



IBEAM

Ideal Body Environment And Mind



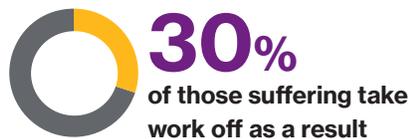
Video Three: Construction: An Industry in Crisis

Main Points

1. Higher rates of both mental illness and suicide occur in the construction industry in comparison to any other occupation.
2. Certain occupational challenges lead to a “perfect storm” of risk factors that increase construction workers risk of mental illness and suicide.
3. Industry leadership, more than ever, is acknowledging and addressing mental health issues in the construction industry.
4. Every person working in the construction industry has a role to play in supporting mental health and suicide prevention efforts.

➤ What is the problem?

The statistics on the state of mental health in construction are alarming and evidence of an industry in crisis. More than half of the industry workforce has experienced mental health issues.



Construction ranks number one of all industries in drug and alcohol abuse and the suicide rate is the highest of any other industry. Sadly, the suicide rate is 4 times greater than the national average.

➤ Why is it worse in the construction industry?

Traditional industry risk control and safety efforts focus nearly entirely on physical injury and loss, and greatly ignores mental health and wellness. However, a key to understanding the crisis is considering the occupational challenges and increased frequency of risk factors the construction labor force faces.

Occupational Culture

Rooted deep in the construction industry is a “tough guy/girl” or “macho” culture. Personality traits including risk taking, stoicism, self-reliance, and courageousness – all lead an individual to be less likely to seek help and assistance. Construction workers aren’t alone. Other occupations share this culture such as surgeons, athletes, and police officers.



The Nature of the Job

Certain characteristics of construction work itself create or enhance risk factors such as:

- The impermanence of projects
- Requirement to travel frequently and be away from family and friends
- Little or no connection to a workplace community
- Seasonality of jobs adds to fragmented work availability
- Possible inconsistency in pay and access to healthcare – bouts of job insecurity and lack of job control all increase someone's risk.

Stigma of mental illness

The stigma associated with mental illness can induce feelings of shame and fear, making it less likely for individuals to talk about mental illness or reach out for help when it's needed. In fact, two-thirds of those with a mental illness do not seek help.

However, it's important to know that reaching out for help is never a sign of weakness, but instead, a sign of strength

Substance Abuse

Sadly, construction ranks number one in drug and alcohol abuse of any industry. The wear and tear of physical labor makes injuries and chronic pain all too common. To treat pain, sufferers often turn to opioids and alcohol which may then lead to unintentional dependence or addiction. Feelings of shame and embarrassment of addiction may then lead to depression and even suicidal thoughts.

Military Background

Having served time in the U.S. military is an increasingly common background for many construction industry workers. Adjusting to civilian life has been recognized as a difficult transition. Many who have served in combat also are already at heightened risk for PTSD and other mental health disorders.

Access to Lethal Means

Having access to dangerous equipment, firearms, and narcotics places construction workers at higher risk of suicide.

Limited Access to Care

Most workers obtain health insurance through their employer or labor union, however having health insurance does not guarantee having adequate and appropriate coverage for mental health services. Busy work schedules that require being onsite may also conflict with the ability to see a provider.

➤ What is the industry doing about it?

More and more people in the construction industry recognize the impact of these risk factors and all agree that it's time for change. We cannot not allow this crisis to continue. The industry is working together to continue progress and key efforts that:

1. Strive to change the "tough guy/girl" culture through education and awareness training to one that exhibits acceptance, compassion and understanding of mental illness.
2. Work to break down stigma by talking about mental illness openly and honestly in group settings and one on one, by supporting one another in seeking help for mental illness, and by engaging with management and leadership in providing new resources at work.
3. Combat substance abuse by talking about it openly, providing more information about treatment resources available – regardless of financial situation, and ensure that employers do not discriminate based on history of mental illness and substance abuse issues if treatment was sought.
4. Provide additional support to former military members and veterans who may experience mental illness as a result of their time in the military and create closer ties with U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs services.

5. Develop career paths and cross train workforce to fill skills gaps and empower the workforce.
6. Promote job site safety, with the needed focus on mental health and suicide risk and prevention.
7. Encourage employers to provide adequate health insurance to construction workers that covers sick time, injuries, and temporary leaves of absence due to illness, injury, paternity leave, etc.
8. Reduce jobsite pressures through appropriate staffing and setting realistic expectations for progress and fulfilment.

➤ **What can I do about it?**

Everyone has a role in maintaining a safe and accepting work environment that supports mental health and wellness and prevents suicide. Here are a few ways you can be a part of the solution:

1. Engage in toolbox talks about mental health and openly support employer mental health initiatives.
2. Combat stigma surrounding mental illness by saying something when inflammatory or discriminatory language is used at a job site. The language we use matters. Calling a co-worker crazy or a psychopath is stigmatizing language.
3. If you notice a co-worker is struggling, reach out to them. Show your colleagues that you genuinely care about them. Acts of kindness within the workplace create a safe environment to express new ideas, innovate, and reach the highest potential.
4. Participate and encourage others to participate in company activities like stress management workshops or other education programs that support mental health. Ongoing skills training keeps a workforce mentally fit.
5. Familiarize yourself with the protocol to report when toxic behavior is happening on a job site. This can be related to physical safety, sexual harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, or other discriminatory acts. Mitigating toxic behavior at work creates a safe and healthy workplace where people want to work.

If you are worried you may be experiencing a mental health crisis or having thoughts of suicide, call the National Lifeline at +1 800-273-8255 OR text "Hello" to the Crisis Text Line at 741-741 for free, confidential 24/7 support.

➤ **Find more information about mental health at**
willistowerswatson.com/underthehardhat

It is our obligation to create a safer, more responsive and compassionate construction industry. By applying the same mentality into psychological safety as we do to physical safety, we can help create a culture that supports holistic wellbeing.

Now, perhaps more than ever, we must remember to focus equally on the hard hat and what goes on under it.

Contact

Jonathan Oppenheim

Southeast Region Construction Leader

+1 404 224 5062

jon.oppenheim@willistowerswatson.com



About SAVE

SAVE is the nation's leading nonprofit agency working to prevent suicide through public awareness and education, reduce stigma, and serve as a resource to those touched by suicide. For more than 30 years SAVE has been at the forefront of suicide prevention and is the world's leader in developing safe messaging standards, practices and awareness campaigns on suicide prevention. We developed an evidence-based program for suicide prevention, numerous best practice tools and a peer support program to help those in crisis. SAVE also conducts professional training, education, technical assistance and provides consultation to businesses, organizations, communities and governments on all aspects of suicide prevention, intervention and postvention (grief after suicide).

About Willis Towers Watson

Willis Towers Watson (NASDAQ: WLTW) is a leading global advisory, broking and solutions company that helps clients around the world turn risk into a path for growth. With roots dating to 1828, Willis Towers Watson has 45,000 employees serving more than 140 countries and markets. We design and deliver solutions that manage risk, optimize benefits, cultivate talent, and expand the power of capital to protect and strengthen institutions and individuals. Our unique perspective allows us to see the critical intersections between talent, assets and ideas – the dynamic formula that drives business performance. Together, we unlock potential. Learn more at willistowerswatson.com.



willistowerswatson.com/social-media

Copyright © 2020 Willis Towers Watson. All rights reserved.
WTW528273/12/2020

willistowerswatson.com



Willis Towers Watson