



Therapeutic alliance with children and adolescents and their parents: Results using the Portuguese WAI version for children and adolescents (WAI-CA)

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Introduction

Working alliance has shown to be related to therapeutic change in several studies (Horvath et al., 1986; Kokotovic et al., 1990; Hanson, Curry, & Bandalos, 2002; Kivlighan, 1990; Rait, 2000). Bordin (1976) suggested that working alliance consists on 3 dimensions: tasks, bond, and goals. Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) was developed by Horvath (1981; 1982) in order to assess these dimensions. This inventory is widely used in psychotherapeutic research and clinical context, in several countries, including Portugal (Machado & Horvath, 1999), supporting the relevance of this dimension in therapeutic process and outcome.

The purpose of this poster is to discuss working alliance with children and adolescents and their parents. We also intend to present the Portuguese WAI version for children and adolescents (WAI-CA), a version of the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI, Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) for children and adolescents aged between 7 and 8 years old.

Method

Participants

72 children and adolescents involved in outpatient psychotherapy in an university child and adolescent clinical psychology unit in northern Portugal.
Age ranged between 7 and 16 years-old
Gender distribution: 61% boys and 39% girls

Measures

Working Alliance Inventory – Children and Adolescents (Lima, Dias & Figueiredo, 2001)

The process of adaptation of the WAI to children and adolescents involved individual reflection and discussion about items meaning with 9 participants aged between 8 and 10 years old in order to facilitate their comprehension. Based on the participants' opinion, items were shortened, advanced vocabulary was replaced and sentence structure was simplified. The new version was presented to a small sample of children who read the items to make sure they were understandable.

To simplify the response process, likert scale was reduced from 7 to 5 points.

Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1986; Portuguese version by Machado & Horvath, 1999).

Self-report measure comprising 36 items
7-point Likert-type scale.
three subscales of 12 items each:

- (a) Goals: agreement about the goals of therapy
- (b) Tasks: agreement about the tasks of the therapy
- (c) Bonds: the bond between the client and therapist

Procedures

Study 1: Psychometric properties of the WAI-CA were assessed with 72 children and adolescents, who filled the measure between the 3rd and the 8th psychotherapeutic session.

Study 2: Portuguese versions were administered between sessions 3 and 8 to 25 children/adolescents (WAI-CA) and their accompanying parent. (WAI).

Results

Study 1 Psychometric properties of the WAI-CA

Internal consistency of WAI-CA (Cronbach's Alpha)

-Bonds: .76
-Goals: .75
-Tasks: .83
-Total WAI-CA: .93

Table I: Pearson correlations between WAI-CA subscales and total score

	Bonds WAI-CA	Tasks WAI-CA	Goals WAI-CA	Total WAI-CA
Bonds WAI-CA	1	-	-	-
Tasks WAI-CA	.76*	1	-	-
Goals WAI-CA	.70*	.74*	1	-
Total WAI-CA	.89*	.92*	.91*	1

*p<.001

Study 2 Child/adolescent's WAI-CA and parent's WAI

Table II: Pearson correlations between WAI-CA subscales and Parent's WAI subscales

	Bonds WAI (Parent)	Tasks WAI (Parent)	Goals WAI (Parent)	Total WAI (Parent)
Bonds WAI-CA	.86*	.76*	.77*	.84*
Tasks WAI-CA	.63*	.66*	.58*	.65*
Goals WAI-CA	.55*	.63*	.83*	.76*
Total WAI-CA	.76*	.77*	.82	.84*

*p<.001

Discussion

• Results suggest that the new version of the WAI for children and adolescents is a valid measure of working alliance to be used with clients between 7 and 16 years-old.

• Strong correlations between the parent's WAI and the children/adolescents' WAI-CA indicate that children/adolescents and their parents evaluate the therapeutic process in a similar way, underlining the relevance of the establishment and maintenance of working alliance in psychotherapy with this age group, particularly when both the child/adolescent and his/her parents are involved.

• Research on psychotherapy with children and adolescents may use this measure to examine several key issues, such as the role of working alliance in process and outcome monitoring, its relation to psychopathology, and parental involvement in psychotherapy.

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