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: 22 September 2014

Reviewer: Harm van Marwijk

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting and sympathetic study on group-based guidance support for a bibliotherapy approach for anxiety and depression in community settings, I assume versus usual care although this is not stated in the objectives. Delayed access controls were the comparison condition. This should be made clear, in the abstract and introduction (that reads well). The many results suggest that inference is possible in some way and I disagree with that.

Major compulsory revisions:

First a few important overall points/questions that need to be answered:

- Why was the PHQ9 score of 5 their inclusion criterion (mild depressive symptoms) an inclusion criterion and was their mean sample score over 14?
- The authors mention depressive and anxiety symptoms as outcomes and potential treatment focus but include only on PHQ9 depression symptoms, why? What does that mean for inference purposes?
- The paper is generally written well but has an overly English/British perspective for an international journal. NICE does not make guidelines for the whole world. To add a bit on the specifics of the UK situation (IAPT) would help international readers on the other hand to better place results. I saw several typo’s in the references.
- The paper is a bit long and has much detail for relatively small samples. The number of tables is also rather large. Table 1 and 2 could be combined and table 3 could go in the text. Table 4 is reasonably easy to read although I prefer to read intervention and controls in columns rather than in rows. Tables 5 and 6 seem a bit much for such a small study and could perhaps be put in appendices.
- The paragraph on how the pilot would inform a subsequent trial I found difficult to understand. Was that preconceived? Was the design published beforehand? Why not if not?
- Most psychological or psychotropic treatments work better for people with higher symptom scores. I am not sure such a stratification is needed for practice purposes.

Harm van Marwijk

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.