INTRODUCTION

• In the midst of the pandemic, the U.S. remains entrenched in an opioid crisis with the rate of opioid overdose (128 people/day) increasing in more than 40 states.
• Workers with opioid use disorder are more likely to lose employment (Krueger, 2017).
• Construction workers have a high risk of opioid misuse, abuse, and overdose due to work factors (higher proportion with pain from work injuries, fewer offered paid sick leave, and high rates of alcohol use).
• During the pandemic, job loss and drug and alcohol use has increased.
• The purpose of this study was to identify employment factors that acted as barriers and facilitators in the development of opioid use disorder (OUD) among construction workers.

METHODS

• We recruited former & current construction workers with a diagnosis of OUD or who self-identified as misusing opioids (n=25).
• The interview asked open-ended and probing questions about the workers’ journey to OUD; barriers and facilitators of employment experiences while using opioids, OUD treatment and recovery, and re-employment.
• Interview recordings were transcribed; all identifiers were removed from transcripts.
• Development of codes:
  - Two research technicians (AS and SB) jointly open-coded two interview transcripts in NVivo.
  - Initial codes were matched to employment categories (worker, co-workers/supervisors, employer policy and culture, and state and federal laws and regulations) within the social ecological model (SEM).
  - Technicians independently coded 3 more transcripts and discussed differences to refine the code book.
  - Agreement of independent codes was assessed.
• Initial coded transcripts were summarized by employment categories of SEM and preliminary themes were identified.
• Future plan: all remaining interviews (n=20) will be independently coded.

RESULTS / PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Summary of Themes

• Employment-related issues span all levels of the SEM.
• Employment factors (i.e. health insurance) influence the development of opioid use disorder.
• Education about employer policies and procedures is needed
  – "I had no idea we had some of the benefits that we had cause nobody ever told me.”
• Workers perceive drug testing as an ineffective deterrent of drug use
  – “The people that do drugs every day…a drug test never stopped anyone before”
• Co-workers in recovery from substance use disorder can be role models or provide support to those who still use or are in recovery
  – “[I] just happened to get put on a job with another guy…and this gentleman was in AA and had some years of sobriety, and you know, we became good friends, and you know, I expressed to him wanting to kind of change, do something different. And so he was willing to help me.”

The Coding Process

• Coding agreement between two technicians of two independently coded transcripts was approximately 75% as assessed by NVivo report.
• Joint and independent coding processes were important to develop clear, consistent codes and relate the codes to a pre-determined conceptual model.
• Continued discussion will be needed to code barriers and facilitators of remaining interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

• Preliminary results suggest employment factors influence the development of opioid use disorders.
• Employment factors acted as barriers and facilitators in workers’ employment experience and use of drugs.
• These preliminary findings suggest that there is opportunity for employers to influence workers’ drug use through their policies, benefits, and workplace culture.
• Future plan: code the outstanding interviews and summarize findings. Potential strategies and positive employer policies and programs will also be explored in future interviews with employers.

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Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the NIH/NIDA grant: “Improving health and employment outcomes through workplace opioid policies,” R34 DA050044