

DRUG POLICY IN WORKPLACE

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Introduction

The use of illicit drugs and alcohol among employees within the working premises or even away from the places of work has constantly been attributed to accidents, occupational injuries and unpleasant behaviors (Ramchand *et al.* 2009, p. 13). Drug use does not only cause absenteeism and low productivity at work but it causes psychological disorientation hence the workers are unable to competently follow instructions which leads to accidents, poor social relations between the workers themselves and also the employers. Due to the poor behavior associated with drug abuse, rates of crime which affect both the workers, surrounding society and property are high hence the working environment becomes unsafe for the other workers and employers (Zwerling 1994, p. 1468). There are ethical barriers in carrying out comprehensive research on the impact of drug abuse on work place environment but through self reported and medical record data, it is established that having a drug policy which regulates and limits drug abuse within work place is a promising way of curbing the accidents and crime while enhancing safety in the work place (Carpenter 2007, p. 796). This work analyzes the claims and findings of research on the impact of drug policy in work place environment in relation to safety enhancement and proposes solutions to the persistent problem.

Impact of drug policy on workers safety

The establishment of drug testing procedures among workers in the United States and Canada has been associated with identification and punishment of employees involved in drug abuse due to the safety risks that the drug abusers pose to the other people in the working environment (Macdonald *et al.* 2010, p. 409). Through the process of obtaining urine samples from all employees and carrying out laboratory tests, there is an awareness that drug abuse is

punishable hence the abusers who could easily cause accidents and engage in crime feel limited and are forced to abandon the drug abuse since they are not ready to face punishments (Macdonald *et al.* 2010, p. 411). Cocaine, opiates and cannabis are the common drugs tested through urinalysis and this is possible due to the established policies that allow the testing and punishments to be administered on the employees since this process enhances the safety of the workers.

Impact of drug policy on accidents in the work place

It is estimated that approximately \$45 to \$ 85 each year is lost due to drug abuse among workers in the United States (Orvis 1994, p. 290). 40% of accident related hospital admission among employees is attributed to drug abuse and this is due to the fact that employees involved in drug abuse are 5 times more likely to cause accidents and engage in crimes compared to individuals who do not engage in drug misuse (Orvis 1994, p. 290). The drug testing policy has been embraced in both public and private institutions as depicted by Orvis (1994, p. 294) to help in identifying and dealing with drug abuse problems which are causing huge losses to these sectors. Maintaining a drug free work place has the capacity to increase productivity by more than 30% since there will be less leave days related to accidents, sickness and crimes.

Based on the high accident rates and low productivity, zero tolerance standards that focus on maintain drug free work environments have been adapted as statistics indicate 46% of employers perform the drug tests in line with specific policies that minimize accidents and enhance safety at work places (Carpenter 2007, p. 799). These programs basically aim at eliminating the consumption or use of dangerous drug substances not only among current employees but also among the prospective ones who are fully aware that these tests are in

existence (Carpenter 2007, p. 800). The findings of studies based on drug tests have revealed that companies that engage in the drug tests and zero tolerance policies have less cases of drug abuse hence less crimes and more safety compared to work places or organizations who do not subject their employees to the policies (Carpenter 2007, p. 800).

Impact of drug policy on crimes experienced in work environments

Illicit drugs like marijuana and alcohol have been associated with increased impairment of cognitive functions which directly affect employee output and interaction with the surroundings (Doran *et al.* 2017, p. 126). Undesirable behaviors like fights, stealing and non performance in work places may be caused by a wide range of factors and it is only through relevant tests that the causal factors can be established. Carrying out tests on employees and subjecting those found with high levels of drugs in their fluid samples to punishments or rehabilitation have proved to be a significant tool of dealing with drug abuse related outcomes in work places. A case study by (Doran *et al.* 2017, p. 127) shows that less is spent on accident cases, absent employees and other safety compromises when the tests are carried out and the drug policies adhered to unless in cases when the policy is absent and employees engage in drug abuse at their free will.

Social relationships are significant in work place environments since they enable the workers to engage in team work and become more productive. Unfortunately, drug abuse interferes with social interactions since the behavior of a drug abuse is impaired and they become withdrawn making it impossible for them to be productive in team work. In other cases, the drug abusers are violent and they instill fear and poor cooperation among other workers and the violence could result to criminal activities as reported by Cheng & McElderry (2017, p. 156). To solve such outcomes, a drug policy that limits drug levels that employees have in their body

systems is an efficient solution since the behavior and social aspects of all workers will be standardized resulting to work safety and pleasing outputs.

These research findings reveal that drug policies are a promising approach of dealing with the high crime and accident rates in work places since non sober and cognitively impaired individuals are accountable for most of these happenings hence in absence of drug abuse, the happenings are eliminated or at least minimized and safety is enhanced.

Barriers against establishment of drug policy in work place

Despite the confirmed positive impacts of drug policies in enhancing work place safety, the concept is not well embraced globally due to some challenges. One major challenge is cost since the drug tests involve obtaining samples and taking them through laboratory tests while giving reports and some work places or organizations may lack the capacity to fund this (Orvis 1994, p. 295). The ethical issues involved have also acted as a barrier since the workers may feel like their private lives are being interfered with when they are forced to go through tests and it is also difficult to carry out adequate studies on the relationship between drug abuse and work place accidents and safety since workers cannot just be assigned to experimental groups that subject them to drug abuse (Orvis 1994, p. 296). Researchers are therefore forced to rely on self assessments and extraction of medical data which may fail to be inclusive or accurate especially if workers attend diverse healthcare facilities.

Summary of solution to the crimes and accidents caused in work places by drug abuse

Accidents and crimes in workplaces attributed to drug abuse are the basic causes of economic losses, poor social relations and low productivity. Drug policies in work places help in

modifying behaviors and cognitive functions of existing drug abusers and warning the prospective abusers who are aiming at becoming employees in the future.

- It is significant that federal governments, private and public institutions embrace the establishment and implementation of drug policies since the impact of drug abuse cuts across all organizations and individuals in the society.
- Further research and assessments are needed to establish means of sealing the ethical and cost gaps which limit some organizations from participating in drug policies which rely on drug tests.
- Extensive education sessions that enable current and potential employees on the dangers of drug abuse at places at work should be carried out regularly to ensure that even as the drug policy is established, there is a firm foundation and understanding on its significance.

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