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# **Motivational Interviewing Training for Juvenile Correctional Staff in California: One Year Initial Outcomes**

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*This study reports initial results of a program designed to train California corrections staff ( $n = 576$ ) in motivational interviewing (MI), a method of communication that is based on a client-centered, collaborative style. After three days of training, participants made significant gains in terms of knowledge of MI principles and reflective listening skills. Results also indicated that motivation to use MI at baseline was not related to higher scores on the other measures, suggesting that trainees do not have to be motivated toward MI to learn and demonstrate skill gain. Implications of these findings, and their limitations, are discussed.*

**KEYWORDS** *correctional staff, motivational interviewing, training*

## INTRODUCTION

Initially founded on the concept of *parens patriae* or the state as parent, juvenile corrections was oriented to the rehabilitation of youth who became involved with the justice system (Blevins, Cullen, & Sundt, 2008). However, over the past 30 years, the juvenile system has become increasingly punitive as evidenced by the increasing numbers of juveniles incarcerated in the adult system and harsher treatment within the juvenile courts (Benekos & Merlo, 2008). On the other hand, effective rehabilitation programs for youth have also received a great deal of support and many juvenile justice settings are

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moving in that direction, including the use of juvenile drug courts, graduated sanctions, and specific risk assessment batteries with treatment matching (Butts & Mears, 2001). Correctional programs where staff engages offenders using warmth, empathy, genuineness, respect, and flexibility have been found to reduce recidivism (Serin & Shturman, 2007). Correctional officers, however, often view this shift toward rehabilitation with some concern as many see their role as needing to maintain safety or even punish offenders, not to counsel or talk to them (Jen Der Pan, Chang, & Lin, 2007). Being open instead of guarded is sometimes viewed as allowing the offender an opportunity to manipulate the correctional worker (Mann, Ginsburg, & Weekes, 2002; Tracy, 2004).

Motivational interviewing (MI) is an evidence-based practice that has been found effective in promoting initial and longer term positive behavioral changes in offenders resulting in criminal recidivism reduction (Mann et al., 2002; McMurrin, 2009; NIC, 2004; Walters, Clark, Gingerich, & Meltzer, 2007). Further, MI has been found particularly effective with juvenile clients (Feldstein & Ginsburg, 2007). Developed initially for use in substance abuse treatment, it is a method of communication that is person-centered but strategically directive in eliciting from clients their own reasons and motivations for change and for following through on these changes. Essential to MI is having a "spirit" of empathy and collaboration along with skills such as reflective listening, asking open-ended questions, and methods to evoke positive discussion regarding change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). MI is based on several social psychological theories, including self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), and discrepancy theory (Rokeach, 1973). Self-determination theory provides the best overall framework for MI (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005). This theory posits that humans need relatedness to others, a sense of competency, and support of autonomy. Correctional environments are not typically places where these needs can be met. The use of MI in these settings can provide a way for youthful offenders to interact with staff to address these needs within the context of a contained environment (Ginsburg, Mann, Rotgers, & Weekes, 2002). Several studies have assessed the use of MI with youthful offenders. Results indicate that MI can be useful in engaging youth in treatment programming (Sinha, Easton, Renee-Aubin, & Carroll, 2003; Slavet, Stein, Klein, Colby, Barnett, & Monti, 2005; Stein et al., 2006).

Studies regarding the training of criminal justice staff in MI have been mainly limited to the training of probation officers. Results have indicated trainees were able to make skill and knowledge gains but that these gains did not always change interactions with clients (Miller & Mount, 2001; Walters & Alexander, 2008). Other studies however have found that after MI training, offenders rated their probation officers as more helpful and understanding, which in turn was positively associated with their attitudes toward crime and reoffending (Harper & Hardy, 2000; Spiller & Guelfi, 2007).

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

No studies have reported on the training of correctional workers in MI, nor of mandated MI training for all staff in a criminal justice setting. In fact, there is a dearth in knowledge of training of any kind of counseling skills in correctional workers (Jen Der Pan, Chang, & Lin, 2007). The purpose of this study was to address that gap by reporting initial results of a state-wide training project in MI for California juvenile correctional staff in a system that is making a large shift towards a rehabilitation orientation. More specifically, the study was designed to test the hypothesis that an initial three-day training with juvenile correctional workers naïve to MI would result in increased MI knowledge and skills, and heightened motivation to use MI in a correctional setting, even if they had no initial interest in learning or using the MI skills. The present study adds to the knowledge of training of MI in a correctional setting, particularly regarding factors that contribute to knowledge and skill gain among employees to enhance future trainings in similar settings.

## METHOD

A training project in MI is currently underway at the California Department of Corrections, Division of Juvenile Justice (CDCR/DJJ), formerly the California Youth Authority. DJJ maintains eight secure correctional facilities across the state along with parole services. Currently about 2,000 youth 12–25 years old (mean = 19.5) are housed in secure facilities, and another 3,000 are on parole. The average length of incarceration is about two years (CDCR/DJJ, 2006). Typically, the youth in the DJJ system are those who have committed the most serious crimes and have been turned over from jurisdiction of their local counties.

The Cal-METRO (California Motivational Enhancement Toward Rehabilitative Outcomes) training project in MI stems out of the consent decree of *Farrell v. Allen* of 2004 that led to reform. There were problems in California juvenile correctional facilities with violence, lack of safety, insufficient mental health and health care, and a lack of access to treatment, among others. The state used this opportunity to not only address these problems but to make a sweeping reform and begin a culture change from containment and control to a rehabilitation focus, including use of evidence-based practices to provide psychological, drug treatment, and other services (Siggins & Seidlitz, 2008).

A plan was drafted to create a therapeutic environment with a focus on rehabilitation, particularly within the institutional settings. Remediation plans were established regarding health and safety, health care, mental health, education, and also for sexual offenders and youth with disabilities. The plans, for instance, have led to the establishment of small mental health and drug

treatment units in the facilities, crisis response teams, and increased staffing of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and other health care providers. Consistent with a focus on implementation of evidence-based practices, the Safety and Welfare plan called for training for all staff in the use of “motivational enhancement strategies” to engage resistant youth in the various programming opportunities that were being offered (CDCR/DJJ, 2006, p. 3).

The Center for Criminality and Addiction Research, Training, and Application at the University of California San Diego, Department of Psychiatry was selected by the CDCR/DJJ to provide a series of trainings (initial three-day and follow-up two-day sessions) in MI to over 2,000 DJJ employees, including youth correctional officers (security), youth correctional counselors, psychologists, case management specialists, nurses, psychiatric technicians, dentists, physicians, teachers, and teaching assistants. The plan also called for MI training for DJJ trainers. All of the Cal-METRO trainings were to occur over a three-year period. It should be noted that DJJ staff are concurrently being trained in a variety of other evidence-based practices, such as crisis management, risk assessment, and cognitive-behavioral methods (Hohman & Koutsenok, 2008).

## TRAINERS AND THE TRAINING CURRICULUM

Due to the size of the training project, trainers were recruited from across the country. Trainers, many with criminal justice experience and who are members of the MI Network of Trainers (MINT, <http://www.motivational-interview.org>), were recruited from a member listserv. A meeting was held with these trainers to orient them to the three-day curriculum, which was created by two of the authors and other local MINT trainers. The curriculum was refined at this meeting with feedback from the trainers.

The training was based on a standard MI curriculum (Miller & Rollnick, 1991, 2002) with an orientation and examples geared to youth correctional work. Like other MI trainings, the format included conceptual information, demonstration, role-play, other direct skill practice, and coaching (Miller, Yahne, Moyers, Martinez, & Pirritano, 2004). This format has been proposed by Jen Der Pan et al. (2007) as an effective way to train correctional workers in counseling skills. MI trainers are expected to model the MI method, which includes eliciting trainees' thoughts and experiences, demonstrating empathy and support, even if trainees are resistant to concepts or engaging in exercises or role plays, and acting more as a collaborator than an expert in the best ways to utilize MI in the work setting. Assistance in the training was provided by program specialists who were a part of the reform team from DJJ. They were available to answer departmental policy or other concerns that may have been raised during the training. The present study was designed to provide an initial assessment of the training by determining

whether trainees gained knowledge and skills in using MI over the course of the training, and whether these gains were related to demographic variables or to motivation to utilize MI.

All data reported here were collected in the first year of training (2008), during which a total of 23 three-day training sessions were held. Because the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of the initial training on MI knowledge, skills and motivation, we report the findings from the three-day trainings only. Sixteen different trainers provided these trainings and all followed the standard curriculum. Notably, there is substantial variability in sample sizes for the different analyses reported below, for two primary reasons. First, outcome data from four of the early training sessions were excluded due to data collection problems (e.g., failure to label some questionnaires as pretest vs. posttest, failure to distribute some questionnaires). Data from these trainings were included in compiling demographic information but are not included in the analyses of outcome data. Participants in these four training sessions did not differ from participants in the other 19 sessions on any demographic variables. Second, participants were asked to include a unique identifier to be written on each questionnaire to allow matching of demographic information, pretests, and posttests. While the majority of trainees did as requested, others either failed to do so or inadvertently used a different identifier on day three than they did on day one, causing us to be unable to match their pre- and posttests. Consequently, pre- and posttest data were available for 52–69% of trainees, depending on the outcome. It was not possible to directly determine the extent to which trainees' failure to provide matching identifiers on all questionnaires was intentional. Demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, occupation, race/ethnicity, years at DJJ) did not differ for cases where data were missing and those that did not have missing data.

## Participants

Corrections employees ( $n=576$ ) attended a three-day training in MI conducted by one or two experienced, certified MI trainers. Trainees' mean age was 43.6 years ( $SD=10.1$ ), and 58% were male. In terms of race and ethnicity, 36% identified themselves as White, 26% as African American, and 24% as Hispanic/Latino. Other demographic data are shown in Table 1.

## Procedure

DJJ employees were mandated to attend the trainings, as described above. Data were collected for evaluation purposes and were anonymous, with trainees using unique identifiers for pre/post matching purposes. Trainees who agreed to participate completed a set of questionnaires at the beginning of the first day and again at the end of the final day.

**TABLE 1** Demographic Data ( $n = 576$ )

Variable	Proportion or $M$ ( $SD$ )
Education Position	
Bachelor's degree or higher	58%
Youth correctional counselor	47%
Parole or security	18%
Psychology/medical/dental	15%
Teacher/teacher's aide	12%
Other	8%
Tenure	
Years of DJJ employment	10.0 (8.5)
Years at current position	6.5 (7.4)
Training	
Previous training in MI	15%

## Measures

### QUICK READINESS MEASURE (QRM)

Similar to the readiness ruler used by Heather, Smailes, and Cassidy (2008), the QRM consisted of a single item that was designed for this study: "How motivated are you to utilize MI in your work with DJJ youth?" The item was rated on a scale from 1 (*not motivated at all*) to 10 (*extremely motivated*). A definition of MI was provided with the scale. The QRM was administered at the start of the trainings and at the end of the trainings.

### MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDES TEST (MIKAT)

The MIKAT is a 15-item scale that was used to test participants' knowledge of MI principles (Leffingwell, 2006). The first 14 items ask participants to indicate whether a statement (e.g., "Empathy is demonstrated through skillful reflective listening") is true or false. The final item lists 15 ways of interacting (e.g., "express empathy," "give direct advice") and asks trainees to check those that are consistent with an MI approach. The MIKAT was administered on days one and three of the training.

### WORKER RESPONSES QUESTIONNAIRE (WRQ)

The WRQ was adapted from the Officer Responses Questionnaire (ORQ) (Walters & Alexander, 2008) which was written for adult probation officers. This had been adapted from the Helpful Responses Questionnaire (HRQ) (Miller, Hedrick, & Orlofsky, 1991) which has been used in evaluation of MI training with counselors and therapists (Baer et al., 2004; Miller & Mount, 2001). Trainees were given a list of five vignettes of two to three sentences each, describing interactions with juveniles consistent with what they might experience in their work. They were then asked to write, in one or two sentences, the next thing they would say if they wanted to let the person know

they were listening. Each item was scored on a scale from 0–5, with higher scores indicating greater consistency with MI principles. The WRQ was administered on the first and last days of the training.

### Analytic Plan

Prior to examining change in the primary outcome variables, we explored whether any demographic variables were significantly associated with questionnaire scores. We then used repeated measures analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) to assess change in QRM, MIKAT, and WRQ scores from pre- to posttest. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were also used to determine the effect of motivation to learn MI on changes in MI knowledge and skills. Age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and employment type were included as covariates in each analysis. For the purposes of these analyses, employment type was recoded into five categories: youth correctional counselor ( $n=271$ , 47% of the sample); health professional (e.g., physician, dentist, nurse, psychologist;  $n=86$ , 15%); security (e.g., parole officer, youth correctional officer, sergeant;  $n=104$ , 18%); education (e.g., teacher, principal, resource specialist;  $n=69$ , 12%); and other ( $n=46$ , 8%).

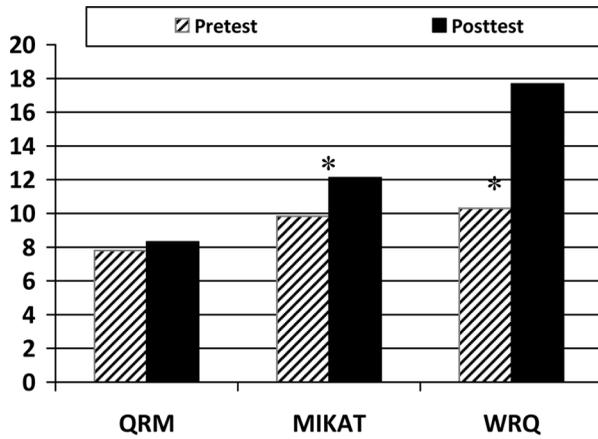
## RESULTS

### Quick Readiness Measure

QRM scores for both pre- and post-test were available for 370 trainees. As shown on Figure 1, scores increased somewhat from pretest ( $M=7.80$ ,  $SD=1.84$ ) to posttest ( $M=8.31$ ,  $SD=1.56$ ), but the difference was not significant [ $F(1, 359)=1.43$ ,  $p=.233$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.004$ ]. Within-subjects effects indicated that none of the covariates was a significant predictor of pretest to posttest change in QRM scores. As Table 2 shows, however, there were significant effects of age, gender, and education on QRM scores across measurements. Specifically, trainees who were older, female, and had more education tended to report greater motivation to use MI than others.

### Motivational Interviewing Knowledge and Attitudes Test

Pre- and posttest MIKAT data were available from 343 trainees. As shown in Figure 1, MIKAT scores increased from 9.83 ( $SD=2.81$ ) at the pre-test to 12.12 ( $SD=2.68$ ) at the post-test, a significant difference [ $F(1, 339)=18.63$ ,  $p<.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.05$ ]. None of the covariates significantly predicted change in MIKAT scores over time. Covariate effects across time are shown in Table 3. There were significant effects of race/ethnicity and education, such that trainees who identified themselves as Caucasian and those with more education scored higher on the MIKAT at both pre- and posttest.



Note. QRM = Quick Readiness Measure;  
 MIKAT = Motivational Interviewing Knowledge and Attitudes Test;  
 WRQ = Worker Responses Questionnaire.  
 \* indicates  $p < .05$ .

**FIGURE 1** Pre- and posttest outcome measures.

**TABLE 2** Covariate Effects on Motivation to use MI Techniques

Variable	$F(1, 359)$	$p$	Partial $\eta^2$
Intercept	126.39	.000	0.260
Age	5.48	.020	0.015
Gender	13.93	.000	0.037
Race/Ethnicity	2.25	.134	0.006
Education	6.94	.009	0.019
Employment Type	1.05	.307	0.003

Note.  $\eta^2$  = eta squared.

**TABLE 3** Covariate Effects on Knowledge of MI Principles

Variable	$F(1, 332)$	$p$	Partial $\eta^2$
Intercept	87.19	.000	0.208
Age	0.37	.546	0.001
Gender	2.02	.156	0.006
Race/Ethnicity	7.31	.007	0.022
Education	58.92	.000	0.151
Employment type	0.82	.365	0.002

Note.  $\eta^2$  = eta squared.

**TABLE 4** Covariate Effects on WRQ Scores

Variable	<i>F</i> (1, 276)	<i>p</i>	Partial $\eta^2$
Intercept	36.03	.000	0.115
Age	0.32	.572	0.001
Gender	10.95	.001	0.038
Race/Ethnicity	2.82	.094	0.010
Education	20.62	.000	0.070
Employment type	0.97	.327	0.003

Note.  $\eta^2$  = eta squared.

### Worker Responses Questionnaire

WRQ data were available for 286 participants. There was a significant pre- ( $M=10.31$ ,  $SD=5.20$ ) to posttest ( $M=17.68$ ,  $SD=4.75$ ) increase in WRQ scores [ $F(1, 282)=46.13$ ,  $p<.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.14$ ; see Figure 1]. In terms of covariates, there was a significant gender effect (Table 4), such that female trainees had higher WRQ scores at both measurements. There was also a significant education  $\times$  time interaction [ $F(1, 282)=12.64$ ,  $p<.001$ , partial  $\eta^2=0.04$ ], indicating that while more education was associated with higher WRQ scores at both timepoints, the association was stronger at baseline than it was at the post-test, as trainees with less education tended to demonstrate greater WRQ gains.

### Effect of Motivation

Two OLS regression analyses were used to determine the influence of motivation on changes in MIKAT and WRQ scores from baseline to posttest. Simple difference scores (i.e., posttest-pretest) were calculated for both the MIKAT and WRQ and entered as the outcome variable. Demographic variables (age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and employment type) were entered as predictors in the first block. Pretest MIKAT or WRQ score was also

**TABLE 5** Effect of Motivation to Use MI on Change in Knowledge of MI Principles

Block	Variable	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Block 1 $R^2=0.31$ , $F(6, 311)=22.80$ , $p<.001$	Age	0.01	0.11	.915
	Gender	-0.01	-0.07	.947
	Race/Ethnicity	-0.02	-0.33	.741
	Education	0.15	2.82	.005
	Employment type	0.07	1.41	.160
	Baseline MIKAT score	-0.59	-11.25	<.001
Block 2 $R^2$ change = 0.00, $F(1, 310)=.01$ , $p=.937$	Motivation to use MI	-0.01	-0.08	.937

**TABLE 6** Effect of Motivation to Use MI on Change in WRQ Scores

Block	Variable	$\beta$	t	p
Block 1 $R^2 = 0.37$ , $F(6, 249) = 26.66$ , $p < .001$	Age	-0.05	-0.96	.340
	Gender	0.16	3.12	.002
	Race/Ethnicity	-0.04	-0.75	.456
	Education	-0.01	-0.24	.813
	Employment type	-0.02	-0.39	.694
Block 2 $R^2$ change = 0.00, $F(1, 248) = .03$ , $p = .863$	Baseline WRQ score	-0.61	-11.15	<.001
	Motivation to use MI	-0.01	-0.17	.863

entered in the first block and pretest QRM scores in the second step to account for baseline effects. In the analyses of both the MIKAT (Table 5) and WRQ (Table 6), motivation to learn MI was not a significant predictor of knowledge or skills gains.

## DISCUSSION

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation/Division of Juvenile Justice is undergoing a great deal of change as a result of a court order. Being told that one's work needs to be changed can produce a good deal of resistance and reluctance to embrace the court-ordered methods. Despite being mandated to attend training in MI, results of the first year of training indicated that DJJ trainees made significant gains in MI knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The relationship between these gains and gender and higher educational attainment may be related to openness in general towards humanistic or rehabilitative methods, or to more and more recent experience in a training environment. That these skill gains were not related to tenure or position is important as it indicates that staff is open to learn, despite job roles or length of time in their current positions.

The fact that trainees improved their knowledge of MI principles and their MI skills from pre- to posttest suggests that the curriculum has generally been successful. Our findings indicate that it is possible to implement an intensive but relatively brief MI training program in a large institutional setting, even in the context of multiple other ongoing training programs. These data also indicate the importance of maximizing trainee concerns about privacy when collecting data to assess such training programs. As noted previously, we are unable to determine the extent to which trainees purposely failed to use a consistent identifying code on assessment forms. However, some trainees did express concerns about whether their supervisors would have access to the results of identifiable employees. Although trainers assured participants of confidentiality, it is likely that some portion of the

sample was sufficiently concerned that they were unwilling to use the same identifying code across measurements.

That initial motivation to use MI was not related to higher scores on the measures at post-test suggests that mandated training can still produce benefits. However, while it appears that trainees made gains in their skills, training research has demonstrated that often these skills tend to disappear with time, and that pen-and-paper measures are not necessarily related to actual skill gain or use (Miller & Mount, 2001; Miller et al., 2004). To address this problem, DJJ had contracted for additional two-day trainings as indicated as well as a live-skill demonstration role play with a simulated client. To fully implement the rehabilitation-orientation and skills among staff, DJJ has included a component to instruct their own trainers in training MI principles as well as in coaching MI. System-wide implementation plans such as this are recommended to truly make cultural changes in corrections work (Alexander & Walters, 2008). Research has also indicated that the best way to learn MI is through audio taping of client interactions, coding of the tapes, and feedback with coaching, all done over a length of time (Miller et al., 2004). Due to the size of the CDCR/DJJ this is not feasible, but the agency is making an effort to give in-depth training and the opportunity for individual feedback to each employee.

Practice implications of this study include information for other large systems that may implement agency-wide MI training, particularly within criminal justice settings. Mandating training for all staff can produce benefits; however to maintain these benefits, there must be follow-up observation and coaching to maintain skill gains. It is easy to slip back to old methods of interaction, particularly when under stress (Miller & Mount, 2001).

Further research will explore the relationship between initial skill gains at the first training and maintenance of these skills at the second, follow-up training, and the trainee characteristics that are related to these gains. Trainee performance in the live role play will also be reported in future studies. Ideally, future research should assess the extent to which MI is implemented in real-life interactions with DJJ wards, and the effect of this style of communication in engaging youth and managing behavior.

An important limitation of the present study is that we were unable to determine whether staff are using MI in their work, or whether the trainings have influenced long-term outcomes for youth offenders. As part of the reform, employees are simultaneously being trained in other areas of evidence-based practices, such as cognitive behavioral work and crisis intervention, thus making it difficult to tease out the impact of MI. Other limitations of this study include the fact that almost half of the Worker Response Questionnaires were missing for almost half the cases. Not all trainees submitted evaluation materials and we were unable to determine whether the nonparticipants are different from those who participated in terms of motivation. It may be those who participated were more interested or motivated to learn and use MI to begin with.

DJJ has taken important first steps in implementing a rehabilitation orientation. This study found that the trainees were able to demonstrate skill gains whether or not they were motivated to learn MI, and that these gains were achieved across all job categories. Embedding this training within a context that supports continued skill practice and encourages combining MI skills with other methods will allow for these gains to become a part of corrections practice, as envisioned in the remedial plan.

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