

Factors that predict propensity to use an Employee Assistance Program
by Laura Ashlee Schneider

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Applied Psychology
Montana State University
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Abstract:
Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are designed to address several physical and mental health issues of employees. Employers who implement such a program have a responsibility to inform employees of the program and make them familiar with procedures to contact the EAP. Confidentiality of the program should also be assured.

An EAP that addresses these issues should have successful utilization rates. A questionnaire designed to assess factors hypothesized to predict propensity to use an Employee Assistance Program was administered to university faculty and staff (N=2,230) at a medium-sized western university. Based on a structural equations modeling analysis, a model of factors hypothesized to predict propensity to use an EAP was determined to be unidentified. However, a similar revised model adequately fit the data. Specifically, results revealed associations between (a) degree of familiarity with an EAP, (b) degree of confidence in an EAP, (c) perceived accessibility of an EAP, (d) perceived effectiveness of an EAP, (e) perceived purpose of an EAP, and (f) propensity to use an EAP. Results are discussed from an employee well-being perspective.

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of a thesis submitted by

Laura Ashlee Schneider

This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are designed to address several physical and mental health issues of employees. Employers who implement such a program have a responsibility to inform employees of the program and make them familiar with procedures to contact the EAP. Confidentiality of the program should also be assured. An EAP that addresses these issues should have successful utilization rates. A questionnaire designed to assess factors hypothesized to predict propensity to use an Employee Assistance Program was administered to university faculty and staff (N=2,230) at a medium-sized western university. Based on a structural equations modeling analysis, a model of factors hypothesized to predict propensity to use an EAP was determined to be unidentified. However, a similar revised model adequately fit the data. Specifically, results revealed associations between (a) degree of familiarity with an EAP, (b) degree of confidence in an EAP, (c) perceived accessibility of an EAP, (d) perceived effectiveness of an EAP, (e) perceived purpose of an EAP, and (f) propensity to use an EAP. Results are discussed from an employee well-being perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Stress and Well-being

Researchers have been concerned with employee well-being for several decades, as is evident by the abundance of literature addressing the topic. Well-being represents an appealing psychological state and is presumed to fluctuate in accordance with life events (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Well-being is operationalized through global measures of happiness and/or life satisfaction. Organizations and employees benefit when employees are happy (Leiter & Durup, 1996). Happiness can be negatively affected by many variables. For example, sickness, environmental factors, and stress can reduce feelings of happiness. Further, stress is known to reduce feelings of well-being (Edwards, 1992).

Stress has numerous causes, including heavy workloads and high task demands (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Family demands are also positively related to daily stressors (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Schilling, 1989). Stress has even been shown to spillover from home to work and vice versa (Leiter & Durup, 1996; Williams & Alliger, 1994). The well-being of employees can lead to increased productivity and, thus, it is important for organizations to consider their employees' well-being when making decisions. Pressure and stress, regardless of what organization employees are a member of, can affect negatively their well-being. The manner in which stress is handled is of great importance. For example, self-disclosure seems to produce apparent health benefits (Pennebaker, 1990). Having someone available for an individual to discuss stressors with is beneficial in reducing the individual's stress. Therefore, one way to mediate this stress

is through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (Sullivan & Poverny, 1992).

Employee Assistance Programs

Definition

Employee Assistance Programs are defined as "...policies and procedures adopted by the employers in order to identify problem employees, including those with alcoholic involvement, as manifested by deteriorating job performance. Once identified, such employees are steered to a variety of agencies (both inside and outside the workplace) for the express purpose of receiving treatment or rehabilitation" (Shain & Groeneveld, 1990, p. 1). Similarly, Milne, Blum, and Roman (1994, p. 124) defined EAPs as "a formal intervention system that identifies and assists organizational members with a wide range of personal problems that may be affecting their job-related behaviors." A health promotion aspect should be added to these definitions to fully understand the intent of implementing an EAP (Lubin, Shanklin, & Polk, 1996). As it stands, it reads that troubled employees are sought out and rehabilitated only for the sake of productivity. In the true spirit of an EAP, these employees are rehabilitated to improve their overall health, which typically results in increased productivity (Csiernik, 1995). Furthermore, employees who have any type of problem, not just substance problems, are free to utilize an EAP.

Types of Programs

At present, 95% of EAPs are the broad brush type in which employees have access to a wide range of services, and not merely assistance with alcohol and drug abuse (Grosch, Duffy, & Hessink, 1996). Employee Assistance Programs can be offered internally or externally. An internal program has staff on site and can refer employees to outside agencies for long-term intensive programs. Large organizations are more likely than small organizations to have an internal EAP (Feinstein & Brown, 1982; Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1986). An externally-operated program will contract out services. Grosch et al. (1996) ascertained that employers who used external EAPs had a significantly lower percentage of employees who used the program than employers who used internal EAPs. Sometimes it is the case that several organizations will combine their resources to develop a collaborative EAP (Dessler, 1997). For both internal and external EAPs, a telephone hot line may be set up for employees. Employees can call 24 hours a day with concerns or problems they would like to discuss. Regardless of the type of EAP, an individual can be referred to the program by a supervisor, coworker, family member, peer, or can enter voluntarily upon self-referral.

History

Employee Assistance Programs, in their current state, have been in operation for approximately 40 years (Holosko, 1988). They have their roots in the social betterment movement, personnel counseling, occupational mental health programs, and industrial alcoholism programs (Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1986). The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) coined the label Employee Assistance Program.

Certainly, businesses which are concerned about their employees' well-being, and which assume a social responsibility to the community, are more likely to adopt an EAP than businesses which are not concerned about employee well-being and the community (Roman, 1980; Trice & Beyer, 1984). A 1995 national survey indicated that 39% of all private worksites with 50 or more full-time employees have an EAP (French, Dunlap, Roman, & Steele, 1997). Furthermore, the majority of Fortune 500 companies are currently using an EAP (Major, 1990). Nevertheless, only 11% of U.S. colleges and universities implement an EAP (Mermis, 1994). The NIAAA was the impetus in the development of EAPs in university environments; funding from the NIAAA to implement EAPs in universities began in the mid-1970s (Roman, 1980).

Universities

The university environment is different from the prototypical business environment. The university environment usually involves more autonomy, flexibility, creativity, and individualism compared to a prototypical business environment (Sullivan & Poverny, 1992). However, university employees experience the same pressures as employees in a prototypical business environment. For example, both universities and prototypical businesses must deal with lower revenues while battling higher costs. In addition, similar to employees in a prototypical business environment, individual faculty are held accountable for remaining productive throughout their tenure (Sullivan & Poverny, 1992).

Previous Research

Previous research on EAPs has examined topics such as supervisor reactions to EAPs, employee reactions to EAPs (including propensity to use the program), EAP adoption and implementation, and EAP evaluation (Harris & Heft, 1992). Employee Assistance Programs arose out of a need to deal with alcohol and drug problems in the workplace. Thus, most research focuses on employees with chemical dependencies. The majority of studies on EAPs continue to focus on prototypical business environments rather than university environments. Overall, most of the research on EAPs indicates positive outcomes associated with the presence of an EAP. Examples of these positive outcomes include decreased absenteeism, increased well-being, and financial savings to the organization (Evans & Lair, 1983; Every & Leong, 1994; Gam, Sauser, Evans, & Lair, 1983; Klarreich, DiGiuseppe, & DiMattia, 1987; McClellan & Miller, 1988).

Employee Assistance Programs are similar to other health-related programs (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous) in that many factors contribute to employees' reported willingness to seek help. McKirnan (1980) found that familiarity with and perceptions of effectiveness of such a program are related to self-reported propensity to use the program. Many times, utilizing a program like an EAP carries certain stigmas. Seeking help can be viewed as a product of moral weakness which, in turn, could cause embarrassment to the individual and decrease the likelihood of that individual utilizing an EAP (Harris & Fennell, 1988).

Cost-effectiveness

An annual loss of 132 million working days are due to stress-related illnesses (Feinstein & Brown, 1982). Harris and Heft (1992) noted that nearly $90 billion of lost productivity is due to illegal drug use and alcohol abuse. Employee Assistance Programs are designed to address, among other factors, issues of illegal drug use and alcohol abuse and help an employee deal with these issues most effectively. Employees who do nothing to address their problems may become dissatisfied with their jobs, families, or lives in general. Maintaining satisfied employees benefits an employer's bottom line by reducing absenteeism and health care costs (Gam et al., 1983; McClellan & Miller, 1988).

Although research indicates how valuable an EAP can be to an organization, it is always more difficult to convince an organization to spend money, time, and resources to implement a program. Previous research indicates that EAPs are cost-effective (Evans & Lair, 1983; Every & Leong, 1994; Gam et al., 1983). Reports on the overall cost effectiveness of an EAP indicate that organizations can save between $2.74 and $8.00 per dollar spent on an EAP (Klarreich et al., 1987).

The key to saving this money is utilization. The higher the percentage of total employees utilizing an EAP, the more likely it is that those who will benefit most are those who are using the program. As a result, the organization will save money (Every & Leong, 1994). One study indicated a 70% reduction in absenteeism due to utilization of an EAP (Klarreich et al., 1987). Employee Assistance Programs also have the potential to improve employee well-being through self-disclosure. That is, merely talking about

one's problems may increase an individual's sense of personal well-being. Therefore, it is important to examine factors that influence an employee's propensity to use an EAP.

Theoretical Framework

Two social psychological theories provided the framework for developing the present study's hypotheses. The first, social comparison, involves assessing one's opinions and attitudes by comparing oneself to others (Myers, 1990). Further, when an individual categorizes others as a group and expects to join them (e.g., starting a new job), they perceive the group norm to be more extreme than if they did not intend on joining the group (Mackie, 1986). If the norms of the organization include negative attitudes toward the EAP, these negative attitudes will be perceived as more extreme than they actually are. Attitudes are one important factor that people use in the group categorization process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Therefore, if people want to feel comfortable categorizing themselves as part of the group, they are likely to adopt the same attitudes that others hold toward the EAP and, subsequently, the attitudes may be exaggerated. Therefore, it is of much importance to assure the EAP is running correctly and possesses positive attributes so that employees will develop positive attitudes toward the EAP.

A second theory used to develop the hypotheses of the present study is expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). Expectancy theory states that individuals will expend energy on activities that lead to desired outcomes (Muchinsky, 1997). In this sense, a person must want to get better; that is, solve his or her problems. The individual must

also believe there is a relationship between using the EAP and achieving this desired outcome. Finally, the person must perceive that attempting to contact the EAP will get them an appointment with someone who is willing to help them. These theoretical foundations, as well as the following background of the present study, provided the framework for developing the hypotheses in this study.

Background of Present Study

Studies have shown that employees' awareness of or familiarity with an EAP (Frost, 1990; Harris & Fennell, 1988; Park, 1992; Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1986; Steele & Hubbard, 1985), and perceptions of trustworthiness or confidentiality of an EAP (Harris & Fennell, 1988; Park, 1992; Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1986), are positively associated with propensity to use an EAP. Milne et al. (1994) conducted a study on factors that affect employees' propensity to use an EAP. They ascertained that familiarity with an EAP, perception of top management support for an EAP, perception of supervisory support for an EAP, and perception of accessibility of an EAP were positively associated with perceived confidence in the EAP. Perceived confidence was measured as a function of perceived confidentiality and credibility of the program. Milne et al.'s (1994) results further indicated that confidence in the EAP was positively associated with propensity to use the EAP. Thus, confidence in the EAP seems to mediate an individual's perceptions of the EAP and propensity to use the EAP. Milne et al.'s study did not examine perceived effectiveness of the EAP, although these authors stated that if confidence is lacking in the EAP, it cannot be an effective or successful program.

Although many variables have been identified as being associated with propensity to use an EAP, perceived effectiveness of an EAP is one variable that has received relatively little attention. Data reveal that somewhere between 70% and 85% of employees who use an EAP are self-referred (Blum & Roman, 1989; Grosch et al., 1996). It seems likely that an employee who utilizes an EAP voluntarily does so because he or she believes the EAP to be effective. Familiarity with an EAP precedes perceptions of accessibility and confidence in the program. In turn, perceptions of accessibility and confidence in an EAP are associated with perceptions of effectiveness. Thus, before a program is considered effective, it must contain positive qualities that would lead one to perceive it as effective. These positive qualities would include perceiving the program as accessible, confidential, and credible. In addition, a program that employees perceive as benefiting the employee will perhaps be more likely to be used compared to a program that has a perceived purpose of benefiting the employer (cf. McClellan & Miller, 1988).

Based on the foregoing assertions and results from previous research, a structural model was developed that incorporates factors hypothesized to be associated with employees' propensity to use an EAP (see Figure 1). As depicted in the hypothesized model shown in Figure 1, it is predicted that (a) familiarity with an EAP is positively associated with confidence in and perceived accessibility of the EAP, (b) accessibility of an EAP is positively associated with confidence in the EAP, (c) confidence in and perceived accessibility of an EAP are positively associated with perceived effectiveness of the EAP, (d) confidence in and perceived effectiveness of an EAP are positively associated with propensity to use the EAP, and (e) perceived purpose of an EAP is associated with propensity to use the EAP.

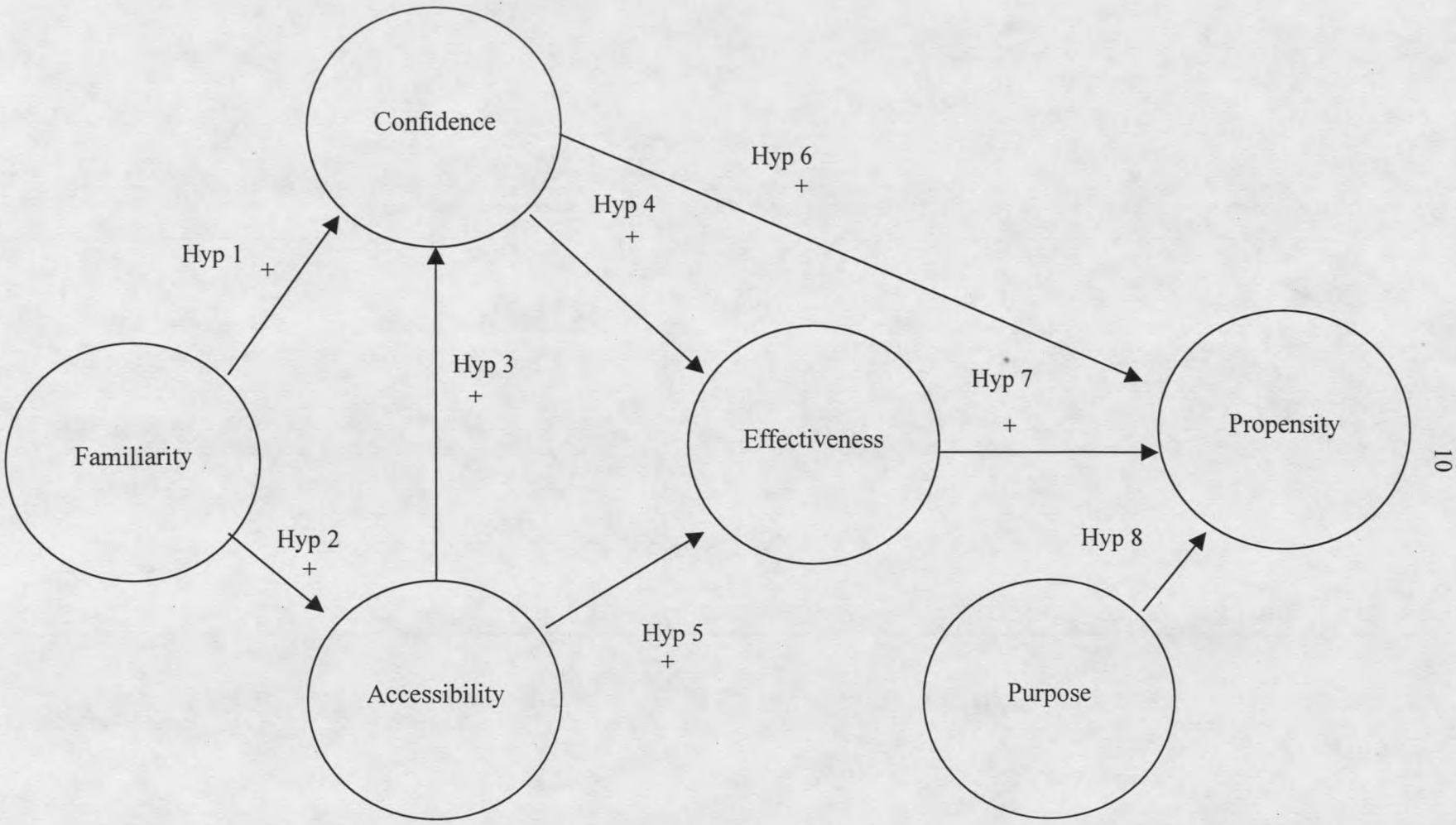


Figure 1. Model of Factors Hypothesized to Predict Propensity to Use an Employee Assistance Program.

Hypotheses

In sum, the following hypotheses were tested in the present study:

Hypothesis 1: Employees' familiarity with an EAP is positively associated with their confidence in the EAP.

Hypothesis 2: Employees' familiarity with an EAP is positively associated with their perceived accessibility of the EAP.

Hypothesis 3: Employees' perceived accessibility of an EAP is positively associated with their confidence in the EAP.

Hypothesis 4: Employees' confidence in an EAP is positively associated with their perceived effectiveness of the EAP.

Hypothesis 5: Employees' perceived accessibility of an EAP is positively associated with their perceived effectiveness of the EAP.

Hypothesis 6: Employees' confidence in an EAP is positively associated with their propensity to use the EAP.

Hypothesis 7: Employees' perceived effectiveness of an EAP is positively associated with their propensity to use the EAP.

Hypothesis 8: Employees' perceived purpose of an EAP is associated with their propensity to use the EAP, such that employees who believe the purpose of the EAP is to benefit the employee will have a greater propensity to use the program compared to employees who believe the purpose of the EAP is to benefit the employer.

METHOD

Participants

All faculty, staff, and administration at Montana State University-Bozeman (N = 2,230) had the opportunity to participate in this study. The Faculty Staff Assistance Program (FSAP) at Montana State University-Bozeman is an external EAP and has a representative on campus one day per week. All employees covered by the university's health plan (94% of the population) have access to this assistance program.

Procedure

A 4-page questionnaire designed to assess familiarity with, perceptions of, and propensity to use the FSAP was sent via campus mail. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured for all questionnaire responses, and a $50.00 random lottery was offered to those who returned a completed questionnaire.

A response rate of 35% was obtained (n = 768). A 30% to 40% return rate is typical in the social sciences (Berdie, Anderson, & Niebuhr, 1986). Demographic information was obtained for all university employees to determine the representativeness of the sample of 768 respondents to its corresponding population.

Measures of Study Variables

The 4-page questionnaire administered, including the cover letter and each of the measures described next, can be found in the Appendix.

Familiarity

Two measures of familiarity were used. The dichotomous variable labeled Heard2 was a single-item measure from Frost (1990) asking if respondents had heard of the FSAP (yes/no). The variable labeled Familiar was a five-item measure from Milne et al. (1994) assessing level of familiarity with the FSAP. Respondents rated these items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). Example items include "I know how to contact the FSAP" and "I would be able to contact the FSAP."

Confidence

Perceived confidence in the FSAP was assessed with two measures. Confid1 is a three-item measure adapted from Milne et al. (1994) and Confid2 is a two item measure from Frost (1990). Both are measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree). Example items include "Things that I would say to an FSAP consultant would not get back to fellow employees" and "The FSAP can be trusted to keep information confidential."

Accessibility

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree) was used for two items that assess perceived accessibility (Milne et al., 1994). Example items include "The FSAP is adequately accessible to employees" and "The FSAP is adequately visible to employees."

Effectiveness

A two-item measure from Frost (1990) was used to measure perceived effectiveness. On a 4-point Likert scale (1 = to no extent to 4 = great extent), respondents indicated to what extent using the FSAP would help solve their problems. Example items include "To what extent do you think talking to someone at the FSAP would help make a change" and "To what extent do you think you would want to solve these problems on your own."

Purpose

The two-item scale used to assess perceptions of the purpose of the FSAP was modeled after McClellan and Miller (1988). Respondents indicated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = to no extent to 4 = great extent) the extent to which they believed the FSAP to be a benefit to employees and to the employer. The items used were "To what extent do you believe the FSAP benefits employees" and "To what extent do you believe the FSAP benefits the employer?"

Propensity to Use

From Frost (1990), one item, labeled Likeuse, asked respondents how likely they would be to use the FSAP (1 = not at all likely to 4 = very likely). Another two-item measure from Frost (1990), labeled Propens1, asked about respondents' comfort level in dealing with the FSAP (1 = not comfortable to 4 = very comfortable). Finally, Propens2, a two-item measure from Milne et al. (1994), used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree) to measure propensity to use the program. Example items include "I would not hesitate to contact the FSAP with a personal problem of my own" and "I would not hesitate to contact the FSAP with a personal problem affecting my spouse, children, or family member."

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and the range of values for participants' (a) age in years, (b) number of months employed by the university, and (c) gross annual income. In addition, Table 1 shows frequencies and percents for participants' (a) sex, (b) ethnic background, (c) marital status, and (d) job title.

As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of study participants were (a) between the ages of 34 and 53, (b) married, (c) Caucasian, and (d) staff members. With respect to sex, there were more females ($n = 458$; 59.6%) than males ($n = 306$; 39.8%) in the sample.

The population of Montana State University-Bozeman employees is 51% female (49% male), 60% staff (35% faculty, 5% administration), and 97.5% Caucasian (1% Native American, 1% Asian, .5% Black or Hispanic). Their average age is 45.8 years and average length of time with the university is 10 years. The present sample was highly representative of the population with respect to gender, ethnicity, age, and length of time with the university. In addition, the sample was closely representative of the population with respect to job title, such that the sample slightly under-represented faculty and slightly over-represented administration. Overall, in terms of demographics, the present sample of university employees is representative of the population of university employees and, thus, does not appear to be biased.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range
Age in Years	43.62	9.69	20 – 68
Months Employed with University	112.80	94.21	2 – 456
Gross Annual Income in Dollars	31,262.40	19,307.66	1,223 – 150,000

	n	% of N
Sex		
Male	306	39.8
Female	458	59.6
Missing	4	0.6
Ethnic Background		
Asian	6	.8
Black	3	.4
Caucasian	726	94.5
Native American	13	1.7
Other	9	1.2
Missing	11	1.4
Marital Status		
Single	118	15.3
Married	550	71.6
Divorced	75	9.8
Separated	7	.9
Widowed	9	1.2
Missing	9	1.2
Job Title		
Assistant Professor	51	6.6
Associate Professor	60	7.8
Full Professor	55	7.2
Clerical	125	16.3
Staff	327	42.6
Other	133	17.3
Missing	17	2.2

Note. "Job Title-Other" includes upper-level administrative staff.

Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Table 2 reports means, standard deviations, internal consistency estimates, and intercorrelations for all focal study variables. As can be seen in this table, each measure was internally consistent, with the exception of the two-item measure of effectiveness. In order to test Hypotheses 1-8, this correlation matrix and the respective standard deviations for each variable were entered into AMOS 3.6 (Arbuckle, 1994) to conduct a structural equations modeling analysis. AMOS 3.6 computes and conducts the analysis using a covariance matrix for the study variables.

Structural Equations Modeling

The hypothesized model shown in Figure 1 was tested using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 3.6 using a marker variable approach to define the metric of each latent variable. Cases with missing data were deleted on a listwise basis. The hypothesized model was unidentified by AMOS 3.6.

The revised model shown in Figure 2 was also tested using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 3.6 using a marker variable approach to define the metric of each latent variable. Cases with missing data were deleted on a listwise basis. AMOS 3.6 required that the parameter estimate between accessibility and effectiveness be constrained to zero. In addition, purpose and familiarity were allowed to covary ($r = .50$). The proportion of variance accounted for in each latent variable by their respective observed measures ranged from .16 to .83, though the majority were greater than .50.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency Estimates, and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Heard2	---	---	---										
2. Familiarity	2.42	1.02	.499**	**(.88)**									
3. Confidence #1	3.21	.69	.337**	.560**	**(.88)**								
4. Confidence #2	3.33	.83	.303**	.499**	.812**	**(.97)**							
5. Accessibility	2.90	.90	.373**	.596**	.516**	.466**	**(.78)**						
6. Effectiveness	2.34	.77	.128**	.279**	.283**	.315**	.187**	**(.46)**					
7. Benefit Employee	2.50	.81	.248**	.410**	.409**	.402**	.361**	.588**	---				
8. Benefit Employer	2.51	.86	.184**	.363**	.333**	.353**	.287**	.529**	.818**	---			
9. Likely to Use	1.78	.86	.180**	.397**	.415**	.397**	.285**	.562**	.576**	.526**	---		
10. Propensity #1	2.94	1.10	.185**	.448**	.595**	.571**	.381**	.462**	.499**	.443**	.611**	**(.96)**	
11. Propensity #2	1.91	.87	.148**	.359**	.421**	.424**	.286**	.478**	.484**	.446**	.659**	.590**	**(.92)**

Cronbach's alphas appear in bold on the main diagonal in parentheses. N ranged from 684 to 760.
**p < .01.

Measurement errors for each observed measure ranged from .11 to .59. In short, each measure served as an adequate indicator of its underlying latent variable.

The revised model shown in Figure 2 offered an acceptable but not outstanding fit to the data, χ^2 (41, $\underline{N}$ = 643) = 573.69, $\underline{p} < .01$; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = .84, adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = .74, comparative fit index (CFI) = .87, normed fit index (NFI) = .86, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .14.

As shown in Figure 2, in support of Hypothesis 1, results reveal that familiarity with the FSAP is significantly positively associated with confidence in the program (β = 1.00, $\underline{p} < .01$, Beta (β) is measured in z-score units). In support of Hypothesis 2, familiarity with the FSAP is significantly positively associated with perceptions of accessibility of the program (β = 1.00, $\underline{p} < .01$). Hypothesis 3 was not supported, such that perceived accessibility of the FSAP was not significantly associated with confidence in the program. In support of Hypothesis 4, perceived confidence in the FSAP is significantly positively associated with perceived effectiveness of the program (β = .12, $\underline{p}$ < .05). Hypothesis 5 was not supported, such that perceived accessibility of the FSAP was not significantly associated with perceived effectiveness of the program. Hypothesis 6 was also not supported, such that confidence in the FSAP was not significantly associated with propensity to use the program. In support of Hypothesis 7, perceived effectiveness of the FSAP is significantly positively associated with propensity to use the program (β = 4.54, $\underline{p} < .05$). Finally, Hypothesis 8 was not supported, such that no significant relationship was found between perceived purpose of the FSAP and

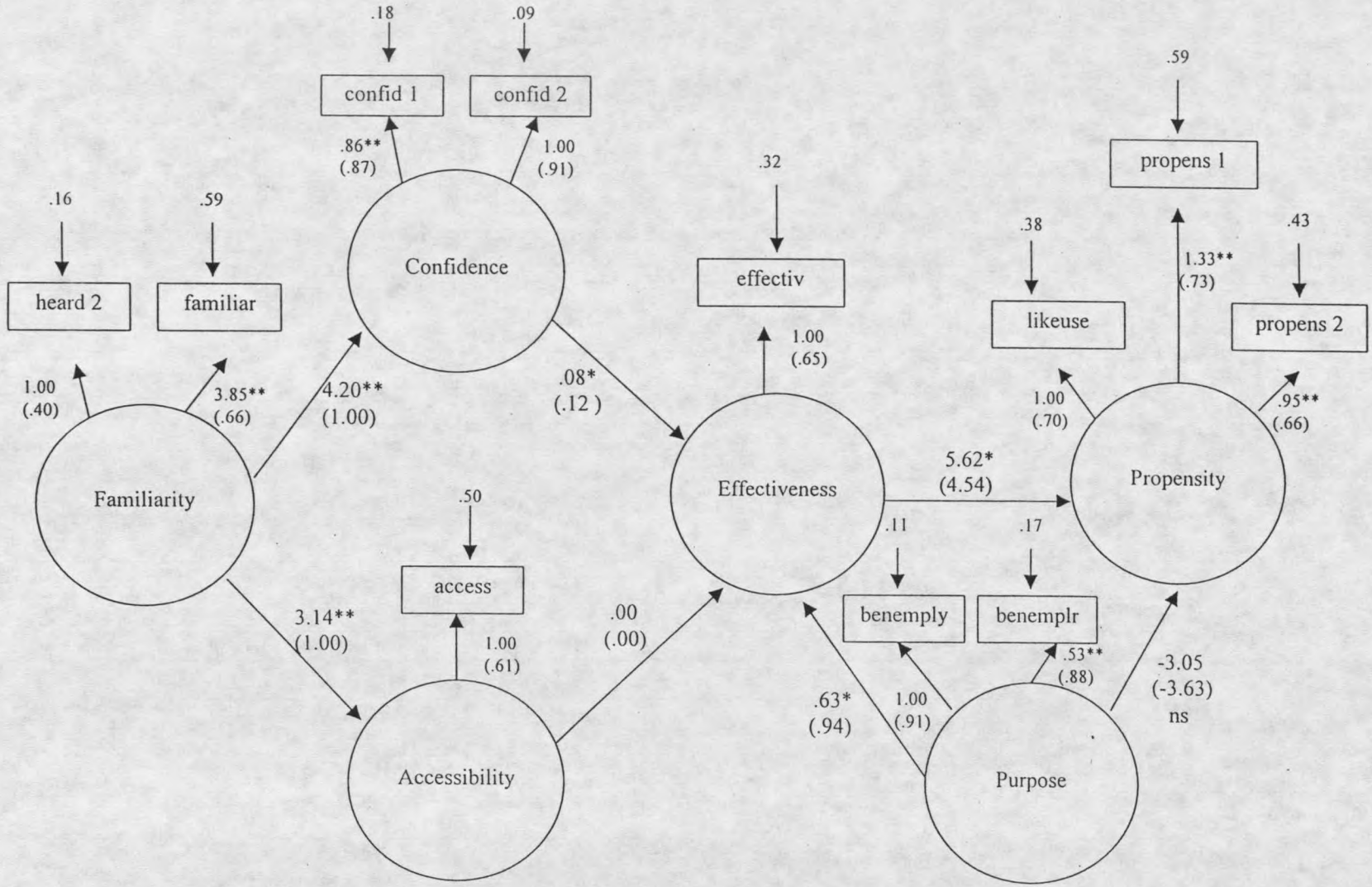


Figure 2. Best-fit Model of Factors Hypothesized to Predict Propensity to Use an Employee Assistance Program. Unstandardized parameter estimates (bs) on each path with standardized estimates (βs) in parentheses.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

propensity to use the program. Although not associated with Hypotheses 1-8, perceived purpose of the FSAP is significantly positively associated with perceived effectiveness of the program ($\beta = .94$, $p < .01$), such that employees who perceive the FSAP as a benefit to employees are more likely to perceive the program as effective compared to employees who perceive the FSAP as a benefit to the employer. In sum, Hypotheses 1, 2, 4, and 7 were supported, while Hypotheses 3, 5, 6, and 8 were not supported.

Multivariate Normality

It deserves noting that an assumption of using maximum likelihood estimation in structural equations modeling is multivariate normality, which is particularly sensitive to multivariate kurtosis. For the 11 observed Y variables, the index of multivariate kurtosis was fairly large (Mardia's coefficient = 21.41; values exceeding 6.00 are considered large). The univariate skewness values ranged in magnitude from –1.09 to .89 (zero represents no skew), and the univariate kurtosis values ranged in magnitude from -.80 to 2.74 (zero represents a mesokurtotic distribution). Nevertheless, most of the observed Y variables had a univariate kurtosis value near zero. Although the assumption of multivariate normality was not met, an inspection of the univariate skewness and kurtosis statistics suggests that most of the variables were normally, or approximately normally, distributed.

Additional Analyses

Additional analyses were conducted to examine select demographic characteristics and likelihood to use an EAP. These were conducted on account of the overwhelming amount of literature that reports gender differences in propensity to use an EAP. Women are more likely than men to use and report propensity to use an EAP (Blum & Roman, 1992; Blum, Martin & Roman, 1992; French et al., 1997; Harris & Fennell, 1988; Milne et al., 1994). The present study revealed consistent results such that women were significantly more likely than men to report likelihood to use the FSAP (r_{pb} = .22, $p < .01$). Furthermore, consistent with Blum and Roman (1992), there was a significant negative relationship between gross annual income and reported likelihood to use the FSAP ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$). This is consistent with the result that likelihood to use the FSAP differed as a function of an employee's job title (F [5, 738] = 4.35, $p < .001$). Specifically, post hoc Tukey tests indicated that (a) associate professors differed from clerical, (b) associate professors differed from staff, (c) full professors differed from clerical, and (d) clerical differed from "other" in terms of likelihood to use the FSAP. An inspection of the means suggested that clerical and staff were reportedly more likely to use the FSAP than were all other groups.

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of the present study was to investigate whether and how familiarity with and perceptions of an EAP are associated with propensity to use the EAP. On the basis of previous research (Milne et al., 1994) and the social psychological theories of social comparison and expectancy theory, a model was hypothesized in which familiarity with an EAP predicts perceptions of the EAP which, in turn, predicts propensity to use the program. These variables were examined under the assumption that EAPs have the potential to sustain or increase employee well-being.

The subjective sense of well-being involves "the ability to maintain relative control over emotional states in response to life events and is associated with stress management..." (Csiernik, 1995, p. 4). Social support is an ameliorating factor and has a direct positive impact on a sense of wellness. Utilizing an EAP is one way of receiving social support and, thus, improving a personal sense of well-being. In view of this information, it is important to examine why individuals choose (or choose not) to use an EAP.

Hypotheses

In support of Hypotheses 1 and 2, degree of familiarity with the FSAP was significantly positively associated with an individual's perceptions of confidence in and accessibility of the program. These findings suggest that in order to have positive perceptions regarding an EAP's confidentiality and accessibility, the individual needs to

have high levels of familiarity with the EAP and the policies and procedures concerning the EAP. This can be accomplished in many ways. Pamphlets, meetings, electronic mail, postings throughout the organization, or any other means of informing employees of the EAP will increase their degree of familiarity with the EAP. Universities may find it is more difficult to reach every employee and, therefore, campus mail or requiring each department head to be responsible for informing the employees in his or her department of the EAP may improve the degree of familiarity among university employees. In any case, it is helpful to have a local or toll-free telephone number that employees can call to seek information about or ask questions regarding the EAP. Employees cannot develop informed perceptions, or choose to utilize an EAP, if they are not aware that one exists or are not familiar with how to contact the program.

Contrary to Milne et al.'s (1994) results, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. The present study's results revealed that perceived accessibility of the FSAP was not significantly positively associated with confidence in the program. This indicates that merely perceiving an EAP as accessible does not necessarily increase (or decrease) perceptions of the confidentiality of the EAP.

In support of Hypothesis 4, perceptions of confidentiality of the FSAP were positively associated with perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. This finding suggests that employees who perceive the EAP to be confidential and credible will also perceive the EAP as an effective means to help solve their problems. This illustrates the importance of keeping information about employees confidential. An EAP cannot be perceived as effective if any of the confidential information that employees divulge is jeopardized.

Two ways perceived confidence in an EAP can be positively affected are (a) make confidentiality a written priority of the EAP, and (b) only involve people who can be trusted to keep information confidential in the EAP. Employees who feel confidential information will get back to supervisors, co-workers, or somehow affect negatively their position in the organization will not perceive the EAP as an effective means to help solve their problems. This, in turn, will affect their degree of propensity to use the program.

Inconsistent with Hypothesis 5, perceived accessibility of the FSAP was not positively associated with perceived effectiveness of the program. Similar to Hypothesis 3, this finding suggests that merely perceiving an EAP as accessible does not affect whether or not an employee thinks the program will be effective in helping to solve their problems.

Inconsistent with Hypothesis 6, confidence in the FSAP was not significantly positively associated with propensity to use the program. These results suggest that propensity to use the FSAP is a function of factors other than perceived confidentiality of the program and perceived credibility of the program. It also suggests that perceived effectiveness of the FSAP may be a mediator between perceived confidentiality and propensity to use the program.

In support of Hypothesis 7, perceptions of effectiveness of the FSAP were positively associated with propensity to use the program. Certainly, employees who believe the EAP will be effective in helping to solve their problems will be much more likely to use the program compared to employees who believe the program will not be effective in helping to solve their problems. Propensity to use an EAP may be affected by many interacting variables, and these variables may differ for each individual. It

seems logical that individuals would choose a method that they believe to be effective in helping to solve their problems.

One potential way to positively influence the effectiveness of an EAP is to hire people who have previously been involved with these kinds of health-related programs. This may increase the chances that common problems can be avoided and small problems ironed out in a timely fashion. One way to then monitor and maintain effectiveness of an EAP is to use client satisfaction surveys. Deficiencies could then be addressed by reading responses from clients and improving on areas where needed.

Inconsistent with Hypothesis 8, no significant relationship was found between perceived purpose of the FSAP and propensity to use the program. Similar to Hypothesis 6, and consistent with the results reported next, perceived effectiveness may be a mediator between perceived purpose and propensity to use the program.

Additional Results

Although not associated with Hypotheses 1-8, results reveal that perceptions of the purpose of an EAP were associated with perceptions of effectiveness of the EAP. That is, employees who believe the purpose of the EAP is to benefit the employee will perceive the EAP to be more effective compared to employees who believe the purpose of the EAP is to benefit the employer. Most EAPs, when implemented correctly, should benefit both the employee and the employer. Nonetheless, the present results suggest that if employees perceive the program to be implemented solely to save money for the organization, and to have nothing to do with attempting to sustain or improve the well-

being of employees, employees will perceive the EAP to be less effective than if they perceive the purpose of the EAP to benefit employees. One potential way to influence employees' perceptions of the purpose of the EAP is to advertise the EAP as part of a benefits package. Another possible way would be to associate the EAP with any kind of wellness program the organization may have in place.

The author strongly believes that perceived effectiveness of any type of program will be the largest factor in determining voluntary propensity to use the program. This could indicate that all other factors assumed to determine propensity to use a program would actually be means of evaluating the program's effectiveness.

Directions for Future Research

To most effectively sell the idea of EAPs to organizations, research should focus on generalizable cost-benefit studies and evaluation studies of EAPs of the broad brush type. Only 4% of the colleges and universities surveyed in the Grosch et al. (1996) study had conducted a formal cost-benefit analysis. This is an extremely low percentage considering organizations that are likely to adopt an EAP would be very interested in this data. Although evaluations of EAPs pose unique problems due to the difficulty in measuring specific benefits, cost-benefit studies could help organizations identify the importance that an EAP can play in reducing expenses. The evaluation studies, with follow-up client satisfaction surveys, will demonstrate to organizations that these programs are useful and effective.

More research should focus on how employees can be made aware of and familiar with an EAP. Employees only have the choice to utilize an EAP when they are aware that such a program is available. Increased familiarity with an EAP will also positively affect perceptions of accessibility of the program. The present study and others indicate that awareness needs to be increased in male employees, faculty, and employees exceeding 50 years of age (Grosch et al., 1996; Park, 1992; Sullivan & Poverny, 1992). Research should focus on how we can best reach this population of university employees.

The present study used self-reported propensity to use an EAP as an indicator of actual use of the program. Intention to behave in a particular manner predicts actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Kraus, 1995). Therefore, if employees have problems or concerns, those employees who report a propensity to use an EAP should be more likely to actually use the program compared to employees who do not report a propensity to use the program. Utilization is an important variable to study because an EAP that is not being used by employees is not serving its purpose to the employees and is not saving money for the organization.

Research addressing the potential of EAPs to sustain or improve employee well-being should be conducted. In organizations, questionnaires addressing employee well-being should be administered before and after using the EAP. Finally, researchers should fit the revised structural equations model of the present study to other samples to assess the stability of the parameter estimates.

In addition, there are other potential variables that may be associated with propensity to use an EAP. The culture, norms, values, mission, goals, and gender composition of the organization may affect how comfortable one feels in utilizing such a

program. Further, variables such as affective states may be associated with an individuals reported willingness to use an EAP, and may potentially affect the development of perceptions of the EAP.

Potential Study Limitations

The data collected for the present study used self-report measures. This is a very common method of collecting data, but it does have problems. One problem deals with asking individuals to engage in higher-order cognitive processes. Different people will determine responses to questions considering different variables and circumstances, also assigning differential weights to how much each variable plays a part in making their decision. Another disadvantage is what is known as common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). When two or more measures are collected from the same respondents, any defect in that source contaminates all measures. Therefore, one notable problem with self-report measures is identifying the potential causes of artifactual covariance between two distinctly different variables. Despite these problems, self-report measures are often used and, at times, there is no realistic alternative to their use.

Another potential limitation to this study is the low response rate. Although, as stated earlier, 30%-40% response rates are typical in the social sciences, it represents less than half of the population. One possible reason for the low response rate was the timing of the mailing of the questionnaires. They were delivered to employees with only a few weeks remaining in the semester before summer break. This could have limited the number of individuals in the population who were able to complete and return the

questionnaire. For example, it is interesting to note that the majority of respondents were staff members. The results of the present study could be more representative of staff members at universities rather than all employees at universities. Possibly, staff members have less pressure and fewer deadlines than assistant, associate, or full professors have at the end of a semester, allowing them more time to complete and return the questionnaire.

Uniqueness of Study

This study focused on EAP utilization in a university setting. Although some research has examined university settings, most concentrate on prototypical business environments. The combination of variables examined and their association with propensity to use the EAP in a university setting was unique. Further, some suggestions for increasing familiarity with the EAP focused specifically on universities.

McKirnan (1980) examined the association between perceived effectiveness of a health-related program and propensity to use that program. This study expanded on that literature and examined the association between perceived effectiveness of an EAP and propensity to use the EAP.

Concluding Remarks

Results from the present study suggest that in order to have an EAP that will be utilized, information about the EAP should be distributed to the population of potential users to increase their familiarity with the program. Further, the program should be accessible to all employees and adhere to standards of confidentiality. When the program

is perceived as benefiting the employees and as confidential, employees will perceive the program to be effective and will be more likely to use the program when needed.

Organizations need to invest sufficient time and effort into the implementation of an EAP. Employees should be aware of the EAP and become familiar with services and procedures through organizational efforts (e.g., newsletters, meetings, e-mail). These sources should identify correct steps for an employee to contact someone involved with an EAP, thereby influencing employees to perceive the EAP as accessible. Organizations should also assure that their EAPs are confidential and credible. Finally, so that employees perceive an EAP as effective, organizations should take steps to guarantee that an EAP is operating appropriately. With the majority of the literature reporting positive outcomes from the presence and utilization of EAPs, it is a wonder that every organization does not have such a program.

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APPENDIX

Dear Montana State University Faculty or Staff member:

My name is Laura Schneider and I am a psychology graduate student here at MSU. I am working on my Master's thesis and would appreciate your help. I am asking that you please take approximately 15 minutes of your time to fill out this short questionnaire regarding MSU's Faculty Staff Assistance Program (FSAP).

On the bottom of the last page of this packet, you will find two tickets with identical numbers. Please tear off the ticket that has your mailing address label on the back and keep it in a safe place. Leave the other ticket attached to the questionnaire. When you return the questionnaire to me via campus mail, please refold the packet, staple it once, and attach my return mailing address label (enclosed).

Your ticket number will be entered into a random lottery for the chance to win **$50.00**. The winning number will be posted under the heading "MSU Employee Survey" at the AskUs Information Desk on the second floor of the SUB on Friday, May 8. You can claim your **$50.00 prize** at the AskUs Information Desk. You will need to present your lottery ticket to receive the prize.

DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS PACKET. Your questionnaire responses are ANONYMOUS and will remain strictly CONFIDENTIAL. They will NOT be used for administrative purposes. They will be used for research purposes ONLY.

After completing the questionnaire, fold it in half with the address label for Laura Schneider showing and please return it by **Thursday, May 7**.

Thank you very much for taking the time to assist me. Your responses will contribute to scientific research intended to benefit employees.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Schneider
(406) 994-7051
lschneider@montana.campus.mci.net

Please indicate your response to each item below

1. Have you heard about MSU's Wellness Program? Y___ N___
2. Have you heard about MSU's Faculty Staff Assistance Program (FSAP)?Y___ N___

Please indicate your response to the following items using the scale below

|---|---|---|---|---|
1 2 3 4 5
strongly agree agree neither agree nor disagree disagree strongly disagree

3. I am aware of the appropriate steps to take to refer a peer to the MSU FSAP._____
4. I know how to contact the MSU FSAP._____
5. I would be able to contact the MSU FSAP._____
6. I have read the MSU FSAP policy statement._____
7. I am familiar with the details of the MSU FSAP policy._____
8. The MSU FSAP can be trusted to keep information confidential._____
9. The MSU FSAP has good credibility in this organization._____
10. The MSU FSAP has been careful not to breach its promise of confidentiality to those who come for appointments._____
11. Things that I would say to an MSU FSAP consultant would not get back to fellow employees._____
12. Things that I would say to an MSU FSAP consultant would not get back to my supervisor/boss/department head._____
13. I would not hesitate to contact the FSAP with a personal problem of my own._____
14. I would not hesitate to contact the FSAP with a personal problem affecting my spouse, children, or family member._____
15. The FSAP is adequately accessible to employees. _____
16. The FSAP is adequately visible to employees. _____

The MSU FSAP is available for employees to talk to someone about things that are bothering them. Consider a situation when you might have a problem that you would like to change.

Please indicate your response to the following items using the scale below

|---|---|---|---|
1 2 3 4
No extent Small extent Moderate extent Great extent

17. To what extent do you think you would want to solve these problems on your own?_____ (R)
18. To what extent do you think talking to someone at the FSAP would help make a change?_____
19. To what extent do you believe the FSAP benefits MSU employees? _____
20. To what extent do you believe the FSAP benefits the employer (MSU)?_____ (R)

Please indicate your response to the following item using the scale below
1 = Not at all likely 2 = Somewhat likely 3 = Likely 4 = Very likely

21. How likely would you be to use the FSAP if you had a problem?_____

Please indicate your response to the following items using the scale below
1 = Not comfortable 2 = Somewhat comfortable 3 = Comfortable 4 = Very comfortable

22. How comfortable do you think you would be talking to someone at the FSAP about your personal problems?_____
23. How comfortable do you think you would be in scheduling appointments to see someone at the FSAP?_____

Everyone has good days and bad days. Think back to last year. Check the category that best fits you.

24. How would you rate your physical health?
Excellent_____Good_____Fair_____Poor_____

25. How would you rate your mental health?
Excellent_____Good_____Fair_____Poor_____

26. Are you concerned about your health? Y_____N_____

Thinking about the past year, would you say you had (mark only one response)...

27. A great deal of stress_____ Some stress_____ Very little stress_____
What is your greatest source of stress? _____

28. Have you been irritable or tense over this last year?
Never_____ Sometimes_____ Often_____ All the time_____

29. Would you say that your spirits most of the time were....
Very good_____ Good_____ Fair_____ Poor_____

Please Circle Either True OR False

T F 30. Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.
T F 31. It's sometimes hard go on with my work if I'm not encouraged. (R)
T F 32. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way. (R)
T F 33. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.
T F 34. If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen, I would probably do it. (R)
T F 35. I like to gossip at times. (R)

T F 36. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right. (R)
T F 37. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something. (R)
T F 38. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone. (R)
T F 39. I always try to practice what I preach.
T F 40. When I don't know something I don't at all mind admitting it.
T F 41. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.
T F 42. I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car.
T F 43. I have never felt that I was punished without cause.
T F 44. I sometimes think when people have a misfortune they only got what they deserved. (R)
T F 45. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Please indicate the following:

46. Gender M_____ F_____

47. Current marital status:
Single_____ Married_____
Divorced_____ Separated_____
Widowed_____

48. Age in years _____

49. Ethnic background:
Asian_____ Black_____ Caucasian_____ Native American_____
Other (please specify)_____

50. How long have you been employed at MSU? _____ year(s) _____ month(s)

51. What is your gross annual income? $_____

52. Are you investing in a retirement plan? Y_____ N_____

53. Job title:
Assistant Prof_____ Associate Prof _____ Full Prof _____ Clerical_____
Staff_____ Other (please specify)_____

54. How many children do you have? _____

55. Are you covered by the MSU Health Care Plan? Y_____N_____

Thank you very much for your time. Your responses are greatly appreciated. Below are two identical lottery tickets. Please tear off ONLY the ticket that has your mailing address label attached on the back. You can use my return address label enclosed to mail back this entire questionnaire packet via campus mail.

Note. (R) = item is reversed scored. Lottery tickets omitted.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY - BOZEMAN
3 1762 10421004 0