

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.

Objective

Subjective

Wages - Structured Day - Peer Group - Positive Regard - Self Esteem - Self Identity

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

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