



Measuring craving among patients receiving addiction treatment

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OVERVIEW

- Craving is commonly measured using a popular tool that captures only one substance at a time.
- Today, many patients receiving addiction treatment use multiple substances, rendering common craving-measurement tools inefficient.
- Researchers adapted and tested an existing tool to measure craving broadly across many substances (i.e., alcohol and drugs) in a treatment setting for mixed substance use disorder.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Craving is a key aspect of addiction, but it is difficult to measure. The Penn Alcohol Craving Scale (PACS) is a simple, five-question tool that is widely used for assessing craving. The PACS, however, is typically used to assess craving in only one substance at a time.

In reality, addiction treatment is rarely substance-specific and many people who seek treatment for addiction use several substances at a time. The PACS is therefore inefficient for use in treatment settings where patients use multiple substances.

To meet the changing needs of addicted individuals and treatment providers, there is a demand for a succinct tool that can measure craving more broadly, across a range of substances at once.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Researchers modified the PACS tool to measure craving across multiple substances, adapting it for use in a large inpatient addiction treatment setting.

In three separate studies, the researchers then tested how well the adapted tool – renamed the Aggregated Drug Craving Scale (ADCS) – measured craving.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Researchers confirmed that the tool measured short-term craving efficiently and reliably, and it also detected meaningful changes in craving over time, for up to 12 months after treatment.

Overall, these results provide support for using the adapted tool within a mixed addiction treatment setting.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

To understand if and how addiction treatment is working, we must measure how patients are doing before, during, and after receiving treatment.

Monitoring craving is critical to determining the success of an addiction treatment program.

This research has successfully identified a means of measuring craving across a range of substances with improved efficiency as compared to traditional tools.

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

The Aggregated Drug Craving Scale now has the potential to be used across mixed addiction treatment settings and other clinical environments to measure and improve care.

VIEW THE FULL ARTICLE

Costello, MJ., Viel, C., Li, Y., Oshri, A., MacKillop, J. (2020) Psychometric validation of an adaptation of the Penn Alcohol Craving Scale to assess aggregated drug craving. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2020.108127>

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KEYWORDS

Craving; Substance use disorder; Addiction; Scale validation

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