

These are the workers who drink the most

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Researchers surveyed more than 3,500 workers in Norway about their alcohol habits and problems.

"Workers who drink too much don't get enough attention or help," says the head of the research project.

We all know that drinking too much is bad for our health — but it can also affect workplace productivity and safety.

And yet — workers drink. One Norwegian study from 2017 found that 25 percent of respondents said that they were hung over or less effective on the job because they had been drinking the day before.

Now, researchers have asked more than 3,500 workers in 14 different Norwegian industries and businesses about their drinking habits, and found a surprising prevalence of risky drinking, according to Dagens Medisin, a Norwegian professional publication.

Younger, childless men were most prone to this behaviour, according to the study, which was published in BMC Public Health. The study found that 33.5 per cent of this group drank so much, so often and with such bad side effects that their habits were considered for their health.

11 per cent risky drinkers

The study was based on a questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). Participants were given a score based on how they had answered the questions in the survey.

If they scored above a certain level, their drinking was defined as risky.

Of the 3571 participants, which included both women and men, 11 per cent were classified as risky drinkers.

Previous research has shown that between 10 and 30 per cent of European workers have risky drinking habits, if evaluated using the scores in the WHO's questionnaires.

Risk factors: male, single, childless

The survey showed that childless men were most likely to be risky drinkers.

Additionally, 31.4 per cent of men who lived alone and 26.5 per cent of all men under the age of 39 were found to be risky drinkers.

But the researchers also found some good news: 94.6 per cent of respondents who reported drinking enough to be assigned a risk category were actually in the lowest risk group, based on the WHO definitions.

"Most people are far from abusing alcohol, which suggests that raising awareness about alcohol habits could be a good approach. For example, the company health service could take on this job, and the companies

themselves could also work with the alcohol culture,” Thørrisen told Dagens Medisin.

Not enough attention or help

Professor Randi Wågø Aas, from the Faculty of Health Sciences at Oslo Metropolitan University, is in charge of a nationwide research project called WIRUS (Workplace Intervention Prevention Risky Use of Alcohol and Sick Leave), which now comprises 25 companies and around 6000 employees. She is also one of the researchers behind the new study.

"Alcoholism causes 5.9 per cent of deaths worldwide and is linked to more than 200 different illnesses such as cardiovascular disease. Risky alcohol consumption is likely one of the reasons behind any number of symptoms that cause us to visit the doctor. Prevention has clearly fewest side effects," she said.

Currently, workers who drink too much don't get much attention or help, Aas says. And it's not clear what's the best way to provide support to this group — whether it is via a general practitioner or another health care provider from the national health service or the hospital, or at the workplace, where the employer and corporate health services can take the lead, she wrote in an e-mail about her study.

“We're using the WIRUS project to test different workplace measures. We don't want to medicalize this public health problem, and we think the workplace should be explored more as a place where workers can get access to help. We are also aware of the positive aspects of alcohol use — which are also often experienced in the workplace,” she said.

Nevertheless, Aas said, studies have shown that over 40 percent of single-day work absences are related to alcohol consumption. Longer sick leave is also associated with alcohol use, she said.

“That makes it natural to look at the employer as a player in our work on this public health problem,” Aas said. “As they implement their HSE policies, employers should look beyond just physical activity, well-being, ergonomics, smoking and diet as they try to improve their workers' health.”

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[M. M. Thørrisen et al.: The associations between employees' risky drinking and sociodemographics, and implications for intervention needs. BMC Public Health, 14 June 2018.](#) [10]

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