

Do the tools to quantify addiction help to define it?

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Understanding what counts as an addiction, and what can be done to address it is the work of researchers across many disciplines. But what tools are used to 'measure' addiction, and are these capable of legitimising an addiction or improving our knowledge of it?

These are the questions being addressed by a team of researchers based at the Australian National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Australia, who have analysed the tools used to identify [substance abuse](#) and addiction to understand how they contribute to or stabilise the realities of addiction.

The researchers, Dr Robyn Dwyer and Dr Suzanne Fraser, writing in the journal *Health Sociology Review*, identify five key processes by which the tools used to screen or diagnose addiction which help to establish, standardise and normalise an addiction within an individual. They conclude that some of the tools may contribute to establishing an addiction, and suggest further research into the choice of tools used.

Dwyer and Fraser identify five key processes by which these tools can be analysed and considered to establish or standardise an addiction; reduction, expression, quantification, normalisation and populationisation.

They believe that through these processes more and more individuals can be considered 'addicted', thereby inflating assumed rates of addiction, or that tools can be applied without discrimination to individuals,

reinforcing assumptions about the scale and character of addiction and shaping individual experiences of addiction.

By using this analysis to identify such limitations and characteristics of the tools used to define an addiction, the researchers do not intend to suggest that a perfect catch-all [tool](#) could be developed allowing a perfect window into the reality of an individual's addiction. However, they do hope that by questioning how knowledge of [addiction](#) is gained, better or different ways of understanding it might be obtained.

More information: Robyn Dwyer et al. Making addictions in standardised screening and diagnostic tools, *Health Sociology Review* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/14461242.2016.1184581](https://doi.org/10.1080/14461242.2016.1184581)

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