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Julia Woods

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# An Analysis of the UK and US on the Perceived Adequacy of Workplace Mental Health Programs

Julia Woods\*, BS & Deborah DiazGranados, PhD

VCU School of Business, VCU College of Humanities and Sciences \*woodsjj@vcu.edu

## Abstract

The typical methods used for evaluation of employer-provided mental health benefits tend to be quantitative in nature, however, qualitative methods could help organizations better understand how its employees react to and view such programs. This paper explores employee's perceptions of health benefits provided by employers, specifically mental health programs, within the United Kingdom and the United States. A review and analysis of major categories of mental health programs were conducted to best capture the cultural context, effectiveness, and employee perception of employee health benefits. Results of the analysis of sources indicate that employer-provided benefits improved employee's mental well-being, which in turn impacted their work.

## Introduction

Research examining employee provided health benefits typically concentrate on evaluating a program's impact on organizational outcomes such as retention, absenteeism, presenteeism, and cost-effectiveness (Cuffel, Goldman, and Schlesinger, 1999; Munz & Kohler, 1997). There are fewer bodies of research that have examined employee's perceptions of mental health or wellness interventions: their opinions on the type, quality, amount, and awareness of care that are provided in their workplaces.

## Methodology

- The search for literature primarily included online searches of the following databases (e.g., Google Scholar, PsychINFO, PubMed, PsycNET) for literature published between 1995 and 2019.
- The following key terms were used in different combinations: Mental health programs, mental health benefits, adequacy, employer-provided programs, employee satisfaction, employee perception, either the United Kingdom or the United States.
- A targeted search was done for specific benefits (e.g., employee assistance programs, workplace counseling, cognitive behavior therapy, mental health insurance/coverage, and stress management interventions) in combination with the previously listed terms.
- The initial search resulted in nine publications which were then used for a manual secondary search of references lists which resulted in two additional publications that were used for the review.

## Acknowledgements

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## Results/Discussion

### Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):

- Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz's (2006) review found that research often focused on employee well-being outcome or organizational outcomes, and recommended that organizations consult psychologists to confirm that the program can result in both and that it aligns with the organization's culture.

### Workplace Counseling:

- Post-intervention, clients could differentiate between the aspects of the study that they are not satisfied with, while still being satisfied with the overall program (Elliot & Williams, 2002; Millar, 2002).
- Millar (2002) noted that a majority of clients found that they had improved regarding their physical and psychological health, social functioning, and work performance.

### Benefits Packages and Insurance:

- Cuffel et. al. (1999) study does not study employee perception of care, but it does measure employee actions after a change in cost and care in a managed behavioral mental health care plan. It noted that the rate of behavioral health care usage increased (4.9% to 6.1%) after a change in care.
- Jensen, Rost, Burton, and Bulycheva (1998) suggest that, while more employees received mental health care coverage for services, they received a shallower level of care.

### Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):

- Grime's (2004) study found that anxiety and depression scores were lower, and attributional style scores were higher one-month post-intervention, compared to those that received conventional care.

### Stress Management:

- The direct impact of care on participants centered around ~~like~~ increased communication with and support for their employees. The narrative method of capturing participant information post-intervention can help assess similar programs.
- Research cited in Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz's (2006) review indicates that stress management training can lead to more engaged employees, can improve employee well-being (Munz, Kohler, & Greenberg, 2001; Munz & Kohler, 1997).

### Cultural Considerations:

- The US and UK have a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislature to ensure that employees are not discriminated against for their mental illnesses.
- Workplace trends regarding stress are fairly similar in the UK and the US, and the effects of job stress are noted as a common work-related health problem (Gabriel & Liimatainen, 2000).

Table 1: Mental Health Programs: Definitions and Key Sources

Category of Care in Literature	Definition	Key Sources
Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)	The internal or external provision of psychological therapy for employees in an organization, paid for by the employer (McLeod & Henderson, 2003 cited by Mellor-Clark et al., 2013).	Arthur (2010); Elliott, Williams (2002); Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz (2006); Mellor-Clark, Twigg, Farrell, & Kinder (2013); Millar (2002)
Workplace Counseling	The internal or external use of counseling or psychotherapy for work-related problems: can be in-house counseling, externally contracted counseling, or an employee's visits to a counselor outside of their organization's service but for work-related stress (McLeod, 2010).	Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz (2006); McLeod (2010); Rogers, McLeod (1995)
Mental Health Insurance/Benefits	Psychological, behavioral, or mental health care given through employer-chosen plans.	Cuffel, Goldman, & Schlesinger (1999); Jensen, Rost, Burton, & Bulycheva (1998)
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	A brief and highly structured therapy where specific thinking patterns are targeted in an effort to enact behavioral changes.	Grime (2004)
Stress Management Intervention	An intervention used by organizations or employers to reduce stress by either addressing causes of stress or reducing the impact of stress (Holman, Johnson, O'Conner, 2018).	Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz (2006); Randall, Cox, & Griffiths (2007)

## Conclusion

- Qualitative reports are particularly interesting when trying to understand how employees view their work after they conclude a mental health program. Implications include:
  - Ability to describe the effects on the business and employees can draw attention to any benefits or gaps in care.
  - A clear understanding of what employees need in a mental health program can help employers implement the best program for their unique obligations and enact meaningful change in their employee's well-being.
- Future research should consider examining questions such as:
  - What is the overall and longitudinal impact on employee well-being from employer provided mental health benefits,
  - How do employer provided mental health programs influence personal well-being, and how does an employee's personal well-being in turn influence employee productivity,
  - How do cultural differences and a country's approach to mental health care inform the employee's availability/accessibility to mental health care at work.

## References

References available upon request.