

Thesis abstract

An examination of the process of motivational interviewing in the anxiety disorders

Mia Romano

Abstract of a thesis for a Doctorate of Philosophy submitted to Macquarie University, Sydney

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a collaborative, client-centred therapy style that aims to prepare people for behaviour change by helping them to explore and resolve ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, 2013). MI was originally developed to treat problematic substance use but is increasingly used as both a stand-alone and adjunctive treatment for a variety of physical and mental health concerns. Proposed mechanisms of MI's success have been well specified. However, most research that examines MI mechanisms and particularly MI's proposed causal model has been conducted in the realm of substance use. Little is known about the generalisability of MI mechanisms from the substance use literature to the other problem areas where MI is being applied. The current thesis aims to address this gap by investigating the process of MI in areas beyond substance use. The thesis combines different approaches to address this central question.

The first two papers in my thesis investigate the current state of MI mechanism research. Paper One is a systematic review of evidence for the causal chain model proposed by Miller and Rose (2009). The review draws together research that tests paths of the causal chain in varying treatment domains. Paper Two is a meta-analysis that investigates MI mechanisms of change in populations diag-

nosed with mood, anxiety, psychotic, and eating disorders, and patients with comorbid mental health conditions. Taken together, the review papers pointed to limited use of control conditions and few investigations of MI mechanisms in the context of anxiety disorders. Therefore, the final three papers of this program of research aim to overcome these limitations and are dedicated to an empirical examination of MI processes in the context of social anxiety disorder (SAD). Each paper employs a sample of adults diagnosed with SAD who were randomised to receive either an MI-style treatment called Treatment Expectations and Engagement (TEE) or a supportive counselling control condition (SC) before all received group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for SAD.

Specifically, Paper Three investigates the capacity of MI to decrease ambivalence for people with social anxiety and examined the impact of client ambivalence on treatment outcome. Paper Four employs observational coding methods to examine the transition between therapist and client behaviour during MI sessions for social anxiety. Finally, Paper Five further explores the relationship between therapist behaviours and client language in MI, as well as the relationship between therapist and client variables and outcome.

The current thesis represents the first examination of MI process variables in an MI-style treatment for SAD. Given that MI is beginning to demonstrate positive effects in terms of engagement and treatment outcome in the realm of anxiety disorders, there is a need to investigate the process through which MI generates such effects. In doing so, we may be able to identify best practice for MI in the treatment of anxiety disorders. The research findings from the current thesis, taken together, support the proposal that MI mechanisms and treatment ingredients

may be important to examine in the context of treatment for anxiety disorders, as well as partly being implicated in the treatment outcome of socially anxious individuals, specifically.

Mia Romano
Department of Psychology
Macquarie University
Sydney NSW 2109
Australia

Email: mia.romano@mq.edu.au