Reviewer's report

Title: Understanding long-term sick leave in female white-collar workers with burnout and stress-related diagnoses: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Dag Bruusgaard

Reviewer's report:

Qualitative studies are wanted in sickness absence research to grasp unexpected dimensions of the complex phenomenon. Your findings are however not that unexpected. I have several comments that might contribute to the improvement of the article.

1) As an epidemiologist I lack a clear description of the respondents. I imagine that the procedure is this: 16 women out of 300 consecutively (?) included women on sick leave >90 days from full time job, in private sector, white collar (how defined?), in higher position (how defined?) with defined min. wages and predefined diagnoses (which) are strategically (place and age?) selected by the authors.

2) The problems described varies from gender specific to problems shared by women and men. This should be better dealt with. Now it is briefly mentioned in the end of the conclusion.

3) It seems to me that some of the women are misplaced from the beginning. Did any of them look forward to be better and coming back to the job they left? That is, for some it is a periodic problem, for others a permanent. The solutions might accordingly be quite different.

4) Some dramatic figures on increase in sick leave is cited, but as far as I know, the figures have been dramatically reduced the last 4-5 years! Please update.

5) Biomedical INCLUDES physiological! and no one would mean that sickness absence is "entirely identical with biomedical dysfunction" (p. 5)

6) I do not like "She BELIEVES she is being bullied".

7) "The respondents have traumatic experiences...." all of them?? (p. 18)

8) I would have ended the result presentation with the important part on deteriorating health.

9) You should mention possible attribution in the discussion of the results.

10) How could you avoid including among the references some of the extensive work on gender aspects of sickness absence done by Kristina Alexanderson and Gunnel Hensing?

11) Table 2 is confusing. Either drop it or make it more available.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interest