Research on Employment and Substance Abuse Treatment

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Major Limitation of the Body of Research on Employment and Treatment

- Almost all research in the area uses employment or vocational status as a dependent (or outcome) variable.
- Very few studies examine vocational services as an independent (or treatment) variable.
Other Limitations

- Typically descriptive, non-experimental designs
  - Restricted to using correlation or regression analyses to examine relationships
  - Non-random assignment or samples of convenience
  - Poorly defined client groups (i.e., heterogeneous samples)
  - Few studies use control or comparison groups of people not in treatment

- Systematic bias or threats to validity are often not addressed (e.g., self-selection, response rates, response bias, inadequate measures, labor market factors, etc.)
Limitations (continued)

- Employment criteria are loosely defined and often watered down (e.g., $1000 in earnings = employment)
- Few longitudinal studies
- Most studies have small n – larger studies are archival
- No systematic, theory-based inquiry
Employment As An Outcome Measure

- What is the impact of substance abuse on employability?
People With Alcohol and Drug Problems Are Employable

- 70% of illicit drug users are employed (NIDA, 1990)
- 10% of employed males and 2% of employed females are heavy drinkers
- 8% of employed males and 6% of employed females used illicit drugs within the last 30 days (Normand et al., 1994)
- Substance abusing population have about 15-30% employment rate (compared to 71-76% for non-abusers; TIP, 2000)
Most People in Treatment Are Not Employed (Platt & Metzger, 1987)

- Less than 33% are employed while in treatment
- 74% of those in methadone treatment are inconsistently employed, typically unemployed, or constantly unemployed
- Less than 50% of people in methadone treatment consider themselves to be “job ready” (NIDA, 1996)
Identified Barriers to Employment (Jason et al., 2001)

- Low motivation and learned helplessness
- High risk environments
- Poor social supports
- Low educational attainment
The likelihood of obtaining employment is negatively correlated with commonly found conditions (Platt, 1995):

- Cultural minority status;
- Physical disability;
- Criminal record;
- Mental instability;
- Less than high school education.
Research on Employment as Treatment Outcome

- Predicting Employment Outcome (Wickizer et al., 1997)
  - 12-18% of outcome accounted for by treatment factors (e.g., duration of treatment)
  - 33% of outcome accounted for by client characteristics (e.g., gender, age)
- Pretreatment employment is the best predictor of posttreatment employment (Gill, 1994)
Employment Outcome Research (continued)

- Receiving treatment increased the probability of obtaining employment and increased earnings (Wickizer et al. 2000)
- Obtaining and holding posttreatment employment is the best predictor of long-term successful treatment outcome in women (Gregoire & Snively, 2001)
Some Gender-based findings (Suffet, 2001)

- Men are more likely than women to be employed both before and after treatment
- Employment was positively related to education and stable housing in both sexes
- Employment was negatively related to the number of work barriers in both sexes
  - Women had more barriers to employment than men
- Employment was negatively correlated with mobility and sensory impairment in men
- Employment was negatively correlated with the number of children and being pregnant
Vocational Services as a Component of Treatment

- Employment may provide a continuum of benefits to client which support treatment goals.

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<th>Objective</th>
<th>Subjective</th>
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<td>Wages - Structured Day - Peer Group - Positive Regard - Self Esteem - Self Identity</td>
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Substance Abuse Clients Want Vocational Services That Result in Meaningful Help

- 88% want vocational services if services resulted in full-time employment paying $8-10 per hour (French et al. 1992).
The Availability of Vocational Services Declined Relative to Demand (Etheridge et al., 1995)

- proportion of clients entering treatment with vocational and financial service needs grew from 1981 to 1993
- proportion of clients whose employment and financial needs went unmet grew from 1981 to 1993
Barriers to Integrating Vocational Services (Brewington et al., 1987)

- Conflicts with medical treatment model or psychotherapeutic philosophy
- Financial and programmatic disincentives to programs (too costly and time consuming)
- Inadequate preparation of staff and supervisors
- Managed care restrictions
Employment Services in Treatment (Drake et al., 1994)

- Types of Services
  - Vocational Screening, Pre-vocational services (Work adjustment), Job Readiness (Job Seeking Skills Instruction), Job placement, Job Club, Follow up

- In a comparative study,
  - All clients experienced a 15% improvement in competitive employment outcome
  - Clients who used vocational services regularly had a 22% improvement in competitive employment outcome
Research is Needed to Examine the Impact of Vocational Services on Treatment Outcome

- Findings from such research should then
  - Shape programs structures and staffing patterns
  - Determine pre-service education and determine in-service training
  - Result in systematic theory building and more research


References (cont.)