Reviewer's report

Title: A community-based pilot randomised controlled study of life skills classes for individuals with low mood and depression.

Version: 2 Date: 26 August 2014

Reviewer: Lara Ebenfeld

Reviewer's report:

In this article, the authors present a pilot randomized controlled study of a group-based guidance/support bibliotherapy for depression and anxiety in a community setting with regard to rate of recruitment, retention, acceptibility and adherence to the intervention and a sample size calculation of a future RCT.

Overall, this pilot study is innovative due to its very interesting target group. The purpose and the presentation of the pilot study is clear, but there are some points which should be addressed in a revision, especially regarding the neglect of formal guidelines of BMC Psychiatry.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Abstract: Primary and secondary outcome measures: Please state what exactly is primary outcome (it is usually only one measure); what are secondary outcomes.

2. Abstract: Results: In this section you mention 2 x 25 participants. In the study flow you randomized 53 participants. Please use the correct number.

3. Abstract: Results: If you report a p-value, please add the test method where it is based on (e.g. t-test etc.). Check this in the whole manuscript and be sure to use the style the journal proposes. (Also lines 331, 338, 339, 343, 344 etc and tables).

4. Methods: Recruitment and participants: In the abstract you mention the duration of depressive symptoms for one year as inclusion criteria. Please make sure to state this here as well and mention how it is measured. State this also in the discussion when you summarize what you have done.

5. Methods: Outcome measures: lines 215, 237: I guess that reference number 15 is not correct. You mean 18, right?

6. Methods: Outcome measures: line 244: Reference number 18 might be 17. Please check and make sure that you use sequential numbers in your manuscript.

7. Discussion: lines 417/418: Here you say that an adherence of 50% is "high". In the conclusions line 456 you describe adherence as "reasonable" what is more appropriate to my mind. Please be consistent. If you choose for "high adherence"
please explain where this is based on and how you define adherence.

8. References: Please check all references carefully regarding formal errors and be sure to use the guidelines provided by the journal. Especially have a look at reference numbers 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 (it is not in your manuscript), 23.

9. Overall: The whole manuscript should be checked carefully regarding correct presentation of reference numbers (e.g. lines 103, 104, 107, 108, 109, 161, 184, 215, 216 etc.. Mention reference before punctuation, e.g. line 119: no punctuation).

10. Overall: Choose either British English or American English (e.g. 'randomized' vs. 'randomised').

11. Overall: Please make sure to report statistical numbers in the same style. For example you use for standard deviation "+/−..." vs. (sd=...).

Minor Essential Revisions:


13. Abstract: Results: Explain abbreviations of IA and DAC when used first.

14. Background: line 111: Why does one to one contact by phone or face to face result in a delay? It would be good to make this point clearer.

15. Background: line 111/112: I am not a native speaker but you should check if "deliver a resource" is correct language. To my mind it is possible to deliver a training in order to activate/manage resources.

16. Background: line 128: What exactly do you mean with "make-up of surrounding community"?

17. Methods: Recruitment and participants: line 150/151: Where is your assumption of sufficient sample size based on?

18. Methods: Intervention: I would prefer if you state it earlier that the intervention is CBT-based (maybe in the first sentence).


20. Methods: Intervention: line 197: Please mention by whom the sessions were manualised/scripted.


22. Methods: Outcome measures: line 240: Make sure to report the original paper in the first sentence like you did it with the other questionnaires as well.
23. Methods: Outcome measures: line 251: I would advise to use "The results of the interview of the study will be published separately" because you use the class feedback form (what is qualitative as well, if I understood correctly) in your results in this paper. Please check.

24. Methods: Statistical methods: line 252: Why do you use a capital letter for methods "Statistical Methods"? Please be consistent with other parts of the manuscript.

25. Methods: Why do you only choose for an intention-to-treat analysis? Particularly, in a pilot study it would be interesting to perform a per protocol analysis in order to get an idea of the efficacy of your intervention. Regarding the meaningfullness of a pilot paper, I would suggest to add such an analysis.

26. Results: You choose to compare significant differences in meanscores of the different outcome measures at different times. That is okay, but if someone is not familiar with the questionnaires it would be great to add Cohen's d to get a better impression of the progress of the participants.

27. Figures: Title figure 2: line 562: Please add full stop (like in title figure 1).

28. Figures: Title figure 3: line 567: Please add full stop (like in title figure 1).

29. Tables: Table 1: line 572: Full stop is not common at the end (like in table 2)

30. Tables: Table 1: Add your test statistic (where is the p-value based on?).

31. Tables: Table 3: Add your test statistic (where is the p-value based on?).

32. Tables: Table 4: line 581: Full stop is not common at the end (like in table 2).

33. Tables: Table 4: Add your test statistic (where is the p-value based on?).

34. Tables: Table 5: line 586: Full stop is not common at the end (like in table 2).

35. Tables: Table 5: Add your test statistic (where is the p-value based on?).

36. Tables: Table 6: line 591: Full stop is not common at the end (like in table 2).

37. Tables: Table 6: Add your test statistic (where is the p-value based on?).

38. Figure 1: Make sure that you use either British English or American English consistent with the rest of the manuscript (analyzed vs. analysed, randomized vs. randomised).

39. Figure 1: Please have closer look at the layout (line width, boxes should be in line, consistency among whitespaces when reporting n's).

40. Overall: Please be consistent with "3 months" vs. "12 weeks" for reporting your follow-up assessment (have also a look at figure 3).
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.