

Strength Based Interventions Within the Context of Risk Need Responsivity; Supporting a Treatment Milieu Through Positive Psychology, while Targeting the Reduction of Risks and Enhancement of Protective Qualities

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Background

Positive Psychology is an effective approach for motivating patients to engage in treatment. Working from the perspective of the Self-Regulation/Better Life (SR/BL) models, and Risk Need Responsivity principles, foundational principles from Positive Psychology were incorporated into a formalized treatment group. The Risk Need Responsivity principles assist the providers to focus treatment efforts on those factors that are most likely to impact reoffending while delivering treatment in ways that the client can maximally benefit. The Self-Regulation/Better Life (SR/BL) models, stresses that common human goods and the pursuit of these goods, in a pro social manner, is integral to living a life free of recidivism; a life that is fulfilling, engaging, and meaningful.

Incorporation of positive psychology and strength based psychotherapy supports patients by bolstering their protective factors and allowing the patient to move from avoidance to strength; enhancing their skills, abilities, and resources. The application of positive psychology to forensic mental health treatment does not imply that one should ignore criminogenic thoughts, behaviors, or emotions; states that are maladaptive and interfere or impair daily living. Rather, positive psychology emphasizes enhancing personal strengths to reduce risk factors and replace abusive behaviors with behaviors that are life enhancing, free from recidivistic tendencies (Marshall, Marshall, Serran and O'Brian 2011).

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what goes right and what encourages a person to engage in life in ways that motivate them to find meaning and flourish in their everyday interactions.

When strengths are focused upon, patients have increased optimism, hope, and an overall positive outlook on their future and life goals. The exploration of self-identification of strengths, successful deployment of the principles of positive psychology, along with identifying protective factors may increase successful in reintegration and establishing a pro social way of life. This group was developed so that patients in forensic mental health could discover, more comprehensively, their self-identified strengths, using them in daily life to cultivate and build an offense free future. The focus of the group aimed to encourage the patient to consider how one can be at their best, understand their personal strengths, build protective qualities, and work towards utilizing these factors to live an engaged and fulfilling life.

Research on strength based psychological interventions found that identifying, activity using, and building personal strengths, in turn, broaden the repertoire of positive emotions and cognitions they can experience, which facilitates a greater sense of wellbeing, allowing a person the flourish. (Quinlan, Swain, and Vella-Brodick, 2011).

Virtues & Strengths

VIRTUES AND STRENGTHS	DEFINITIONS
Wisdom and Knowledge Creativity Curiosity Judgment Love of Learning Perspective	Cognitive strengths that entail acquisition of wisdom and knowledge Thinking of novel and productive ways of doing things Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience Thinking things through and examining them from all sides Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge Being able to provide wise counsel to others
Courage Bravery Perseverance Honesty Zest	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals Speaking the truth and presenting in a genuine way Nor shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty or pain Finishing what one starts Approaching life with excitement and energy
Humanity Love Kindness Social intelligence	Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others Doing favors and good deeds for others Valuing close relationships with others Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
Justice Teamwork Fairness Leadership	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life Treating all people the same according to the notions of fairness and respect Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen Working well with members of a group or team
Temperance Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-Regulation	Strengths that protect against excesses Forgiving those who have done you wrong Letting ones accomplishments speak for themselves Being careful about ones choices Regulating what one feels and does
Transcendence Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence Gratitude Hope Humor Spirituality	Strengths that forge connections to larger universe and provides meaning Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen Expecting the best and working to achieve it Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Risk Factors & Strengths

Criminogenic Dynamic Risk Factor	VIA-IS Identified Strengths
Significant Social Influence	Judgment, Perspective, Honesty, Social IQ
Capacity for Relationship Stability	Perseverance, Zest, Honesty, Love, Humility, Social IQ, and Gratitude
Impulsive Acts	Judgment, Perspective, Honesty, Spirituality, and Self-Regulation
Poor Cognitive Problem Solving	Judgment, Perspective, Creativity, Self-Regulation

Protective Qualities

Individuals that have history of criminogenic sexual behavior were encouraged to develop and sustain protective factors to reduce their risk. Vries Robbe et al (2014) suggested the, "definition of protective factors should encompass social, interpersonal, and environmental factors as well as psychological and behavioral features." In this psychotherapy treatment group members seek to remediate conscious and unconscious criminogenic thoughts and behaviors. Group interactions provide members a level of support, caring, and confrontation that has illuminated open discourse and analytic analysis. These dialogues among group members and facilitators have been important in bringing about change. Over time group themes emerged highlighting the interplay between criminogenic dynamic risk factors and the conscious awareness of strengths improved. Members reported the presence of strength and shared situations when strength supported healthy, pro social interaction across multiple life domains. Clinician and other support staff members began to note the following behavioral changes among treatment participants in a controlled facility. Participants were observed and reported having: 1. Increased overall treatment engagement, 2. Increased willingness to hear and consider feedback from peers and staff, 3. Improved relationships among peers, family members, and staff, and 4. A willingness to assist and help peers or family members. Clinicians noted group themes that emerged. Multiple group members behavioral changes included an inter and intra process which extended beyond the absence of the risk factor; group members reported having more meaningful interactions, and an increased positive outlook on life.

Future Direction

The Positive Psychology pilot program has sought to merge the current risk focused forensic treatment modalities with the recent research on what makes humans live with meaning and engagement. Our hypothesis was that patients who felt more efficacious within their own lives producing strength based actions would show an increased ability to utilize protective qualities to decrease risks. While this seems to be the case, more investigation needs to be done to ascertain what factors truly reduce risks as well as bolster protective qualities in forensic mental health.

References

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