



MANAGING SUBSTANCE USE IN THE WORKPLACE

DR. FLORENCE JAGUGA

Chairperson, Employee Assistance Program

Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital

ISSUP webinar series

29th June 2023



Outline



- Prevalence of substance use among the workforce
- Risk factors for employee substance use
- Importance of addressing alcohol and drug use problems in the workplace
- Employee Assistance Programs

Prevalence of substance use among the workforce

- **US:** Illicit drug use - 14.1% of employed adults¹.
- **US:** 8.7% of employees aged 18 to 64 used alcohol heavily, 8.6% used illicit drugs, and 9.5% had SUD².
 - highest rates of heavy alcohol use: mining- 17.5%; construction- 16.5%.
 - highest rates of illicit drug use: accommodations and food services industry - 19.1%.
 - highest SUD rates: accommodations and food services industry -16.9%

Prevalence of substance use among the workforce

- Sweden: 5.6% of employees tested positive for illicit drug use in 2019⁴
- South Africa: national datasets from EAPs - 65.4% reported an alcohol related problem; 34.6% reported a drug-related problem⁵
- Kenya: 56% of public officers have drunk alcohol, 23% used tobacco products, 16% chewed khat, 6.6% bhang and 1.3% other drugs⁶

Risk factors for employee substance use



- Male⁶
- Co-worker use⁶
- Availability of substances in the workplace⁶
- Social isolation⁶
- More permissive drinking norms⁷
- Lower supervisor ability to handle substance use problems⁷
- Greater exposure to job hazards⁷
- Lower levels of coworker interactions⁷

Why should we care?



Health impact of alcohol and drug use:

- Risk factor for cardiovascular, digestive diseases, cancers, injuries, road traffic accidents⁸
- Increased risk suicidal thoughts, psychosis, anxiety, depression

Why should we care? Cont.

- Increased risk of interpersonal violence, social dysfunction
- Costly to society in terms of costs of productivity (presenteeism, absenteeism) and health impact costs
- In 2020 (in Kenya), Alcohol use disorder – 3 billion KES due to absenteeism, presenteeism, premature death⁹

Why should employers care?

- Employees are a critical resource for their organizations
- Substance use interferes with delivery of institution mandate
- Poses safety risks e.g., injuries, errors

What barriers do employees face in accessing treatment?

- Treatment services are scarce/unavailable
- Stigma and discrimination
- Lack of organizational mechanisms that supports staff with alcohol and drug use



What can be done to manage alcohol and drug in the workplace?

Employee Assistance Programs

- Programs that support staff with psychosocial issues that impact workplace performance
- Roles:- support employee wellness, improve productivity; risk management tool
- International Labor Organization (ILO) has developed guidelines for managing alcohol and drug use in the workplace

What kind of resources are needed to implement EAP activities?

- EAP committee
- EAP policy
- EAP programs/interventions
- Annual work plan and budget

EAP Committee

- Planning, coordination and oversight of EAP activities
- Establishing EAP services in collaboration with organizational management
- Advocacy roles
- **Membership:** Mental health professionals, human resource, occupational health and safety, workers' union representatives, persons in recovery...

EAP Policy

- Prohibition of use in the workplace
- Alcohol and drug use treatment and prevention programs to be implemented
- Addressing intoxication in the workplace/drug testing
- Human resource issues: Job security and promotion, disciplinary action, determination of fitness to work.
- Roles, responsibilities of employees and employers

What kinds of programs can EAPs implement?

- Regular education to staff on substance use (provide accurate info & destigmatize harmful substance use)
- Education on strategies to promote mental health and well-being, and cope better with stress
- Education on other areas e.g. managing finances, managing conflict
- Early identification, assessment and referral to appropriate care

What kinds of programs can EAPs implement? Cont.

- Urine/breath testing for alcohol and drugs (random/indicated)
- Staff support interventions e.g., could recommend reassigning of duties or redeployment as necessary, financial support
- Psychotherapy: individual, family, group therapy programs
- Psychiatric care: Out-patient and in-patient treatment for alcohol and drug use disorders

What kinds of programs can EAPs implement? Cont.

- Staff support interventions e.g., reassigning of duties or redeployment as necessary; financial support
- Family therapy programs; financial education
- Training of supervisors and management on managing alcohol and drug use in the workplace

Other activities, workplan and budget

- Surveys to determine burden and obtain feedback on programs being implemented
- The committee should have an annual workplan to guide activities
- Budget allocated to its activities
- Reporting to management done regularly

Pro-abstinence Workplaces



- Supportive of staff mental health and alcohol and drug use concerns
- Fairness and respect.
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated.
- Roles assigned fit in with employees' competencies/skills.
- Work well done rewarded in a timely and fair manner.
- Employees involved in decision making
- Favorable work schedules
- Recognizes need for work life balance

Role of disciplinary action?



“It should be recognized that the employer has authority to discipline workers for employment-related misconduct associated with alcohol and drugs. However, counselling, treatment and rehabilitation should be preferred to disciplinary action.

Should a worker fail to cooperate fully with the treatment programme, the employer may take disciplinary action as considered appropriate” (ILO, 1996)

In summary



- Alcohol and drug use is a common problem among employees
- Addressing substance use among employee has benefits for employer and employees.

Future directions



- Research that quantifies the burden of employee substance use
- Sharing of strategies that work across organisations
- Developing and testing workplace interventions

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Jaguga 2022

Thank you!

flokemboi@gmail.com

