Reviewer's report

Title: A pragmatic randomised trial of two counselling models at the Swedish National Alcohol Helpline

Version: 0 Date: 22 Mar 2019

Reviewer: Dennis McCarty

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The Swedish National Alcohol Helpline conducted a clinical trial comparing a) a brief structure intervention that included self-help materials based on CBT plus a counselor initiated telephone call versus b) a multiple session intervention using motivational interviewing. The primary outcome was a reduction in AUDIT risk zone. Outcomes were similar in both groups -- AUDIT scores declined a risk zone for 68% of the individuals assigned to a brief structured intervention and 61% of the individuals assigned to a multi-session MI intervention. The study acknowledges limitations due to small samples, slow recruitment and a potential for intervention contamination. The analysis concludes that the brief intervention appears to be as effective as the more intensive multi-session intervention and suggest that not all participants require the intensiveness of the usual multi-session intervention.

Alcohol helplines are a somewhat novel adaptation of tobacco cessation helplines and a unique approach to enhancing population health through reductions in alcohol use. The paper is clearly written in English and concise. Attention to 5 issues may strengthen the manuscript.

1. page 4 line 87: edit "will be" to "is"

2. The use of the term "proactive" is unclear. Initially I assumed that the study participant is the proactive party. The text makes clear, however, that the counselor called the study participant proactively. To eliminate the vagueness, please simply label the call as "a counselor initiated call." See for example, page 6 line 119 and 120.
3. page 8 lines 169 - 171. the last sentence of the paragraph is unclear. When was the AUDIT completed? Does the helpline complete the AUDIT as part of the intake or was it completed as part of the baseline study interview. I assume it was re-administered during the follow-up interview.

4. An additional study limitation is that the data are dated and response may differ if replicated currently.

5. The assessment of strengths and limitations implies that the hotline was testing the brief structured intervention as an alternative to the more intensive multi-session intervention. Some more discussion on why only 46% of the callers were eligible would be helpful. Is it feasible to simply use the brief structured intervention with all (or most) callers and compare performance before and after the change occurred?

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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