



# Common Factors Related to Illicit Substance Use Among Nurses in North America

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**Introduction-**  
The prevalence of illicit substance use among registered nurses, though not widely studied or addressed, is understood to be an essential issue facing healthcare professionals. An impaired nurse is defined as someone who has impaired functioning as a result of substance abuse and it interferes with their professional judgment and ability to deliver safe, high quality care. Registered nurses have access to many high-controlled prescription medications, with little oversight, and the opportunity for substance abuse is significant. In our research, we studied the risk factors, the prevalence, and the preventative measures involved in addressing illicit substance use among nurses.



## Findings-

- Specialties: Critical care and emergency nurses are more likely to report using marijuana and cocaine. Oncology and psychiatry had high overall substance use rates. Psychiatric, gerontology, and emergency nurses had high rates of smoking.
- Factors associated: increased role strain due to high expectations, ready access to prescription medications, disrupted lifestyle due to inconsistent work schedules
- Psychosocial factors that predict drug abuse: distance in the family, psychological stress, low self-esteem, low religiosity, high sensation seeking, misuse of a substance within the family, high use of drugs among peers, and early use of tobacco alcohol and drugs.
- Other factors: females, homosexual, married, prescription opiates most commonly used, worked in suburban settings or hospitals, victims of physical and verbal abuse
- Research must be focused on a whole person rather than on specific parts or factors.

## Summary/Implications for Practice –

- Nursing managers play a significant role in addressing substance-related issues among nurses. It is important they recognize the ineffectiveness of discipline for the substance-related risk mitigation.
- Educating those entering high-risk specialties on recognition of problem users in clinical practice settings, goal of early identification and treatment
- Early risk indicators allow a focus on prevention, education, and early identification. We can then implement methods and evaluate the successfulness of interventions.

## Conclusion-

- Throughout our research, we were able to identify and evaluate the various risk factors for substance use among nurses. We also found that the two biggest reasons for not getting help after becoming involved with illicit drugs were that these nurses were “too embarrassed to discuss it with anyone” and they “did not think anyone could help.” All nurses should be aware of risk factors and signs of someone who is involved with frequent drug use in order to lessen the use of illicit substances among themselves and peers.
- Further research is needed to evaluate early risk indicators and signs of someone who is using illicit drugs. These can be taught to nursing students in school, leading to being able to identify and prevent substance use for themselves and those around them.

## Study Design/Sample

Study Title	Design	Sample
Early risk indicators of substance abuse among nurses	Quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and comparative	N=100 Substance impaired, N=100 Non impaired
Family History of Alcohol and Drug Use in Health Care Professionals	Cross-sectional descriptive self report survey	N=697
Substance abuse among nurses: differences between specialties	Balanced stratified sample w/ anonymous surveys	N=6,000
Physicians and Nurses with substance abuse disorders	Retrospective record reviews and perspective questionnaires	N=37
Substance use disorders among registered nurses	Qualitative Self-report questionnaires	N=4,064

# References

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