

# ALCOHOL SCREENING & BRIEF INTERVENTION IN THE CUSTODY SUITE SETTING

## BACKGROUND

There is evidence of an association between alcohol use and offending behaviour [1]. Alcohol has been found to be a factor in half of all violent crimes [2]. In England and Wales alcohol-related crime is estimated to cost society £11 billion (2010-2011 costs) [3]. However the precise relationship is complex [4], with an intricate interplay between drinking patterns, the amount of alcohol consumed and individual and contextual factors [5]. Alcohol screening and brief intervention is a secondary preventative approach, which involves the identification via screening of hazardous and harmful drinking and the delivery of an intervention aimed at reducing consumption and associated problems [6].

## PREVALENCE

A systematic review of the literature was conducted that identified studies in the UK that used the AUDIT screening tool to measure alcohol use disorders (AUDs) with adults in the probation system [7]. A score of 8 or more (out of 40) is categorised as an AUD whilst a score of 20+ indicates probable dependency. Five studies were found [8-12].

■ 64%-88% screened positive for an AUD [8-12].  
This compares to 20-30% observed in the general population [13]

■ 21-48% scored positive for probable alcohol dependency [8-12].  
This compares to 4% observed in the general population [14].

## INTERVENTIONS:

A rapid review of the worldwide literature of effectiveness studies of brief intervention (< 3 hours) was carried out. Three publications were found [8, 11, 12]. None of the studies showed effectiveness.

**Hopkins and Sparrow, (2006)** evaluated the use of alcohol screening and brief interventions in the custody suite setting in Nottingham [8]. Of the 805 detainees screened, 67% received information/brief intervention. The research team looked at arrest data for included participants for the time period between April 1995 and April 2002 and identified that 15% of participants arrested for alcohol-related offences were re-arrested in the three months after intervention. Of the 186 participants who had only been arrested once for an alcohol-related offence in the three months before intervention, 11% were re-arrested within three months after intervention. Four of the 14 participants who had been arrested twice or more for alcohol-related offences in the three months before intervention were re-arrested in the three months after intervention [8]. The authors acknowledge that the numbers are low and without a comparison group it is impossible to show effectiveness [8].

**Blakeborough and Richardson's (2012)** study was carried out across 12 police forces in the UK between 2007 and 2010 [11]. The pilot scheme was able to deliver brief interventions (less than 30 minutes) in custody suites after the arrest or in a non-custody venue. The session could either be voluntary or mandatory. Arrest data was compared against a matched group from the same police force in a previous time period to when the study was conducted. The study did not show any evidence of reduced reoffending for individuals arrested for alcohol-related offences [11].

**McCracken et al (2012)** followed on from the work of Blakeborough and Richardson (2012) [12]. The study was carried out across 8 police forces in the UK between 2009 and 2010. Between one and three brief intervention sessions were offered across the sites in the police custody setting or a non-custody venue. Like the pilot, the scheme was made up of voluntary or mandatory sessions. Arrest data was compared against a matched group from the same police force in a previous time period to when the study was conducted. Those under a mandatory route were more likely to attend the first appointment (65%) compared to those in the voluntary sessions (28%). Like the pilot study there was no evidence of reduced offending for individuals when compared to a matched group [12].

# ALCOHOL SCREENING & BRIEF INTERVENTION IN THE CUSTODY SUITE SETTING

## REFERENCES

1. Boden, J., D. Fergusson, and L. Horwood, Alcohol misuse and violent behavior: Findings from a 30-year longitudinal study. *Drug & Alcohol Dependence*, 2012. 122: p. 135-141.
2. Flatley, J., et al., *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10*. 2010, Home Office: London.
3. Alcohol Team Home Office, *Next steps following the consultation on delivering the Government's alcohol strategy*. 2013: London.
4. Plant, M., M. Plant, and C. Thornton, People and places: Some factors in the alcohol violence link. *Journal of Substance Use*, 2002. 7: p. 207-213.
5. Graham, L., et al., Alcohol problems in the criminal justice system: an opportunity for intervention. 2012, World Health Organization: Regional Office for Europe: Denmark.
6. Kaner, E., D. Newbury-Birch, and N. Heather, Brief Interventions, in *Evidence-based Addiction Treatment*, P. Miller, Editor. 2009, Elsevier: San Diego, California.
7. Saunders, J.B., et al., Development of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT): WHO Collaborative Project on Early Detection of Persons with Harmful Alcohol Consumption. *Addiction*, 1993. 88(6): p. 791-804.
8. Hopkins, M. and P. Sparrow, Sobering up: Arrest referral and brief intervention for alcohol users in the custody suite. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 2006. 6(4): p. 389-410.
9. Brown, N., et al., Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention in a Policing Context: A mixed methods feasibility study. *Drug & Alcohol Review*, 2010. 29: p. 647-654.
10. Barton, A., Screening and Brief Intervention of Detainees for Alcohol use: A Social Crime Prevention Approach to Combating Alcohol-Related Crime? *The Howard Journal*, 2011. 50(1): p. 62-74.
11. Blakeborough, L. and A. Richardson, Summary of findings from two evaluations of Home office Alcohol Arrest Referral pilot schemes, in *Research Report 60*, Home Office, Editor. 2012.
12. McCracken, K., et al., Evaluation of Alcohol Arrest Referral Pilot Schemes (Phase 2). Occasional Paper 102. 2012, London: Home Office.  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116267/occ102.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116267/occ102.pdf).
13. Funk, M., et al., A multi country controlled trial of strategies to promote dissemination and implementation of brief alcohol intervention in primary health care: Findings of a WHO Collaborative Study. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 2005. Vol. 66: p. 379-388.
14. Drummond, C., et al., Alcohol needs assessment research project (ANARP). The 2004 national needs assessment for England. 2004, Department of Health and the National Treatment Agency: London.

---

## AUTHORS

Dorothy Newbury-Birch, Ruth McGovern, Jennifer Birch, Gillian O'Neill, Hannah Kaner,  
Arun Sondhi, Kieran Lynch

## CONTACT

d.newbury-birch@tees.ac.uk