

Job accommodations for persons with mental health challenges or impairments: what are they and what does the research tell us?

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for
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Outline of the Webinar

- **1. Introduction**
- **2. Research review:** *Empirical lessons about job accommodations for persons with mental health challenges*
 - Joan Rapp
 - Questions/Answers
- **3. Experience review:** *What JAN has learned about accommodations for persons with mental health impairments*
 - Melanie Whetzel
 - Questions/Answers
- **4. General discussion**

1. INTRODUCTION: Job accommodations & the ADA

- Mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990 and Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Certain employers are required to provide *'reasonable accommodations'* to *qualified* individuals with disabilities unless doing so would create an *undue hardship*

INTRODUCTION: Terminology

- Target population – “Qualified Individuals”
 - Individuals with mental health challenges, behavioral health conditions, psychiatric disabilities or mental health impairments; we often use “person in recovery”



- Job Accommodations
 - “any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done (EEOC, 2002).”

Purpose of Job Accommodations

Accommodations are intended to remove the workplace barriers for individuals with disabilities (EEOC, 2002).



“Reasonable vs. Unreasonable Accommodations”

- unreasonably high costs
- significant disruption to the nature of the business



2. Research Review

Steps in Process:

- Reviewed & graded the research in for rigor & meaningfulness
- Synthesized results into one document
- Developed dissemination plan with organizations
- Developed information tools

Context for Review: Past Research

- Job Accommodations for people with other disabilities are associated with:
 - higher job retention rates
 - satisfactory work outcomes
- Limited knowledge of people with psychiatric disabilities about how to use the ADA and job accommodations
- Deciding about disclosure of psychiatric disabilities may also interfere with requesting and using job accommodations

What Research was Analyzed ?

- Screened 60 articles out of 100 documents that were found.
- How did we decide what to review?
 1. Had to focus on Job Accommodations
 2. Those studied had to be exclusively or mostly people with psychiatric impairments
 3. Design could include:
 - Experimental;
 - Quasi-experimental;
 - Pre-test/Post-test;
 - Observational cohort;
 - Correlational;
 - Survey Research



After Screening ... we had 19 left

19 **studies** selected for review :

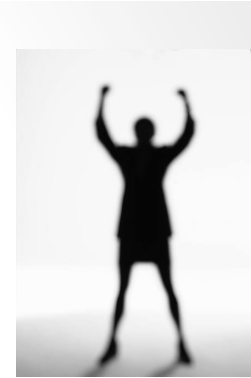
- 4 studies examined Outcomes of Accommodations
(All Correlational or Survey Designs ; Rated for rigor)
- 15 studies described accommodations and related
factors – Process Studies



[In addition, we found 9 **Qualitative Studies** on job accommodations and disclosure]

Findings: Some uncertainty

The extent to which job accommodations are effective or ineffective for people with psychiatric challenges



So what did we learn about Outcomes ?

Some evidence that job accommodations are positively associated with:

- staying employed
- job satisfaction
- satisfactory job terminations (e.g. leaving for better job etc.)
- sense of mastery and well-being
- opportunity for promotion

What did we learn about Employment Tenure ?

What did we learn?

- Employment tenure is positively associated with **number** of job accommodations
- Unsatisfactory job terminations are related to **unmet accommodation needs** (e.g. flexible hours, more training, and improved supervision and support)
- Inadequate accommodation is associated with **disability leave status and with poorer employment outcomes** (e.g. lower job satisfaction, lower sense of mastery and well-being, and a lack of opportunity for promotion)

What does that mean?

- More accommodations-longer on the job
- Quitting/getting fired has something to do with needing accommodations and not getting them
- Not getting the right accommodations or enough accommodations-- has something to do with more disability leave time and bad experiences in the workplace



Findings Related to Costs

Evidence from existing descriptive and qualitative studies suggest that most accommodations for people with psychiatric challenges require little to nothing in direct costs

What did we learn about typical accommodations ?

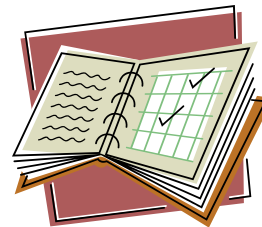
- Accommodations generally fall into 3 types:

- **task**
- **routine**
- **relationships**



Typical Job Accommodations

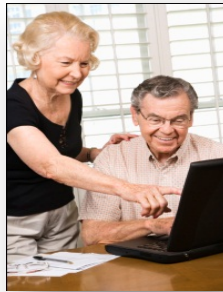
Most frequently used accommodations:



- Flexible schedules
- Job assistance by vocational rehabilitation specialist
- Interpersonal or other support interactions provided by supervisors and coworkers
- Changes in job tasks
- Changes in the training process

What have we learned about the nature of job accommodations?

- Employees and supervisors tend to identify different accommodations when asked about a particular job (e.g. flexibility in schedules, modifications in job demands, type of supervision etc.)



- Relationship accommodation needs were **least often met**

Other Findings:



What did we find?

1. The functional limitations requiring accommodations are most often **cognitive or social-interpersonal** in nature
2. Disclosure of psychiatric disabilities to employers is a complex process for which individuals need guidance in order to weigh both the risks and the benefits: **what to say, when, and to whom.**
3. Disclosure is less complicated when employees with psychiatric disabilities are involved in **supported employment** services, since service providers often are actively involved in the disclosure and arranging of accommodations.

What does it mean?

1. Most of what you 'll be asked to do, as an employer or supervisor is to make accommodations that help people think more clearly or in a more focused way and get along with colleagues, supervisors etc.
2. Telling someone you have a psychiatric disability is scary- if you tell, you may get support or be ostracized; if you don't – you may not get what you need—so employees need input on what to do about this
3. When there is a specific program— mental health job coaches—the issue of identifying oneself or not is usually taken care of from the beginning



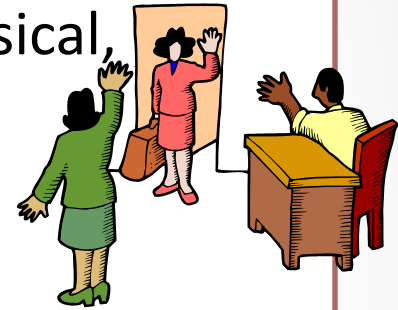
Findings: Functional Limitations

Examples of limitations which are helped by accommodations:

- **Cognitive** – learning job tasks, concentrating, working independently
- **Social-interpersonal** – interacting with coworkers or customers, responding to supervisor feedback
- **Emotional** – managing stress, adjusting to changes in the workplace, lack of confidence
- **Physical** – maintaining stamina, adjusting to low energy levels or fatigue, experiencing physical side effects of medications

What have we learned about disclosure & accommodation

- People with mental health challenges vs. physical, sensory impairments are **less likely to have accommodations** in the workplace
- Supervisor and coworker **supportiveness are associated with disclosure** of disability and successful accommodations in the workplace
- Over-accommodation or **excessive supportiveness may result in employees leaving jobs** due to feeling unchallenged and overprotected in their work

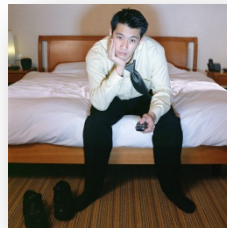


Findings: Attitudes about Accommodations

- Employers tend to be aware of the ADA for people with psychiatric disabilities
- Majority of employers are satisfied with these employees
- Coworkers generally supportive of job accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities:
 - (e.g. flexible work hours, banking overtime for use as sick leave, and access to counseling)

Why More Research Needed?

- Unemployment and underemployment rates among those with psychiatric impairments are extremely high (75 -85% not working).



- We need more rigorous research on effectiveness of job accommodations to benefit people with mental health challenges, employers & policy makers.
- Knowledge from Supported Housing and Supported Employment shows the value of the right supports in effecting positive outcomes.

WEBSITE FOR THE ENTIRE RESEARCH SUMMARY ON JOB ACCOMMODATIONS

- [Disability Research Right to Know](http://www.bu.edu/drrk/research-syntheses/psychiatric-disabilities/job-accommodations/)
- <http://www.bu.edu/drrk/research-syntheses/psychiatric-disabilities/job-accommodations/>



WEBSITE FOR THIS WEBINAR, SLIDES & OTHER INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Training Division

<http://cpr.bu.edu/develop/webinar/usbln>



“If it wasn't hard, everyone would do it. It's the hard that makes it great.”

Tom Hanks --Playing Jimmy Dugan From “A League Of Their Own”



- **Providing Reasonable Accommodations to**
- **Employees with Mental Health Impairments**
 - **Melanie Whetzel, Senior Consultant**
 - **Cognitive/Neurological Team**

Job Accommodation Network: JAN

- Established in 1983 as a national, free service.
- Specialize in job accommodations and the employment provisions of the ADA.
- Assist with the interactive process.
- Give targeted technical assistance.

JAN - Continued

- Provide comprehensive resources.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Communicate via telephone, chat, text, TTY, relay, email, Skype, and social networks.
- Offer live and archived training.
- Work as a partner in making model employers.

Mental Health Impairments

- **Agenda**
- About Mental Health Impairments
- Job Accommodations
- Q&A



Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Mental Health Impairments

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (n.d.a) defines a mental health impairment as:

- a medical condition that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental health impairments are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life.

** used as source for definitions and statistics in this presentation*

www.nami.org



Mental Health Impairments

Common Mental Health Impairments

- Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- Major Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



Mental Health Impairments

Limitations

- Attendance
- Concentration
- Emotions
- Fatigue
- Memory
- Organization
- Panic Attacks
- Sleep Disturbances
- Stress
- Coworker Interaction
- Working Effectively



Mental Health Impairments

Daily Accommodation Servings

- Mental health impairments can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income.
- For many people with mental health impairments, the stigma can be worse than the condition.
- Mental health impairments are often revealed in the workplace only when a crisis occurs.
- Statistics vary.



Mental Health Impairments

Some Mental Health Impairments Include:

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Schizophrenia

= Can Substantially Limit Brain Function



Mental Health Impairments

Job Accommodations



Mental Health Impairments

Productivity



Mental Health Impairments

Example

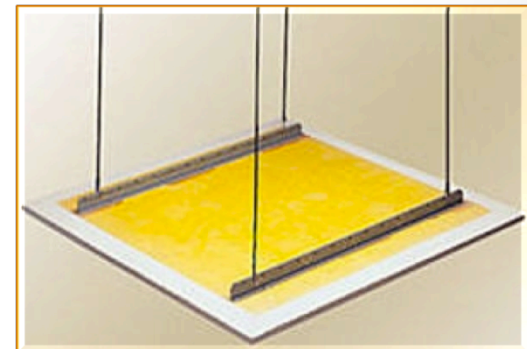
A production manager for a large manufacturer had bipolar disorder. His duties included working 40 hours per week with additional over time to complete and oversee paperwork and shipping orders. He was not meeting his production standards.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: Concentration

- **Reduce distractions in the work area:**
 - Space enclosures, sound absorption panels, or a private office
 - White noise, music player, or environmental sound machines
 - Uninterrupted “off” work time
 - Desk organizers



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: Concentration

- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Use auditory or written cues as appropriate
- Restructure job to include only essential functions
- Provide memory aids such as schedulers, calendars, email add-ons, or apps



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

Initially the employee was allowed to work 30 hours per week for one month, increasing to 40 hours per week for the next month. Then, the manager returned back to his regular schedule. He was also provided a work area that was away from noise and given earbuds to listen to music. He also met briefly with his supervisor once a week to discuss workload issues.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A housekeeper with OCD repeatedly checked and re-checked rooms for supplies. She was not completing the number of rooms required during a shift.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: **Organization**

- Use daily, weekly, and monthly task lists
- Use calendar with automated reminders to highlight meetings and deadlines
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Use a color coding scheme to prioritize tasks
- Use electronic organizers or mobile devices / apps



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

The individual was accommodated with a computerized checklist for each supply listed for each type of room.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A customer service representative with arthritis and major depression experienced extreme fatigue during the afternoon, which had an effect on her speed.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: **Fatigue**

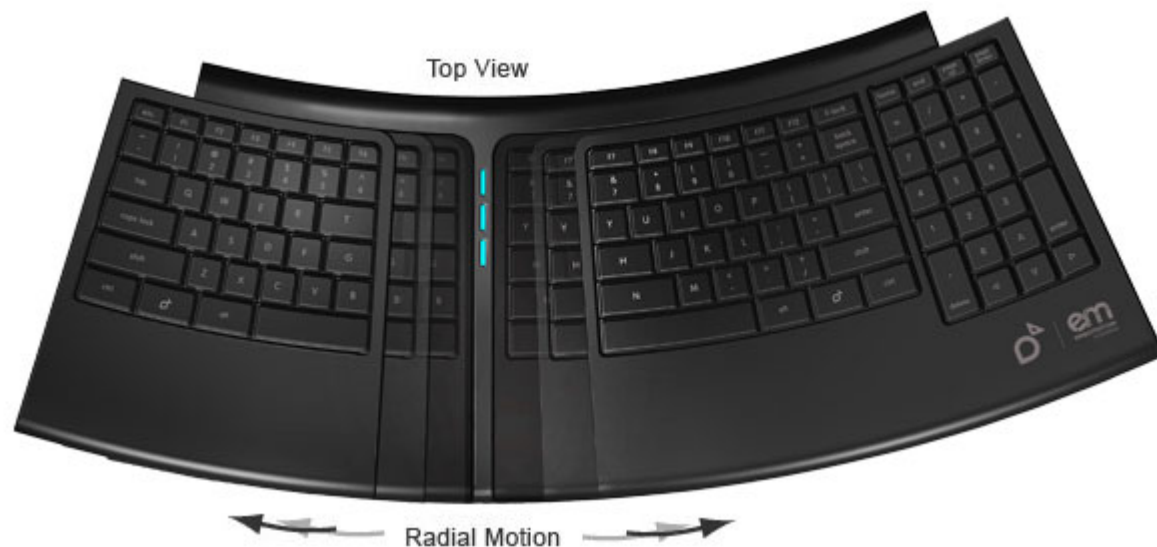
- Allow flexible work environment
- Provide a goal-oriented workload
- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Regulate temperature and lighting



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

The individual was accommodated with a wireless headset, an articulating keyboard tray, and an ergonomic keyboard.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A grocery store bagger with SAD had difficulty working an early schedule due to oversleeping. She also experienced fatigue and depression during late fall and winter months. As a result her attendance was erratic.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: Sleep Disturbances

- Allow for a flexible start time
- Combine scheduled short breaks into one longer break
- Provide a place for the employee to rest during break
- Allow the employee to work one consistent schedule
- Provide work areas with natural lighting



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

She was accommodated with an afternoon schedule and was moved to the front of the store, which had windows that let sunlight enter her workspace.



Mental Health Impairments

Conduct



Mental Health Impairments

Example

An electronic engineering technician with bipolar disorder had difficulty managing his emotions while experiencing the side effects of periodic prescription changes.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: Emotions

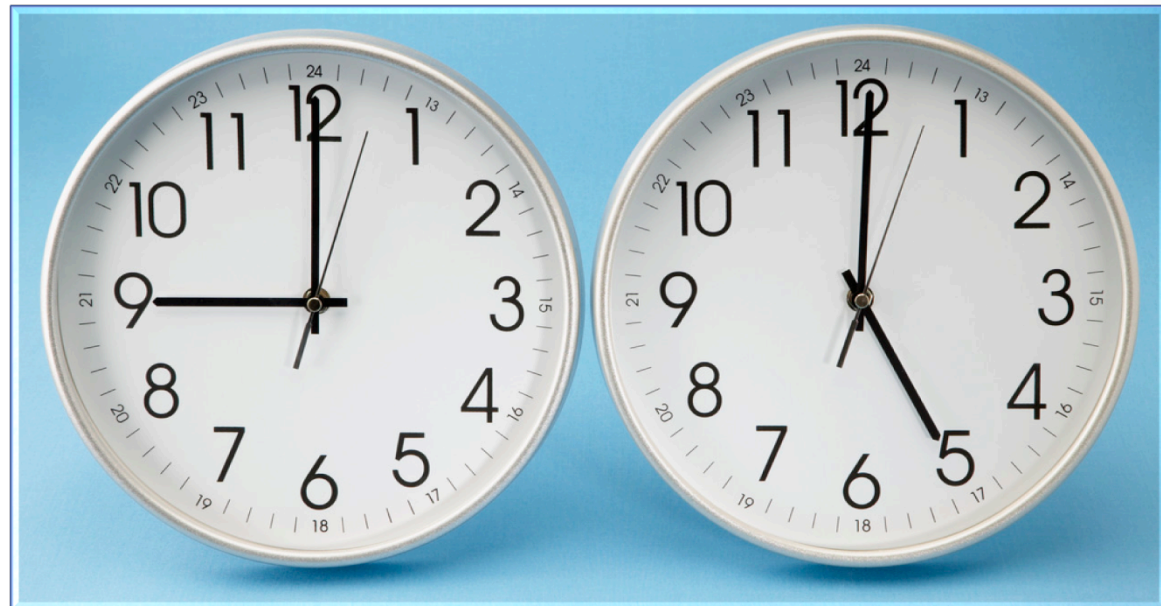
- Encourage the use of stress management techniques to deal with frustration
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow flexible breaks
- Refer to EAP



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

The individual was accommodated with a more flexible schedule and allowed to take breaks to call his counselor when experiencing heightened emotions.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A claims adjuster with social anxiety was experiencing problems when interacting with the public. As a result he said inappropriate things to clients.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: **Working Effectively**

- Develop clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Schedule consistent meetings with employee to set goals and review progress
- Allow for open communication
- Establish written long-term and short-term goals



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

The employee was given a temporary work schedule change to part-time for two weeks to attend the outpatient services he needed. He returned full-time to a later shift (when one became available) with flexible scheduling to attend counseling appointments.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A real estate appraiser with migraine headaches and post-traumatic stress disorder became very stressed when her work environment was noisy. She became angry and was insubordinate to her supervisor.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: Managing Stress

- Refer to counseling and EAP
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Modify environmental triggers
- Allow flexible work environment:
 - Flexible scheduling
 - Modified break schedule
 - Leave for counseling
 - Work from home/Flexi-place



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

The employee was given a headset to help reduce noise in her environment. She was also given a light dimmer to control her workstation lighting and help her with light sensitivity. She was also given time off when she gets migraines.



Mental Health Impairments

Job Performance



Mental Health Impairments

Example

An electrician with severe depression needed to attend periodic licensure trainings. The person had difficulty taking effective notes and remembering information in the meetings.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: **Memory**

- Allow use of job coach / Provide mentor
- Use auditory or written cues
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists
- Use a **color** coding scheme to prioritize tasks
- Use notebooks, planners, sticky notes, apps to record information
- Provide labels/bulletin board to assist in locating items
- Provide minutes of meetings and trainings



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

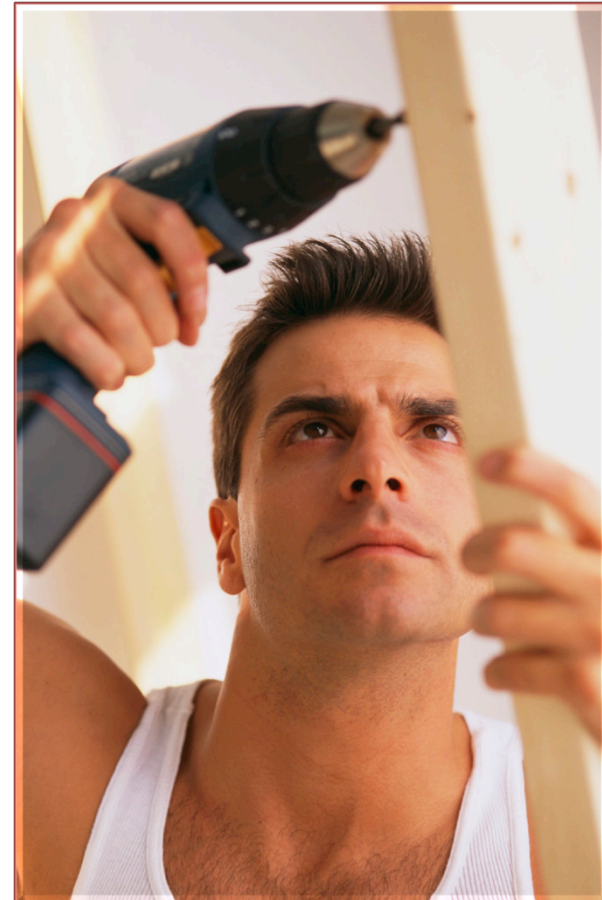
The individual was accommodated with notes from a remote Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) service.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

A woodworker/carpenter with a panic disorder experienced recurrent panic attacks when traveling during peak traffic times. He was required to pick up and order supplies when necessary.



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation Issues: **Panic Attacks**

- Allow the employee to take a break and go to a place where s/he feels comfortable to use relaxation techniques or contact a support person
- Identify and remove environmental triggers such as particular smells or noises
- Allow the presence of a support animal



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

He was accommodated with a schedule that gave him the opportunity to drop off and pick up materials when coming to work in the morning.



Mental Health Impairments

Example

- An attorney with depression experienced memory deficits due to medication, affecting his ability to recall actions and activities during depositions. The attorney became frustrated and continued to miss and reschedule meetings.



Mental Health Impairments

Attendance

- Allow flexible work environment:
 - Flexible scheduling
 - Modified break schedule
 - Leave for counseling
 - Work from home/Flexi-place
- Modify environmental triggers



Mental Health Impairments

Accommodation

- The attorney was given an alternate site to take depositions. He was moved to a smaller conference room with natural lighting away from office noise.



Mental Health Impairments: JAN

- **Contact**

- (800)526-7234 (V) & (877)781-9403 (TTY)
- AskJAN.org & jan@askjan.org
- (304)216-8189 via Text
- janconsultants via Skype

