

# Substance abuse among nurses—warning signs and barriers

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Research published in *Substance Abuse* journal has found that 48 percent of the respondents in a study on drug abuse within the nursing profession reported drug or alcohol use at work. The study was conducted to learn more about substance abuse issues in conjunction with mental illness in nurses, specifically about on-the-job use and prevention. The article, *Substance Use and Mental Illness Among Nurses: Workplace Warning Signs and Barriers to Seeking Assistance*, looks into the statistics of drug use by nurses, and potential solutions to the barriers for outreach.

Substance abuse within the [nursing profession](#) is a particularly concerning area, due to the nature of their job and their interaction with patients. The research was conducted using responses from 302 nurses. The survey looked into substance-related behaviors in the workplace; behavioral cues that may lead to earlier identification of substance use and mental illness; perceptions of barriers to seeking help; and strategies for preventing issues and overcoming barriers to seeking assistance.

48 percent of the [respondents](#) reported drug or alcohol use at work, and 40 percent felt that their competency level was affected by their use. 27 percent of respondents acknowledged that patients were put at risk one or more times because of their substance use. Out of those surveyed, 25 percent indicated that they obtained drugs in the workplace.

The results indicated that problem recognition and seeking assistance is also an issue for nurses due to various barriers. Over 50 percent of respondents answered "somewhat" or "a lot" to the following barriers:

too scared, too embarrassed to seek assistance, concerns about confidentiality, and thought they would lose their license. To overcome those barriers, respondents recommended more education about how to seek support from friends, colleagues, and family, as well as what steps to take to seek help confidentially, so their licenses are not at risk.

The authors said of the importance of this research, "We hope that our findings can be used to help improve awareness and understanding of substance use and [mental illness](#) among nurses and their professional peers, inform education and training efforts in nursing schools, encourage further research to explore the prevention and early identification of co-occurring disorders in healthcare settings where [nurses](#) work, and ultimately enhance public safety."

**More information:** Alexa Cares et al. Substance Use and Mental Illness Among Nurses: Workplace Warning Signs and Barriers to Seeking Assistance, *Substance Abuse* (2014). [DOI: 10.1080/08897077.2014.933725](#)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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