Personal and Work Performance Outcomes of Employee Assistance Services

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Purpose of the Study

• Employee assistance services are commonly available to US workers (80% of workers have access to company sponsored EAPs)

• Little research on the outcomes for users of this kind of short term counseling that focuses on problem assessment, information, and referral

• EAP service by telephone is common, yet only a few studies have examined its effectiveness
Study Methodology

• **Design**: Exploratory, non-experimental, one-group
• **Service Provider**: Optum® - Including over 1000 employers nationwide
• **Timeframe**: 1999
• **Variables**: Age, sex, clinical problem type, clinical severity, health and work outcomes
• **Data Collection Process**: Regular clinical system transactions and regular on-going standardized telephone surveys of random samples of clinical cases - each case was called within a week after completion of use of health service
Sample

- Sample of 1,050 employees
- Callers to employee assistance counseling and referral service provided by employer or health plan
- 70% women and 30% men
- Age average 30 year (range 18-65)
- Assessed Clinical Problem Topic Areas:
  - 43% personal, relationship and daily living issues
  - 36% mental health issues
  - 10% physical health issues
  - 16% work issues
Personal Outcomes

• 75% decreased stress

• 73% improved overall health & well-being

• 67% improved performance of routine daily activities

• 98% satisfied with service
Level of Employee Productivity Before vs After Calling the Counselor Service (Survey $N = 1,050$)

Before: “How productive were you when you first called Optum? After: “How productive are you now? (after use of Optum)
(1-10 Scale: 1 = the least productive you have ever been and 10 = the most productive you have ever been)”
Of the 72% of employees with improved work productivity after use of the service, the average gain in productivity was 43% (4.7 to 8.2; paired t-test p < .01).
Absenteism Outcomes

60% had avoided absenteeism

Average of 17 hours of lost work time avoided per case with effect

Of the 60% of employees who reported being able to avoid taking time off from work because of use of the service, the average amount of time not lost was 17 hours.
Correlational Findings

- Significant positive correlations were found between all of the personal and work outcomes ($r = .09$ to $.47$, $p < .001$)

- Few significant associations were found between the individual demographic and clinical factors and the personal and work outcomes after use of the counseling service
Limitations and Strengths

Limitations

• No control group of non-users of health services; natural change and causal factors of change untested
• One time assessments of outcomes
• Self-report data

Strengths

• Real world data
• National sample
• Large sample size
• Standardized measures
• Third party data collection
• Employee self-report perspective
Summary

• This is one of the first large-scale empirical studies of telephonic counseling services that are now available to most U.S. employees

• Most users of these kinds of services report positive outcomes in personal health and in workplace performance factors

• A study of the same EAP using data from the next year replicated the findings of this study