim. It starts to feel depressing and hopeless.

It is not unusual to be physically ill, following an asylum hearing hearing with past persecution for up to 3 days.

I've been working with marginalized communities for some time now, so have been able to develop coping mechanisms. I exercise a lot and have a good family/ personal life. I am not sure I am representative of most attorneys who represent asylum seekers. Thanks for doing this survey!

I find the fact that I now rate levels of trauma amount clients troubling, but necessary to cope.

It has always been difficult to represent asylum seekers but it has never been as overbearingly emotionally disruptive as under the Trump administration. I feel, like my clients feel, constantly paranoid and concerned about when the next shoe will drop and it makes it difficult to continue practice.

Much of my work is with detained clients. Personally I find the trauma of detention itself to be disturbing. I find more difficulties working with and dealing with the families/point of contact than I do with the client. Many of the points of contact have very little understanding about the

situation is for their loved one. Managing them and their expectations is more stressful to me than client interaction.

I'm retired volunteering old strategies no longer work.

I absolutely love my clients. Yes, it's exhausting, but they give me a lot by trusting me (for the most part). It's the system that exhausts me, and the pain they feel that I can't do anything about. If I stop working with clients, it won't be because they don't give back.

A constant nagging feeling that you're not doing enough.

I work part time, and recently returned from parental leave. Some of my answers (exhaustion, burnout, workload) reflect my outside-of-work reality as well as inside.

It used to be easier.

It's a question of how much longer I can do this. This is the best job I've ever had, and also the worst.

Feeling that I am in a perpetual loop; working more hours to work on cases and stay abreast with the current caselaw/rules; very political field of law to practice; racism; discrimination; etc.

I recently took a maternity leave and came back at reduced hours and that transition has doubled as a nice way to work less and prioritize my family.

I am the primary attorney in the firm charged with asylum cases and it is isolating.

I'd recommend this survey be amended to include UC asylum as a category of asylum cases. It's not affirmative, nor is the asylum portion in court.

It's hard to keep up with all the changes.

Re the question about being around others [referring to survey question 44, which asks: "I have little interest in being around others" and then provides a range of agree to disagree options] -- I like to be around others who do the same kind of work. It is exhausting to be around people, even close friends, who don't because so much explanation goes into "how are you doing?" That

is isolating in and of itself because the circle of people in your life who you can really talk to becomes smaller and smaller.

I feel complicit in a system that is antiquated and racist.

I think it's hard to know what stressors are because of work and what are things outside of work (the general political climate, I have a baby)

Frustration from the lack of diversity within the immigration legal field.

The struggle is real

After 12 years doing this, I am quitting to change professions at the end of this year.

It brings me incredible satisfaction, and the horrific nature of our legal system-- not my clients, themselves-- is what makes me question whether I can continue to do this work long term. I hope I do.

This administration, the GOP and the Supreme Court justices making up the majority feel like a never ending hell. Educating the public is another unending part of the job. It feels like the deck is stacked so high against us and our clients that I don't know why we try sometimes.

The changes in the administration and policies barring asylum claims is another source of stress and trauma. I often dread giving clients news that they don't want to hear because of policy changes that adversely affect their options / futures.

not enough understanding/support from management. need more flex time, need social workers at the office to assist clients and attorneys

I rely heavily on the emotional support my amazing colleagues!

I fear that the student attorneys look at me and think, "God, I don't want to live like that."

Since Trump, it is very frustrating. With each passing day it seems like there are more restrictions put in place. It just gets to be very frustrating. Sometimes I feel like it is all hopeless, and I feel helpless. Presenting a case in court is sad; most often our judges sit there

expressionless as my clients present harrowing facts, and at the end the relief is denied. Then, think to myself, how can this be happening? After all, we are all human beings. I've only practiced immigration law 8 years, but the difference in the practice from then to now has been a sea change. A sea change. Enough! I don't want this to sound like I am complaining--just explaining! But, Steven Miller is the WORST. He is one disgusting human being!

I recently transitioned from removal defense and defensive asylum claims to only taking USCIS work and affirmative filings. I have noticed a major improvement in my stress levels and mental health, which I attribute to not practicing in the Immigration Court.

While the legal work on asylum cases is critically important, it is so undervalued. It seems everyone thinks we should be doing it for free, which of course would make it impossible to sustain a practice and stay in business.

The biggest challenge is less to do with working with clients, and considerably more to do with the unpredictability in the shifting asylum law landscape and process.

My main frustration is with the law. I do feel honored with the work that I do for these clients. What makes me sometimes even go more than 50 hours, is the fear that they might get deported and it will be my fault. That's the anxiety that forces me to go overboard. I keep imagining what if it were me, what if it were my family members and that's when I can't sleep. I worry about what would happen to them. And my frustration is with the immigration law system that keeps hindering us at every turn. Otherwise, my clients are wonderful, resilient individuals who are a model of strength to me.

sometimes debilitating or paralyzing feelings

I feel sad for many colleagues who are having a really hard time, especially those who focus primarily on asylum.

The government has taken a difficult system and tried to make it impossible. These are legitimate claims by many people that should be processed in a neutral environment, not one where the government tries to stack the deck against you.

Alot of the asylum cases I have involve children and I find it specially challenging dealing with treating them as clients since they are so young. I often disempowered by not being able to make the decisions that I think are in their best interest, despite the fact that I somethings feel like the are taking actions that can negatively impact their immigration case.

My organization provides excellent self-care support.

While it is hard for me to listen to and read so many accounts about violence and death, I know it is even more difficult for the staff I work with, for whom it brings back vivid personal memories of the countries they left

Despite the incredible physical and psychological toll of asylum work, I remain passionate about representing asylum applicants in removal proceedings. I know that there are a number of ways to cope with the stresses of my work, however, I find that I have little energy, time and motivation to attempt any of those methods.

Although the work is demanding and the political climate hostile, I love what I do and wouldn't trade it for the world. Being an immigration lawyer is very fulfilling and meaningful. I couldn't imagine a better way for me contribute my time and talents to our global community and our nation.

I tell myself that it can't always be this bad. I'll say that it has to get better sometime, but then I find myself bracing for the next legal blow.

With the arbitrary and unexpected changes in the last two years, my work has become increasingly challenging--both on a practical as well as an emotional level.

I am a fully accredited representative, not an attorney.

I have less asylum cases, but I feel these stressed out and emotional responses with my SIJS and U-Visa cases often.

For around 3 years I practiced at a legal service provider. I represented immigrants in removal proceedings and traveled to the detention centers a lot. I experienced an enormous level of burnout due to the high case loads. Since moving to the Clinical Teaching it is so clear to me that I was experiencing burn out before.

I am an optimistic person by nature, but the last 5 years practicing in [city], with IJs and TAs that demean immigrant women and re-traumatize them at trial, have been difficult, exhausting, and usually not enjoyable. As busy as I am (which is extremely busy) as a solo practitioner, I try to make time in my schedule at least twice a week to jog or attend yoga class. That helps my mind a

little. Thank you for taking an interest in how challenging this work has become in the past 3 years under this openly anti-immigrant administration.

I'm ashamed of my country.

I love my clients a lot and I left my work. This government is making my job nearly impossible cases that I had many years ago that were winnable are no longer winnable case is that I had many years ago I would never have been appealed by the government are now appealed by the government. This administration is making it virtually impossible to represent asylum-seekers we have less time less resources Less favorable law and more Judges with a background in immigration prosecution. The government will not negotiate on cases. The government will Appeal every decision even when they know that's not an issue they should appeal. The government say no to everything. The law changes on almost a daily basis

I often think "what's the point?"

The workplace environment and lack of support at my agency doing this work contributes heavily to my feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout, which multiples negative feelings about client work.

Secondary trauma is real

I feel like I am in a constant state of irritation with the world.

I am an attorney supervisor at a non-profit organization representing detained immigrants in removal proceedings (and continuing on their cases if they are released). I am exhausted and numb. I work 13-14+ hour days 6-7 days a week. One of the most significant causes of my own burnout is the mass burnout of the attorneys in my office who I am supervising. The attrition rate is incredible and it has been difficult to keep people on staff for more than a year. I have had friends and colleagues stop working in immigration removal defense due to the onset of panic attacks and other anxiety issues. Those left are then burned out by the volume of cases and only increasing number of people in need due to constantly increasing ICE enforcement. Dealing with the combined trauma of a full docket of clients (most in detention) and the trauma of burned-out attorneys is numbing.

I don't feel like it's the clients that necessarily exhaust me, it's the combination of the emotional impact the client stories have combined with the stress of the legal system and the constant battling with bureaucracy and laws that are stacked against both immigrants and their advocates.



The extreme difficulties make the successes extremely sweet, and I do have successes.

I went to [city, state] for one week with [non-profit organization] . The project is great and the experience was really positive and worthwhile, but there's a reason they have volunteers serve only one week! I got really sick at the end of the week (spent the whole weekend sleeping in my hotel room) and when I got to the airport to go home I literally fainted. Apparently I'd been working so hard - and the conditions in our nation's largest jail for women and children were so bad - that I got dehydrated to the point of passing out. Some lovely medics at the airport helped me and I got home and drank lots of liquids - but the physical consequences of my service were real.

For me, working with clients is one of the most rewarding aspects of the job. I should probably deal with the vicarious trauma better, but far and away the worst part of the job is the defeatism I feel constantly - that I am spending 100s of hours of work preparing cases that aren't good enough, to judges that won't care, as part of a system that won't change.

it sucks and it fascinating and its rewarding and then it sucks loke a rollercoaster ride

Started working as an immg atty 6 months ago, so very new still. Also -- the question about feeling discouraged about the future -- feelings about my future are very different than my feelings about the future of our nation

The survey seems to focus on the work with the clients. My clients are the reason I keep working. It's the administration and its draconian policies that cause the stress and frustration.

It's hard that it ever has been.

Adding exercise into my daily routine has saved my career

I am currently only volunteering on pro bono cases, while working a non-lawyer job. This has made it a little less stressful as I can focus on just a handful of cases. But it also makes me feel guilty because I could be doing so much more for asylum applicants.

I made changes to my workload in order to recover from burnout last year. This includes more conscientious limiting of my work hours (less than 10 per day, with some exceptions) and limits on taking new clients because the cases have been pending for so long. I feel guilty that I have not taken more clients recently, because there are so many people who need help. And I am fortunate to have my employer's support (nonprofit org), but I don't know how financially

sustainable this approach is. If I were still taking on new cases, I would remain burnt-out today. I sought to leave this type of work last year, until I made changes that make my continuation possible. The stress, including hostile judges and constant policy changes intended to block immigrants, make the work agonizing. The clients and my supportive colleagues are the only way I can continue.

It makes me exhausted, but I love my job. It's also rewarding when we get cases granted. We can only do our best.

My answer to these questions is colored more by the framework in place now because Donald Trump is the president than it is because of client-burnout. The main sources of my frustration these days are the US Government, not my clients. My clients are often the best part of my day.

I am thinking of quitting the practice of law all together.

No

I've been doing predominantly asylum work for 11 years and have never felt so negative, angry, helpless, frustrated or overworked before this administration. I love this work and my clients but hate what this administration has done to the process. If he gets reelected I may leave the practice.

Many of the challenges we are currently facing come from rapid changes in policy/law handed down by the Trump administration. It is difficult to competently keep pace with.

I am so glad you are doing this survey, and that it is part of normalizing conversations around attorney burnout, stress and trauma. I think it's worth noting that because I am in academia, I feel one step removed from the deep trauma of my clients - my students are just a bit more on the front lines. Of course, I know all the facts, meet the clients, prep them for trial, etc. but I think that that half step removal gives me the emotional distance I need to do this work long term. As a front line attorney in non profit practice earlier in my career, I felt even closer to the trauma, and very deeply affected by it. One other thing not on this survey that I can't help but think about, is what it means to parent young children while also doing this work. That is a separate survey, but working with survivors of torture, trauma and abuse - many of whom are children/were children when persecuted - is an extra layer for me as a mother. Thank you for doing this, Lindsay!

Stress is more from government than clients

If I had to do it over again, I would not be an attorney.

I feel like I'm just beating my head against a solid concrete wall and feel foolish for continuing to do so, but also feel that I want to help and this is the only avenue (legally) that we have.

my frustration is with the system, and to the degree I feel like I'm not getting back what I put in, it is about the clients not getting the desired outcome despite the work and the reality of their lived experiences.

I feel frustrated almost all the time and my level of stress has increased exponentially since Trump took office

I have what I think is a relatively small caseload (usually 2-3 detained cases). My stress fluctuates a lot based on changes in my cases and caseload, and particularly leading up to important dates like merits hearings. I consider myself very lucky to have a supportive supervisor who ensures that I am not overworked (to the extent possible in this type of work), that I take time off, and who I feel supports me as a whole person and is invested in my ability to sustain this work long-term. Even with that support, the possibility of judges denying my client's cases is very stressful and weighty. I have also basically stopped following much of the news, which I found to be a source of stress.

Most of my work now is not in direct services, but mentoring attorneys working on direct rep cases by reviewing declarations, consulting on cases, providing trainings. I wanted to give this context as I do not work with clients on a daily basis in case it impacts the results of your study. That said, I have years of direct services experience and feel the compounded impact of vicarious trauma.

Everything is 1000% harder when the clients are detained. That is by far the most traumatic aspect of the work--the ongoing brutalization of people who have already suffered so much.

It is made harder because there is currently no light at the end of the tunnel.

No

it can at times be emotionally draining, but most often extremely rewarding and uplifting.

For a solo practitioner the reward-cost analysis has weighted a great deal towards the cost side in the last four years. It is very disheartening.

I think this administration has created a generation of public service workers with serious PTSD from the absolute chaos and horror of the changes in the immigration system. It feels like we are all drowning and there is no one to save us.

Often feeling hopeless or guilty for not taking clients

I am [information redacted to protect respondent's identity].

THE HIGH DENIAL RATE IS DISHEARTENING, THE NUMBER OF APPLICANTS OVERWHELMING

I thought I would practice until I physically could not but the past year has worn me out and I am aiming to retire by end of year. Physically I am very healthy and outdoorsy but emotionally drained.

Increases anxiety re: "what if" situations my clients have experienced

I have been practicing for over 15 years and this is the most exhausted I have ever felt.

Most of the stress has a direct connection not to the client and their story but to the administration's efforts to stop all legal and illegal immigration.

It's like hacking away at a cement wall with a plastic spoon. There are no words to describe how awful it is to tell a client they have to go back to the place where they are in so much danger, that the law doesn't protect them - especially after we grow so close to our clients. Many times I've felt the urge to "Anne Frank" my clients (hide them in my house). I can't of course, but since there's no legal justice, aren't we compelled to do something else? Civil disobedience sometimes seems the only way, but we can't do that because then we undermine our ability to help more people... but then it's like, are we even helping, or by participating in this system, are we giving credence to the system and propping it up? These questions have no good answers. But near everyday is heartbreak.

Has become substantially more difficult and draining under the Trump administration

I will not make it four more years. I'm not even sure how I'll get through the next month. It's been like this since 2018 and I'm booked out for IH until 2024. I'm tired

I feel unappreciated even though I work very hard and truly care about my clients. I feel friends and family have no respect for the little spare time I have. I often found myself wondering what else I could be good at, in other words, considering a change of career

<<SIGH>>

Yes. While I'm now retired for [number redacted] years, I've worked in the immigration law environment for over 45 years. I've never experienced an immigration environment that's so purposefully cruel in its treatment of immigrants. over [number redacted] years. I've never experienced an immigration environment that's

it is very challenging to be in a supervisory/leadership role in managing one's own vicarious trauma and burnout while also supporting a cascade of attorneys to effectively steward their own trauma and vicarious trauma

I know this survey is focused on asylum work but I don't think it is the only thing leading to burnout. I do a very high volume of I-130/consular processing cases for former refugees. At this point the majority of my clients' family members are banned due to the two travel bans. This is also greatly affecting my mental health. I don't relate to feeling burnout specifically with the clients. I think the majority of my clients are fairly easy to work with and incredibly appreciative. My feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and depression are a direct result of government policies. I am starting to feel paranoid and scared of the US government myself. Objectively I know I shouldn't feel this way but I think I am absorbing that emotion from the clients. All of my frustration with doing this job is coming from having to interact with employees of DHS/DOS/DOJ. I think it would be helpful to add in some questions about working with federal agencies. It is a nightmare. I have only been doing this work for 6 years. I love the clients but I don't feel like I can keep doing it because of all the legal changes and the hostility of DOJ/DHS/DOS. I am wrapping up my practice and leaving the country in a few months. This decision is a direct result of the Trump Administration.

I worked as an asylum attorney for over five years and I had to leave removal because it was too difficult and emotionally draining without good support from the firm I was working at. A good support system is key.

It's the worst its been in all the years I've been practicing. I'm training young lawyers to do the work. .I don't know if they'll stay with the practice. It's almost impossible to win even those most deserving cases. The deck is stacked against our clients.

It feels impossible and hopeless.

While working with clients can be frustrating, working under the constraints of the system and especially the injustices of the current system are significantly more stressful than working with clients.

I can't do full-time direct rep anymore. Am focusing my practice on ghostwriting for other attorneys. I think about rape/sexual abuse all the time. I have very little hope for/faith in humanity. My work has permanently damaged me, and it affects my parenting. But I don't want to stop, either.

You did not ask how we would feel if we turned back the clock one, two, or three, administrations and practiced asylum law under a non-white-nationalist/supremacist administration.

I wasn't like this before Trump took office; I've been diagnosed with vicarious trauma by my therapist and am undergoing EMDR therapy

I have worked for over 10 years in immigration law. I have never seen a worse environment for the mental health of anyone practicing immigration law than right now. It is really a crisis and I think there is increasing acknowledgment of that, but I cannot continue working in these circumstances for much longer. I am hoping the election in November will change everything.

It's just hard. And the guilt never stops.

I used to work with adult asylum applicants, and would find myself more agitated when working on their cases. I currently work with kids and teens, and their stories, generally, are not as traumatizing to me.

Futility can be soul-sapping.

Changed to part time to help with burn out. Not sure yet if it is helping.

Hope for best and be prepared for the worst.

just want to note that I represent unaccompanied kids, so they're both in immigration court \*and\* filing affirmatively before the asylum office

I am leaving non-profit work for a while to work in private immigration practice that is not all removal defense. It's too intense, unproductive, and exhausting to carry my heavy caseload of solely NQRP (mentally incompetent) clients in removal proceedings.

I feel my organization and others are mirroring the dysfunction of the immigration system.

Denial plays a huge role in recognizing the personal detriment this field of work brings to my every day life.

People are so cruel to each other. Knowing, and living this, has greatly diminished the joy in my life.

I have been practicing asylum law for 3 years. I started on the same day as Donald Trump's presidency and have found it both rewarding, but I'm overwhelmed by the sheer number of cases coming through our doors. I work for in non-profit legal services. I have realized within the past few months that one of the biggest things stressing me out is my own self-censure. I'm sick and tired of pretending that I believe there is any moral justification for deporting someone who has never committed a crime and is running from violence, whether they are members of a PSG or not. At first, listening to the horrific stories was the hardest part of the job, but eventually you learn to take it in without taking it on. But as time goes on, I am more and more conflicted about whether my participation legitimates the structure, and whether I should quit and stand in participate in civil disobedience.

It is a very difficult task, and not financially rewarding.

The way we are treated by Judges as practitioners of asylum cases contribute to the overall stress and unpleasantness of handling asylum cases. The accelerated timelines of asylum cases have also aggravated stress and apathy towards asylum cases.

The last couple of years have been really rough on everyone and I feel for our clients the most because nothing seems to be fair or make any sense. It is a very dark time.

I am ADHD and am on medicine

I have been handling asylum cases for 28 years now. I'm in the process of retiring and closing my practice. The last 2 years especially have been exhausting. I'm burned out.

The AG of the US is a horrible person.

My outlook on the future and ability to cope with the stress of work has changed dramatically with this administration. It is much more frustrating and I sometimes find myself feeling hopeless because of all of the obstacles. I love working with my clients. I had working in this system.

It is much more stressful than filing I-130s, but it just isn't that bad. I think that many of the younger immigration lawyers become too involved with their clients. It makes professional judgement very difficult. My job is relatively easy, especially compared to what my clients are going through.

There are several frustrations in working with asylum clients: they often have little idea about how to obtain the materials they need; they sometimes cannot express themselves very well, primarily due to the lack of education; they miss appointments because of problems with transportation or work hours; but the most frustrating thing is the attitude of some immigration judges who have absolutely NO idea of what is involved and the new judges follow the "rule book" of this dreadful administration, which is determined to eliminate asylum. When one of my clients wins a case, I feel like I have saved a life; the denials are so pat and formulated it is disgusting. i could go on for hours -- I am committed to working as hard as I can for the most people I can -- my work is my mission and my reason for living

As difficult as its become, I love my profession and my career and wouldn't trade it for the world.

There is nothing better than winning an asylum case for someone. It changes their whole life and offers them (and their families) a future.



To be clear, I LOVE MY CLIENTS. The frustration is with the law and with the responses of the government. I put more into the cases than the courts give back - but my clients are grateful even when we aren't successful because I treat them with dignity and put my all into my cases.

No

More frustrating than the clients and their experiences is dealing with the immigration court, the judges, their clerks, and the constantly changing policies. I would feel less burned out if the system were more fair. I feel ineffective as an attorney, but only with my asylum clients. The policies with USCIS feel less arbitrary and provide obstacles with a chance of success. I feel like nothing I do will affect the outcome in an asylum case; it is determined more by the mood of the judge and the number of cases he needs to clear that week.

These last three years have been the most difficult for this kind of work

Working in a system that is built to remove my clients is very difficult. The law seems to be against most of the people I have consultations with. This is very disturbing because many of these people have been here for many years and do not want to go back to their home country. Working with clients who have children is very difficult because I think about the stress that the children might be facing.

In general, I find asylum cases quite interesting. It's also feels good to help people in danger.

In addition to the stress associated with working with clients, preparing and litigating the cases before the asylum office and immigration court have become much more strenuous. I often find myself having little energy to think of creative, successful PSGs or delve into asylum law research. I fear losing cases and lack motivation. Yet, we have been very successful and that is what keeps me going, along with my positive relationship with my clients and their needs.

When I win a case (I have been doing this for 10 years) the happiness and euphoria lasted sometimes weeks. Since trump assault to our asylum law the euphoria is just momentarily. Before when I lost a case, I had more fire to want to appeal and fight, now it really drains me. I have lost faith and confidence in the judges (I practice in once upon a time the most liberal court [city] thanks to the retirement rate and the pro trump new hires my court is not the same) and even worse to BIA. To be able to reach the more fair [x] Cir. We are talking years and years and clients usually don't have the money to afford such type of litigation. This needs to end. A new blue president must be elected in 2020 or I'm really fearful of what the future will hold.

It's more about the persistent feeling that things are not going to get better and that I am sad about the outcomes and coming deaths of deported clients.

I'm sorry to make it about politics, but politics. If we could just get politics out of immigration law ...

Clients rarely follow my instructions and do as they please. You tell them to email and they call. This is a major problem...LISTENING!!!!

I can't sleep at night. Insomnia is huge with me right now.

There's always hope for better conditions in the future.

The guilt. There is so much need and a diminishing number of people who do this work. Any case that I don't take I know that they probably won't find another attorney and will get an order of removal. I have a hard time saying no, but an even harder time working those cases.

I took this survey during COVID 19, might affect responses.

I feel stuck

I did get out of representing all but one of my asylum cases, and that one I had before MPP started. The MPP issues really did me in. I am so angry about all this persecution of asylum-seekers that I am nearly paralyzed. So I retired.

Being afraid of covid virus when I see clients or go to court makes the work extremely stressful

I was the first law student in an immigration law clinic (law school) and worked on the Chilean parolees, one ended being my mailperson in [city, state]. Over the years, I had to stop doing asylum because of the self-identified secondary post-traumatic stress syndrome. I organized years ago a CLE from our [state bar association] on this where the Bar psychologists came. I learned to concentrate in one area - muslim minority cases - and take only affirmative cases, and I polygraph each of my cases, so there is no hiding from the emotional impact by saying to ourself, it can't be true. I was in the class of [year redacted to protect respondent's identity], so you can contact me if you wish.

Arbitrary decisions by certain jurisdictions where client has to incur in larger fees to no avail

Most of the anxiety has to do with how the IJ/DHS will treat clients and the risk of them being deported despite a meritorious case, as opposed to replaying the events that occurred in the clients' home country.

I am financially underwater from trying to make this legal practice work.

Working with clients who refuse to seek the help of a social worker or therapist makes the case doubly difficult

I transitioned from working alone, representing UACs entirely from Mexico and Central America, to clinical teaching in [year redacted to protect respondent's identity]. Before I started teaching, I was barreling towards compassion fatigue, and I was experiencing almost all of the symptoms being asked about in this survey. After transitioning to clinical teaching, many of these have dissipated. Having the additional goal of teaching future lawyers and the energy of people new to the field is incredibly re-energizing for me. The lower caseload, variety of cases, and addition of a social work component has been integral in the recovery of my mental health.

After 12 years of doing asylum cases, some of the first cases from Rwanda before the court, I was diagnosed with PRSD. I moved to get away from it all but had trouble totally leaving it. I taught and ran a clinic but limited the number of asylum cases I took. At 66 I do not take asylum or court cases any longer. I am glad you are doing this study. we don't teach enough about boundaries and self care but should in law school!

I would note that most of my answers are as of now - I'm currently working from home due to the COVID pandemic, and I have not been interacting with clients nearly as much as usual. I also have not had to work on an asylum case in a while as USCIS is closed thru early June at least (all my cases are with young people, the majority UACS - so they are defensive, but before the AO). When preparation for those cases were active, my jumpiness, irritation, and bad dreams were much more frequent (I would have answered "often" to all of those questions.)

Working with people seeking asylum while detained during COVID-19 has been beyond difficult as ICE has been unreasonable and I truly have worried that my clients will die in detention because of our government's cruelty.

There is a constant sense of what is the end. Can I last till the end? sits a bleak outlook because it means there is an end. I mean part of me thinks an end to immigration or asylum in general but also part of me wants it to also be can I last until a new administration? The end though is just tough to think about. Sometimes I think we are so close to that and then another horrible thing gets implemented or rolled out.

The uncertainty of what is coming down the pike with changes in the law or policy by our current AG; the stress of negative law and policy from our current AG and President

I previously worked a legal services attorney on a 50/60+ hours a week job, where I felt like I could never catch up and my clients' lives would never improve. I would have endorsed nearly every single symptom then, even though my case load was not asylum seekers at that point. I now work a very reduced work load, rarely more than 30 hours per week, and nearly all of my work is done remotely. While I have sometimes still felt traumatized by what is happening to asylum seekers, it is more often than not from the news, especially during family separation, than directly from my own work. At this workload I feel I am a healthier person but it has come at significant cost in terms of number of clients I am helping

I feel a sort of survivors guilt. I don't know why I get to live the privileged life I lead while thousands upon thousands suffer. I often go to MPP encampments and I quite honestly do not understand how we are letting people live like this. Sometimes I worry I will develop PTSD.

The work is incredibly difficult and tiring. Clients are amazing and frustrating all at once. However, the hardest thing is the uphill battle we are constantly fighting against the courts and the administration. Knowing the amount of work we must put in to give our clients a fighting chance, while knowing the government can do next to nothing and still win is the most disheartening part of it and the thing that makes me feel the closest to burnout.

Apart from asylum, my caseload is VAWA/U/T/SIJS.

NO

It's heartbreaking knowing that the cards are against you from the beginning, and that there's not much one can do.

I should note that the number of cases I personally handle is not high. That's because my job is mainly to offer technical assistance to other attorneys handling their own asy cases. So while I

don't personally have a large number of asy cases, I serve as an advisor on several cases. I also was an adjudicator of asy cases before my present position for several years.

The cruelty as policy of this current administration is hard to bear.

I do believe there is secondary trauma

I feel that a lot of the pressure in my job comes from my employer's expectations that we take on as many cases as possible, without room to rest after putting in extra hours. Especially in detained work, the need to take on as many cases as we can is so compelling, but I feel crushed by the amount of work there is to do, and the ongoing emergency state everything has been in since I took this job. I need more time to rest, and that is not being respected. My clients aren't the problem.

I just want to be able to use family as a particular social group again.

I actually feel very energized and excited about my affirmative asylum cases. The defensive ones are the ones I struggle with. They are harder and the stakes are higher.

Frustration is common, not with the clients but the government and system in place

The trauma of asylum work grew more intense under the previous Administration, but now it is unrelenting. I essentially feel hopeless about the future of my practice.

It is very difficult to prepare and fight cases that you know are going to lose even if they are strong cases. That is very dispiriting and leading to burnout IMO.

I have decided to quit law altogether. It's impossible to deal with the financial crush of serving a low income population AND cope with the secondary trauma. I've lost my appetite for the law altogether after this shit show area of law. I have no faith in justice or the law anymore.

The US government wants to hurt our clients. This causes significant additional stress.

I note a lot of questions about difficulties and burn out working with clients. Its not the clients. Its the system. For me, the emotional exhaustion and burn out comes from an overly adversarial, contentious, arbitrary, and cruel system.

I have stopped doing detained work because I burned out doing detained asylum/withholding cases for three years.

It's not as bad now, with the pandemic. I got very sick when the government started kidnapping children. I have vertigo from stress and can no longer drive.

Though my feelings would likely have been similar prior to the current administration, the degree to which I feel these things have most definitely heightened now. With the constant obstacles thrown at my client's cases, from stupid procedural things like having filings rejected for not putting "n/a" in the middle name blanks, to cruel policies and precedential decisions, it is hard not to feel hopeless in being able to help my clients where the decks are so stacked against them. For example, for Q47, my answer that I want to avoid certain cases refers to CAM cases. It is not that I feel that they are any less deserving of asylum or needing representation, but it just can feel like an insurmountable mountain to climb. That said, I will often take these cases because I know often no one else will, but I would be lying if I said I didn't want to avoid them.

Staying abreast of caselaw changes

The hardest battles are the ones fought within the organization I work for. Where I should feel support, I feel abandoned. I signed up to work with trauma-survivors in a highly contentious environment, I did not sign up to battle my organization to provide the tool needed to do the job..

Thoughts about malpractice are persistent even though I've trying to do as much as possible for my clients. It's a somewhat irrational fear, but I sometimes have impending doom feelings that I am forgetting something or a deadline or a document or advising a client of something.

Many of my answers have changed since the COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders have been in effect - basically my cases are at a standstill now, and I have had some time to recuperate and rest. I am working much less now also.

This study assumes that the source of my stress is working with clients and vicarious trauma. It's not. If you're prone to suffer vicarious or post-secondary trauma, then this is wrong line of work. I do experience great stress in feeling unsupported by my employer and not earning enough money.

I don't want to work with clients because I don't want to get close to them in case they lose their cases. I don't want to blame and hate myself because I know that I will blame myself. I care too much about my clients and so find it difficult to work with them.

It is hard working with traumatized clients on a daily basis, especially when you've suffered personal trauma yourself. I don't know how much of my survey answers are because of my personal (recent) trauma or because of secondary trauma from clients. Certainly one is making the other one worse. I've been in therapy for my personal trauma for almost two years. My work with asylum seekers and the effects of this administration's immigration policies comes up frequently in sessions.

Feelings of failure / self-doubt

Sometimes I expect that I'm going to be killed because I advocate on behalf of immigrants and many people where I live don't like undocumented immigrants.

It's hard to get excited about good news and wins, because I feel so hopeless about asylum in general.

The government is cutting off every avenue so that's really the most depressing part

At this time, I often feel that the current state of the law is sometimes more frustrating and a bigger source of helplessness than the clients. It feels like the clients and the judges are working against letting me do my work to help the client.

I was diagnosed with secondary trauma and went to therapy and took medication. I think that has a lot to do with why I am feeling better about life now than I was before. I also just had [information redacted to protect respondent's identity] bringing me a lot of joy and hope where I didn't find it before.

Working with clients does not upset me rather fighting the system especially these last 3 years has been exhausting. It has required a lot of effort to defend my clients from a just cruel policies of this administration.

I'm answering these questions during a pandemic when I'm unable to visit my detained client, so I am a bit more stressed out than usual. But, I think my answers translate pretty well into non-pandemic times

All of the judges I work before deny the vast majority of asylum cases (over 90%); probably even more when it comes to Central American asylum applicants. They absolutely do not follow the very positive law of my Circuit. I know now that all of my clients are going to lose, and it's killing me. I plan to either move to another part of the country where my cases will be before a different immigration court, and/or to take a break from practicing immigration law, because I just can't take this anymore.

I've been doing this for six years and looking for a way out

When I'm not doing asylum I primarily practice U/VAWA. I always assume that there's something bad out there now. I am tired of the fight and get emotionally wrung out from the VT (hearing the stories). But hearing the stories isn't even the hard part anymore. It's the constant attempts by the government to undermine protection, everything changing every ten minutes, the loss of opportunity and cases that used to be winnable. I alternate between not being able to think about anything but my job to shutting off completely and ignoring it and pretending it isn't there. I should probably be working more hours to keep up, but I can't bring myself to do it.

The pay simply does not equal the effort.

The dread of wanting to help someone who deserves a grant of asylum but there is no legal path for them is devastating. I find myself most affected by those cases, re sleeping, thinking about it when I don't want to, affecting my work with other clients, etc.

The government's change to being unscrupulous, devious, and disingenuous in immigration cases.

When I was working full time with asylum seekers I felt these things to a higher degree and spent more hours working, had less time and energy for other things.

It isn't the clients, it's the system.

The chronic figurative wall-building of AG, BIA and [x] Cir. opinions that make this work so much more difficult are disheartening.



I think immigration lawyers by nature is disturbing, high stress. And our turnover are huge.

The hostility and unreasonably high expectations from the judges and TAs

I lash out at people who I feel don't take the plight of asylum seekers seriously enough. I have stopped doing detained work completely to protect my mental health.

No

My stress/frustrations come more from government policies making my job impossible or unreasonably difficult more than working with my clients

I work with refugees who ask me to bring their family members suffering abroad to join them. It is crushing to tell them if they are lucky, it will be YEARS or never that they see their family again in addition to hearing the trauma-filled stories.

The clients aren't the problem, the system is. Working with clients can be incredibly rewarding and fulfilling, but seeing them trashed by the judge and your work torn apart is what causes the exhaustion for me.

When evaluating responses, it may be significant to note the date the survey was completed, as being in quarantine may affect responses. Also, please note that I responded to the emotional questions generally as it relates to my overall feelings. However, most of these feelings are magnified when I am specifically working on an asylum case(s) for a prolonged period of time, e.g. during a time crunch when I'm trying to meet a deadline. Thank you for your work.

I've been doing this a long time, and because of burnout I'm transitioning into a management role (away from direct client services). It's helping.

I feel more burn out when I have a bad supervisor. Having a good supervisor makes this work so much more sustainable.

The last three years have been by far the hardest in all areas of the practice. There is really no safe refuge any more.

I would say the majority of the challenges/negative feelings I feel about my work have more to do with my interaction with government agencies than they do with asylum seekers themselves.

The last 5+ years (yes, from before Trump) have been grueling. My overall reaction has been a kind of emotional numbness. The horror of applicants' lives are one thing - and they are as horrible as anything I've heard in my 25 years of this kind of practice. But what is most emotionally exhausting to me is the relentlessness of the government's determination to demonize, dehumanize and dispose of these resilient, damaged, hopeful human beings. That, more than anything, tries my capacity for hope and faith in a better, more humane future. I am a teacher, though, and it is my law students who continue to buoy my spirits with their outrage, their empathy and their energy for change and the future.

I feel that I am not doing enough.

It's not about clients, as the research seems to be designed to show. It's about an already absurdly convoluted asylum law, which gave adjudicators unfettered discretion, further obscured by AG decisions. It's about judges acting like zealous prosecutors, federal judges servile to the Administration, and impotence before horrendous human rights violations by law enforcement. It's about having just your voice as a weapon when nobody hears you.

I have only worked in asylum under the Trump administration, so I do not have any experience under another president. I heard it used to be better/more rewarding. I really like helping people. At first I thought I was fighting the good fight, part of a cause. Now I feel like I'm walking into Mordor every time I enter immigration court "abandon all hope all ye who enter here" sort of thing. I just don't know how to fix it.

Trump's administration has made this work even tougher!!

The trauma of listening to my clients traumatic stories isn't the problem: its the trauma of knowing that they will be treated like lying, deceptive, ignorant, unintelligent people who don't deserve any measure of dignity by judges, TAs, and the powers that be in the immigration system, and the trauma of knowing that there is very little I can do about that. I shouldn't have to act as a buffer between the racism and horror of the system and my clients because the racism isn't okay, that is the problem. It is so painful to understand, deeply, that the way that asylum, detention, and immigration laws are written and interpreted so deeply fails to account for the reality of people's lived experiences. That is the worst part, and a trauma in and of itself.

One challenge is that the game is rigged against the underdogs, the immigrants, and that really upsets me. Another is that it is very frustrating is those occasions that I discover through the process of normal trial preparations that a client has either been hiding things from me or has been making things up or even has fabricated evidence. On top of that frustration, the difficult times I sometimes have when I try to withdraw infuriates me.

I have worked on these cases since 2012. Most of these feelings have arisen since Donald Trump's presidency. The trauma of the clients is always there, however, it now feels like even doing the best we can there may be nothing we can do to protect some of our clients. That part is the biggest cause of anxiety for me.

The increased inanity and banality of evil of this administration as it relates to immigration law compounds the frustration and despair a thousandfold.

The most difficult aspect of the work is the rigged system within which we are working right now. It is very hard to put a lot of effort into a case that you may well lose for no good reason.

Nearly all of my frustrations with asylum work relate to the institutional injustices and cruelty that clients experience, not the clients - they are resilient and inspiring. Their strength and perseverance strengthen me. But our system fails and harms them, and that is exhausting and disheartening.

This administration has caused me great pain and my clients even more pain. I am at retirement age but cannot afford to retire yet and it frustrates me that my last years of practice are so stressful. I should be winding down but everything takes twice as long and I am burned out. I do not blame the clients. I am also stressed by how long it is taking to get an asylum hearing. I cannot retire until these cases are heard. I blame our xenophobic immigration policy and the Trump administration.

I had a full load of asylum clients, and finally had to quit representing them as I was too overloaded and burned out.

I am not burned out so much because of my clients, but because of what the system does to them. When my clients have needs, I know those needs come from the very understandable effects of poverty and other systemic violence. Every interaction I have with DHS now is designed to make my life and the lives of my clients more difficult. I am trying to get away from client based work not because of them, but because of how abusive the system is to them.

having clients in detention is the most stressful part. I wake in the middle of the night thinking about them and worrying about how can I get them out

I truly love my work - after two years of practicing asylum work, I am still excited to get out of bed and go to my job. My clients are some of the most incredible people I've ever met. Most of my frustration around my job comes from lack of institutional support (lack of care of other attorneys in organization, lack of care by social workers/case managers with my clients) in addition to the violence to which they have already been subjected.

Yes I have so much to share! I practice before the [city] Immigration Court and took on many affirmative and defensive asylum cases the first few years I was in practice. I had never heard of secondary trauma back then. I became so burnt out I almost left immigration law entirely. I have learned and grown a lot since then but I have also stopped taking asylum cases and am only working on my current asylum cases. Since they take so many years, cause a lot of stress, and I do a lot of waivers and family based cases I decided it was best to stop taking new asylum cases. I know this is confidential but I will email Professor Harris because I have so much more to say about this. A heartfelt thanks for the work you are doing.

100% of my cases begin as detained and most stay that way. We provide universal representation, so don't screen for merits, so many of my client's claims are extremely difficult. Virtually all of my clients are time barred and criminally barred so I'm seeking withholding or CAT. I feel substantially more burnt out and discouraged now during quarantine.

It has gotten worse. These last 3 years have been really really rough. The constant changes, the lack of compassion, the illogical requirements (e.g. N/A or none in unrelated blanks)... I am much more burned out than I have ever been despite investing in self-care and having a good understanding about trauma, vicarious trauma, and a supportive work environment.

I think this job comes in waves, and you ride them on your own little ship. Sometimes the ship is sturdy and stable, and sometimes it's makeshift and springs a hole and you're just trying to keep the water out.

constant change in regulations, laws and not enough time in the day to catch up

This administration has added unnecessary pressure to the practice of immigration law.

It's way harder under Obama and Trump and especially crazy during COVID. You never know when you will have your hearing.

It is increasingly difficult to sound upbeat with clients or to provide them with a sense of hope.

The laws are stacked against us. The laws get worse all the time. The [x] Circuit is the worst. But it makes me want to fight harder!

I am a new immigration attorney working at very high volume firm that covers cases in the [x] and [x] Circuits. I know the work would be impossible without the tireless work of our Spanish-speaking paralegals who handle so much of the client-facing side of practice; my tasks are more strictly legal: writing briefs and advocating in hearings. I feel sustained by the urgency of the work but know that I cannot do it forever if nothing in our immigration policy changes. The contempt that the government displays to our clients is something very discouraging, as are the kafkaesque processes that seem to confound even the most experienced immigration attorneys (and occasionally judges!). I am sustained by: (1) leaving work at the end of the day; (2) having things I do outside of work that really refresh and refocus me; (3) having a group of friends who are in similarly difficult jobs - public defenders, housing attorneys, and other immigration attorneys - share their experiences with me and being able to vent / share their victories. Thank you for this very helpful survey and hope you and your team/family are staying safe.