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Co-creation of an Escape Game on University students' mental health

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University students' mental health has been strongly impacted by the health crisis linked to Covid-19, with increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression in this population. During the pandemic and afterwards, there was the urgent need to implement interventions to promote students' well-being and help them cope with these stressful conditions. Gamification - defined as the use of game features in serious contexts - can increase knowledge on health-related topics using a learning-by-doing approach. Studies have proved its effectiveness in promoting players' health literacy. For this, a team of researchers and a start-up worked together to create an Escape Game (called EscapeCovid) addressed to students on their mental health during the Covid-19 series of lockdowns and curfews. Through playing, students could improve their mental health literacy, destigmatize mental illnesses and learn how to tackle psychological problems. The aim of this study was to describe the preliminary steps of the co-creation of EscapeCovid by researchers, industrials and students. Starting from a prototype, 45 students tested the game and provided their comments through mixed-methods data collection. All players completed a questionnaire before and after the game. They were asked about their knowledge and mental health status to observe a modification due to the game. Satisfaction questions were also asked concerning the design and contents of the game. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students for in-depth opinions. According to the results of the evaluation, participant appreciated the Escape Game as an innovative tool for health promotion. Especially because of its ability to transmit knowledge and increase skills through gamification. University students seemed very receptive to this type of tool. In order to guarantee its effectiveness, it was clear that the game must be adapted to the target audience and meet its expectations.

Key messages:

- Escape Games are innovative tools in health promotion and disease prevention which can be well received by young people.
- It is essential to test an intervention with end-users before deploying it in order to ensure its effectiveness.