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15 pct of workforce affected by alcohol: study

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By Jamie McGeever

NEW YORK (Reuters) - There may be an alcohol problem brewing in American offices, shops and factories.

An estimated 15 percent of the U.S. workforce consumes alcohol on the job, has a drink before going to work or otherwise is under the influence of alcohol, according to a study by the University of Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions.

That equates to some 19.2 million workers impaired during the workday via intoxication, withdrawal or hangover.

"Clear policies should be in place regarding alcohol impairment and impairment at work," wrote Doctor Michael Frone, principal investigator of the study.

"But despite management's responsibility for the development and enforcement of such policies, managers report elevated rates of consuming alcohol during the workday, working under the influence of alcohol, and working with a hangover," he said.

The institute said that the study, the first of workplace alcohol use to utilize a representative sample of the U.S. workforce, surveyed 2,805 employed adults across the United States from January 2002 through June 2003.

Young, single men figured prominently among those who were affected by alcohol, the results showed.

Drinking on the job, being under the influence or working with a hangover was more prevalent among men than women, more common among younger workers than older staff, and among unmarried workers than married workers, the study found.

Coming into work with a hangover was the most common finding.

The highest levels of alcohol use and impairment were in management, sales, catering and construction.

"Of all psychoactive substances with the potential to impair cognitive and behavioral performance, alcohol is the most widely used and misused substance in the general population and the workforce," Frone said.

"The misuse of alcohol by employed adults is an important social policy issue with the potential to undermine employee productivity and safety," he added.

The institute said that 10.8 percent admitted they either drank at work, before work or turned up with a hangover but that it happened less than once a month, while 2.9 percent said it was a monthly occurrence and 1.65 percent said weekly.

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