

Vocational Interventions for Adults Engaging in Substance Misuse: A Scoping Review

Madeline Zarro, OT/s, Julia Angell, OT/s, Natasha Harianto, OT/s, Ashley Loh, OT/s, Xenia Proestakis-Ortiz, OT/s, Nancy Baker, ScD, MPH, OTR, FAOTA

INTRODUCTION

- **48.7 million people** aged 12 or older (17.3% of the U.S. population³) were identified as having a **substance use disorder (SUD)** within the past year
- **Unemployment** is a major risk factor for SUD²
- **Positive relationships, financial security, & satisfying work** can be supportive factors of **recovery**¹
- **Vocational interventions** may be effective in addressing this growing public health concern²
- Occupational therapist practitioners (OTPs) frequently encounter clients with SUD due to the condition's impacts on **occupational performance & strong comorbidity** with other physical and psychiatric conditions⁴
- **Key Definitions:**
 - **Substance misuse:** used to refer to those who engage in problematic substance use who may or may not have a diagnosis of SUD
 - **Vocational interventions:** the therapeutic use of job training, education, or programs to facilitate employment. Also referred to in the literature as job skills & work skills interventions

Clinical Research Question: For adults 18 years & older who currently engage in or have a history of substance misuse, do vocational interventions increase positive employment outcomes & socioemotional well-being?

AIMS

- Examine the literature to determine efficacy of **vocational interventions** for adults **currently engaging in or with a history of substance misuse** in improving **employment outcomes**
- Investigate the impact of **vocational interventions** for adults **currently engaging in or with a history of substance misuse** on **socioemotional well-being**

METHODS

Inclusion criteria: currently engaging in or history of substance misuse, aged 18+, any gender, addresses employment and emotional wellbeing, peer-reviewed

Exclusion criteria: not available in English, no access to full study, conference abstracts, grant awards

199 articles collected through Embase, Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, & Cochrane

Total of **8 articles** included in review

- Title screening
- Duplicates removed
- Peer review of abstracts & articles with inclusion criteria

Intervention Categories Identified in These Studies

Therapeutic Workplace	Contingency-management work environment
Job training	a) Job skills training: skills generalizable to any workplace b) Job specific training: skills that pertain to a specific job
Passive Employment Services	Providing individuals with resources for vocational self-studying
Combined Interventions	Merged two or more types of work skills interventions

RESULTS

Study Characteristics

Types of Studies

- 4 Level II RCTs, 2 Level III quasi-experimentals, 2 Level IV longitudinal studies (CEBM levels of evidence)
- 8 articles on employment outcomes
- 2 articles on socioemotional outcomes

Participants

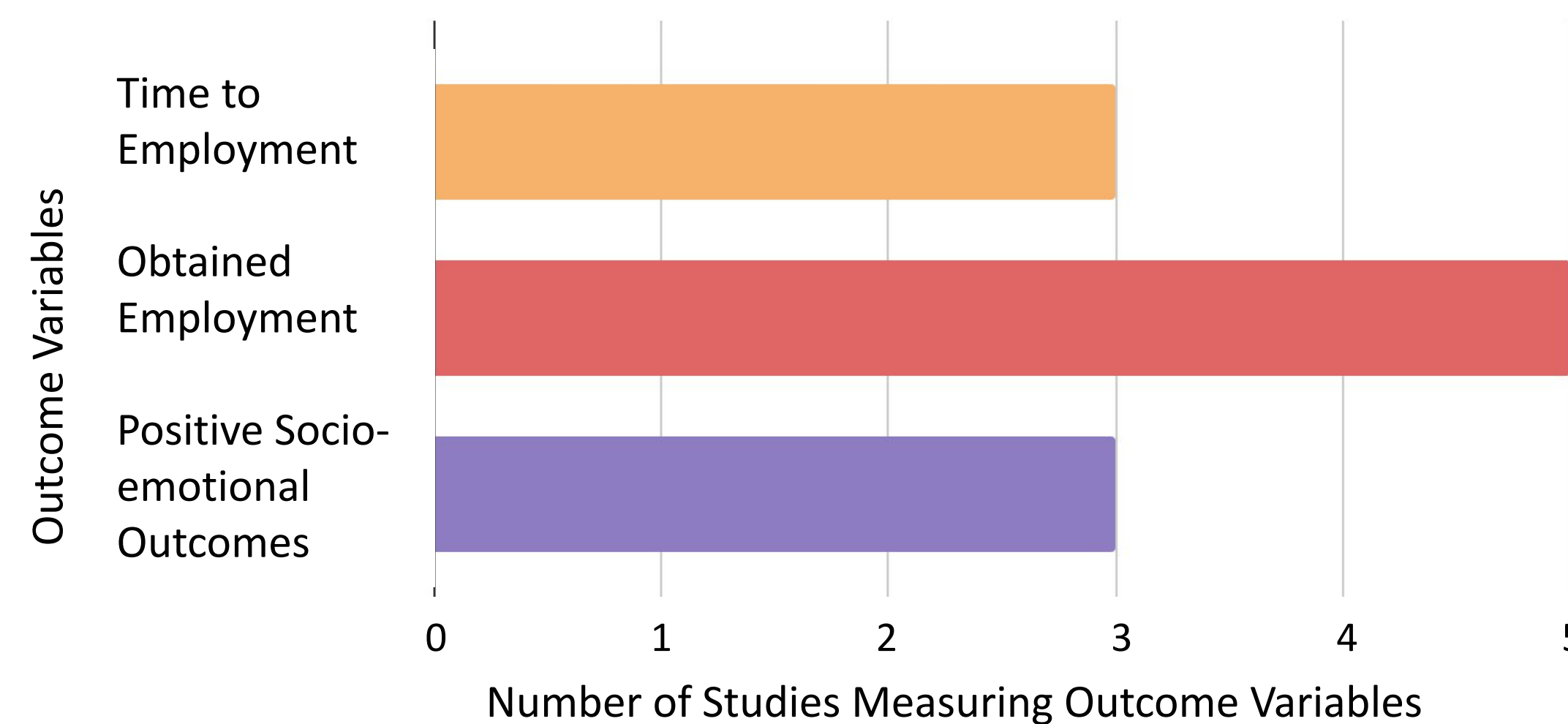
- Adults over 18, history of substance misuse, & either unemployed, underemployed, or interested in seeking employment
- Other common characteristics: veteran, history of incarceration, low socioeconomic status

Outcomes Data

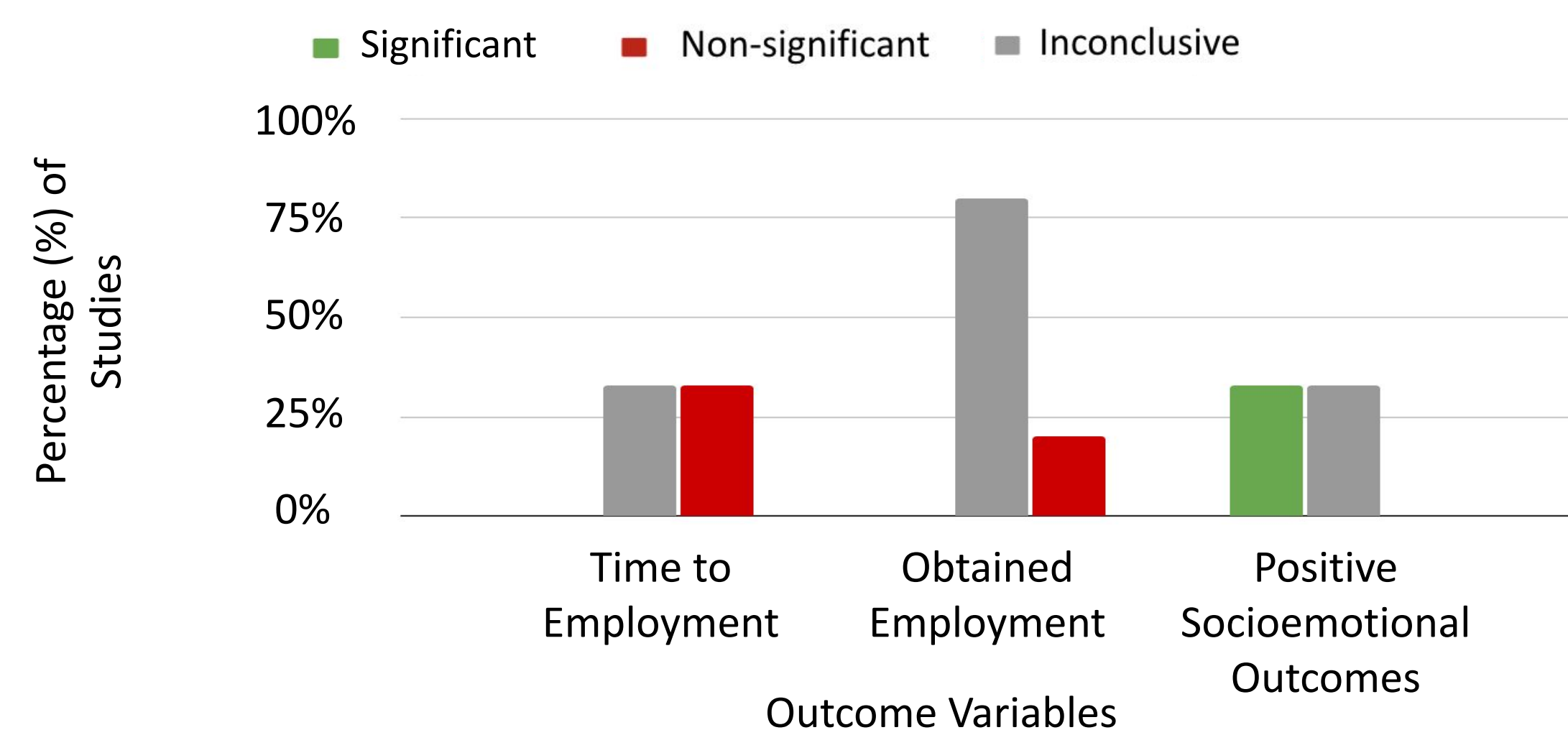
- **Positive employment outcomes:** obtained employment & less time needed to secure employment
- **Positive socioemotional outcomes:** positive mood, increased social network quality, increased employment hope, less stress

Synthesis of Results

Counts of Employment & Socioemotional Outcomes



Studies Found In Favor of Vocational Intervention



Note: Studies were marked **inconclusive** if it did not note statistical significance, reported both significant & non-significant outcomes, did not have or analyze control groups, & had missing data

Study Findings

- **7 out of 8 studies** measuring **positive employment outcomes** favored job training and combined interventions. However, **none were found to be significant**
- **2 out of 3 studies** measuring **positive socioemotional outcomes** favored job training, therapeutic workplace, and combined interventions. 1 study showed **significant increases in social network quality**

DISCUSSION

Key Takeaways:

- Available data show positive impacts of vocational interventions on **socioemotional wellbeing & employment**
 - ↓ Stress
 - ↑ Job Attainment
 - ↑ Employment Hope
 - ↓ Time to Employment
 - ↑ Social Network Quality* *p < .001
- Findings provide evidence for principles of the **recovery model**¹
 - Satisfying work, financial security, & positive relationships support resilience in substance misuse recovery

Strengths & Limitations:

- ✓ Representation of populations experiencing higher rates of substance misuse, such as veterans & formerly incarcerated individuals
- ✓ Identification of terminology clarifies comparison of existing research
- ✗ Low trustworthiness due to limited significance testing & control groups

Applications in OT

OTPs are well-positioned to:

1. Address **contextual & client factors** that facilitate substance misuse (i.e. unemployment & dual diagnosis)
2. Implement **functional interventions** in context to support vocational participation
3. Develop **community based practices** for the provision of vocational interventions

CONCLUSION

Summary

The aim of this scoping review was to evaluate the impact of vocational interventions in facilitating employment & socioemotional well-being among adults who misuse substances. Our data suggest that vocational interventions enhance social network quality and workplace engagement. Given their expertise in holistic approaches to enhancing participation, OT practitioners are well-equipped to implement vocational interventions in support of substance misuse recovery and socioemotional wellbeing.

Future Directions

- Evaluate impacts of vocational interventions on a wider range of outcomes (such as sustained employment & income)
- Integrate vocational interventions and employment resources into substance misuse treatment centers & prevention efforts

REFERENCES & CONTACT INFO



Madeline Zarro, OT/s
Madeline.Zarro@tufts.edu

Julia Angell, OT/s
Julia.Angell@tufts.edu

Natasha Harianto, OT/s
Natasha.Harianto@tufts.edu

Ashley Loh, OT/s
Ashley.Loh@tufts.edu

Xenia Proestakis-Ortiz, OT/s
Xenia.Proestakis@tufts.edu

Nancy Baker, ScD, MPH, OTR, FAOTA
Nancy.Baker@tufts.edu