

Job skills training leads to long-term reduction in drug abuse

May 13 2020, by Jeff Grabmeier

Job skills training for low-income youth does more than just help them get better jobs—it makes them significantly less likely than others to use some illicit drugs, even 16 years later.

These [positive effects](#) on drug use were seen in those who received job-specific skills training, but not in [youth](#) who received only basic job services, such as help with job search or a General Education Development (GED) program.

Results showed that the use of [illicit drugs](#) such as cocaine and heroin (not including marijuana) declined for youth who received [job-skills](#) training, down to 2.8 percent after 16 years. However, illicit [drug use](#) increased for those who received only basic services, up to 5.2 percent in the same time.

"We have to look at what kind of job services we provide low-income youth, because they don't all provide the same level of benefits," said Sehun Oh, lead author of the study and assistant professor of social work at The Ohio State University.

"There were positive spillover effects from job training on drug misuse, which we did not see in youth who were provided only more basic services."

The study appears in the June 2020 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

The results are important because the federal and state governments emphasize a "job-first" approach that focuses on helping adults in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program obtain immediate employment, Oh said.

Under a "job first" approach, people usually receive only basic services, which alone were not found to be helpful in preventing drug misuse in this study.

The study uses data about [young people](#) from around the country who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. The NLSY97 interviewed people who were between the ages of 13 and 17 in 1997 and then interviewed the same people 17 times until 2016. The NLSY is conducted by Ohio State's Center for Human Resource Research for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The researchers identified 581 people from NLSY97 who participated in government-sponsored employment programs for low-income youth and adults.

About half reported receiving job skills training services, such as vocational training, on-the-job training, work experience, and other classroom training for a specific job. The other half received only basic services, such as a GED program or job-search assistance.

Results showed that binge drinking decreased significantly among both the basic services and job skills training groups, with no group differences found in the trends.

Slightly more than 40 percent of both groups said they engaged in binge drinking (5 or more drinks on one occasion in the past month) at the start of the study, which declined to 30 percent in year 16.

Marijuana use was relatively steady for both groups over the entire period of the study, with 11 to 16 percent of the groups reporting they had used the [drug](#) in the past year.

The reduction seen in the use of illicit drugs like cocaine and heroin is an advantage of job skills [training](#) programs that has not been studied before, Oh said.

"Substance misuse is a significant public health problem in the United States," he said.

"Giving people the skills needed to get good jobs is one way to help fight that crisis, and one that doesn't come from a '[jobs](#)-first' approach."

Provided by The Ohio State University

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