

Alcohol Timeline Followback (TLFB)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Alcohol TLFB is a drinking assessment method that obtains estimates of daily drinking and has been evaluated with clinical and nonclinical populations. Using a calendar, people provide retrospective estimates of their daily drinking over a specified time period that can vary up to 12 months from the interview date. Several memory aids can be used to enhance recall (e.g., calendar; key dates serve as anchors for reporting drinking; standard drink conversion). The Alcohol TLFB has been shown to have good psychometric characteristics with a variety of drinker groups, and can generate variables that provide a wide range of information about an individual's drinking (e.g., pattern, variability, and magnitude of drinking). The method is recommended for use when relatively precise estimates of drinking are necessary, especially when a complete picture of drinking days (i.e., high- and low-risk days) is needed (evaluating drinking pre-posttreatment). Clinically, the TLFB can be used to provide feedback about one's drinking in an effort to increase a client's motivation to change. Although Timeline summary data have been found to be generally reliable, as with all drinking assessment methods, exact day-by-day precision cannot be assumed or necessarily expected. Overall, the Alcohol TLFB method provides a relatively accurate portrayal of drinking, and has both clinical and research utility.

TARGET POPULATIONS

Adults

Adolescents

Groups for which this instrument might be especially helpful?

Evaluated across multiple drinker populations—alcohol abusers of varying severity, male and female normal drinkers in the general population, college students, and adolescents

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Number of items: *Number of days drinking assessed can vary from 30 to 360 from the interview.*

Number of scales: *Not applicable*

Formats: Pencil-and-paper
 Interviewer
 Computer
 Other

Time required for administration: *Amount of time varies depending upon the interval over which drinking is to be assessed (e.g., 90 days takes about 10 to 15 minutes; 12 months takes about 30 minutes).*

Administered by: *In person by trained interviewer; self-administered by clinical and nonclinical populations, completed in a pencil-and-paper format; available in a computerized version*

Training required for administration: *Yes, a training video is available to aid new users.*

Comments: *Some training is needed for proper administration. Printed instructions are available for pencil-and-paper administration and are included in the computer-assisted program.*

SCORING

Time required to score/interpret: *5 minutes to enter data into the computer program; then a printed report is generated*

Scored by: *Computer program or by individual tabulating number of days, drinks per drinking day, and other desired statistics*

Scoring key: yes no

Computerized scoring or interpretation available: yes no

Norms available: *Not applicable*

Have reliability studies been done: yes no

What measures of reliability have been done?

Test-retest (*high reliability across multiple populations of drinkers*)

Have validity studies been done: *Yes. Evidence for the method's validity derives from clinical and general population samples.*

What measures of validity were used?

Content

Criterion (*Concurrent: Verifiable Events days jailed, hospitalized; Collateral Informants*)

Construct (*Measures of alcohol-related consequences—Alcohol Dependence Scale, Short Alcohol Dependence Data Questionnaire; Biochemical measures—SGOT, GGTP*)

CLINICAL UTILITY OF INSTRUMENT

The clinical value of the Alcohol TLFB goes beyond assessing and obtaining drinking data. By reviewing the completed Timeline calendar, therapists can assist clients in gaining a picture of the main features of their drinking during the time period under study (e.g., did drinking increase prior to treatment entry? distinct patterns to drinking). Discussing the Timeline results with clients can help illuminate antecedents and consequences of heavy drinking. Periods of relapse can be identified, and this can serve as the basis for probing causes of relapse. Giving clients feedback about themselves has been suggested as one strategy for strengthening motivation for change or at least for getting clients to more actively participate in their treatment. Different types of Individualized Drinking Consequence graphs (e.g., health, financial, caloric) are available for use with the TLFB and can be used as a feedback tool to help increase clients' motivation to change.

RESEARCH APPLICABILITY

The Alcohol TLFB allows several dimensions of a person's drinking to be separately examined: (a) variability (i.e., scatter); (b) pattern (i.e., shape); and (c) extent of drinking (i.e., elevation; how much). The TLFB method can generate a variety of continuous and categorical variables. It provides different and more precise information on individual consumption levels than indirect estimation formulae (e.g., quantity-frequency methods). Data collected by the TLFB method is amenable to a variety of statistical analyses: survival analysis, profile analysis, and pre-post treatment comparisons.

SOURCE

Copyright: *Yes. Pencil-and-paper version can be used freely. The Timeline Followback materials are available to the public as a free download at www.nova.edu/~gsc. At the Web site on the left-hand side, click on the section entitled "Online Files"; go to the section on Timeline Followback and download the files.*

Cost: No charge for pencil-and-paper version. Charges only for manual and instructional training video.

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SOURCE REFERENCES

- Sobell, L.C. & Sobell, M.B. (1995). *Alcohol Timeline Followback Users' Manual*. Toronto, Canada: Addiction Research Foundation.
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SUPPORTING REFERENCES

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- Manwell, L.B., Fleming, M.F., Mundt, M.P., Stauffacher, E.A. & Barry, K.L. (2000). Treatment of problem alcohol use in women of childbearing age: Results of a brief intervention trial. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 24, 1517-1524.
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- Sobell, L.C., Brown, J., Leo, G.I. & Sobell, M.B. (1996). The reliability of the Alcohol Timeline Followback when administered by telephone and by computer. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 42, 49-54.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE VERSIONS AND HOW TO OBTAIN

*Belgian Dutch, Belgian French,
French, German, Japanese, Polish,
Spanish, and Swedish*

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KEY REFERENCES FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE VERSIONS

Sobell, L.C., Agrawal, S., Annis, H.M., et al. (2001). Cross-cultural evaluation of two drinking related assessment instruments: Alcohol Timeline Followback and Inventory of Drinking Situations. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 36, 313-331.

Annis, H.M., Sobell, L.C., Ayala-Velazquez, H., Rybakowski, J.K., Sandahl, C., Saunders, B., Thomas, S. & Ziolkowski, M. (1996). Drinking-related assessment instruments: Cross-cultural studies. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 31, 1525-1546.