

Two-Week Ambulatory Assessment of Craving as a Predictor of 5-Year Addiction Treatment Outcomes

E. Baillet*^{1,2,4}, M. Auriacombe^{1,2,4,5}, F. Serre^{1,2,4}

Affiliations

¹ University of Bordeaux, SANPSY, USR 3413, F-33000 Bordeaux, France,

² CNRS, SANPSY, USR 3413, FR-33000 Bordeaux, France

⁴ Pôle interétablissement Addictologie, CH Ch. Perrens and CHU de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France

⁵ Department of Psychiatry, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

*Corresponding author

Emmanuelle Baillet

e-mail: emmanuelle.baillet.1@u-bordeaux.fr

Pôle Addictologie, CHCP, 121 rue de la Béchade, 33076 Bordeaux Cedex, France

Tel: +33 634 080 897

Introduction: Addiction is a chronic condition characterized by attempts to stop or reduce substance use followed by relapse. A main objective of addiction treatment is to prevent relapse by targeting craving, an unwanted and intense desire to use substances that constitutes a major risk factor for relapse. Craving may fluctuate considerably over a period of several hours and can be assessed in real time by Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA). However, the predictive value of craving relative to addiction outcomes has only been studied over short periods of time (1 month to 2 years) whereas this disorder often follows a chronic course (5 to 10 years).

Objective: To examine whether craving levels at the initiation of treatment are associated with long-term outcomes (abstinence/non-abstinence).

Methods: Craving intensity was assessed 4 times per day by a two-week EMA study among participants initiating outpatient treatment for Substance Use Disorders (DSM-5) in a French addiction clinic. Subjects received a follow-up assessment 5 or more years after inclusion. Craving fluctuations and its association with 5-year outcomes were analyzed with Hierarchical Linear Models.

Results: Stronger decreases in craving intensity during the first two weeks of treatment was associated with more abstinence at 5 years ($n=39$; $b=0.08$; $p=0.043$).

Discussion: Our results suggest that the craving trajectory at the beginning of addiction treatment may provide an important indicator of long-term treatment outcomes. This finding has potential implications for personalized treatment.

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Corresponding Author

emmanuelle.baillet.1@u-bordeaux.fr

Addiction Psychiatry, CNRS USR 3413 SANPSY, University of Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France
05 56 56 17 38 / 34 86