

Research Paper

An exploratory study of inclusive worksite wellness: Considering employees with disabilities

LaWanda H. Cook, Ph.D.^{a,*}, John T. Foley, Ph.D.^b, and Luz Mairena Semeah, Ph.D., M.P.A.^c

^aK. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Employment and Disability Institute, 201 Dolgen Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA

^bThe State University of New York at Cortland, Department of Physical Education, Center, Rm 1125, Cortland, NY 13045, USA

^cUniversity of Florida, College of Public Health and Health Professions, North Florida/South Georgia Veteran Health Services, Center of Innovation in Disability Rehabilitation Research (CINDRR), 300 E. University Ave. Ste 350 (Commerce Building), Gainesville, FL 32608, USA

Abstract

Background: An increasing number of employers are offering worksite wellness programs, yet, little is known about the participation of workers with disabilities.

Objective: The primary purpose of this study was to explore the factors, which facilitate and impede participation in worksite wellness offerings by individuals with disabilities.

Methods: Participants completed the *Access to Worksite Wellness Services to Employees with Disabilities* (AWWSED).

Results: The decision to participate in worksite wellness programs is influenced by several individual, social, and organizational factors including perceptions of the impact of one's disability on health, the health habits of coworkers, and an organizational commitment to employee well-being. Study participants also indicated the importance of affordability, convenient times, and interest in the wellness activities being offered, as influencing participation decisions.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that individual, social, and organizational factors all contribute to the decision to participate and suggest that social support from colleagues as well as easily obtained and understandable program information from the employer, may be especially useful in engaging employees with disabilities in wellness programs. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Worksite wellness; Secondary health conditions; People with disabilities

Concerns about declines in health among the general population, rising health care costs and lost productivity have contributed to the considerable increase in the number of employer-sponsored wellness programs over the past two decades. These programs positively impact diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol use, physiologic markers, health care costs, as well as absenteeism and mental health, and emphasize prevention of disease and disability.¹ The provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which calls for increased efforts toward health promotion in both public and private programs, prohibit discrimination based solely on health status and/or disability.^{2,3} To date, little is known

about the participation of workers with disabilities in wellness programs.

The issue of participation in worksite wellness programs by employees with disabilities has received considerable attention recently. In April 2015, following a number of lawsuits alleging illegal employer practices violating confidentiality of medical information, requiring involuntary disability disclosure, and improperly imposing penalties on employees who choose not to take part in such programs, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a Proposed Rule on Application of the ADA about employer-sponsored wellness programs.⁴ The need for inclusive wellness programs is an emerging issue as several trends suggest that the number of workers with disabilities will increase in the years ahead: 1) the American workforce is aging; and disability is more prevalent among older persons, 2) a significant number of veterans are returning home with service-connected disabilities, 3) the first generation of people with disabilities who have come of age under the provisions of the ADA are entering the labor market, and 4) the recent U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) regulations impacting Section 503 of the

Sponsorship for this study was provided by the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Employment and Disability Institute at Cornell University.

Disclosure: Information about development of the survey tool developed for this research was presented at the North American Federation of Adapted Physical Activity, October 2012.

Conflict of interest: None.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 607 255 2928; fax: +1 607 255 2763.

E-mail address: lhc62@cornell.edu (L.H. Cook).

Rehabilitation Act which require companies of 100 or more employees contracted to do work for the federal government to strive toward 7% disability representation at all levels of the organization.⁵ Additionally, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) clarified that the definition of disability is to be broadly construed and that chronic conditions such as diabetes are typically covered under the law; thus, there may be many more people with disabilities in the workforce than is generally thought. Given these realities, employers who ensure that their wellness programs are accessible to workers with disabilities will not only meet these legal obligations, but will have a competitive advantage.

In this article we describe an exploratory study, the purpose of which was to inquire about factors that facilitate or impede wellness program participation among employees with disabilities. We provide a brief description of the development and validation of the Access to Worksite Wellness Survey for Employees with Disabilities (AWWSED), which was informed by an ecological model that accounts for the importance of individual, social, and organizational factors in one's participation in wellness activities. We also discuss the value of using an ecological framework when creating and promoting disability inclusive worksite wellness programs. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to explore this emerging issue and is highly relevant as organizations strive to attract and retain qualified employees, many of whom will experience disability and/or chronic health conditions during their working years.

Disability and worksite wellness

Everyday life tends to be more stressful for individuals with disabilities than for people without disabilities due to factors such as physical inaccessibility, social exclusion, and barriers to employment.^{6–8} While workers with and without disabilities may experience stress from workload and work hours,⁹ strained colleague relationships, lack of job security, and poor working conditions,¹⁰ individuals with disabilities may experience additional stressors such as less coworker support, and concerns about potential decline in health due to secondary conditions or aging^{11,12} as well as potentially greater challenges in meeting basic needs including transportation and personal care.^{8,13} Although prior related research has focused on persons with physical disabilities, similar concerns have been reported among individuals with visual impairments,¹⁴ learning disabilities,¹⁵ and mental illness.^{16,17} For this study, persons with disabilities included, but was not limited to, individuals who reported a physical or cognitive disability, mental health condition, chronic health condition, vision or hearing impairment, or workplace injury or illness.

Worksite wellness offerings defined by Call, Gerdes, and Robinson (2009)¹⁸ as “employer-sponsored services

designed to promote and maintain the health of employees” (p. 1), can help employees in the general population establish and maintain healthy lifestyle changes.¹⁹ According to the RAND Employer Survey,²⁰ approximately half of U.S. employers offer wellness promotion initiatives, with larger employers typically having more comprehensive programs. Wellness programs may be especially beneficial in helping individuals with disabilities cope with stress and prevent or delay the onset of secondary health conditions. This is critical given the role secondary health conditions play in “the ‘age by disability’ interaction” that leads people with disabilities to leave the workforce many years sooner than their colleagues without disabilities (p. 157).²¹

Although there is considerable research on secondary health conditions among persons with disabilities,^{22–24} little is known about the use of worksite wellness resources by employees with disabilities. A literature search conducted for the timeframe 2004–2014 using the search terms “health promotion” and “people with disabilities” yielded over 350 articles; the vast majority of those relating to people with disabilities, focus on individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or elderly persons. A search of the terms “workplace wellness” or “worksite wellness” and “employees with disabilities” yielded only six articles published in the past decade, which focused on prevention of chronic health conditions rather than on the needs of individuals with existing disabilities.

In the current study, “worksite wellness resources” were defined as services and initiatives available through the employer that focus on promoting healthy behaviors and/or enhancing employees' health, such as offering healthy choices in the cafeteria, opportunities for physical activity during the workday, and the availability of health-related lectures. Employee Assistance programs (EAPs), typically offered as a health benefit, are designed to assist in the identification and resolution of a broad range of personal concerns that may affect job performance (e.g., substance abuse, marital problems, stress), as well as health education and disease prevention,²⁵ and were therefore, included as a wellness resource in the current study.

Our specific research questions were:

- (1) What are the worksite wellness resources available to people with disabilities in different work settings?
- (2) What factors facilitate the utilization of worksite wellness resources by workers with disabilities?
- (3) What factors impede the utilization of these resources by workers with disabilities?

Methods

Survey development

In order to inquire about participants' perceptions of access to and factors influencing the use of worksite wellness

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6238716>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6238716>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)