

Findings from the Evaluation of the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) Project Demonstration

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Overview

- **Evaluation design and components**
- **Process analysis findings**
- **Impact analysis findings**
- **Conclusions and implications**
- **Study limitations**
- **Questions for future analyses**

Evaluation design

- **Office-level (clustered) random assignment**
 - Offices were grouped into strata based on geographic location, urban versus rural, and past Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) client outcomes
 - Offices from each stratum were randomly assigned to treatment or control status
- **About 1,000 SSDI-only clients were enrolled in the demonstration in each state (Minnesota and Kentucky)**
 - Roughly half at treatment offices and half at control offices
 - Services began in mid-2015

Process analysis

- **Purpose: Document implementation of and staff experiences with the SGA Project innovations**
- **Research questions**
 - How did the innovations differ from usual practices?
 - What were the innovations, and were they implemented as planned?
 - What were the sites' experiences in implementing the innovations?
 - How likely is it that any of the innovations will be sustained?
- **Data**
 - Site visits and interviews conducted in spring 2016 and 2017
 - Vocational rehabilitation (VR) case file and SGA Project implementation data

Process analysis findings

- **Accelerating the eligibility/individualized plan for employment (IPE) development process was challenging in both states**
 - Lack of timely information about SSDI status, competing workloads, some clients did not want to be rushed
 - Over time, staff became more comfortable with a faster pace and viewing the IPE as an evolving document
- **Benefits planning enhancement was consistently viewed as highly beneficial**
 - Challenging to find qualified staff to fill this role
 - Capacity was stretched in Kentucky; work-around in Minnesota succeeded
 - Early information about benefits was essential to inform both staff and clients, and to address benefit loss concerns

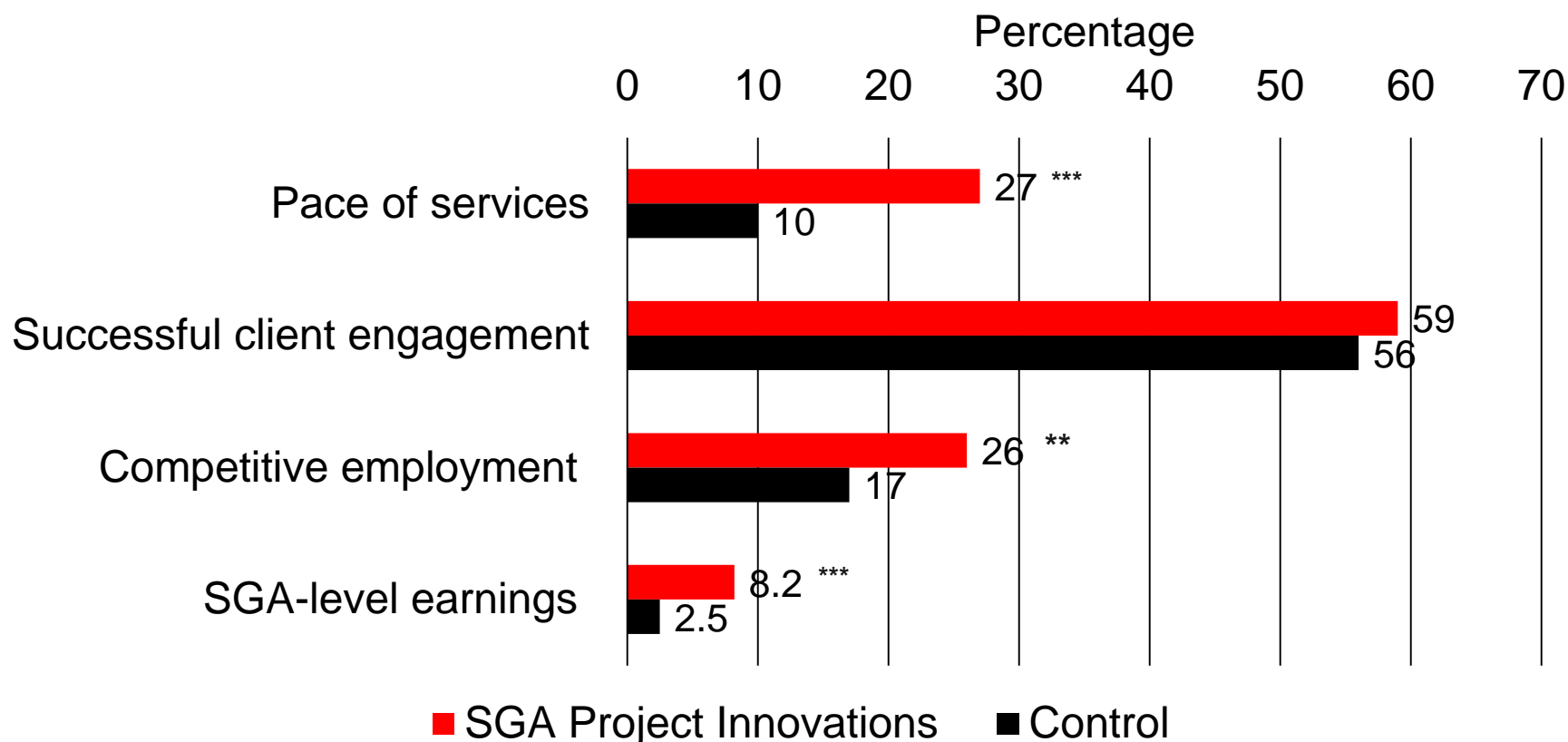
Process analysis findings (cont'd)

- **Job placement specialist role was not a big change**
 - Some believed the early involvement of these staff led to more realistic goal development
- **Coordinated team meetings were logistically challenging, but over time, staff came to see their value**
 - Important to be able to consult with others
 - Improved counselor knowledge and effectiveness
- **In both states, the data suggest that the innovations were not implemented consistently with all clients**
 - Challenges impeded service provision
 - Services not appropriate for some clients
 - Services may have been provided, but VR case file data were not entered

Impact analysis

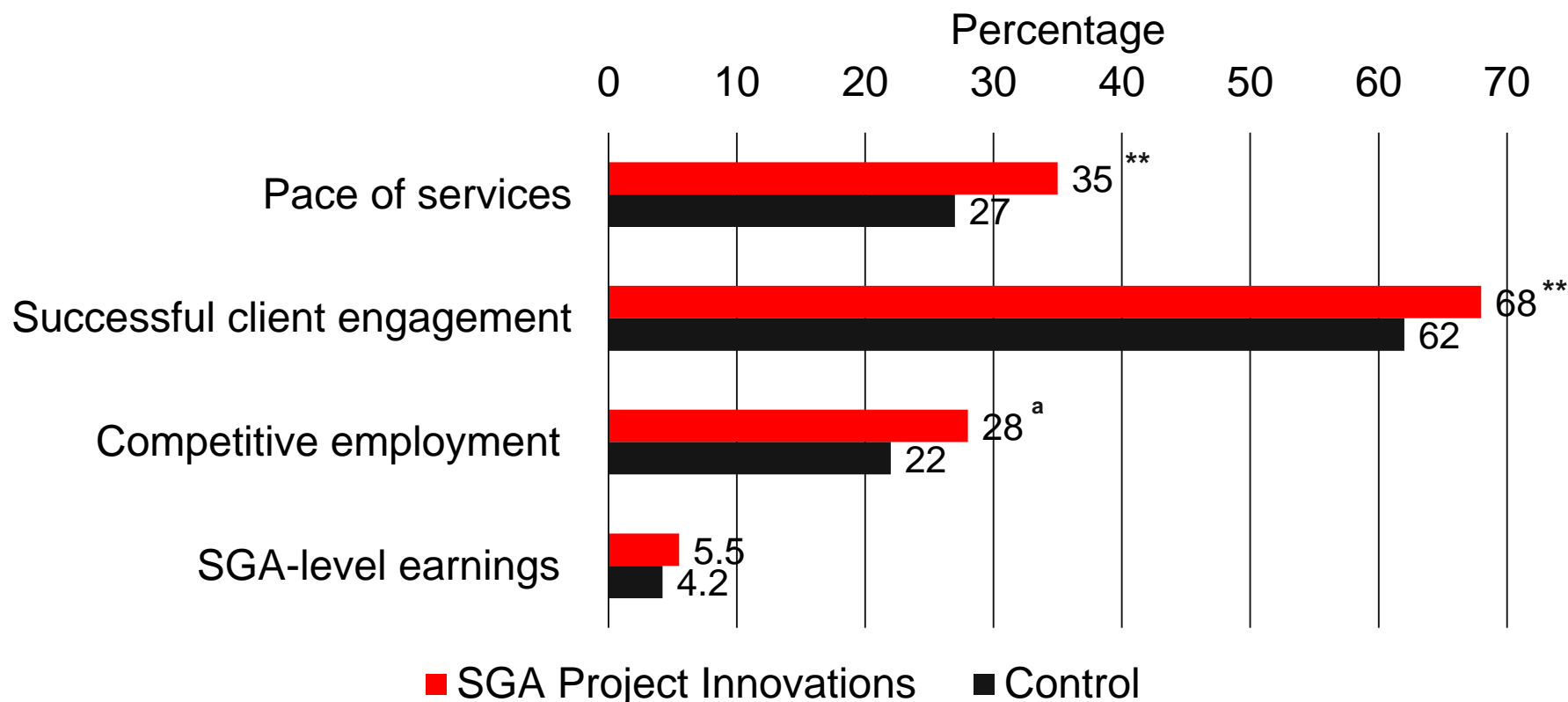
- **Purpose: Estimate the impact of the SGA Project innovations on four primary outcomes:**
 - **Pace of services: Percentage of applicants with IPE within 30 days of application**
 - **Successful client engagement: Percentage of applicants still enrolled in services or closed with competitive employment (that is, did not drop out before obtaining competitive employment)**
 - **Competitive employment: Percentage of applicants who closed with competitive employment**
 - **SGA-level earnings: Percentage of applicants who closed with SGA-level earnings**
- **Data: VR case file data reflecting service delivery and client outcomes through late April 2017**

SGA Project's impacts in Kentucky



*/**/** Treatment/control difference is significant at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 levels, respectively.

SGA Project's impacts in Minnesota



*/**/** Treatment/control difference is significant at the 0.10/0.05/0.01 level.

^a Treatment/control difference is significant at the $p = 0.11$ level.

Impacts on non-SGA Project clients

- **None that we could detect**
 - No significant differences in the four primary outcomes between non-SGA Project clients at the treatment and control sites
 - Suggests that
 - Counselors did not divert their attention away from their non-SGA Project clients
 - There was minimal spillover of the SGA Project innovations to non-SGA Project clients

Conclusions

- **The SGA Project innovations had impacts on key outcomes in both states**
 - Pace of services and employment impacts were more substantial in Kentucky than in Minnesota
 - The innovations represented a greater deviation from usual practice in Kentucky than in Minnesota
 - Better outcomes do not appear to be at the expense of other VR clients
- **Service data suggest that some clients in both states did not receive some of the innovations**
 - The extent to which this was a lack of data entry versus lack of service delivery is unclear for some of the innovations
 - Was more consistent implementation possible, and if so, would impacts have been greater?

Lessons for KY and MN

- **Both states learned important lessons about their service delivery approaches that might be applicable to other VR agencies**
 - Presumptive eligibility determination
 - The importance of timely and accurate information about SSA benefit status
 - The value of financial and benefits planning services
 - IPE development strategy
 - The value of coordinating with service partners
 - Engaging clients in services

Implications for other VR agencies

- A faster pace of services is possible without negative consequences but might not be feasible for all clients
- The innovations are well suited for targeting to certain non-SSDI-only clients
- The financial counseling and teaming strategies might be more difficult to implement because of the investment needed to build the skills and capacity to deliver them
- Technical assistance and monitoring are important to successfully implementing innovations in a manner that maximizes their potential impacts
- The random assignment design used in the SGA Project demonstration is a feasible approach

Limitations of the study

- **The observation period was too short to assess the ultimate impacts of the intervention**
 - **35% to 40% of cases were still open in each state**
 - **Because the impacts in Kentucky were large, we expect them to persist even as more cases close**
 - **Significant employment impacts in Minnesota might become evident as more cases close**
- **We do not have evidence about the relative importance of the specific innovations in terms of their impacts on employment**
- **We could not assess some important outcomes (for example, Social Security Administration [SSA] payments to VR, costs relative to benefits)**

Questions for future analyses

- **What was the impact of the SGA Project innovations on**
 - Long-term employment and earnings?
 - Receipt of SSDI and SSI benefits?
 - SSA payments to VR?
 - Net costs and savings to VR and SSA?
- **Questions could be addressed in the future with Rehabilitation Services Administration and SSA data**

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