TRANSDERMAL MONITORS TO ASSESS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN REAL-TIME AND REAL-LIFE – A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON USER-EXPERIENCE

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Background:
Transdermal alcohol monitors, such as SCRAM CAMs, enable continuous measurement of alcohol consumption in participants’ natural environments free from recall bias and response burden. This paper explores research participants’ experience of wearing SCRAM CAMs to provide insights into the potential of the devices to be used for research on a larger scale.

Approach:
Two groups of participants were recruited: a sample of college students in Victoria (n=18), and a sample of festival attendees in Tasmania (n=12). Participants wore the SCRAM CAMs over three days, and upon returning the devices participated in a semi-structured qualitative interview about their experiences of the devices.

Outcomes:
Most participants reported becoming unaware of the device after initial adjustment and did not believe their drinking patterns had been altered by wearing it. Perceived similarities with correctional monitoring equipment led to a number of social interactions with onlookers, but participants generally felt at ease with this. Common issues reported by participants related to the physical discomfort and restrictions caused by the devices, citing problems with sleeping, exercising, and irritation with the clamping mechanism as impediments to overall user satisfaction.

Conclusions:
Although SCRAM CAMs have not been designed with research purposes in mind this study highlights their utility in measuring alcohol consumption in real-life and real-time. Most participants suggested that their drinking patterns were unaffected and that any physical discomfort was manageable; however, adequately controlled validation studies are needed to determine whether and how wearing SCRAM CAM devices affect retention, behaviour and drinking patterns.

Comfort is a critical consideration in terms of improving the user experience. With the current SCRAM CAM devices, relatively simple measures can be taken to improve comfort without compromising the quality of the transdermal readings.

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