Reviewer's report

Title: Health problems account for a small part of the association between socioeconomic status and disability pension award. Results from the Hordaland Health Study.

Version: 2 Date: 6 July 2010

Reviewer: Marianna Virtanen

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REVIEW OF THE MANUSCRIPT: Health problems account for a small part of the association between socioeconomic status and disability pension award. Results from the Hordaland Health Study.

This is an interesting study with somewhat surprising findings. The manuscript is generally well written and compact, however, I have some points to be addressed to improve it.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. If the requirement to be awarded a disability pension is that “your earning capacity must be reduced due to permanent illness, injury or impairment”, what makes you ‘a priori’ suggest that it is not the case when explaining socioeconomic differences in work disability? This should be clearly stated in the introduction.

2. The time range assessing disability pension is not clear; is it 1992-1997/99? I wonder whether it is too long to the assessment of health as an explanatory factor for SES differences in disability since in some cases disability may have been granted in 1992 and health assessment is seven years later, 1999.

3. About the disability pension: were all awarded pensions granted permanently? In many Scandinavian countries a substantial part of disability pensions are granted on a fixed-term basis. Therefore the status may have changed in some cases. How would this affect your results?

4. Results: it would be important to see whether there were socioeconomic differences in health indicators and whether health indicators were associated with disability pension. That is crucial because in order to test a mediator, associations should be found with these respects.

5. Discussion: I think you should also discuss the possibility that people with low socioeconomic status have more serious health problems which was not exactly examined in your study since you measured number rather than severity of symptoms/diseases

Minor essential revisions:
6. Introduction, second paragraph: could you please define what is meant by “social factors”?

7. Methods: you say all Norwegians are given a personal identification number at birth. Doesn’t the HUSK study include any immigrants?

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

**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.