



News Release

Study offers new insights to career paths in private practice of law

Toronto: Results of a study commissioned by the Law Society show that most new lawyers who begin their careers in private practice no longer follow the traditional career path that leads to partnership within a single law firm.

Led by Professor Fiona Kay, [*The Diversification of Career Paths in Law: Tracking Movement out of Private Practice Among a Recent Two-Decade Cohort of Law Graduates*](#) sampled a 19-year cohort (1990 to 2009) of law graduates admitted to the Ontario Bar. More common career paths among the lawyers in this new study included job changes across firms, across sectors of the profession, and with intervals of unemployment or time away from law practice.

The study found that new male lawyers were most likely to leave private practice during their early career years, with a peak in departures at about seven to eight years after entry. New women lawyers also departed from private practice in their early career years, but this was characterized by a rapid, initial exodus, followed by a steady stream of departures over time.

Results also show that certain areas of law, such as litigation, held greater retention for lawyers in private practice. As well, billing long hours lowered men's risk of leaving private practice, but did not have the same effect on women's risk of leaving.

Additionally, men working as sole practitioners were less likely to leave private practice than men working in smaller mid-size law firms. This was not the case for women — the size of firm or whether they had started as sole practitioners did not affect their risk of leaving private practice.

And, contrary to previous studies that showed that parental leaves have damaging effects on the careers of women lawyers, this study did not show a similar, negative effect. In fact, the increased risk of leaving private practice surfaced among men who had taken parental leaves. However, both men and women reported that taking time away from their law practice for purposes other than parental leave increased their risk of leaving private practice.

Overall changes that study participants said they would like to see implemented in law firms included flexible hours, improved mentoring and training, modification or departure from the billable hour system and targeted efforts to achieve gender equality.

The study furthers the findings of a previous study conducted by Kay, [*Leaving Law and Barriers to Re-entry: A Study of Departures from and Re-entries to Private Practice*](#).

The Law Society has a duty to protect the public interest, to maintain and advance the cause of justice and the rule of law, to facilitate access to justice for the people of Ontario, and to act in a timely, open and efficient manner.

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