ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Therapeutic Relationships in Mandated Treatment

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Although a substantial body of research indicates that strong therapeutic relationships predict positive clinical outcomes in traditional treatment contexts, it is unclear whether such findings generalize to contexts where clients are required or mandated to participate in treatment by third parties. This study is designed to determine (A) what is the proper operationalization of the mandated treatment relationship and (B) what are the best tools to reliably and validly assess this relationship. To address these two goals, 125 people with serious mental illness mandated to psychiatric treatment through a mental health court participated in a two-hour semi-structured interview in which they rated the INTREX (Benjamin, 2000), a measure that describes the core interpersonal features of the mandated treatment relationship characterized within an interpersonal circumplex framework; the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989), a measure of treatment alliance used widely in voluntary treatment contexts; and the Dual-Role Relationship Inventory (DRI-R; Skeem, Eno Louden, Polaschek, & Camp, 1997), a measure of firm-but-fair relationships in community corrections supervision. Using principally a structural summary approach, which is an appropriate analytical approach for
examining circumplex data, I found that (1) mandated treatment relationships entail much higher pure, or neutral control, and higher affiliative control, relative to voluntary treatment relationships, (2) mandated treatment relationships are largely affiliative, despite the strong presence of control, and (3) the DRI-R is a more face valid measure for these relationships than the WAI, but further conclusions about the measures’ relative strengths are limited by the high inter-correlation of WAI and DRI-R scores. This study is the first known study to examine the form of the mandated therapeutic relationship and investigate the best approach with which to assess it. Replication and more rigorous tests of construct generalization and validation are needed. Proper specification and assessment of the mandated therapeutic relationship is a necessary first step toward understanding the importance of therapeutic relationships in mandated treatment settings.