



**Why are recovering substance abuse counselors paid less?**

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The goal of this study is to determine why recovering substance abuse counselors are paid less, on average and controlling for other factors, than nonrecovering substance abuse counselors. The data come from the 2002-2003 wave of the National Treatment Center Study and consist of 1,487 full-time counselors from nationally representative samples of public and private substance abuse treatment programs in the United States. We use ordinary least squares regression models to estimate the differential impacts of numerous personal and program characteristics on the self-reported annual salaries of recovering and nonrecovering counselors. We found that differential returns to a college degree explain the vast majority of the difference in pay by counselor recovery status. Compared to nonrecovering counselors, recovering counselors receive, on average and controlling for other factors, \$2,580 less per year for a college degree. Several possible explanations for this result are discussed, including the possibility that recovering counselors are willing to accept lower pay as a reflection of their "calling" to this work.