

# What is the relationship between the experience of trauma and substance use among health care workers?

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## Background

The connection between trauma and substance use among healthcare providers (HCPs) is important to consider since those experiencing trauma are more likely to turn to substance use. Tobacco and alcohol are the two most abused substances; they have a significant impact on health outcomes. Healthcare providers are susceptible to experiencing workplace trauma due to the diverse settings in which they serve.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between trauma and substance abuse among HCPs. More specifically, this study aims to investigate the following:

- Frequency of current tobacco and risky alcohol use,
- Frequency and types of trauma experiences, and
- The relationships between the frequency of trauma experiences and current tobacco and risky alcohol use, while controlling for demographic factors.

## Study Design

Data was collected from 850 HCPs at a large academic medical center in Kentucky. From November 2018 to April 2019, surveys were completed by participants to examine how different factors such as demographics, work-related aspects, and lifestyle/behavioral changes are linked to tobacco use and risky alcohol consumption.

## Results

A significant association was found between trauma experiences and substance abuse with risky alcohol and tobacco use.

## Tobacco Use

Participants who reported tobacco use were more likely to be cohabiting or divorced/separated, have less than a college education level, work as nursing aides/assistants, work in psychiatry services, and serve the adult population.

## Risky Alcohol Use

Risky alcohol use was more common in participants aged 18 to 25 years, males, cohabiters, social workers/psychologists, and those with less than a year in their current role.

## Trauma Experiences and Substance Abuse

A significant association was found between trauma experiences and substance abuse with risky alcohol and tobacco use.

- Nearly 75% of participants reported at least one traumatic occurrence, of which 30% were work-related violence. The top trauma experience category was work-related and the least trauma experience category reported was war/terrorism (Figure 1).
- Nearly one-fourth (23.4%) of participants have received treatment services for trauma.
- While 11.5% of participants use tobacco, they reported workplace, personal, sexual/physical, and domestic violence trauma experience at much higher than non-tobacco users.
- While 11.6% of participants use alcohol, they reported sexual/physical and domestic violence and had received trauma treatment services in the past compared to non-risky alcohol users.

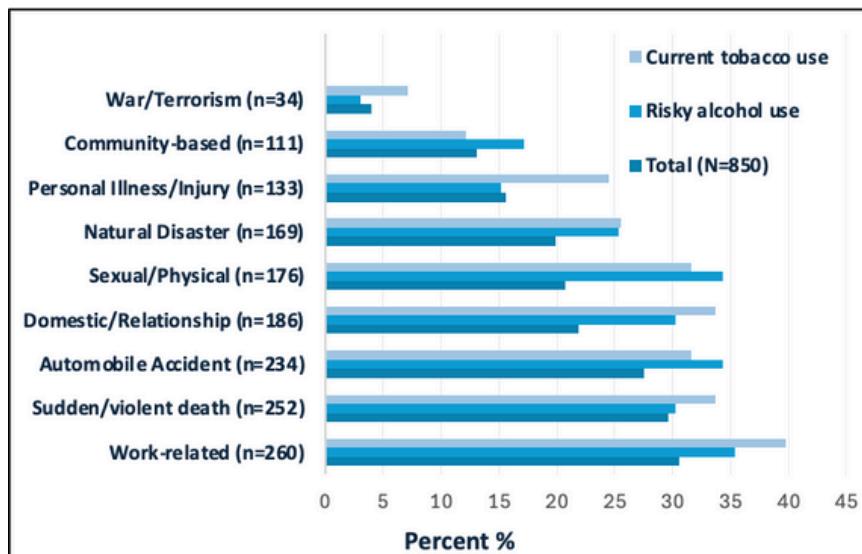


Figure 1: Percentage of current tobacco and risky alcohol use compared to total sample by trauma experience categories.

## Conclusion

- An association was found between trauma experiences and substance abuse with risky alcohol and tobacco use.
- Future studies should focus on interventions to enhance screening and treatment of trauma and substance use among healthcare professionals to improve behavioral health outcomes.