



**Construction Trades:
Facing the Mental Health Issues of our Members**

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The construction industry is facing a serious mental health crisis, larger in scale and with more dire and detrimental outcomes than any other industry in the United States. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the US construction industry contributed \$2.8 trillion to the GDP in 2022 and employed more than ten million workers. **Unfortunately, the mental health of construction workers, who are the backbone of our economy, is often neglected.**

The term "mental health" encompasses a number of various conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, schizophrenia, alcoholism, and substance abuse. These conditions have important implications for employers that include absenteeism, turnover, disability, accident, and injury rates, not to mention healthcare and workers compensation costs.

Key Takeaways of this report:

- **1 in 5 construction workers suffers from some type of mental illness.**
- **The construction industry ranks #1 for substance abuse/addiction and #2 in suicide of all industries in the United States.**
- **76% of construction workers report at least one mental health symptom in the past year.**
- **Only 17% of construction workers would discuss personal mental health concerns with supervisors & only 18% would with co-workers.**
- **Primary reasons construction workers do not seek mental health help are shame/stigma, fear of judgment, fear of repercussions at work, and lack of knowledge where and how to access help.**

Mental health conditions in the construction industry are more prevalent than in any other industry, with **1 in 5 workers suffering from some type of mental health issue**. According to research conducted by the Construction Industry Rehabilitation Plan, 83% of construction workers have experienced some form of a moderate to severe mental health issue. Additionally, almost all numbers and statistics in regard to the mental health of construction workers are largely self-reported by the workers. The actual numbers of construction workers suffering from depression including suicide ideation, anxiety, substance abuse, and other mental health issues is likely much higher than the reported numbers.

Higher suicide rates

Research shows that up to 90% of people who die by suicide have a mental health condition, with depression cited as the most prevalent. The suicide rate among construction workers is drastically higher than the national average. According to the Center for Disease Control, **construction has the second highest suicide rate of all industry categories, at 56.0 every 100,000 workers**. This number is four times greater than the national average (17.3/100,000) and five times greater than all other construction fatalities combined (10.1/100,000). This means that suicide deaths in the construction industry are higher than deaths from OSHA's Fatal Four Hazards, (falls, struck-by, caught-in/between, and electrocution). Within the construction industry, trade-specific suicide rates include:

- Carpenters 69.4
- Construction equipment operators 58.6
- Electricians 52.1
- Glaziers 69.6
- Pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters 49.4
- Roofers 79.9
- Structural iron and steel workers 86.1

Substance abuse rates

Equally concerning is the very real issue of substance abuse in the construction industry. The *“National Household Survey of Drug Abuse”* revealed that substance abuse in the construction industry is twice the national average. Data from the *“National Survey on Drug Use”* and *“Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services”* found that the construction industry is found at/near the top in most categories:

ISSUE	RANK
pain reliever abuse (22%)	1
marijuana abuse (60%)	1
heroin abuse (4.5%)	1
substance abuse disorders (16%)	2
heavy drinking (16%)	2

The national opioid overdose epidemic is hitting the construction industry particularly hard due to the physical demands of the industry and injuries that require being treated with opioids.

Construction workers have been shown to have higher death rate from accidental death from opioid overdose than any other industry.

Additionally, OSHA statistics show that substance abuse is the inherent reason for 65% of all work-related accidents. Additionally, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Labor, **substance abusers are 25-30% less productive** than non-abusing employees due to issues such as tardiness/sleeping on the job, hangover on-site, poor decision-making, cloudy thinking and slower reaction times, lower morale, and increased interpersonal issues with co-workers and supervisors.

This study further shows that substance-abusing employees negatively affect cost-overruns due to compensation and insurance claims, increased health care expenses, training of new employees/higher turnover, and theft. Approximately 80% of substance-abusing employees were found to have stolen from employers to support their drug use. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates substance abuse costs American Businesses about \$110 billion/year. In addition to these issues, **substance abusers are absent 3.8-8.3 times as often** as a non-substance using employee, are more likely to be involved in illegal activities in the workplace such as buying and selling illicit substances in the workplace, and are more often involved in legal issues with the company due to an inability to meet terms of a hiring document, getting fired, and disciplinary procedures due to an increase in violence and crime.

What is causing this crisis?

Mental health issues have become the norm rather than the exception, and the causes are numerous and complex. The Qualtrics "*Mental Health at Work Report*" in 2021 revealed that, among construction workers, **76% reported confronting at least one symptom of a mental health condition within the prior year**. This is up from 59% as recently as 2019. Most of these industry workers have suffered symptoms associated with stress, anxiety, depression, burnout.

Certainly, the nature of the construction industry itself places workers at much higher risk for significant mental health issues. According to a CDC study, many risk factors that are associated with mental illness are inherent to the industry:

- competitive & high-pressure work environment
- high prevalence of alcohol & substance abuse
- end-of-season layoffs, job insecurity
- geographic separation from family
- long hours
- unpredictable job changes, deadlines, and delays
- job sites that are extremely loud, have temperature extremes, and can be isolating

Long work hours and large volumes of required overtime can lead to fatigue and increased chances of injury. There is also undeniable wear-and-tear on workers' bodies due to the physical demands of construction jobs often lead to chronic pain. A 2019 survey of construction workers, conducted by professors at Melbourne's RMIT University, shows that **workers whose pain originated at work had significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress**. Injuries at work are often treated with prescribed opioids which are often the seeds of substance abuse. Chronic pain and depression often lead to poor sleep habits and sleep deprivation, which in turn increase the likelihood of accidents. It's an endless loop.

An industry of “tough guys”

One of the primary reasons construction workers are so prone to mental health issues is the fact that almost 90% of construction workers are men. Typically, men underreport mental health issues and are much less likely to ask for and receive appropriate help. Additionally, **men are far more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol to "self-medicate" and are far more likely to commit suicide.** Both of these are extreme forms of self-treatment for chronic physical and mental health problems. The construction culture has traditionally idealized "toughness," risk-taking, stoicism, and self-reliance. The Construction Alliance for Suicide Prevention states that many within the industry suffer in silence due to these cultural expectations.

In a survey conducted by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation's Center for Workplace Mental Health and the Construction Financial Management Association, 93% of respondents stated addressing mental health at work is a

sound business practice. However, only 17% of workers felt comfortable discussing mental health issues with a supervisor, and only 18% would do so with a co-worker. According to a 2022 GALLUP study, **employees with inadequate mental health miss four times more work** and over 50% of workers stated they do not have easily accessible support services or do not know if they exist; this number jumps to 75% in the construction industry.

WHY MEN DON'T SEEK HELP FOR MENTAL ILLNESS ISSUES:

- Shame and stigma (78%)
- Fear of judgment by peers (77%)
- Fear of repercussions at work (55%)
- Don't know how to access mental health care (46%)

Making mental health a priority

Safety of the workers should be the top priority of any trade union, contractor, and company. To this end, vast amounts of research, time, and money have been spent creating work environments that are safer for the physical health of construction industry workers. Mental health should garner equal attention. In a recent survey, 44% of respondents believe that help should be available in a workplace to get this help. When it comes to mental health conditions, the best outcomes occur when people seek and connect with care early.

Organizations are realizing the impact that mental health has on their operations – on safety, performance, health and well-being of workers, quality of performance, and their financial bottom line. They are making it a priority through leadership engagement, raising mental health awareness, creating a mentally healthy organization, and enhancing access to services and support for their members.

Member1 Clinics shares this focus.

As proponents of Total Member Health™, Member1 Clinics believes that mental health is a crucial part of keeping your Members as happy and healthy as possible. We offer online mental health resources and educational materials for Members to help themselves.

We offer access to Virtual Mental Health Care (for an additional fee) through which Members can self-schedule appointments with licensed therapists and board-certified psychiatrists. These appointments can be conducted via phone or video, from any phone, tablet, or computer, and from wherever they feel most comfortable (at home, from their car, or anywhere else with Internet access). The sessions are 100% confidential: management of local trades never see the names of Members or dependents who have mental health appointments.

Call Member1 Clinics (844-612-5464) to learn more about how we can help improve the mental health of your most important asset.

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