



MIDLAND
CIRCUIT EDSM
COMMITTEE:
MALE
WELLBEING
EVENT

Midland Circuit EDSM Committee: Male Wellbeing Event
Thursday 11th September 2025

James Cleary is a children law barrister at St. Ives Chambers, he is the Wellbeing, Disability and Inclusion Officer for the Midland Circuit and chairs the Wellbeing Committee of the Circuit.

My practice is chiefly in child protection cases before the family courts. This means that almost every case I do involves some form of child abuse. I volunteered to become one of the wellbeing officers on the Midland Circuit because I saw the consequences of the pressures of the job on many colleagues. I am fortunate to have a supportive wife and family. Over the years though I have seen many colleagues struggle – in some cases having to the leave the profession because of the impact of the strain placed upon them. As part of my role, I organised a ‘Male Wellbeing Event’ in September.

Why Only Men?

My professional and personal experience has been that many men – possibly most – are less inclined to discuss how they are feeling than their female counterparts. I am not a psychologist so not qualified to give an authoritative view about why this would be. It may be linked to historic conceptions of the role of men, that even in modern times are difficult to overcome in our collective subconscious. Whatever the reason though the thinking was that it would be positive to have an event that would encourage male members of the Bar to be open about upon the pressures of the job and – perhaps most importantly – to learn from more senior members how these can be managed.

Preparing for the event made me reflect on the unique pressures we face as a profession. The volume of work in all areas of practice is immense and growing all the time. Whilst modern technology and working methods have helped in many ways, it has also contributed to the pressures. I was recently sent over 500,000 pages of evidence – something unlikely to have occurred with such ease in the days of papers bundles... Allied to this there is a greater expectation for us to be ‘available’. When I started (only in 2004) my clerks would never have called me on my mobile, and I could only access work e-mails through the chambers computers. Nowadays

I often find myself exchanging e-mails into the early hours of the morning and taking calls anywhere in the world.

The work we do also invariably involves awful subject matter. I have already noted my own area of practice. This extends though across much of the work of the Bar – in crime, social housing, immigration and so on. We deal with humanity at its most vulnerable and at times – sadly – its worst. This will impact upon even the most robust and dispassionate of us.

How Others Felt

It was heartening for me to hear from others at the event – many of whom I have been against and worked with – sharing some of the same feelings about the impact of our job. We all had experience either personally or with colleagues of the how the strains upon us can impact upon our families, mental and/or physical health. It was also noted how the change in work patterns post-Covid, with fewer of us going into chambers to work, has diminished the social interaction within the profession – and so also the peer support that this once provided. On the vexed question of why men appear more reluctant to discuss the stresses upon them, again – none of us were psychologists. There was an acknowledgement though that for many men this is a problem. In so far as we could identify a reason for this, the view of some was this is likely linked to not wanting to appear weak or to be struggling – going back to my homespun psychological analysis.

What Can We Do?

We were fortunate to have senior members of the profession present to give us advice on how to overcome the challenges we discussed. One of the key points for me was to build a support network of colleagues whom you can turn to for advice and support – particularly so given the post-Covid changes in work patterns. The importance of taking time out when needed was also something that we could all agree upon – even if it means saying no to an instruction (something I confess that I struggle with). Above all though we could each agree that the traditional stigma for men of speaking about wellbeing issues is something that needs to be consigned to the past.

Where Now?

Whilst this event was focused upon male wellbeing, it will be clear to most practitioners that the concerns raised are common across the genders. There is not necessarily a difference in issues but rather the willingness to talk about and acknowledge them. Having tried in this small way to address this, my next aim for wellbeing on our Circuit is develop training on strategies for all to overcome the more negative effects of the difficult work that we do.