Reviewer’s report

Title: A school intervention for mental health literacy in adolescents: Effects of a non-randomized cluster controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 23 May 2013

Reviewer: Katharine Chisholm

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In the paper entitled ‘A school intervention for mental health literacy in adolescents: Effect of a non-randomized cluster controlled trial’ the authors present an interesting study in an important research area, worthy of investigation. The results hold much promise for the area of school-based mental health education.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Knowledge about available help is one of the reasons it is so important that adolescents have adequate mental health literacy - the authors mention that ‘recognition of symptoms and lack of fear of stigma may be crucial for help-seeking’. My feeling is this needs more discussion as it is one of the central reasons why the research presented is so important.

2. The authors mention that 17 of the 23 intervention classes were taught by the authors rather than the teachers. If the authors were evaluating the intervention under optimal conditions then why were all classes not taught by the authors? If the authors were evaluating the intervention under real word conditions, then why were any of the classes taught by the authors?

3. Some acknowledgement of the fact that the intervention was only conducted in one (very large) school and so may not be easily generalizable to other schools is needed. I would also like to see what the demographic characteristics of this school were - the authors mention that gaining data on parental level of education might have helped them place the school in context; what about things like percentage of free school meals received by students (though I am not sure what the system for this is in Norway), where the school lies in relation to other schools in terms of final exam grades, the ethnic mix of students and so on. This would add context and give indication of how generalizable the research might be to other schools in Norway or elsewhere.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Some spelling and/or grammatical errors e.g. ‘a school program for mental health literacy and prevention aimed at secondary school (13-16 yrs)’ instead of ‘secondary schools (13-16 yrs)’ ‘The basis principle of empowerment health education’ instead of ‘basic principle’

2. Occasionally the abstract lacks clarity – for example in the results section
gender and age/school grade contributed to variance’ it is not clear whether this is relating to the cross sectional analysis conducted before the intervention, or whether it is as an interaction with the intervention.

3. I appreciate that this is a large study with many components, but I think many of the concepts could be explained with equal clarity but in a more concise manner. I think this would help the flow of the introduction.

4. Much of the literature cited regarding recognition of mental disorder concerns adult data – as this study deals with adolescents less on comparing adults from different cultures and more on adolescents here would be beneficial (though I appreciate that adolescent research is scarce).

5. Participants and attrition in the method contains a large number of percentages – I think it would add clarity to have these in a table instead of in the text. This would also allow the section to be more concise. Measures used are also mentioned in the participants and attrition section; it would add clarity therefore for the measurements section to go before this section, or even for the authors to consider putting the attrition section at the start of the results rather than in the method.

6. The timeline for data collection is not clear; The intervention school (January and March) and ‘school b’ (April and June) both appear to have two data collection points. Currently it appears that ‘school C’ has four data collection points (June and August, at the end of one school year and at the beginning of the next).

7. I appreciate that the authors have a large number of results to report but at times I feel these results could be presented more concisely.

8. Other authors have investigated anxiety recognition in adolescents e.g. Olsson and Kennedy, 2010, ‘Mental health literacy among young people in a small US town: recognition of disorders and hypothetical helping responses’

9. Some discussion of other research programmes which have reduced prejudiced beliefs in adolescents would help place the research in context, e.g. Naylor et al. (2009) ‘Impact of mental health teaching programme on adolescents’

10. Give evidence for the gender differences in prevalence rate of diagnosis mentioned in the impact of gender in mental health literacy

Discretionary Revisions

1. Sometimes the authors refer to pupils, sometimes to students. I think that ‘students’ is the more internationally used/recognised term.

2. A definition of ‘universal’ interventions might also add clarity for those not familiar with the term. A definition of self-stigma might be also be beneficial.

**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 no competing interests