



# HIGH-LIGHT



ALCOHOL AND DRUG NEWS BRIEF FOR EMPLOYERS

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## INDUSTRIAL CASEWORK MONITOR

### Social Work intervention with the substance abusing employee – does it change anything ?

Employers often refer problem-drinking employees to social work agencies in the hope of a swift, textbook recovery and are often disillusioned when the full range of treatment modes does not produce immediate and lasting results. But what is successful intervention ? Were we successful when the employee still uses alcohol – but “ controls” it to the satisfaction of family members ? If the spouse of the problem drinker obtains a favorable divorce settlement and start off on a life free from abuse and uncertainty : does that spell success – even though the partner may still be drinking ? Not all problem drinkers require in-patient treatment and there are good reasons why professional Social Work intervention on an out-patient basis may be the preferred mode. But does this mode of intervention produce any significant changes, particularly as perceived by the employer who initiated the process.

In October 2001 , SANCA introduced a system of monitoring employer initiated referrals in terms of a number of variables, viz nature of the problem, absenteeism, supervisors perception of job performance changes and problem outcome. It should be noted that this is an ongoing system and that the 49 cases to date ( end of May 2002 ) may offer limited data to make any firm conclusions. However, we believe that the information at hand suggests some interesting preliminary findings which could assist us in improving our services.

*Table 1* presents a diagnostic breakdown of the primary reported problem. As most of the referrals occurred on an ad hoc basis ( i.e. at companies where we do not render an on-site service), very few non substance abuse cases were reported.

### 1 OUTCOME OF SW INTERVENTION

Social workers rated counseling session outcomes in terms of the degree of change perceived. The *pie chart* reflects the outcome assessment of 36 terminated

cases. Almost 50% of this group showed some positive change, less than a third showed no positive change and in 9 % of cases the main problem had been solved, i.e. the person maintained sobriety at the time of termination. Where no positive change occurred, the average number of sessions was somewhat lower ( 2,7 sessions per employee) than those where some positive change occurred ( 4.3 sessions ) and where the problem had been resolved ( 4 sessions ) It is an unfortunate reality that clients often simply drop out too soon for meaningful change to occur.

### 2 SUPERVISORS JOB PERFORMANCE RATINGS

*Graph 1* reflects a comparison of the Supervisors job performance ratings of employees at the point of referral and termination. The following are noteworthy :

- Referring to the “below average” block, attendance appeared to be most seriously affected, followed by behavior/attitude on the job. Respectively 64 and 48% of employees were rated by Supervisors as “below average “ These percentages dropped to 25 and 11% respectively following intervention.
- Overall improvement is demonstrated in the “Average” performance block. The proportions rated average on referral increased substantially following intervention, eg. Attendance increased from 16 to 52% and productivity from 24 to 42 %.

### 3 SICKNESS/UNAUTHORISED ABSENTEEISM

*Table 2* shows that the average monthly pre-intervention absenteeism days of 34 referrals over a 3 month period was 1,1 days. Of the 36 referrals, 6 were responsible for more than 40% of the total absenteeism days. The absenteeism figures for the 3 months following intervention were obtained in respect of 13 of the abovementioned employees, which showed an average monthly absenteeism rate of ,6 days per person. Despite the small post intervention sample size, the figures suggest that sick and unauthorized absenteeism tends to be lower following intervention- this of course will have to be closely monitored and a larger sample size used before any firm conclusions can be made

GRAPH 1: SUPERVISOR'S JOB PERFORMANCE RATINGS AT REFERRAL AND TERMINATION

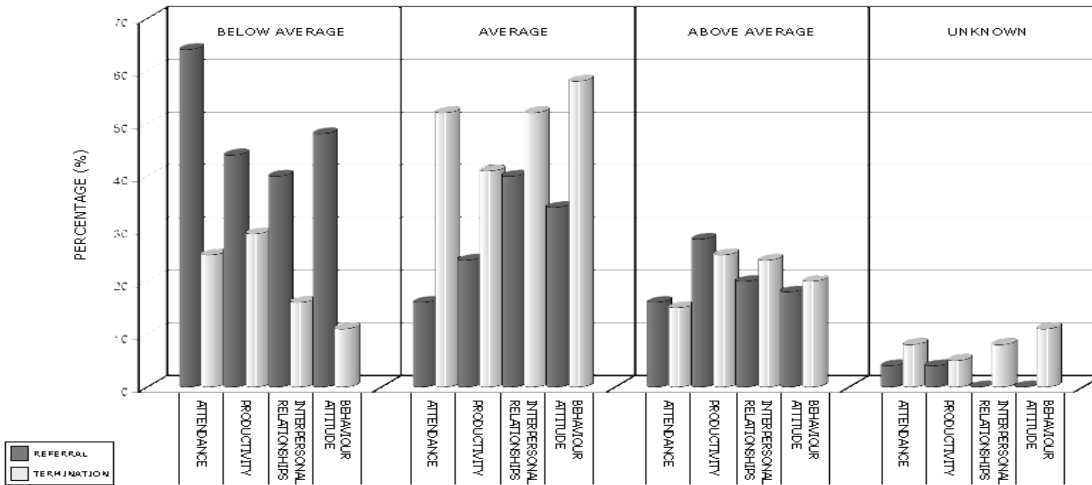


TABLE 1: MAIN PROBLEM REPORTED

PROBLEM	No.	%
ALCOHOL	37	76
DRUGS	6	12
ALCOHOL & DRUGS	3	6
FAMILY / MARITAL	3	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

PIE CHART: OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

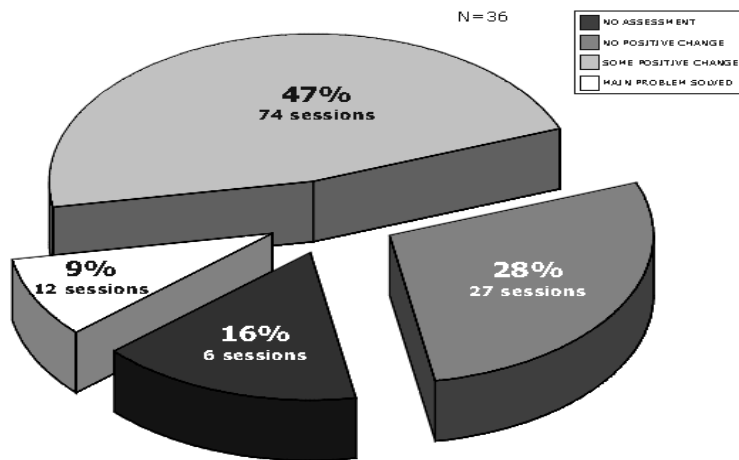


TABLE 2: PRE/POST INTERVENTION

ABSENTEEISM (SICK/UNAUTHORISED)	TOTAL DAYS	AVG P/P P/MONTH
3 MTHS PRIOR (N=34)	120	1,1
3 MTHS AFTER (N=13)	25	0,6

COMMENT

The employer holds much leverage in restoring the troubled employee to full capacity. Whilst sobriety may be the most apparent and desirable goal from a professional point of view, for the employer, it remains essentially one of restoring productivity at least from a legal perspective. Although only 56% of terminated cases indicated a favourable outcome, it is encouraging to note that referring supervisors still indicated some significant improvement in overall performance, specifically regarding attendance and general behaviour. This is perhaps suggesting to us that job performance may be more responsive to intervention than sobriety or abstinence per se. Improved performance may indeed be the first beneficial return on the employer's referral, perhaps long before deep rooted pathologies are resolved.