

Comparison of different methods assessing the contribution of alcohol to emergency room visits

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Abstract – Introduction. The main objective of research was to compare different methods of assessing the contribution of alcohol to injuries and medical conditions treated in the emergency room (ER) in Poland. Four methods are discussed, including breathalyser readings, clinical appraisal following Y91 ICD-10 codes, interviewer's observations and self-reports.

Methods. In two Polish cities, Warsaw and Sosnowiec, probability samples of patients admitted to the ER were selected and interviewed face-to-face by trained interviewers. Close to 1500 patients were interviewed with a response rate of 67%. To identify injuries and medical conditions associated with drinking (preceded by alcohol consumption), four methods were used: clinical observations made by nurses trained in applying Y91 ICD-10 codes (in the Sosnowiec ER only), observations by interviewers who did not receive such training, breathalyser readings and patient self-reports of drinking within six hours prior to the event.

Results. Breathalyser readings identified 4.4% under the influence of alcohol among all patients, and 5.7% among those who were breathalysed. Clinical assessment in Sosnowiec and interviewers' observations in both cities identified almost the same proportion: 5.1% and 4.7%, respectively, while self-reports identified almost 10%. All four measures for identifying potentially alcohol-related ER visits found a total of 11.5% cases among sampled patients.

Key words: alcohol involvement measures, emergency room, Poland

INTRODUCTION

From the 1980s when the World Health Organisation began to promote the development of methods efficient for early alcohol intervention before alcohol-related consequences became severe, a large number of researchers conducted studies in primary care and other out-patient services, and subsequently in a variety of treatment

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