Drugs in the Workplace

Employee Surveys on Drug Use

Title: Employee Surveys on Drug Use and Organizational Climate
Principal Investigator: Wayne E. K. Lehman, Ph.D.
Co-Principal Investigator: D. Dwayne Simpson, Ph.D.
Research Staff: Joel B. Bennett, Ph.D.
Funded by: National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
Phase I Project Period: September 1988 to August 1991
Phase II Project Period: September 1991 to August 1997

Project Summary

Concern about drug abuse in the United States work force has increased in recent years because of its serious implications for worker productivity and health. The causes and prevalence of drug use in different work settings presumably reflect greater social acceptance of some forms of drug use, increased availability of drugs, and factors in the workplace such as stress and boredom. Although objective data concerning the size or effects of drug use in the work site are limited, larger numbers of employers are implementing mandatory drug testing programs to identify drug users.

This project addressed the need for more empirical information and for a clearer understanding of this complex problem. Data in the first phase of the research were obtained from confidential self-report questionnaires completed by a sample of 2,000 employees in a large southwestern city in the U.S. The project was extended under a 5-year grant which added a second large municipal workforce and a smaller suburban municipality, and replicated the survey over a 3-year interval at the two larger sites. Approximately 3,400 surveys were completed in the three sites in the second phase.

The surveys included information on employee background, organizational climate and working conditions, self-reported drug use on and off the job, perceived drug use among co-workers, attitudes toward drug use and related policies on drug testing, employee well-being, and job performance indicators such as absenteeism, sick days, accidents, and health care costs.

Participation in the study was voluntary and precautions were taken to insure confidentiality of responses.

The long-term objectives of the projects were to develop tools for assessing substance abuse risk in the workplace and to identify factors which contribute to drug use and impaired job performance. Major findings have been that personal background factors, particularly general deviance indicators, are the strongest predictors of personal substance use, and that substance use has strong associations with negative job behaviors (e.g., psychological withdrawal, antagonistic behaviors, accidents, and exposure to workplace violence). The complex role of policy, work group processes, and organizational culture also have been examined. Findings show that employee tolerance for co-worker substance use, attitudes toward discrete policy components, and work group drinking climates are each predictive of risk for substance-use related problems.
Results of this project led to the development of a prevention training program that is designed to address work group cultures and permissive attitudes that tolerate or enable employee substance use.

**Publication Lists**

**Selected Publications from this Research**


**Abstract:** *Objective.* While job-related alcohol use may be associated with problems for drinkers, less is known about the effects of employee drinking on co-workers. We hypothesized that either exposure to co-worker drinking or the presence of a drinking climate would positively correlate with reports of stress and other problems. Following previous research, we also predicted that work group cohesion (or team orientation) would buffer against such problems. *Method.* Two random samples of municipal employees (Ns = 909 and 1,068) completed anonymous surveys. These assessed individual drinking, co-worker drinking, task-oriented group cohesion, the direct reports of negative consequences due to co-worker substance use, and five problem indicators: job stress, job withdrawal, health problems, and performance (work accidents and absences). *Results.* In each sample, drinking climate correlated with stress and withdrawal more so than did reports of individual drinking. Drinking climate and individual job stress were negatively associated with cohesion. ANCOVA results indicated that drinking climate combined with low cohesion resulted in increased vulnerability for all five problems. Moreover, cohesion appeared to attenuate the negative impact of exposure to drinking norms. *Conclusions.* As many as 40% of employees report at least one negative consequence associated with co-worker substance use (alcohol and drugs). Because teamwork may buffer negative effects of drinking climate on co-workers, workplace prevention efforts might be enhanced through a focus on the social environment. These efforts would include teambuilding and discussions of the impact of co-worker drinking on employee productivity.


**Abstract:** Perceptions and consequences of co-worker substance use were assessed to (1) examine perceptions of co-worker use as supplemental measures of substance use problems in organizations, and (2) examine relationships with employee perceptions and attitudes. Support for the hypothesis that exposure to co-worker substance use is negatively associated with job performance and attitudes is presented. Results suggest the utility of evaluating perceptions of co-worker substance use in assessments of drug use in the workplace. These results have implications for training and education programs which should emphasize that employee substance use is a problem that extends beyond the substance-using employee.


**Abstract:** This study examined the influence on substance use of organizational wellness and of attitudes toward the EAP. We developed the Organizational Wellness Scale (OWS) to assess perceptions of healthy (e.g., respectful) and addictive (e.g., workaholic) work climates. Employees from a municipal organization (N = 780) who scored high on the OWS reported less personal and co-worker substance use and enabling behaviors, and more favorable attitudes towards substance use policies. Results suggest that, beyond the influence of the EAP, work site health may effect both
individual and work group substance use. Using the OWS, health service providers could benefit from monitoring the impact of organizational wellness on individual and work group health.


Abstract: With the Hispanic population becoming the fastest growing ethnic faction in the civilian labor force, research findings from workforces that are predominately Hispanic are becoming greater in number. This raises the possibility that findings from Hispanic research samples may not generalize to workforces that are primarily non-Hispanic, and vice versa. Evidence is presented to suggest that differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic employees, among responses to several industrial and organizational research scales and personal background variables, are very slight. These findings are advanced from several hundred employees in two municipal workforces, one that was 70% Hispanic and one that was 14% Hispanic.


Abstract: Previous research suggests that employees are often unaware of or ambivalent toward substance abuse policies. These studies focus on one policy component—drug-testing—and fail to distinguish employees with clear (or crystallized) from unclear attitudes. The current study explored a broader view of policy and examined both personal and situational factors that may determine attitudes. Survey data from employees in three municipalities support a distinction among five attitude categories; those who are: (a) dissatisfied with efforts to control employee abuse, (b) satisfied, (c) anti-policy, (d) pro-policy, and (e) uninformed. Discriminant analyses suggest that different profiles characterize these attitude groups. For example, dissatisfied employees report low personal alcohol use, high co-worker alcohol use, and low self-referral whereas anti-policy employees report high personal drug use, high co-worker use, and low job identity. Discussion focuses on policy as a social construction and the implications of attitude distinctions for employee training.


Abstract: Relationships between employee substance use and accidents (i.e., injury and non injury accidents) at work were assessed in a sample of municipal employees in a large southwestern city in the United States. Employees were classified into low- and high-risk job samples and discriminant function analyses were computed within job samples to classify employees into "no accident" and "some accident' classifications. Variables from personal, job, and substance-use domains were used as discriminators. Results indicated that employees likely to have accidents tended to have dysfunctional personal backgrounds and reported that they were dissatisfied and tense at work. Drug and alcohol use were major discriminators of accident groups for the high-risk job sample but not for the low-risk job samples.

**Abstract:** Relationships of personal and job factors with employee substance use in a sample of municipal workers were assessed. Logistic regression results showed that personal and job domains each significantly predicted substance use at and away from work, although the best fit was provided by a model including both domains. The profile of the employee most likely to be a substance abuser was a young male with low self-esteem and an arrest history, who came from a family with substance abuse problems, and associated with substance-using peers. The drug-using employee was also likely to be estranged from work and to work under risky job conditions.