Introduction

Good background and clear objectives, with one caveat. There are several papers describing high rates of problem alcohol use among people being prescribed methadone. Therefore, what new information will this study provide? [major compulsory revision]

P4: In Ireland, the number of people seeking treatment for problem drug use for the first time in a one-year period has increased in recent years….although the number of these new cases reporting problem opiate use has fallen during this time

- Presumably this means higher proportion of new cases are non opiate related? [discretionary revisions]

Method

Clearly described

Discussion

This study is the first to present data on the prevalence of problem alcohol use among a national sample of opiate dependent patients attending primary care for methadone treatment.

- As your findings were similar to those in other settings in Ireland, what are the implications? Presumably, that primary care patients receiving methadone are similar to those in secondary care? [discretionary revisions]

the possibility of selection bias can not be discounted

- It's not obvious that responders would be biased (e.g. having lower/higher rates of problem drug use) unless non-responders were different. Is this something you have checked? [discretionary revisions]

Patients attending primary care for methadone treatment have been reported to be more likely to be employed and to have less severe addiction problems [26] - despite this similar rates of problem alcohol use? [discretionary revisions]

Problem alcohol users actually reported higher rates of concurrent abuse of other
substances, with alcohol therefore forming part of a ‘polysubstance misuse’
pattern that has been previously reported.

-Could you clarify this-are you saying that your findings are similar or dissimilar?
How much of a literature is there on this? [discretionary revisions]

Problem alcohol users were less likely to have attended a specialist hospital
clinic and less likely to have attended specialist hepatology clinics

-than who? I don’t follow this bit. [discretionary revisions]

To date, the issue of screening and treatment interventions for problem alcohol
use among current or former heroin users attending primary care for methadone
treatment has not been explored. -I am not a medical practitioner. Are you saying
this has never been addressed? [discretionary revisions]

I found this paper which seems to be saying something similar

Drug Alcohol Depend. 2008 Dec 8. [Epub ahead of print] Correlates of alcohol
use among methadone-maintained adults.

“To optimize MMT, alcohol screening should be part of routine assessment and
alcohol treatment should be made available within MMT programs. Moreover,
special consideration should be provided to the most vulnerable clients, such as
the younger user, those with a long-term and current history of heavy drug use,
and those victimized and reporting fair or poor health.”

Also this paper seems very relevant.

methadone maintenance treatment on alcohol consumption: a systematic review.

This review found that alcohol use, although often problematic in
methadone-using patients, likely does not change upon entering MMT. We
recommend routine screening and treatment for problematic alcohol use in
patients on MMT.

Limitations

-Those noted are in terms of bias. Another is the type of information collected.
There is no information on the time course? Of those whose alcohol use was not
problematic, might it have been previously? Was alcohol more or less of a
problem after heroin use. What about other characteristics other than those
mentioned in the analysis-e.g. social, family problems? Perhaps discussion should
focus on what questions have been answered and what issues are raised by the
study. I am unsure about the “brief intervention” discussion. Does this literature
suggest that this might be difficult with complex cases? Is a qualitative study
need to understand more about the relationship between drinking and heroin
use? [discretionary revisions]

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.