

Effectiveness of Spanish-Language Training for Clinicians in Motivational Interviewing

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Abstract

The EMMEE Project (Evaluating Methods for Motivational Enhancement Education) tested the effectiveness of strategies for teaching motivational interviewing (MI) to practicing clinicians who treat substance use disorders. After an initial phase of training 130 English-speaking practitioners, we provided training for 32 Spanish-speaking health professionals. The effectiveness of training was judged from structured coding (via the Motivational Interviewing Skills Code; MISC) of practice tapes before, immediately after, and 4 months after a 2-day training workshop. Gains in MI practice skills were compared for the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking groups of clinicians. On most measures of MI style, the Spanish-speaking sample showed higher levels of skillfulness prior to training, relative to the English-speaking clinicians. Both groups showed large increases in MI practice skills immediately after training, that were maintained 4 months later. On one measure, the percentage of client talk time within session, English speakers increased from roughly 65% to 75%, whereas Spanish speakers declined from 91% to 75%, approaching an optimal level from different directions. For both samples, skill ratings at baseline were below clinical trial practice benchmarks, and increased to a mean level that would be certified as competent in clinical research with an MI protocol.

Adapting Motivational Interviewing

After completing a large randomized trial of clinician training in motivational interviewing (MI), we have begun a series of three projects to evaluate MI training with Spanish-speaking, Native American, and African-American health professionals who treat substance abuse. The primary purpose of these projects is to discover how well and how MI can be adapted to work with ethnic populations. Each is a combination of traditional MI training with an expert-clinician focus group (the participants) to advise on cultural adaptation. This is a report of findings from our first training with Spanish-speaking professionals.

Methods

Spanish-speaking health professionals who treat substance use disorders applied via website to attend a free 2-day MI training workshop with Dr. Yahne. They arranged their own travel to Albuquerque, but their lodging, meals, and all training materials were provided by the study. Participants were required to submit a pre-training audiotaped sample of their usual

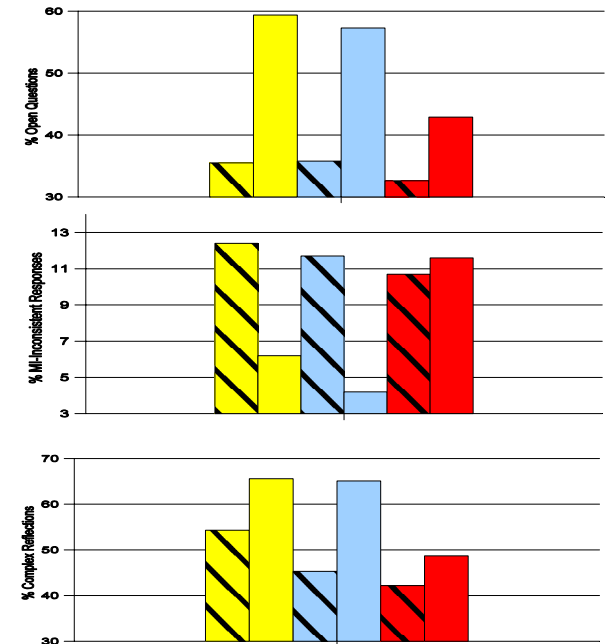
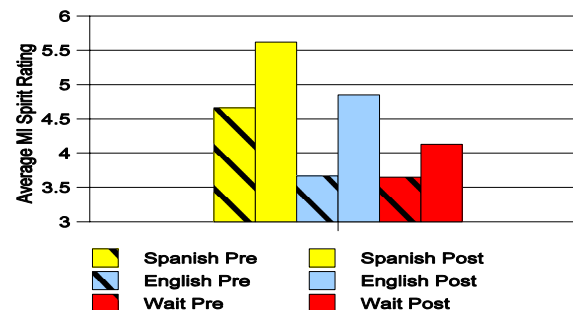
counseling with an actual client, and after training were taped interacting with a standard-patient actor to demonstrate their MI skills acquired during training. They were also asked to provide clinical samples of MI with actual substance abuse clients at 4 months after training, for which they were compensated. Tapes were coded using the Motivational Interviewing Skill Code (MISC; <http://casaa.unm.edu/download/misc.pdf>; Miller & Mount, 2001). Response to training was compared with that of participants in the English-speaking training program.

Results

Participants

A total of 32 health professionals (63% female) enrolled in the study, and completed baseline assessment, training, and post-training assessment. Beyond four (13%) with doctoral degrees, most had masters-level (41%) or no graduate degree (47%). They reported an average of 7 years of experience in treating substance use disorders (range: novice to 20 years). Only 13 returned 4-month follow-up work samples (41%). As in the parent study, proficiency levels from the 4-month tapes showed excellent maintenance of post-training performance, and often continued improvement. The charts below reflect only pre- and post-training data for which the entire sample was available.

On all measures of acquired proficiency in MI, gains coded from the Spanish-language tapes were statistically comparable to those for the English-language clinicians. On several measures, the Spanish-speaking clinicians showed higher baseline levels of MI proficiency, including overall MI style ("spirit"; $ES = .73$), and the use of complex reflections ($ES = .37$). In the ratio of reflections to questions, the Spanish group showed substantially greater improvement after training, as compared with the English-speaking group ($ES = .86$).



Conclusions

When MI training was conducted in Spanish, and proficiency tapes were coded in Spanish, gains in skills during training were at least as large, and in some cases larger, than those demonstrated by the English-language group. Maintenance of skills at 4 months after training also appears to be comparable. Bilingual practitioners who had previously received MI training in English reported anecdotally that they were more able to understand and consolidate MI into their Spanish-language therapy, having received training in Spanish.

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