Reviewer's report

Title: Divorce and professional care seeking for mental health problems in Europe: a cross-sectional population based study

Version: 1 Date: 22 November 2008

Reviewer: Terrance J Wade

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Discretionary Revisions

Both the question and the guiding framework are well defined and appropriate. However, the literature review is selective and there is much more recent work on mental health and marriage and marital transitions using European/British samples that is not referenced.

The measure of mental health used the SF-12. Why was a measure of physical health based on the SF-12 not used? The SF-12 provides a measure of both.

Minor Revisions

The statistical methods are appropriate for the data. Use of statistical method (poisson regression) and adjustment of sampling design effects is appropriate. However, the large size of the sample requires a more stringent test of statistical significance. Perhaps the use of a BIC statistic to adjust for large sample sizes might be appropriate. Alternatively, perhaps a minimum level of significance set at p<.001 would be more appropriate that a minimum level set at p<.05.

Major Compulsory Revisions

I have problems with the measurement/operationalization of certain constructs, especially social support-- the presence of children is not a measure of social support! In fact, literature on lone parent families (mainly lone mothers which the authors may want to look at) has shown that presence of children is a source of stress/strain, not support. I'm also not too certain about the reflection of custody in the introduction as men being because mothers most often get custody. It could be perceived of as women getting twice harmed because they get saddled with the responsibility of raising a family on diminished economic and social resources. Only at the end in the discussion do they acknowledge that children can be a burden as well as an asset.

And the other measures of social support are quite specific to health/mental health and are questionable in their ability to tap “social support”. They appear that perhaps they are just additional indicators of need, or in the case of difficulty in finding information, a barrier for care.

Overall, while they attempt to test all the facets of Andersen’s model, they are
unable to examine the traditional enabling factors generally used. As such, this is really only a partial test of the model examining predisposing and need factors. They attempt to use social support (and very poor measures of it) as the test for enabling. This is a major limitation in this work which they acknowledge. But then they suggest that education and occupation may partially compensate for this but they are discussed and treated as predisposing factors, not enabling factors.

Be clear an upfront that you are only testing a component of the model based on limitations in the data.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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 interests'