Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health affects future employment as job loss affects mental health: Findings from a longitudinal population study

Version: 1 Date: 16 November 2012

Reviewer: Stephen Stansfeld

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study examining the reciprocal relationships between mental health and unemployment in the Australian HILDA Survey. It is unusual in properly addressing the causal pathway from mental ill-health to unemployment as well as the more conventionally examined pathway from unemployment to mental ill-health. The introduction lays this out clearly and concisely. Another reference you could use to support the findings that psychological distress in childhood is linked to longer term unemployment in later life is the work from Scott Montgomery.

Major compulsory revisions: none

Minor essential revisions:

Page 4, last para
It would be helpful to know the number of working age respondents in the 20-55 year old group overall before those with missing data were excluded. Did the analytic sample differ significantly from the baseline sample of working age respondents in terms of demographic characteristics?

Page 17, line 8
‘but men’s mental health was not found to predict subsequent unemployment in this sample’. This sounds a bit too definitive given that your results suggested that there was a relationship between men’s mental health at baseline and unemployment at Phase 2. May be because of men’s attachment to the labour market, this process just takes longer in men? As you suggest it would be good to replicate this in another sample in the future.

Discretionary revisions:

Page 5, measures
Given this paper is looking at depression and anxiety it is, perhaps, rather unfair to ask, but did you have any indication of whether the participant might have had more serious mental illness in the past or conditions such as Asperger’s syndrome or ADHD that might affect work and employment.

Page 7, second para
Analyses
I wondered whether you’d also considered apart from models separately by
gender models by occupational status of posts, maybe non-manual versus
manual as it is possible these relationships might differ according to the type of
job. However, this may be beyond the scope of your current paper.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have been funded by ANU in Canberra to give a keynote lecture at a
conference in Canberra organised by Peter Butterworth