



Expressions of Resistance to Change at Intake Predict Abstinence One Year Later.

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Abstract

It has long been a goal of substance abuse treatment research to predict which clients among those receiving an intervention will be successful in bringing about adaptive behavior change. Miller and Rollnick (2002) have proposed that client in-session resistance behavior will be negatively associated with substance abuse treatment outcomes. Consequently, specific methods are prescribed when using motivational interviewing in order to minimize the occurrence of in-session resistance. This study investigated the hypothesized relationship between in-session client resistance and subsequent substance use, using 20 client-therapist pairs from a RCT investigating the effectiveness of CRAFT and TSF therapies (Miller, Meyers and Tonigan, 1999). Client resistance behaviors were evaluated using the Motivational Interviewing Skills Code (MISC) and substance abuse was measured as percent days abstinent from all substances at the one year follow up point. We predicted that client verbal expressions that favored change would predict more abstinence, while expressions of resistance to change would predict less abstinence. This latter prediction found support in a regression analysis, which indicated that resistance at intake was negatively correlated with abstinence, as proposed in the MI model. The implications of these findings for the use of motivational interviewing with substance-abusing clients is discussed.

Introduction

Client resistance has long been recognized as an impediment to treatment progress, both in psychotherapy patients in general (Beutler et. al, 1996) and substance abuse in particular (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Despite the theoretical importance of this construct, and previous research indicating its importance in predicting substance abuse outcomes (Miller, Benefield and Tonigan, 1993), it has rarely been operationally defined and measured in substance abuse treatment studies. This is especially noteworthy considering treatment approaches which advocate confrontational interventions for substance abusers despite the increased client resistance engendered.

This study replicates and expands on existing knowledge in this area by 1) measuring resistance with a standardized instrument of proven reliability and 2) using a heterogeneous substance-abusing population being treated 3) in a real-world treatment setting.

Methods

- 20 client-therapist pairs were selected from a RCT comparing the Community Reinforcement Approach (CRAFT) and Twelve-Step Facilitation Therapy (TSF) (Miller, Meyers and Tonigan, 1999).
- Video tapes of one early (sessions 1-4) treatment session per pair were coded using the Motivational Interviewing Skills Code (MISC).
- From MISC, the frequency of client speech expressing resistance to behavioral change (RES) was calculated for each client, and used to predict outcome. MISC measures of client resistance focus on statements indicating arguments for the status quo, enjoyment of substances, minimizing need/reasons to change and hopelessness about change. Raters were blind to treatment condition and the ICC for RES was .845.
- Additional predictors used because of their likely relationship to treatment outcome and resistance included employment status measured at intake as well as self-reported percent days of abstinence from all drugs for 90 days prior to intake (ABS1).
- The outcome measure used was self-reported percent days abstinence from all substances at the 12 month follow up (ABS2).

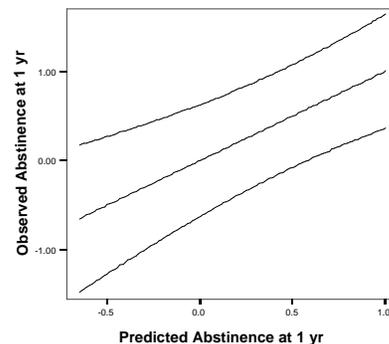


Figure 1: Observed percentage of days abstinent (in 90 days prior to Measurement) at a 1-yr followup as a function of predicted days abstinent.

Results

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(3,17) = 4.72$, $p = .014$, $R^2_{adj} = .358$, $SE = .284$

Resistance language at intake significantly predicted abstinence one year later, $\beta = -.42$, $t = 2.30$, $p = .034$.

Abstinence from all substances at intake significantly predicted abstinence one year later, $\beta = .43$, $t = 2.37$, $p = .03$.

Employment status was not a significant predictor of abstinence at one year, $\beta = -.265$, $t = -1.47$, ns.

Discussion

As predicted, in-session resistance language predicted abstinence one year later. Specifically, more resistance language during an early interview predicted fewer days of abstinence. In fact, in-session client resistance language was a more robust predictor of treatment outcome than employment status and as good a predictor as intake level of substance use. These findings are consistent with a growing body of evidence indicating the importance of accounting for client resistance in substance abuse treatment outcomes. More specifically these data suggest that reducing client resistance during treatment sessions is likely to be associated with better client outcomes. Given previous research (Miller, Benefield & Tonigan, 1993) indicating that specific therapist behaviors (confrontation and warning) are associated with increases in client resistance during treatment sessions, these data suggest proscriptions against a confrontational approach for ambivalent substance-abusing clients, at least during initial sessions.

References

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