

Motivational Interviewing and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Dual Approach to Substance Use Treatment

Maria Hu, DSW, LCSW

Level

Intermediate

Room

Track

Substance Use Disorder

CE

CPA/BBS/CJER

Bio

Maria Hu, DSW, LCSW, is a clinical trainer with UCLA's Integrated Substance Abuse Programs (ISAP) and the Pacific Southwest Addiction Technology Transfer Center (PSATTC). She earned her Doctorate in Social Work from the University of Southern California, specializing in social justice and mental health. Maria has worked in the behavioral health field since 2006, providing culturally responsive mental health and substance use treatment to diverse communities.

Maria has also worked extensively in psychiatry, where she provided clinical oversight and training to multidisciplinary teams treating co-occurring disorders. In this role, she trained clinicians to effectively assess, engage, and treat individuals with substance use disorders and complex mental health conditions, emphasizing integrated and evidence-based approaches. She has delivered numerous trainings to clinical and non-clinical audiences on topics including the synergy of Motivational Interviewing and trauma-informed practices, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for substance use disorders, chronic pain, anxiety, and depression, Problem Solving Therapy, multicultural counseling, cultural humility, suicide prevention, race-based traumatic stress. She is formally trained in EMDR and has been practicing it with clients presenting with an array of conditions, including trauma and co-occurring behavioral health needs.

In addition to her training and clinical leadership, Maria has served as a professor and lecturer, teaching future clinicians how to provide services grounded in research, cultural humility, and self-reflection. Her presentation on polysubstance use draws upon her experience integrating research, clinical practice, and skills-based training to support professionals working with individuals experiencing substance use conditions.

Narrative

Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) are two evidence-based approaches that work together to support individuals seeking change in substance use. MI helps clients explore their ambivalence and strengthen their internal motivation by using open-ended questions, affirmations, and reflective listening. This creates a non-judgmental, collaborative environment where clients feel heard rather than pressured, allowing them to articulate their own reasons for change.

Once motivation begins to develop, CBT provides the practical tools needed to understand and modify the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that drive substance use. Through techniques such as identifying triggers, recognizing unhelpful thinking patterns, building coping skills, and practicing alternative behaviors, clients learn how to manage cravings, reduce high-risk situations, and develop new habits.

Together, MI and CBT offer a dual approach. When combined, these methods improve engagement, reduce resistance, and support sustainable recovery by aligning client motivation with concrete behavioral strategies.

Learning Objectives

- Identify two Motivational Interviewing (MI) strategies that reduce ambivalence and enhance client engagement in substance use treatment
- Identify one component of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) model specifically the Thoughts–Feelings–Behavior cycle as it relate to substance use patterns
- Apply one combined MI + CBT technique by creating a response that uses an MI reflection alongside a CBT strategy