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GOOD NEWS

Five Research Studies Examine Ways to Improve Construction Worker Mental Health

CPWR is leading a Research and Action Agenda on suicide, mental health, and opioids. It features three objectives:

1. **Tackling Root Causes:** Addressing upstream, work-related factors that contribute to mental health struggles and substance use.
2. **Breaking Down Barriers:** Ensuring workers have access to essential treatment and recovery resources.
3. **Enhancing Support Systems:** Strengthening services, programs, and policies to support workers facing mental health and substance use challenges.

As part of implementing this agenda, in 2023 CPWR invited experts and industry leaders to propose research projects examining approaches to preventing suicide and opioid overdose among construction workers. After a rigorous selection process, [five studies](#) were funded: each focused on contributing to the growing evidence base about suicide and opioid overdose prevention in the industry.

The [February issue of this newsletter](#) summarized three of the five studies, which looked at the impact of public policies, a successful member assistance program, and naloxone training. The final two studies were released in May.

Suicide prevention for Ironworkers. Dr. Behzad Esmaeili led a team from Purdue University that explored [the effects of suicide prevention practices on ironworkers](#) in the Indianapolis area. The team analyzed employer-led prevention practices and the effectiveness of two suicide awareness trainings

created by LivingWorks, a company specializing in that work.

The study conducted three rounds of expert surveys to identify high-priority areas for improvement in employer-led interventions: integrating mental health education into safety training, conducting active follow-ups with employees at risk, and equipping workers with suicide prevention skills. The evaluation showed improvements in suicide awareness but no “sustained changes in emotional wellbeing,” suggesting that a series of trainings may be necessary to achieve this goal. This finding aligns with previous research, and the authors recommend long-term employer-support for mental health initiatives tailored to ironworkers’ occupational stressors, such as “structured peer programs, ongoing education, and reoccurring training.” Finally, the researchers suggest that future research assess the long-term impact of such interventions among construction workers.

Peer Support Programs to Promote Mental Health Among Construction Workers. Researchers led by Dr. Brad Evanoff of Washington University in St. Louis [evaluated two peer support programs for construction workers](#) in that region. One, LEAN StL, was carried out by the Greater St. Louis Area Laborers Health and Welfare fund and modeled after a program from the Laborers fund in Massachusetts; the other, by a local firm, the Tarlton Corporation, was based on the successful MATES program in Australia. Pre- and post-measures of effectiveness were obtained to compare these two different models of peer support. The researchers found that:

1. Key stakeholders reported increased awareness of suicide and mental health in the workforce due to both the LEAN StL and Tarlton MATES programs.
2. Stakeholders felt that LEAN StL and Tarlton MATES were acceptable solutions to an unmet need in the construction industry.
3. Peer support models that build upon existing relationships and experiences are effective.
4. The Tarlton MATES program increased individuals’ perceived knowledge, attitudes, and skills when intervening with suicide.
5. LEAN StL and Tarlton MATES addressed stigma and promoted mental health awareness in a way that stakeholders felt was congruent with industry culture.
6. Utilization of health plans and member assistance programs, especially for mental health-related claims, increased after the implementation of the Lean StL program.

CPWR featured these two studies in [recent webinar](#), which is also [available in Spanish](#).

FREE RESOURCE FROM CPWR

CPWR Updates Opioid Hazard Alert

CPWR has just updated its Hazard Alert Card on Opioid Deaths in Construction. Part of a collection of [nearly 40 short, image-driven cards](#) that deliver simple, direct messages for protection against safety and health hazards, this Hazard Alert highlights why construction workers are at increased risk of opioid use, particularly because of work-related injuries and prescribing practices. The alert, which is available in English and Spanish, includes CPWR’s three-part public health model for addressing opioid use:

- Preventing injuries by creating safer job sites.
- Managing pain safely by discussing non-opioid options with healthcare providers.
- Providing help when workers are struggling. Addiction is treatable, and

support is available.

The alert also shares practical tips, including how to talk to a doctor, safely dispose of medications, and access recovery resources and national hotlines.

RESEARCH CORNER

CDC Links Manual Labor Jobs to High Methamphetamine Use in Overdose Deaths

A [new CDC report](#) examines opioid overdose deaths that also involved stimulant use. The study, which analyzes trends by industry and occupation, found that the proportion of opioid-related deaths involving stimulants is increasing, particularly among workers in manual labor industries, like construction, extraction, farming, fishing, and forestry. These workers were more likely to use methamphetamines than other stimulants like cocaine, possibly to counteract the sedative effects of the opioids they were taking. The researchers noted that methamphetamine's longer-lasting effects may explain its higher prevalence in physically demanding jobs, while cocaine was more common in overdose deaths among workers in less physically intensive roles. Among construction workers who died from opioid overdoses involving stimulants, 55.6% had used methamphetamine and/or cocaine—33% used methamphetamine, 27% cocaine. The report emphasizes the need to address the root causes of substance use disorders by reducing work-related risk factors such as injury and stress. It also calls for expanded access to harm reduction services and evidence-based treatment both on and off the job site.

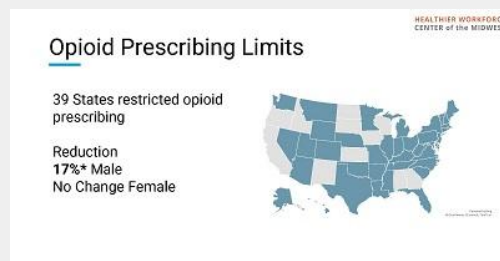
FOCUS ON PREVENTION

Impact of Employment Laws on Construction Worker Suicide

CPWR [hosted a webinar](#) in March featuring the first three of the five research studies described earlier. One study explored a critical question: Do workers with access to paid leave experience lower suicide rates than those without such benefits? It found that:

- Female construction workers had significantly lower suicide rates in states with family and paid leave laws. Suicides also declined among male workers, though less significantly.
- States with laws limiting opioid prescribing practices reported lower suicide rates among male construction workers (see graphic).
- Substance use was more frequently a contributing factor in suicides among construction workers than in other professions.

You can also [view the webinar in Spanish](#).



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