

Short Communication

Performance of a new substance dependence screening questionnaire (SDSQ) in a non-clinical population

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Abstract

Little research has been done on the development of brief screening instruments for the identification of persons meeting diagnostic criteria for drug dependence in non-clinical populations. In the work described in this paper, a new instrument, the Substance Dependence Screening Questionnaire (SDSQ), was drawn up and administered by interviewers to 554 subjects aged 18–34 years (65.9% women), and its results were compared with the diagnoses arrived at by expert clinicians using the Structured Clinical Interview of DSM-IV Axis I Disorders (Clinician Version) (SCID-CV). The SDSQ exhibited satisfactory agreement with SCID-CV ($\kappa=0.904$), and had a sensitivity of 0.914, a specificity of 0.990, positive and negative predictive values of 0.914 and 0.990, respectively, and positive and negative likelihood ratios of 90.65 and 0.087, respectively, for SCID-CV-diagnosed drug dependence. These results suggest that the new instrument may, as intended, prove useful for screening for substance dependence in non-clinical populations.

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1. Introduction

The high prevalence of substance abuse and the seriousness of its personal and social consequences call for screening instruments capable of detecting and evaluating abuse-related disorders and of thereby contributing to the identification of candidates for preventive and therapeutic intervention. Most studies of drug dependence screening have taken place in emergency services (Bastiaens, Riccardi & Sakhrani,

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2002; Cherpitel & Borges, 2004), primary care services (Davis, Bush, Kivlahan, Dobie & Bradley, 2003), medical services (Aidala et al., 2004; Ashman, Schwartz, Cantor, Hibbard & Gordon, 2004) or psychiatric services (Hirata, Almeida, Funari & Klein, 2001; Staley & El-Guebaly, 1990; Westermeyer, Yargic & Thuras, 2004); relatively few have concerned other populations. Moreover, most of the instruments employed in these studies quantify symptoms rather than using diagnostic criteria such as those of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) or the WHO International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) (e.g., Bradley, Kivlahan, Bush, McDonnell & Fihn, 2001; Staley & El-Guebaly, 1990). Also, many of these instruments concern just a single substance, usually alcohol (e.g., Bradley et al., 2001; Hirata et al., 2001). As far as we know, no substance dependence screening instruments have been developed specifically for Spanish target populations, and many adaptations have undocumented or deficient psychometric characteristics, a case in point being the Spanish version of the Severity of Dependence Scale (González-Sáiz & Salvador-Carulla, 1998).

Here we describe a new instrument, the Substance Dependence Screening Questionnaire (SDSQ), and its performance when used in a non-clinical population of Spanish university students to screen for substance dependence diagnosed with the Structured Clinical Interview of DSM-IV Axis I Disorders (Clinician Version) (SCID-CV; First, Gibbon, Spitzer & Williams, 1997).

2. Method

From a population of 27,587 university students, a 559-member multi-stage random sample stratified by sex and seniority was drawn. Five of this initial sample declined the invitation to take part in the study, leaving a final sample of 554 subjects (65.9% women) aged 18–34 years ($M=22.2$ years, $SD=2.6$ years). Variables describing this sample were distributed as follows (in each case, the modal category is mentioned first, and blank responses are not mentioned): 99.3% of the sample were single, 0.5% were married, and 0.2% divorced or widowed; 41.9% were from families with a monthly income of 960–1920 € (cf. 27.3% for income > 1920 € and 8.8% for income < 960 €); 71.6% described themselves as middle-class, 15.0% as upper class and 11.6% as lower class; 68.8% came from urban localities as against 31.2% from rural localities; 66.4% were studying social sciences, law or humanities, 16.4% health sciences, and 17.2% natural science or mathematics; and 53.1% had not yet completed the first three years of their course, 42.2% were in the fourth or fifth year of a 4- or 5-year course, and 4.7% were postgraduates.

The study was designed in accordance with the recommendations of Browner, Newman and Cummings (1988) for diagnostic test evaluation. Demographic information and responses to the Substance Dependence Screening Questionnaire (SDSQ; see Appendix A) were obtained in interviews conducted by three psychology PhD students who had received specific training for this task. Interview duration ranged from 5 to 10 min. The SDSQ comprises 11 items (plus 5 additional items associated with item 1), the aim of which is to determine whether the subject is currently suffering or has ever suffered from substance dependence (maladaptive consumption of a psychoactive substance resulting in clinically significant impairment or distress) according to the diagnostic criteria of DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). It is based on the substance abuse sections of SCID-CV (First et al., 1997) and the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI; WHO, 1998). Item 1 obtains relevant non-diagnostic information (the substance in question, intensity of consumption, current or past, etc.); items 2–7 cover the first six of the seven DSM-IV-TR criteria for substance dependence; and items 8–11 jointly cover the seventh criterion (continued use in spite of awareness of harm). Substance dependence is

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