



EMPLOYMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS: A NEW ARENA FOR RESEARCH AND INTERVENTION?

BACKGROUND & ARGUMENTS

- Work has a strong influence on health. Although many people believe that people who use drugs are incapable of or unwilling to work, many drug users hold regular jobs.
- However, unemployment can be a daily challenge for drug users, especially those who use a lot of drugs or who have health issues that interfere with their ability to find and hold a job.
- We wrote an editorial exploring views and research about employment among people who use drugs.
- Addiction treatment and employment programs often require people to stop using drugs before they find a job.
- Further, the tendency to relapse often means individuals lose employment.
- We argue that there are potentially widespread advantages for people to have access to employment whether or not they are actively using drugs.

QUICK FACT

WE PROPOSE EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALITY WORK AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE ACTIVELY USING DRUGS ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF JOB TYPES.

FINDINGS

- While not well studied, the potential benefits of employment among active drug users include:
 - Increasing income and stability;
 - Gaining valuable work experience;
 - Building skills, self-esteem, and social networks;
 - Avoiding illegal ways of making money, such as drug dealing;
 - Lowering risky behaviour related to drug use and sexual activity;
 - Improving physical and mental health and lowering stress; and
 - Decreasing drug use.

IMPLICATIONS

- We propose expanding opportunities for quality work among people who are actively using drugs across a wide range of job types.
- Since work is linked to health, we call for an increased understanding of how access to employment among active drug users impacts their social and economic well-being, their drug use, and their health.

Richardson L, Sherman SG, Kerr T. **Employment amongst people who use drugs: A new arena for research and intervention?** *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 2011; 23(1): 3-5.

