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: 24 Jul 2019

Reviewer: Vjenka Garms-Homolová

Reviewer's report:

Meaning in Life and Health Care Use

Clarity and transparency:
You operate with the data set that contains 4,655 persons. Could you please give the absolute number of persons whose data were actually analyzed (n)? It seems that the actual data amounted to 1,973 individuals only. Please give the absolute n in the abstract and the description of the method.

Background
The theoretical background is a little bit inconsistent. On the one hand, the authors equate the meaning in life and life satisfaction, psychological concepts, that differ considerably. On the other hand, they equate the utilization of health prevention and that of health (medical) care, although they seem to have different determinants. The paper would benefit from a clarity of concepts and references (in particular, if the authors would not only refer to own publications [2,4,5 etc.], but primarily to publications of external research).

Dependent variable - the number of visits to GPs and physician specialists:
* Please explain, if the visits by GPs and/or physician specialists are included?
* If you have such data on visits by doctors available, it would be interesting, if the relation with the meaning of life is the same as when people visit a doctor actively.
* You seemingly do not have absolute frequency of visits to GPs and/or physician specialists, but only categories (e.g. 2-3 visits, 7-12 visits etc.), which were re-coded (e.g., 9.5 instead 7-12). Afterwards, a mean was calculated. I consider this procedure to be highly problematic and distortive, especially because this is the most important variable in your research. Wouldn't it be better and more correct if you were to use the variable as is, i.e., as a categorical variable in your analysis?
* Moreover, could you provide information on how many participants fell into the respective categories of visit frequencies?

Formal aspects:
Please check the reference number 18 - Is it possible to complete it? And what about the reference 22? Could you for example add an internet source?

Discussion/Limitations
The data used are at least 17 years old. Perhaps the authors could consider possible cohort effects in the meaning of life (Zeitgeist!). At the same time, the accessibility of physician specialists changed in Germany.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

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

Unable to assess

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

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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