Drugs and Alcohol – Stats and Facts

DID YOU KNOW?

Drug use in the workplace is much more prevalent than you'd think. Many addicts are functioning addicts, and can usually hide their addiction pretty well. They can be your accountant, your favorite cashier at your local grocery store, your child's teacher or even your doctor. To explore the prevalence and impact of this issue, here are 5 statistics on drug use in the workplace.

1. More than 70% of Americans Dealing with Alcohol or Drug Addiction Are Employed

You heard that right. Statistics show that 1 in 7 Americans will succumb to addiction in their lifetime. Of these individuals, more than 70% of them will still hold a job and be employed.

As mentioned above, these individuals can be anyone and can hold different jobs and positions. Addiction does not discriminate. They can be your child's elementary school teacher or even your doctor. They can be your boss or even your employee.

Some professions are more susceptible to addiction than others. These individuals typically work in high stress environments, and may use drugs or alcohol to self-medicate. Addiction is most prevalent among the following professions:

- Health care professionals, like doctors and nurses
- Law enforcement officers, as they are prone to developing PTSD
- Farming, fishing and forestry professionals
- Restaurant workers

Those who work in these professions should be wary of their environment, and be sure that they receive the mental health support that they need. Those who find themselves relying on drugs or alcohol should seek professional help immediately or as soon as possible.

2. Drug Use in the Workplace Results in an Average of $81 Billion in Lost Profits Every Year

Those numbers are staggering. Drug use in the workplace causes a huge loss in profits every year for many companies. This is because substance abuse can lead to a loss in productivity, an increase in absenteeism, high turnover rates, an increase in theft and a deprecation in the quality of work produced.

“Alcoholics will miss 34% more work days than non-alcoholic workers. They’re more likely to call in and report that they are sick last-minute while they are nursing a hangover.”

Those who struggle with addiction are less likely to show up for work. When they do, they may not be productive. They may spend a huge majority of their working hours obsessing over how they are going to obtain drugs to get high later on in the day. Some workers may be under the influence while they are at work, which means that they may produce lower quality work or make more errors.

3. Only 50% of Organizations in America Require Pre-Employment Screenings for All New Hires

With substance abuse and addiction rates at an all-time high, you would think that more employers would try to snuff out this issue. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Only a little over 50% of organizations in America require pre-employment drug screenings for all new hires. This includes professions in high-risk industries, like public safety and screenings.

It’s also important to note that not many employers offer drug testing programs. This is because state laws have restrictions on who can be drug tested and when they can be drug tested.

Many addiction experts urge more employers to develop a solid drug testing program within their company. This may reduce drug use in the workplace, which can lead to an increase in productivity and quality of work.

4. 217 Workers Died on the Job in 2016 Due to an Overdose

Overdose is the number one killer of Americans. In fact, it is now the leading killer of those who are under the age of 55. As the opioid epidemic continues to spread, more and more Americans are succumbing to overdoses.

“More than 70,200 Americans died from an overdose in 2017 alone. This is a significant increase from the years before.”

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 217 workers died on the job due to an unintentional overdose. This is a huge liability for companies. Those who die from an overdose may put their fellow colleagues at-risk if they are working in a high-risk position, like in mining or construction.

What’s scarier is that this number is actually a 30% increase from 2015. Statistics show that these numbers are continuing to rise year after year.

5. Opioids Abuse Account for Anywhere from $25.6 to $53.4 Billion in Lost Productivity Each Year

Opioids and opiates are some of the most commonly abused drugs. A recent survey found that 17.83% of employees reported taking opioids while at work.

This is not surprising, considering the fact that opioids are some of the most common prescription drugs in America. Americans consumed 99% of the world’s hydrocodone, 60% of the world’s hydromorphone and 81% of the world’s oxycodone.

Opioid misuse leads to a 17% and 18% reduction in productivity among men and women, respectively. Those who had an opioid use disorder (OUD) were more likely to be absent from work and more likely to change jobs. In fact, a recent study found that these employees tend to miss 18.5 days more work than those who do not struggle with any type of addiction at all. Additionally, only 58% of those with an addiction to opioids had the same employer throughout the previous year. This is in comparison to 75% of the general population.

Some other interesting things to note is that the annual cost of unexplained absences can be as much as $660 per employee. Also, those struggling with opioid abuse are 4.5 times more likely to visit the ER. They also have healthcare costs that are 8.7 times higher than someone who does not abuse opioids. The last statistic is particularly troubling for employers, as they are usually slapped with higher health insurance premiums as a result.

These statistics are based upon Quest Diagnostics' 2019 Drug Testing Index report that has analyzed over 10 million workplace drug tests over three decades. The data are organized by industry which includes all positions within that industry, except for federally mandated safety-sensitive positions such as with transportation positions or nuclear operators, for example.

General Highlights

- According to Quest Diagnostics, the urine drug test positivity rate among the non-safety-sensitive workforce in the U.S. is at 4.5 percent which is the highest level since 2004. This number is 25 percent higher than the lowest recorded rate of 3.5 percent in 2010 and 2012.
- Marijuana is the most commonly detected drug among all of the workforce including safety-sensitive.
- Opiates testing positivity decreased by 37 percent to its lowest level in 4 years to .31 percent. Opioids testing positivity has similarly decreased by 46 percent to its lowest level in five years to .43 percent.
- The U.S. general workforce positivity rate increased from 4.8 percent in 2015 to 5.1 percent in 2018.

Industry Highlights

- Two industries, Other Services and Retail Trade, both had positivity rates above the national average of 5.1 percent with 5.4 percent and 5.2 percent respectively.
- Six industry sectors had double-digit increases between 2015 and 2018 in drug testing positivity rates that were twice the national positivity rate increase of 6.2 percent. These industries were:
  1. Transportation & Warehousing 34.5%
  2. Other Services 33.3%
  3. Wholesale Trade 20.0%
  4. Retail Trade 14.9%
  5. Construction 13.2%
  6. Administrative Support, Waste Management, & Remediation Services 12.2%
- Eight industry sectors saw double-digit increases between 2015 – 2018 in marijuana positivity rates compared to the national average of 16.7 percent. These industries were:
  1. Other services 61.9%
  2. Transportation & Warehousing 53.3%
  3. Mining 50.0%
  4. Wholesale Trade 47.1%
  5. Construction 46.7%
  6. Manufacturing 38.5%
  7. Accommodations & Food Services 37.9%
  8. Administrative Support, Waste Management, & Remediation Services 33.3%
  9. Retail Trade 29.6%

- On the positive side, the Information Services industry saw a double-digit decrease in marijuana positivity rates with a 12.5% decrease between 2015 and 2018, and was the only industry sector with a decrease between 2017 and 2018.

KEEP IN MIND

Alcohol and drug abuse by employees cause many expensive problems for business and industry ranging from lost productivity, injuries, and an increase in health insurance claims.

The loss to companies in the United States due to alcohol and drug-related abuse by employees totals $100 billion a year, according to the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI).

These staggering numbers do not include the cost of diverting company resources, that could be used for other purposes, toward addressing substance abuse issues. Nor does it include the “pain and suffering” aspects, which cannot be measured in economic terms.

Drinking and drugging among U.S. workers create costly medical, social, and other problems that affect both employees and employers.

Substance abuse among employees can threaten public safety, impair job performance and threaten their own safety.

Using drugs **impairs decision-making** abilities and **physically impairs** people. This is a deadly concoction when on the job. In fact, **10-20% of American workers who die at work have a positive result when tested for drugs or alcohol.** A study by OSHA states that the most dangerous occupations, such as mining and construction, also have the highest rates of drug use by their employees.

Employers suffer from hiring **substance abusers** in many ways. Not only do they run the risk of having deadly or **dangerous accidents** occur, but substance abusers also cost employers money and hurt them financially.

Substance abusers may:

- Have poor work performance.
- Frequently call out of or arrive late to the workplace.
- Frequently change workplaces.
- Struggle with productivity.
- File for workers’ compensation claims and benefits.

Problems Caused in the Workplace

In addition to deaths and accidents, absenteeism and loss of production, other problems that alcohol and drug abuse can cause on the job include:

- Tardiness/sleeping on the job
- Hangover or withdrawal affecting job performance
- Poor decision making
- Loss of efficiency
- Theft
- Lower morale of co-workers
- Increased likelihood of having trouble with co-workers/supervisors or tasks
- Preoccupation with obtaining and using substances while at work, interfering with attention and concentration

- Illegal activities at work including selling illicit drugs to other employees
- Higher turnover
- Training of new employees
- Disciplinary procedures

Measuring the Costs of Substance Abuse

However, costs to businesses can be measured at the expense of absenteeism, injuries, health insurance claims, loss of productivity, employee morale, theft, and fatalities.

Impact of Drug and Alcohol Abuse

According to NCADI statistics, alcohol and drug users:

- Are far less productive.
- Use three times as many sick days.
- Are more likely to injure themselves or someone else.
- Are five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim.

One survey found that nine percent of heavy drinkers and 10 percent of drug users had missed work because of a hangover, six percent had gone to work high or drunk in the past year, and 11 percent of heavy drinkers and 18 percent of drug users had skipped work in the past month.

Factors Contributing to Employee Substance Abuse

Research has shown that several factors can contribute to problem drinking and drugging in the workplace. Factors that can encourage or discourage workplace substance abuse include:

- Workplace culture and acceptance of drinking/drugging
- Workplace alienation
- Availability of alcohol and drugs
- Existence and enforcement of workplace substance abuse policies

Workplace Culture

The culture of the workplace can play a large role in whether drinking and drug use are accepted and encouraged or discouraged and inhibited. Part of this culture can depend on the gender mix of employees.

In predominantly female occupations research shows that both male and female employees are less likely to have substance abuse problems compared to employees of both genders in male-dominated occupations.

How the Effects of Alcoholism Differ in Men

Studies have found that male-dominated occupations create heavy drinking cultures in which employees drink to build solidarity and show conformity. Therefore, these occupations have higher rates of alcohol- and drug-related problems.

Any industry or organization can be affected by workplace alcoholism, but research shows it is prevalent in these industries: food service, construction, mining and drilling,[9] excavation, installation, maintenance, and repair.

Workplace Alienation

Research shows that the job itself can contribute to higher rates of employee substance abuse. Work that is boring, stressful[10] or isolating can contribute to employees' drinking. Employee substance abuse has been linked to low job autonomy, lack of job complexity, lack of control over work conditions and products, boredom, sexual harassment, verbal and physical aggression, and disrespectful behavior.

Alcohol Availability

The availability and accessibility of alcohol can influence employee drinking.

More than two-thirds of the 984 workers surveyed at a large manufacturing plant said it was "easy" or "very easy" to bring alcohol into the workplace, to drink at workstations, and to drink during breaks.

In cultures where alcohol is prohibited, drinking on the job and drinking, in general, is decreased significantly.

Supervision

The level of supervision on the job can affect drinking and drugging at work rates. A study of evening shift workers, when supervision was reduced, found that employees were more likely to drink at work than highly supervised shifts.

Casual Drinkers Are a Problem, Too

Remarkably, research shows it is the social drinkers, not the hard-core alcoholics or problem drinkers, who are responsible for most of the lost productivity, according to a *Christian Science Monitor* article, specifically tying the hangover issue to production in the workplace[11]

What are the Symptoms of a Hangover?

This study also found that it was managers, not hourly employees, who were most often drinking during the workday. And 21 percent of employees said their own productivity had been affected because of a co-worker's drinking

Twenty-three percent of upper managers and 11 percent of first-line supervisors reported having a drink during the workday, compared with only 8 percent of hourly employees.

Prevention Works

When the issue of workplace substance abuse is addressed by establishing comprehensive programs, it is a "win-win" situation for both employers and employees, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

A study of the economic impact of substance abuse treatment in Ohio found significant improvements in job-related performance:

- 91 percent decrease in absenteeism
- 88 percent decrease in problems with supervisors
- 93 percent decrease in mistakes in work
- 97 percent decrease in on-the-job injuries.

Companies and employers, large and small, can adopt a workplace substance abuse policy that will reduce the loss of productivity and provide a safer work environment for all.

Do Your Part in Reducing Drug Use in the Workplace

If you're an employer or if you're in a position to, you should try to create programs that may reduce drug use in the workplace. This can include anything from hosting drug education classes or offering Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

By reducing drug use in the workplace, you can improve overall productivity within your company by several folds. You will also see an improvement in the quality of work that is produced, as well as enhanced workplace safety.

Those who are currently struggling with drug use should try to get help as soon as possible. Addiction will only fester and worsen if you let it. Put an end to abusive and addictive behaviors by seeking help from a drug and alcohol rehab center near you.