Qeios

Peer Review

Review of: "Benefits to Mental Wellbeing from Making Positive Changes in Health-Related Behaviours: An Ultra-Rapid Review"

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What justification is there for considering the attached as an ultra vapid review rather than an ultra rapid review? A few genuine methodological concerns could justify the "vapid" label.

The most substantive critique is that the review tells us remarkably little that isn't already obvious or well-established. The conclusion that exercise, healthy eating, not smoking, and drinking less are good for your mental wellbeing is hardly a revelation — it's the type of finding that would surprise nobody, and one wonders what the commissioned funders (the Department of Health and Social Care, via a communications agency) were actually paying for beyond a citable document to support public messaging they were already planning to produce.

The methodology is also quite thin. The "ultra-rapid review" framing manages substantial heavy lifting here — it essentially licenses a shallow search combined with an AI tool (elicit.com) in ways the authors themselves admit could miss studies, hallucinate findings, or overweight low-quality evidence. The manual component amounts to a Google Scholar search plus citation-chasing, which would be considered fairly modest even for a scoping exercise.

The treatment of the AI tool is arguably the most problematic element. The "unplanned analyses" — where they simply *asked* elicit.com how quickly benefits could be expected — are presented alongside findings as if they carry evidential weight, when they're really just prompting a language model and reporting its output.

The competing interests declaration is also striking: the paper was directly commissioned by the Department of Health *through a communications agency* (Freuds), which is an unusual and somewhat

 doi.org/10.32388/8FEJXR

murky funding arrangement that could easily shape both the research questions asked and the conclusions emphasized.

So while the findings aren't wrong, the paper is largely an exercise in dressing up received wisdom in academic clothing for policy communications purposes — which is arguably the definition of vapid scholarship. **Acknowledgement: Peer Review by AI was considered the most appropriate response to this invitation to peer review.**

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.