2012

Treatment Retention Intervention for Emerging Adults in Outpatient Psychotherapy

Lisa Mistler
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Maryann Davis
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Ashli J. Sheidow
*Medical University of South Carolina*

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Repository Citation
Mistler, Lisa; Davis, Maryann; and Sheidow, Ashli J., "Treatment Retention Intervention for Emerging Adults in Outpatient Psychotherapy" (2012). *Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center Publications and Presentations*. 636.
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Emerging Adults (ages 18-25) with serious mental health conditions have poor functioning, yet are more likely to drop out of treatment than older adults.

Our logic model proposes that the MET improves therapeutic alliance, increases client self-efficacy and normalizes beliefs about therapy via decreasing ambivalence and increasing intention to stay in therapy.

We developed a manualized MET to be used prior to other treatment (MET-EA) and conducted a randomized trial of the MET compared to usual treatment in a community mental health agency.

Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) is a structured brief form of Motivational Interviewing (MI) with demonstrated effectiveness for treatment retention in adults, but has not been used in emerging adults for treatment retention.

Characteristics of Emerging Adults That May Impede Typical Engagement
- Rejection of authority as part of identity formation
- Irrelevance of the direction of therapy to the actual problems they face
- Less mature goal setting and pursuit.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) Principles fit with Emerging Adult needs

R = resist righting reflex
emerging adults more likely to follow through if they come up with answers

U = understand client
open questions, affirmations and reflections support therapeutic alliance with emerging adult

I = listen to client
emerging adults fear stigma and being judged; MI emphasizes a non judgmental stance

E = empower client
emerging adults tend to reject and challenge authority; MI is a collaboration of partners

Instruments

Therapist Fidelity
- 18-25 yrs old
- Initiating voluntary individual outpatient psychotherapy
- No PDD or moderate/severe MR
- Empower client
- emerging adults tend to reject and challenge authority; MI is a collaboration of partners

Mechanisms of Action
- Intention to attend Tx
- Ambivalence about attending Tx

MET-EA
- Reflective listening, acceptance & affirmation, client choice & control, directive
- Elicit clients’ reasons for seeking psychotherapy
- Explore history distress/coping, therapy experience/hopes
- Provide education about therapy
- Collaborate on problem-solving client-identified treatment barriers.
- Negotiate a plan for staying in treatment
- Identify & explore ambivalence about Tx

Instrumental Goals
- Strong working alliance
- Strong therapy self-efficacy
- Positive beliefs about therapy

Ultimate Goals
- Sessions attended
- Missed sessions
- Treatment dropout
- Distress

Client Moderators
- Executive Functioning
- Identity Formation Clarity
- Social Support for Treatment
- Sociodemographics
- Baseline symptoms and distress
- Baseline change readiness

Funding for this research comes from the National Institute of Mental Health (RC1MH088542-02) to PI Davis.