

Measuring Hope: Levels of hope in Australian Law students experience

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In Australia, particularly over the last decade there has been increased attention paid to wellness in law. The Wellness Network for Law was established as part of Rachael Field's 2010 Australian Learning and Teaching Council Fellowship. That has become a hub for sharing resources about known wellness issues in the legal academy and law profession. We know from previous research that symptoms of psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) begin early in law school and continue throughout the study of law and into lawyers working lives. The recognition of psychological distress, and the focus on promoting wellness at law school and in the profession, has seen the development of good practice guidelines, law society wellness support services, and annual conferences on the topic. Wellbeing is a distinct area of research falling under positive psychology banner, and is now a focus across sectors (not just law). So this is currently a very topical issue.

I have chosen to focus on the distinct topic of hope, the levels of hope in law students, in contrast to student's levels of depression, anxiety or stress. Hope is defined as a positive motivational state that is based on one's own self-derived sense of successful agency thinking and goal-directed energy, and pathway thinking (planning to meet goals). It is a recognized theory, that includes a validated and reliable hope survey that is used to measure a person's level of 'hope'. According to the hope survey measure, a person can be classified as high hope or low hope. This paper will review hope theory literature and report preliminary results of levels of hope in law students at James Cook University.