

Workplace alcohol and other drug interventions: An overview of reviews

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Introduction and Aims: The detrimental impacts of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use amongst workers can be costly to organisations. Besides AOD testing which can be expensive and ineffective, a variety of other prevention/intervention strategies can be implemented to reduce AOD use and improve workplace safety. An umbrella systematic review of reviews was undertaken to assess the cumulative evidence on the effectiveness of different workplace AOD interventions.

Design and Methods: Eight databases were searched for relevant reviews published from inception to April 2021. Reviews were included if they examined primary studies about worker AOD use; AOD-related occupational accidents/injuries, absenteeism or presenteeism; knowledge/attitudes towards AOD use; and workplace-based AOD interventions. Reviews were quality-assessed using the AMSTAR 2 (for systematic reviews) and SANRA (for narrative/scoping reviews) tools.

Results: From a total of 9,204 papers screened, 10 systematic reviews and four narrative/descriptive reviews met the inclusion criteria. Workplace interventions examined were AOD policies, screening, brief interventions, psychosocial interventions, education and training, health promotion, EAPs, and multi-component interventions. The majority of primary studies included in the reviews were methodologically inadequate, with inconsistent results. The heterogeneity of interventions and settings made any conclusions difficult.

Discussions and Conclusions: There is poor and limited evidence to indicate that some interventions may be more effective than others. It is also unclear if these interventions have sustainable benefits or are applicable across different settings and cultures. More rigorous studies could provide further certainty regarding the optimal features of an effective intervention that minimises AOD-related health and safety risks for workers.

Implications for Practice or Policy: It may be beneficial to implement a multifaceted workplace AOD program that comprises a form of screening/brief intervention, peer-based psychosocial intervention, alongside a clear and supported AOD policy, with treatment options to assist workers with more serious issues.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.*