Reviewer’s report

Title: Analysis of the emotional experiences of Japanese Alcoholics Anonymous members striving for sobriety

Version: 0 Date: 11 Feb 2019

Reviewer: M. Claire Greene

Reviewer's report:

Please include all comments for the authors in this box rather than uploading your report as an attachment. Please only upload as attachments annotated versions of manuscripts, graphs, supporting materials or other aspects of your report which cannot be included in a text format.

General Comments:

* This study presents a qualitative analysis of the emotional experiences of AA members in Japan. The qualitative findings provide important insight regarding these emotional processes; however, the objectives presented in the abstract and introduction are a bit disconnected from the results. It is unclear whether this is a study of emotional processes among individuals who are seeking/in recovery from an alcohol use disorder who happen to be sampled from AA, or if the focus is on emotional processes specifically related to experiences in AA. I think the findings are valuable and advance our understanding of the emotional experiences of AA members, particularly in a novel sample of AA members in Japan, but reframing the introduction and discussion may make the article more cohesive (please see my specific suggestions below).

Introduction:

* The majority of research on AA and mutual help organizations come from the United States. I think it would be helpful to include some background and a summary of any available literature on AA in Japan or other countries in east Asia.

* Some of the statements made in the background section are perhaps too strong and not consistent with prior literature. For example, the statement that alcohol is the most harmful drug is not consistent with prior studies that have found that alcohol may be most harmful to society, but not to the individual using the drug (see Nutt et al., Lancet, 2010).

* There have been studies on psychological mechanisms of AA and other emotional processes in the United States. It may be helpful to incorporate this literature into the introduction.
Methods:

* Include the description of recruitment that is currently provided in the ethical considerations section in the beginning of the methods section (e.g., under the procedures and participants section)

* I am unsure what you mean by the interviews were "faithfully" transcribed. Please further elaborate on what you mean by "faithfully" or perhaps reconsider this word choice.

* Was AA and related experiences central to the interview guide? As written it seems that the themes included in the interview guide could be applied to any sample seeking recovery from an alcohol use disorder and is not specific to AA. This is confusing because the introduction focuses on AA, while the interview and results do not seem to align with this focus

* The KJ Method seems similar to other more commonly cited qualitative analytic approaches. Please clarify how this is different from thematic analysis? Or do the differences emerge in the later parts of the analysis related to the affinity diagrams?

Results:

* In general the quotations that are included in the results should be better integrated into the text. Instead of just presenting the themes, further analysis or description/discussion of the themes would make the results read more fluidly.

* If the goal of this paper is to discuss AA-related experiences, I think it is important that the results are more closely tied to AA membership.

Discussion:

* The discussion aims to connect the results to AA membership (see last comment above in results section); but I'm not sure whether this is an extrapolation of the data. I think it is necessary to reframe the results according to their connection to AA (informed by the data) or instead lessen the connection to AA in the discussion. This decision should be informed by the structure of the interview guide and the data resulting from the interviews.

* The second sentence under the "Self-help group programs that lead to long-term abstinence" attributing the abstinence of the sample to their adherence to AA is flawed. We cannot conclude that the reason the participants are reportedly abstinent is due to AA. There is a huge potential for selection bias here and I think this sentence needs to be removed as it is not supported by the data and cannot be determined based on this study design.
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.

Unable to assess

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

No

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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