Reviewer’s report

Title: Occupational stressors and its organizational and individual correlates: A nationwide study of Norwegian ambulance personnel

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Reviewer: john heyworth

Reviewer’s report:

It was a pleasure to review this interesting paper.

The authors are to be congratulated on a comprehensive and detailed study addressing a topic of fundamental importance with international relevance and applicability.

The research question addressed by the authors adds to the limited body of knowledge already available on this topic.

The methodology is generally robust with sufficient detail to allow replication.

My concern regarding the methodology was the development by the authors of the Norwegian ambulance stress survey. Although the authors justify in detail the procedure to develop this survey, the question of validity of this type of instrument is always important until it has been tested in other situations. However, this particular tool represents part of the overall study and does not weaken or invalidate the overall conclusion.

The description of the methodology, data obtained and interpretation of the data is prolonged and detailed. In the absence of space constraints regarding publication, however, this will allow readers the opportunity to understand in depth the findings of this study.

My major concern regarding the data and the validity of the conclusions subsequently reached, is the limited response rate. Unfortunately, this is an inevitable consequence of this type of survey but a response rate of less than 50% is vulnerable to criticism regarding the applicability of any conclusions drawn from this sample. In addition, there are always concerns that the responders represent a self-selecting biased group whose experiences and reports will inevitably skew the results and may lead to conclusions which are of limited applicability.

However, the authors did attempt to optimise the response rate by sending out two reminders. Achieving response rates high enough to allow reliable data interpretation may not be possible and this factor should not detract from the messages contained within this study. However, in my opinion, greater emphasis should be placed in the discussion section regarding the limitations of the study considering the response rate and the implications thereof.
Otherwise, the discussions and conclusions are robustly argued.

There are one or two aspects of the paper which require either correction or clarification, either because of the term is unclear or the phrases are epidemiological/statistical in nature and would require explanation for a wider audience.

For example, in the abstract, line 2, is the word “empirical” correct?

On page 6, para 2, the phrase “appraisal of stressors” could be reviewed.

The term “neuroticism” could I think be replaced with a better term.

On page 10, the phrase “tree factors with eigenvalues” would require explanation to register with the wider potential readership.

Finally, in the Conclusion, it would be helpful to have a list of recommendations regarding the next steps, both in terms of further work required in this area and how the findings of this study might be used to benefit the personnel involved.