Reviewer's report

Title: Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people: a systematic review

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Reviewer: Debra Rickwood

Reviewer's report:

This paper is very timely, as it provides the first systematic review of perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking by young people. Young people’s mental health has become an area of critical focus, with studies across the developed world attesting to the high level of mental disorder in adolescents and young adults aged 12-25 years, but low level of accessing professional mental health care. The barriers and facilitators to young people seeking professional mental health care have become an area of considerable research interest, and the field has developed to the point where a systematic review is warranted.

The authors provide a rigorous review, with a well-defined question, appropriate and thoroughly described methods, and sound data. Importantly, the paper reviews both quantitative and qualitative studies, revealing the breadth of approaches in this field, with the sample size of studies ranging from 3 to 374. Most of the research is shown to have taken place in Australia or the United States, and mostly with high school students. The paper is exemplary in adhering to appropriate standards for reporting and data deposition, and the conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data. The limitations of the work are described, all work that is drawn upon is clearly acknowledged, and the writing is clear.

The paper does not go beyond describing the findings of the systematic review, except for the final sentence, which argues for systematic investigation of programs to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and mental health help-seeking through randomised controlled trials (RCTs). It is not clear how this conclusion was reached, and an argument for RCTs is not made; notably, in the field of mental health promotion, RCTs may not be the most appropriate methodology for many types of interventions.

A more salient point to be made about the literature area, however, is that a more sophisticated investigation of the barriers and facilitators as they affect different parts of the process of help-seeking is required to advance the field. Seeking professional mental health care is not a one-step action; rather it is a process that includes awareness of a problem that needs addressing, the decision to seek professional help, choosing and accessing a source of professional help, and then engaging with that source to achieve outcomes. Barriers and facilitators vary in type and intensity at different parts of the process. The paper makes a
worthwhile contribution in furthering this understanding by carefully reviewing the current evidence base. It also shows that other important omissions in the youth mental health help-seeking literature are the lack of prospective community-based studies and studies of high-risk groups of young people, which should be the focus of future research endeavour.

Some very minor amendments are required as follows:

It is unclear in the settings and target groups section on page 8 what “semi-rural students” means.

There is a minor typographical error on page 8, where the number ‘3746’ should be ‘374’.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have not competing interests.