

# ALCOHOL SCREENING & BRIEF INTERVENTION IN PROBATION

## 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. Two studies were found [8, 9].

### **Newbury-Birch et al (2009) found that:**

- 67% (69% males; 54% females) screened positive for an AUD [8].
- 33% (35% males; 53% females) screened positive for probable alcohol dependency [8].

### **Orr et al (2013) found that:**

- 59% screened positive for an AUD [9].
- 17% screened positive for probable alcohol dependency [9].

This compares to **20-30%** observed in the general population [10].

This compares to **4%** observed in the general population [11].

## INTERVENTIONS:

A rapid review of the worldwide literature of effectiveness studies of brief intervention (< 3 hours) was carried out. Two studies were found [8, 9].

**Orr et al, (2013)** conducted a pilot RCT from February 2010 to April 2011 with offenders given probation or community service orders in Scotland [9]. One hundred and ninety five individual AUDIT forms were completed and 82 (43%) were eligible for the trial. Participants randomised to the control group received a booklet whilst those in the intervention group received a one off brief intervention (no time given) delivered by routine criminal justice staff. Only 22% (n=16) of the sample were followed up therefore no effectiveness data was available [9].

**Newbury-Birch et al, (2014)** carried out a pragmatic cluster RCT of the effectiveness of two different brief intervention strategies compared to a control condition of feedback on screening outcome and a client information leaflet at reducing hazardous or harmful drinking in the English probation setting [12].

Offender managers were recruited across three geographical regions of England from May 2008 to July 2009; the North East, South East and London. Offender managers were randomised to one of three interventions, each of which built on the previous one: feedback on screening outcome and a client information leaflet control group, five minutes of structured brief advice, and 20 minutes of brief lifestyle counselling. Follow-up rates were 68% at six months and 60% at 12 months. At both time points there was no significant advantage of more intensive interventions compared to the control group in terms of AUDIT status. Those in the brief advice and brief lifestyle counselling intervention groups were statistically significantly less likely to reoffend (36% and 38% respectively) than those in the client information leaflet group (50%) in the year following intervention [12].

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