



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Drug and Alcohol Dependence

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/drugalcdep](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/drugalcdep)

## Letter to the Editor

### Context matters: On the importance of context-specific analysis for the use of screening questionnaires

Baggio and Iglesias (2019) pointed out the necessity to be aware of the limitations of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). We absolutely agree with their argument that screening instruments such as the AUDIT need to be vigorously examined in regard to their psychometric properties and practitioners and researchers should be mindful of possible limitations. Nevertheless, we would like to maintain our conclusion that the AUDIT is a reliable screening tool. Baggio and Iglesias mention two crucial aspects: 1) the individual cut-off point should be chosen in regard to the specific sub-population because the prevalence of hazardous drinking differs between sub-groups. 2) Different cut-off points may be adequate depending on the purpose of the screening.

Previous results showed that the AUDIT is a psychometrically robust measure in different sub-populations (Moehring et al., 2018). According to subpopulation-specific cut-off points, Baggio et al. (2019) provide results from a sample of young Swiss men and recommend a cut-off point of 15 for the best balance of sensitivity (69%) and specificity (76%). This is in contrast to our findings from a random general adult population sample from a region in Germany (Moehring et al., 2019). For our sample a threshold of 15 would display an unacceptably low sensitivity (e.g. 21% for men and 14% for women for the screening of at least mild alcohol use disorder). An important issue with respect to validity and appropriate cut-offs of the AUDIT is related to the consumption questions and differences in standard drinks in different countries as noted in a recent publication (Higgins-Biddle and Babor, 2018). Differences between our data and those found by Baggio and colleagues could be easily explained by this. As noted by Baggio and Iglesias, young men are a vulnerable population for hazardous drinking although life events such as occupational training or living alone before starting a family could facilitate transient increases in alcohol drinking. Some of the AUDIT items are relevant particularly for long-term substance misuse, so younger age groups are less likely to score on them.

Depending on the goal of the assessment, it is desirable to classify them as screening positive, for example in a context of brief intervention programs for problem drinkers. In our view, the risk of including false positives is acceptable in the context of prevention measures. Interventions targeted to subgroups with specific drinking patterns or high average alcohol consumption might require a higher specificity and therefore higher thresholds. However, the most important point we should keep in mind is the fact that the AUDIT is a screening instrument

and as such should not be used as a stand-alone clinical assessment for diagnostic purposes.

#### Contributors

The manuscript was drafted by AM and critically reviewed by all authors (AM, CM, UJ, HJR, GB, UH). All authors have approved the final manuscript and will hold themselves jointly and individually responsible for its content.

#### Funding source

The underlying analyses for this manuscript were part of the consortium “Addiction: Early Recognition and Intervention Across the Lifespan (AERIAL)” and were funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (grant no: 01EE1406F). The funding sources had no further role in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

#### Declaration of Competing Interest

No conflict declared.

#### References

- Baggio, S., Iglesias, K., 2019. On the limitations of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) (in press). *Drug Alcohol Depend.* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107662>.
- Baggio, S., Trächsel, B., Rousson, V., Studer, J., Marmet, S., Heller, P., Sporkert, F., Daeppen, J.-B., Gmel, G., Iglesias, K., 2019. Identifying an accurate self-reported screening tool for alcohol use disorder: Evidence from a Swiss, male population-based assessment. *Addiction*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/add.14864>.
- Higgins-Biddle, J.C., Babor, T.F., 2018. A review of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), AUDIT-C, and USAUDIT for screening in the United States: past issues and future directions. *Am. J. Drug Alcohol Abuse* 44, 578–586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00952990.2018.1456545>.
- Moehring, A., Krause, K., Guertler, D., Bischof, G., Hapke, U., Freyer-Adam, J., Baumann, S., Batra, A., Rumpf, H.-J., Ulbricht, S., John, U., Meyer, C., 2018. Measurement invariance of the alcohol use disorders identification test: establishing its factor structure in different settings and across gender. *Drug Alcohol Depend* 189, 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2018.05.002>.
- Moehring, A., Rumpf, H.-J., Hapke, U., Bischof, G., John, U., Meyer, C., 2019. Diagnostic performance of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) in detecting DSM-5 alcohol use disorders in the general population. *Drug Alcohol Depend* 204, 107530. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.06.032>.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107663>

Received 18 October 2019

Available online 25 October 2019

0376-8716/ © 2019 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Anne Moehring<sup>a,b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University Medicine Greifswald, Institute for Community Medicine,  
Department of Social Medicine and Prevention, Walther-Rathenau-Str. 48,  
D-17475, Greifswald, Germany

<sup>b</sup> German Center for Cardiovascular Research, Partner site Greifswald,  
Greifswald, Germany

E-mail address: [anne.moehring@med.uni-greifswald.de](mailto:anne.moehring@med.uni-greifswald.de).

Hans-Juergen Rumpf

University of Luebeck, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy,  
Ratzeburger Allee 160, D-23538, Luebeck, Germany

Ulfert Hapke

Robert Koch Institute, Department of Epidemiology and Health Monitoring,

Mental Health Unit, D-13302, Berlin, Germany

Gallus Bischof

University of Luebeck, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy,  
Ratzeburger Allee 160, D-23538, Luebeck, Germany

Ulrich John<sup>a,b</sup>, Christian Meyer<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University Medicine Greifswald, Institute for Community Medicine,  
Department of Social Medicine and Prevention, Walther-Rathenau-Str. 48,  
D-17475, Greifswald, Germany

<sup>b</sup> German Center for Cardiovascular Research, Partner site Greifswald,  
Greifswald, Germany

---

\* Corresponding author at: University Medicine Greifswald, Institute for Community Medicine, Department of Social Medicine and Prevention, Walther-Rathenau-Str. 48, D-17475, Greifswald, Germany.