



Healthy Professional Workers Partnership – Dentistry Case Study

DENTISTS AND LEAVES OF ABSENCE AND RETURN TO
WORK EXPERIENCES: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Background

- Among dentists, mental illness ranks third in order of frequency of health problems (Lang, 2007).
- Compared to some other health care worker groups such as pharmacists and nurses, dentists seem to have an increased risk for mental health impairment (Boran et al, 2012; Chiu et al., 2012).
 - *Healthcare workers are 1.5 times more likely to be off work due to illness or disability than workers in all other sectors (Kitts, 2013).*





Objectives

- This paper examines *influences shaping dentists' decisions about taking a leave of absence (LoA) and their return to work (RTW).*





Methods/Approach

- Data were drawn from the interviews with 16 dentistry stakeholders.
- The data from the interviews have been analyzed *thematically* using *inductive methods of analysis*.





Preliminary Findings

Barriers and Enablers for Taking Leaves of Absence

- Financial concerns
 - Difficulty of finding a locum to replace them while they are away
 - Stigma and fear of professional sanctions
 - Fear of losing patients
 - Fear of professional sanctions
 - Being a practice owner
- Reducing the stigma attached to MH issues
 - Working in an employment arrangement that facilitates leaves of absence (i.e., being an associate and not a practice owner)
 - Supportive staff/co-workers
 - Spousal/family support

These barriers may lead to *presenteeism*





Preliminary Findings: Fear of Professional Sanctions and Stigma as Barriers to LoA

“I think just the reluctance to talk about it for fear if word gets out it may affect their practice. Their regulatory may find out and they really don't understand that the regulator is there to really help them which is a message our college has been trying to get out for years. But I think that is a barrier still, a significant barrier. Just a failure to disclose and confide in anybody and just keep it contained and things of course deteriorate further from that point. So I think the barrier would be still the *stigma* surrounding this whole issue, this whole area of illness.”





Preliminary Findings

Barriers and Enablers for Return to Work

- A relative lack of Return-to-Work policies and interventions
- Lack of support at home
- Lack of support at work
- Being a woman
- Older age
- Having a racialized identity

- Awareness of having an addiction issue and/or an (underlying) mental health issue
- Support from the business partners and/or co-workers
- Family support
- Being male
- Young age





Preliminary Findings: Race as a Barrier to RTW

“I think depending if *race* was an issue of why you left, or why you are stressed or why you leave an area or have to take a leave from work, it can be difficult to come back. We certainly have some internationally trained dentists who are certified to work in the province and oddly enough, they tend to be the ones who will go to remote communities to provide care. Sometimes those remote communities are not really able to accept different race. If that's a factor in your leaving and stress and work anxiety, then you are going to leave the area at least I would think”.





Key Take Home Messages:

Our findings indicate that there is a need to:

- develop anti-stigma campaigns targeting dentists and their work environment;
- initiate RTW supports for dentists; and
- develop RTW interventions for dentists that are gender-sensitive.





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