Comparing Perceptions of Motivation to Change: Clinicians Versus Their Substance-Abuse Clients

Arthur Tabrizi, BA
School of Social Work, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract

Although some clients enter treatment voluntarily to seek intervention for their substance abuse problems, most enter under coercive external pressures that may be perceived by clinicians as less influenced by addressing substance abuse than by appeasing mandates from the judicial system, family, or employers. Little research has examined and compared how clinicians assess clients’ extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to change as opposed to how the clients assess themselves. A congruency between the two parties’ assessments may inform the quality of the therapeutic relationship and facilitate an effective treatment plan. Using the Circumstance, Motivation, and Readiness Scales (CMR) and availability sampling methods, we surveyed both the clinicians and their clients (N = 31 clients and 11 clinicians). Results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the ratings of the clinicians and their clients. The clinicians tended to rate the clients as having lower motivation and being less ready to change than the clients rated themselves. In addition, the clinicians rated three groups of clients similarly; no significant difference existed comparing (a) a court-mandated group, (b) a conditional (e.g., referred by family or welfare office), and (c) a voluntary group. Likewise, there was no significant difference with respect to clients’ own ratings, comparing the three client groups. Implications for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.