

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Working Alliance in Treatment of Military Adolescents

Owen, J., Miller, S. D., Seidel, J., & Chow, D. (2016). The working alliance in treatment of military adolescents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 84*(3), 200-210. doi:10.1037/ccp0000035

SUMMARY: Researchers examined the association between working alliance and treatment outcome in a sample of military youth who received psychotherapy for problems related to substance abuse. Participants' ratings on working alliance and treatment outcome were collected during each session. Results supported the change-based model that suggested that adolescents who experienced a growth of alliance over the course of treatment were more likely to achieve better treatment outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The change-based model (i.e., changes in working alliance scores predicted treatment outcome) best predicted how the growth in working alliance between therapist and client affected the treatment outcome.
- On the contrary, the other two models (i.e., one general rating of working alliance score associated with outcome, or an aggregation of working alliance score associated with outcome) could not predict the attribution of working alliance to treatment outcome as well as the change-based model.
- Military adolescents who reported an increased in working alliance experienced the best treatment outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education to military children about the importance of seeking professional help when mental health issues occur
- Collaborate with mental health professionals to develop opportunities for young people to cultivate skills that would enhance the provider-client relationship
- Provide additional prevention/intervention services to military adolescents who may have a substance abuse problem

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage public awareness campaigns about the substance abuse issues faced by military adolescents
- Support training of professionals to pay special attention to nurturing the alliance with youth
- Continue dedicating resources to help military adolescents who have substance abuse problems

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METHODS

- The military adolescents were recruited through the counselling services offered by the Adolescent Support and Counselling Services (ASACS).
- Participants needed to complete the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) and Session Rating Scale (SRS) during each session.
- The ORS measured the psychological well-being/distress of participants, and the SRS measured client's perception of quality of the working alliance with the therapist.

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 2,990 military children who received at least eight psychotherapy sessions for issues related to substance abuse.
- Participants ranged in age from 11 to 19 years old ($M = 14.91$ years, $SD = 1.79$); 48% of them identified as boys, 52% as girls, and 0.3% did not indicate their gender.
- Participants' race and ethnicity were not specified in the article.

LIMITATIONS

- The study only used adolescent ratings of the working alliance and outcome, and no ratings from other perspectives were available.
- Researchers did not have a standard process to determine the diagnosis of each participant, and there was no control for treatment approach, therefore some confounding factors might influence the results.
- The sample was limited to military adolescents who attended therapy for at least eight sessions, so it might be hard to generalize the results to the general population, and to the clients who attended fewer sessions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine how the association between alliance and outcome is modeled; more specifically, it could focus on a more dynamic and change-oriented view of the rapport to understand the alliance-outcome relationship
- Study the characteristics of the therapists whose clients are more likely to experience improvement in working alliance than other therapists' clients
- Utilize standard tests to measure treatment outcomes, and get the alliance data from the therapists' perspectives

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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