

Daily Craving Reports from Drinkers Not in Treatment

T.L. Fazzino; G.L. Rose; J.E. Helzer.

University of Vermont, Department of Psychology and Department of Psychiatry

Aim: Craving is a central component in alcohol use disorders and most individuals who are dependent on alcohol experience craving. Alcohol craving has been widely studied, although few studies have investigated how craving operates on a daily basis and no studies have investigated alcohol craving in non-treatment seeking participants. The purpose of this study was to describe the occurrence and key characteristics of craving in non-treatment seeking, heavy drinkers.

Methods: Ninety participants were recruited from primary care centers in Vermont and identified by primary care physicians as having at-risk drinking (based on NIAAA guidelines). Participants called an automated interactive voice response system (IVR) daily for 180 days and reported their alcohol use, craving, and life events and stressors.

Results: Participants called on a mean of 59% of days during the study and reported drinking alcohol on 72% of days. Participants reported experiencing craving on most (80%) call days. Participants reported craving on the majority (94%) of the days when they drank, compared to about half (46%) of days when they did not drink. Mean craving intensity was moderate ($M=3.9$) and the majority of craving ratings (89%) were low to moderate (1 to 6). There was a significant positive association ($r=.421$) between intensity of craving and the amount of alcohol drank on the same day, with higher levels of craving being associated with larger amounts of alcohol consumed ($p<.01$).

Discussion: Daily process data from heavy drinkers in a primary care sample indicate that craving occurs nearly every day, and that craving intensity is associated with amount of same-day alcohol use. These data address a gap in the literature and describe the occurrence of daily craving in a non-treatment seeking, heavy drinking participant group. Further research examining the drinking-craving relationship would further improve our understanding of the natural course of craving.