

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Construction Workers More Likely to Use Drugs

According to a recent study published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, construction workers are the most likely of all occupations to use cocaine and misuse prescription opioids (taking them for nonmedical purposes), and the second most likely to use marijuana.

The construction, mining, and extraction industries are among the largest sectors in the United States. The hazards of this type of work -- including falls, injuries from overexertion, and being struck by or caught in heavy machinery -- result in high injury and fatality rates. In particular, injuries from repetitive, strenuous work can lead to treatment or self-treatment with pain medication such as marijuana or opioids.

Researchers maintain construction workers are at an increased risk for drug use, which makes them vulnerable to work-related injuries or even overdose deaths. In Ohio and Massachusetts, recent studies have shown that construction workers were six to seven times more likely than other workers to die from an opioid overdose.

Using a decade of data (2005-2014) from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, a nationally representative sample of U.S. 293,492 participant responses were analyzed regarding drug use. They compared 16,610 construction, extraction, and mining workers (who made up 5.6 percent of the sample) to those working in 13 other occupations. Participants were asked about their employment and workplace drug policies, as well as whether they used drugs including marijuana and cocaine within the past month. They were also asked about their use of opioids for nonmedical reasons, such as taking opioids not prescribed to them or taking them only for the experience of getting high.

The researchers found that, compared to all other professions, construction workers had the highest prevalence of misusing prescription opioids (3.4 percent vs. 2 percent) and cocaine use (1.8 percent vs. 0.8 percent). Construction workers also had the second highest prevalence of marijuana use after those in service jobs (12.3 percent vs. 12.4 percent, compared with 7.5 percent in non-construction occupations). It makes sense that higher rates of construction workers using pain-relieving substances such as opioids and marijuana, given the labor-intensive nature of their work and high rates of injuries.

The researchers also observed that having unstable work or missing work was linked to being more likely to use drugs. Construction workers who were unemployed in the past week or working for three or more employers were more likely to use marijuana or misuse prescription opioids. Missing one or two days in the past month due to not wanting to go to work was associated with increased odds for marijuana, cocaine, and prescription opioid misuse, and missing three to five days of work in the past month due to illness or injury was associated with double the odds of opioid misuse.

Workplace drug policies were more "protective" against marijuana use than the use of cocaine or misuse of prescription opioids. Specifically, workplace alcohol testing, drug testing during the hiring process, random drug testing, and working for an employer that fires employees with a positive drug test were all associated with lower odds of marijuana use.

In the high-risk settings of construction work, where safely handling hazardous equipment is critical for reducing harms for workers, drug testing and other workplace substance use policies may play a role in protecting workers. However, not all marijuana and opioid use is problematic and drug testing cannot distinguish recreational use from medical use. Thus, strict workplace drug policies also have the potential to harm companies and reduce employment opportunities for workers. Coupled with reports of high overdose mortality among construction workers, research findings suggest that prevention and harm reduction programming is needed to prevent drug-related risks and mortality among this population.

Drug and Alcohol Dependence is an international journal devoted to publishing original research, scholarly reviews, commentaries, and policy analyses in the area of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and dependence. To learn more please visit <https://www.journals.elsevier.com/drug-and-alcohol-dependence>.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org