

Safety issue revealed as 1 in 20 Australian workers admits to drinking at work

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A national survey has found that more than one in twenty Australian workers report using alcohol while at work or just before work, and more than one in fifty report taking drugs during or just before work. These findings, published online today in the journal *Addiction*, have implications for workplace safety.

Researchers used data from the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), which polled over 23,000 Australian residents aged 12 and over on their use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The resulting statistics showed that working while under the influence of alcohol or drugs was more likely to happen in the hospitality, construction, and financial services industries. Young, male, never married workers with no dependent children were likelier than other groups to [work](#) under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Managers showed the highest prevalence of alcohol use at work, while tradespeople and unskilled workers were most likely to use drugs at work.

The most commonly used workplace drugs were [painkillers](#) and [amphetamines](#) and methamphetamines (stimulants), followed by cannabis and ecstasy. But alcohol was by far the most popular intoxicating substance used at work.

The survey also revealed that a substantial portion of workers who use alcohol or drugs at work appear to underestimate their negative affect on [workplace safety](#). For example, only 17% of those who reported using alcohol at work also reported attending work while under the influence

of alcohol, a discrepancy that suggests the respondents did not associate drinking at work with potentially dangerous impairment. Workplace [drug users](#) showed a similar discrepancy: they used drugs at work but did not think they were drug-impaired. The [discrepancy](#) may be because some drinking and drug use occurs among co-workers after work but before leaving the workplace, in places like canteens, lunchrooms, and changing rooms. Says lead author Ken Pidd, "People may not think of a drink or a joint in the parking lot after work as a 'workplace' activity, but it does negatively affect workplace safety. Out of the 295 Australian workplace fatalities reported in 2006 and 2007, almost a third were caused by auto accidents while travelling to and from work. Showing up at work and leaving work while under the influence of alcohol or drugs may have a lot to do with those high numbers."

Provided by Wiley

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