

What works in the workplace? Alcohol and other drug interventions for employees

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Aim: The aim of this symposium is to present recent advancements in our understanding of the efficacy, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of workplace-based interventions for the prevention and treatment of problematic substance use. We will begin by contextualising the workplace as an intervention setting, and the unique benefits and challenges it presents for implementing alcohol and other drug (AOD) interventions. We will then present the findings from two systematic reviews of studies of workplace-based interventions for AOD use, and findings from a study on employees views of barriers and facilitators to accessing workplace AOD interventions. The symposium will conclude with an interactive discussion with attendees regarding future directions for workplace-based AOD interventions.

PRESENTATION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKPLACE AS AN INTERVENTION SETTING

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Introduction and Aims: The workplace is a unique setting for implementing interventions for alcohol and other drug (AOD) use. As a large proportion of the population are engaged in paid employment, workplace culture plays an important role in shaping a wide array of health-related behaviours including AOD use. Indeed, the transition into work is often associated with major changes in AOD use, as well as exacerbation of AOD problems. The workplace is therefore an important setting for both the prevention and amelioration of AOD issues.

Design and Methods: This presentation will outline key considerations associated with AOD use and the workplace. It will detail the types of contextual issues as they apply to the workplace and the range of approaches to addressing AOD and the workplace to-date.

Key Findings: Workers' AOD use varies by industry and occupation warranting tailored interventions. An overview of the varying approaches to interventions and policy responses will be described. These include policy intervention, counselling options, Employee Assistance Programs, health promotion and general wellbeing and safety programs. Some of these interventions will be addressed in detail in the subsequent presentations.

Discussion and Conclusions: A number of different options exist for addressing AOD issues within the workplace context. To-date there has been relatively little research undertaken of their efficacy and/or suitability for different workplace settings. An examination of the strengths and weaknesses of available options is required to facilitate evidenced based and cost-effective interventions.

PRESENTATION 2: A THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WORKPLACE-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE

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Introduction and Aims: The workplace is a unique but relatively understudied setting for implementing interventions for alcohol and other drug (AOD) use. The aim of this review was to assess the efficacy and/or effectiveness of workplace-based interventions

Design and Methods: A systematic review was conducted of studies that evaluated workplace-based interventions for AOD use published in 2010 or later. Primary and secondary studies were identified by a search of five online databases (PsycINFO, MEDLINE, Embase, Cochrane Library and Scopus). Studies that did not measure substance use in the same cohort of participants over time (i.e., studies that only analysed data at the workplace level) were excluded. Findings were analysed via a narrative synthesis of the literature. The full protocol was registered with PROSPERO.

Key Findings: All of the 28 primary studies that met the inclusion criteria assessed alcohol use; only one study assessed other drug use. Analysis found some evidence for the effectiveness of brief interventions for alcohol use delivered to employees who drink at harmful levels. Universal programs delivered to all employees that included broad health promotion interventions were also found to significantly reduce alcohol use. Evidence for psychosocial and e-health interventions, Employee Assistance Programs, and drug testing was mixed.

Discussion and Conclusions: There is a clear need for the development and evaluation of workplace-based interventions for drugs other than alcohol. Due to the limited number and limited quality of studies conducted it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the efficacy and/or effectiveness of interventions.

PRESENTATION 3: WORKPLACE ALCOHOL AND DRUG TESTING: WHAT IS THE LATEST EVIDENCE ON ITS EFFECTIVENESS?

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Introduction and Aims: Alcohol and other drug (AOD) use has a significant impact on worker health, safety and productivity. Workplace-based AOD testing is a commonly used prevention/intervention tool utilised by organisations in Australia and worldwide. A systematic review was undertaken to examine the latest evidence on the effectiveness of

AOD testing as a strategy for deterring use, reducing accidents/injuries, and decreasing absenteeism or presenteeism in the workplace.

Design and Methods: A systematic review was conducted of research published between January 2013 to August 2020. Eight databases were searched using relevant key terms. Papers were included if they were peer-reviewed primary studies in English that examined workplace AOD testing in relation to AOD use or as a safety strategy. Methodological adequacy was assessed using the Effective Public Health Practice Project (EPHPP) tool.

Results: The results were reported using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. From 22,860 papers screened, seven met the inclusion criteria. Findings on the effectiveness of drug testing as a measure of deterrence or workplace safety strategy were mixed and inconclusive. All but one study was rated as methodologically weak.

Discussions and Conclusions: The limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of workplace AOD testing remains tenuous. In light of increasing use of prescribed medications, and the legalisation and decriminalisation of marijuana, drug testing may no longer be viable and raises more issues for a practice that is already fraught with controversy and negativity.

PRESENTATION 4: EMPLOYEES VIEWS REGARDING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO ACCESSING WORKPLACE-BASED AOD INTERVENTIONS

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Introduction and Aims: The impact of employee alcohol and other drug use has been an issue of increasing concern and many organisation are seeking to incorporate AOD interventions that focus on prevention, early intervention and treatment of problematic use. To help guide the development and implementation of such interventions, a scoping exercise was undertaken to identify barriers and facilitators of access to AOD interventions in the workplace.

Design and Methods: The scoping exercise, consisting of an online survey and individual interviews of public sector employees, commenced in June 2021. Data were collected from employees as well as family members/loved ones. Data collection will be complete in October 2021.

Key Findings: Key findings of the scoping exercise will be presented including descriptive statistics, associations between trauma and mental health symptoms and alcohol and/or other drug use, and preferences for alcohol and other drug use services and treatment.

Discussions and Conclusions: The findings of this scoping exercise will be used alongside the best available evidence to develop a workplace-based model of care for AOD use.

PRESENTATION 5: IDENTIFYING FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR WORKPLACE STUDIES OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE

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Introduction and Aims: There has been relatively little attention focussed on the role that workplaces play in contributing to and exacerbating problematic AOD use among workers and the community more broadly. This Symposium has attempted to provide an overview of some of the key issues identified to-date and to map directions for future research and interventions. Having provided a broad overview of a wide range of core considerations this session will focus on engaging with the participants to explore their views about barriers, challenges and identified priorities for moving forward.

Method / Approach: Participants will be provided with a set of statements and prompting questions to instigate discussion.

Results: A brief summary of the issues and key findings from Sessions 1-4 will be presented with an emphasis on the questions raised in each presentation that warrant further exploration. This will include addressing factors related to challenges involved in undertaking workplace related research.

Discussion: All participants will be encouraged to share their views and experiences (see 'Discussion Section' below).

Implications for Practice or Policy: The focus of the interactive session will be directed towards both the identification of current and future research needs and priorities, the barriers and challenges to undertaking such research and as well as the work needed to be undertaken to address policy and practice. In particular, there will be directed discussion around the role of industry partnerships and collaborations, and translating evidence into policy and practice.

Implications for Translational Research: The interactive session will also seek attendees' input on future directions for pragmatic studies in workplace settings.

Discussion Section: To facilitate discussion amongst attendees, a semi-structured session is planned whereby a series of specific questions will be posed for the audience stemming from the content of the earlier presentations. In addition, participants will be invited to submit questions to the Chair and panel for incorporation into this session where appropriate. Finally, participants will be invited to raise any issues for discussion not covered.

Discussant: Chair

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