

Opioids: Declining America's Workforce

Studies show the opioid crisis is affecting the workforce in America

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MADISON COUNTY, Ala. - The opioid crisis is targeting people and it is hitting hard.

It is an epidemic that does not care about race, gender, or age.

None of that matters when it comes to substance abuse, but there is a group of people that seem to be suffering more from opioid abuse, working age men and women.

Overdoses, families and the individuals impacted come to mind when you think of substance abuse and consequences of the opioid crisis are also creating a decline in America's workforce.

Goldman Sachs is a financial powerhouse on Wall Street, a financial institute that focuses on the economy.

So when a rare study, by the institute, came out it was hard to ignore.

Goldman Sachs placed a bull's eye on Drug abuse.

Specifically how Opioids are affecting the number of people employed and those actively searching for work.

Studies from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show a drop in unemployment rates.

At the start of February the rate was unchanged at 4.1% with about 6.7 million unemployed.

Of that 3.9% are adult men, but what's mind boggling for economists, job markets show strong numbers, yet people are not searching for jobs.

"You have people that are professionals, you have physicians and pharmacists and nurses and lawyers and businessmen and bankers and all sorts of people," said Patty Sykstus.

Goldman Sachs says addiction to opioids is part to blame.

On average, 115 Americans die every day from an opioid according to the CDC.

In 2016 Opioids killed 42,000 people.

Sykstus said, "That's a jet plane going down everyday. That's a huge number and many of those people most of those people are in prime working years of their lives. They're 18,19-55."

37-year-old Justin Parker is in what he would call the prime working age of his life.

For now he is spending his days at His Way a recovery center for men in Huntsville.

"It's going to consume every thought that you have and it's going to basically dictate every mood you make," said Justin Parker.

Parker's credentials include a B.A. from Heritage Christian University in Florence.

He's worked throughout his life and has had financial stability a prototype of the American Dream.

"Personally speaking I know that when you try to serve two masters it doesn't work out too well," said Parker.

So many prime age adults are dealing with a similar struggle as Parker.

He said, "When you're trying to do the normal thing and hold a job down so to speak show up clock in show up uphold your basic responsibilities but yet you're constantly thinking about getting your next fix."

Patty Sykstus is the President of Not One More Alabama.

A group of family members and professionals working together and addressing the epidemic of substance abuse.

Sykstus said, "Those people are coming out of the workforce. If they are in active addiction, struggling with their addiction they may be unemployable. Even if they can get a job they may have a hard time holding a job. I think employers are becoming more and more aware of the problem. If they have a good employee that they want to retain it's in their interest to help that employee and help them find treatment."

According to a 2014 study by the National Survey on Drug Use and health about 9.5 million adults aged 18 or older misused opioids in the previous year.

That's a prime age group of adults capable of employment in America's workforce.