Reviewer’s report

Title: Exploring the characteristics of newly defined at-risk drinkers following the change to the UK Low Risk Drinking Guidelines: A retrospective analysis using Health Survey for England data

Version: 0 Date: 28 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Jacqueline Bowden

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to read the paper 'Newly at risk? Using Health Survey for England data to retrospectively explore the characteristics of newly defined at-risk drinkers following the change to the UK lower risk drinking guidelines'. The aims of the study are clear and were: a) to establish the number of additional men in England who have been drinking at increasing risk levels over the past 5 years according to the new Low Risk Drinking Guidelines, b) To establish whether this group are different in terms of socio-demographic or other behavioural risk factors to those who would have been defined as lower risk drinkers and/or those who would have been higher risk drinkers. The study is conceptually sound and well-written. I read the paper with interest. Below are comments on each section of the manuscript intended to help clarify points made in the manuscript to increase the overall contributions of the study to the field.

Title

- I had concerns with the title, particularly the section 'Newly at risk?' This section of the title, while some-what attention grabbing and well-intentioned, may be misinterpreted that the authors do not believe that a new segment of men are at risk. I suggest a revision of this aspect of the title, or omission.

Abstract

- line 6/ should include 'was reduced to xx drinks'
- line 9/ should elaborate slightly on 'shared any characteristics' to include reference to which groups
- lines 18-21/ should include which survey year for (N=2982)
- conclusions - should be more aligned to the conclusions of the paper (i.e. ) xx men per year now fit within the new category and then discuss the potential ramifications for services and potentially for campaigns
Background

- page 3, line 5/6/ needs a further line to explain that the guidelines were changed in 2016 in recognition of latest evidence in ...
- page 3, line 50 - needs further elaboration of the link between the alcohol and the various types of cancer and the dose-response relationship
- page 4, line 7 - could benefit from further elaboration on the education campaigns run in England to increase awareness
- page 4, line 24 - the term 'suddenly became increasing' could be misinterpreted as emotive language, I suggest changing it to a less emotive term such as 'are now within'
- page 4, line 24 - I query why 5 years was used given that the guidelines changed in 2016, further justification for the 5 year time-period is required at some point in the introduction or methods

Measures

- page 5, line 15 - further elaboration is required on 'typical amount consumed in any one day' this section is too brief for the reader to understand - were images of bottles or glasses depicted, a standard drink serve etc?

Results

- page 7 line 19 - please elaborate on the year used for the analysis conducted in Table 4 - the caption for Table 4 also needs to include this

Discussion

- page 8/ paragraphs 1 and 2 appear to be a summary of the results and further discussion about the likely implications of these results is required
- page 8, line 33/ further elaboration after 'targeting would not be beneficial' is required as it is not exactly clear what this means, I think the author is inferring but needs to be more explicit -does it mean that they should be treated as per existing standards for anyone at risk? or are you arguing that they should not be treated?

Discussion overall - while not a focus of this study, it is important to discuss the broader field and there is no mention of the benefits of education campaigns now including these people and the benefits that that may bring. I would suggest a few sentences discussing this, as in isolation, the study reads a little as though this is putting a large burden on the system without balancing
the fact that new evidence highlights that segments of society are putting themselves at increased risk.

Overall, the paper is well-written and with these modifications would add value to the literature.

**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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