

# Factors Associated with Premature Exit from Vocational Rehabilitation Services

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## STUDY DESCRIPTION

### Premature Exit from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

The VR program spends approximately \$365 million annually to serve consumers who disengage from services and drop out of the program (RSA-911 data). These dropouts are premature exits and account for approximately 50% of VR caseloads.

Premature exits include cases closed to:

- “unable to locate or lost contact”
- “refused services or further services”
- “failure to cooperate”

### Study Design

- Conducted a prospective study to explore exit reasons.
- Study participants (n = 355) were newly enrolled in the VR program.
- Collected four waves of data at 6 month intervals to track progression through VR and dropout as it naturally occurred.

### Theoretical Background and Study Hypotheses

Attachment to VR depends on dimensions of engagement including consumer-counselor relationship, delivery pacing, and reinforcement.

### Consumer-Counselor Relationship

- Working Alliance – shared goals, tasks, and bonds between the consumer and counselor improves outcomes (Lustig, et al., 2002).

### Delivery Pacing

- Engagement in the VR process capitalizes on short-term motivation to achieve a goal.

### Reinforcement

- Reinforcement in terms of consumer-counselor contact is provided frequently and early in the process to engage the consumer and build relationship.

### Measures

#### Counseling Satisfaction Scale (CSS-12) – 12 items to measure 4 counseling dimensions

- *Relationship*: respects, listens, understands, responds
- *Meeting Quality*: productive, informative, comfortable
- *Professionalism*: follow-through, understands job market
- *Responsiveness*: makes time to meet, returns phone calls, returns emails

#### Delivery Pacing – single item

- Progress through services is too slow, at a good pace, or too fast

#### Satisfaction with VR services – single item

- Rated on four point Likert-type scale from dissatisfied to satisfied

#### Counselor-Consumer Contact Rates – 2 items

- Face to face meetings in the last six months
- Conversations by phone or email in the last six months

#### Reason for Exit – 12 choices classified into three groups

- *Personal Reasons* (e.g. concerns about losing benefits, health issues, family issues, substance use issues, transportation barriers, moved)
- *Dissatisfied with Services* (e.g. not receiving desired services, VR stopped contacting me, problems with counselor, process taking too long)
- *Met VR Goals* (e.g. got a job, received desired services)

## RESULTS and IMPLICATIONS

Reason for Exit	Percent
I got a job	30
I was not receiving the services I desired	28
VR stopped contacting me	20
The VR process was taking too long	18
My health stopped me from continuing services	12
I received the services I desired	12
I became discouraged with job opportunities in my community	12
I was having problems with my counselor	11
I could not find transportation to appointments or to a job	9
I moved out of the area	9
Family issues stopped me from continuing services	7
I did not want to risk losing my benefits	5
Other	17

### Reasons for Exit Classifications

- We classified reason for exit into three groups including personal reasons, dissatisfied with services, and met goals.
- Because individuals could select more than one exit reason, we created a hierarchy where “met goals” trumped “dissatisfied with services” trumped “personal reasons”

For example, if consumer endorsed “got job” and “having problems with counselor,” exit reason was classified as met goals.

### Relationship

- Reason for exit was influenced by overall satisfaction with counseling.
- Using a global counselor satisfaction score (CSS-12), we found significant between-subjects effects based on exit reason.

Reason for Exit	Counselor Satisfaction	
	Mean	SD
Dissatisfied with Services	2.8	.99
Personal Reasons	3.3	.90
Met Goals	3.6	.55
F(2, 123) = 10.52, p <= .05		

### Delivery Pacing

- Almost half felt VR pacing was “too slow”
- Results were consistent across time periods
- At any time point, only 1-3% felt services were too fast
- Reason for exit varied based on feelings about delivery pacing

Reason for exit	Services too slow	Right pace
Personal Reasons	50%	50%
Dissatisfied with Services *	71%	29%
Met Goals *	28%	72%
* Column proportions are significantly different, p <= .05		

### Reinforcement

- Satisfaction with VR was shaped by frequency of counselor-consumer contact for both face to face visits and conversations by phone or email.

## Discussion

### More engagement during the VR process may reduce exit from the VR program.

- Increased contact rates create additional opportunities for developing a strong counselor-consumer Working Alliance.
- Cost neutral communication channels (such as email, phone, or video conferencing) may be effective engagement strategies for rural communities.

### Faster service delivery may improve engagement with VR services.

- Compressing upfront services may help consumers become engaged in the VR process since most drop out occurs in the first six months.
- Data analysis from 48 VR agencies indicated that less time taken to develop an Individualized Plan of Employment was associated with higher rates of competitive employment closures (Ipsen & Swicegood, 2015).

### Even a small increase in consumer engagement could result in significant financial and employment outcomes.

- Using 2012 RSA-911 data, a 5% increase in retention rates could save approximately \$16.3 million and result in an additional 6,650 employment outcomes.

## References

Lustig, D. Strauser, D., Rice, N, & Rucker, T. (2002). The relationship between working alliance and rehabilitation outcomes. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 46(1), 25-33.

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