

An Investigation of Reasonable Accommodations for People with Psychiatric Disabilities: Quantitative Findings from a Multi-Site Study

Article Summary

The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation examined accommodations in the workplace for persons with psychiatric disabilities. MacDonald-Wilson, Rogers, Massaro, Lyass, & Crean (2002) collected and analyzed data describing the range of accommodations, functional limitations, environmental demands as well as specific accommodations for each participant. They also examined characteristics of employers, employees as well as service provider agencies involved in the development of reasonable accommodations. The study was exploratory, descriptive, longitudinal, and a multi-site investigation of reasonable accommodations in the workplace for people with psychiatric disabilities.

MacDonald-Wilson et al. (2002) found that individuals obtaining employment through supported employment programs were working in the service and retail industries for entry level pay. MacDonald-Wilson et al. reported, "In terms of job tenure, while all individuals were employed at entry into the study, less than half had the same job at the 6-month observation point." They also reported, "These data suggest that job tenure of individuals in this study is relatively short. However, while less than half of participants had the same job, almost 60% were employed in some job at the sixth month point." In terms of the functional limitation that might create the need for an accommodation, MacDonald-Wilson and colleagues found that persons with psychiatric disabilities appear to have complex issues regarding the interpersonal domain, specifically interacting with others as well as interpreting the social cues of the work environment. MacDonald-Wilson also reported, "Unlike many accommodations for persons with physical disabilities, accommodations for persons with psychiatric disabilities tend to involve human assistance of some kind, usually a job coach, and tend to have few if any direct or tangible costs to the employer." The costs related to accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities are incurred due to extra supervision or training, modifying job duties as well as flexible scheduling. They also described the role of the job coach on providing accommodations as pivotal in obtaining most of the accommodations.

MacDonald-Wilson and colleagues believe this study reveals the importance of training and assistance of supported employment personnel to conceptualize the functional limitations of their employees so that they may creatively consider a variety of accommodations. The study also reveals the costs to employers involved with employing a person with a psychiatric disability as well as the possible limitations they may encounter.

MacDonald-Wilson et al. concludes, "The information available from this study adds to the body of accumulating knowledge about the process and types of reasonable accommodations needed by individuals with psychiatric disabilities."

Reference

MacDonald-Wilson, K. L., Rogers, E. S., Massaro, J.M., Lyass, A., & Crean, T. (2002). An investigation of reasonable workplace accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities: Quantitative findings from a multi-site study. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 38(1), 35-50.