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REHABILITATION IN THE STATE SECTOR: DO  
JOB DESCRIPTIONS ACCURATELY REFLECT EXPECTED DUTIES?

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Rehabilitation Counseling

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by  
Douglas Edward Allen

June 1995

REHABILITATION COUNSELING IN THE STATE SECTOR: DO  
JOB DESCRIPTIONS ACCURATELY REFLECT EXPECTED DUTIES?

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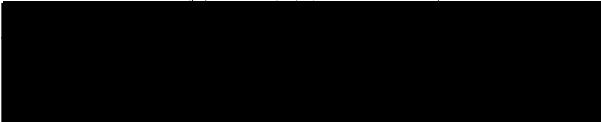
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by  
Douglas Edward Allen

June 1995

Approved by:

  
Joseph Turpin, First Reader

6/8/95  
Date

  
Dwight Sweeney, Second Reader

### ABSTRACT

Job descriptions of entry level rehabilitation counseling positions advertised by state vocational rehabilitation agencies were examined in order to determine if states are effectively conveying expected duties to potential employees. Duties described in published state job listings were compared to areas of human resource development perceived to be significantly important by certified rehabilitation counselors in public settings. Results indicate that state descriptions do appear to reflect expected duties to potential employment candidates. Discussion addresses the need for description standardization, limitations of the study, and suggested direction for future research.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Rehabilitation Counseling in the State Sector: Do Job Descriptions Accurately Reflect Expected Duties?

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, section 101 (a) (7) and (a) (35), require public rehabilitation agencies to establish a comprehensive system of personnel development and evaluation of rehabilitation professionals in their employ. In order to accomplish this task it would seem necessary to identify and provide information concerning duties performed by these rehabilitation counselors. The purpose of this study was to determine if the state sector is conveying these expected duties in their current job descriptions.

Since its emergence as a recognized profession in the 1950s, the identification of the roles and functions of the rehabilitation counselor has produced an abundance of research (e.g., Patterson, 1961; Rubin & Puckett, 1984; Stone, 1966). The passing of Public Law 565 greatly increased efforts to establish these criteria, as federal funding was made available for research pertaining to consumer needs, as well as training for rehabilitation counselors (Rubin & Rossler, 1987). This clarification was important in the sense that it would allow rehabilitation counseling to become recognized as a profession based on the traditional model of autonomous expertise and the service ideal (Wilson-sky, 1964).

Initially, these studies sought to determine if rehabilitation counselors should be viewed as counselors or coordinators with each position being viewed as a separate entity, or if the duties of a rehabilitation counselor should encompass both roles (for background on these studies refer to Patterson 1966, 1967, 1968, 1970). Ultimately, the concept of counselor/coordinator would be accepted as the recognized function of rehabilitation counselors. This concept was global in nature and identified rehabilitation counselors as professionals who could serve persons with disabilities from a multifaceted but integrated service standpoint (Rubin & Roessler, 1987). Later studies would attempt to empirically define the roles and functions through the use of self-reporting instruments and observation.

Some of the more notable of these early studies were conducted by Muthard and Salomone. Rubin, et al. (1984) recognized the role and function research of J.E. Muthard and P.R. Salomone in 1966 as being the foundation for the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification examination content. Although the work of Muthard and Salomone greatly contributed to identifying the duties of rehabilitation counselors, changing consumer eligibility criteria and new federal mandates generated the need for further investigation of evolving roles and functions (e.g., Rubin & Emmer, 1979; Zandny & James, 1977).



The identification of these changing roles and functions was further complicated by the differences in instrumentation used among researchers (Rubin & Puckett, 1984). Included in these instruments were the Abbreviated Task Inventory (ATI), the Rehabilitation Professional Job Tasks Inventory (RPJTI) and Rehabilitation Profession Knowledge Competency Inventory (RPKCI) developed by Muthard and Salomone (1969), and the Rehabilitation Skills Inventory (RSI) developed by Leahy, Shapson and Wright (1987). The RSI grouped empirically defined items through the use of a hierarchal clustering technique based on perceived importance.

More recently, Linkowski, Thoreson, Diamond, Leahy, Szymanski, and Witty (1993) conducted a study that sought to (a) represent the existing standards of knowledge to be used in certification and accreditation, and (b) identify new and emerging knowledge areas. An instrument developed for this study has also been used to measure knowledge importance in rehabilitation counseling (Leahy, Szymanski, and Linkowski, 1993), reported preparedness of rehabilitation counselors in areas of knowledge relating to duties performed (Szymanski, Leahy, and Linkowski, 1993), and human resource development (Szymanski, Linkowski, Leahy, Diamond, and Thoreson, 1993). It was this instrument and the results of the human resource development study that were used to determine if state rehabilitation agencies are conveying expected job duties to

potential entry-level rehabilitation counselors.

## METHOD

### Procedure

This study was an extension of a previous work where minimum training and experience qualifications for entry-level rehabilitation counselors was examined (Garske and Turpin 1992). As in their study, duty descriptions for rehabilitation counselors were obtained from each state rehabilitation agency. These descriptions were examined by a panel of three second-year rehabilitation counseling graduate students preparing to enter the rehabilitation profession. When job descriptions included several levels of rehabilitation counseling, only the description or portion of the description designated as "entry-level" was included for analysis. A comparison for presence/non-presence of reported counseling duties in the state job descriptions was then executed by the panel.

### Instrument

an adaptation of the instrument developed by Linkowski, et al. (1993) and used by Szymanski, et al. (1993) was utilized. The scale consisted of ten perceived rehabilitation duty components: vocational services, case management and services, group and family issues, medical and psychosocial aspects, foundations of rehabilitation, worker's compensation, employer services, and technology, social, cultural, and environmental issues, research, individual counseling and development, and assessment. An eleventh item,

vocational service was listed as a required duty in all 50

the presence of open-ended statements (e.g., duties not limited to, an example of duties) was included. A sample of this instrument is found in Appendix A. The panel of graduate students examined the state duty descriptions of entry level rehabilitation counselors in order to determine if the descriptions reflected what certified rehabilitation counselors reported as areas of importance in the execution of their duties.

### Coding

Job descriptions were content analyzed for keywords included in Szymanski's (1993) instrument. Components were coded as present/not present based on the presence of associated keywords/phrases. When keywords/phrases were found to be present in the state job descriptions they were recorded by the readers. As an example, knowledge areas pertaining to vocational services were considered highly desirable by rehabilitation counselors in state settings;

states. The interpretation of this particular information is: if knowledge of vocational services is seen as important to rehabilitation counselors in state settings, then they must be engaging in the vocational servicing of consumers. Moreover, as vocational service is listed as a required duty in each of the states, the states accurately convey this specific aspect of employment as a rehabilitation counselor. The results of this study reflect individu-

al interpretations recorded by the three members of the panel.

## RESULTS

Results showed that state job descriptions do reflect the areas of knowledge rated as important by the certified rehabilitation counselors in public settings. Table 1 found in Appendix B, shows the results of components found to be present/not present in each state job description by the panel of readers. A measure of interrater agreement was obtained using Cohen's kappa. Difference between raters on each of the 11 variables did not approach significance. Results were compared to components which were perceived as having high importance/moderate importance/low importance from the appropriate respondent group (those employed in the state/federal sector) in the human resource development study (Szymanski, et al., 1993) that was used as a comparative measure. Component ratings and their level of importance are shown in Table 2, see Appendix C.

The results show a high importance rating was indicated in the following areas by public agency respondents: vocational services, case management, medical and psychosocial issues, individual counseling, and assessment. Table 3 indicates all 50 states include these components in their rehabilitation counselor job descriptions. A moderate importance rating was given to areas pertaining to: foundations of rehabilitation, and social/cultural issues. The number of state job descriptions containing these components were: foundations of rehabilitation (36), social/cultural

issues (18).

Levels of importance, ranging from low to less-than-moderate importance was indicated in areas relating to: group and family issues, research, and worker's compensation. The number of state job descriptions containing these components were: group and family issues (21), research (7), worker's compensation (3). Open-ended statements, e.g, "example" of duties, found in state job descriptions (46).

## DISCUSSION

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to examine state job descriptions of entry-level rehabilitation counselor positions to determine if states are effectively conveying the expected duties of rehabilitation counselors to potential employees. This was done by matching key words or phrases in state job descriptions to key words or phrases found in the instrument developed by Linkowski, et al.

(1993), and used in the study of human resource development needs conducted by Szymanski, et al. (1993). This study had 1025 Certified rehabilitation counselors rate skills (in the form of human resource development needs) by their degree of importance in the execution of duties. Since this study indirectly reflected an rehabilitation counselor's duties, it should have been possible to determine if the states are effectively conveying the scope of expected duties by comparing the items in the state descriptions to the categories used in the instrument. The more items in the state descriptions that matched the categories in the instrument, the more likely it was that the states were successfully conveying the scope of expected duties.

A limiting factor of this study was the chance of subjective error during the interpretation and matching process. This problem was addressed by having a panel of three readers repeat the comparison and then testing the results for non-concordance. As stated, there was no sig-



nificant difference among the raters. The several differences that occurred were the result of human error (overlooked). Lack of clarity was initially viewed as a major shortcoming in more than a few of the descriptions. Therefore, non-concordance in some areas was anticipated at the beginning of the study.

Results demonstrated that state job descriptions appear to reflect the areas of resource developmental needs required for duty performance and their degree of importance as rated by the CRCs. Although 44 states will have to eliminate their open-ended statements in order to meet the guidelines of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992.

Even though many of the job descriptions appear to be somewhat confusing and difficult to read, it would seem that anyone familiar with reading typical job listings should be able to ascertain a reasonable interpretation of expected duties. However, someone who scans the job descriptions too quickly may miss an important issue. It would be extremely beneficial if all states could develop more easily read duty descriptions. Idaho and Indiana represent two of the better models, although both need to eliminate their open-ended statements.

In summary, the state duty descriptions for entry-level rehabilitation counselors appear to be somewhat confusing. Nevertheless, they do reasonably represent the duties being performed by rehabilitation counselors employed by

state/federal vocational rehabilitation agencies. However, a standardized description would greatly benefit both the states and the counselors in terms of job efficiency and management/employee relationship. This in turn may benefit the consumer. Future research is recommended to establish a standardized description of rehabilitation counselor's roles and functions in the state sector; it is further recommended that states continue to place an emphasis on the hiring of Master's level rehabilitation counselors.

## APPENDIX A: COMPARISON INSTRUMENT\*

### Components/Sub-Components

#### **1. Vocational Services**

- a. Planning for vocational rehabilitation services
- b. Vocational implications of various disabling conditions
- c. Occupational and labor market information
- d. Job placement strategies
- e. Client job seeking skills development
- f. Employer practices that affect employment or return to work
- g. Job analysis
- h. Client job retention skills development
- i. Job modification and restructuring techniques
- j. Job and employer development
- k. Theories of career development and work adjustment
- l. Follow-up/post-employment services
- m. Accommodation and rehabilitation engineering
- n. Supported employment services and strategies
- o. Services to employer organizations

#### **2. Case Management and Services**

- a. The case management process
- b. The case management process
- c. Community resources and services for rehabilitation planning
- d. Services available for a variety of rehabilitation populations
- e. Financial resources for rehabilitation services
- f. Rehabilitation services in diverse settings
- g. Evaluation procedures for assessing effectiveness of services
- h. Planning for independent living services
- i. Organizational structure of public vocational rehabilitation

#### **3. Group and Family Issues**

- a. Human growth and development
- b. Family counseling practices
- c. Family counseling theories
- d. Group counseling practices and interventions
- e. Group counseling theories

#### **4. Medical and Psychological Aspects**

- a. Medical aspects and implications of various disabling conditions
- b. Physical/functional capacities of individuals
- c. Psycho-social and cultural impact of disabilities on

- individuals
- d. Medical terminology
- e. Appropriate medical intervention resources
- 5. Foundations of Rehabilitation**
  - a. Ethical standards for rehabilitation counselors
  - b. Legislation or laws affecting individuals with disabilities
  - c. Rehabilitation terminology and concepts
  - d. Philosophical foundations of rehabilitation
  - e. History of rehabilitation
- 6. Worker's Compensation, Employer Services, and Technology**
  - a. Worker's Compensation laws and practices
  - b. Expert testimony
  - c. Employer-based disability prevention and management strategies
  - d. Organizational structure of private for-profit rehabilitation
- 7. Social, Cultural, and Environmental Issues**
  - a. Attitudinal barriers for individuals with disabilities
  - b. Environmental barriers for individuals with disabilities
  - c. Societal issues, trends, and developments related to rehabilitation
  - d. Psycho-social and cultural impact of disabilities on the family
  - e. Multi-cultural counseling issues
  - f. Gender issues
- 8. Research**
  - a. Rehabilitation research literature
  - b. Basic research methods
  - c. Design of research projects
- 9. Individual Counseling and Development**
  - a. Individual counseling practices and interventions
  - b. Individual counseling theories
  - c. Behavior and personality theory
- 10. Assessment**
  - a. Interpretation of assessment results
  - b. Tests and evaluation techniques available for assessing clients needs

\*Adapted from Szymanski, et al. (1993)

# APPENDIX B

Table 1: Findings of Three Member Panel

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
AL	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
AK	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
AR	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
AZ	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
CA	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
CO	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
CT	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
DE	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
FL	*	*		*					*	*	*
GA	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
HI	*	*		*					*	*	
ID	*	*		*					*	*	*
IL	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
IN	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
IA	*	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*
KS	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
KY	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
LA	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
ME	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
MD	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*
MA	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
MI	*	*		*			*		*	*	*
MN	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
MS	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	*
MO	*	*	*	*			*		*	*	*
MT	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
NE	*	*		*	*		*		*	*	*
NV	*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*
NH	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*

(TABLE CONTINUES)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
NJ	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*
NM	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*
NY	*	*		*	*	*	*		*	*	*
NC	*	*	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	
ND	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	
OH	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
OK	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
OR	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
PA	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
RI	*	*		*					*	*	*
SC	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
SD	*	*	*	*					*	*	*
TN	*	*		*					*	*	*
TX	*	*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*
UT	*	*		*			*		*	*	*
VT	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
VA	*	*	*	*	*				*	*	
WA	*	*		*	*			*	*	*	*
WV	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
WI	*	*	*	*	*		*		*	*	*
WY	*	*		*	*				*	*	*
50	50	50	21	50	36	03	18	07	50	50	46
1	Vocational Services						6	Worker's Compensation			
2	Case Management						7	Socio/cultural Issues			
3	Group/Family Issues						8	Research			
4	Medical/Psychosocial Issues						9	Individual counseling			
5	Foundations of Rehabilitation						10	Assessment			
	11 Open-ended Statements of Duties										

APPENDIX C:

Table 2: Importance of Rehabilitation Job Components Found Present

Component/level of importance	Present	Not Present
Vocational Services+++	50	0
Case Management+++	50	0
Group/Family Issues++	21	29
Medical/Psychosocial Issues+++	50	0
Foundations of Rehabilitation++	36	14
Worker's Compensation+	03	47
Socio/cultural Issues++	18	32
Research+	07	43
Individual Counseling+++	50	0
Assessment+++	50	0
Open-Ended Statements n/a	46	4

+++ high importance

++ moderate importance

+ less than moderate importance

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