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**EAP Impact on Work, Stress and Health:
National Data 1999-2002**

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Summary

This project brings together applied naturalistic research data to assess the impact of employee assistance program (EAP) services on employee work, stress, and health. Clinical and follow-up self-report survey data from one EAP company (Optum®) is analyzed representing four large national samples (N > 1000 cases randomly selected each year for 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002). Results show that the majority of EAP clients report improvements in their work productivity and avoided absenteeism, stress, overall health and well-being and daily functioning after use of the service. The findings are found consistently in each year's data and thus provide replication of results. Financial estimates of workplace outcomes are provided.

Statement of the Problem

Employees often have personal issues associated with mental health, substance abuse, family and daily life. In the past three decades, employers have responded to this need by offering problem assessment, brief counseling and referral services to help employees resolve personal problems affecting work performance. These services are called Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Recent estimates indicate that 80% of workers in America now have EAP services available as a company sponsored benefit (Oher, 1999). In spite of their widespread use, there has been little empirical investigation of the outcomes of these services and the research that has been done has not been widely distributed to the larger employer community (Attridge, 2000). This focus of the present study was to explore how the use of employee assistance counseling services impact employees in the areas of work, stress and health and to determine if this impact is obtained consistently across several years of EAP service delivery.

Samples

The study involves national samples of employees who had voluntarily used an external vendor-based employee assistance program (see Table 1).

Note: by the time of the APA-NIOSH meetings in March of 2003, I will have analyzed the national data from this EAP provider for the year 2002 as well – probably adding another 3000+ cases to the database. This will allow me to replicate the findings from earlier three years.

Table 1 – Data Sets in Study

Year	Sample Size	Source	Reference
1999	n = 1050	Optum	Attridge <i>et al</i> (2001)
2000	n = 1251	Optum	Attridge (2001 APA)
2001	n = 3200	Optum	Attridge (2002 APS)
2002	n = 3000 ?	Optum	

Procedure

The data for this study was taken from larger datasets created by a major employee assistance service provider (Optum®). This company provides services to over 1,000 employers in the U.S. It offers masters-level counselors available by phone 24-hours a day, 7-days a week as well as in-person counselors and specialists in legal, financial, management and crisis areas. Telephone sessions include a problem assessment process and discussion of appropriate options for addressing the employee's issues. Typically, about 10 to 20% of cases also have in-person sessions with an EAP counselor located near the employee. Additionally, about 10% to 20% of cases get referred on for more intensive professional care from mental health or substance abuse services covered by health care insurance benefits or community providers. On a routine basis, about 10% of cases are randomly selected to participate in a survey. About a week after the

clinical experience was concluded, a third-party survey firm conducted structured telephone interviews of these clients.

Results

Items on the survey asked employees how their personal and work lives were affected by the service. Results show that the majority of employees who contacted the EAP reported positive outcomes on all areas assessed. For example, data from 1999 show that employees reported decreased stress (80%), improved overall health and well-being (82%), improved performance of routine daily activities (77%), improved work productivity (77%) and avoided absenteeism from work (62%). All of these outcomes were positively inter-correlated ($r = .20$ to $.61$, $p < .001$).

Respondents also rated their productivity at work before and after use of the EAP. The rating used a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = least productive ever been and 10 = most productive ever been. Among those with an improvement in productivity after use of the EAP (77%), the average rating went from 4.75 for the period before use of the counselor to 8.38 for the period after use. This increase was significant (paired t -test at the $p < .001$ level) and represents a 43% gain in productivity. Among those who reported avoiding missing time off from work (62%), the average amount of time not lost from work due to use of the EAP service was 16 hours (two 8 hour work days).

This EAP company has recently developed a methodology for using these results to estimate the amount of dollars saved for the employer that are associated with absenteeism and productivity outcomes. Thus, the economic implications for employers can be estimated if their employees had not had access to EAP services. Typically, the cost-offset provided by these kinds of services offers a positive return on investment by the company. By extension, the financial costs of non-treatment can be estimated for employers who do not have these kinds of EAP services available to their employees. Taken together, this analysis can address larger societal costs and benefits of mental health promotion at the workplace.

Conclusions

This study explored the impact of employee assistance services on employee work, stress and health. Outcomes from several national random samples found that the majority of employees reported improvements in personal health and work performance. This significance of this study is threefold. First, it is one of the few large-scale assessments of outcomes for modern EAP services. Second, it offers measurement advances through the replication of findings from multiple years of data. Most importantly, the findings offer empirical support for the argument that workplace performance outcomes (and thus reductions in company operating costs) are associated with improvements in the personal health of employees. These results support the "human capital" approach now popular among many

leading organizations defines employees as a valuable resource (Davenport, 1999, Fuller et al, 2001).

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