

## **2010 Minnesota AVP Impact On Anger Study**

**Terry Kayser**

**Laura Roberts**

**John Shuford**

**John Michaelis**

### **Introduction**

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 US alone impacting over 230,000 individuals, 85% in prisons. Last year in the US, 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 genocides, Latin America to heal from civil war, Australia to reduce bullying in schools and as a college course [150,000+ students have enrolled], 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 US 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 been featured on NPR, the New York Times and Atlantic Monthly.

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.

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 2000 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], in the post training evaluation 70% said it was excellent and 27% said it was good, 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. 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], a significantly shorter life expectancy than other professions [58 years], a high suicide rate [double that of police], major depressive disorder and many other health issues, and it has been reported that they have a high divorce and alcohol abuse rate [although not verified by research].

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 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.

Comments like 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.

## **Methodology**

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 impact on anger would be beneficial. Thus, AVP Minnesota engaged in such a study. The study was done by Dr. Terry Kayser and used the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-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.

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

- State Anger: measures the intensity of anger being experienced at that time or at a time specified by the test administrator.
  - State Anger Feelings: measures the intensity of angry feelings currently being experienced

- State Anger Expression Verbal: measures the extent to which the individual feels like expressing her/his anger verbally during the testing situation.
- State Anger Expression Physical: measures the extent to which the individual feels like expressing his/her anger physically during the testing situation.
- Trait Anger: measures the individual's predisposition to become angry, with or without provocation.
  - 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 hotheaded temperament.
  - 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 doesn't matter if the events are real, imagined or unintended; it is the person's perception that is important.
- Anger Expression: measures the tendency to express anger inwardly or outwardly.
  - Anger Expression Index: measures the overall tendency to express anger outwardly toward other people or inwardly toward self.
  - Anger Expression Out: measures how often angry feelings are expressed in verbally or physically aggressive behavior.
  - Anger Expression In: measures how often angry feelings are experienced but suppressed or turned inward.
- Anger Control is the control of inward and outward expressions of anger (this scale is in reverse, the higher the better).
  - Anger Control Out: measures the expenditure of energy to monitor and control the physical or verbal expressions of anger.
  - 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. For example, S\_Ang\_F\_.1 is the pretest score (before the Basic workshop) for State Anger Feelings. And, S\_Ang\_F\_.2 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 (S\_Ang\_V\_.1 at pretest to S\_Ang\_V\_.2 at post test). Moreover, there was a drop in anger for State Anger Physical Expression (S\_Ang\_P\_.1 at pretest to S\_Ang\_P\_.2 at post test). 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 (T\_Ang\_T) and Trait Anger Reaction (T\_Ang\_R) and for Anger Expression Out (AX\_O ) and Anger Expression In (AX\_I).

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 post test, 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

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>
Pair 1	S_Ang_F_.1	8.57	67	4.190	.512
	S_Ang_F_.2	6.70	67	2.939	.359
Pair 2	S_Ang_V_.1	7.96	67	3.796	.464
	S_Ang_V_.2	6.16	67	2.233	.273
Pair 3	S_Ang_P_.1	6.52	67	3.032	.370
	S_Ang_P_.2	5.36	67	1.453	.178
Pair 4	T_Ang_T_.1	7.60	67	2.908	.355
	T_Ang_T_.2	6.00	67	1.697	.207
Pair 5	T_Ang_R_.1	8.63	67	2.740	.335
	T_Ang_R_.2	7.30	67	2.067	.253
Pair 6	AX_O_.1	16.21	67	4.402	.538
	AX_O_.2	15.10	67	3.866	.472
Pair 7	AX_I_.1	18.61	67	4.638	.567
	AX_I_.2	16.96	67	4.866	.594
Pair 8	AC_O_1	21.57	67	5.633	.688
	AC_O_2	24.64	67	5.523	.675
Pair 9	AC_I_1	21.36	67	5.902	.721
	AC_I_2	24.70	67	6.038	.738
Pair 10	AX_Index_1	39.90	67	15.321	1.872
	AX_Index_2	30.72	67	16.538	2.020

Question 2: Was the change in anger from pretest to posttest (before and after taking the Basic workshop) a significant change?

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 AX\_O, all effects were significant. AX\_O was very close to being significant.

Table 2

Pre minus Post Basic	<i>m</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
S_Ang_F	1.866	4.716	3.238	66	.002
S_Ang_V	1.791	3.910	3.749	66	.0005
S_Ang_P	1.164	2.767	3.444	66	.001
T_Ang_T	1.597	2.329	5.612	66	.0005
T_Ang_R	1.328	2.814	3.863	66	.0005
AX_O	1.104	4.609	1.961	66	.054
AX_I	1.657	4.614	2.939	66	.005
AC_O	-3.075	6.011	-4.187	66	.0005
AC_I	-3.343	6.752	-4.053	66	.0005
AX_Index	9.179	16.478	4.560	66	.0005

Question 3: How large was the effect of the Basic workshop on anger?

We computed a Cohen's *d* statistic 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 T\_Ang\_T, AX\_index, AC\_I, and AC\_O which had large changes and AX\_O change which had a small change. Note that the change for the anger control scales (AC\_I and AC\_O) were in the negative direction. This was because pretest scores were lower than post test scores. We computed Cohen's *d* by subtracting post test 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 <i>d</i> statistic
S_Ang_F change	moderate	0.40
S_Ang_V change	moderate	0.46
S_Ang_P change	moderate	0.42
T_Ang_T change	large	0.69
T_Ang_R change	moderate	0.47
AX_O change	small	0.24
AX_I change	moderate	0.36
AX_index change	large	0.56
AC_I change	large	-0.51
AC_O change	large	-0.50

Question 4: Do older inmates have more success than younger inmates. That is, does their anger drop more after taking AVP Basic workshop.

Hypothesis: Older inmates will show greater drops in anger after taking the Basic workshop.

We created change scores for each subscale and tested to see whether change was linked to age. Change was not significantly linked to age. See Table 3. The probability value was .079. It must be less than .05 to conclude a significant effect. It is recommended that the study be replicated with a larger sample. With a larger sample, this could possibly have been a significant effect.

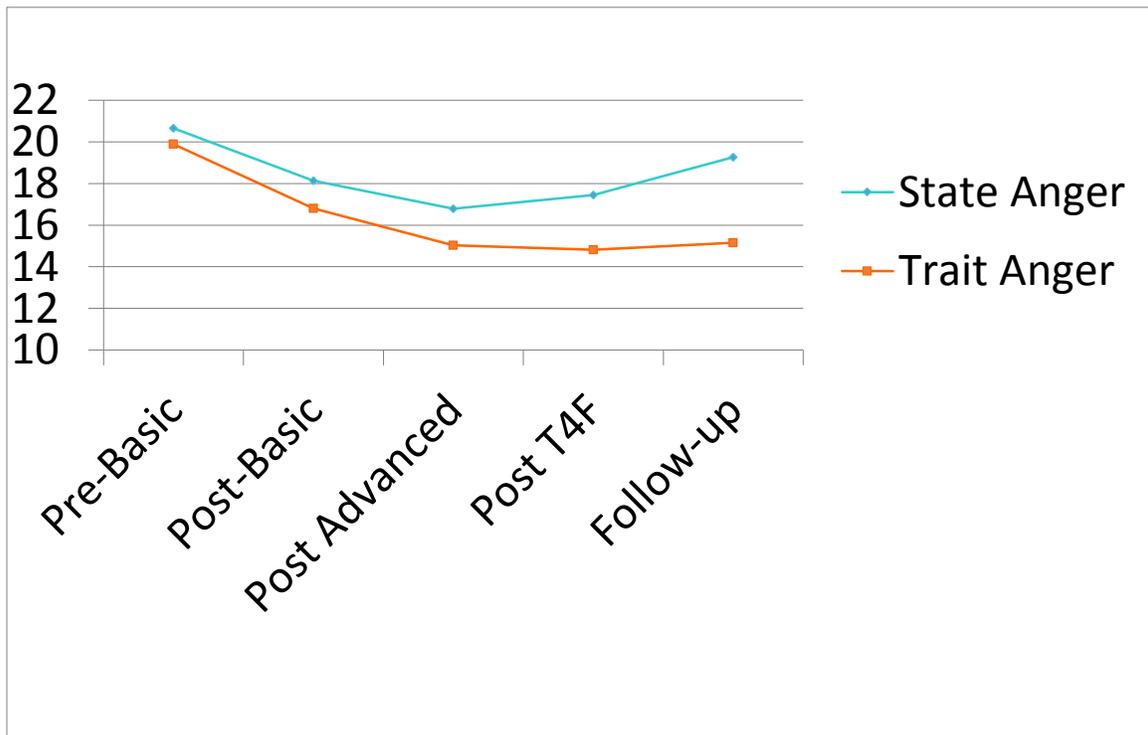
Table 4  
Age Effects

Effect		<i>Value</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.300	2.720 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.010
	Wilks' Lambda	.700	2.720 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.010
	Hotelling's Trace	.429	2.720 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.010
	Roy's Largest Root	.429	2.720 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.010
Age	Pillai's Trace	.226	1.848 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.079
	Wilks' Lambda	.774	1.848 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.079
	Hotelling's Trace	.292	1.848 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.079
	Roy's Largest Root	.292	1.848 <sup>a</sup>	9.000	57.000	.079

## Conclusion

The use of AVP as an intervention tool to reduce anger proved effective with immediate impact that persisted over time. All subscales showed positive change and all but one were significant. The one exception was Anger Expression Out. It was a small change that was on the border of being significant.

The State Anger score, or level of anger at the time of taking the inventory, showed a moderate reduction during the period of taking the workshops, but subsequent to that, increased somewhat at the two-year follow-up, but was still below the pre Basic level. 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. How toxic an environment can be understood when 34% of correctional officers have PTSD, 34% experience Major Depression Disorder [Desert Waters Correctional Outreach study 2012] and they have a suicide rate double that of police. The toxic environment is wearing on both inmates and staff.



The Trait Anger Temperament score is probably the most important of the subscales, because it indicates a more permanent change in the individual's relationship to anger or their predisposition to anger. The score on this subscale was a reduction that was large, significant ( $p = .0005$ ) and remained low at the two year follow-up. The trait score dropped from 20 to 15 and the norming score for the test was 18.4, which is what the normal score for the community outside prison. Thus, the pre-AVP trait score went from well above the outside community average to well below at the two year follow-up, and this was while 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 reduces violent attitudes, inappropriate behavior, and recidivism. Thus, AVP should be considered an effective intervention with people who have anger problems or who have been violent. The impact of AVP is a significant change in attitude, in how participants see themselves, others and life in general. This change in attitude [self-awareness, empathy and personal responsibility] literally transforms the individual. This transformation occurs through a reconnection within oneself and a reconnection with others. We now know through research, that most violence, drug abuse, mental health issues and criminal behavior have a root cause of unhealed trauma, resulting in a feeling of disconnection from others and from oneself. The importance of a methodology that effectively reconnects people in a short amount of time and at a minimum amount of cost cannot be overstated.

The methodology of AVP can be used to address the epidemic of disconnection we are currently experiencing in our society. Areas where AVP has already been used with great success or where it shows great promise are schools [bullying], inner-city [violence], prisons [crime and drugs], families [domestic violence], youth [suicide], religious violence, racism and post-civil war and genocide healing and reconciliation. The model is simple, easily adaptable and can be used along with other programs. It is a methodology that needs to be shared more widely.