

Review of: "Assessing the Impact of a Group Intervention on the Mental Well-being of Undergraduate Healthcare Students"

Prof. Dr. Manuel Pascal Stadtmann

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper.

These indeed point to an interesting topic and a relevance in today's world that urgently needs more exploration. The authors present interesting results that measure an intervention and its effects. While the approach is sound, there are several issues that need to be addressed in the process.

Introduction: Possibly the word well-being is more appropriate than wellness.

Methods: an initial specification of which method would be appropriate for allocation to the intervention or control group would be appropriate.

Introduction:

The referencing seems to me to be outdated. For instance, it states that mental illness is linked to crime. This would require current literature. The study from 2004 is not sufficient. The same applies to the other associations made. There is more recent literature for them as well.

The argumentation does not seem consistent at certain points: for example, the authors state: "Mental distress affects the students on both personal and professional levels. In the following sentence, the cause is listed as the result: "physical symptoms, mental distress, emotional exhaustion". Here, a refinement of the argumentation would increase the quality of the introduction.

Method

Data from the overall student population are missing here. How many were enrolled at the time? Also missing is information on how the students were invited to participate in the study. Was it through information events, flyers or email communication? The question also arises as to why the intervention and control groups were not matched in order to better control possible effects.

While a standardised instrument was used with the WEMWBS, it does not seem clear here what is understood under the terms stressors as well as coping techniques. Or indeed whether these were collected with a standardised tool or not. This circumstance limits the development of an understanding of the operationalisation.

The survey methods are identifiable in the text. Nevertheless, it can be doubted whether an influence of corresponding effects can actually be avoided after 9 days.

The statistical methods used must be added. This raises the following questions: Which specific method was applied? How were missing's dealt with? Which corrections had to be made?

Results:

The results are presented in a clear manner. Nevertheless, the readership lacks some background information. E.g. how did the classification of stressors take place in detail? Numerically? Were clusterings carried out on the basis of a content analysis? Also some insight into attrition is missing.

The paragraph " Lastly, a statistically significant dose-response relation..." shows good approaches. However, the quality cannot be deduced by the reader, as statistical methodological approaches are not described.

Discussion:

The discussion could benefit from current literature. For example, "The poor mental well-being among the students is also comparable to the general population elsewhere". Current literature indicates that it is indeed lower than in the general population. The authors fail to point out the various limitations. For example, no conclusive statements can be made regarding effects, as randomisation is lacking and controls for confounders were not addressed. Recommendations for future power analyses would also be missing. Therefore, a more cautious discussion would be appropriate.

Conclusion:

This seems too generalised for the reader. The design, the missing data and also the structure of this study are interesting. However, statements on the improvement of well-being are limited.