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Addressing Alcohol Abuse Gaps in Questionnaire-Based Studies

Paula Pereira ¹

¹ Specialist of Internal Medicine. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the limitations of relying solely on alcohol use frequency or quantity (e.g., cc/year) to assess alcohol abuse in studies primarily based on questionnaires. While these measures provide valuable insights into drinking patterns, they often fail to capture the intricate nature of problematic alcohol consumption (1-4). Focusing solely on frequency and quantity risks overlooking key aspects of alcohol abuse, such as (3-8):

Binge drinking: Consuming a large amount of alcohol in a short period (e.g., 5 drinks for men, 4 drinks for women in 2 hours) is a significant indicator of risky behavior, even if overall frequency or quantity appears moderate.

Pattern of consumption: Daily or near-daily drinking, even in smaller amounts, can be indicative of dependence and raises concerns about long-term health consequences.

Loss of control: Difficulty limiting or stopping alcohol consumption despite negative consequences is a crucial marker of abuse, often not well-detected by simple frequency or quantity measures.

Psychological dependence: Cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and neglecting important activities due to alcohol are critical aspects of abuse that might not be directly addressed by standard questionnaire items.

Overlooking these nuances can lead to misinterpretations of the true prevalence and impact of alcohol abuse in research findings. To address this gap, I urge researchers to consider incorporating additional tools in questionnaire-based studies, such as:

Screening instruments: Validated screening tools like the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) or CAGE (Cut down, Annoyed, Guilty, Eye-opener) can efficiently identify individuals with potential alcohol problems.

Questions addressing specific behaviors: Including items about binge drinking, daily consumption, loss of control, and

consequences experienced due to alcohol can provide deeper insights into problematic patterns.

Open-ended questions: Allowing participants to elaborate on their drinking habits and experiences can capture personal narratives and reveal important details that might be missed by closed-ended questions.

By adopting a more comprehensive approach to measuring alcohol abuse in questionnaire-based studies, we can gain a more accurate understanding of this complex issue and inform more effective interventions and prevention strategies.

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