The ASSIST in Pitjantjatjara: A randomised crossover validation study for use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

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Introduction: Substance use significantly contributes to Australia's disease burden, with disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (herein respectfully referred to as Indigenous Australian) peoples, due to ongoing effects from colonisation. Effective intervention requires culturally appropriate screening tools in familiar, community-relevant languages to identify at-risk individuals. This study evaluates the validity and reliability of the Pitjantjatjara-translated Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST).

Methods: We recruited self-identified Pitjantjatjara- or English-speaking Anangu men and women aged 18-65. Participants completed both the ASSIST (index measure) and a yarning-style diagnostic interview (DIS-SAM) evaluating substance use according to ICD-11 and DSM-5-TR classifications (gold-standard). Assessments were conducted by researchers experienced in working with Aboriginal clients, with randomized ordering (to account for fatigue effects). Follow-up ASSIST assessments occurred 7–14 days after initial testing to determine reliability.

Results: Preliminary data from 54 participants who have completed initial assessments thus far (34 [63%] completing follow-up) suggest promising outcomes, though data collection continues.

Discussions and Conclusions: Early findings indicate the Pitjantjatjara ASSIST demonstrates validity and reliability for assessing risk related to alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis use when measured against diagnostic classifications. Insufficient data exist to determine reliability for methamphetamine and inhalants. Pending full validation, future research will examine substance use disorder prevalence within Indigenous Australian communities.

Implications for Practice or Policy: A validated, culturally appropriate screening tool for Indigenous Australian settings has significant potential to reduce substance-related harms. An instrument with high diagnostic accuracy will provide greater insight into substance use disorder prevalence among Indigenous Australian populations, informing targeted public health responses.