Decision Making in Medical Psychological Assessment Procedures: Translation of the Assessment Criteria in Reports on Fitness-to-Drive

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OBJECTIVES: In Germany the medical psychological assessment of the driver’s aptitude (MPA) is a mandatory condition for license reinstatement in any case the DUl offender scores a BAC equal or above 1.6 mg/g or has repeated offenses in the past. Since the Federal Highway Research Institute has published the Expert Guidelines on Driver’s Aptitude in 2000 the medical and psychological preconditions for re-licensing apply accordingly for these assessments. In 2005 the Assessment Criteria (Schubert & Mattern, 2005) were released and introduced as a standard document in order to support the process of decision making. The development of these criteria additionally tended to make the individual assessment process comprehensible and fair.

This study aimed (1) to analyze to what extent the criteria and the postulated indicators were translated in the reports on fitness-to-drive, (2) to identify the client’s statements and on-site findings that were taken into account as diagnostic information and (3) how the relevant information were integrated to a final result and diagnostic judgement.

METHODS: 35 reports on fitness-to-drive from 4 different assessment institutes were randomly chosen and analyzed by two especially educated evaluators (Kappa: .75 - .95).

RESULTS: The results indicate that most of the decisions were indeed comprehensible, but some indicators (e.g. for problem awareness, cooperativeness, need for abstinence, quality and stability of behavioral changes) were not concretely operationalized and thus are poorly checkable (e.g. “and”-connection in one indicator, vague descriptions of alcohol amounts or missing time details). Only a few of the indicators that should be explored actually were explored. In most cases it was traceable by means of which statements the diagnostic information was gained, but the manner of interpretation for decision making remained subjective to a large extent. In addition to that it became clear that numerous indicators are not empirically approved or do not comply with the current state of the art.

DISCUSSION: The results of the evaluation show that a reliable and statistically testable algorithm for the integration of diagnostic information in order to make the decision verifiable is missing (Schuhfried, 2004). The findings indicate a substantial need for further research on this topic.

Keywords: Medical psychological assessment, Assessment criteria, Fitness to drive