



Impairment and Addiction Program in the Australian Construction Industry

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Mates in Construction (partner)



Background

- Safety performance is an ongoing challenge for employers
- Estimated 640,700 persons suffered a work-related injury or illness in 2009-2010 and 337 lost their lives as a result in 2009-2010, in Australia
- Very little is known about what proportion of accidents are directly attributable to the effects of AOD – despite AOD consumption being relatively prevalent + clear link with declines in cognitive and behavioural performance



Evidence

- Anecdotal evidence highlights issues of AOD and its association with safety risk on construction sites
- Some studies but very limited (i.e. sample size, specific groups or locations, out dated, measurement variation)
- No clear evidence on the prevalence and risk of AOD use among Australian construction workers
- Mental health (AOD) is an accepted industry safety concern



Questions remain

- Widespread implementation of workplace AOD policies in organisations and where safety sensitive work is undertaken
- Developments should be grounded in an accurate understanding of the level of risk and impact of AOD within the industry – previous study
- Tailored and effective interventions designed to target the problem within the cultural and operating context of the industry – current study

Research Objectives

- To scientifically evaluate the use of AOD within the Australian construction industry – previous study
- To develop and implement a tailored intervention for the construction industry – current study
- To reduce the risk of impaired performance on construction sites and increasing workers' commitment to AOD awareness and safety

Mates in Construction (MIC)

- Construction workers are more than twice as likely to suicide than other people in Australia
- Increased use of AOD has been found to have significant impact on poor mental health, wellbeing and suicide amongst workers in the construction industry
- Construction workers generally more likely to be under the influence of AOD at the time of suicide than other men in QLD at the time of suicide

Method

AOD consumption and behaviour assessment

- National qualitative and quantitative assessment of the use of AODs in the industry
- Head office and operational site visits around Australia
 - Survey using WHO AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test)
 - 500 employees
 - Structured interviews with management and employees, to supplement survey data
 - 20 interviewees

Results: Survey

- Based on the completion of 494 surveys in 3 states (tunnelling, roads, commercial buildings)
- Majority male, mean age = 36 yrs
- Distributed across all roles within the company, most classifying themselves as a tradesperson (31%) or labourer (24%)
- Of a possible maximum cumulative score of 40, participants recorded a mean score of 9.98 (range 0 to 40, median score 9)
- Total of 286 participants (58%) scored above the cut-off cumulative score for hazardous alcohol use of ≥ 8
- Total of 43 participants (15%) scored ≥ 20 = significantly “at risk”

Results: Survey

- Subsequent analysis focused on the three domains identified within the AUDIT:

| AUDIT domain | Mean (SD) | No. of respondents (and %) who scored at or above the cut off |
|--------------------------|------------|---|
| Consumption | 6.17 (3.1) | 300 (61%) |
| Dependency | 1.38 (2.1) | 79 (16%) |
| Alcohol-related problems | 2.48 (3.1) | 291 (51%) |

Results: Survey

- 33 participants (7%) reported that they either possibly or definitely had a problem with drinking.
- Over the next 3 months, 71 (14%) participants reported that it would be either fairly difficult or very difficult to cut down or stop drinking
- 292 (59%) had used cannabis – 46 (16%) in the last year
- 196 (40%) had used ecstasy/meth type substances – 62 (32%) in the last year

Results: Interviews

- Lack of knowledge surrounding the physical effects of AOD; despite the attitude that AOD use is detrimental to workplace productivity, safety and the risks that it may pose both for one's self and co-workers
- Support for the need for further educational initiatives
- Suggestions for effective communication of AOD education at tool box talks i.e. clear 'visual' hard copy brochures or posters, videos + positive feedback towards a web-based resource

Results: Interviews

- Job security highlighted as a common fear when it comes to seeking help or advice at work about AOD
- Importance of management commitment to AOD and the consistent communication of policies
- Ensuring that contractors are made aware of the same policies and practices that employees are subject to in their regular pre-start and tool box talks

Results: Interviews

- Educating younger employees about how to cope with the 'lifestyle' that can accompany a high-salary, project-to-project, transient type job and *'getting in before having to deal with the aftermath'*
- The idea of a 'mentoring' initiative was suggested as one way of contributing towards this education

Current work

- Working with MIC to develop a tailored AOD addiction/impairment component into their existing suicide awareness program
- GAT and PAT 'Connector' Training
- Program to be piloted locally by MIC staff
- Then implemented at a selected construction site
- To be evaluated using MIC processes – survey + interviews: process and outcome

Conclusions

- First study to scientifically examine the use of AOD in the Australian construction industry
- Results indicate that, as in the general population, a proportion of those sampled in the construction sector may be at risk of hazardous alcohol consumption and many may not realise that they are at risk
- Other drug use also highlighted as a major issue
- Serious link to mental health and suicide

Conclusions (2)

- Support for the need for more comprehensive educational initiatives for the construction workforce
- Development of a tailored AOD program for the industry, to be adopted nationally – open the discussion
- Contribute to a cultural change towards improving internal safety culture across the workforce

Save the Date!



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