Reviewer’s report

Title: Meaning in life and health care use: findings from a nationally representative study of older adults in Germany

Version: 0 Date: 11 Jul 2019

Reviewer: Johanna de Almeida Mello

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for this interesting study about the association between meaning in life and health care utilization. As most studies in this subject explore the association using either health outcomes or subjective quality of life, the paper adds to literature with the concept of meaning in life.

Here are my comments and suggestions:

- Please, introduce the abbreviation HCU at the beginning of the background section.

- Add one or two references to this statement: Demographic ageing already places a considerable burden on health care systems.

- Please explain the technique you used, as the reader may not be familiar with negative binomial regressions. Why did you choose this technique and how you can interpret an IRR.

- It would be useful to know the distribution of the scores of meaning in life, as this is your main dependent variable. I think the sample was rather positive about this question. Maybe you can add the distribution of the answers on Table 1.

- For the scales which were particularly large in range (depressive symptoms and physical functioning), I particularly think it is better to use validated cut-offs, as they can make binomial regressions more robust. The IRR would probably become been higher than in your results, as the ones you found were around 1.00.

- In this phrase: "... With the exceptions of employment status (retired vs. employed), income and need factors, none of the covariates was consistently associated with both outcome measures."

I think you should rewrite this paragraph because there were other factors associated with the outcome variable, such as gender (female), self-rated health, depressive symptoms, etc. I think it is important to mention these associations and try to explain them: for example, the link of self-rated health and he outcome and how it related to HCU. The IRR of this variable is high and significant and it seems to have a contrary direction than the meaning of life. Is there an explanation for this in literature?
- On table 1:

Please, precise that income is indicated in Euros.

Indicate that GP visits and Specialist visits are for the last 12 months.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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