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Employer Perceptions of Addiction Recovery and Hiring Decisions

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Rationale

- Substance misuse is a prevalent issue in our society, with an estimated 22 million US adults in recovery from substance misuse.¹
- Individuals who seek and receive treatment for addiction often experience discrimination due to addiction-related stigmas.²
- Little research has been done to determine if these stigmas affect employers' hiring decisions.

Introduction

While there is a vast body of literature on stigma toward individuals in addiction recovery, there is limited research on employers' stigma toward those with past substance misuse and how that stigma may affect hiring decisions. Drug and alcohol misuse are prominent in the Appalachian region of the US, which presents an issue for employers in the area who maintain a drug-free work place or who feel stigma toward those in addiction recovery. The proposed study will assess employers' attitudes towards applicants who have a history of substance misuse and/or are in treatment for substance misuse. Specifically, this study will focus on self-reported likelihood of hiring an applicant who is in recovery.

Hypotheses

We hypothesize that the majority of respondents:

- 1) will indicate negative employer perceptions of applicants/employees who are in recovery;
- 2) will indicate they would be less likely to hire someone who is in recovery;
- 3) with past substance misuse will report perceived stigma from employers and in the workplace.

Method

The proposed study is part of a larger study assessing attitudes toward addiction in the Appalachian Highlands and other surrounding areas. Participants who are at least eighteen years of age and English-speaking will be recruited via social media platforms and email to complete a survey on the REDCap web platform. The survey includes demographic items, items from the Addiction Attitudes and Beliefs Scale (AABS), and items from the Tobacco, Alcohol, Prescription medication and other Substance use Tool (TAPS). Items from the AABS used to assess employers' attitudes were adapted from the Substance Use Stigma Mechanisms Scale (SU-SMS) and the Perceived Stigma Addiction Scale (PSAS).

Employer Attitudes Item Examples

(5-point Likert-type likelihood response scale)

- I would hire someone who has been in treatment for substance misuse if they are qualified for the job.
- I would feel the need to supervise an employee more closely who has a history of substance misuse.
- I would pass over the application of someone who has a history of substance misuse in favor of another applicant.
- I would trust an employee who has a history of substance misuse as much as one who does not.
- I would allow a person on MAT to adjust their schedule for treatment appointments.

Perceived Workplace Stigma Item Examples

(5-point Likert-type agreement response scale)

- I feel I am not welcome in my workplace because I used alcohol and/or drugs.
- I don't feel welcome at work because of my alcohol and/or drug use.
- I feel like I'm thought of as a bad employee at work because of my alcohol and/or drug use.

Data Analysis Plan

At this stage of research, we will use descriptive statistics to analyze the data. We will report the percentage of respondents who indicate the following: negative perceptions of applicants/employees in recovery, a decreased likelihood to hire an applicant in recovery, and perceived workplace stigma.

Expected Results

As hypothesized, we expect the majority of respondents to report negative employer perceptions of those in addiction recovery. As such, we also expect the majority of respondents to state that it is unlikely they would hire someone in treatment for substance misuse. If these predictions are supported by data, the results would align with past research that indicates personal and societal biases negatively affect hiring decisions.³ For those who have lived with addiction in the past, we expect participants to report perceived workplace stigma due to their past substance misuse. Many individuals with a history of addiction have reported perceived fear from employers and coworkers due to their substance use, as well as a belief that they are treated poorly or unfairly because of their addiction.⁴

Discussion

Employers are in a position to respond to the addiction crisis by supporting those in their recovery journey. Individuals in addiction recovery have reported that employment provided positive outcomes during their recovery, such as providing an outlet for them, and thereby helping them to manage their addiction.^{5,3} Additionally, those in recovery are more likely to remain in treatment if they are employed.⁶ With drug and alcohol misuse being a pressing societal issue, steps need to be taken to support those in recovery as they work to support themselves.



Potential Limitations

Possible limitations of this proposed study include the lack of generalizability since employers in the Appalachian area may not be representative of the overall population. Another possible limitation is the use of self-report measures. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants may respond in ways that make them appear socially desirable.

Potential Future Directions

If results of the proposed study support our hypotheses, future research should investigate ways to reduce employer and workplace stigma. Research should also assess ways to support employers who hire, or are working with, those in addiction recovery.

Key References

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