Is enquiry regarding alcohol consumption and alcohol reduction advice acceptable to sexual health service users? A cross-sectional study of clinic attendees

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INTRODUCTION

Problem alcohol consumption is a major health problem in the UK. Alcohol assessment and behavioural advice or “brief interventions” undertaken by healthcare practitioners have been shown to be effective in achieving decreased alcohol intake in primary and secondary care but not in trials undertaken sexual health clinics.^{1,2,3}

METHODS

We assessed sexual health service user views towards alcohol screening using a quantitative opinions survey to identify any themes which limit acceptability of these methods.

Age, gender, alcohol consumption measured by AUDIT-C score were recorded. Opinions towards 10 statements on alcohol screening within a sexual health clinic were assessed using a five point Likert scale.

Demographic variables were assessed for associations and logistic regression techniques were used to assess if demographic variables (age, gender, positive/negative AUDIT-C score) were predictive of a positive attitude response to the opinion statements.

RESULTS

- **462 surveys returned**
- **64% Female**
- **36% Male**
- **53.7% aged ≥25 years,**
- **Median age category 25-29 years**
- **61.6% had hazardous alcohol consumption. (Males > Females 75% vs 54%, p<0.001)**
- **Under 30s had more positive AUDIT-C scores (67.9% vs 32.1%, p<0.001).**

Attitudes to alcohol assessment performed by sexual health practitioners were positive, responses were less favourable, becoming negative towards the appropriateness of the sexual health clinic as a screening venue. Responses to 4 out of 10 opinion statements were related (multivariate regression model) to age or AUDIT-C score. Table 1 summarises opinions and predictor factors.

DISCUSSION

Different strategies need to be explored within sexual health for alcohol consumption reduction interventions as clinic users are younger, have higher rates of hazardous alcohol consumption and are potentially more resistant to standard brief intervention techniques.

Table 1. Attitudinal responses to questions regarding alcohol screening within Sexual Health				
	Valid Responses	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	Significant multivariate Logistic regression predictors of a positive response
		N (%)	N (%)	
As part of a sexual health checkup, my doctor should feel free to ask me how much alcohol I drink? <i>Positive response = Strongly Agree / Agree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly disagree / disagree / No opinion</i>	439	341 (77.7)	98 (22.3)	NEG AUDIT C > POS AUDIT C (Adj OR 0.539, CI 0.323–0.897, p=0.017)
I would be embarrassed if the sexual health doctor asked me how much alcohol I drink? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	440	364 (82.7)	76 (17.3)	NEG AUDIT C > POS AUDIT C (Adj OR 0.487, CI 0.273 - 0.867, p=0.014)
If my drinking may be affecting my general health, the Sexual Health doctor should advise me to cut down on alcohol? <i>Positive response = Strongly Agree / Agree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly disagree / disagree / No opinion</i>	439	386 (87.9)	53 (12.1)	None
Asking about alcohol and its effects should be part of a sexual health checkup? <i>Positive response = Strongly Agree / Agree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly disagree / disagree / No opinion</i>	439	249 (56.7)	190 (43.3)	Older > Younger (Adj OR 1.141, CI 1.027 – 1.268, p=0.014)
If the sexual health doctor asked me how much alcohol I drink, I would give an honest answer <i>Positive response = Strongly Agree / Agree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly disagree / disagree / No opinion</i>	439	400 (91.1)	39 (8.9)	None
How much alcohol I drink is personal and confidential, and the sexual health doctor should not ask me about it? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	439	327 (74.5)	112 (25.5)	None
I would be annoyed if the sexual health doctor asked me how much alcohol I drink? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	439	361 (82.2)	78 (17.8)	None
If the sexual health doctor asked me how much alcohol I drink, I would probably not give an honest answer? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	438	379 (86.5)	59 (13.5)	None
The sexual health doctor asking about alcohol is not relevant to why I have come to clinic today? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	438	147 (33.6)	291 (66.4)	Older > Younger (Adj OR: 1.208, CI 1.089 – 1.339, p<0.001)
Asking about alcohol takes up too much time and I would prefer to only talk about why I have come today? <i>Positive response = Strongly disagree / disagree</i> <i>Negative response = Strongly Agree / Agree / No Opinion</i>	438	219 (50.0)	219 (50.0)	None
*Non-Valid responses = question not answered Logistic regression model: Males coded 0, Females 1; AUDIT-C Negative coded 0, Positive coded 1; Age 18-19 coded 1, each further 5 year increment assigned higher code number in ordinal fashion.				

References

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2. Poikolainen K. Effectiveness of brief interventions to reduce alcohol intake in primary health care populations: a meta-analysis. Preventive Medicine 1999;**28**:503-9. .

3. Wilk A. Meta-analysis of randomized control trial addressing brief interventions in heavy alcohol drinkers. Journal of general internal medicine 1997;**12**(5):274-83