

Adapting Motivational Interviewing to the Filipino Cultural Context

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a humanistic, person-centered approach to communication that encourages a person's intrinsic motivation to change. MI is based on the four elements of partnership, acceptance, evocation, and compassion. It acts as an alternative to confrontational, directive approaches, as it works to avoid imposing external pressure by eliciting a client's own commitment to change.



In this research brief, we reflect on the experiences of social workers using MI with survivors of human trafficking and their family members in the Philippines. Growing findings have shown the importance of culturally adapting MI. Though the majority of research on the cultural adaptation of MI has focussed on Latinx and Native American populations, there is limited research on culutral adaptation of MI in Asia. Our observations regarding the use of MI in the Filipino context could inform social work practitioners' implementation of MI in contexts in which cultural adaptation has not yet been conducted. For this paper, we drew upon from feedback received from service providers in the Philippines through group discussions and documentation of field practices, as well as our own practice experiences. Our observations regarding the adaptation/ implementation of MI in the Filipino context reveal the following themes:

Authority Patterns

MI takes a person-centered approach and recognizes the client as an expert on their own experiences. Research has shown that individuals from certain cultural backgrounds may not be comfortable with this highly person-centred approach. In the Philippines, authority patterns can conflict with MI. Clients and social workers may be accustomed to hierarchical, prescriptive relationships in which the worker enforces direction to change unto the client. In MI, the focus is on the client's individualized pace and on the person gaining motivation for change internally. For effective MI implementation, it is important to have a supportive institutional environment with an alignment of organizational values and MI.

Change Talk

In MI, change talk refers to speech from the client that indicates a desired change. MI uses

techniques to evoke change talk from the client. In culturally adapting MI, change talk is recommended to include broader social and cultural contexts that impacts the client's behavior. In the Filipino context, one could consider the significance of family and concepts such as "kapwa" and "utang na loob" in eliciting change talk.



Manifestations of Resistance

In MI, the notion of resistance to change within MI consists of two types of behaviors: sustain talk and discord. Sustain talk refers to verbalizations of a desire to keep status quo. Discord is dissonance in the relationship between the worker and client. Forms of "resistance" in the Philippines commonly include more indirect means, such as not showing up for meetings or disappearing from contact. These indirect forms of "resistance" can be linked to cultural values of mutual cooperation and social acceptance. In MI, the recommended response is to "roll with resistance," which means to pause, reflect, and utilize different strategies to affirm clients' autonomy. In the Filipino context and in our experience, our first response is to give space to the client before reaching out and returning to the initial stages of MI process engagement.

Language

In MI, the DARN-CAT mnemonic refers to clients' change talk: DARN presents the preparatory change talk of the clients' desire, ability, reason and need to change, whilst CAT refers to the clients' commitment, activation, and taking steps towards change. It is important to attend to linguistic nuances when listening for client change talk. For example, clients will often state they "will try" to engage in change behavior. However, in the Visayan language there are many words for "try" which indicate different meanings and levels of commitment. It is important for MI practitioners to acknowledge subtle distinctions in translations of the DARN-CAT, and consider differences in meaning. Practitioners can ask what the words mean to clients themselves, allowing space for clients to describe what aspects of change talk mean to them.

Working with Marginalized Populations

Research has shown that marginalized people may respond positively to MI due its person-centred nature, which can be a welcome contrast to more top-down approaches. Legacies of colonization in the Philippines have solidified a hierarchical social order, which can be perpetuated by social work systems through one-sided control patterns minimizing client autonomy. MI works to avoid pushing clients to meet demands of oppressive systems and perpetuating this social order. Cultural adaptation of MI should expand the focus from the individual to broader socio-cultural contexts, and recognize social structures which impact marginalized communities.

Summary of Recommendations

Our recommendations based on our practice experience include:

- ❖ Adaptations in understanding resistance: There should be an acknowledgement of the **cultural norms surrounding resistance** to change since discord and sustain talk can vary in different cultural contexts. Attempts to **“roll with resistance”** and proceed at the clients’ own pace may differ according to how clients culturally manifest “resistance.”
- ❖ Heightened **awareness of family and community** when evoking change talk. Filipino concepts such as “kapwa” influences clients’ motivations and perspectives on making changes.
- ❖ **Sensitivity to authority patterns:** Common authority patterns produce hierarchical relationships which the MI process works to avoid. MI should be supported by an institutional system which aligns itself with these values.
- ❖ Careful translation that reflects **nuances within and across dialects:** In change talk, it is important to acknowledge the varying meanings behind word choice. Practitioners can use language that mirrors the language of clients, showing sensitivity to linguistic nuances.
- ❖ Attention to the **context of the social work profession** and to the broader **social structures that impact marginalized populations.** Culturally adapted MI may be particularly appropriate for marginalized communities.



Why it matters

- MI holds promise as an alternative to hierarchical, confrontational approaches to achieving behavioral change.
- MI is particularly appropriate for survivors of human trafficking and GBV, as it is trauma-informed and centers survivor autonomy.
- Research demonstrates that culturally adapting MI increases its effectiveness. However, very little work has been done on cultural adaptation of MI in Asia, underscoring the importance of prioritizing cultural adaptation in Asian contexts.