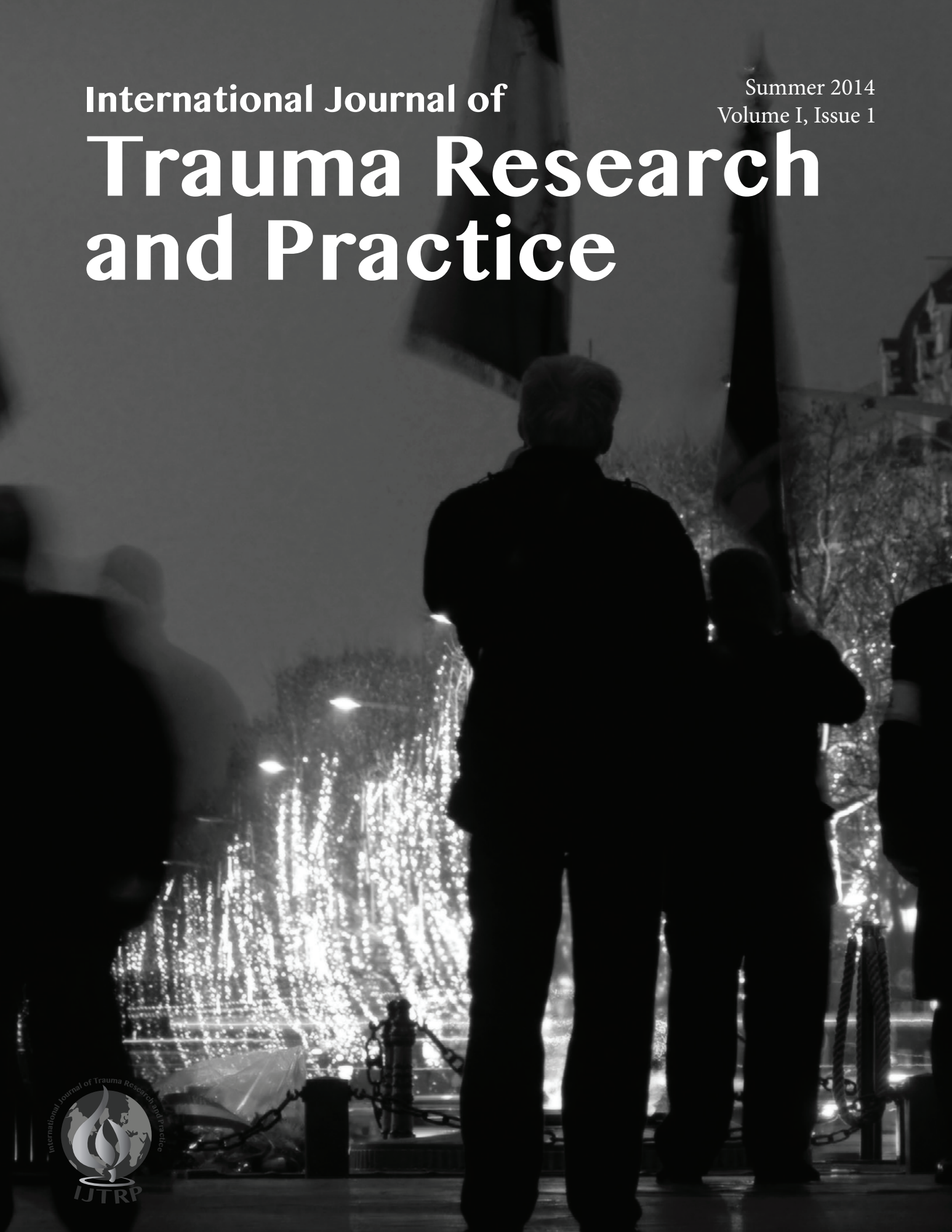
Summer 2014
Volume I, Issue 1

International Journal of Trauma Research and Practice



International Journal of Trauma Research and Practice

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This is a joint publication of IATP, LLC and Ottawa University

Minnesota AVP Anger Study

Terry Kayser, Laura Roberts, John Shuford, John Michaelis

Problem and Purpose of Study

There is a great need in America's prisons for effective programming that can teach inmates how to resolve conflicts without violence (Saunders, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine a popular program called Alternatives to Violence (AVP) that was designed to achieve the goal of teaching people, in this case, prison inmates, to solve conflicts with prosocial strategies rather than with fighting and violence. We reasoned that a key first step to teaching inmates to choose prosocial over violent strategies was to reduce feelings of anger that are often stimulated during conflict situations. Thus, the purpose of this study was to test whether inmates who participated in AVP exhibited reductions in feelings of and expression of anger.

Introduction

History of the program. The Alternatives to Violence Project began in 1975 at Green Haven Prison in upstate New York. It started mostly as lecture and role play and has evolved into the Full Emersion Experiential Training [FEET] design that it is today. There have been over 15,800 workshops completed in the U.S. alone impacting over 230,000 individuals, 85% in prisons. Last year in the U.S., there were 983 workshops in prisons with 15,085 participants in 27 states facilitated by 807 inmate and 598 outside volunteer facilitators in 94 prisons. AVP has spread around the world and has been used in Central Africa to heal from genocide, Latin America to heal from civil war, Australia to reduce bullying in schools and as a college course [150,000+ students have enrolled] in South Africa and Kenya to reduce and heal from violent conflict and in Russia to bring communities together. In fact, the Russian Ministry of Prisons requested a six-page article on AVP be written for its professional corrections journal; it was the only time a foreigner had had an article published in that journal. More recently in 2012, trainings were held in Afghanistan with women who wanted to prepare themselves for a male dominant government run by the Taliban.

Further, AVP and AVP facilitators have received the U.S. President's "1000 Points of Light Award," the "Order of Australia," the International Association of Correctional Training Personnel's "2004 Award of Excellence," the Delaware Center for Justice's "2011 Exemplar of Justice Award," the 2012 Delaware Governors Outstanding Volunteer Program award, nomination for the Presidential Citizens Metal, and has been featured on NPR[1], the New York Times [2] and Atlantic Monthly.[3]

AVP is an 18-20 hour program, typically held over a three-day period with both the facilitators and the participants being volunteers. Some prisons and judges mandate inmates to take the program, and it does not change the impact of the workshops. The workshops are fun, engaging, connecting and transformational. Even those with a resentful and/or hostile attitude about taking the training soon forget their hostility and fully engage in the experience. Because of its impact on motivation, AVP has been used prior to or in conjunction with other programs to improve the impact of those programs.[4]

The AVP training model has also been used to train governmental employees [teachers and social workers] and correctional staff in the USA and around the world, although not always on a volunteer basis. Of the 2,000 plus prison staff of the Philadelphia Prison System who were mandated to take the training [50% did not want to take the training and 25% were openly hostile], 70% said it was excellent and 27% said it was good in the post training evaluation , for a 97% positive evaluation. Even six months after the training with no other follow-up training or refresher program, 82% stated they were using the skills with co-workers [the focus of the training] and 71% were using them with superiors. Of special interest is that

even though the focus of the training was only on co-workers, 71% were using the skills with inmates and 84% were using them at home with their families.[5] The importance of this last statistic is quite significant when considering the recent research findings that correctional personnel have an alarmingly high rate of PTSD [double that of Viet Nam and Iraq veterans],[6] a significantly shorter life expectancy than other professions [58 years, on average],[7] a high suicide rate [double that of police],[8] major depressive disorder and many other health issues.[9]

Description of the program. Many training models offer experiential skills training, but what sets AVP and the Full Emersion Experiential Training model apart is the creation of an emotional climate of safety based on honesty, respect and caring that is at the beginning of every workshop. This emotional climate of safety enables participants to effortlessly lower their barriers and defenses, opening them up to honestly see themselves, their behaviors and the consequences of their behaviors, as well as be receptive to new attitudes and interpersonal skills. As one inmate put it, "That we are all the same beneath all that life has given us to experience. That no matter what persona or mask we wear, we can be reached, loved, and healed. Only a group of this nature can provide us with the safe environment to remove this mask." One result of this is that participants take responsibility for their actions, as indicated by a letter from a prison psychologist about an inmate in her sex offenders group who had flatly stated that his encounter with another person "...was consensual sex," and when he returned to the group after an AVP weekend, he admitted it was, in fact, rape. An individual's charges or legal situation are never discussed in a workshop, so the facilitators would not have known the individual was in a sex offenders' group. The individual took personal responsibility without ever having been asked to. It is part of the process of AVP, to take personal responsibility for our actions and our thoughts. This emotional climate of safety along with "transforming power" as an attitude changing element are part of every workshop, even though the other exercises and activities from the manuals are tailored to each situation. Transforming Power, as a core element, is that power within every person to change his/her attitude, which changes her/his outlook on self, others and life in general and thus, they as well as their relationships are transformed.

Qualitative evaluations of the program from corrections officials. Comments such as the following from corrections officials are common:

> Your program has been a mainstay contributing to the lowering of violence in the Facility. Time and again, we have witnessed the effectiveness of the Alternatives to Violence Project through changed behavior of inmates, who might otherwise have committed violent acts which would have lengthened their period of incarceration. We have no substitute program; we must rely on you and your staff for this vital support. Philip Coombe, Jr., Superintendent, Eastern Correctional Facility, New York.

> I saw AVP facilitate a dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates in what had been a difficult maximum security unit. As the program continued to run and "graduate" more and more inmates, the overall climate improved to a point where the inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively affect their living environment. I've seen similar results in each of the prisons that have implemented AVP. There have never been any security breaches and the staff and inmate population alike respect the AVP volunteers. I'd highly recommend AVP to any correctional manager and especially to those experiencing a high level of inmate on inmate conflict. Stan Taylor, Commissioner Delaware DOC.

> Comments from corrections officials about staff trainings:

> It is generally thought to be the best training program that staff has participated in. The labor unions are strong supporters of it and employee grievances have dropped to an all-time low. Thank you for helping us change the culture at MCI. It is the best investment of resources that we have ever made. Chris Money, Warden, Merion Correctional Institution, Ohio.

> Words cannot express the value of the training you have conducted at the Academy. The impact your training has had on my staff is remarkable. After the first training workshop, there was a definite change in attitude and I saw a cohesive bond develop between many of my staff. Your training addressed the Academy's need to have our supervisors better enabled to motivate and lead line staff. I am constantly amazed at the transformation our staff experiences during the training sessions. There is actually a paradigm shift from the rigidity and inflexibility ingrained in Corrections, to the understanding and acceptance of the value of community and teamwork. Craig Conway, Director, New Jersey Office of Training.

AVP participation and anger. Although AVP has a long history of effectiveness and many testimonials from participants and officials, as well as research on recidivism, violent attitudes and behavior, it was felt a study on the links between AVP participation and anger would be beneficial. We were looking for data to support or refute the theory that AVP participation would bring about reductions in inmates' feelings of anger. Thus, AVP Minnesota engaged in such a study. We measured changes in the levels of anger with the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2) with inmate participants before and after the Basic workshop, after the Advanced workshop, after the Training for Facilitators and a follow-up two years later. The results of this study are presented in this paper.

Description of research instrument. The State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (STAXI-2) is a 57-item inventory which measures the following: (a) the intensity of anger as an emotional state (State Anger); (b) the disposition to experience angry feelings as a personality trait (Trait Anger); (c) the frequency with which angry feelings are expressed inwardly and outwardly (Anger Expression); and (d) the frequency with which anger is controlled inwardly and outwardly (Anger Control). The scales and subscales are:

State Anger. These three scales measure the intensity of anger being experienced at the time of testing or at a time specified by the test administrator. The three scales are as follows:

1. State Anger Feelings: measures the intensity of angry feelings currently being experienced.
2. State Anger Expression Verbal: measures the extent to which the individual feels like expressing her/his anger verbally during the testing situation.
3. State Anger Expression Physical: measures the extent to which the individual feels like expressing his/her anger physically during the testing situation.

Trait Anger. These two scales measure the individual's predisposition to become angry, with or without provocation. The two scales are as follows:

1. Trait Anger Temperament: measures anger that is expressed quickly and with little provocation and has little to do with situational factors, e.g., someone described as an angry person or having a hot-headed temperament.
2. Trait Anger Reaction: measures the tendency to become angry when the individual is criticized, given negative feedback or believes has been treated badly or unfairly. It does not matter if the events are real, imagined or unintended; it is the person's perception that is important.

Anger Expression. These three scales measure the tendency to express anger inwardly or outwardly. The scales are as follows:

1. Anger Expression Index: measures the overall tendency to express anger outwardly toward other

people or inwardly toward self.

2. Anger Expression Out: measures how often angry feelings are expressed in verbally or physically aggressive behavior.

3. Anger Expression In: measures how often angry feelings are experienced but suppressed or turned inward.

Anger Control. These two scales measure the control of inward and outward expressions of anger (these scales are in reverse, the higher the better). The scales are as follows:

1. Anger Control Out: measures the expenditure of energy to monitor and control the physical or verbal expressions of anger.

2. Anger Control In: measures how often the individual attempts to relax, calm down and reduce angry feelings before they get out of control.

Results

Question 1. Did inmates show a drop in anger after taking a Basic workshop? Table 1 shows each pair of mean scores before and after the inmates participated in the Basic workshop. For example, SAF pre is the pretest score (before the Basic workshop) for State Anger Feelings; SAF post is the posttest score (after the Basic workshop) for State Anger Feelings. Table 1 also shows a drop in anger for State Anger Verbal Expression (SAV at pretest to SAV at posttest). Moreover, there was a drop in anger for State Anger Physical Expression (SAP at pretest to SAP at posttest). As shown on the table, scores tend to drop from pretest to posttest, indicating a drop in anger. This pattern was also observed for Trait Anger Temperament (TAT) and Trait Anger Reaction (TAR) and for Anger Expression Out (AXO) and Anger Expression In (AXI).

The Anger Control Out (ACO) and Anger Control In (ACI) scores went in the opposite direction from the other anger scores. They showed gains from pretest to posttest, which means the scores actually show an increase in outward and inward control. Not only did the anger drop, but the outward control increased, meaning participants learned to control their outward expression of anger toward others and internal controls increased, meaning they learned to calm themselves down.

Table 1

Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	*N*	*Std. Deviation*
Pair 1	SAF pre	8.57	67	4.19
	SAF post	6.70	67	2.94
Pair 2	SAV pre	7.96	67	3.80
	SAV post	6.16	67	2.23
Pair 3	SAP pre	6.52	67	3.03
	SAP post	5.36	67	1.45
Pair 4	TAT pre	7.60	67	2.91
	TAT post	6.00	67	1.70
Pair 5	TAR pre	8.63	67	2.74
	TAR post	7.30	67	2.07
Pair 6	AXO pre	16.21	67	4.40
	AXO post	15.10	67	3.87
Pair 7	AXI pre	18.61	67	4.64
	AXI post	16.96	67	4.87
Pair 8	ACO pre	21.57	67	5.63
	ACO post	24.64	67	5.52
Pair 9	ACI pre	21.36	67	5.90
	ACI post	24.70	67	6.04
Pair 10	AXIndex pre	39.90	67	15.32
	AXIndex post	30.72	67	16.54

Question 2. Was the change in anger from pretest to posttest (before and after taking the Basic workshop) a significant change? In order to answer this question, we conducted a series of paired t tests to answer the question. The results are given on Table 2. The p value or probability value in the right hand column shows whether the change was significant for each subscale. If the p value is less than .05, it is considered a significant effect. If the p value is greater than .05, it is considered a non-significant effect. With the exception of AXO, all effects were significant. AXO was very close to being significant.

Table 2

Subscale Significance Statistics

Pre minus Post Basic	*m*	*SD*	*t*	*df*
SAF	1.87	4.72	3.24	66
SAV	1.79	3.91	3.75	66
SAP	1.16	2.77	3.44	66
TAT	1.60	2.33	5.61	66
TAR	1.33	2.81	3.86	66
AXO	1.10	4.61	1.96	66
AXI	1.66	4.61	2.94	66
ACO	-3.07	6.01	-4.19	66
ACI	-3.34	6.75	-4.05	66
AXIndex	9.18	16.48	4.56	66

Question 3. How large was the effect of the Basic workshop on anger? We addressed this question by first computing Cohen's d statistics to gauge the effect of the Basic workshop. A d statistic less than .3 is considered small, between .3 and .5 moderate, and larger than .5 is a large effect. Table 3 shows that most effects were moderate in size with the exception of TAT, AXIndex, ACI, and ACO which had large changes and AXO change which had a small change. Note that the change for the anger control scales (ACI and ACO) were in the negative direction. This was because pretest scores were lower than post test scores. We computed Cohen's d by subtracting posttest scores from pretest scores. Increases in the anger control scales mean the participants learned how to control outward expressions of anger and also learned to calm themselves down.

Table 3

Effect Sizes for STAXI Subscale Change Scores

Subscale	Effect Size	Cohen's *d* statistic
SAF change	moderate	0.40
SAV change	moderate	0.46
SAP change	moderate	0.42
TAT change	large	0.69
TAR change	moderate	0.47
AXO change	small	0.24
AXI change	moderate	0.36
AXIndex change	large	0.56
ACI change	large	-0.51
ACO change	large	-0.50

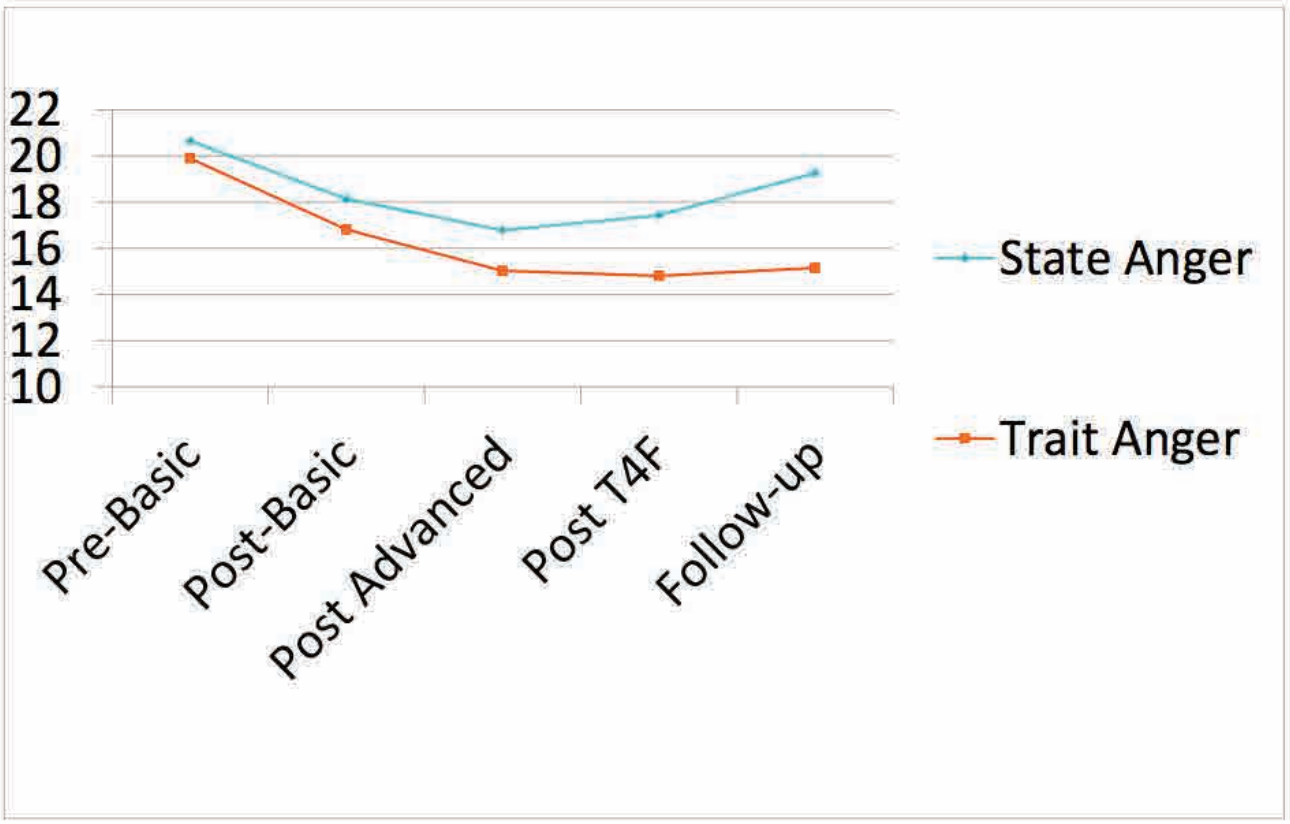
Conclusion

All subscales showed change in the predicted direction and, with one exception, all subscale changes were significant. These findings provide support for the theory that the use of AVP can reduce anger and that, with regard to trait level anger, these changes persist over time. The one exception to the general conclusion pertained to the subscale: Anger Expression Out. This subscale showed a small change that was on the border of being significant.

As shown in Figure 1, the State Anger score, or level of anger at the time of taking the inventory, showed a moderate reduction after taking the Basic and Advanced workshops, but subsequent to that, rebounded by the time of the two-year follow-up. This increase over time may be explained because of the toxic environment inmates live in and correctional staff work in, which tends to wear down one's resistance. As an indicator of the level of toxicity in the prison environment, it should be noted that research shows 34% of correctional officers have PTSD, 34% experience Major Depression Disorder[10] and they have a suicide rate double that of police.[11] The toxic environment is wearing on both inmates and staff.

Figure 1

Change on State Anger and Trait Anger Among Inmates from Pre-Basic to Post-Basic to Post Advanced to Post Training for Facilitators (T4F) to Follow-up.



The Trait Anger score is the most important of the subscales, because it indicates a more permanent change in the individual's predisposition to anger. Figure 1 also shows the Trait Anger score showed a large, significant reduction ($p < .0005$) and remained low at the two-year follow-up. The trait score dropped from 20 to 15. In comparison, the norming score for the test was 18.4, which is a typical trait anger level for people outside the prison community. Thus, the pre-AVP trait score started well above the trait anger level for the non-incarcerated community. After AVP participation, trait anger dropped significantly and remained low at the two-year follow-up. This is especially notable given that the inmates were still living in a toxic environment. Also, the Anger Expression Index, which measures an individual's tendency to express his/her anger outwardly toward other people, or inwardly toward himself/herself, showed a large and significant reduction ($p < .0005$). Further, the two Anger Control scores, which relate to coping skills, showed large improvement ($p < .0005$). These scores indicate a long lasting positive change in attitude and coping skills.

These results support findings in other studies on AVP, which show that AVP is linked to reductions in violent attitudes, [12] inappropriate behaviors, [13] and recidivism.[14] Thus, AVP should be given serious consideration by corrections officers seeking to bring about improvement among inmates who have anger problems. Moreover, corrections officers should consider implementing AVP with inmates who have a pattern of resolving conflicts by using violence.

Authors:

Terrence F. Kayser, Ph.D, Retired Senior Planner, Research Department Metropolitan Council of the Twin

Cities, 1983-2006.
Laura Roberts, PhD: President of Right Angle Educators, an international dissertation mentoring corporation, Professor of Research Methods and Statistics, served as research methods and statistics consultant for over 125 successful doctoral dissertations, published widely in the areas of peace technology, educational leadership, teacher retention, and sex differences in mathematics achievement. I serve as consultant for Peace Praxis, an organization dedicated to promoting Peace technology in schools, I wrote and evaluated a peace skills training program for middle schoolers called Project WIN (Working out Integrated Negotiations).
John A. Shuford, Ed.S., MBA, President of Conflict Resolution Services, Vice-President of AVP International, Past President of AVP USA.
John Michaelis, President AVP International.

Footnotes

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Female Therapists' Experiences of Burnout While Providing Treatment for Domestic Violence

Sara R. Byczek, Wayne State University; Debra G. Leggett, Argosy University

Abstract

American women receive multiple messages regarding appropriate gendered roles in Western culture. Many of these messages encourage self-sacrifice in which women adapt more passive, care-taking roles. Female mental health clinicians are not immune to these messages which may impact their susceptibility to burnout. The current research examines the experiences of female mental health professionals in a small mental health agency. Specifically examined were participants' experiences of burnout, support, self-care, and struggle related to working with a clinical population with high trauma. Two in-depth interviews and four hours of observations of staff at the agency were completed. The major themes identified were: *personal stressors*, *work related stressors*, *self-care coping strategies*, *experience of burnout*, and *supervision*. Sub-categories that emerged were: s*ocial support*, *stressors related to clients*, *stressors related to relationship with co-workers*, and *stressors related to relationship with Executive Director and with policy*. Phenomenological analysis of observation data provided triangulation of *interactions among office staff*, and *interactions among therapists*. Clinical, research and agency implications were explored with recommendations for supervisors and agency development provided.