Outcomes of drug and alcohol testing among offshore workers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (a preliminary study)

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ABSTRACT

Background: Drug and Alcohol screening tests have been employed in the oil and gas sector for decades particularly as most roles in this sector require working in the offshore environment in safety critical capacities. These screening tests wherever employed aim to identify substance abusers in particular and deter off shore workers in general from engaging in the harmful use of drugs and alcohol. Employee Drug and Alcohol screening is gaining popularity in Nigeria’s thriving Oil and Gas Industry. Unfortunately, there is little available information regarding the outcomes of workplace drug and alcohol testing in Nigeria.

Objective: This study aims to evaluate outcomes of drug screening among offshore workers in Nigeria.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 448 offshore workers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in attendance at a local Occupational Health Clinic from July 2014 to July 2015 for different aspects of fitness to work testing including Drug & Alcohol screening. Screening results were anonymized appropriately and grouped by race, age and sex.

Results: A total of 14 samples (3.1% of the samples analysed) were found to be non-negative for illicit drugs and one sample for alcohol. Benzodiazepines accounted for the majority of the non-negative samples (8 samples - 57%), followed by methadone (3 samples - 21%), cannabis (2 samples - 14%) and amphetamines (1 sample - 7%). 1 sample was positive for alcohol (0.2%) Following confirmatory testing for 4 samples the detection rate further dropped to 2.2%.

Conclusion: This study showed a low detection rate for illicit drug and alcohol use among offshore workers probably due to the deterrence factor of testing. The substances detected in order of frequency were Benzodiazepines, cannabis, amphetamines and alcohol. Little or no confirmatory testing and a punitive approach to workplace testing are just some of the problems that were observed in the course of the study. More extensive research needs to be done in this area.