Reviewer’s report

Title: A self-guided internet-based intervention for individuals with gambling problems: study protocol for a randomized controlled trial

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Reviewer: Ana Zaninotto

Reviewer's report:

The authors wrote a manuscript describing a protocol in which they want to use an internet-based intervention to improve gambling and depressive symptoms.

There are major methodological issues in this paper that keeps hard to understand how the authors are planning to manage.

Major concerns:

- The hypotheses are not clear. In the abstract, there is a mix of gambling measurement (I have no idea what they are trying to measure here) and depressive symptoms. What is the primary outcome???

- In the introduction, the authors again did not specify what they are trying to measure.

- The most important peace: how do the authors trust the data? How do they know if someone can self-enroll many times to receive 20 Euros card? Or if the participants are faking the symptoms or their age to participate in the study?

The introduction is badly linked with the main proposal of the study. The authors report things like cognitive restructuring, internet-based self-report, telephone support, in which I couldn't see the relationship with the proposal. The authors reported 2 types of gambles and I didn't get why this information is relevant. Also, the authors cited a meta-analysis but did not discuss the main results.

Moreover, the authors report the attrition rates of two studies as 83% and 97% and they are estimating their study lost as 50%. There is an incongruence here! Also, they report that guidance has adverse effects in internet-based intervention - 1st, I don't know why this information is relevant; 2nd, I didn't understand how they can be affirmative on that.
The penultimate paragraph is badly written and could be addressed in the methods section.

The aim of the study is not clear and the hypothesis very weak.

The study design should be re-written. The conditions are not clear and neither the endpoints.

The sample size reports an estimated dropout of 50% based on previous studies?? Which papers??(see above).

I didn't understand the recruitment strategy.

There are many points in the randomization that needs to be clarified, such: self-selected? Participants are allocated to the conditions according to the randomization plan and based on the date and timeline of the baseline assessment????? Please explain.

The intervention is badly described: what is CBT 3rd wave??? What are they considering mindfulness-based and metacognitive technique based on their Figure 1???

Please explain about the audio files and videos.

How are they controlling the participant participation?

The primary and secondary outcome measures don't make a strong link with the background.

Are they using baseline scores as covariates??

Many basic assumptions for a good protocol are missing. The authors should follow the CONSORT Statement.
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