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The Process of Motivational Interviewing with Offenders

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ABSTRACT

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a form of client-centred psychotherapy that resolves ambivalence and elicits motivation to change problem behaviours (Miller & Rollnick, 2009). An emerging theory suggests that MI works through the combination of a relational component and the goal directed application of MI methods to evoke and reinforce change talk (Miller & Rose, 2009).

A process study was conducted on an adaptation of MI for offenders, the Short Motivational Programme (SMP). The SMP combines MI and cognitive behavioural content across five sessions to enhance motivation for change among medium risk offenders (Devereux, 2009). A single-case design and descriptive statistics were employed and supplemented with inferential statistics. The MI Skills Code 2.1 (Miller, Moyers, Ernst, & Amrhein, 2008) was used to rate the language of 12 facilitators and 26 offenders during 98 video-recorded SMP sessions.

There was some evidence that facilitators were less able to use specific MI methods during sessions that included cognitive behavioural content. Offenders' ambivalence about changing offending behaviour was most pronounced during sessions that included cognitive behavioural content. Offenders' change and committing change talk was highest during sessions without cognitive behavioural content. Offenders who completed the SMP with more commitment to change demonstrated less ambivalence during earlier sessions. The relational component of MI appeared to be related to whether offenders completed the SMP. There was some evidence to support a relationship between the use of MI consistent methods and offender change talk. The use of MI inconsistent methods and a lack of MI consistent methods were related to ambivalence about changing criminal behaviour and premature exit from the SMP. These results suggested that facilitators should judiciously avoid the use of MI inconsistent methods and strategically employ MI consistent methods to reduce offenders' ambivalence about change. The integration of cognitive behavioural content and MI needs to be carefully considered in reference to the aim of each session, the subsequent session, and the programme's overall goal.

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