

LINKING PROGRAM OUTCOME WITH EXPRESSED CLIENT
SATISFACTION IN VOCATIONAL EVALUATION SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

With the concept of client participation in the rehabilitation process becoming more widespread, the use of client satisfaction measures has increased. After development and implementation of a Vocational Evaluation Satisfaction Scale (VESS) in an evaluation and developmental center (Sabin, Cuvo, & Musgrave, in press), two of the authors decided to examine the relationship of the evaluation outcome to the VESS scores. Participants were those of the original client group on which the VESS was validated who could be contacted. It was hypothesized that those clients who were more satisfied with evaluation services would have followed through with their evaluation plans or at least started the procedures which could be done if the services had not yet begun.

Results indicated that although the majority of contacted clients were satisfied with previous recommendations at the time of this followup study, and that the majority of the total sample of clients did follow through with planned programming, point bi-serial correlations between satisfaction scores on the VESS and client follow through were non-significant. Possible reasons for these results are discussed, and suggestions for further research presented.

With the greater emphasis on consumer or client participation in rehabilitation established as a result of both program accountability (Commission on Accreditation for Rehabilitation Facilities, 1986) and consumer advocacy (Bowe, 1980), measures of qualitative success in vocational rehabilitation services are being investigated increasingly (Patterson & Leach, 1987).

One such qualitative measure is that of client satisfaction. Early studies on client (Reagles, Wright & Thomas, 1972; Sink & McCroskey, 1979) and later studies on patient (Koerner, Cohen & Armstrong, 1985; Lebow, 1983a, (1983b) satisfaction focussed on satisfaction with the results of services as a whole, e.g., rehabilitated or not rehabilitated, improved functioning level or no improvement. A few have focussed on treatment environment (Spreitzer, 1975). Research has suggested that client satisfaction appears to be two dimensional, i.e., (a) satisfaction with programming and staff, and (b) satisfaction with the environment of the program (Distefano, Pryor & Baker, 1983) whether utilizing outcome or environmental variables. These and other studies have tended to show a relatively high satisfaction rate (outpatient, 78%; inpatient, 76%; and comprehensive services, 83% regardless of outcome (Lebow, 1983a).

Patterson and Leach (1987) discuss the difficulties in using treatment outcome, and by implication, rehabilitation status as predictors of client satisfaction. There are methodological issues in collection of data, content coverage, and design as well as utilization in program evaluation. The fact that there is high satisfaction regardless of closure status and whether clients can, in fact, determine what services are needed and appropriately judge if their needs are met are also issues that have been noted in the literature (see Patterson and Leach for the most recent discussion). No recent studies have contraindicated Rubin's statement that "a client's satisfaction may not be synonymous with the outcome of rehabilitation but it can be assumed that there is a relationship between the two" (cited in Patterson & Leach, 1987).

In an effort to address the question of whether client expression of higher satisfaction with services is a positive indicator of following through with program recommendation (a measure of "success" in vocational evaluation services), the authors chose to investigate the relationship of client scores on the Vocational Evaluation Satisfaction Scale (VESS) developed by Sabin, Cuvo and Musgrave (in press) to the clients' carrying out

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the recommendations of those same vocational evaluation services. They also were interested in determining if clients were still satisfied at the follow up time with the previous recommendations made at the time of their evaluation. It was hypothesized that those who were more satisfied with the original evaluation services as determined by their score on the VESS would have (a) followed through with their evaluation plans and/or (b) taken those possible steps which could be done if the services had not yet begun, and (c) continued to express satisfaction with the original recommendations. Thus, the relationship between expressed satisfaction with prior services and follow through of planned vocational services were expected to be positively correlated, as were the expressed satisfaction at termination of the evaluation services (VESS scores) and continued satisfaction with those services as indicated in the mailed questionnaire.

Method

Participants

Participants were clients referred from the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services to a community based rehabilitation facility in the midwest for vocational evaluation services and were the original client group on which the VESS was validated. All participants had completed vocational evaluation programming at least one calendar year earlier. The age range was 17 to 51 years (mean = 27.98%; standard deviation = 9.31). The majority (60%) of the clients were single, male (79%), white (88%) individuals with little or no previous job experience. The most frequently attained educational level was regular high school graduation or getting a General Educational Level (GED) certificate. Forty-six percent had no public financial assistance. The majority of the participants (92%) were classified as severely disabled with the most frequently named disabling conditions being: (a) orthopedic (38%), (b) mental retardation (13%), and behavior disorders (13%). No other specific category exceeded 6% of the clients (psychiatric); 8% of the remaining individuals were classified as miscellaneous or other conditions. Slightly more than half (52%) had received their education in a community based regular school. Almost half (48%) lived with a parent or guardian when referred, and 40% resided in their own apartment or home. Table 1 presents details of participant demographic characteristics.

Procedure

Participants were sent a facility-addressed, stamped 3½ by 5" double post card mailing which asked if they had followed through with planned vocational evaluation services, and if they were still satisfied with the services they had obtained. Two versions of this mailing were prepared to take into account both job placement and school or training recommendations (see Table 2). If participants could not be reached by mail, followup information was requested from the referring state vocational

rehabilitation counselor case manager.

Results

Response Rate

Thirteen of 47 original participants returned the questionnaire mailer which included the satisfaction data. One client had moved from the area, one was deceased, and three mailers were not deliverable. Hence, of the potential clients (N = 42) available for this study, 31% responded. This rate compares favorably with recent published figures (Steeh, 1981). Information on follow through of recommendations was received from case managers for 32 of the remaining individuals.

Questionnaire Responses

Of the 13 individuals who returned their questionnaires, 9 (69%) indicated they either had followed through with evaluation recommendations or were still planning to; 10 (77%) indicated they were still satisfied with the original plans, and 3 (23%) were no longer satisfied with those plans. Of the remaining 32 individuals, information received from referring case managers indicated that 26 (81%) had followed the recommendations or were still planning to do so. Thus 35 (78%) of the total sample had followed through with previous program planning. See Table 3 for a breakdown of responses by recommendation for school or training, recommendations for a job, and total recommendations.

Correlation Analysis

A point-biserial correlation was calculated between the VESS scores and (a) statements of still satisfied/not satisfied for the 13 respondents of the questionnaires ($r_{pb} = -.025$), and (b) for the total sample for which information was available from case managers who had followed through with their vocational evaluation recommendations ($r_{pb} = .0022$). Significance was not reached for either of these correlations ($t_{11} = .0073$), ns; $t_{44} = -.1659$, ns).

Discussion

The hypothesis that higher client satisfaction scores as expressed by VESS scores would be significantly positively correlated with program follow through of recommendations by the vocational evaluation programming was not upheld. This finding is in agreement with prior research in the client or consumer satisfaction field (LeBow, 1983a, 1983b; Patterson & Leach, 1987). Although the focus of the satisfaction measure (VESS) was both on process and outcome, no differences were apparent as had been noted by Distefano, Pryor and Baker (1983) previously. That the majority of clients followed through with their recommended programming seems therefore to be based on something other than their satisfaction with programming. This study is limited by the small number of participants, with a larger client database, prediction equations might be able to be developed utilizing the satisfaction measures. Further research on a longitudinal

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basis may provide different results. With a larger client database, prediction equations might be able to be developed utilizing the satisfaction measures. The use of a pretest measure to determine client expectations might also be paired with scores at the time of program completion and then with follow up measures.

Perhaps, as noted by Patterson and Leach (1987), the role of client satisfaction needs to be re-defined. Client satisfaction with services may be useful in itself as a part of planned program evaluation as a method of refining staff or practitioner practices and in soliciting consumer reaction. However, our conclusion is that further study is needed in defining measures that will be able to be utilized in determining the success of programming in terms of both outcome of services and what clients desire from services.

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Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Gender	Race	Disability Type
Male 79%	White 87%	Severe 92%
Female 21%	Black 13%	Non Severe 8%
	Other 1%	

Marital Status	Educational Level
Divorced 17%	High School 63%
Married 23%	1-4 year college 15%
Single 60%	Grades 9-11 6%
	4 year degree 10%
	Not given 6%

Financial Assistance	Employment Status
None 46%	Sheltered 29%
Public assistance 17%	Over 5 years 21%
SSI 15%	2-5 years 19%
SSDI 13%	1 year or less 17%
AFDC 8%	Never 15%
Unemployed 2%	

Kind of Disability	Type of Schooling
Orthopedic 38%	Regular 52%
Mentally retarded 13%	Special Education 19%
Behavior disorder 13%	Technical 19%
Psychiatric 6%	Non-traditional 4%
Alcoholism 4%	Not given 6%
Drug addiction 4%	
Eye disorders 4%	Living Situation
Epilepsy 2%	With parent 48%
Hearing 2%	Own apt/home 40%
Learning disorder 2%	Half-way house 8%
Metabolic diseases 2%	Institution 4%
Respiratory 2%	
All others 8%	

Table 2
Mailer Examples

Job Recommendation
You completed a vocational evaluation at EDC* on _____ and you were recommended for job placement.

- Did you carry out the recommendations made through vocational evaluation for a job?
Yes ___ No ___
If yes, did you get a job? Yes ___ No ___
are you still working? Yes ___ No ___
are you still looking? Yes ___ No ___
- Did you change your mind and do something else? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you satisfied with the vocational evaluation recommendations made at EDC? Yes ___ No ___

Your name will not be used. "PLEASE" answer these questions and put this post card in the mailbox. # _____

School or Training Recommendation
You completed a vocational evaluation at EDC on _____ and you were recommended for school or training.

- Did you carry out the recommendations for school or training made through your vocational evaluation? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, did you start your school or training? Yes ___ No ___
are you in school or training? Yes ___ No ___
are you waiting to begin? Yes ___ No ___
have you completed? Yes ___ No ___
- Did you change your mind and do something else? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you satisfied with the vocational evaluation recommendations made at EDC? Yes ___ No ___

Your name will not be used. "PLEASE" answer these questions and put this post card in the mailbox.

*EDC is the facility acronym

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Table 3
Questionnaire Responses

	Job	School	Total
	91%	74%	78%
Carried out recommendations (N = 45)			
Changed mind/something else (N = 13)	0%	0%	15%
Satisfied with recommendations (N = 13)	100*	75%	77%

* one individual

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