

# Addressing Mental Health in Construction and Related Industries



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THE CENTER FOR CONSTRUCTION  
**RESEARCH AND TRAINING**

# Mental Health Trends & What We Can Do About Them

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# Mental Health Trends in the Construction Industry

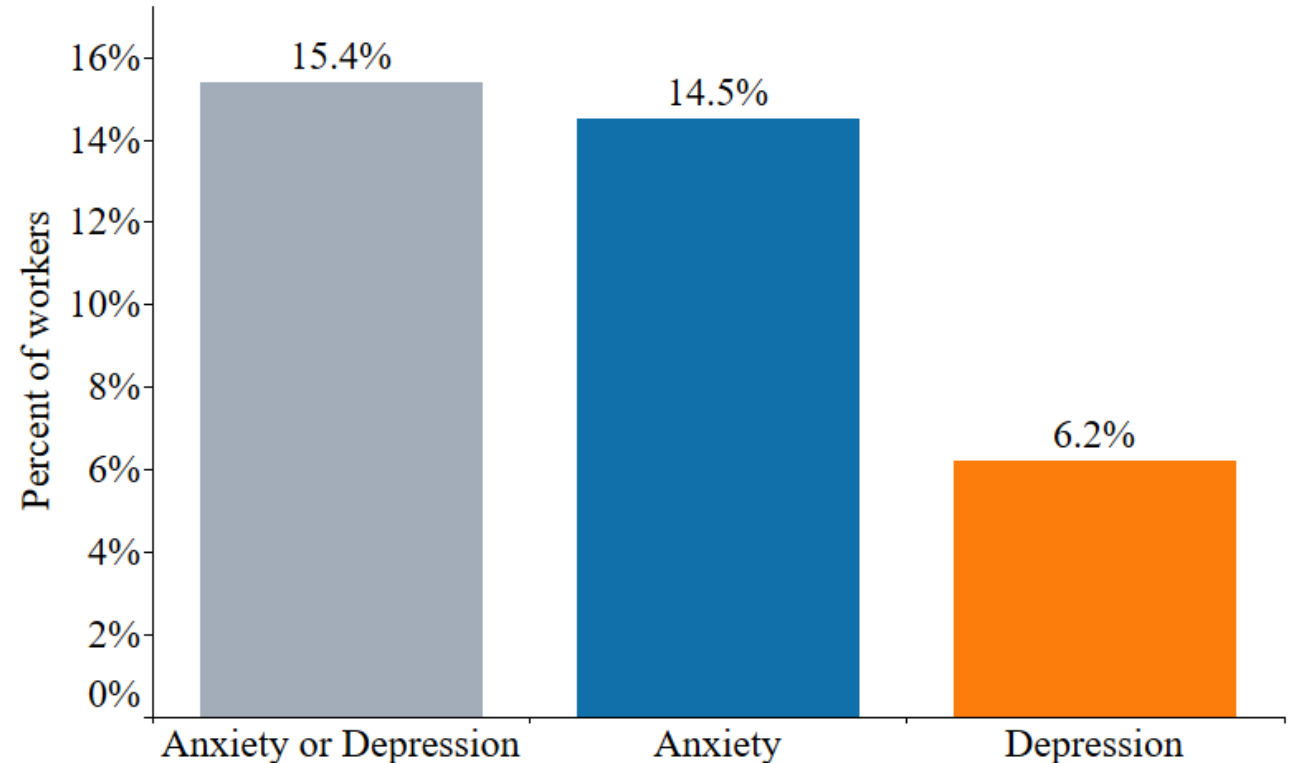
**Courtesy of CPWR's Data Center**

[datacenter@cpwr.com](mailto:datacenter@cpwr.com)

# Anxiety/Depression Trends

- In 2021:
  - **15.4%** of construction workers had anxiety or depression
  - **34.9%** of female workers
  - **23.6%** of Black/African American workers
  - **17.6%** of non-Hispanic workers
  - **18.6%** of workers with any college
  - **20.6%** of workers with good/fair/poor health status
  - **17.5%** of workers born in the U.S.

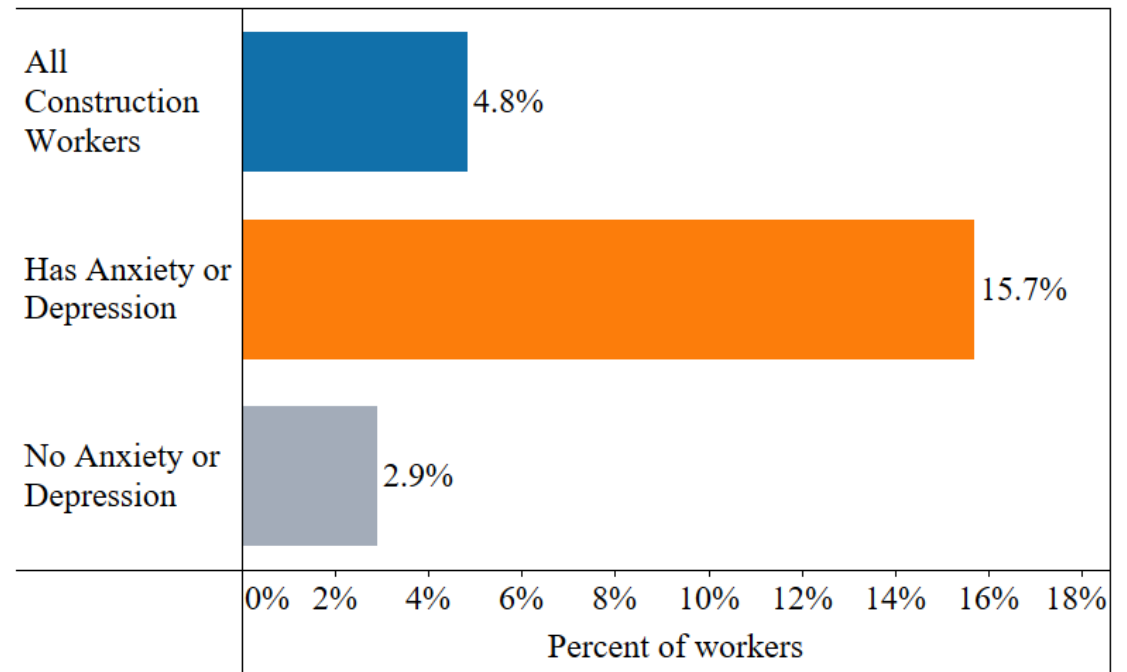
Prevalence of anxiety or depression among construction workers, 2021



# Mental Health Professional

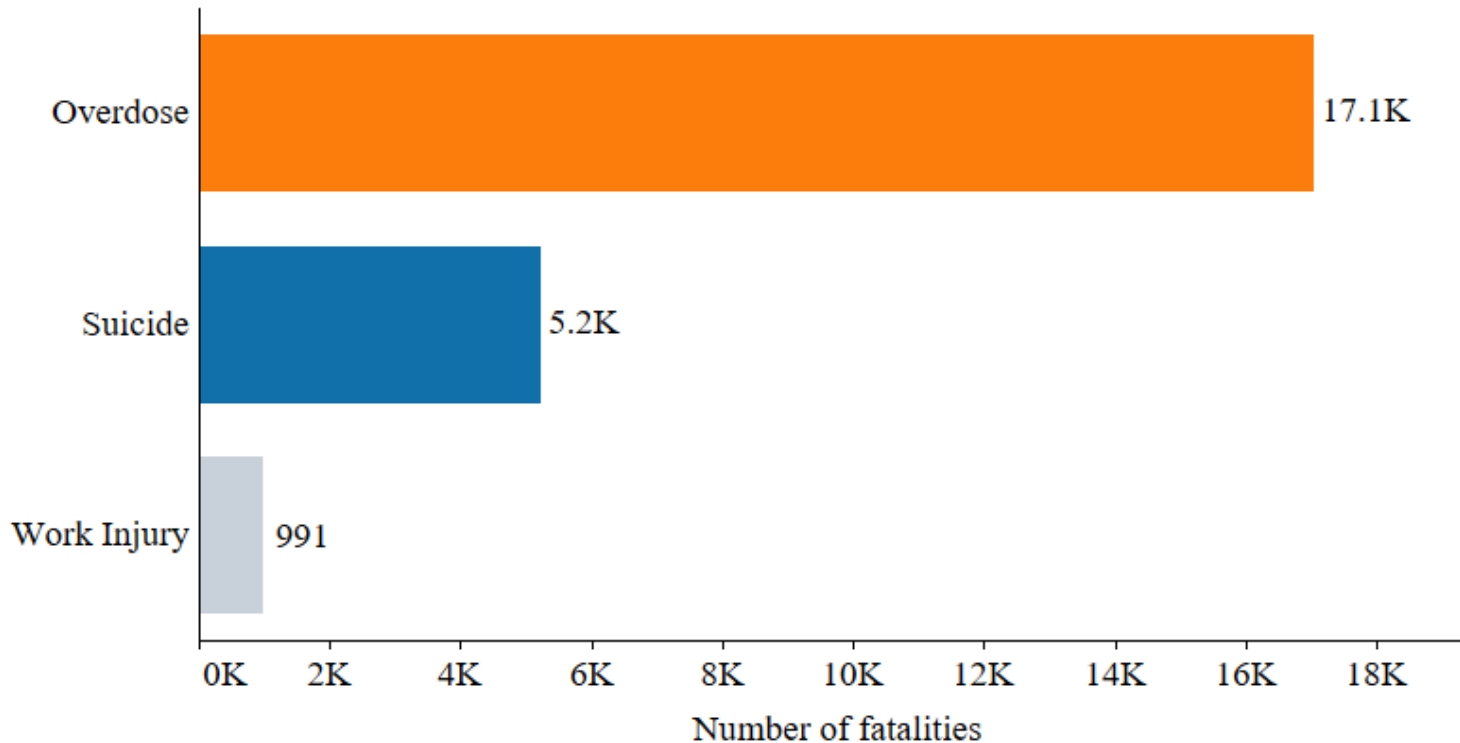
- **4.8%** of construction workers reported seeing a mental health professional (MHP)
- **15.7%** of construction workers who had anxiety or depression reported seeing a MHP
- **3.6%** of construction workers delayed seeing a MHP due to cost
- **3.7%** of construction workers did not see a MHP due to cost

Percentage of construction workers who reported seeing a mental health professional in past 12 months by anxiety or depression status, 2021



# Fatalities by Cause

Fatalities by cause among construction workers aged 16 to 64 years old, 2022\*

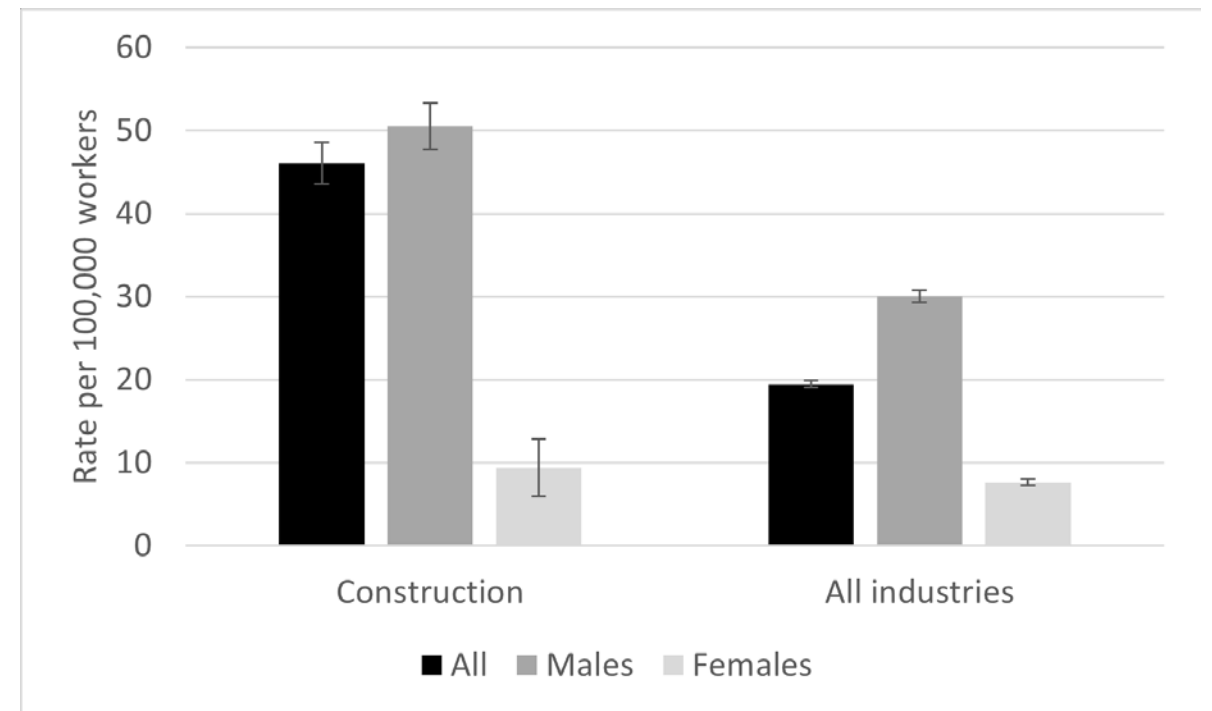


- **17.2** times as many overdose deaths (**n=17.1K**) as fatal work injuries (**n=991**)
- **5.3** times as many suicide deaths (**n=5.2K**) as fatal work injuries

<https://www.cpwr.com/wp-content/uploads/DataBulletin-July2024.pdf>

# Suicides among Construction Workers in the United States, 2021

- Suicide death rate for workers in construction was **2.4** times higher than in all industries
  - **46.1** versus **19.5** per 100,000 workers
- Male suicide rate in construction was **50.5** per 100,000 workers, compared to **30.0** per 100,000 workers for all industries



# Suicides among Construction Workers in the United States, 2021

- Male Suicide Rates
  - **Highest Rates:** 55 to 64 years old, American Indian or Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic, completed high school or equivalent, single
    - Highest rate was among single males which was **1.8** times higher than all industries
      - **77.9** versus **43.4** per 100,000 workers
- Female Suicide Rates
  - **Highest Rates:** 55 to 64 years old, completed high school or equivalent, single
    - Highest rate was among those who completed high school or equivalent which was **1.3** times higher than all industries
      - **14.3** versus **11.3** per 100,000 workers

# Suicides among Construction Workers in the United States, 2021

**TABLE 4** Top 5 occupations with the greatest rates of suicides per 100,000 male construction workers,<sup>a</sup> 2021.

Occupation	Number of suicides (% <sup>b</sup> )	Workers	Crude rate	95% CI	Rate ratio <sup>c</sup>	95% CI	p-value
Iron and Steel Workers	47 (0.92)	39,867	117.89	[84.19–151.60]	2.33	[1.75–3.11]	<0.0001
Welder	85 (1.67)	97,665	87.03	[68.53–105.54]	1.72	[1.39–2.14]	<0.0001
Brickmasons	77 (1.51)	93,196	82.62	[64.17–106.68]	1.64	[1.31–2.05]	0.000015
Crane Tower Operators	20 (0.39)	26,963	74.17	[41.67–106.68]	1.47	[0.95–2.28]	0.084
Laborers	1498 (29.38)	2,105,200	71.15	[67.55–74.76]	1.41	[1.33–1.49]	<0.0001

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

<sup>a</sup>Civilian, noninstitutionalized working persons aged 16–64 years.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages do not sum to 100% due to only the top five occupations being shown.

<sup>c</sup>Rate ratio calculated between male occupations and all male suicides from Table 2 (CR = 50.49, 95% CI: 49.10–51.87).



# Creating a Culture of Care: What is the Role of the Employer in Promoting Mental Wellness?

# WHAT is a Culture of Care?

A philosophy of creating a workplace where individuals feel valued, supported, and ***as though they are part of a community that genuinely cares about their wellbeing.***

## and WHY is it important?

To ***keep workers safe both physically and psychologically,*** allowing them to bring their authentic selves to work and creating an environment where there is mutual respect between leadership and employees.

# Industry-Related Risk Factors for Suicide



Extreme pressure to work quickly and effectively



Low margin for error



Job instability or uncertainty



High injury rates & chronic pain



Lack of paid leave



Isolation / separation from family & friends



Poor access to / utilization of health care (including behavioral)



Lack of leadership training



Demographics (male dominated, tough-guy mentality, veterans)



Alcohol and drug use

# Creating a Culture of Care

- Provide leadership training & support
  - Communication & other soft skills
  - Leading by example
  - Safety leadership
- Set up injury management/return to work programs
  - Reduce worker reliance on prescription opioids
- Offer paid leave
- Be flexible with scheduling
- Set reasonable expectations
- Implement second chance agreements
- Cultivate peer support programs



# Creating a Culture of Care (continued)

- Build in protective factors for veterans
- Set up an EAP/MAP
- Lead & Destigmatize by Example
  - Share your experiences
  - Make a phone call
  - Invite someone to lunch
  - Post on social media letting people know you're available to talk
- Build a Community
  - Find ways for crew members to get to know each other better in morning meetings and at lunch (e.g., games, contests)
  - Schedule afterwork and weekend activities
  - Include EVERYONE!



# Addressing Mental Health within a Culture of Care

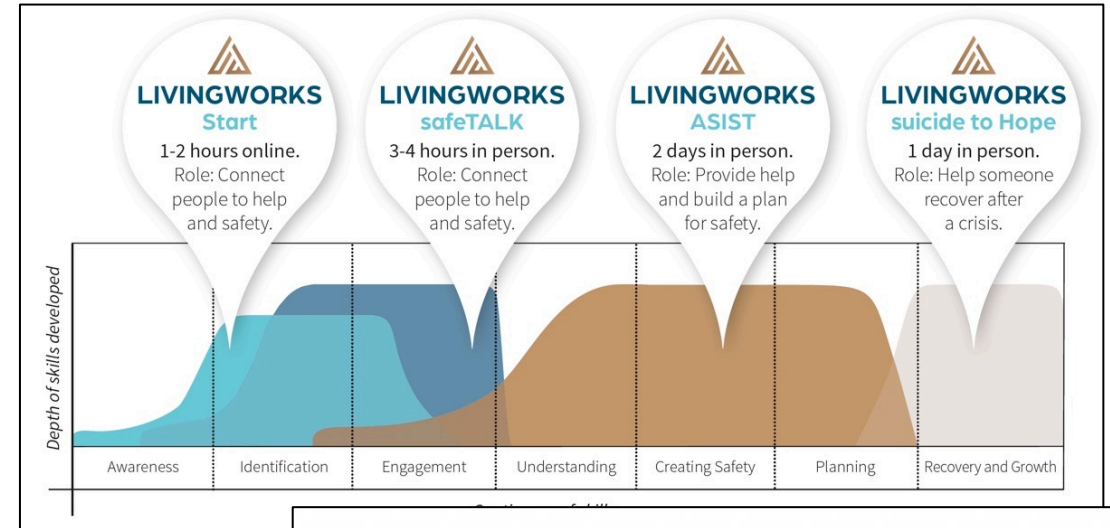
## PREVENTION STAGE

**CPWR TOOLBOX TALK**  
THE CENTER FOR CONSTRUCTION RESEARCH AND TRAINING

**Suicide Prevention in Construction**

**MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID**

- ✘ Learn to recognize the warning signs of suicide.
- ✘ If someone you know is exhibiting warning signs, don't ignore them. Reach out and start a conversation.
- ✘ Offer support and encourage them to get help.
- ✘ If you believe someone is in immediate danger, call 911, take them to a nearby emergency room, call or text 988 the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or reach out to the Crisis Text Line by texting "HOME" to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor.



# Addressing Mental Health within a Culture of Care

## CRISIS INTERVENTION STAGE

### Tune in

**Tune in:** When you notice or sense that a person may need help, focus your attention on them for warning signs

### Ask

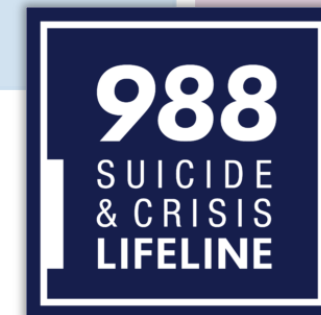
**Ask:** Ask if they are thinking about suicide clearly, directly & calmly – and without judgement

### State

**State:** State that suicide is serious and that connecting to help is important

### Connect

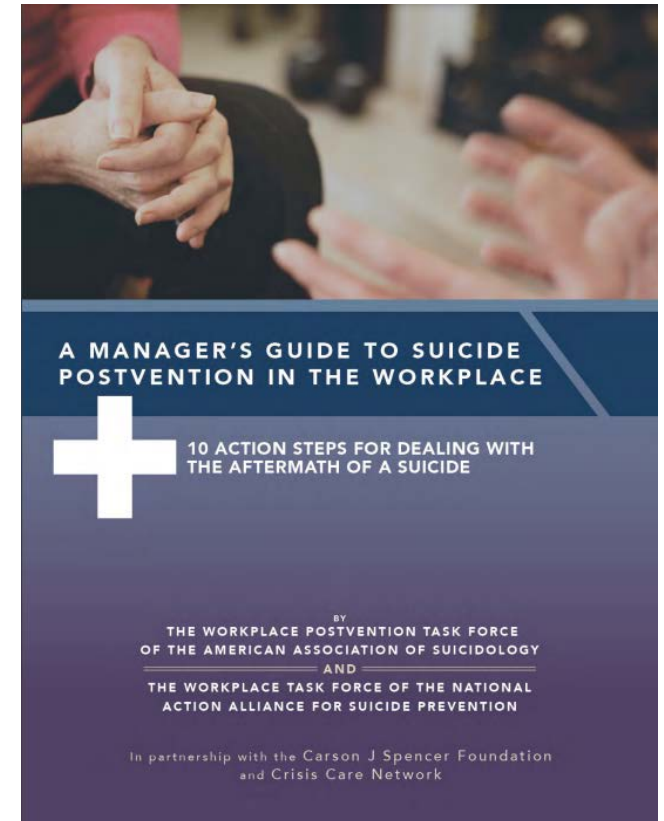
**Connect:** Connect the person to a helping resource who knows suicide first-aid skills



# Addressing Mental Health within a Culture of Care

## POSTVENTION STAGE

- Focus on reintegration of someone who has attempted suicide
  - Provide compassion, support, and flexibility as they return
  - Connect to professional support if not already
- Or assisting survivors in the case of a suicide death
  - Provide strong, visible leadership
  - Connect those impacted to informal and professional grief support
  - Promote healthy grieving
  - Transition postvention into suicide prevention education



# Highlighted CPWR Resources

- **Main Mental Health Page:** <https://cpwr.com/mentalhealth>
- [Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Mental Health Resilience Training](#): A free discussion-based training with 9 modules that cover topics from general health, opioid awareness, suicide awareness, motivational interviewing. Each module can be taught in 30–50-minute sessions. Pick and choose those that work for you.
- [Opioids Resources](#)
- **CPWR/NABTU Opioid Awareness Training Program:** This piloted and updated training, intended for use by experienced instructors, can be utilized to increase awareness of the dangers of opioids and decrease the stigma associated with opioid use and asking for help.
  - [Presentation](#)
  - [Facilitator Guide](#)
  - [Participant Handout](#)
- **New newsletter sign-up:** [REASON \(Resources and Effective programs Addressing Suicides and Opioids Now\)](#)
- [Previous Webinars on Mental Health](#)(scroll to Mental Health category)

# Thank you!

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# Strength. Determination. Grit.

CHARACTER TRAITS THAT GET HARD WORK DONE.

The same traits can be a  
**barrier to asking for help.**

SPEAK UP TO  
**STANDUP**



INFORMATION & RESOURCES AT  
[preventconstruction suicide.com](http://preventconstruction suicide.com)



THE NATIONAL SUICIDE  
PREVENTION LIFELINE AT  
1800.273.TALK (8255) or  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

CRISIS TEXT LINE

TEXT **HELLO** TO 70706  
Free, 24/7, Confidential  
[crisistextline.org](http://crisistextline.org)

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**IT'S OK TO NOT BE OK. BE BRAVE - SPEAK UP  
FOR YOUR TEAM. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.**

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# Industry Related Risk Factors for Suicide



Chronic Pain



Extreme Pressure



Veterans in the Workforce



Access to Lethal Means



Lack of Leadership Training



Demographics



Substance Misuse



Skills Gaps/Feeling Stuck



Tough Stoic Mentality



Sleep Deprivation



Isolation

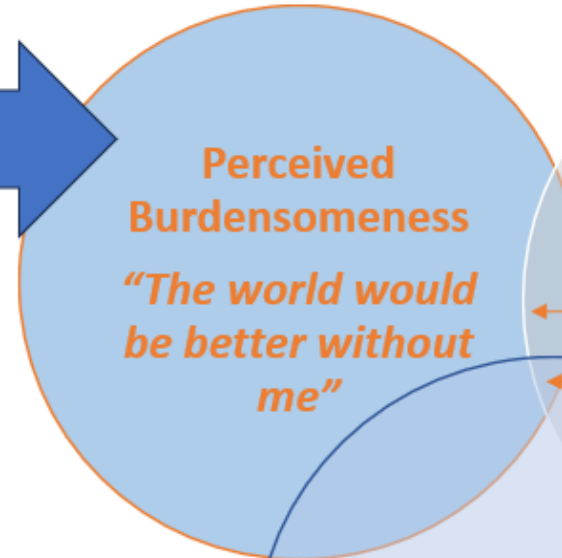


Financial Instability

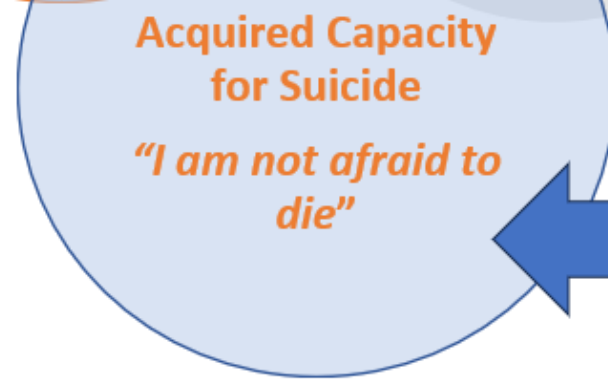
# Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

- Chronic Pain
- Extreme Pressure
- Lack of Leadership Training
- Skills Gap/ Feeling Stuck

- Tough Stoic Mentality
- Isolation
- Financial Instability



Thoughts of /  
Desire for Suicide



Suicide Attempt or  
Death

- Access to Lethal Means
- Veterans in the Workforce
- Substance Misuse
- Demographics
- Sleep Deprivation

# Leadership Webinar

Josh Rizzo

Justin Azbill



In partnership with MISSION MINDSET

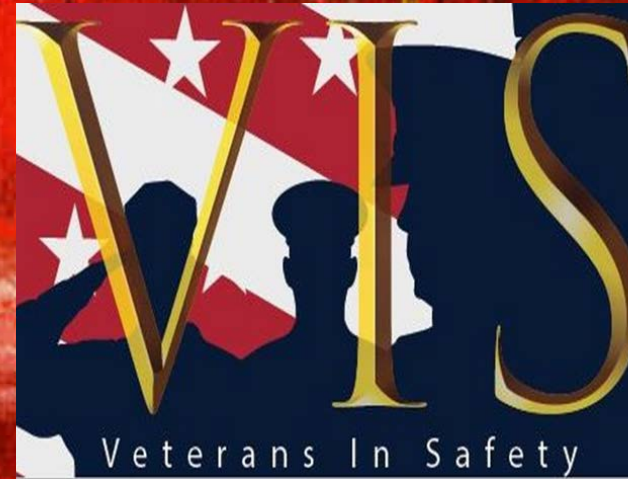


TRIBAL GROUP, LLC.  
LEADERSHIP GROUP



[joshrizzohuman.com](http://joshrizzohuman.com)

# Peer Groups



# Substance Abuse and Suicide

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# Substance Abuse and Overdose

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Overdose deaths increase each year with over **100,000 overdose deaths** in 2022

Construction and mining have the highest overdose death rates ([NSC](#))

- **23.1%** of all overdose deaths occurred in construction industry

In construction, for every **1** fatal worker injury...there were **6** suicides....and **17** overdose deaths

*Odds of dying by opioid overdose  
(1 in 58) are greater than those of  
dying in a motor vehicle crash  
(1 in 93) (National Safety Council, 2021)*

# Substance Use is Common in Construction

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1 in 5 construction workers  
have a substance use disorder—

[NORC and NSC, 2020](#)

**Construction workers**

Are **6-7x** more  
likely to die of an  
overdose than workers  
in other professions

[Dong, CPWR 2019](#)

# Substance Misuse is Linked to Suicidal Ideation

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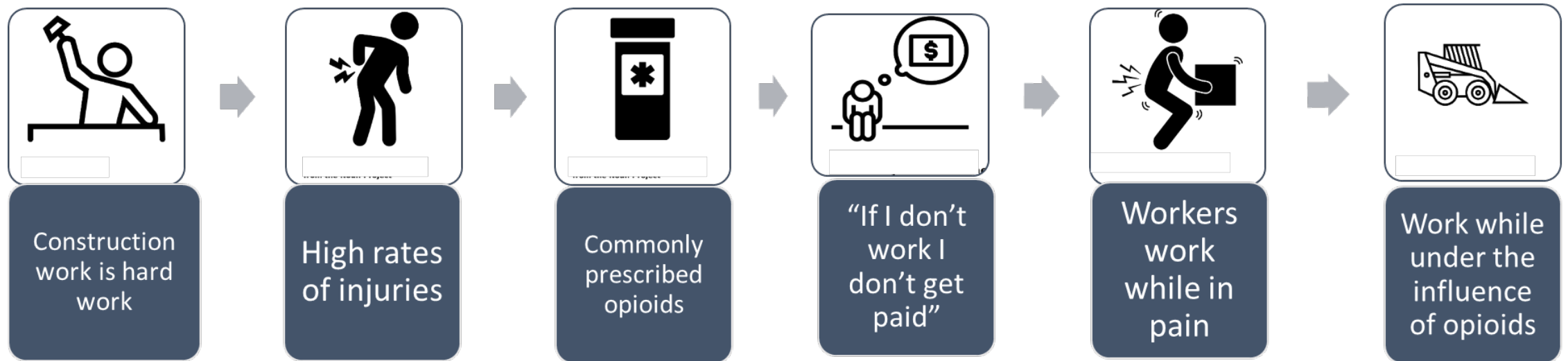
- Male construction workers with illicit opioid abuse were nearly **twice** as likely to report suicidal ideation  
those with alcohol abuse were almost **three** times as likely to report suicidal ideation. ([Dong, 2022](#))
- Roofers' suicides were 76% more likely than other suicides to involve substance misuse. ([Stack, 2023](#))
- Substance use disorder (alcohol, opioids, others) is a brain disease. ([NIDA, 2014](#))

# Contributing Factors to Substance Misuse

Physically demanding work tasks causes chronic pain and high injuries

Job stress (schedule, work organization) causes mental distress

Poor work policies and benefits leave workers unsupported





# Physical Pain Leads to Prescription Opioids

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## Acute Treatment with Opioids Leads to Long Term Use

Duration of acute use:

1 Day = 6% chance of still using the drug a year later

7 Days = 13.5% chance

**31 Days = 29.9% chance**

Long term use leads to:

- Increased perception of pain
- Increases risk of depression
- Increases risk of suicide

# Stigma and Substance Use Disorders

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- Workers with a substance abuse know they **cannot** control their use but...Others believe they use by choice.
- More than 80% of workers who misuse opioids say they do so to manage workplace stress.
- Stigma causes a failure to seek help when needed

*“A lot of people don't understand. They don't look at you the same, you know? So I just don't....I'd rather be looked at as like a normal person, you know?”*

*“Who wants to go to their boss and be like...I can't come to work...cause I'm strung out...or my life's falling apart, my wife left me.”*

# Substance Use to Manage Physical and Mental Pain

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## Substance use:

- is a way of coping with physical pain
- is a way to escape from feelings of stigma and loneliness
- increases suicide risk

**Substance abuse disproportionately contributes to male construction worker suicide.**

# Workplace Protective Factors For Substance Abuse and Mental Distress

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## Goals

Management support to create a culture of care

Create social connections across all levels of the organization

Substance use and recovery benefits and policies

# First Steps

1. Educate everyone!
  - a) Substance Use Disorder is a brain disease
  - b) Build personal skills to manage mental health
2. Management needs to provide support
  - a) Model commitment and prevent stigmatized behaviors
  - b) Eliminate work factors that cause pain and mental distress
3. Select supportive and accessible benefits: EAP, medical providers
4. Create non-punitive policies
  - a) Time off for medical treatment
  - b) Second chance drug programs

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For more information, check out these resources:

[Opioid Management Guidelines for the Construction Trades](#)

[CPWR Opioid Prevention Resources](#)

[NIOSH Workplace Supported Recovery](#)

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