

Opioid addiction in male-dominated trades

Workers in the trades often work in physically demanding, high-risk environments where they can experience injuries and pain or witness traumatic workplace accidents. While these jobs are rewarding, they also come with challenges that impact their physical and mental health. Unfortunately, many men in the trades will deal with these challenges by misusing prescription medications, such as opioid to manage pain or cope with the stresses of the job.

Opioid addiction among trades workers is a growing concern, with significant impacts on worker well-being and safety. To make matters worse, men in the trades face unique barriers to seeking help.

Given that the vast majority of Ontario's trade workforce is male, workplaces cannot ignore men's mental health and addiction issues. Employers have a duty to provide a safe and supportive work environment—addressing mental health in the workplace is not only the right thing to do but also makes the workplace safer overall.

Mental health and addiction can directly impact a worker's job performance, leading to a higher risk of accidents and injuries. Addiction, anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems can impair concentration, decision-making, and physical coordination.

Male suicide rates in Canada

- Males account for more than 75 per cent of suicides in Canada. That is an average of 50 men per week dying by suicide. The suicide rate in construction is four times greater than the North American average.
- Canadian men are around three times more likely to experience addiction and substance abuse compared to Canadian women. This includes alcohol, cannabis, and opioid abuse.
- Use of more than one illicit substance and daily use of illicit substances is higher among men.
- Risk factors such as educational dropout, unemployment and loneliness, which are strong determinants of mental health issues, including suicide and substance abuse, are disproportionately affecting men and boys.

Masculine gender norms creating barriers

- Masculine gender norms can cause men to feel greater shame than women in seeking help for mental illness. As a result, men often downplay their symptoms.
- Men's issues often stem from societal expectations and traditional gender roles, which may lead men to think that they must:
 - Be the breadwinners in the family
 - Display traditional "masculine" traits, such as strength, control, and aggression
 - Rely on oneself and not seek help from others
 - Not speak openly about their emotions
- Holding on to these traditional beliefs can negatively influence men's mental health and keep them from accessing support and treatment.
- Men's health must be considered more than a problem of masculinity. Men themselves are not the problem; the problem is how our society has placed unrealistic gender norms upon them.
- We need to offer real solutions that meet men where they are and give them the tools to not only survive, but to thrive.

- Understanding the bigger picture of the problems men face in our society concerning mental health and substance use is key to understanding the needs of your workforce.
- We must all challenge our gender bias towards men to build greater compassion and empathy for the challenges they face.

What should employers do to help?

To address male worker's unique mental health needs, employers should provide the following:

- Specific training about the distinct mental health challenges and societal expectations men face.
- Male-centered and culturally sensitive programs, information, and services to empower men to make informed choices about their health.
- A workplace culture that encourages and supports open conversations about mental health and substance use.

More resources

- R U OK? website (at www.ruok.org.au/about-us)
- IHSA's mental health safety talks at ihsa.ca/safetytalks
- Mindfit Toolkit from the Canadian Men's Mental Health Foundation (at menshealthfoundation.ca/mindfit-toolkit)
- Movember's Rooted and Rising Collective (at movermber.com/about/rooted-rising-collective)
- Man Therapy website (at mantherapy.org)
- Suicide Crisis Helpline (call or text 988 or visit 988.ca)
- Multi-lingual mental health resources for newcomers from the Canadian Association for Mental Health (at <https://kmb.camh.ca/eenet/news/multilingual-mental-health-resources-newcomers>)