NEW GUIDELINES ARE NEEDED TO IMPROVE THE REPORTING OF TRIALS IN ADDICTION SCIENCES

We are pleased to announce the development of a new reporting guideline for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of social and psychological interventions. We invite your readership to participate in this project by visiting our website (http://tinyurl.com/CONSORT-study).

Researchers within the addiction sciences have sought to improve the rigour of RCTs for more than 40 years [1]. There has been growing support for high-quality evaluation in addiction research, as evidenced by the standards of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Empirically Supported Treatments; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices; and the Cochrane Collaboration’s Tobacco Addiction Group, and Drugs and Alcohol Group. Although the quality of RCTs has improved in recent decades, the reporting quality of RCTs within many disciplines—including addiction sciences—remains suboptimal [1, 2].

RCTs of addiction interventions are particularly challenging to report clearly and comprehensively. These interventions are often complex; they include multiple, interacting components at several levels and have various relevant outcomes [3]. RCTs of these interventions are often reported insufficiently to understand internal validity (bias) and external validity (the applicability of a study’s results in other settings or populations). To use the evidence provided by RCTs for developing and disseminating these interventions, the quality of reporting must be addressed.

Reporting guidelines aim to improve the reporting of research by listing the minimum information required to understand how studies were conducted. The Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) Statement is an evidence-based guideline for RCTs that includes a checklist of 25 items, a flow diagram and examples of good reporting [4]. CONSORT has improved the reporting of thousands of medical experiments and has been endorsed by more than 600 journals. Researchers and journal editors in the social and behavioural sciences are generally aware of CONSORT, yet many question its suitability for social and psychological interventions. We conducted a systematic review to assess reporting guidelines for and the current reporting quality of social and psychological intervention RCTs; we found that existing guidelines have important limitations in content, development and/or dissemination, with important details routinely missing from RCT publications [5]. Overall, the literature suggests that a new reporting guideline for these interventions is needed—CONSORT-SPI (an extension for social and psychological interventions).

CONSORT-SPI will be developed by an international collaboration of researchers, funders, service providers and journal editors. We will use consensus techniques to reduce bias and to promote widespread guideline uptake. Following rigorous reviews of existing guidelines and current reporting quality, we will conduct a Delphi process to identify a prioritized list of reporting items to consider for the extension. We will then host a consensus meeting to decide upon the list of minimal reporting standards for the guideline, mirroring the development of previous CONSORT guidelines [6].

The success of this project depends upon widespread involvement and agreement among key international stakeholders in research, policy and practice. Many have already agreed to participate, and we hope others will volunteer their time and expertise. *Addiction* has led the way among journals in this field in its commitment to improving the reporting of intervention studies. Recent editorials have highlighted *Addiction*’s policies requiring full manuals, intervention descriptions and use of current CONSORT guidelines for RCTs involving behavioural interventions [7], as well as the publication of full trial protocols [8]. To facilitate *Addiction*’s ongoing work in this area, we invite stakeholders in the addiction sciences and other related disciplines to share their views, join this important effort and participate in guideline development.

**Declaration of interests**

None.

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**References**


