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UPDATE 102

Spring 2022

Report by the Center for Construction Research and Training Identifies the Impact the Pandemic has had on Substance Abuse & Mental Health among Construction Workers

By Bill Lillis, CPS

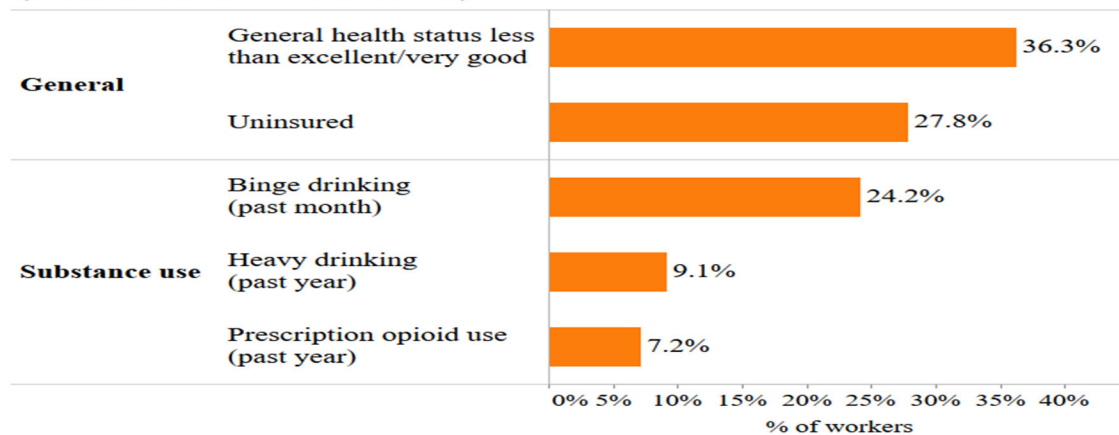
The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how work is done in many ways. Clearly one area where a fundamental shift has taken place is the need for employers to focus on mental health. Employers have realized that when an employee is experiencing a mental health issue, the problem is often exacerbated by the use and misuse of alcohol, marijuana, opioids and/or other drugs. Research conducted by The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) clearly demonstrates that mental health and substance abuse are often intertwined within the workplace. The center's research is not only useful for those in the construction industry but also provides a better understanding and a road map for how all employers can be better equipped to handle this complicated issue. Spending time educating employees on mental health and substance use and misuse, working to overcome the stigma associated with mental health and substance use, engaging in other prevention strategies, and fostering a friendly work environment for those who need treatment or who are in long-term recovery will all pay off in the long term, resulting in healthier employees and a safer and more productive workplace.

The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) analyzed recent data on mental health and substance use provided by the National Institute for Health (NIH), the Substance Abuse Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), and National Institute for

Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Their research noted that “anxiety and depression symptoms significantly worsened nationwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. Construction workers already suffer from an increasing and alarmingly high suicide rate, making it particularly important to understand mental health in the industry during the pandemic.” Here is additional data:

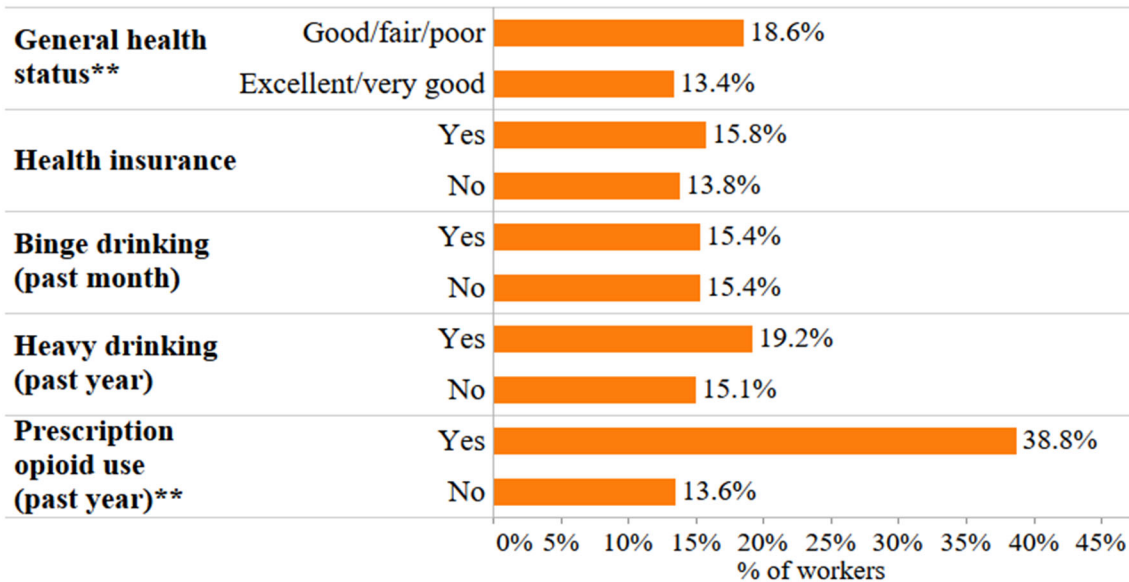
- Between 2019 and 2020, 42.9% of workers reported feeling more anxious and/or depressed, including 37.3% who felt more anxious and 18.4% who felt more depressed.
- Prevalence of anxiety and/or depression was highest in workers who were ages 18-34 years old (17.9%).
- More than a third (36.3%) of respondents considered themselves not in very good or excellent health, and 27.8% were uninsured.
- Nearly one in five (19.2%) workers who drank heavily throughout the past year reported anxiety and/or depression compared to 15.1% for those who did not drink heavily.
- Workers who used prescription opioids in the past year were more likely to report anxiety and/or depression compared to those who did not (38.8% versus 13.6%).
- In 2020, symptoms or medication use for anxiety/ depression were almost three times higher in workers who used prescription opioids in the past year compared to those who did not (39% versus 14%).
- Workers whose general health worsened during the pandemic were also more likely to report growing anxious or feeling depressed than those whose health improved or did not change (48.1% versus 41.1%). Increased anxious/depressed feelings were more common in workers who reported binge drinking than those who did not (48.6% versus 40.8%).

3. Health indicators among construction workers, 2020
(Estimated total = 12.98 million)



Source: National Health Interview Survey, 2020. Calculations by the CPWR Data Center.

7. Anxiety/depression[^] prevalence among construction workers, by health indicators, 2020*



Source: National Health Interview Survey, 2020. Calculations by the CPWR Data Center.

[^]Anxiety/depression based on symptoms or medication (Definition B in the Data Bulletin).

*N<30 for Heavy drinking (past year).

**Significant difference between categories (Chi-square p-value <0.05).

Binge drinking - having 5 or more (for men) or 4 or more (for women) alcoholic drinks on one occasion
 Heavy drinking - drank more than 14 (for men) or seven (for women) alcoholic drinks per week in the last year

Click [here](#) to read the entire report by the Center for Construction and Research Training.

The report clearly demonstrates the need for employers to address the issue of substance abuse, as almost 10% of construction workers reported drinking heavily in the past year, and, even more alarmingly, almost 25% of construction workers acknowledged in 2020 that they were binge drinking. While this report focuses on construction workers, related research on the consequences of the pandemic has shown significant increases in alcohol and other drug use by employees.

CPWR Offers Recommendations for Construction Workers

The center noted in its report that employers can take action to improve the mental health of construction workers. CPWR has several resources to address growing mental health concerns, including to prevent suicide and opioid deaths. NIOSH has developed special webpages devoted to stress at work, opioids in the workplace, and suicide. Additionally, the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention provides a host of resources aiming to create a zero-suicide industry, including workplace suicide prevention programs and tools that specifically address mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employers outside of the construction industry also have many resources available to address the issue of mental health. These resources are noted below. We now know that best way to address this issue is to incorporate a mental health and substance use/misuse component into a comprehensive health and wellness program.

Jaime Angelini, the statewide director of disaster services and special projects for the NJ Mental Health Association (NJMHA) and Ruth Kaluski, a licensed mental health counselor who also works for NJMHA, encouraged employers in a previous quarterly update to be aware of common work-related factors that can add to employee stress, such as: being exposed to the virus, managing a different workload, adapting to a new workspace or different schedule, or having feelings of uncertainty about future employment. HR directors can support their employees by acknowledging that job stress is common, addressing the issue of stigma that exists regarding mental health, creating a safe space to talk about the stress brought about by the pandemic or other issues, and communicating openly and honestly with employees. Your company can offer workshops that address depression, anxiety and substance use, as well as place educational materials and resources, such as brochures, call lines and factsheets in common areas and on the company website.

Read the quarterly update written by Jaime Angelini and Ruth Kaluski:
[Addressing Mental Health in Your Workplace.](#)

Recommended Resources

NJ Mental Health Cares 866-202-4357

Mental Health Association in NJ - www.mhanj.org

NJ Hope and Healing - <https://www.mhanj.org/njhope>

NJ Connect for Recovery - www.njconnectforrecovery.org

NAMI NJ - www.naminj.org

New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies - <https://www.njamhaa.org>

Center for Workplace Mental Health - <https://workplacementalhealth.org>

Mental Health America-Bell Seal for Workplace Mental Health -

<https://www.mhanational.org/bestemployers>

<http://www.drugfreenj.org/>

www.mhascreening.org

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mental-health-non-healthcare.html

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

<https://mhanational.org/research-reports/2021-mind-workplace-report>

<https://mhanational.org/employeesupportguide>

<https://mhanational.org/workplace/mental-health-for-employers>

<https://workplacementalhealth.org/>

Resources for Addressing Stigma



April 28th at 1 pm

Combating the Stigma of Opioid Addiction

This webinar will address the stigma of addiction and how that affects people with substance use disorders. Experts will discuss the ways in which stigma serves as a barrier to effective prevention, treatment and recovery and highlight resources available to help overcome it and begin to break down this stigma in society.

<https://www.nj.gov/mhstigmacouncil/about/basics/index.html>

Treatment

1-844-Reach NJ or visit www.reachnj.gov

References & Data Sources

[Construction Worker Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic Data Bulletin January 2022](#)

Written by Samantha Brown, MPH, Amber Brooke Trueblood, DrPH, William Harris, MS, and Xiuwen Sue Dong, DrPH

Center for Disease Control

2019-2020 data: National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), 2019- 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/index.htm>.

Jamie Angelini, MA, DRCC & Ruth Kaluski, MS, CRC, LMH

PDNJ Quarterly Update Spring 2021 [Addressing Mental Health in Your Workplace](#)

Special Thanks to: *The Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR) for the use of the research for this update. The center is a nonprofit dedicated to reducing occupational injuries, illnesses and fatalities in the construction industry. CPWR serves the construction industry by collaborating with key partners, including workers, contractors, project owners, health and safety professionals, researchers, key government agencies, unions, and associations in order to conduct research, and provide training, and service programs, CPWR is considered a world leader in construction safety and health research and training. www.cpwr.org*

About the Author: Bill Lillis is certified as a prevention specialist (CPS) by the Addiction Professional Certification Board of NJ and has spent more than 15 years working in the field of prevention and treatment of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. As the drug-free workplace coordinator, he is available to all members at no charge to provide technical assistance in establishing or updating their drug-free workplace policies and procedures, as well as to provide a one-hour virtual training session for supervisors and managers. He also serves as parent educator coordinator for PDFNJ. (bill@drugfreenj.org 862-253-6808)

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The Partnership for a Drug-Free New Jersey (PDFNJ) is a private 501 (c) (3) not-for profit organization that promotes the prevention of substance abuse throughout the state through media campaigns, school-based programs and community and workplace initiatives. PDFNJ programs are made possible by support from the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the New Jersey Department of Human Services, and funding from corporations and foundations. All programs and services provided by PDFNJ are free of charge. For more information visit www.drugfreenj.org or call 973 467-2100.

For Treatment Information, Call 1-844-Reach NJ or visit www.reachnj.gov