

## Research Paper

When deciding what topics to address within the broad spectrum of the number of drug users and/or motivations for drug use, I wanted to look into drug use in the workplace, specifically in industries such as hospitality where I have personally been witness to the use and abuse of illicit substances. I found multiple primary source articles that examined alcohol and other drug (AOD) use across several different industries in Australia. There are several common themes to AOD abuse across various industries, including but not limited to stressful and hazardous workplace environments, long and irregular work hours, availability of illicit substances, workplace cultures that normalize and even encourage drug use, and social factors like peer pressure.

I chose articles that centered around three different work industries in Australia: hospitality, construction, and trucking. These three industries share many notable traits that may be linked to an increase in AOD abuse among workers. They all have hazardous workplace environments: Kitchens are full of the hustle and bustle of staff moving dishes, hot grills and ovens, and heavy cookware, construction involves heavy machinery, power tools, and working at dangerous heights, and trucking requires being on the road with other drivers for lengthy, monotonous trips. These industries are also characterized by long and/or irregular work hours, with many shifts lasting 12 hours or longer, working long into the night or even overnight, and having shifts scheduled with inconsistent days off.

Additionally, there is normalization of the use of drugs within these workplace cultures, both legal and illegal. Restaurants will offer workers a free drink after work (known as a “staffie” or “shiftie”) so the staff can unwind and socialize (Pidd et al. 111-112). Between 9-17% of construction workers shared that they were aware of coworkers using drugs while at work, and

an even greater percentage (35-45%) said they thought it would be easy to use drugs at work (Chapman et al. 3-4). Truckers reported that in addition to using drugs for their stimulant properties, other important motivations for drug use were socializing and relaxation. Some even said they thought it was important to fit the image of a trucker (Davey et al., 9).

The profile of drug and alcohol use in these three industries has some important distinctions. Truckers are more likely to use stimulants such as caffeine, prescription drugs, or amphetamines to help them remain awake and alert during long drives (Davey et al., 3-4). Restaurant workers are more likely to use tobacco for access to socially-acceptable breaks and alcohol due to easy accessibility (Pidd et al. 111). Construction workers, on the other hand, had a greater amount of marijuana and cocaine use (Chapman et al. 4-5). I think that these differences show that many workers are using alcohol and drugs as a tool to help perform their workplace responsibilities instead of using strictly from an addiction standpoint. This assumption is backed by Pidd et al., who suggest that despite the prevailing misconception that drug use is determined by individual attitudes and predispositions, work environments and cultures play a large part in motivating individuals to begin and continue to use illicit substances (112).

Availability and proximity play an important part in motivation to use AOD in hospitality, construction, and trucking workplaces. Truckers overwhelmingly reported how easy it was to obtain drugs, citing an ever-increasing number of contacts that formed within the industry. Users were able to obtain illicit drugs from other industry workers within this subculture (Davey et al., 7). Restaurant trainees reported that alcohol and drugs were easily accessible to them:

*“Once you’re in the industry access is so much easier. Everybody does it, if you were to ask where I work, probably five people could get what you want. We know who has the drugs and how to get them.”* (Pidd et al. 111)

There is also evidence that AOD use is more prevalent among workers in hospitality, construction, and trucking than it is in workers in other industries. These employees have been shown to use drugs at a greater rate and to show up to work under the influence more

frequently than workers in other industries. Hospitality workers are 3.5 times more likely than workers in other industries to use drugs and alcohol and use AOD during their shifts.

Interestingly enough, these workers perceived tobacco use to be higher in their industry than other sectors while they perceived alcohol and illicit drug use to be the same in hospitality as other industries (Pidd et al., 108). Construction workers are twice as likely to use drugs as the national average (Chapman et al. 1). While there is not a comparison of overall drug use in truckers compared to the national average, studies have shown that driving while under the influence of drugs is more prevalent than driving under the influence of alcohol. In observing the toxicology of fatal accidents, truck drivers were almost 6 times as likely to test positive for stimulants (23% versus 4.1%) than other drivers (Davey et al., 4).

Within workers in these three industries, it is also shown that younger workers are more likely to use AOD than older workers. In the study done by Chapman et al., just a single year increase in age decreased the likelihood of using cannabis by a factor of 0.93 and decreased the likelihood of using cocaine by a factor of 0.95 (4). Restaurant workers under the age of 25 were shown to drink at risky levels and use drugs at a higher likelihood than older workers (109). One of the truckers interviewed by Davey et al. emphasized that there was peer pressure for “younger blokes” to use drugs (9).

In conclusion, I think there is good evidence that drug and alcohol use among workers has varied and nuanced motivations and cannot be boiled down to personal failings or simply being an issue of addiction (though addiction certainly plays a role.) When certain industries have higher-than-average amounts of AOD use, we should look to both the work environment itself and the social culture of employees to determine where the motivations for drug use originate.

Works Cited:

Chapman, Janine, et al. "Working at Heights: Patterns and Predictors of Illicit Drug Use in Construction Workers." *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy* 28 (2020): 1-9.

Davey, Jeremy, Naomi Richards, and James Freeman. "Fatigue and beyond: patterns of and motivations for illicit drug use among long-haul truck drivers." *Traffic injury prevention* 8.3 (2007): 1-19.

Pidd, Ken, Ann Roche, and Victoria Kostadinov. "Trainee chefs' experiences of alcohol, tobacco and drug use." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 21 (2014): 108-115.