

Measuring Working Alliance with Non-Voluntary Clients:
An Investigation of Response Validity

Executive Summary

Dr. Tony Tatman, Licensed Psychologist and Clinical Services Manager for the 5th Judicial District recently conducted a study using the Working Alliance Inventory-Short, *“Working Alliance Inventory-Short Reliability: Anonymous Versus Identifiable Assessments with Non-Voluntary Clients.”* We all know that a strong working alliance between a probation/parole officer (PPO) or treatment provider and an offender predicts successful treatment outcomes and reduces recidivism. However, working alliance research with non-voluntary clients makes the underlying assumption that the responses provided by the clients are valid in respect to their honest endorsements of their PPO or treatment provider. It was Dr. Tatman’s view that this assumption is a major limitation in the existing working alliance research due to the high probability that non-voluntary clients will over endorse a positive alliance with their Court ordered therapist or PPO in order to remain in their good graces. To date, no research has been conducted that investigates the validity or authenticity of non-voluntary client’s endorsements of the working alliance with their providers. Therefore, Dr. Tatman asked the question “Are non-voluntary client’s anonymous endorsements of the working alliance statistically similar or different from identifiable endorsements?”

In order to answer this question a group of adult male convicted of sexual offenders who were sentenced to probation or parole and sex offender treatment were asked to complete 2 administrations of the Working Alliance Inventory-Short (WAI-S). Offenders were asked to

complete the first WAI-S anonymously, only identifying their PPO and treatment provider. Three weeks later the same group of offenders were asked to complete the WAI-S again, however were required to identify themselves on the form.

Results of this study revealed no statistically significant difference between the anonymous and identifiable WAI-S administrations. This finding adds to the existing literature, and is valuable to corrections personnel, in two unique ways. First, this research provides empirical evidence that the WAI-S is a reliable tool to use with non-voluntary, adult clients. Second, this study has particular implications for future longitudinal research on the working alliance and offender recidivism, in that researchers can feel more comfortable knowing that, statistically, a client's endorsement of their PPO or therapist is an valid and authentic interpretation of the alliance, and therefore a valid predictive measure of recidivism.