

Identifying Opioid Use Among Construction Workers

Pain and Prescription Opioid Use Among US Construction Workers: Findings From the 2011-2018 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey

Xiuwen Sue Dong, Raina Brooks, Christopher Rodman, Richard Rinehart, and Samantha Brown. American Journal of Public Health, 2022.

Overview

The opioid epidemic has been particularly severe for workers in the construction industry, who are more likely to use opioids and to die of opioid-related overdoses than workers overall. Following their studies on the associations with opioid use and injuries and musculoskeletal conditions among construction workers, the researchers examined types of pain and patterns of opioid and non-opioid analgesic use among these workers using data from the 2011-2018 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS).

Key Findings

- Almost 16% of construction workers in the study population used either opioid or non-opioid analgesics during the study period.
- On average, an estimated 10% of construction workers (n=1.2 million) used prescription opioid analgesics annually.
- Workers suffering from work-related injuries were almost four times as likely to use prescription opioids than those without injuries. In comparison, those with non-work-related injuries were three times as likely to use prescription opioids as those without.
- Workers with musculoskeletal disorders, poor physical health, or mental health disorders were twice as likely to use prescription opioids than those without the listed conditions.
- Those with other pain (such as cancer or headaches/migraines) had a higher prevalence of opioid use than those without the conditions.
- The findings suggest the workplace can play an important role in addressing opioid use. Multiprong strategies could help reduce opioid use, including:
 - Supporting workers with pain conditions or existing injuries, as well as those in need of health care or mental health care through finding alternative treatments and providing workplace services to promote recovery from injuries.
 - Improving working conditions to reduce factors leading to opioid use, including injuries and stress.

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