



Employment and Persons with Substance Use Disorder:

A Targeted Response Initiative, July 2015 - June 2016

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Abstract

This Targeted Response Initiative (TRI) focused on the employment experiences of consumers of substance abuse treatment services to provide a better understanding of what employment services are offered and what needs treatment agencies have in the area of employment services. The Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network collected data via a mixed research methodology of focus groups, interviews and survey from July 2015 through June 2016. A total of 668 active and recovering drug users and 246 treatment providers, law enforcement officials and other community professionals participated in this study. Employment is a challenge for persons with substance use disorders. Of the participants who indicated their employment status, only a quarter reported being currently employed; further, of those participants who reported no current employment, greater than half reported their current unemployment status was due to their substance abuse. Participants in substance abuse treatment programs face many challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. However, there was consensus that it is generally up to the client whether employment goals would be included in their treatment plan. Most participants throughout OSAM regions acknowledged that links to employment services were offered through their substance abuse treatment programs. Several barriers were identified among community professionals in regards to implementation of employment services. They discussed client lack of readiness to receive employment services as a primary barrier. Providers also stressed lack of time in their treatment program to dedicate to addressing employment needs, along with lack of funding and lack of appropriate staff to deliver these services as other barriers. Some providers believed employment services fall outside of their scope of practice. Many felt that other agencies were better suited to address employment needs.

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Introduction

The purpose of this Targeted Response Initiative (TRI) was to learn about employment experiences of consumers of substance abuse treatment services to provide a better understanding of what employment services are offered and what needs treatment agencies have in the area of employment services. To answer these questions, the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network added employment questions to its drug trend study protocols. Data will potentially aid in the development of needed employment services.

The OSAM Network consists of eight regional epidemiologists (REPIs) located in the following regions of the state: Akron-Canton, Athens, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. REPIs conduct focus groups and individual interviews with active and recovering drug users and community professionals (treatment providers, law enforcement officials, etc.) to produce epidemiological descriptions of local substance abuse trends every six months. Once integrated, these valuable sources provide the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) with a real-time method of providing accurate epidemiological descriptions that policymakers need to plan appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. This report presents major findings related to employment services for persons with substance use disorders in Ohio.

Methods

Data were collected through a mixed research methodology via focus group and individual interviews from July 2015 through June 2016. REPIs, contracted by OhioMHAS, conducted focus group and individual interviews and administered a survey to active and recovering drug users in their respective regions (for a map of OSAM regions, please see Appendix A). REPIs were professionals with at least a master's degree in a social science (public health, psychology, social work, counseling, anthropology or sociology) with relevant research experience in the area of qualitative data collection and/or licensure in counseling/social work.

Each REPI was required to interview a minimum of 80 active and recovering drug users and 20 community professionals with intimate knowledge of drug use (treatment providers and law enforcement professionals) during the 12-month study. The sampling design was one of convenience. The study's target sample size was 640 active and recovering drug users and 160 community providers.

Prior to focus group start, REPIs obtained participant informed consent and administered a brief survey of participant characteristics, which contained demographic and drug using questions along with the following employment questions: *Have you been employed during the past six months; Are you currently employed; If currently employed, how long have you been employed at your current job; If not currently employed, is substance use the reason for your current unemployment?* Note, only active and recovering drug users completed the survey; no survey was administered to community professionals. REPIs conducted focus groups and interviews following scripted protocols, detailing personal and regional drug use, as well as, exposure to and provision of employment services.



Employment questions asked during focus groups of active and recovering drug users consisted of the following four items: *What are the challenges to obtaining employment; What has been your involvement in employment services; What type of employment services have you utilized; Has employment been a part of your treatment plan?*

Employment questions asked of community professionals consisted of the following five items: *What are the challenges for consumers of substance abuse treatment in obtaining and maintaining employment; Does the organization provide employment services (if so, what); Is employment discussed as a part of the treatment plan (if so, is it a focus in treatment); What are the major barriers to implementing employment services at the organization; What would be helpful to provide the organization in terms of employment for clients with substance use disorders?*

All interview data were qualitative and self-reported to REPIs who recorded responses and audio recorded all focus group and interview proceedings with participant knowledge and informed consent. An appropriate institutional review board approved this study. Duration of interviews was approximately 1-2 hours. All analyses of quantitative data, conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), were descriptive in nature,

consisting of counts and frequencies. All qualitative data were transcribed and thematically analyzed, with themes reflecting the majority viewpoint abstracted and highlighted in the results section below.

Results

A total of 668 active and recovering drug users and 246 community professionals participated in the study. For demographic information of active and recovering drug users, please see Appendix B. For a list of all reported drugs used during the past six months by these participants, please see Appendix C. For participant employment characteristics, please see Figures 1 and 2. In terms of current employment status, of the 596 participants who indicated a status, only a quarter (25.7%) reported being currently employed; and of the 598 participants who indicated employment status during the past six months, only 45.6 percent reported having been employed during the past six months. Of the 148 currently employed participants who reported length of time at current job, almost half (48%) reported being at their current job less than six months; and, of 429 participants who reported no current employment, greater than half (54.3%) reported that their current unemployed was due to their substance use.

Challenges to Obtaining Employment

Participants and community professionals agreed on many challenges that persons in substance abuse treatment face in obtaining employment. Below are descriptions of commonly reported challenges (for a summary list of these challenges, please see Table 1).

Table 1. Challenges to Obtaining Employment*

▪ Criminal history
▪ Continued substance abuse
▪ Probation and treatment program requirements
▪ Gaps in employment history
▪ Lack of education
▪ Lack of transportation
▪ Lack of valid identification
▪ Loss of government assistance
▪ Low job availability
▪ Low self-esteem/self-confidence
▪ Homelessness
▪ Lack of computer skills

* This information is not rank ordered.

Criminal History

Respondents most often identified a criminal history, particularly a felony conviction, as the primary barrier to employment. One participant stated, *“If employers see my background, they’ll just throw the application in the garbage.”* Besides felonies, some participants expressed challenges due to drug and theft convictions on their police record. One participant explained how their history of theft was prohibitive: *“I don’t have any felonies, but I have petty thefts and they were all due to my addiction, so when that comes back ... people don’t really want you because they think you’re going to steal from them ... they don’t understand [addiction].”* Another participant stated, *“Even if you have gone through drug treatment, they aren’t going to hire you.”*

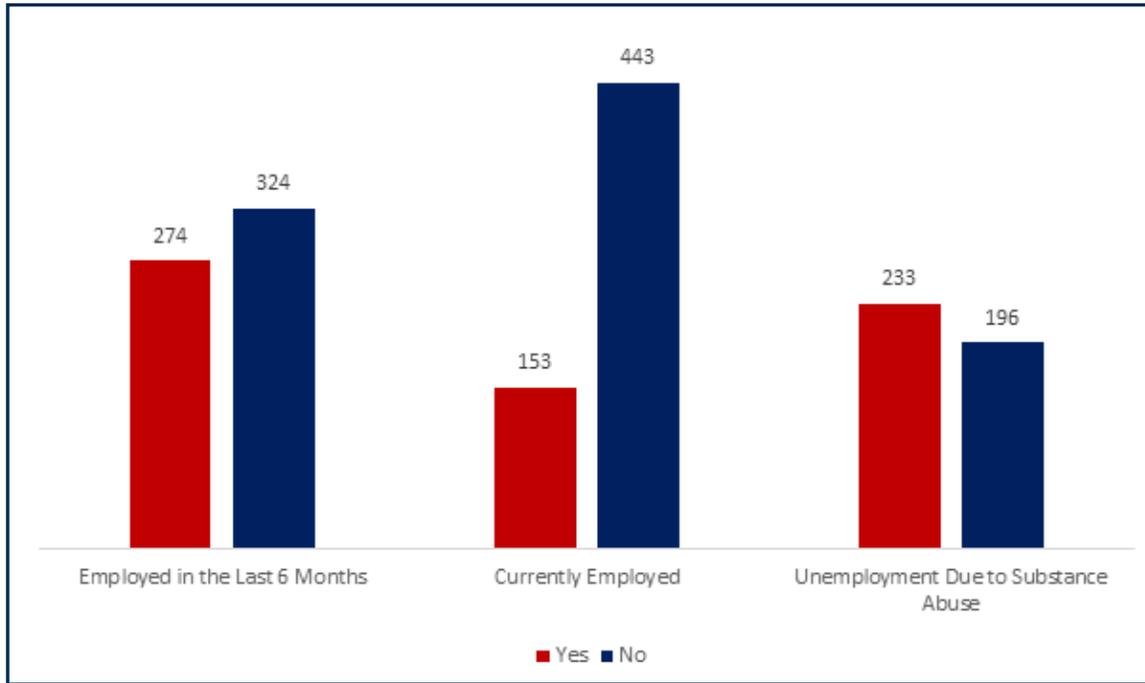
Community professionals agreed that the primary barrier to employment is having a criminal history. Treatment providers commented: *“If they have any drug charge, that really limits their employment opportunities, greatly; A lot of employers do background [checks] with the heroin epidemic ... they don’t want to take that chance of hiring a person with a drug history; If a person is a convicted felon, it’s a major obstacle.”* Another professional added, *“For any type of professional licensure, if you have a felony record, you are disqualified.”*

Participants also highlighted problems with professional licensure as career limiting. One participant explained, *“I used to be a licensed insurance agent and obviously I can’t get back into that. I used to handle money a lot. I can’t do that anymore.”* Other participants commented, *“I used to be a nurse, but I lost my nursing license because of my felony; I lost my social work license because I got a felony ... the obstacle for me is my legal problems.”* In addition, one participant explained how his felony conviction impacts his career and educational aspirations: *“I actually have to think about what I can go for in college because I have the felony.”*

Continued Substance Abuse

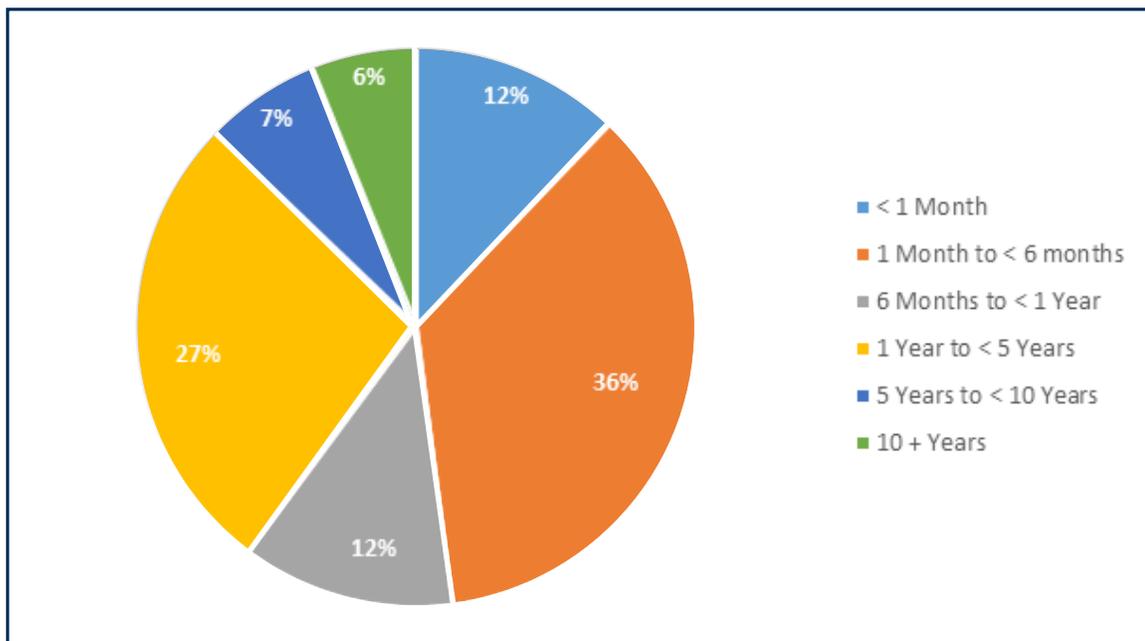
Continued substance use and not being able to pass a pre-employment drug screen are common challenges to obtaining employment. One participant reported, *“You may be qualified and getting off drugs. But, the [hair sampling drug] test goes so far back ... you are disqualified [when past drug use is detected].”* Others explained that continued drug use contributes to poor work performance which can lead to employment termination. A participant stated, *“When I am using, I’m not in a position to work ... I can’t be held accountable.”* Another participant commented, *“I would say withdrawal as well ... not being*

Figure 1
Employment Status*



*Not all participants filled out forms completely; therefore, numbers may not equal 668

Figure 2
Length of Time at Current Job (N = 148)



able to go to job interviews because I would be sick or losing jobs after a short amount of time 'cause of using."

Many community professionals agreed that continued substance use and the inability to pass a drug test are barriers to employment. One professional noted, "[Persons in recovery] are going to have relapse, you know, and I wish that employers would understand that and work with them." Another professional reported, "I've seen that the problem is not the ability to get jobs, but they have trouble maintaining [employment] ... using [substances] before or even at work. Some believe they work better high."

Probation and Treatment Program Requirements

Participants illustrated how probation or treatment program requirements hinder the ability to obtain and maintain employment. Participants expressed: "Finding a job where I can work around all of my requirements for probation [is difficult]; You have a pretty big schedule you have to follow, so it's hard to work around ... all the things you have to do to comply with probation and with your [treatment] program." One participant mentioned, "If [employers] find out you're in treatment ... some places look down on that."

Community professionals agreed that requirements of probation and treatment programs are challenging to employment. One treatment provider stated, "Probation makes [employment] difficult because they want them there every Tuesday, but the client can't do it because they have to work. So, what do you do?" Another professional noted, "With the clinic [offering medication-assisted treatment] only being open during day shift ... if they have a day shift job, they really have to get creative with working around that."

Gaps in Employment History

Many participants acknowledged that a poor work history is a challenge to getting a job. Participants shared: "I got lack of work experience; [I have a poor] job history ... like quitting jobs within short periods of time." Many community professionals explained that participants often have gaps in their work history due to substance use, treatment and/or incarceration which hinders job obtainment. A treatment provider reported, "Because of their drug and alcohol use, many of them have a spotty job history and [employment] gaps on their resume, and then they have to answer why there are those gaps ... so, we try to help prepare them to answer those questions." A law enforcement officer noted that prior work history was even more important with temporary employment agencies, commenting, "Clients burn a lot of bridges with 'temp' (temporary employment) agencies ... poor work history (late arrivals, unexcused

absences, quitting without notice). [Job] competition is high, and temp services have tightened their expectations."

Lack of Education

A lack of education is also a factor that prevents people engaged in substance abuse treatment from obtaining and maintaining employment. One participant stated, "[My challenge to employment is] probably my [lack of] education. I didn't graduate high school ... [I] usually have to lie on an application ... It's what you gotta do to make it." Treatment providers commented: "A lot of the individuals we have, don't even have their GED or haven't finished high school, so they're starting back at needing to get their GED, or finding some way to be able to be qualified for some of the positions that are available for them; Maybe they want to get their high school diploma, but they have no idea how to ... there should be an easier, more accessible option." Another treatment provider concluded, "A lot of people who have substance abuse issues have a lot of skills, knowledge and abilities ... it's just focusing them in the right direction and then calling on supports to help them."

Lack of Transportation and Valid Identification

Participants discussed lack of transportation to get to/from work in conjunction with not having a valid ID to present during the hiring process as barriers to employment for persons in substance abuse treatment. Participants reported: "In small towns ... if you don't have a ride to get to jobs out of town, you're pretty limited; My addiction led to me to not paying child support ... [the court suspended] my driver's license. They recently lifted [the suspension], but I have to pay so much money to still get it back ... and that's a big factor because a lot of companies ... it doesn't even matter if it's a driving job or not, they want a driver's license."

Many participants also noted that persons in treatment often do not have valid driver's licenses, following OVI (operating a vehicle intoxicated) convictions. One participant stated, "After so many 'DUIs' (OVIs), they don't want to give you a driver's license, or even [driving] privileges, and that was my main thing I needed for work." Other participants reported IDs expiring while incarcerated and not having the money to get new IDs. One participant shared, "Being that I just came home from prison, it was hard for me to get a new ID. I had all of these fines that I had to pay."

Community professionals also cited lack of transportation and not having a valid form of identification as employment barriers. They shared: "Some of the challenges that they face is getting their identification, their ID ... they



do need their ID to obtain full-time employment; Transportation is really challenging for them. This is not a large city where you can just go down and get on a bus; That's especially a large problem for those in the rural areas ... there's no taxi service here for them; Many employers are outside bus transportation route."

Other Challenges

Community professionals listed the following additional barriers to employment, although these challenges were not mentioned by the majority of people interviewed: potential loss of government assistance (Medicaid), lack of computer skills needed to complete an online application, low job availability, low self-esteem/self-confidence and homelessness. Many treatment providers discussed the fear of losing government assistance as preventing many clients from obtaining employment. One provider explained, "Most of our clients are on Medicaid ... they're getting food stamps; They're getting a lot of government assistance and we hear a lot, 'I can't get a job. If I get a job, I'll lose my Medicaid. If I lose my Medicaid, I won't be able to dose' (get methadone or Suboxone®) or get treatment." One treatment provider highlighted lack of computer skills as a barrier: "A lot of them aren't good with computer skills and a lot of the applications are online and you have to be able to apply for the position online ... A lot of our clients have a difficult time doing that. They just can't maneuver through the difficulty of actually applying online."

Respondents in the Athens and Youngstown regions discussed lack of employment opportunities. A Youngstown community professional stated, "They can get a job at [a fast food restaurant], but in terms of jobs with living wages, there's not a lot in our community. With the steel mills shutting down, and ... a lot of factory shut downs and not a lot of new businesses coming into our area to offer people who aren't skilled or who don't have college degrees, employment."

A few community professionals highlighted personal challenges such as low self-esteem and a lack of confidence as possibly preventing some clients from obtaining employment. One professional stated, "Especially with guys that have been 'locked up' (incarcerated), there's a lack of confidence that they can function in the outside world. It takes a lot of gradual encouragement to get them up to speed ... to sign up to take a college course or training program or something like that. A lot of guys just think they're too old or they can't cut it and all that." In addition, a treatment provider noted homelessness as a barrier to employment, stating, "Employers are not hiring employees without a permanent address."



Client Exposure to Employment Services

Participants reported a range in the level of involvement and types of employment services in which they have participated (for a summary list of experienced employment services, please see Table 2). State-wide, participants reported having utilized temporary employment services, job assistance programs, career fairs, hiring events and programs at trade and vocational schools. Specifically, participants mentioned utilizing employment services offered through the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Goodwill Industries International, Job and Family Services, Ohio Means Jobs, Recovery to Work (a collaborative program with Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission), Veteran's Affairs, as well as, services offered through various local agencies. Besides assistance with a job search (access to a computer and job listings), some participants reported receiving assistance with resume writing, interview skills and interview preparation, as well as, with GED courses.

Table 2. Types of Employment Services Utilized*

▪ Temporary employment services
▪ Job assistance programs
▪ Career fairs
▪ Hiring events
▪ Programs at trade and vocational schools
▪ Treatment program employment services**

*This information is not rank ordered.

**See Table 3 for a list of employment services offered by treatment programs.

Participant descriptions of employment services they've accessed included the following: *"Job and Family Services ... You can go to the Job Center ... They help you type up your resume and stuff like that ... they are good about that; There's Job and Family Services down the street ... I've used it plenty of times; I'm going through Recovery to Work. It's where they take addicts or alcoholics and they help us with training, how to behave in interviews, resumes. They also do like mathematics and English skills; We have Recovery to Work now where we live at. They help get a job. They'll help you get established ... build a resume. They have people ... job fairs, that kind of thing."*

Most participants throughout OSAM regions acknowledged that links to employment services were offered through their substance abuse treatment programs; however, there was consensus that participation in these services was not typically a requirement of treatment. One participant said, *"They ask about it, but there's not a real emphasis on it."* Another participant stated, *"There are employment services available upon request through treatment. They do not do a very good job though of letting you know it's available."* Participants shared experiences with accessing employment assistance through their programs: *"My case manager takes me to put some applications in; The Work Station specializes in getting folks from here jobs ... I can go there and work on getting my GED. They help you do resumes and [sponsor] job fairs."* A participant from Columbus stated, *"We have a class here, it's called, 'Getting Ahead' ... it teaches us different things on how to find jobs and go back to school."*

Participants from Cincinnati reported extensive employment services as available, including application assistance, how to approach an interview with a felony record, job search assistance and skill-based training classes. One participant reported, *"They have vocational classes here ... there's eight of them and when you're closer to leaving, they take you out ... within a certain radius, to go to interviews and fill out applications and stuff, which is really helpful."* Others commented, *"The last month here they take you out to find a job. I just got back from a job search today; They let us get online, that's the first step. Take us to the career center in Warren County and research for jobs online and, if we need to go again, we'll go again. If not, then they'll take us out looking wherever we want to for jobs; They know employers who will hire us in recovery; They help you answer the felony question and give you a list of places that hire felons."* Dayton participants also highlighted available employment services: *"I'm doing the supportive employment program here; UMADAOP [the Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Programs] gives us references where to go*

... and then, amongst ourselves, we tell each other places to go for jobs and stuff."

While many participants reported involvement in some form of employment services, several participants stated that they were not actively searching for employment or participating in employment services. One participant stated, *"I'm not looking. I need to focus on recovery ... I want my recovery right now."* Another participant elaborated: *"I agree with staying away from work for the first three months just because I am going to be a way better employee if I get a firm foundation with my recovery. And I'm going to be able to cope and handle the stress that I am going to get with the workplace."* Additionally, many participants claimed that employment was not part of their program. Some participants from Columbus, Toledo and Youngstown regions stated that their programs simply did not provide any employment services while some participants in Youngstown did not know if their program provided employment services.

Lastly, there were some participants who expressed wanting more emphasis placed on employment services while receiving treatment for substance abuse, primarily because of the pressing need to be financially stable and support family members. One participant explained, *"For me, being financially responsible helps me feel good about myself ... so, being able to work and take care of myself and take care of my kids and not be more of a burden on my family as I already have been ... it's a self-esteem booster and it encourages me to keep [recovering]."* Another participant explained, *"Without employment, treatment is pretty much useless. If you can't live, it doesn't matter how well you're doing."*





Treatment Program Employment Services

Substance abuse treatment programs provide a varying degree of employment services (for a summary list of employment services offered by participating providers, please see Table 3). Even if employment services were not formally part of the treatment program, most organizations throughout OSAM regions reported providing some form of employment services or service referrals to their clientele.

Table 3. Treatment Program Employment Services*

▪ Referral to employment services
▪ Referral to vocational training
▪ Transportation to employment services
▪ Access to computers and job lists
▪ Assistance with resume writing
▪ Assistance in completing job applications
▪ Interview skills training
▪ Case management for employment assistance
▪ Job/school readiness
▪ GED courses
▪ Agency sponsored job fairs

*This information is not rank ordered.

Most treatment providers in Toledo reported providing some level of employment services. One provider shared, *"We do some mock [job] interviews ... helping them with their resumes as they get into the last stages of treatment where they may be given privileges to work."* A few Cincinnati providers described: *"About two weeks before their discharge, their vocational case managers take them out job searching, putting in applications ... taking them to interviews. They also have vocational seminars that they do throughout their stay where they learn interview questions, how to interview, make resumes; One of the things is we help them get their GEDs here ... if they do not have a high school education, they have to be in classes."* Community professionals in Dayton detailed: *"We have a supportive employment program here with our four employment specialists; They get assigned an employment specialist who helps them and works with them. They develop job skills: interviewing skills, filling out an application, resume building, just whatever areas they need; [Employment specialists] will take them out on job interviews and advocate on their behalf with employers; The employment specialists are also out in the community making employer contacts and letting them know about our program, so they will be more likely to hire our clients."*

In addition to making referrals to employment services, it was common for agencies to provide a list of employers who are open to hiring persons with a felony record. One Toledo treatment provider reported, *"We do resume building. I also have a list of employers that hire [persons with] felonies ... and actually, it's getting to be a better, longer list ... there's a lot more options. I leave it out on the table for them to call ... some have a job lined up before they leave."* One Cleveland provider commented, *"I do have a list of agencies in Cuyahoga (County) and a few of them are in Lake County ... a few of them will hire people that are convicted of felonies."* Many providers also outlined a program in which clients were taught how to discuss their felony conviction in a job interview. One treatment provider stated, *"There is interviewing where they are trained to answer a felony question, and they do resumes ... They do a sample application."*

Community professionals in the Akron-Canton region explained that some agencies provide transportation to other community organizations for employment services, such as Ohio Means Jobs and vocational counseling through Kent State University. Cincinnati professionals reported linking clients to organizations that provide job search assistance, GED courses, vocational training and job interview preparation. One Cincinnati treatment provider stated, *"There are some agencies that we have linked them to that have helped out with employment recently. We refer them there."*

Treatment providers in the Dayton region explained that only clients who qualify for a case manager would receive employment assistance: *"When they are in NIOP, which is the non-intensive outpatient program, they are not case management [eligible], so they are not linked with supportive employment ... which is something I would love to see changed; If you are not mentally ill, you do not need a case manager. So, if they don't get a case manager, they don't get supportive employment ... and we can't help them with getting a job; If they don't have a case manager, then they have to find a job on their own."* One Toledo provider commented that their program is *"strictly mental health services and housing."*

Community professionals in Cleveland agreed that employment services were fairly limited at their agencies; however, they reported that the standard was to refer clients to other community organizations for needed employment services. One professional stated, *"[A local behavioral health agency] has a vocational counselor, so we usually refer ... Usually case managers in the mental health field will help [deliver employment services]."* Another

professional shared, “I sent them to Job and Family Services for the jobs component . . . to help them with resume writing and also with job interviews.” Community professionals in Youngstown reported that their organizations did not provide employment services, but did refer clients to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ohio Means Jobs and other community organizations within Mahoning County.

Employment and Treatment Plans

While most participants throughout OSAM regions reported on available employment services or connections to employment services through their substance abuse programs, there was consensus that it was generally up to the client whether employment goals would be included in their treatment plan.

Similar to participants, most community professionals explained that employment could be included as part of a treatment plan, while highlighting that employment was typically not a required component of treatment plans. Akron-Canton treatment providers reported that the degree to which employment was part of a treatment plan, and the timing in which employment was addressed, was dependent on the client and their circumstances. Treatment providers discussed: “[Employment] is always in the background, even in the first two weeks, but ramps up the last couple of weeks of treatment; It is definitely talked about for transitioning and comes up as a big part before an approved discharge; It depends on the person . . . some, with multiple relapses, going to employment right away is not a good option because employment stressors contribute to relapse, so the focus is on sober housing and continued treatment; I discuss in treatment, ‘What is one job you want to do as a kid?’ Then we’ll discuss how to attain that.”

Generally, it’s up to the client whether employment goals would be included in their treatment plan.

Participants from the Athens, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Youngstown regions explained that sobriety and recovery are the primary goals during treatment, not employment. These participants shared, “My probation officer was like, ‘Don’t worry about finding a job right now;’ [Employment] takes away time from focusing on recovery and you have to learn how to manage it; They actually don’t talk much about employment . . . actually almost discourage



against it, which I find not really productive . . . not realistic at all; They do discourage about you getting a job in your first year of recovery because, you know, it’s not good for addicts to have money . . . but it is unrealistic . . . A job is in my treatment plan. I need money to live; No, they do not require you to get a job. They would prefer you stay focused on your recovery throughout the year; Money . . . is a trigger at times.” One participant observed, “Eventually, when you get to a certain point in your treatment, you’re encouraged to get employment.”

Many treatment providers also stated that employment services were not a priority in their substance abuse treatment programs. One provider from Columbus explained, “Only if [employment] relates to their inability to stay clean or sober . . . If it’s identified as an issue to their sobriety or a stumbling block to their sobriety, then sure, it would be part of the treatment plan . . . but only as it relates to getting and staying clean and sober.” Other providers related similar statements: “First things first, how about you get 90 days clean [before addressing employment]; Their life is usually in such chaos that we need to focus on basic needs first; If they don’t see [employment] as a problem, it’s not normally on the treatment plan.”

Community professionals from Cincinnati and Toledo discussed employment as not a priority until the end of the treatment program. One Cincinnati provider explained, “I think if you’re in a program where the emphasis is on getting you to work quickly, [clients say] . . . ‘All I need is some money in my pocket . . . I just need a wallet transplant . . . Some money that’s all I need. Get me a job, get me a job.’ And if you . . . listen to that, then you’re not helping [the client] because alcoholics are good at getting jobs. They just can’t keep them.” Other professionals elaborated, “Recovery is key, so we’re getting that kind of settled first; I guess when think about it, though, employment is a part of the treat-



ment plan on the back end because on the front end ... it has to do with raising self-esteem, learning how to be honest; As they progress in treatment and sort of get towards the end ... we like to think of the last 3 to 4 weeks as a transitional period, so we try to get them prepped as much as we can to transitioning back out into the community and ... some of that looks like gaining employment."

However, many participants reported that employment is required at a certain stage of their program. Participants from the Akron-Canton region explained, "Yes, [employment] is one of my priorities getting out of treatment; If we do not have a job, it is required that we attend 'Jobs for Life.'" In the Cincinnati region, participants stated: "We have a mandatory 24-25 hours of vocational education here. You have to take that before you can do the job search part ... You have to do the job search part and complete that successfully in order to be released (complete the program); As you get closer to getting out, they help you with the interviewing process ... That's part of your plan. You have to do that." One participant from the Toledo region reported, "[The medication assisted therapy program] wanted me to have a job ... It was on my treatment plan because it's just something that you have to do to live a productive life and be any sort of normal and independent individual."

Reportedly, participants on probation or involved in drug court are often required to obtain employment during their programs. A participant group in the Akron-Canton region reported that clients in the County Community Corrections Program are required to participate in a program called, "Jobs for Life" which is facilitated by the county's Ohio Means Jobs Office. One participant from the Dayton region explained, "We have a log for my probation ... and I have to fill out so many applications each week and get it signed by the managers"

Participants on probation or involved in drug court are often required to obtain employment during their programs.

Community professionals in Akron-Canton, Cincinnati, Columbus and Youngstown noted employment as a requirement for some clients involved in the criminal justice system. One provider in Akron-Canton reported, "Many probation [officers] require employment ... [clients] need to have a job in so many days. [Employment is] part of the women's DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) case plan." Cincinnati professionals explained,

"When they're in the program, one of the requirements is they have to leave with a job; That is part of their requirement. In order to successfully complete the program, they have to have employment." In the Youngstown region, professionals explained that employment was only required by specific drug courts. One professional stated, "It's mandated in the last phase of our program. They either have to be employed, that can be either part time or full time, or they have to be actively continuing their education."

Barriers to Implementing Employment Services

Several barriers were discussed among community professionals in regards to implementation of employment services at their organizations (for a summary list of these barriers, please see Table 4). Professionals throughout OSAM regions discussed client lack of readiness to receive employment services as a barrier. Many treatment providers expressed that most clients were not typically prepared to take on employment before completion of their substance abuse treatment; thus, many thought implementation of employment services in tandem with substance abuse treatment to be inappropriate.

Table 4. Barriers to Implementing Employment Services*

▪ Clients not ready for employment
▪ Funding – not enough resources in the community
▪ Time – treatment programs are short in duration
▪ Loss of connection to clients after discharge – belief that employment services come later in recovery
▪ Lack of space to accommodate new services
▪ Employment services are not an agency priority
▪ Belief that employment services are out of provider's scope of practice

*This information is not ranked ordered.

Lack of time in the treatment program to dedicate to addressing employment needs was also named as a barrier. Treatment providers explained that job readiness for persons with substance use disorder was a process of establishing sobriety and learning how to maintain sobriety before learning how to obtain and maintain employment. Many providers noted that the process typically takes longer than the short-term stay of the clients in their programs. These providers, operating on the belief that employment services come later in recovery, noted difficulty in keeping connected with clients long enough to implement employment services upon completion of

substance abuse treatment when contact with the client generally ended.

Many community professionals also noted that many clients lack basic life skills needed to ensure employment success; such as, self-care, coping skills, self-discipline, self-confidence, general social skills, a routine sleep schedule and knowledge of how to dress appropriately for the situation. Additionally, a few providers stated that many clients had problems with authority. Treatment providers explained: *“They’re not ready. Half of them don’t even know how to live life yet. They don’t know how to wash clothes. Half of them don’t even know how to talk to people because they isolate; They don’t know how to communicate in the real world or know where you would go to get a job interview.”* One treatment provider commented, *“General lack of discipline in their lives.”*

Lastly, community professionals stressed the lack of community resources as a barrier to implementing employment services. Treatment providers discussed: *“We have so many people that need [employment services] and only so little of those services to go around; We need more resources to be able to offer them more assistance; Primarily ... [a barrier] would be [the lack of] reliable referral sources ... dependable independent or government services that we could send patients to.”* Treatment providers consistently cited lack of funding and staffing as primary barriers to employment services. In addition, a group of treatment providers in the Athens region reported that they would be limited on office space if they were to bring in additional staff for employment services; they would need group space for those participating in such a program. Finally, employment services were often not a priority of the agency; some providers believed employment services to fall outside of their scope of practice.

Resources Needed to Implement Employment Services

Community professionals named an array of resources needed for implementation of employment services at their organizations, as well as, suggestions to improve/expand existing employment services (for a summary list of these needed resources, please see Table 5). Professionals throughout OSAM regions agreed with the sentiments expressed by a couple of providers: *“We need more jobs in our community; More networking opportunities in order to link people with jobs.”* Professionals also expressed a need for equipment (computers), additional staff (appropriate staff to deliver employment services), list of employers that will hire persons with felony convictions (not all orga-

nizations have such a list), transportation to/from services and affordable, reliable and accessible childcare to allow for participation in services and eventual employment.

Table 5. Resources Needed to Implement Employment Services*

▪ More jobs
▪ More networking opportunities to link clients to jobs
▪ Equipment (computers)
▪ Additional staff (appropriate staff to deliver employment services)
▪ Transportation to/from services
▪ Affordable, reliable and accessible childcare
▪ Job coaches to mentor clients as they transition into employment
▪ Additional funding for supportive employment programs
▪ On-site BVR counselor
▪ Enlist a person with vocational training background to offer a program on-site
▪ Reliable referral sources to employment services in communities
▪ Training employment specialists in substance abuse issues

*This information is not ranked ordered.

One treatment provider group suggested job coaches who would work in the community and on the job site to mentor clients as they transition into employment as a much needed resource. A treatment provider stated, *“I’d like to see NIOOP (non-intensive outpatient program) funds be able to be part of supportive employment.”* One treatment provider in Athens County believed, *“A BVR (Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation) counselor would be helpful ... a counselor on-site, every day, 40 hours [per week] ... Our people could use the assistance of the BVR to find and maintain employment. That’s what that bureau does. If you want to put your money into something, that’s where you put your money.”* Another treatment provider from Toledo suggested, *“Maybe some vocational training ... maybe we could implement a training or [acquire] a person with vocational experience who could come and do a group once a week. I think that would be a good goal.”*

Lastly, community professionals in Cincinnati would like more resources to assist clients with obtaining a state identification card. One professional stated, *“I think the ID situation is probably the biggest struggle that we have.”* Columbus treatment providers noted a need for reliable referral sources to employment services in their commu-

nities. Professionals in Dayton expressed interest in training employment specialists in how to work with persons in substance abuse treatment programs. Another agency provider shared that they have an employment program, and indicated that expectations of employment specialists were often not realistic for people in recovery; thus, they also advocated for training employment specialists in substance abuse issues.



Conclusion

Our employment study of substance abuse treatment services was successful in generating data needed to provide a better understanding of what employment services are available, as well as, what needs treatment agencies have in the area of employment services. These data will undoubtedly aid in the development of employment services.

Employment is a challenge for persons with substance use disorders. Of the participants who indicated their employment status, only a quarter reported being currently employed; and of those participants who reported no current employment, greater than half reported their current unemployment status was due to their substance abuse.

Participants in substance abuse treatment programs and community professionals who serve them, agreed on many challenges these consumers face to obtain and maintain employment. Both groups of respondents identified a criminal history, particularly a felony, as a primary barrier. They also agreed that theft and drug charges, probation and treatment program requirements, continued substance abuse, the ability to pass a drug test, gaps in work history, and a general lack of education, transportation and a state ID were employment challenges as well.

Community professionals also identified a general lack of skills and a fear of losing government assistance such as Medicaid as additional challenges.

Participants reported a range in the level of involvement and types of employment services in which they have participated. State-wide, participants reported having utilized temporary employment services, job assistance programs, career fairs, hiring events, programs at trade and vocational schools, as well as, treatment program employment services. In fact, most participants throughout OSAM regions acknowledged that links to employment services were offered through their substance abuse treatment programs; however, there was consensus in that participation in these services was not typically a requirement. And while many participants reported involvement in some form of service, several participants stated that they were not actively searching for employment or participating in services due to a singular focus on recovery. It was equally noteworthy that some participants expressed wanting more emphasis placed on employment services while receiving treatment for substance abuse.

Substance abuse treatment programs provide a varying degree of employment services. Even if employment services were not formally part of the treatment program, most organizations reported providing some form of services or service referrals to their clientele. However, there was consensus among respondents that it was generally up to the client whether employment goals would be included in their treatment plan. Treatment providers explained that the degree to which employment was part of a treatment plan, and the timing in which employment was addressed, was dependent on the client and their circumstances. Many participants expressed that sobriety and recovery were the primary goals during treatment, not employment. Many treatment providers stated that employment services were not a priority of their programs, or at least not a priority until the end of the treatment process. Reportedly, participants on probation or involved in drug court are often required to obtain employment during their programs.

Several barriers were discussed among community professionals in regards to implementation of employment services at their organizations. Professionals throughout OSAM regions discussed client lack of readiness to receive employment services as a primary barrier. Many treatment providers expressed that most clients were not typically prepared to take on employment before completion of their substance abuse treatment; thus, many thought

implementation of employment services in tandem with substance abuse treatment to be inappropriate. Providers also stressed lack of time in their treatment program to dedicate to addressing employment needs along with lack of funding and lack of appropriate staff to deliver these services as other barriers. Some providers also believed employment services to fall outside of their scope of practice. Many community professionals felt that other agencies were better suited to address employment; they often referred to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) and the Department of Jobs and Family Services where employment is a priority.

Lastly, community professionals named an array of resources needed for implementation of employment services at their organizations: increased funding for supportive employment programs, equipment (computers), list of employers that hire persons with felony convictions (not all organizations have such a list), transportation to/from services and affordable, reliable and accessible childcare to allow for participation in services and eventual employment. In addition, staff appropriate to the delivery of employment services was almost universally mentioned as a need. Specific staff requested include: job coaches to mentor clients as they transition into employment, on-site BVR counselors and persons with vocational training experience to offer employment programs in-house.



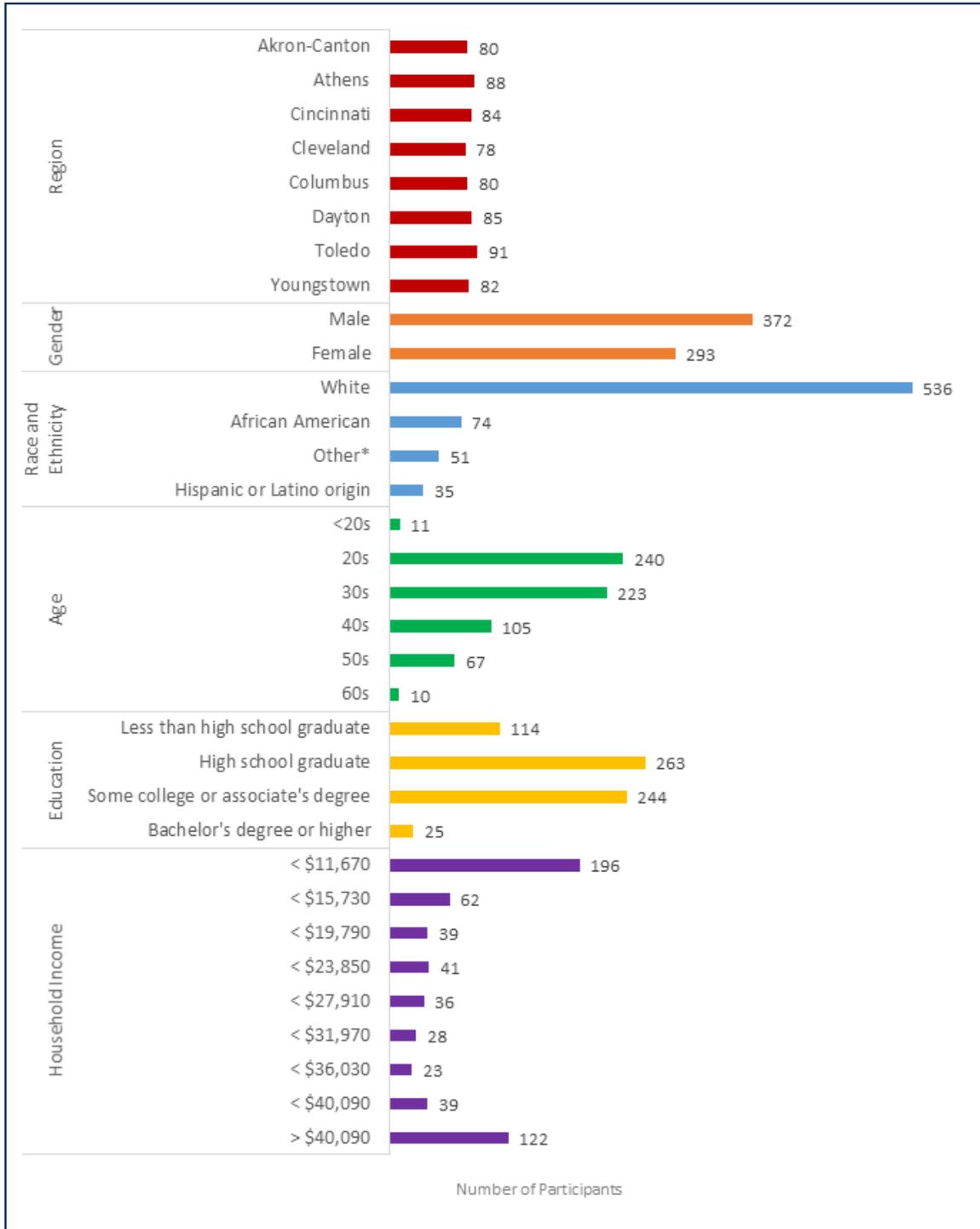
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Appendices

- A. OSAM Regional Map
- B. Participant Characteristics
- C. Reported Drugs Used During the Past Six Months

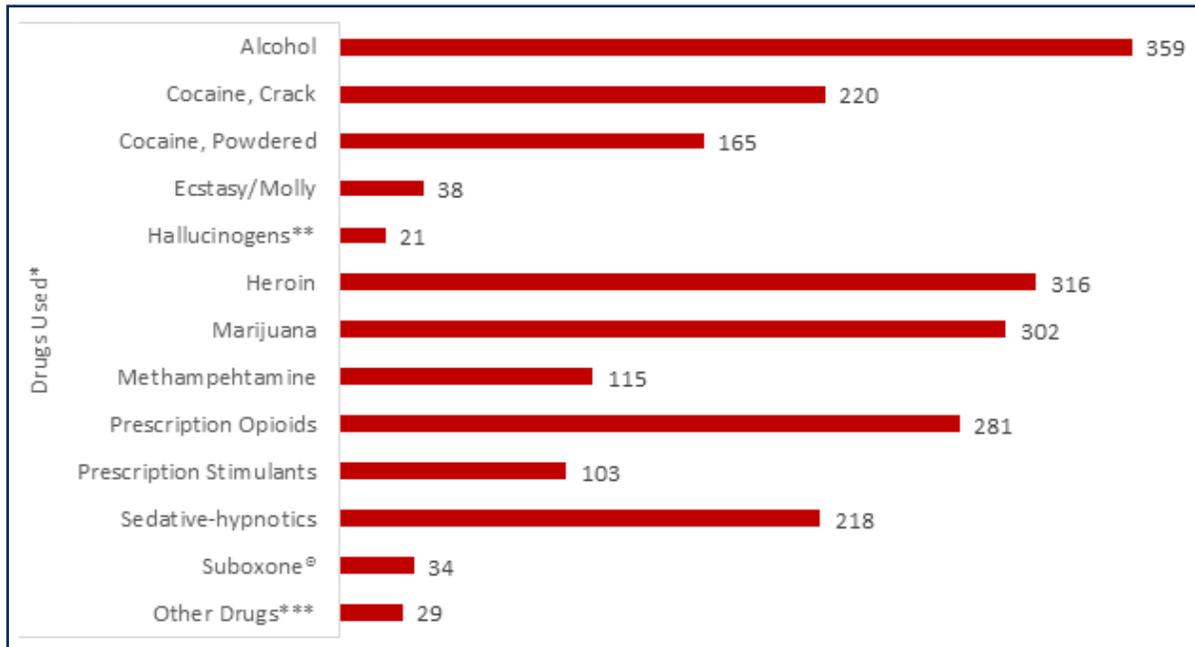
Appendix B
Participant Characteristics (N = 668*)



*Not all participants filled out forms completely; therefore, numbers may not equal 668.

** Other included: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, unspecified other and more than one race.

Appendix C
Reported Drugs Used During the Past Six Months



*Some respondents reported multiple drugs of use during the past six months.

**Hallucinogens included: dimethyltryptamine (DMT), lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin mushrooms.

***Other drugs included: bath salts, inhalants (duster), ketamine, methadone, Neurontin®, cold-and-cough medications (Coricidin® and promethazine) and phencyclidine (PCP).