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Geographically Distributed Employees' Perceptions of Employee Assistance Program Access

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Many investigators have documented high levels of stress in the U.S. workplace and the underutilization of employee assistance programs (EAP). Researchers in other studies have concluded that an employee's perception of a service influences participation and service use. However, the perceptions of geographically distributed employees, who represent a growing population, have not been sufficiently examined. The purpose of this study was to investigate geographically distributed employees' perceptions regarding access to EAP stress management services to address the problem of EAP underutilization. Organizational justice theory served as the theoretical framework. The study design was generic qualitative. A purposeful sample of 15 geographically distributed employees provided rich data through semi structured interviews and online questionnaires. The use of generic inductive coding yielded emergent themes regarding geographically distributed employees. Results indicated that geographically distributed employee's perceived access to EAP stress management services as unclear, time-consuming, and inconvenient due to physical separation. This research is significant for human service, employee assistance, and human resource professionals who want to improve geographically distributed employees' perceptions of access to EAP stress management programs. More effective marketing may increase employee use of EAP services and alleviate workplace stress, thus positively impacting social change by helping to cultivate a healthy workforce.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and friends. A special thank you to my husband Tobias and my children Thomas, Devon and Dasia who were patient and understanding and continually supported and encouraged me throughout the process. I also dedicate this dissertation to my best friend Judy for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program offering me words of encouragement, prayer and unwavering support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

To help employees address productivity issues and manage stress, health, and well-being in the workplace, many employers offer an employee assistance program (EAP; Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Bennett, Weaver, Senft, & Neeper, 2017; Gong, Wang, & Zhang, 2011; Grawitch, Ballard, & Erb, 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Richardson, 2017; Sandys, 2012; Vojnovic, Michelson, Jackson, & Bahn, 2014). According to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA), in the United States over 97% of large employers with 5,000 or more employees make an EAP available while 80% of midsize employers with 1,001-5,000 employees and 75% of small employers with 251-1,000 employees make one available to employees (EAPA, 2018). Despite availability, only approximately 4.5% of employees accessed EAP services between 2013- 2018 (Amaral & Sharar, 2013; American Public Health Association, 2016; Society of Human Resource Managers, 2018). One factor accounting for the low usage may be perceptions of access. As various researchers have noted, an employee's perceptions of access to a service may influence service use more than availability (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Sulu, Ceylan, & Kaynak, 2010; Toker, Heaney, & Ein-Gar, 2015).

In reviewing the EAP literature, I found few studies encompassing the perspectives of geographically distributed employees on EAP accessibility. Therefore, I conducted a generic qualitative study to address this gap in the literature using interviews and surveys to discover insights from the external experiences and perceptions of individuals who are eligible for EAP services (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). The social value of this study is that employee assistance (EA) and other human service

professionals may use the findings to increase their understanding of EAP use and outreach efforts that can be used to encourage the use of EA services among employees and their family members. The remainder of this chapter includes the background, problem, and purpose of the study; research question; theoretical foundation; and nature of the study. Key definitions and the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study are also provided.

Background of the Study

In 2018 members of the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) reported that 77% of mid- and large-size employers in the United States offered employees an EAP (SHRM, 2018). An EAP is a potentially valuable resource employees and family members may use to manage workplace stress, conflict, and other health- and productivity-related issues (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Bennett et al., 2017; Gong et al., 2011; Grawitch et al., 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Richardson, 2017). Despite the availability of these free services, it is estimated that between 94-96% of employees do not use an available EAP (Dunning, 2014; Kalish, 2017; Zamosky, 2014). Correlations exist between an employee's perceptions of an EAP and actual EAP utilization (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Toker et al., 2015); however, based on my review of the literature what is unknown is how the 43% of geographically distributed employees in the U.S. workforce (Allen & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2013; Bano, Zowghi, & Sarkissian, 2016; Eubanks, Palanski, Olabisi, Joinson, & Dove, 2016) perceive access to EA services. This study was needed to provide understanding of how geographically

distributed employees describe their perceptions about, report their experiences with, and make sense of their access to EA services.

Problem Statement

An EAP offers an option for employees to manage personal issues (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Bennett et al., 2017; Gong et al., 2011; Grawitch et al., 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Richardson, 2017). Although most U.S. employers offer an EAP (Richmond, Pampel, Wood, & Nunes, 2017), many individuals have expressed concerns regarding employees' underuse of EA services (American Psychological Association, 2016; Dunning, 2014; Toker et al., 2015). In the United States 40% of employees reported experiencing stress at work, and 75% of employees believed that work stress is increasing (Richardson, 2017).

Geographically distributed employees fall behind collocated employees in managing workplace stress and conflict, according to researchers (Allen & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2013; Armstrong & Cole, 2002; Ayoko, Konrad, & Boyle, 2012; Bentley et al., 2016; Hill & Bartol, 2016), and in 2017, 40% of geographically distributed employees reported elevated levels of stress compared to 25% of collocated employees (Morgan, 2017). In addition, geographically distributed employees expressed concerns regarding access to social support and services (Bachkirova, 2012; Hill & Bartol, 2016; Milton, Sinclair, & Vakalahi, 2017).

Many studies contain data on employees' perceptions of an EAP (see Joseph & Walker, 2017; Levers Mugari, Mtapuri, & Rangono, 2014; Taute & Manzini, 2014); however, there appears to be a lack of studies regarding the perspectives of

geographically distributed employees regarding EAP access. To extend the EAP literature, a generic qualitative study was warranted to provide human service professionals concerned with this aspect of EAP underutilization (Dunning, 2014; Toker et al., 2015) a more holistic understanding of how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to extend the EAP literature and provide an understanding of how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services. In 2016 EAP providers from Chestnut Global Partners identified stress-related concerns as the number 1 concern of EAP users in North America (Hirsch, 2017). In 2017 employees continued to identify stress as a top reason for accessing EAP services (Chestnut Global Partners, 2017). Although there is some research that explores employees' perceptions of access to workplace assistance programs, there appears to be a gap on the experience and perspective of geographically distributed employees regarding perceptions of access to EA services (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). Understanding the perceptions of geographically distributed employees regarding access to such services may reveal new information that human service professionals can use to gain a better understanding of EAP underutilization. Therefore, I conducted a generic qualitative study to fill a gap in the literature regarding how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services.

Research Question

How do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services?

Theoretical Foundation

Organizational justice theory (Greenberg, 2009) is a derivative of equity theory (Adams, 1965) and provided the theoretical framework for this study. An individual's subjective and descriptive opinions of fairness and equity in an organization form the basis of organizational justice theory. Organizational justice theorists assert that an employee's perceptions of justice are central to fully understanding their participation in the workplace (Greenberg, 2009). In this study, organizational justice theory provided a foundation to explore and understand geographically distributed employees perceptions of access to external EAP stress management services. Chapter 2 includes additional information regarding this theory.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I used a generic qualitative approach to gain an understanding of how people explain their world and experiences (Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015) regarding access to external EAP stress management services. The generic approach is based on a model by Percy et al. (2015). I applied this approach because my research purpose was to understand geographically distributed employees' perceptions regarding access to an EAP. Using the generic approach helped me to discover insights relevant to the study. I collected data using interviews and questionnaires from a purposeful sample of 15 geographically distributed employees with a minimum of three months knowledge

and experience of the phenomenon under investigation to reach the point of data saturation. Data analysis consisted of general inductive analysis to capture the significant themes that emerged from the data from the participants' perspectives (Thomas, 2006).

Definitions

The following terms are fundamental to this study:

Access: The equitable ability to find and use required information and services regardless of an employee's location (Mutula, 2013).

Employee assistance program: A work-based service that assists employers in addressing productivity issues by helping them to identify, cope with, and resolve issues that negatively impact productivity (Pescud et al., 2015).

Geographically distributed employees: Personnel who work at a remote site away from their employer's central or main location.

Workplace stress: A personal experience consisting of a combination of physical and psychological reactions arising from an imbalance between job demand, resources, and requirements (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Sohail & Rehman, 2015).

Assumptions

I assumed employees participating in interviews would understand the interview and questionnaire questions and would share pertinent information openly and honestly. In addition, I assumed that the interview and questionnaire questions were suitable to yield relevant information.

Scope and Delimitations

Boundaries of my study included data collection only from geographically

distributed employees as opposed to other groups of employees. I did not collect data

from collocated employees, because co-located employees were beyond the scope of this

study. The results may have the potential for transferability and applicability in other

contexts.

Limitations

The use of self-reported data from participants may have limited my ability to

gather honest responses from participants (see Van de Mortel, 2008). In addition, the

purposive sampling of individuals working in a geographically distributed position may

have limited my ability to capture the experiences of other individuals working in a

geographically distributed organization (see Palinkas et al., 2015). The results may have

the potential to be transferable and applicable to other contexts, however. An additional

limitation is that my personal bias as a geographically distributed employee may have

influenced data collection, data analysis, and the outcome of the study.

Significance of the Study

Scholars may use the findings from this study to fill a gap in the EAP literature

and gain insight into the study phenomenon, the increasing population of geographically

distributed employees in the U.S. workforce (Percy et al., 2015). An employee's

perception of an EAP corresponds to how much an employee uses the program (Gerstein

& Bayer, 1988; Grandey & Cordeiro, 2002; Veiga, Baldridge, & Eddleston, 2004).

Therefore, human service professionals and employers may need to understand how

geographically distributed employees view access to EA services differently than workers in a central or main worksite.

EAP providers and other human service professionals may use the findings from this study to better understand EAP utilization from the unique perspectives of geographically distributed employees. Understanding the perceptions of geographically distributed employees may help employers take additional steps to alleviate the stress employees experience in the workplace (Nobrega, Champagne, Azaroff, Shetty, & Punnett, 2010). Understanding the perceptions these employees have toward an EAP may lead to positive social change because an EAP plays a significant role in helping employers cultivate a healthy workforce, increase productivity, and produce resilient vital communities (Pronk, 2014).

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 included the background and purpose of the study, an overview of its research design, and a discussion of its potential significance. In Chapter 2, I review the EAP literature on geographically distributed employees' access to workplace programs. I also discuss my literature search strategy and the study's theoretical foundation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Stress in the workplace may damage an employee's health and well-being (Agarwal, & Kaur, 2016; Proost et al., 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016; Richardson, 2017; Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). One reason an employer may offer an EAP is to help employees manage stress (Gong et al., 2011; Kurzman, 2013; Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Richmond et al., 2017). A concern, among EA providers however, is that employees may underuse available EAP services (Dunning, 2014; Zamosky, 2014). It is unknown how geographically distributed employees perceive access to EAP services. In this study, I sought to extend the knowledge in the human services field and fill a gap in the EAP literature regarding how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services. In this chapter, I discuss organizational justice theory (Greenberg, 2009) and review the literature on EAP services and geographically distributed employees.

Literature Search Strategy

While conducting the literature review, I searched Walden University Library databases including Business Source Complete, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, MEDLINE, CINAHL Plus, and SocINDEX. I used the following key words and phrases, both individually and in combination: *employee assistance programs*, *occupational stress*, *stress management*, *geographically distributed employees*, *EAP utilization*, *EAP participation*, and *EAP barriers*. I examined a variety of Walden University dissertations and articles published by SHRM and EAPA, along with relevant books. I also used Google Scholar, internal citations, and references. I examined approximately 243 articles

and other sources after eliminating those articles that did not add value to the purpose of the study. I mainly included sources with publication dates between 2013 and 2018. However, literature published before 2013 was also included if the article made a significant contribution to the human services field or this study.

Justification for the Selection of Literature Review Variables

During an extensive search, I located literature on EAPs and geographically distributed employees, but I was unable to locate a meaningful number of articles that specifically addressed geographically distributed employees and an EAP. As I reviewed the literature, I identified several themes which are the variables and concepts I chose for this review. Each theme is meaningful and conveys what researchers know about EAPs and geographically distributed employees.

Theoretical Foundation

The origin of organizational justice theory is found in equity theory and social exchange theory (Adams, 1965; Srimannarayana, 2016). Scholars describe organizational justice as an individual's subjective perceptions of organizational fairness (Greenberg, 1987). According to organizational justice theory, individuals determine justice based on their perceptions of fairness in organizational settings (Greenberg, 2009).

In Colquitt's (2001) seminal organizational justice review, he described the evolution and expansion of justice theories from a legal context to perceptions of fairness in organizational settings. Organizational justice and perceptions of fairness influences individual well-being and organizational participation, functioning, and outcomes (Hassan, Azim, & Abbas, 2017; Heymann, McNeill, & Earle, 2013; O'Leary, Wilson, &

Metiu, 2014; Proost, Verboon, & Van Ruysseveldt, 2015; Scott, Garza, Conlon, & Kim, 2014; Tahseen & Akhtar, 2016). Furthermore, an employee's perceptions of the level of fairness can help alleviate conflict in the workplace (Romaine & Schmidt, 2009). Organizational justice is of relevance to geographically distributed employees who may sense a lack of equal access to resources in the workplace (Bentley et al., 2016; Orhan et al., 2016).

Application of Organizational Justice Theory

Tahseen and Akhtar (2016) explored organizational justice in a university setting using survey instruments. The researchers focused on teachers and the educational discipline in a single province of Pakistan, so the results are not easily generalizable beyond this group. However, they made some critical contributions to the existing literature regarding organizational justice by providing evidence that positive perceptions of organizational justice lead to better participation and productivity in the workplace (Tahseen & Akhtar, 2016).

The rapid growth of geographically distributed employees creates additional concerns regarding the perceptions employees hold regarding justice and fairness in the workplace (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Romaine & Schmidt, 2009). Previous researchers considered fair access to information, resources, and support (Bentley et al., 2016; Hill & Bartol, 2016; Milton et al., 2017; Nurmi, 2011; Orhan et al., 2016) among geographically distributed employees. However, their findings do not address the perceptions geographically distributed employees may hold toward EAP access.

Kurland and Egan (1999) addressed the perceptions of organizational justice among geographically distributed employees, noting that physical separation from the workplace was a hindrance to employees' perceptions of justice and fairness. Ollier-Malaterre and Andrade (2016) studied inequalities in access to work-life policies between workers based on work locations, reporting that offsite employees perceived disparities in access to work programs and disclosed concerns regarding organizational justice. In line with the tenets of equity theory (Adams, 1965) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), employees working offsite reported feelings of unfairness, when comparing their benefits to their peers working within headquarters locations (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016).

Consistent with the work of Kurland and Egan (1999), Sulu et al. (2010) offered that organizational justice theory may be used to predict job attitudes and behaviors, suggesting it is necessary to pay attention to an employee's perceptions regarding equitable access because employees may perceive that physical separation limits their access to organizational resources and benefits. Further research to explore the perceptions of geographically distributed employees is essential because an employee's perceptions may influence use more than actual access (Sulu et al., 2010).

Rationale for Choice of Organizational Justice Theory

I applied organizational justice theory as a lens to understand the phenomenon of how geographically distributed employees perceive access to an EAP. My focus was on geographically distributed employees' perceptions of access to external EAP-provided stress management services in the workplace. Organizational justice concepts may

provide insight into understanding an employee's perceptions of fairness to EAP services in the workplace (O'Leary et al., 2016). In using organizational justice theory as a framework for the study, I sought to help EA professionals, human service professionals, and employers understand how geographically distributed employees may perceive their access to these services differently.

Relationship of Organizational Justice to the Current Study

Researchers have studied organizational justice regarding a variety of workplace characteristics such as trust, stress, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive work behaviors (Bentley et al., 2016; Hill & Bartol, 2016; Milton et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016; Nurmi, 2011; Tahseen & Akhtar, 2016); thus, I deemed it an appropriate framework for exploring geographically distributed employees' perceptions of EAP access. The perceptions employees hold towards access to workplace resources is significant particularly among geographically distributed employees (Bentley et al., 2016; Toker et al., 2015), who may perceive inequalities in access to workplace resources because of their physical separation (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016).

Employees' perceptions of fairness and accessibility factor into their usage of employer-provided benefits. An individual's perceptions of inequality can undermine organizational justice and negatively impact an employee's perception of fairness (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016). Furthermore, an employee's perceptions of access may influence the utilization of workplace benefits (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016). Thus, when employees perceive inequitable distribution of benefits, they may view

benefits as unequally accessible which may discourage use (Grandey & Cordeiro, 2002; Veiga et al., 2004).

Researchers' Approach in Employee Assistance Program Literature

In the human service discipline, researchers have approached the problem of EAP underutilization using experimental research to determine if specific activities influence the outcome of variables including availability, utilization, effectiveness, and barriers to participation (French et al., 1997; Nobrega et al., 2010; Taute & Manzini, 2014; Toker et al., 2015). Using a quantitative approach allowed researchers to quantify the improvement of employee and organizational outcomes among large and diverse samples of a workplace (Gong et al., 2011; Richmond et al., 2017). Unfortunately, a weakness with using a quantitative approach is that most researchers generated estimates of the prevalence, and frequency of EAP availability (Curry et al., 2009), but did not capture the qualitative perspectives of perceived access.

Researchers' Approach to Studying Geographically Distributed Employees

The incorporation of variables such as geographically distributed employees complicates the phenomena of EAP utilization and may make it difficult for researchers to measure quantitatively (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). Therefore, many researchers choose to study workplace programs and different categories of workers such as geographically distributed employees using a qualitative approach (Bano et al., 2016: Bentley et al., 2016; Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Milton et al., 2017; Nurmi, 2011; Orhan et al., 2016; Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017). The qualitative approach has strengths because it allows researchers to investigate complex phenomena (Curry et al., 2009) such

as an EAP and the perceptions of geographically distributed employees. A generic qualitative study is meaningful because it allows a researcher to address a well-researched area like an EAP from a new angle with novel questions (Kahlke, 2014). Also, in contrast to experimental designs, a generic qualitative study allows researchers to explore the meanings humans construct as they engage with the world (Percy et al., 2015). The choice of a generic qualitative approach is designed to allow the researcher to focus on discovery, insight, and understanding of EAP access from the perspectives of geographically distributed employees to provide new relevant data that EAP and other human service professionals may utilize (Percy et al., 2015). Ideally, the generic qualitative methods may allow the researcher to gain new insights and construct fresh themes to foster a deeper understanding of the research question (Smith, Bekker, & Cheater, 2011).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The Establishment and Evolution of the Employee Assistance Program

Beginning in the 1940s, employers and other work organizations offered the first workplace programs called Occupational Alcoholism Programs (OAP) to address occupational alcohol and drug issues (Bachman, Siegle, & Pace, 2017; Levers Mugari et al., 2014) Beginning in the late 1980s, OAP professionals became known as Employee Assistance (EA) professionals and began providing EA services to address a wide array of personal, work and family related issues, known as the "broad brush approach" (Compton & McManus, 2015; Kurzman, 2013; Li, Sharar, Lennox, & Zhuang, 2015). In today's workplace, employers across the United States typically offer an EAP as a standard

employee benefit (Compton & McManus, 2015; French, Roman, Dunlap, & Steele, 1997; Kurzman, 2013; Lever, Mtapuri & Rangongo, 2014; Hargrave & Hiatt, 2005; Li et al., 2015; Willbanks, 1999) to help employees' address an extensive list of modern-day emotional, physical, familial and organizational issues (Milot, 2017; Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Richmond et al., 2017; Soeker et al., 2016; Wang & Zhang, 2011).

Employee Assistance Program Delivery Methods

Today, employers may choose to deliver EA services through an internal or external model or a combination (hybrid) of both delivery models (Nobrega et al., 2010; Sharar et al., 2013; Jacobson Frey & Attridge, 2010).

Internal employee assistance programs. Traditionally, employers delivered EAP services through internal models consisting of EA professionals employed by the organization, working on premises and integrated into the organization (Nobrega et al., 2010; Sharar et al., 2013; Torun, 2013). Past research studies indicate employees utilized an internal EAP at a higher rate than external models of EAP delivery (Csiernik, 2003) primarily because the integration of EA professionals into the workplace and work culture allowed EA professionals to foster trust and commitment through face-to-face communication (Jimenez, Boehe, Taras & Caprar, 2017). Additionally, onsite internal providers may increase the perceived value and utilization of an EAP because their close vicinity to workers may allow them to engage more effectively with employees and tailor programs suitable for employees within the organization (Sharar et al., 2013; Sandys, 2012; Torun, 2013).

External employee assistance programs. In the 1990's, employers began adopting an external EAP model consisting of externally contracted EA providers (Sharar et al., 2013) to address a wide range of employee problems (Merrick, Hodgkin, Hiatt, Horgan, & McCann, 2011) and today, the majority of EAPs are delivered by external, contract providers (Sandys, 2012). In contrast to the internal EAP model, the external model was easier for employers to implement and required fewer resources (Sharar et al., 2013). However, employers have questioned whether external EA providers are capable of tailoring programs to effectively meet the explicit needs of the workforce (Sharar et al., 2013; Taute & Manzini, 2009). Even though EA providers were able to offer expanded 24-hour, 7 day a week services via the telephone and web-based services (Jacobson Frey & Attridge, 2010) employees typically demonstrate a preference for face to face counseling (Taute & Manzini, 2014). Compared to internal EA providers, many stakeholders have deemed external EA providers less accessible, visible and integrated into the organization (Sharar et al., 2013). Further research can provide insight into how employees in various occupational settings and workforce segments perceive accessibility to an external EAP (Nobrega et al., 2010; Orhan, Rijsman, & VanDijk, 2016; Toker et al., 2015).

Evaluating an Employee Assistance Program

There are a variety of methods researchers may use to measure and validate the quality and success of an EAP (Jacobson Frey & Attridge, 2010; Roman & Blum, 1988). EAP stakeholders such as employer purchasers, with distinctive categories of employees and types of service providers, may choose to measure the value and impact of an EAP

differently (Sharar et al., 2013; Sithole & Khorombi, 2014), therefore measuring the

impact of an EAP can be challenging (Jacobson Frey & Attridge, 2010; Sithole &

Khorombi, 2014).

When assessing the quality of an EAP, scholars have considered factors such as

EAP access, availability (Milot, 2017; Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Richmond et al., 2017;

(Soeker, Matimba, Msimango, Moswaane, & Tom, 2016; Gong et al., 2011), utilization

(Csiernik, 2003; Li et al., 2015; Milot, 2017) and human resources and supervisor

referrals (Jacobson Frey & Attridge, 2010; Kurzman, 2013). Some researchers have

chosen to measure the effect of an EAP on different dimensions of workplace

functioning, such as employee productivity and/or well-being (Athanasiades, Winthrop,

& Gough, 2008; Compton & McManus, 2015; Li, Sharar, Lennox, & Zhuang, 2015;

Richmond et al., 2017; Willbanks, 1999. Milot (2017) took a unique approach to

evaluate EAP success by assessing inequalities in EAP problem resolutions between

different types of workers. His findings demonstrated a strong need for service providers

to tailor EAP program services for different employee groups such as geographically

distributed employees to ensure maximum access and use of services when individuals

are facing personal concerns and/or need for mental health treatment (Levesque, Harris,

& Russell, 2013; Toker et al., 2015).

Workplace Change and the Employee Assistance Program

Employees in the workforce have undergone major changes regarding when and

where they perform their duties (Belle, Burley, & Long, 2015; Grant, Wallace &

Spurgeon, 2013; Torun, 2013). Such changes in the workplace may reduce an

employee's productivity (Jose & Mampilly, 2015) and negatively influence an employee's health (Chou, 2015). Employers may offer an EAP to accommodate the emerging needs of employees in the modern workplace (Richmond et al., 2017).

The ongoing changes in the workplace are adversely affecting employee's well-being (Chou, 2015) and contributing to widespread stress (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Lewis, 2014; West, Lee, & Poynton, 2012). These mounting levels of workplace stress are putting a significant demand on the coping abilities of employees (Richard, 2014; Richmond et al., 2014) and there is overwhelming evidence that employees are increasingly struggling to cope with the rapid changes taking place (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Kato, 2015).

Geographically distributed employees in the workplace. One major change in today's modern workplace is a new configuration that physically separates employees from a central office, coworkers, and supervisors (Bartel, Wrzesniewski, & Wiesenfeld, 2012; Bentley et al., 2016; Jimenez et al., 2017). With this new arrangement employees may rely on technology more than face to face contact to communicate, and employees may have limited understanding or insights into what is occurring at other sites (Jimenez et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016). There is a proliferation of research where scholars describe workers who are separated from a central office as geographically distributed employees (Bano et al., 2016; Eubanks et al., 2016), dispersed workers (Allen & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2013; Hill & Bartol, 2016; Milton et al., 2017; O'Leary, Wilson, & Metiu, 2014), virtual workers (Bartel et al., 2012; Gilson, Maynard, Jones, Young, Vartiainen, & Hakonen, 2015; Jimenez et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016), remote workers

(Belle et al., 2015; Lenthall et al., 2009), or teleworkers and telecommuters (Bentley et al., 2016; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003). Although this population of workers is broadly defined, and may include contractors, full time workers, part-time workers and suppliers (Jimenez et al., 2017) several authors use these terms interchangeably to describe workers who perform duties from a remote location physically isolated from their organizations' central location (Allen, & Ofahengaue, Vakalahi, 2013; Bartel et al., 2012; Bentley et al., 2016; Crawford, MacCalman & Jackson, 2011; Golden & Fromen, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016; Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017). Geographically distributed employees operate in a unique environment (Jimenez et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016) and the isolated nature of these employees may promote low awareness of, or perceptions of reduced access and availability to available resources and services (Buys, Matthews, & Randall, 2010; Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001; Gong et al., 2011).

Access and Awareness as Factors in Employees' Participation in Employee Assistance Programs

An employee's attitudes regarding access and awareness play a role in their participation in workplace programs (Jørgensen, Villadsen, Burr, Punnett, & Holtermann, 2016; Toker et al., 2015). A lack of awareness or knowledge regarding the availability of EA services may lead employees to perceive services as inaccessible or unavailable and may therefore reduce utilization (Bajorek & Kinder, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Sithole & Khorombi, 2014).

When employees are co-located at an organization's central or main location their awareness and perceptions of accessibility reflects positively on their perceptions of the

value and their utilization of an EAP (Allen & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2013; Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Clark, 2015; Otenyo & Smith, 2017; Richmond et al., 2017; Sithole & Khorombi, 2014; Toker et al., 2015). Unfortunately, physical proximity may reduce a geographically distributed employees' awareness or cause them to perceive benefits as inaccessible or unavailable, hindering EAP access and utilization (Crawford et al., 2011; Golden & Schoenleber, 2014; Kim & Mullins, 2016). Taute & Manzini, 2014).

When employees lack information, it may act as a barrier or reduce participation in services and programs (Toker et al., 2015), therefore marketing and regular dissemination of EAP information may enhance awareness and increase the likelihood that employees will use the EAP (Compton & McManus, 2015; McCann et al., 2010; Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Nurmi, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016). Employees may learn about these resources through a variety of methods including written and oral advertising, meetings, workshops, and referrals by human resource staff or from their supervisors (Levers Mugari et al., 2014; Torun, 2013). However, in one study a researcher reported that employees both retained more information from face-to-face than from one-way communication and preferred face to face communication better than information provided by brochures, bulletin boards, etc. (Picherit-Duthler & Freitag, 2004). Unfortunately, geographically distributed employees may face challenges with face-to-face interactions about such services (Crawford et al., 2011; Milot, 2017).

Support in the Workplace

In the workplace EAP support may signify that one is cared for and has access to help (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Chou, 2015; (Gerdenitsch, Scheel, Andorfer, &

Korunka, 2016; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011; Masi, 2005). These social supports may serve as a coping mechanism for work-related stress and when individuals receive support from supervisors and co-workers it can foster healthy, productive workers (Collins, Hislop, & Cartwright, 2016; Jørgensen et al., 2016; Lawson, Noblet, & Rodwell, 2009; Pescud et al., 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016). Additionally, receiving such support can increase participation and utilization of services (Kim & Mullins, 2016; Masi, 2005; Milner et al., 2013).

Social support and well-being. Chou (2015) conducted a study to investigate how social support contributes to an individual's subjective well-being during times of organizational change. He collected data from 1103 participants to measure perceived supervisory support, perceived coworker support, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being. According to Chou's results, perceived supervisory and co-worker support contributes directly to higher levels of subjective well-being.

Chou concluded that supervisors were the primary source of workplace social support. However, although supervisors typically offer emotional support and encouragement to those under their charge, geographically distributed employees may find it difficult to access a supervisors support (Allen & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2013; Bentley et al., 2016; Golden & Schoenleber, 2014; Nurmi, 2011; Orhan et al., 2016).; Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017) and supervisors may find it more difficult to provide support to geographically distributed employees than co-located employees due to decreased interpersonal contact and fewer opportunities for face-to-face communication (Crawford et al., 2011; Golden & Fromen, 2011; Wakefield, Leidner, & Garrison, 2008).

Social support among geographically distributed employees. Social support is

a work resource that may be deficient among geographically distributed employees

(Bentley et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2017; Orhan et al., 2016). Compared to co-located

employees geographically distributed employees report a reduced level of social support,

(Bentley et al., 2016; Buys et al., 2010; Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough,

2001; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Gong et al., 2011) as an underlying cause of stress and

other negative emotions (Bentley et al., 2016; Mann & Holdsworth, 2003).

Employers typically provide an EAP to offer social support in the workplace

(Eisenberger, Malone, & Presson, 2016; Soeker et al., 2016; Swayze & Burke, 2013;

Torun, 2013). However, the isolated nature of geographically distributed workers

changes both the number of interactions and depth of social support that employees have

with the organization, other colleagues, and supervisors (Collins et al., 2016). Therefore,

it may be difficult for managers of geographically distributed employees to identify

problems and refer employees to an EAP for resolution or supportive services (Golden &

Fromen, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2008).

Organizational support and social isolation. Organizational support and

perceptions of organizational support are essential for the adoption and success of

workplace programs (Compton & McManus, 2015; Taute & Manzini, 2014; Milner et al.,

2013; Toker et al., 2015). Employees who perceived their organizations as unsupportive

tended to avoid organizational participation (Toker et al., 2015). In one study, Bentley et

al., (2016) examined employees working in remote locations away from a central office

and brought together the concepts of social isolation and organizational support, using

online questionnaire surveys from individuals in 28 worksites in New Zealand to assess

the role of organizational support on teleworkers well-being. Organizational support

significantly influenced the well-being of employees spending the most time in the

corporate office and participants revealed that this support played a vital role in

mitigating negative impacts of stress and social isolation among employees in co-located

organizations. However, organizational support did not have the same level of influence

on those geographically distributed employees who worked offsite for extended periods

of time supporting the idea that geographically distributed employees may have different

perspectives and experiences than co-located employees (Bentley et al., 2016).

Isolation in the Workplace

Orhan et al. (2016) emphasized the different types of isolation employees may

experience. An employee may experience social, professional, (Belle et al., 2015;

Bentley et al., 2016; Gajendran & Joshi, 2012; Golden & Fromen, 2011; Mann &

Holdsworth, 2003; Poulsen & Ipsen, 2017) physical, informational (Orhan et al., 2016)

and geographical isolation (Lenthall et al., 2009). An employee may feel socially

isolated when physically separated from a corporate office (Orhan et al., 2016). An

employee may associate perceptions of limited access to information, people or resources

with isolation in the workplace, and such feelings of isolation may hinder an employees'

engagement and participation (Milton et al., 2017).

Geographical and professional isolation. Consistent with the work of Bartel et

al. (2012) and Orhan et al. (2016), Lenthall et al., (2009) in preparation of a study of

geographically distributed nurses in Australia, conducted a comprehensive literature

review of 26 papers to identify the challenges among geographically and professionally

isolated employees. Results of the review noted the pervasiveness of isolation and

identified three primary components: geographical, social, and professional isolation.

Additionally, the review noted stress was positively related to isolation and a deficit in

necessary resources and provided information that was especially significant in

demonstrating geographically distributed employees require additional support and

resources to respond to imminent stressors.   Although the literature review in this article

offered a valuable perspective on the challenge of geographically distributed employees,

the study sample was limited to a small cohort of nurses in Australia, which may limit its

generalizability. Given these limitations, the work nevertheless reaffirmed the need for

additional research to understand the perceptions geographically distributed employees

have regarding access to EAP resources (Lenthall et al., 2009).

 Isolation and loneliness. Poulsen and Ipsen (2017) identified a lack of literature

focusing on employee's perceptions related to remote work and to address the gap

conducted a qualitative study exploring the well-being of remote workers dispersed to

client or customer sites. This study sampled employees at 17 companies with inquiries

about remote work experiences, with employees reporting positive experiences with

remote work but also experiencing frustrations such as loneliness and isolation.

Understanding how geographically distributed employees perceive access to an EAP may

add to the findings of Milton et al., (2017) who posited isolation is associated with

perceptions of limited access to information.

Isolation and organizational identification. Another issue concerning social isolation among geographically distributed employees is the impact of isolation on an employee's organizational identification. Organizational identification may improve an employee's health, lower stress levels and increase employee participation; and physically separated employees may identify less with an organization (Avanzi, Schuh, Fraccaroli & Van Dick, 2015; Bartel et al., 2012; Brown, 2017). Milton et al., (2017) collected in-depth data from interviews with 48 dispersed employees to understand how the practice of dispersed work impacted an employee's organizational identification.

Employees described organizational identification as a feeling of belonging to the organization and a connection to the organization. Employees maintained that supervisor support contributed to organizational identification. In contrast, the limited availability of supervisors, being dispersed, and feeling isolated decreased organizational identification among geographically distributed employees. Employees experienced social and professional isolation which compromised their organizational identification. This lack of social interaction and social inclusion caused employees to perceive themselves as unintegrated and separated (Milton et al., 2017).

Using surveys, Bartel et al. (2012) sought to understand how employees depict work in physically isolated settings and the effects on their relationship with the organization. Results of this study purported that higher levels of physical isolation and working offsite diminished an employee's organizational identity. Employees may voluntarily choose virtual work as a beneficial option that offers flexibility and autonomy (Orhan et al., 2016). However, Bartel et al. provided a different viewpoint by focusing

on participants who involuntarily worked in distributed work settings. The study

participants statements regarding how physical isolation had negative implications on

organizational identification, supports the findings of other researchers who suggested

physical isolation compromises an employee's organizational identification (Belle et al.,

2015; Gajendran & Joshi, 2012; Milton et al., 2017). Physical isolation is related to a

lack of organizational identification and a detachment from the organization which may

increase an employee's stress levels and may reduce an employee's perception of

inclusion and access (Bartel et al., 2012).

Workplace Stress

Many individuals view workplace stress as an inevitable problem (Holton, Barry,

& Chaney, 2016; Nobrega et al., 2010; Proost et al., 2015; Quick & Henderson, 2016).

In 2014, 31% of employed adults reported feeling tense or stressed during the workday

(Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). In 2017, 40% of Americans reported feeling stressed at

work, and 75% believed stress in the workplace was more prevalent than it was a

generation ago (Richardson, 2017).

Stress may involve a variety of social, external and internal factors (Buys et al.,

2010; Lewis, 2014). Work-related stress may arise when there is a variance between an

employee's job demands and available resources (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Gillespie,

Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough, 2001; Gong et al., 2011; Nobrega et al., 2010) because

employees may have problems coping in an environment that does not provide enough

resources to meet job demands (Kurzman, 2013). Employees may also experience stress

when faced with personal or individual concerns, incompatible organizational structures,

poor work relationships, or a lack of association with the workplace (Lewis, 2014).

Stress is among the leading causes of death in the world (Quick & Henderson, 2016) and

work-related stress can lead employees to experience a wide range of adverse outcomes

and significant health implications such as anxiety, depression and heart disease (Kato,

2015; Lewis, 2014).

Stress and the employee assistance program. Individuals may use a variety of

approaches to manage the detrimental effects of work stress, but an EAP may provide

effective solutions for relief when providers take into consideration the specific needs of

workers (Grawitch et al., 2015; Holton et al., 2016; Quick & Henderson, 2016).

Employees' may use an EAP as an individual resource to mediate the stress of job

demands (Jose & Mampilly, 2015; Vojnovic et al., 2014). Employees reported stress

(Bajorek & Kinder, 2017; Compton & McManus, 2015; Nobrega et al., 2010; Richmond

et al., 2017) and relationship problems at work and home (Compton & McManus, 2015;

Richmond et al., 2017) as the main reasons they sought EA services. Employees

mentioned interpersonal stressors as the most frequent stressors in the workplace, and

claimed supervisors provided the primary source of support in the workplace (Chou,

2015). However, 41% of employees also attributed their relationship with their

supervisor as a primary source of work-related stress (Kato, 2015). Eisenberger et al.,

(2016) suggested that offering an EAP as a form of organizational support can reduce an

employee's stress and improve an employees' psychological well-being and happiness.

Occupational stress. Gillespie et al. (2001) conducted a study aimed at

understanding staffs' experiences of occupational stress and their perceptions of its

causes, effects, and resolution. In 15 universities, 178 Australian staff members participated in focus groups and shared their experiences and perceptions of occupational stress. The findings of this study mirrored the commonly reported causes of stress in geographically distributed employees such as a lack of resources and social support (Bentley et al., 2016; Gillespie, et al., 2001; Orhan et al., 2016).

The findings of Gillespie et al. (2001) clarify the nature and impact of occupational stress. Employees regarded poor relationships and a lack of social support as a significant source of stress in the workplace (Bentley et al., 2016; Gillespie et al., 2001; Gong et al., 2011; Orhan et al., 2016). Participants acknowledged the consequences of stress and reported that occupational stress had professional and personal impacts, with physical health symptoms including headaches, sleep disorders as well as psychological problems such as anxiety and depression (Gillespie et al., 2001).

Stress and depression in the workplace. West et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore whether stress may be a factor in the onset of depression. A total of 20 participants were invited to talk about their experiences with workplace change, the results of those changes, and their subsequent depression diagnosis. The narratives gathered revealed a four-stage process of how workers became depressed. Stage one was the precursor to workers seeking help for depression and involved employees internalizing and discussing the changes in the workplace leading to the loss of what they valued in the workplace. Participant's subjective feelings segued into the second stage, where the physical changes in behavior manifested as headaches, sleep problems and eating problems and ultimately became identified as the symptoms that led

an individual to need and seek an intervention. In the third and fourth stages workers were diagnosed, treated and managed their conditions with medical treatment options. The authors concluded that changes in the behavior of workers are often evident before any expression of distress. Therefore, managers and EA professionals should learn to recognize workers behavioral changes and consider these as symptoms of problems in the workplace rather than solely as an unrelated individual mental health condition (West et al., 2012).

Stress management. Buys et al. (2010) explored how employees across different worksites perceived their organization's efforts to address stress management in the workplace and sought to observe differences based on organizational demographics such as size and location. The researchers designed workplace stress management questionnaires to collect data using a convenience sample of 84 participants. The researchers highlighted the importance of organizational interventions to address stressors employers could control such as a lack of resources, lack of supervision, and conflict with colleagues. Participants identified an EAP, counseling, wellness information, and family support services as resources available to manage their stress. Participants also identified a relationship between stress and an employee's negative perceptions of the work environment. The researchers concluded that employers could use an EAP to help positively manage employee reactions to changes in the workplace (Buys et al., 2010).

Self-help strategies for managing stress. Marley (2011) asserted that many people experience stress and problems that professional help could improve but may

choose self-help options over a professionally established EAP. Marley (2011)

conducted a study where 11 participants took part in semi-structured face-to-face

interviews. The researcher focused on self-help strategies and employees' attitudes about

counseling. Employees indicated a preference for talking to friends and family or using

personal coping abilities, both of which might act as a barrier to accessing EAP support

(Vojnovic et al., 2014). Congruent with the findings of Toker et al., (2015) employees

preferred familiar strategies and found comfort in accessing everyday self-help activities.

Personal resources also affected help-seeking (Vojnovic et al., 2014) and participants did

not seek help or participate in work programs when they possessed fewer resources

(Toker et al., 2015).

An EAP and positive relationships with supervisors can act as a personal resource

to manage workplace stress (Jose & Mampilly, 2015), however among geographically

distributed employees the availability of supervisors is limited, and employees may feel

isolated (Milton et al., 2017). Marley (2011) found that unless people needed help with

specific physical symptoms, they might not seek professional help. The findings of

Marley (2011) align with those of West et al., (2012) who found individuals did not seek

help until the physical signs of stress manifested. Supporting the findings of previous

scholars, Marley (2011) concluded that social support might be essential, but even though

EAP providers may offer therapeutic support an employee may not seek help unless they

exhibit symptoms of a visible behavior or problem.

Stress and organizational identification. Bachkirova (2012) conducted a

qualitative study to explore how experiences of work-related stress correlated with

coping strategies and how individuals create their relationship with the organization. Using semi-structured interviews with 46 participants to examine the experience of stress and personal factors relevant to work-related stress, he concluded that an individual's identification with the organization and the importance of an individual's self-image plays a role in mitigating an employee's stress.

Dubé and Robey (2009) also noted a correlation between levels of stress and the importance of self-image and identification with the organization. Positive organizational identification can reduce employees stress (Avanzi, Schuh, Fraccaroli & van Dick, 2015) however, organizational identification is typically compromised in geographically distributed employees and reduces participation. An employee's perception of organizational justice may also be a predictor of organizational identification and may influence an employee's behavior and participation in the workplace (Terzi et al., 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 contained a review of the EAP literature, geographically distributed literature and information on the organizational justice. In Chapter 3, I further clarify the research design and my rationale for choosing a generic qualitative methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions geographically distributed employees hold regarding access to external EAP-provided stress management services. This chapter contains five sections. Section 1 contains the research design and rationale for a generic qualitative method. Section 2 includes an explanation of the role of the researcher. Section 3 contains the study methodology. Section 4 addresses trustworthiness. The final section contains a summary of the main points of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative generic study, I sought to understand how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services. The primary research question was, How do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services? Geographically distributed employees' definitions of their perceptions of access, thus, constituted the central phenomenon of this study. Using a qualitative method is appropriate for understanding an individual's perceptions because it is not possible to measure an individual's subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences with a statistical method (Percy et al., 2015). One strength of using a generic qualitative approach for a dissertation is that it allows the researcher to obtain a deeper knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses while simultaneously learning more about the research topic (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016).

When choosing a qualitative approach, I could have chosen a narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, or case-study approach (Flick, 2002). I considered a grounded theory approach but opted against generating theory because it was not an explicit aim of this study. Because I did not conduct an intense study and account of an entity limited by space and time, a case study was not appropriate. Also, I did not study the themes in the life histories and experiences of a single person; therefore, a narrative approach was not appropriate (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). In this project, I studied a group of geographically distributed employees who were not homogeneous enough to conduct a meaningful ethnography. Additionally, I was interested in the external content rather than the internal lived experiences of participants (see Bellamy, Ostini, Martini, & Kairuz, 2016) so a phenomenology was not a good fit.

In addition to qualitative methods, I considered quantitative research methods. Quantitative researchers practice a systematic and empirical investigation using statistics and numerical data (Basias & Pollalis, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). This methodology would not have accomplished the aims of the current study in the same manner as a qualitative approach. I also rejected a mixed-methods approach for this study. Although there would have been some advantages, the disadvantages would have outweighed the advantages, specifically in the time it takes to conduct a mixed-methods study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The more common qualitative approaches were not suitable for this study; therefore, I chose a generic qualitative approach as a stand-alone method (Smith et al., 2011). I used this qualitative approach to gain new insights, construct themes (see Smith,

Bekker, & Cheater, 2011), and explore people's external opinions and subjective

perspectives of a phenomenon (see Auta, Strickland-Hodge, & Maz, 2016; Bellamy et al.,

2016; Kennedy, 2016; Percy et al., 2015).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher differs based on the research method (Sorsa, Kikkala, &

Astedt-Kurki, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for

gathering and analyzing collected information (Collins & Cooper, 2014; Peredaryenko &

Krauss, 2013). As the primary instrument in this qualitative study, my roles included

researcher, interviewer, and analyst (see Gyure et al., 2014).

My perceptions of geographically distributed work have been shaped by my

personal experiences. For 12 years, I worked for three different organizations as a

geographically distributed employee. Given the distributed nature of the study

organization, I do not have a personal or professional relationship with the participants

and did not foresee any ethical relationship concerns. However, to avoid ethical issues

and power differentials, and to mitigate any undue influence that may affect current or

future workplace dynamics, I did not interview participants with whom I work directly on

a daily basis (see Sorsa et al., 2015). I acknowledge that my experience and prior

knowledge may result in a loss of objectivity (Greene, 2014). Therefore, I acknowledged

my personal experiences, history, and assumptions through the practice of bracketing

(Sorsa et al., 2015). The practice of bracketing is useful for setting aside biases,

disclosing past assumptions, and looking at a phenomenon with an open mind to present

data that reflects the participants' perceptions in their words (Perry, 2013; Sorsa et al.,

2015). I maintained a diary to document any biases or assumptions and had reflexive discussions with my peers to acknowledge and distance myself from my preconceived notions and assumptions, so I could present the findings of this study in a transparent and succinct manner (Chakraverty & Tai, 2013; Collins & Cooper, 2014; Greene, 2014; Sorsa et al., 2015).

Methodology

Methodology is like a map and defines how a researcher should proceed with a research study (Bazeley, 2013). Gathering quality data and carefully choosing an appropriate sampling strategy are key decisions researchers make to obtain quality data and insights when planning and conducting research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Greiner, 2015).

Participant Selection Logic

I used a purposeful criterion sampling approach to select participants from a small government contracting company in the Northeast United States who have access to stress management services through their employer's external EA provider. Nearly 77% of the employees are geographically distributed, working in settings apart from the employer's main location. The inclusion criteria for participants included individuals based on their status (Palinkas et al., 2015) as geographically distributed employees with a minimum of three months experience. I assumed that those participants with a minimum of three months experience with the distributed worksite phenomenon would be able to provide adequate informative data for the study.

Sampling strategy. I chose a criterion sampling strategy because of the assumption that participants who meet or exceed a predetermined criterion may possess experience and familiarity with the phenomenon of interest (Omona, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling allows a researcher to focus on gathering data from a few unique individuals until no new information emerges (Etikan et al., 2016). A purposeful sample allows the researcher to identify and select individuals with enough knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Saturation and sample size. A small sample size is suitable for qualitative research (Bellamy et al., 2016; Griffith, 2013). A sample size of 12 may be enough for a researcher to understand the perceptions among a group of relatively homogenous participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). However, a researcher may use a larger sample size in a generic qualitive inquiry (Percy & Kostere, 2015) to gather opinions that represent the population under study (Bellamy et al., 2016). Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2010) suggest that 15 is an acceptable sample size to gather and report subjective findings. I determined that a target sample size of 15 was, therefore, enough to represent the study population and reach data saturation. Data saturation is the point in the data collection process where additional data may not lead to new concepts because a researcher has gathered adequate data to support the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). If data saturation was not evident after collecting data from 15 participants, I would have continued to gather data from additional participants until saturation was achieved.

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

The CEO of an organization whose employees are geographically distributed, provided permission to conduct the research study. The CEO signed a letter of cooperation (Appendix E) allowing the HR Manager to provide me with a list of geographically distributed employees. After receiving the list of e-mail addresses and names, initial contact was made by sending email invitations (Appendix C) to 20 potential participants to obtain a target group of 15 participants. The email and letter correspondence included an introduction explaining the context of the study and requesting their voluntary participation in the study. Individuals had the opportunity to authorize or refuse participation (Grady, 2015). If the response rate to the initial 20 contacts is low, a follow up email was sent on the fifth day, and additional invitations to potential participants were emailed. After 15 employees agreed to participate, data collection following the procedures outline in the data collection section of this chapter commenced.

Instrumentation

In a generic qualitative study, a researcher may collect data using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires (Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015) to understand a phenomenon from the viewpoint of participants (Bellamy et al., 2016). In this study, the researcher used a semi structured, open ended interview protocol, and a questionnaire protocol with open and closed questions to collect data in this study.

The literature review conducted was used as a guide to design the semi-structured open-ended interview protocol (Appendix A) and the questionnaire protocol (Appendix

B). Similarly, the interview and questionnaire protocol guided the data gathering process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Stewart, Polak, Young, & Schultz, 2012) and addressed the research question. Using semi-structured, open-ended interview questions allowed the collection of in-depth descriptions of a participant's viewpoints (Adams & Cox, 2008; Kennedy, 2016) regarding access to EAP stress management services. Self-administered questionnaires offered respondents confidentiality and flexibility (Jackson & Trochim, 2002) to answer the pertinent questions related to their perceptions of access to EAP stress management services.

To promote content validity for the protocols, relevant literature was used as a guide (Meadows, 2003). In addition, a panel of EA professionals with experience managing an EAP for geographically distributed employees reviewed the study protocols, and provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and tone of the data collection instruments. In addition, the researcher's dissertation committee continually reviewed and provided comments to ensure questions are clear and understandable.

Procedures for Data Collection

I personally collected and managed the data throughout the data collection process. After obtaining consent, data collection using semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire began.

Interviews. Scheduling of an interview followed once individuals agreed to participate. Due to the remote nature of employees, when in-person interviews were not feasible, telephone interviews were substituted. Sixty minutes was allotted for each interview. For telephone interviews, a copy of the consent form was sent a week prior to

the interview. A day before the interview, all participants received a reminder to secure a commitment for their participation (Sagoe, 2012). Reminders were sent to telephone participants to sign and return their consent forms. Each participant had to sign and return the consent form before participating in the study. To ensure complete transcripts, recording equipment was tested before the session and a backup recording device was on hand (Marks & Yardley, 2003).

Prior to conducting an in-person interview, each participant received an informed consent form. The researcher fully explained the informed consent form and provided time for participants to ask questions. Informed consent forms covered disclosure, comprehension, voluntary choice and authorization (Grady, 2015) and provided details concerning the research so participants could decide whether to participate in the study (Corneli et al., 2017).

Once participants signed the consent form, they received an introductory briefing that emphasized confidentiality and explained the purpose of the interview, the format of the interview, how long it would take and any administrative issues (Turner, 2010). Additionally, the researcher reminded employees that participation is voluntary, they may withdrawal at any time, and there is no obligation to answer questions that make them uncomfortable.

In-person interviews were conducted in a private location suitable for the participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008), and telephone interviews were conducted from a private room that was free from distractions. After ensuring that participants understand their rights and the procedures, each participant was informed

that the interview would be recorded and was given the opportunity to withdraw if they were uncomfortable with being recorded (Gill et al., 2008). At the beginning of each audio recording the researcher stated their name, the date, time, and purpose of the interview. For each interview the researcher employed open-ended questions for 30-60 minutes. If participants did not consent to being recorded, comprehensive written notes of the participant's verbal responses were taken.

At the end of each interview, the audio recorder was turned off, the participants were thanked for their time, acknowledging their contribution to the study and asking if they had anything to add (Gill et al., 2008). Finally, I conducted a debriefing that included the title and purpose of the study, my name, and contact information, and a reminder about the use and confidentiality of their data (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). Additionally, contact details for EA services were provided (Dempsey et al., 2016) so participants had the option to seek help after the study.

Participants were asked if the researcher may contact them again later to verify the accuracy of the interview transcription. After the interview session ended, backup copies of notes and recordings were created before transcribing (Marks & Yardley, 2003). To protect their privacy, transcripts did not include participant's names or locations and when necessary any identifying and sensitive passages were removed from the report (Marks & Yardley, 2003). After transcribing, I conducted a test for accuracy by sending the transcript to the participants to verify the material. Participants had five working days to review and return the transcript with corrections if necessary. If participants did not provide comments at the end of the fifth day, the researcher assumed

the material was accurate. I will maintain all data from the study in a secure cabinet or on a password-protected computer for five years to protect the identification of the participants. After five years, it will be erased and destroyed.

If a participant chose not to finish the interview, the researcher-participant relationship would have been terminated (Hoover & Morrow, 2015) and a debriefing conducted. The debriefing would have included the title and purpose of the study, my name and contact information, and a reminder about the confidentiality and use of their data (Hoover & Morrow, 2015).

Questionnaires. E-mail invitations were sent to individuals to participate in the research study (Appendix C) and complete an online questionnaire that included open and closed ended questions to provide insight into how geographically distributed employees perceive access to EAP stress management services. Once employees agreed to participate an email that explained how to access and complete the online questionnaire was sent. Upon accessing the link, participants had to complete the informed consent form and indicate their approval to participate. The informed consent page contained a description of the study, the purpose, benefits and risks of participation.

The questionnaire was available for 41 days. To increase the number of responses, a reminder email containing a link to the online questionnaire was sent as necessary on the 3rd, 7th, and 10th day following the initial email invitation. Data was collected only one time from each participant. The questionnaire took 15-30 minutes for participants to complete and data was recorded electronically. The desired sample size was 15. Recruitment resulted in too few participants, so additional potential participants

were contacted after three business days. If a participant chose not to finish the study, the researcher-participant relationship would have been terminated (Hoover & Morrow, 2015) and a debriefing conducted that included the title and purpose of the study, my name and contact information (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). Due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaires, I did not follow up.

Data Analysis Plan

The method of analysis selected for this study was a general inductive analysis process, to collect and analyze data from semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. An inductive approach allows researchers to generate categories (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013) and discover frequent, dominant, significant patterns, and themes that may derive gradually from the data (Thomas, 2006), which can then be synthesized, interpreted to produce rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Kahlke, 2014; Percy et al., 2015).

Interviews. The data gained from semi-structured interviews offered insight into answering the main research question: How do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services? To prepare for data analysis, a I transcribed the interviews word for word. Before beginning the process of inductive analysis, member checking was employed to identify biases and misunderstandings in any observations (Anney, 2014).

During the first step of analysis, the data was formatted and prepared for review (Thomas, 2006) by creating large margins and adequate space to facilitate coding and note-taking (Gale et al., 2013). During the second step, the data was reviewed to become

familiar with the content and themes in the text (Thomas, 2006), continuing through each line of the transcript to become familiar with the entire interview (Gale et al., 2013) and gain an understanding of the perceptions of the geographically distributed employees. In the third stage, the transcript was examined line-by-line, and labels and codes applied to essential passages (Gale et al., 2013). Next, categories or codes from the phrases in the text were identified and defined (Thomas, 2006) to code the data. Open and axial coding was utilized to gather a complete picture of the information collected, to identify themes and assign meaning to relevant features (Carver, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Open coding was accomplished by reading the text over and over and writing notes and headings in the text (Van der Horst, Van de Hoef, Reurink, Huisstede, & Backx, 2016). During axial coding, data was aggregated in new ways to relate and connect categories and subcategories (Kolb, 2012). During the fourth stage the analysis process, core categories were identified to reduce overlap and redundancies (Kolb, 2012; Thomas, 2006). In the fifth stage, these categories were revised and refined (Thomas, 2006), and subsequently produced a data analysis report.

During the inductive analysis process, I was cognizant of the unexpected (Gale et al., 2013) to identify and analyze discrepant data to support the credibility of my findings (Gobat et al., 2018). I examined both supporting and discrepant information using a line by line coding approach, and I challenged, reconciled, and sought to explain anomalies in the data to strengthen the analysis (Gale et al., 2013). The researcher may have also asked for feedback from participants who held discrepant views to support the credibility of the research (Gobat et al., 2018). In these cases, follow-up conversations with

participants were conducted, and the dissertation committee provided guidance to help identify discrepant data during the ongoing review of data.

Questionnaires. I used questionnaire data to answer the main research question: How do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services? The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed queries designed to collect demographic information as well as rich, honest responses regarding the phenomenon (Emde & Fuchs, 2012; Meadows, 2003).

To prepare for data analysis, raw data was extracted from the online software into a spreadsheet format and prepared for review (Thomas, 2006). Then, I followed the same procedures used to analyze the interview data described above.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is the qualitative equivalent of internal validity (Bengtsson, 2016) and is a component in demonstrating trustworthiness (Bengtsson, 2016). To foster credibility, the researcher aimed align the methods and research question, carefully select the study sampling and analysis strategy (Bengtsson, 2016) and aim for congruency between participants findings and reality (Bengtsson, 2016) by including member checking and peer reviews (Anney, 2014; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Data was triangulated using verbatim transcripts of interviews and questionnaires to minimize biases, facilitate rich data and provide a full picture of the phenomenon (Anney, 2014; Gill, et al., 2008; Tracy, 2010). Reflective practices may have helped increase credibility (Hoover & Morrow, 2015) and supporting and discrepant data was

examined to test the validity of my research and improve the creditability of the study

findings (Anney, 2014).

Transferability

Transferability is the quantitative equivalent to generalizability (Anney, 2014) and

is the degree to which the findings of a study apply to other contexts, settings, groups or

populations (Bengtsson, 2016; Hammarberg, Kirkman, & De Lacey, 2016). In this study,

the goal was to explore the perceptions geographically distributed employees hold

regarding access to a companies' external EAP stress management services. To obtain

these perceptions, a purposeful sample was used to generate information regarding the

phenomenon from an information-rich sample (Percy et al., 2015). To foster

transferability, the data analysis and findings describe the factors that shape the study and

provide comprehensive descriptions of the setting and participants, the research process,

data collection, and context of the study (Anney, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015; Tracy,

2010).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and repeatability of a study (Bengtsson,

2016). Dependability is the qualitative equivalent to reliability in quantitative research

(Bengtsson, 2016; Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014). Dependability in this study was addressed

by aiming to make all aspects of the research methods logical and well documented with

careful tracking, an audit trail, triangulation of sources, and peer reviewers (Munn,

Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015).   An

emphasis on clarity and integrity of the research questions and the coding process were priorities. Also, the dissertation committee participated in a vetting process.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether a researcher's findings come from the data (Anney, 2014) and represent the objective and neutral words of the study participants (Bengtsson, 2016). To foster confirmability, audit trails and reflexive journals were used to provide a complete description of the methods, procedures, and findings so others can follow the sequence of data collection and analysis (Anney, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Additionally, the researcher ensured the conclusions of this study are based on information from the study participants and practiced reflexivity to manage biases (Anney, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

While conducting this study, the researcher aimed to reduce or eliminate harm to research participants, society and the wider research community by obeying ethical and moral principles (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2014; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Opsal et al., 2016). To gain access to participants, a letter of cooperation from the appropriate member of the work organization was obtained before contacting potential participants (Appendix D). To ensure this research meets the requirements and standards, this proposal and all required documents were submitted to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approval secured before conducting the study. The IRB approval number is 11-08-18-0611703.

An affiliation with the potential research community may allow for quicker access to participants, however, this may also cause ethical issues regarding confidentiality and autonomous decision making (Green, 2014). Participants may experience discomfort if they feel coerced to participate or disclose personal information. To address this concern when contacting participants, it was emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, and potential participants were informed of all aspects of the research endeavor to ensure they were able to make an autonomous decision to participate (Corneli et al., 2017; Grady, 2015; Gyure et al., 2014).

It is possible participants may experience distress during or after an interview. For example, if the interview is interrupted or others observe the interview taking place, a participant may choose not to finish the interview. To address this concern, the interview would be halted, the researcher-participant relationship terminated (Hoover & Morrow, 2015) and a debriefing conducted. The debriefing would include the title and purpose of the study, my name and contact information, and a reminder about the confidentiality and use of their data (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). After each interview, contact information for the EAP was provided so participants could choose to seek help after the study (Dempsey et al., 2016).

After the interview session, I made backup copies of notes and recordings. I then transcribed, analyzed and reported the findings in a written report that reflects the words and perceptions of geographically distributed employees (Sorsa et al., 2015). The interview data I collected will remain confidential. Transcripts use numbers and do not include names or locations. When necessary I removed identifying and sensitive

passages from the report. I can link information I obtained with participants, but I will not reveal the information publicly (Dawson, 2014).

The data I collected from questionnaires is anonymous and does not include names or locations. I will keep all data from the study in a secure cabinet in my home or on a password-protected computer that I am the only one who can access to prevent identification of participants. I will maintain the data for five years and then erase and destroy the data.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an in-depth discussion of the details and actions planned to answer the research question and add to the body of knowledge regarding an EAP and geographically distributed employees. Using a generic qualitative study and collecting data through interviews and questionnaires may offer the best approach to understanding how geographically distributed employees interpret, construct and make meaning of their experiences regarding use of EA services (Kahlke, 2014). In chapter 4 I will explain the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions geographically distributed employees hold regarding access to external EAP-provided stress management services. The central research question was, How do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services? In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study, including a comprehensive description of the recruiting methods, the interview settings, and the data collection and analysis processes, and a discussion that addresses trustworthiness. At the end of the chapter, I provide the results of my study.

Research Setting

I conducted in-person interviews in a quiet conference room with no distractions or interruptions. I conducted telephone interviews when in-person interviews were not feasible. During the interview, one individual mentioned dealing with a personal family concern. Another participant mentioned they were dealing with the uncertainties of an impending company merger. One participant said that it was a suitable time of year for a study on EAP stress management because the holiday season is a difficult time of year for some people. Another participant mentioned that the end of the year is when HR provides employees with an annual review of benefits, so the timing of the study may have influenced participants' awareness of EAP stress management services.

Demographics

This study consisted of a sample of 15 geographically distributed participants. The demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Time with organization
Participant 1	Female	35-44	Associate degree	6-12 months
Participant 2	Male	55-64	2 years college/training/certificates	3-6 months
Participant 3	Male	55-64	None	1-5 years
Participant 4	Male	55-64	Master's degree	1-5 Years
Participant 5	Male	55-64	Master's degree	5-10 Years
Participant 6	Male	35-44	Master's degree	5-10 Years
Participant 7	Male	45-54	Bachelor's degree	10+ years
Participant 8	Female	45-54	Master's degree	5-10 Years
Participant 9	Female	45-54	Bachelor's degree	5-10 Years
Participant 10	Unknown	45-44	None	6-12 months
Participant 11	Female	35-44	Bachelor's degree	1-5 Years
Participant 12	Male	55-64	Master's degree	1-5 Years
Participant 13	Female	65-74	Master's degree	1-5 years
Participant 14	Female	35-44	Bachelor's degree	5-10 Years
Participant 15	Male	45-54	Master's degree	3-6 months

Most of the participants described themselves as working at a client site away from their employer's central location. The participants included seven women and eight men ranging from ages 35-74. Three participants had no college degree, but one of the three had 2 years of college and relevant training and certificates. All other participants had a college education. All participants confirmed that they had access to an EAP stress management program and worked as a geographically distributed employee for a minimum of 3 months.

Data Collection

I obtained a list of geographically distributed employees from the HR director of a small government contracting company, after which I began sending e-mail invitations to

potential participants. Five individuals accepted the initial e-mail invitation. To

overcome a low response rate, I requested and received IRB approval to change

procedures and invite other geographically distributed employees from other companies

on the same contract. After gaining IRB approval, I hand-delivered paper invitations to

geographically distributed contractors from other companies on the same contract

working at the government worksite. When an individual agreed to participate, I e-mailed

the consent form and obtained electronic consent before sending the questionnaire link

and scheduling a time to conduct an interview. There were a total of 20 participants who

accepted the invitation. Of the 20, 16 signed the informed consent form. From the 16

participants, 15 completed both the interview and the online questionnaire. I collected

interview and questionnaire data from the 15 participants over a period of 41 days. I

conducted six face to face interviews in a private conference room, and I conducted nine

telephone interviews. I collected interview data one time from each participant. With

permission from the participant, I used a hand-held audio recorder to record the

interviews. I also had a notepad available to write notes as necessary. The interviews did

not exceed the allotted 60-minute time frame. Completion of the questionnaires did not

exceed the allotted 30-minute time frame, either. Rather than sending the interviews to a

transcriptionist, after each interview I used Word 2018 to transcribe the data collected

from the participants. I stored backup copies of notes and recordings on my private

password-protected computer for security purposes. I did not experience unusual

circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

I collected data from interviews and online questionnaires. After I collected, transcribed, and reviewed my interview data, I sent participants a copy of their interview transcripts for member checking. Nine participants confirmed their data; two of the nine requested minor changes. I then downloaded the analyzed questionnaire material from Survey Monkey and printed it out. After the participants returned the transcribed interview data, I printed the transcripts ensuring there was plenty of space to facilitate coding and note-taking.

I chose a generic inductive approach to discover common, dominant, significant patterns and themes that might derive gradually from the data (see Thomas, 2006). In conducting a generic inductive analysis, I read the data repeatedly to become familiar with the content. Line by line, I examined the text and underlined sentences and phrases that appeared meaningful. I wrote a label in the margin that described the words and phrases. In open coding, I formed initial categories of participants' perceptions regarding access to EAP stress management services. Some of the original labels and codes included *human resources*, *employee responsibility*, *recurring reminders*, *interpersonal relationships*, *lack of details*, *training, effort*, *convenience*, *finding and digging*, *email*, *communication*, and *knowledge*. During axial coding I assigned definitions and meanings to the relevant data and then continued reading over the text, writing notes and headings and aggregating the data to relate and connect categories and subcategories.

Three-fifths of the participants recognized human resources (HR) as synonymous with EAP stress management access and described calling or contacting HR to access

EAP services. Participants described a heavy reliance on technology and less face-to-face interaction and interpersonal relationships because of their physical separation from the corporate site. "We are email people: we email everything," P4 stated. According to participants, when employees are off-site, access to EAP stress management services becomes a personal responsibility and it is up to the employee to exert an effort to dig around to find information. "I feel like the onus is on the person who needs it, the individual goes online and looks it up," P7 stated. A lack of understanding had an influence on participant's perceptions of access. One participant suggested training and communication are vital to increase understanding and knowledge (P5) because a lack of knowledge regarding the services available leads participants to perceive services as inaccessible or unavailable.

In the final stages of analysis, I identified redundancies and overlap and revised and refined the themes to include (a) Social Support and Social Isolation, (b) Convenience and Familiarity, and (c) Education and Periodic Promotion of EAP.

Discrepant Case

One participant provided discrepant data that was different from most of the data I collected during the study. I included the diverse perceptions as part of the analysis because although distinct, they offered insight into answering the research question and provided an opportunity to consider the findings from a different vantage point. I discuss the discrepant case in more details in the findings section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Member checking was one method I used to foster credibility and congruency between participants findings and reality (Bengtsson, 2016) and to identify biases and misunderstandings in observations (Anney, 201). After I transcribed the interviews, I conducted member checking by sending the transcribed interviews to participants. Nine participants responded and verified the accuracy of their transcripts. Two of the nine made minor adjustments. Data triangulation included interviews and questionnaires to compare participant's viewpoints, experiences, and beliefs against one another. An adjustment to triangulation included having participants from several organizations as opposed to the same institution resulting in site triangulation. I practiced reflectivity and examined discrepant data.

Transferability

I provided comprehensive descriptions of the setting and participants, the research process, data collection, and context of the study to increase the potential that the findings may apply to other contexts, settings, groups or populations (Anney, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015; Tracy, 2010).

Dependability

I aimed to make all aspects of the research methods logical and well documented with careful tracking, an audit trail, and triangulation of sources (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015). To support the

dependability and repeatability of the study the researcher emphasized clarity and integrity of the research questions and the coding process (Bengtsson, 2016).

Confirmability

I used audit trails and reflexive journals to provide a complete description of the methods, procedures, and findings so others can follow the sequence of data collection and analysis (Anney, 2014; Hoover & Morrow, 2015; Tracy, 2010).

Results

The perceptions of geographically distributed employees regarding access to EAP stress management services emerged in the form of words and texts provided by the geographically distributed employees themselves. Three primary themes emerged: Social support and social isolation, convenience and familiarity, and education and promotion.

Social Support and Social Isolation

When participants answered questions about their perceptions regarding physical separation from their employer 66% of participants described feelings of social isolation and disconnection from the organization. Employees described perceptions of limited opportunities for daily social interactions, networking and relationship building. See Table 2. Employees described HR as the catalyst for informational support and communication regarding EAP services and expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of engagement from senior leadership. "I think it is important that the management chain keep an eye on employees to identify when there is a situation that might need help" (P1).

Table 2

Social Support and Social Isolation

Participant Number	Participant Statement
Participant 1	When people are remote from the home office, they don't feel well connected. I think it is important that the management chain keep an eye on employees to identify when there is a situation that might need help. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 2	It wasn't communicated to me, I don't think I got the overview of everything like everybody else did, it wouldn't hurt to at least come and meet who you work with. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 3	The challenge of being geographically distributed is I have a relationship with those at the geographic site" and not those at the home office so I feel more comfortable leaning on the services onsite. Leadership had little or no influence. I think one of the single biggest influence's leadership can have is to make sure employees are aware of the services if we need it.
Participant 6	You don't know the people doing it" and "you don't get to know them cause you don't see them every day. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 7	It's a little confusing accessing information and "I don't have my HR manager 2 doors down. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 8	I might use it if I knew someone personally who used it, if I had someone else's first-hand experience. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 9	"There is a lack of information" and a delay in information, "we don't know what is going on until after the fact. Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 11	You are isolated from discussions and announcements regarding stress management services that "you would get if you were in the building". "It does not always trickle down to those at remote locations". Leadership had little or no influence.
Participant 12	Services "are not" communicated to those offsite and "no one reached out and talks about it". HR exclusively and not leadership communicated regarding EAP services.
Participant 13	Onsite employees "probably have an easier way" and "if you are onsite and your manager is there you can walk over and talk to your manager or walk over to the receptionist or talk to a colleague". HR exclusively and not leadership communicated regarding EAP services
Participant 14	"You can't go to HR and ask questions immediately". Leadership had little or no influence at all.

Almost three-quarters of participants said Leadership did not influence their ideas about EAP stress management services and did not communicate regarding the availability of services. "I think one of the single biggest influences leadership can have is to make sure employees are aware of the services if we need it "(P3).

Participants described HR as the main point of contact for EAP stress management services and the primary source of social support, suggestions, and guidance essential to access EAP stress management information. Employees spoke optimistically regarding HR's support, and communication, however participants noted when you are offsite, there is a delay in information (P9) because you can't go to HR and ask questions immediately (P14). Two participants said HR exclusively and not leadership communicated regarding EAP services (P12, P13). "I have not gotten a single thing from my bosses about stress management" (P11) Leadership had little or no influence at all regarding my access and awareness to stress management services (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15).

Over one-third of the participants said physical separation influenced their perceptions of access. "When people are remote from the home office, they don't feel well connected, "(P-1). You don't get the kind of information that you would get if you were in the building (P11). So, "anything that can be done to reach out to folks can help individuals feel more connected" (P1). Participants associated physical separation with reduced relationship building and a lack of information and communication. Participants commented "It wasn't communicated to me" (P2), "there is a lack of information" (P9),

"you don't always get the information" (P11), and "we are at a standstill", "without communication" (P12).

Convenience, Expediency, and Familiarity

As displayed in Table 3, participants expressed a desire for direct and immediate access and preferred something that looks easily accessible (P13). When people are remote if information is not well communicated and, on the site, easily accessible people may become discouraged and have morale issues" (P14). "I definitely would have to think about where I would go to find it, it is not like second nature" "so I have to really go and look when I need something" (P13). Some Participants raised concerns about the level of effort and time it required to find services from offsite. For geographically distributed employee's, being offsite means, I must "dig around a bit" to find the information, but for those individuals onsite they can walk over and talk to someone in person (P13). I would think if you are in headquarters there might be flyers here and there (P14). Being offsite, there are "usually a bunch of links I have to click through" (P7), but people do not want to have to go into databases or click on websites (P1). "There are too many clicks, "make it less than 3 clicks" and "make it clear where you need to go" (P7). Make it an easy clickable link, a quick click (P13).

Table 3

Convenience, Expediency, and Familiarity

Participant Number	Participant Statement
Participant 1	You must go to a website where you must "find" the links. People do not want to have to go into databases or click on websites".
Participant 3	I lean on services available onsite because they are "more convenient" and readily available
Participant 4	I have "never gotten past calling my family"
Participant 5	I believe HR has the document that covers the procedures and steps to take"
Participant 6	I just don't have the time to use them".
Participant 7	There are "usually a bunch of links I have to click through" it's just" taking the time to go there and look it up. Something that looks easily accessible. I definitely would have to think about where I would go to find it, it is not like second nature" so I have to really go and look when I need something. Make it an easy clickable link, a quick click. There are too many clicks, "make it less than 3 clicks" and "make it clear where you need to go"
Participant 8	I "would consider using EAP stress management services "when talking to friends and family wouldn't relieve the stress"
Participant 9	"There is a lack of information, and a delay in information, we don't know what is going on until after the fact".
Participant 11	"I would not even know where to go, but when you are at the corporate headquarters you probably hear about a meeting to talk about what program we are going to establish for stress management".
Participant 12	"We have no idea other than the HR manager".
Participant 13	"I can't imagine using them because I have a personal therapist"
Participant 14	I find out through HR. "You can't go to HR and ask questions immediately and if I can't find something I just kind of give up easier because I don't have a resource right there for me".

Participants perceived their access from offsite as difficult and time-consuming. Some participants thought it might be easier for employees onsite to access information because "those on-site "probably just know how to get to it" (P7) and it is "readily available to them" because the subject matter experts are at the headquarters". Being offsite "I would not even know where to go, but when you are at the corporate headquarters you probably hear about a meeting to talk about what program we are going to establish for stress management" (P11). Participants relied heavily on HR as a conduit to finding information. Over half of the participants identified HR as a necessary component of access. "I believe HR has the document that covers the procedures and steps to take" (P5). We have no idea other than the HR manager"(P12) "I find out through HR" (P14) and "I would have to call HR to access"(13), but when you are offsite you can't go to HR and ask questions immediately and "if I can't find something I just kind of give up easier because I don't have a resource right there for me"(P14).

When dealing with a problem, participants preferred the familiarity and convenience of reaching out to family and friends. I have "never gotten past calling my family" (P4), but "if I was stressed to the point where talking to family and friends wouldn't really help relieve the stress I would probably use the service or at least think about using the service" (8). "If something traumatic happened like a divorce or a son or daughter passed away. Maybe I would go to talk to someone" (P11).

Employee Assistance Program Education and Periodic Promotion

Over half of the participants were aware that a free and confidential EAP was available. However, participants noted they became aware of an EAP from previous

employers. Despite the knowledge that the service was available, two-fifths of the participants lacked an understanding regarding the specific services available. As displayed in Table 4, participants had a shallow and generic understanding of EAP stress management services. "Everybody thinks that an EAP is for people that have drug and alcohol problems, which it is but I'm not sure everyone is aware that the resources are there for stress management" (P1). Make it a little more understandable (P12). Give people a starting point" (P13). I think more people would use it "if people knew about it and understood what it was (P15). "I have to know a little more about what the actual services are to determine the requirements to meet my needs" (3). I think the more people that know about it, the better "(P5). Participants commented that they had a "lack of information" (P9). I do not know what services are offered (P4), and I couldn't give any detailed information about the services (P5). Participants viewed an EAP as a counseling service and a reactive tool to be used if they had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P11). I am "aware of counseling services and all of the generic stuff that goes along with EAP (P15) but "I only see EAP as grief counseling, I don't know if they offer other kinds of support" (P7).

Table 4

Employee Assistance Program Education

Participant Number	Participant Statement
Participant 1	"They are not sure that everyone is aware that the resources are there for stress management"
Participant 2	"I don't think I got the overview of everything" I would use services if I had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance
Participant 3	"I have to know a little more about what the actual services are to determine the requirements to meet my needs". Would use services if I had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance
Participant 4	"I do not know what services are offered". I would use services if I had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance
Participant 5	"I couldn't give any detailed information about the services". Would use services if I had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance
Participant 8	"Stress management is covered" however they are not certain the services are explained.
Participant 8	"Stress management is covered" however they are not certain the services are explained.
Participant 9	I have a "lack of information"
Participant 11	"I have not personally been briefed" and "I have not gotten a single thing from my bosses about stress management". I would use services if I had a death in the family or a traumatic event that might affect work performance
Participant 12	"Until I get further information, I can't really say"
Participant 13	"Give people a starting point"
Participant 15	I am "aware of counseling services and all of the generic stuff that goes along with EAP".

Periodic Promotion of Employee Assistance Program

Participants said HR was the primary communicator of EAP information and the communication level was deemed adequate by three-fifths of the participants. Participants pointed out that the information is "out there" on websites and in emails, however it would be nice if HR could "remind people what is out there" (P1) so "even if you don't need it, you have it in the back of your mind in case you know someone who needs it (P5). Participants said they received "general reminders that it is there" "I believe stress management is covered, but I am not 100% certain that it is actually called out in the things they have given us to let us know about the program" (8). Participants desired targeted and specific marketing. EAP Stress management is often bundled in with other benefits, so participants desired to periodically receive specific emails or a series of emails that talk about certain benefits and services (P11, P15) or a meeting or training that specifically addresses stress management services (P5, P7). "The one thing I think is important is what I call health maintenance, and helping people proactively manage their stress situation" (P1). Some suggested offering a seminar or something (P1) even if it is a video conference, taking online training annually or having a speaker come in and relay information to the employees (P5). It would help if someone would "systematically send out communication each month" (P12). Maybe they could mail them out to the employee's homes monthly, so it goes directly to the employee at their house (P6). There tends to be a stigma surrounding mental health but periodically promoting EAP might help to normalize it as a resource and benefit like any other benefits, and I think it would encourage people to use it (P15).

Table 2

Periodic Promotion of Employee Assistance Program

	Participant Statement
Participant 1	The communication was adequate because "the information is out there", but a "monthly email blast from the company" to "remind people what is out there" would help.
Participant 5	Said information should be communicated annually with "annual training and refreshers" so "even if you don't need it, you have it in the back of your mind in case you know someone who needs it".
Participant 6	Maybe they could mail them out to the employee's homes monthly, so it goes directly to the employee at their house
Participant 7	said, the information is on the website" but a separate annual meeting to go over the specifics would help
Participant 8	"Reminders that the service is available would be good
Participant 11	said "a series of emails that talk about certain benefits and stress and things like stress management".
Participant 12	Said "systematically send out communication each month"
Participant 15	Said sending specific emails several times a year" would help. Periodically promoting EAP might help to normalize it as a resource and benefit like any other benefits, and I think it would encourage people to use it

Discrepant Case

Participants perceptions of EAP access resulted in three themes: social support and social isolation; convenience, expediency and familiarity; and EAP education and periodic promotion of EAP. One participant's comments stood out as an outlier. The participant identified themselves as a senior leader in an organization. The participant offered alternative perspectives that did not conform with the emerging data. Their senior position in the organization may explain the discrepant data.

Summary

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions geographically distributed employees hold regarding access to external EAP-provided

stress management services. I conducted semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to collect and assemble information about each participant's perceptions of access to EAP stress management services. The central question guiding the study was how do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services?

I analyzed the transcripts using a generic inductive analysis approach. The three themes that emerged provided insight into how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services. The findings show that social support and social isolation, convenience and familiarity, and education and promotion influence an employee's perceptions of access. Theme 1 is related to an employee's perceptions of limited access to support, resources and information regarding accessing EAP stress management information. The findings show that geographically distributed employees perceive access to resources as arduous and time-consuming. The participants believed that accessing information requires too much searching, finding and clicking. Theme 2 is related to geographically distributed employees' perceptions of inconvenience and unfamiliarity with accessing EAP stress management resources. Participants believed a lack of familiarity and a lack of convenience were obstacles to perceptions of easy access. Participants attributed a lack of familiarity with inconvenience and the inability to directedly and immediately access information. Theme three is related to an employee's perception that recurring reminders, training, and education is necessary to improve perceptions of access. Most participants recognized that constant reminders and training could help improve their understanding of how and

where to access EAP services. When the participants were asked what might improve

perceptions of access, the majority mentioned regular communication and ongoing

training and education. In Chapter 5 I will provide interpretations, recommendations, and

suggestions for social change, as well as a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of geographically distributed employees regarding access to external EAP-provided stress management services. The central research question was, how do geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP stress management services? I undertook the study to further scholars' understanding of how geographically distributed employees perceive access to external EAP-provided stress management services. I found no previous literature where researchers studied the perceptions of geographically distributed employees and their access to EAP stress management services. I believed this study might provide valuable insights regarding these employees' perceptions of EAP access.

The findings of my study suggest geographically distributed employees perceive unequal access to EAP stress management support, resources, and information compared to their collocated counterparts. Participants said that being offsite limited awareness of information and resources making access an arduous and time-consuming process. The study findings aligned with previous research addressing perceptions of geographically distributed employees and access to workplace resources (Bartel et al., 2012; Bentley et al., 2016; Compton & McManus, 2015; Marley, 2011; McCann et al., 2010; Milton et al., 2017; Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Orhan et al., 2016; Toker et al., 2015). The participants provided explanations of their perceptions and what might improve their perceptions of access. These insights were the basis for the recommendations included later in this chapter. This chapter includes my interpretation of findings, discussion of

study limitations, and recommendations for future practice. I also describe implications for positive social change at the individual and organizational level. In the conclusion, I summarize the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

As I discussed in Chapter 4, I organized common and relevant ideas from my data into themes. In this section, I provide my interpretation of the findings and explanation of the identified themes as they relate to the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

Social Support and Social Isolation

Employees in this study described feelings of social isolation and limited access to information which supported previous findings regarding remote employees. An employee may feel socially isolated when physically separated from a corporate site (Orhan et al., 2016), and individuals may feel isolated when they perceive they have limited access to information (Milton et al., 2017).

Social support from leaders was deficient. Employees expressed a lack of communication and engagement from leadership regarding EAP stress management services. Leadership support plays a vital role in mitigating social isolation among employees in collocated organizations (Bentley et al., 2016). Physical isolation may cause employees to feel detached and unconnected to an organization (Bartel et al., 2012), and a lack of social interaction may cause employees to perceive themselves as unintegrated and separated (Milton et al., 2017). Participants perceived a lack of relationships, and limited opportunities for networking and relationship building due to their physical separation from their employer and coworkers. Participants described

feeling isolated from the broader community and disconnected from the overall

organizational vision. Three fourths of participants said that leadership did not support or

influence their ideas about EAP stress management services. Taken together, the

findings suggest that the participants' feelings of social isolation may be related to a lack

of leadership support and perceptions of limited access to information.

Convenience and Familiarity

Many people experience stress and problems that professional help might

alleviate, but individuals may choose self-help options instead of a professionally

established EAP (Marley, 2011). More than half of the participants in this study said that

they would not consider taking advantage of stress management services stating that they

had a lack of awareness of services and a lack of knowledge regarding how to access

services; 40% said that if they chose to seek EAP services, it would be if they had a death

in the family or a traumatic event. This finding supports previous research where

researchers suggested a lack of awareness or knowledge regarding the availability of EA

services may lead employees to perceive services as inaccessible or unavailable and may

therefore reduce utilization (Bajorek & Kinder, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016;

Sithole & Khorombi, 2014). This finding contrasts, however, with earlier studies where

employees reported relationship problems at work and home as the main reason they

sought EAP services (Compton & McManus, 2015; Richmond, 2017).

Four participants (P2, P6, P8, and P15) described seeking help from an EAP only

if they felt they needed it. However, one participant (P3) added that the key is knowing

what services are available: "I have to know a little more about what the actual services

are to determine the requirement to meet my needs." Marley (2011) found that unless

people needed help with specific physical symptoms they might not seek professional

help.

Participants indicated a preference for convenient and familiar stress management

strategies. More than half of the participants said they would seek help from friends and

family. These results are consistent with those of Marley (2011) who found that

employees indicated a preference for talking to family and friends over an established

EAP. Participants described EAP services as available but inconvenient to locate. These

findings extend the research on EAP usage by identifying convenience as a critical factor

in perceptions of access.

Participants described access to EAP as fair, equally distributed, and accessible.

However, consistent with organizational justice theory, when participants compared their

benefits to their peers working within headquarters locations they reported feelings of

unfairness (see Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016). Participants described a lengthy

process of digging, finding, and seeking to access information from off-site. In previous

studies, researchers found that participants perceived inequalities in access to workplace

resources because of their physical separation (Agarwal & Kaur, 2016; Romaine &

Schmidt, 2009). In this study participants perceived inequalities regarding the level of

effort and the lack of ease and convenience required to access information because of

their physical separation. Participants desired a more intuitive process that did not

involve so much digging and clicking.

Education and Promotion of EAP

Participants were not aware of the kinds of EAP services available and conveyed limited, generic and outdated information regarding EAP services. Some participants described an EAP as a program to address alcohol and drug issues, while others saw an EAP as merely a grief counseling service. During the interview several individuals identified themselves as seasoned professionals and said their knowledge and experience came from previous employers. Some participants said they used or became aware of EAP services from a previous employer. One participant (P15) stated

> I have worked at other places where they have made it more known and made it more available, and now I am mature enough in my career to know that companies offer this, but if this was a job I had right out of school, or I was early career and didn't know these services exist I probably wouldn't know they have it" (P15).

Three fifths of the participants deemed the EAP communication adequate, though participants sought reminders. P1 said, "I have worked for a bigger company in the past, and this company doesn't communicate that stuff quite as often." Other participants said it would be nice if HR could "remind people what is out there" (P1) so "even if you don't need it, you have it in the back of your mind in case you know someone who needs it" (P5). One participants said they received "general reminders that it is there" "I believe stress management is covered, but I am not 100% certain that it is actually called out in the things they have given us to let us know about the program" (8). Participants desired targeted and specific marketing. EAP Stress management is often bundled in with other

benefits, so participants desired to periodically receive specific emails or a series of emails that talk about certain benefits and services (P11, P15) or a meeting or training that specifically addresses stress management services (P5, P7).

Participants suggested training was necessary to manage stress proactively and increase perceptions of access. The one thing I think is important is what I call health maintenance, and helping people proactively manage their stress situation (P1). Some suggested offering a seminar or (P1) a video conference. Others suggested taking online training annually or having a speaker come in and relay information to the employees (P5). It would help if someone would "systematically send out communication each month" (P12). Maybe they could mail them out to the employee's homes monthly, so it goes directly to the employee at their house (P6). "There tends to be a stigma but periodically promoting EAP might help to normalize EAP as a resource and benefit like any other benefits, and I think it would encourage people to use it" (P15). Marketing and regular dissemination of EAP information is key to enhancing awareness and increasing EAP use (Compton & McManus, 2015; McCann et al., 2010).

In summary, the findings supported the idea that geographically distributed employees may experience feelings of social isolation that may influence their perceptions of access to EAP stress management information. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Milton et al., 2017 who suggested isolation is associated with perceptions of limited access to information and a lack of social interaction which may cause employees to perceive themselves as unintegrated and separated.

The findings in this study support the idea that employees prefer strategies that are familiar (Toker et al., 2015). The findings extended the literature by suggesting that familiarity may include perceptions of easy access, convenience, ease of use and the ability to quickly access services when needed. The findings further suggest that regular communication is vital to helping geographically distributed employees feel connected. Education, training, and consistent dissemination of information is necessary to increase proactivity and perceptions of access.

Limitations of the Study

The findings in this study are subject to the following limitations. A qualitative research by design does not lead to universal claims. Also, the sample size of 15 may limit representation of the findings to larger populations. My lack of experience as an interviewer and the length of the interviews is a potential limitation. Ideally, I would have preferred to have had more dialogue and asked additional follow up questions during the interviews. The sample may not be representative of the population in its entirety. All employees in the sample were geographically distributed but I do not know the specific context of the individual participants. Despite these limitations, this study's findings make a useful springboard for future research on the issue of interest.

Recommendations

To improve perceptions of access among geographically distributed employees I recommend conducting a quantitative study that could provide metrics on how long it takes an employee to find and access EAP information. This study uncovered the need to understand the time and effort it requires for employees to access resources from offsite.

Considering the findings and results of the study, future scholars and researchers should continue studies that investigate the disconnection between how leaders perceive access and how employees perceive access to EAP stress management services. I recommend further research that compares the perceptions of access between employees and leaders.

Furthermore, there is a need for additional studies regarding the best strategies for educating employees on the broad availability of EAP stress management services. Experienced employees may have a different perspective on the availability of EAP services. I recommend a qualitative study that explores the perceptions of employees new to the workforce, compared to those who have more experience.

Implications

The results of this study have the potential to create positive social change, especially for geographically distributed employees. The findings contribute to the existing information about the perceptions of geographically distributed employees and access to workplace resources. An employee's perceptions of access to a service may influence service use more than availability (Ollier-Malaterre & Andrade, 2016; Sulu et al., 2010; Toker et al., 2015).

In the US employees underuse EA services (American Psychological Association, 2016; Dunning, 2014; Toker et al., 2015) and the findings of this study have the capability to enrich understanding of geographically distributed employee's perceptions that may affect participation in EAP stress management programs.

EA professionals and employers may use the knowledge from this study to develop marketing strategies to increase perceptions of access and availability. Marketing and training guided by the findings of this study may promote social change by increasing understanding and familiarity and creating positive perceptions of accessing EAP services to alleviate workplace stress. Furthermore, EA professionals and employers may adopt the recommendations of the participants to make EAP access more expedient, familiar and convenient for employee's offsite.

Moreover, to contribute to social change, I intend to share the findings of this study with a larger audience using multiple venues including professional conferences and publishing in professional and workplace newsletters and journals. Disseminating my study to geographically distributed audiences may make EA professionals and employees aware of the unique perceptions of geographically distributed employees.

Conclusions

This study explored the perceptions of geographically distributed employees regarding access to EAP stress management services. The study supports the proposition that geographically distributed employees have unique perceptions regarding access to EAP stress management resources. A consensus emerged among the participants that physical separation from the corporate office influenced perceptions of access. Participants agreed that being offsite meant a decreased level of awareness and understanding regarding available services and an increased level of time and effort required to find available services. Participants perceived access to EAP stress management services as time-consuming and arduous. The participants suggested

improving EAP communication by incorporating recurring reminders, training and direct

access links so the information is understandable, familiar, and easily accessible to

address immediate concerns in a timely fashion.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____Location: ____ Name of Interviewee: __ Interviewee Code: ____

Opening

Before we begin, I want to thank you for participating in this study. As indicated in the consent form, this interview will be recorded however your identity will always be kept confidential. I will ask a series of questions to gain a better understanding of your perception regarding stress management services available through your employer.

Interview guide

Awareness - Level of knowledge regarding the availability of services

- o What services does your employer offer you as a way to manage stress, if any?
- o Are you aware stress management services are available through your employer's Employee Assistance Program, also known as the EAP? If No skip
    - a. **If yes,** how did you learn about the stress management resources your employer's EAP provides?
    - b. What do you know about the service?
    - c. Are you aware the services are free and confidential? **If yes,** how does this impact your decision to utilize the services?
- o How is EAP information communicated to employees in your organization? Who communicates/distributes the information?
- o Is the level of communication sufficient? Please explain what makes it sufficient or not sufficient.
- o **If Not** what are some ways to improve the way information is communicated?
- o Does working off-site have any effect (positive or negative) on your knowledge of stress management services? **If yes,** what types of things might help improve awareness of stress management services for geographically-distributed employees?
- o Under what circumstances might you choose to use EAP stress management services?
- o Have you ever considered using your employer's EAP stress management services? **If yes,** did you use the EAP services? **If no**, what prevented you from using the EAP services?
- o What is the likelihood you will take advantage of the EAP services (again) and/or recommend the services to others?

Access- Equality in receiving information about and using services regardless of an employee's work location.

How would you describe your ability to access information regarding EAP stress management services? What changes would you recommend to improve access?
- o Do you feel you have the same access to EAP services as your co-located counterparts?
- o In what ways does physical separation from your employer influence your perceptions of access, if at all? What could improve your perceptions?
- o In what ways does physical separation from your employer influence your decision to use EAP services, if at all?
- o What could improve your willingness/ confidence to use EAP stress management services?
- o What would make it easier to use EAP stress management services?
- o In what ways has leadership (or your employer) influenced your ideas about using the EAP stress management services?
- o Is there any additional information that you think might contribute to the study? or Do you have any other thoughts about what we've discussed today that you would like to share?

Ending

Thank you for your participation. The information you shared will be beneficial to the study. If you have additional information that you think might contribute to the study; please contact me using the phone or email address on the consent form. If I require additional clarifications, may I contact you? If you wish, I can make the completed study findings available. With your permission, I would like to follow up to allow you to review and confirm the findings of this study.

Appendix B: Questionnaire Questions

I want to thank you for participating in this study. As indicated in the consent

form your identity will remain confidential. Answering the following questions may help

provide an understanding of your perceptions of access to EAP services as geographically

distributed employee.

History/Experience as geographically distributed Employee

For the purposes of this questionnaire, a geographically distributed employee is defined as an employee who works at a satellite location, a remote location, or a client site away from an employers' headquarters.

- o Which best describes the nature of your current position?
    - o Work at a client site away from employers main location
    - o Work at a remote site away from employers main location
    - o Work between a client site and a remote site away from employers location
    - o Other (please explain)

- o What perceptions do you associate with physical separation from your employer?
    - o Limited access to information OR information is not readily available
    - o Professional isolation /limited or no opportunities to consult and/or connect with professional peers
    - o Social isolation / limited or no opportunities for networking and relationship building with colleagues and supervisor/manager
    - o Geographical isolation from larger community
    - o Disconnect from overall organizational vision and mandate
    - o None of the above
    - o Other please explain

Awareness

- o Are you aware there is a free and confidential employee assistance program available?
    - o Yes
    - o No

- o Are you aware a stress management program is offered as part of the free and confidential employee assistance program?
    - o Yes
    - o No

- o Which information source(s) played a role in your awareness regarding the EAP? (Check all that apply)

    - o Emails
    - o In person Training
    - o Online Training
    - o Onboarding process
    - o Brochures
    - o Other (Please specify).
    - o None

- o Which information source(s) played a role in your awareness regarding EAP stress management services? (Check all that apply)

    - o Emails
    - o In person Training
    - o Online Training
    - o Onboarding process
    - o Brochures
    - o Other (Please specify).
    - o None

- o Which individual(s) played a role in making you aware of the availability of the EAP? (Check all that apply)
    - o Supervisor
    - o Coworker
    - o Human Resource Manager
    - o Other (Please specify).
    - o None

- o Which individual(s) played a role in making you aware of the availability of EAP stress management services? (Check all that apply)
    - o Supervisor
    - o Coworker
    - o Human Resource Manager
    - o Other (Please specify).
    - o None

EAP Use

o Have you or would you consider taking advantage of stress management offered to you through your Employee Assistance Program?
  o Yes
  o No

o If No: From your experience as a geographically distributed employee, which has contributed to your decision to not use EAP stress management services? (check all that apply)
  o A lack of access to services
  o Lack of awareness of services
  o Lack of information
  o Lack of value in services
  o Lack of motivation to seek help
  o Unaware of how to access services
  o Lack of trust
  o None of the above
  o Other please specify

o If you experience stress or problems where would you seek help?
  o EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
  o Self-help strategies (services other than those available through your employer)
  o Friends /family
  o Coworkers
  o Supervisor
  o Community resources
  o Resources through my church
  o Other Please specify

Access –

o As a geographically distributed employee do you perceive your access to EAP as fair?
  o Yes
  o No
  o Other please specify

o From the perspective of a geographically are EAP benefits distributed equally?
  o Yes
  o No
  o Other please specify

- o From the perspective of a geographically are EAP benefits accessible?
    - o Yes
    - o No
    - o Other please specify

Demographic Information

- o What is your Gender
    - o Male
    - o Female
    - o Choose not to answer

- o Age range
    - o 18-24
    - o 25-34
    - o 35-44
    - o 45-54
    - o 55-64
    - o 65-74
    - o 75 or older

- o Length of time with organization
    - o 3-6 months
    - o 6-12 months
    - o 1-5 years
    - o 5-10 years
    - o 10 years or more

- o Level of Education
    - o Bachelors
    - o Masters
    - o Doctorate
    - o None
    - o Other

Thank you for your participation. The information you shared will be beneficial to the study.

Appendix C: Interview Invitation

My name is Davina Smith, and I am doctoral student at Walden University. I would like to invite you to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the unique perceptions of geographically distributed employees like yourself regarding access to stress management services provided by your employers Employee Assistance Program. The findings may help Employers and Employee assistance providers understand the perceptions geographically distributed employees perceive regarding access to EAP stress management services.

I will collect data through an online questionnaire and an interview. If you agree to participate I will first send you a link for an online questionnaire that will take approximately 15-30 minutes to complete. Then I will set up a time to conduct the interview.

The interview may take place in person or over the telephone based on your preference and availability. Your participation is completely voluntary, and there is no penalty for not participating. You have the right to refuse to participate in this project and you may withdraw from the project at any time. At the conclusion of the study, I will share the project results with you and I will also publish the results on Pro Quest, which is an online research database.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Davina Smith, Doctoral Student, Walden University

Appendix D: E-mail Requesting Expert Panel Participation

Title: Expert Panel Participation Request

Dear [Panel Participant name],

My name is Davina Smith and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the College of Social and Behavioral Science at Walden University. I am working on a dissertation study titled *geographically distributed Employees Perceptions of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Access.*

The reason I am writing you is because I am seeking assistance from a few individuals that have expert knowledge about my research topic to provide feedback that will help me refine and improve my interview questions.

The purpose of my interviews are to gather high quality data regarding the perceptions geographically distributed employees hold regarding EAP access.

I would be very appreciative if you would assist me. If you are willing to help, please let me know and I will email you the interview questions for your review.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

I look forward to your participation in assisting me create a quality interview tool.

Thank you,

Davina Smith

Appendix E: Letter of Cooperation From a Research Partner

July 30, 2018

Dear Davina Smith,

Based on our discussion of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Geographically-distributed Employees Perceptions of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Access among the [organizational name redacted] geographically distributed staff. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact, conduct interviews, member check and disseminate findings to staff members. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: providing a list of geographically distributed employees with a minimum of 3 months as a geographically distributed employee. We reserve the right to withdraw support from the study at any time.

I understand that the student will not name our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the raw data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,
Authorization Official
Contact Information