

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

An Evaluation of Motivational Interviewing with Clients in a Probation Setting

Harper, R. and Hardy, S. (2000). *An Evaluation of Motivational Interviewing as a Method of Intervention with Clients in a Probation Setting*. British Journal of Social Work, 30: 393-400.

Key Words: MI, attitudinal changes, motivational interviewing, substance abuse, implementation

Summary/Conclusions

The authors work for probation services in the United Kingdom, where they explored the effectiveness of motivational interviewing (MI) with substance abusing probationers. Using a group of officers trained in MI, they measured attitudinal changes on five scales in a sample of their probationers and compared the results to officers who were not trained in MI. Some results for both groups of probationers' showed improvement, but particularly, the researchers concluded, "MI however was more effective than non-MI work in bringing about change in offenders who had drug and alcohol problems."

Limitations of Information

The sample was not randomly selected and the sample size was small in this study, particularly after attrition. This limits the ability to make broad generalizations of the results to other settings. The sample participants were adult probationers, with no juvenile participants. Additionally, this study was conducted with probationers and line officers in the United Kingdom, where daily practices may be different than those in Colorado departments.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Using MI with Probationers

In an effort to measure the impact motivational interviewing (MI) has on probationers, researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study with four local probation teams in Great Britain. Eighteen officers were selected for the treatment group and asked to recruit the first six offenders identified with drug/alcohol problems. A control group of eighteen officers was selected to conduct business as usual.

All offenders were given the CRIME-PICS II (an instrument developed to measure the changes in offenders' attitudes toward offending) before and after the officers' MI training. The assessment has five scales: 1) **G**-general attitude about offending, 2) **A**-anticipation of re-offending, 3) **V**-victim hurt denial, 4) **E**-evaluation of crime as worthwhile, 5) **P**-perception of current life problems.

For the treatment group, the scores on all the scales except V (four out of five scales) showed improvement that was statistically significant. For the control group, only scores on two of the five scales showed statistically significant improvement. On the A and G scales, which reflected significant changes in both groups, the treatment group experienced greater improvement in their scores on the two scales than did the control group.

The researchers further analyzed the results on the P scale, in which both the treatment and control groups rated "drink/drugs" as one of their top three problems at the beginning of the study. After the MI intervention, the treatment

group had a statistically significant lower rating of "drink/drugs" as a problem, while the control group did not experience a significant change in their rating of "drink/drug" as a problem.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Attend state-sponsored Motivational Interviewing training.
- ✓ Improve MI skills by asking a peer or designated change agent to sit in on an appointment every few weeks and provide feedback of MI skills and rapport.
- ✓ Role play scenarios (either anticipated or experienced) with a co-worker or supervisor to sharpen skills through targeted feedback.
- ✓ Assess clients' stage of change and match interventions to their level of readiness.
- ✓ Remember that clients can be at varying stages of change in different areas, so address each need area individually and match interventions accordingly.
- ✓ Meet the client where they are. For clients in an early stage of change take the time to create ambivalence about their situation before making a referral to treatment and enrolling in a program.
- ✓ MI may not be appropriate for all contacts, such as reading terms and conditions. However, consider using an MI sandwich in these instances. For example, begin with open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections; conduct your business; then, close the session with eliciting a plan of action.

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