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: 26 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses one or several testable research questions? (Brief or other article types: is there a clear objective?)

Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

Yes - the approach is appropriate

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with sufficient technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

Yes - experiments and analyses were performed appropriately

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?

Yes - appropriate statistical analyses have been used in the study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

Yes - the author's interpretation is reasonable
OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Has the author addressed your concerns sufficiently for you to now recommend the work as a technically sound contribution? If not, can further revisions be made to make the work technically sound?

Probably - with minor revisions

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: It is commendable that the authors have substantially revised the manuscript and clarified many of the previously vague details. It is also a positive feature that currently, the health system is considered as the main actor and the potential consumer of the study findings. The role and procedure of screening and brief advice is thoroughly addressed in both the Introduction and the Discussion sections. It is also important that the authors presented new results of data analysis.

However, I still have several minor comments which can be taken into account.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:

In the Methods, the age grouping needs some refinement as now it looks as follows: "grouped in 20 year bands from 35 to 74 plus 16-34 and 75+"

I see a mistake in the second paragraph of the Sample subsection: "... newly defined at-risk male drinkers according to the new guidelines (men drinking ≤14 units/week) ...

The objectives of the study are repeated several times including in the middle of the Methods section. The authors are recommended to make sure whether this repetition is needed.

The earlier mentioned problem with table numbering persists. Therefore, it is for the editor to decide whether referring to table 2 after table 3 is according to the journal author guidelines.

The below sentence in the Results, objective 2, does not seem to make much sense: "In all age groups, the percentage of men classified as at-risk drinkers increased under the new, lower weekly alcohol consumption guideline." This increase is not because something affected it; it is there because the authors consider it as such.

Further on, "Within the 2015 Health Survey for England cohort ..." is inaccurate because this was not a cohort but just a study group of a cross-sectional survey.
Correction is also needed here: "... men living in the North East (30% vs 46%) and South West (38% vs 22%) of England..."

Once or twice in the Discussion, the authors mentioned that some groups were "... twice as likely to be at-risk drinkers". However, this needs correction because the measure of association was neither a relative risk nor a prevalence ratio but the odds ratio. Thus, the wording should be "... had twice higher odds..."

I also find the below phrase questionable: "... were particularly affected by the change in guidelines..." People were not affected, only how they are judged was.

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

No

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

No

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

No

**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:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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