A Case Study of Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Practices in Improving Employment Outcomes of Individuals with Mental Illness

PROJECT SUMMARY

Study Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the study is to identify, study, and disseminate practices of state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to effectively place and retain individuals with mental illness (MI) in employment, particularly individuals with severe and persistent MI. The study focus includes, but is not limited to, VR adoption and implementation of employment models commonly used in the mental health (MH) field (such as Supported Employment/Individual Placement Model), as well as other programmatic approaches to serve those with severe and persistent MI. The study is part of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Vocational Rehabilitation (VR-RRTC) at the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), University of Massachusetts Boston. The goal of the study is to provide VR policymakers and government managers with concrete examples of effective practices to improve employment outcomes specifically for this population.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do state VR agencies effectively increase employment outcomes of individuals with MI, particularly individuals with severe and persistent MI?
2. What management practices and programmatic approaches do they use, and what evidence exists for their effectiveness?
3. How are state VR agencies implementing models developed by the MH system (such as Supported Employment/ Individual Placement Model) and other programmatic approaches to increase employment outcomes of individuals with MI?
4. What specific features of these practices would make them easily transferable to other states given the variation in how states are organized?
5. What are the implications for how individuals with MI can be best served by the VR and MH system?

Definition of Key Terms

Individuals with Mental Illness: The study uses the term 'individuals with mental illness' to refer to individuals who are considered to have MI by the VR system. A particular emphasis is placed on individuals with severe and persistent MI.

Practice refers to management practices and programmatic approaches that state VR agencies implement to increase employment outcomes of individuals with MI.

- A practice may be implemented by more than one agency as long as it includes VR.
- A practice may be implemented at multiple levels (policy, frontline, provider).
- A practice may be associated with a particular employment model (such as Supported Employment/Individual Placement Model) or other programmatic approach.

Effective Practice refers to management practices and programmatic approaches for which there is measurable evidence (qualitative or quantitative) that they improve:

- Employment outcomes of individuals with MI (e.g., employment skills, type of job/occupation, wages, working hours, employee benefits, job retention, job satisfaction) and other outcomes that are related to employment (e.g., job advancement, self-sufficiency, health status, health/disability management).
- Practices that have potential for state-level transferability will be prioritized.

Examples of Practices

- Use of third party funding arrangements/matches (Medicaid)
- Funding personal assistants or mentors to assist individuals with MI with job-related skills (such as medication management, grooming) using individuals who themselves have MI
- Training counselors in motivational interviewing targeted specifically at customers with MI
- Adopting Supported Employment/Individual Placement Model in a VR setting

Methods

The study methodology consists of three phases: First, researchers will solicit nominations for practices from a wide variety of sources (e.g., previous research including the research synthesis and the provider surveys [VR, MH] as well as secondary analysis of Rehabilitation Services Administration data and other relevant datasets; self-nomination; nomination by RRTC senior training, technical assistance and policy staff, the Advisory Board, and the expert Delphi Panel). Individuals or agencies that nominate a practice need to submit at least two sources of evidence (quantitative or qualitative) confirming effectiveness of the practice. Second, an expert Delphi Panel, specifically recruited for this case study, will review the nominated practices (short descriptive summaries including effectiveness evidence) and rate the practices on a number of specified criteria (e.g., innovativeness, transferability). Based on information from the Delphi Panel (ratings and comments) and other factors (sampling criteria), researchers will determine the final sample of 5 – 15 practices for case study research. The third phase involves collecting case study data on each practice (key informant interviews and document review), analyzing the data, and synthesizing the findings.

Sample

The study intends to sample 5 – 15 effective practices for case study research. Researchers will attempt to balance representation of practices associated with a particular employment model or programmatic approach and those not associated with a particular model or programmatic approach in the final sample of practices. In case the nomination process mainly yields effective practices associated with a particular model or programmatic approach, researchers will make another effort to reach out to states to increase sample variation.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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