

# Inside the Numbers How Organizations Conduct EA Research

Compiled by Mark Attridge, Ph.D.

**T**he Research Committee of EAPA recently asked several researchers to describe how they conduct research. Specifically, the committee wanted answers to the following questions:

- What kinds of research issues does your organization address?
- Who conducts the research?
- How do research projects get approved, launched, completed, etc.?
- What kinds of data or tools are used to conduct research?
- What is an example of a recent research project?

The following profiles reveal that EA research activities are conducted in a wide range of different settings. The profiles represent internal EA programs, large and small EAP vendors, academic research teams, academic and vendor partnerships, research consultants, and association research groups.

## Partners HealthCare System, Inc.

Internal EAP/Local Vendor  
Massachusetts, U.S.A.

Partners HealthCare, one of the largest employers in Massachusetts, was formed six years ago by the merger of Massachusetts General Hospital and Brigham and Women's Hospital, two premier academic medical centers. The Partners Employee Assistance Work/Life Resources Program serves professional staff and employees of these institutions as well as other hospitals and physicians' groups within the Partners system, plus two other medical centers in the Boston area.

Four years ago, Partners began providing specialized services to address domestic violence. We currently are researching the connection between domestic violence and the workplace, looking specifically at the following issues: the impact of domestic violence on the victim's job status/professional success; how employment affects the victim's safety and options for seeking safety; and the significance of offering these services in the workplace. With the assistance of social work interns, we are conducting clinical interviews with employee survivors of domestic violence and collecting both quantitative and qualitative information. Technical assistance is being provided by a clinical researcher.

In addition, we are surveying managers to better under-

stand their perceptions and awareness of our program and how they feel about the usefulness of our services. On an ongoing basis, we measure the efficacy of our services through client satisfaction surveys that are offered to every employee who uses the EAP. Our research and evaluation efforts are coordinated internally by our program director and several EAP staff who have assumed leadership roles in this area.

*Andrea Piraino Stidsen, LICSW, CEAP  
Director, Employee Assistance Services  
E-mail: astidsen@Partners.org*

## Hoskinson Associates

EAP Provider and Association Research Participant  
England, U.K.

The U.K. Chapter of EAPA is in the process of determining the extent and nature of external EAP provision in the United Kingdom. The purpose of this exercise is to end confusion about the prevalence of external EAP-related services. The chapter has the agreement of external providers to involve an independent research organisation (based at Bristol University), which will send questionnaires to all providers.

Definitions have been established to ensure consistency, and providers will be able to share, in confidence, the number of lives they cover and with which services. There will be different categories of service, ranging from information and advice to help lines, counseling-only programs, and full EAPs. The results of the survey will be made available later this year.

*Linda Hoskinson, CEAP  
Hoskinson Associates  
Phone: 44 (0)1908 563519  
E-mail: linda@hoskinson-associates.com*

## Optum

EAP Vendor  
Minnesota, U.S.A.

Optum is a provider of employee assistance, work/life, and health information services to more than 18 million people in the United States. Our counselors, nurses, and consultants provide information and assistance 24 hours a day via print materials, the telephone, and the Internet as well as face-to-face.

Optum has had a dedicated research department for the past six years. Of the nine full-time research staff, two have doctoral degrees and two have master's degrees. The research staff work closely with our medical director, student research interns, medical residency interns, and business consultants.

The research function at Optum examines both the operational process of our business and the outcomes experienced by our clients and includes a return-on-investment estimation model for estimating the cost-benefit value of these outcomes for purchasers. Ideas for specific research projects come from the company's leadership, our customers, and the research group. Optum sponsors all research projects. A current project investigates whether variations in clinical processes and the ways services are provided are associated with differences in the level of satisfaction and outcomes reported by our EAP clients.

We use large-scale relational databases of client activity (more than a million callers a year), follow-up telephone surveys (40,000+ annually), customer-specific written or phone-based surveys, qualitative data sources, and, on occasion, health care claims records. Research tools include Access databases, Excel, SPSS statistics, and literature searches.

*Mark Attridge, Ph.D., M.A.*

*Principal, Client Informatics Group*

*Phone: (763) 797-2719*

*E-mail: mattridg@uhc.com*

## **The ISA Group**

### **Research Consultants**

**Virginia, U.S.A.**

For more than a decade, the ISA Group has been conducting collaborative research with EAPs in several corporations (e.g., AT&T, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and GMAC) to develop and test psycho-educational interventions to help prevent substance abuse in the workforce. These health promotion/substance abuse prevention interventions have typically taken the form of group-based sessions in the workplace using health-oriented videos, CD-ROMs, and Web-based resources.

In developing and testing these programs, ISA Group staff (mostly research psychologists) typically work closely with EAP staff in the creation and implementation phases. These collaborations offer the EAP staff the benefit of additional expertise in programming and research at no cost (virtually all of ISA's research is supported by generous grants from the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies), while ISA benefits from practitioner expertise and access to the workforce. EAP staff contribute to the research design and methods, but data collection, analysis, and writing are done primarily by the ISA staff, usually assisted by part-time research analysts and university interns. The field tests of these programs typically take the form of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, using surveys and records-based data.

In a recent example of collaborative research between ISA and an internal EAP, substance abuse prevention materials (video and print) were developed for insertion into other workplace programs. Several hundred employees at a facility were randomly assigned to programs with (or without) the substance abuse prevention materials; all participants were

assessed on relevant measures before and after the program. Results showed that the substance abuse prevention materials had significant effects on substance use attitudes and behavior without hindering the effectiveness of the health promotion programs. At the completion of the research, the EAP director was given access to all materials and programs, along with documented evidence of program impact.

*Royce F. Cook, Ph.D.*

*President, The ISA Group*

*Phone: (703) 739-0880*

*E-mail: rcook@isagroup.com*

## **Johns Hopkins University and Hospital**

### **Internal EAP**

**Maryland, U.S.A.**

The Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FASAP) provides employee assistance assessment and referral services and brief counseling to 23,800 faculty and staff of the Johns Hopkins University and hospital and related health providers. FASAP is one component of a team of 35 professionals in the Office of Human Services.

FASAP has had a staff position dedicated to research for the past 10 years (the current researcher has a doctoral degree in clinical psychology). Other research staff include the medical director, who is a member of the medical faculty at Hopkins; the associate director, who is a licensed doctoral-level clinical psychologist and faculty member; and the director of FASAP and Work/Life Programs, who has a doctorate in social welfare policy. We also have a research internship for a student enrolled in the Masters in Counseling program.

Some research projects originate with the leadership of the university and hospital and the FASAP staff; others are necessitated by the ongoing need for program evaluation. Research topics have included operational issues focused on patterns and profiles of client utilization of services. A sample project has been initiated to examine the longitudinal utilization patterns of the program during the past 14 years of operation, including analysis of demographic, clinical assessment, and service data.

We generally sponsor our own research projects. Research tools we use include Access, Excel, SPSS statistics, literature searches, and our TEAMS database of more than 10,000 clients who have used FASAP since 1986.

*Kathleen O. Beauchesne, Ph.D., M.B.A., M.S.W.*

*Director, Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FASAP) and Work/Life Programs*

*Phone: (443) 997-3800*

*E-mail: kbeauchesne@jhu.edu*

## **COPE, Inc.**

### **EAP Vendor**

**Washington, D.C., U.S.A.**

COPE has provided EAP and work/life services to various public and private organizations for almost 25 years. COPE is proof that a small firm can conduct research activities and initiatives in the EAP field.

COPE has been actively developing a performance measurement initiative that incorporates themes of continuous quality assurance, EAP and work/life benchmarking, and outcomes measurement. The tools used in performance measurement (e.g., surveys, interviews, and standardized measures) and the methodologies for design, sampling, and data collection and analysis are the same as those used in more formal types of social science research.

Data will be gathered from multiple sources via different collection methods, which helps to ensure reliability as well as allow for comparisons between data sources. We hope to share our findings with the EAP and work/life fields to contribute to best practice standards and encourage discussion among other small and mid-sized companies interested in research.

Jodi M. Jacobson, M.S.W., and

Christina Kominoth, M.S.W.

Work and Family Specialists

Phone: (202) 628-5100

E-mail: [jjacobso@pop200.gsfc.nasa.gov](mailto:jjacobso@pop200.gsfc.nasa.gov) or

[ckominoth@cope-inc.com](mailto:ckominoth@cope-inc.com)

## **New York University, School of Social Work**

Academic Research and Training Facility

New York, U.S.A.

Academic research is highly varied and reflects the interests of the researcher and often the specific funding source(s) as well. While some academics conduct studies that increase their own areas of expertise, many are hired to serve as consultants or evaluators of EAPs and related services provided by public or private organizations. In addition, many universities have graduate students involved in research activities, either as an extension of faculty research or on their own research projects.

The Ehrenkranz School of Social Work at New York University has more than 800 students in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. It is in the doctoral program that most students learn how to develop and conduct a research study.

Over the years at NYU, we have conducted studies on specific interventions, issues for particular groups of clients, organizational development, attitudes toward particular groups, staff training, managed care, and many other topics. My own research has compared in-house and external EAP programs, evaluated the impact of job loss, and assessed on-line training for supervisors in substance abuse settings.

S. Lala Ashenberg Straussner, CSW

Professor, School of Social Work

Phone: (212) 998-5947

E-mail: [lala.straussner@nyu.edu](mailto:lala.straussner@nyu.edu)

## **University of Maryland, School of Social Work**

Academic Research and Training Facility

Maryland, U.S.A.

The University of Maryland has one of the largest schools of social work in North America. The doctoral program, which currently has 43 students, is designed for professional social workers who hold the masters' degree and are seeking to contribute to the profession by teaching, developing, and testing

new knowledge for social work practice.

One of the areas of specialization in the school is employee assistance. The EA curriculum provides students with a strong academic foundation in social science research, including problem formulation, research design, statistics, and data analysis and theory. Students choose electives related to their specific research interests, including quantitative/qualitative research, survey research, outcomes measurement, and advanced theory. Students usually choose a specific area of social science (e.g., employee assistance or work/life) in which to practice and implement their research skills.

The school's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews research proposals. Depending on the research topic, data may be compiled from primary or secondary data sources, usually from large national samples. Research also may utilize qualitative data in the form of interviews, focus groups, and observational techniques.

Students use state-of-the-art academic databases for literature reviews, sample selection, and survey design. Some of the specific tools include Access databases, Excel, SPSS statistics, and the Internet.

Jodi M. Jacobson, M.S.W.

Melissa Bach Tamburo, M.S.W.

Doctoral students, University of Maryland

E-mail: [jmjacobson1@juno.com](mailto:jmjacobson1@juno.com) & [mbtlcsw@aol.com](mailto:mbtlcsw@aol.com)

## **Ceridian Corporation and University of Maryland**

Collaboration: EAP Vendor/Academic Research Facility

Maryland, U.S.A.

Ceridian has collaborated with the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland on four research studies of Ceridian's services. Issues that have been studied include client motivations for using telephone counseling services (and client outcomes after using such services) and outcome measurements from clinical case records.

Dale Masi, chair of the EAP specialization in the School of Social Work, directs the research with the assistance of doctoral students. Second-year master's-level students provide staff support and help develop questionnaires, collect data, and assist in data analysis. Research must be approved by the faculty and reviewed by the university's Institutional Review Board, and research methodology must be approved by the research department.

An intensive literature review is conducted for each study. Students work in groups under the guidance of faculty and doctoral students. The most recent collaborative study was on client motivations for using on-line services. This study featured 434 clients who responded to a questionnaire on the Internet regarding why they used on-line EAP services, what issues prompted their use of the services, and their satisfaction with the services.

Dale A. Masi, D.S.W., LICSW, CEAP

Professor, School of Social Work

Phone: (410) 706-3616

E-mail: [masirsrch@aol.com](mailto:masirsrch@aol.com) 