Reviewer’s report

Title: Screening and brief interventions for hazardous and harmful alcohol use among hospital outpatients in South Africa: results from a randomized controlled trial

Version: 5 Date: 15 May 2013

Reviewer: Natalie Johnson

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Minor Compulsory Revisions

1. Since Babor and colleagues (2001) state that the "the total AUDIT score will reflect the patient’s level of risk related to alcohol" (p.19), it would (in my opinion) be preferable to use the term "AUDIT score" when referring to the primary outcome rather than terms like "alcohol consumption" or "alcohol use" (for example, in the Measures section on p. 7 the second heading would be "AUDIT score" not "alcohol consumption", and in the Participant characteristics section on p.9 it would say "AUDIT score" or "proportion who screened positive for hazardous or harmful drinking" rather than "AUDIT level of alcohol use"). Similarly, I would like the null hypothesis to be rephrased in terms of the study outcome measure (eg., so it suggests that the mean AUDIT scores between those in the intervention and control groups will not be statistically significantly different).

2. I'm still unsure what a "chronic hospital outpatient" is (p.8).

3. In Table 1, I would expect one p-value for a chi-square test comparing AUDIT score categories between the arms (eg., a 4 x 2 table [ie., AUDIT 0-6/7, 7/8-15, 16-19 and 20] and group allocation [intervention, control]).

4. There are a number of grammatical or typographical errors throughout the manuscript (for example, should the first line read ".... consumption of 9.5 litre[s of] pure alcohol per year"? Should the first line in the second paragraph read ".... has been [to be] an effective preventive ...."? In addition, in the section on randomisation says patients "are recruited" rather than patients "were recruited").

REF:

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.