



# Improving screening tools to enhance addiction treatment and planning

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## OVERVIEW

- People seeking inpatient treatment for addiction are more likely to have concurrent mental health concerns that may go unaddressed if not identified early on in treatment.
- Clinicians use various tools to screen inpatients with addiction for other mental illnesses; however, many commonly used tools have not been validated in large residential addiction programs.
- In this study, researchers evaluated the utility of three common screening tools among people receiving inpatient addiction treatment.

## WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

People living with addiction often have other mental health disorders, such as anxiety, trauma, or depression; however, when these individuals enter inpatient treatment programs, a full assessment for other mental illnesses is often not feasible or practical. Instead, clinicians rely on brief screening tools to identify secondary concerns. If patients exceed the standard cut-off score for a given tool, they may require additional mental health support.

Unfortunately, standard cut-off scores for common screening tools have not been well-established for people receiving inpatient addiction treatment. This study examined whether some of the most commonly used screening tools were able to predict secondary diagnoses accurately in this patient population.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Researchers analyzed data from 100 people admitted to the inpatient addiction treatment program at Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario. As part of routine care, patients are screened for depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) using common tools, such as the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment (GAD-7), and the PTSD Checklist (PCL-5). This group of patients also participated in a comprehensive clinical interview to determine additional diagnoses.

Researchers compared the results from the screening tools to those of the clinical interviews to determine how accurately screening tools predicted these mental health disorders. Analyses were also conducted to determine the optimal cut-off scores for each of the screening tools within this patient population.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The screening tools examined in this study accurately predicted the presence of depression, anxiety, and PTSD among people receiving inpatient addiction treatment; however, researchers found that the optimal cut-off scores for detecting depression and PTSD in this population were significantly higher than the existing cut-off scores for these tools.

Researchers identified new cut-off scores that would screen more efficiently for depression and PTSD to optimize these tools for use in an inpatient addiction setting.

# RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Further studies in this field should explore whether the newly identified cut-off scores are feasible for broader use in addiction treatment, including outpatient programs.

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

By optimizing screening tools, clinicians can identify co-existing psychiatric symptoms in patients more quickly and accurately to improve treatment planning and better meet each patient's unique needs. When patients receive more individualized care, the recovery experience can be more meaningful and impactful. Enhancing care in this way may help to improve treatment retention rates and long-term recovery outcomes.

## VIEW THE FULL ARTICLE

Levitt, E. E., Syan, S. K., Sousa, S., Costello, M. J., Rush, B., Samokhvalov, A. V., & MacKillop, J. (2020). Optimizing screening for depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder in inpatient addiction treatment: A preliminary investigation. *Addictive Behaviors*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106649>

## ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Emily E. Levitt, BA, PhD Candidate<sup>1</sup> and Research Trainee<sup>2</sup>,

Sabrina Kaur Syan, PhD (Neuroscience), PhD Candidate (Clinical Psychology)<sup>1</sup> and Research Trainee<sup>2</sup>

Sarah Sousa MSc, Senior Research and Evaluation Associate<sup>2</sup>

Jean Costello PhD, Director of Evaluation<sup>2</sup>

Brian Rush PhD, Scientist Emeritus<sup>3</sup>, and Senior Scientist<sup>2</sup>

A. V. Samokhvalov MD, PhD, Psychiatrist<sup>4</sup>, and Collaborating Clinical Scientist<sup>2</sup>

Randy E. McCabe, PhD, Psychologist-in-Chief<sup>1</sup>

John Kelly, PhD, Director, Recovery Research Institute<sup>5</sup> and Associate Director, Centre for Addiction Medicine<sup>5</sup>

James MacKillop, PhD, Director, Peter Boris Centre for Addictions Research<sup>1</sup>, and Senior Scientist<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Peter Boris Centre for Addiction Research, McMaster University & St. Joseph's Health Care (Hamilton, ON)

<sup>2</sup>HRI (Guelph, ON)

<sup>3</sup>Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Toronto, ON)

<sup>4</sup>Homewood Health Centre (Guelph, ON)

<sup>5</sup>Massachusetts General Hospital (Boston, MA, USA)

## KEYWORDS

Diagnosis; Screening; Substance Use Disorder; Major Depressive Disorder; Anxiety Disorder; Post-traumatic Stress Disorder; Measurement-based Care

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