

More than 1 in 10 employees willing to use drugs to cope with job demands

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Tuesday, 20 July 2021

Over 10 percent of employees are willing to take prescription drugs to cope with strain from work, according to new research from the University of Cologne. Three percent reported that they already did so in the past.

The researchers, Professors Myriam Baum, Sebastian Sattler and Mareike Reimann, investigated employee willingness to use prescription drugs to enhance their cognitive function as a response to strain.

They found that job demands, such as agreed working time, overtime, shift work, emotional demands, job insecurity and leadership responsibility, as well as scarcity of resources such as lacking social support, increased strain – making it more likely for employees to rely on drugs for cognitive enhancement.

The researchers used data from a representative survey of employees in Germany, which analysed various job demands and resources, levels of perceived stress and willingness to use drugs for non-medical purposes.

“Our study suggests that respondents who perceive more stress hope that taking prescription drugs is sufficient to help them cope with pressure, and therefore increase or maintain their brain function,” says Dr. Sattler.

The study also found that being a woman, higher in age, and a higher level of education also increases the willingness to take drugs to cope with strain.

“Although employees might experience such drug use as beneficial, they also risk side effects and longterm health consequences, while at the same time their colleagues might perceive such behavior as getting an unfair edge”, says Dr. Sattler.

The researchers hope that these results delivered new insights into mechanisms behind nonmedical prescription drug use that can be used to prevent such behaviour and potential negative health consequences.

Sattler says that “employers’, physicians’, and at-risk individuals’ awareness should be raised that resources such as active strain management, resilience training, or job crafting can help to handle stress and increase work performance”.

The research paper was published in the journal *Current Psychology*

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