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► [An in-depth survey of the screening and assessment practices of highly regarded adolescent substance abuse treatment programs.](#)

Gans J., Falco M., Schackman B.R. et al. [Request reprint](#)

Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse: 2010, 19(1), p. 33–47.

US substance use treatment programmes for adolescents which had been recommended by experts were nevertheless highly variable and inconsistent in the quality of their screening and assessment of the substance use, family circumstances and mental health of their patients.

Original abstract *Aims* To examine the quality of screening and assessment practices at some of the most highly regarded adolescent substance use treatment programmes in the United States.

Methods Between March and September 2005, telephone surveys were administered to directors of highly regarded programmes. Several different publications and databases were then used to measure the quality of the screening and assessment instruments described by programmes.

Results For the 120 programmes responding, 77 distinctly named instruments developed by outside sources were used at some point in the screening and assessment process, and the majority of programmes also used instruments developed in-house. Fewer than half of these instruments were mentioned in the Substance Use Screening & Assessment Instruments Database. We were able to confirm that 87% of the instruments developed by others have a published manual, and 74% have been described in an article appearing in a peer-reviewed publication. Sixty-two percent were designed to be used with adolescents or adults and adolescents, while 19% were designed for adults only.

Conclusion Although adolescent substance abuse treatment programmes recognised the importance of screening and assessment, the quality of such practices varied significantly. A large number of different tools were used by some of the most highly regarded programmes in the country, and many used questionnaires developed in-house

that may not have had high standards of reliability and validity. Furthermore, numerous programmes were using assessment instruments that were not uniquely designed for adolescents. Encouraging the adoption of standardised assessment practices would help those involved in treatment to evaluate programmes and to understand the assessment process.

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