Reviewer's report

Title: Work-related psychosocial events as triggers of sick leave - results from a Swedish case-crossover study.

Version: 2 Date: 2 December 2010

Reviewer: Martin Lindhardt Nielsen

Reviewer's report:

Review comments to revised manuscript by Hultin et al.

In general, I find the response and changes satisfying. A few minor problems remain that reduce the clarity of the message – partly language problems. Maybe it would be wise to consult native English speakers again.

Response to reviewers

Page 9, numbers of exposed/unexposed added as footnotes. This makes the table somewhat clumsy, but I don’t have obvious proposals for improvement. The rather small numbers of exposed workers are interesting in itself. This may be mentioned/discussed.

Page 9, point 12 and 13: These are very important points regarding the hypotheses about triggers, but not very clearly explained. Including a language detail: One continuum can probably not be “slightly above no work ability and slightly below full work ability”, but rather “from slightly above… to slightly below…”. Even so, the point is not very clear. This distracts the reader from understanding the central point on interaction between perceived illness and triggers.

Page 11, first point: The authors still use the expression “earlier work history” about the control period (Abstract and Methods). As an occupational health physician, I am used to interview patients about work histories ranging 10-50 years back in time. In such a setting, “earlier work history” is not perceived to be about the last two weeks, but about what happened in previous jobs, maybe many years ago. This confused the understanding of the concept of control periods, when I read it.

Page 11, point 5: The authors still write “since more than 30 days”. According to my English textbook, you can talk about “since when” or “for how long”. I.e. “for more than 30 days” or “since more than 30 days ago”. Although “since” is closer to the Swedish “sedan”/”sen”, it is quite confusing here, and I still don’t know if the excluded workers were absent for the full 30 days or just had any absence within the last 30 days.

Revised manuscript
Page 10, top: was assessed … was assessed.

Page 10, last paragraph before “Background factors”: “…excluding the case period”. The case period is not defined at this point. At least, it could be stated that it is explained in figure 1.

It is confusing that the difference between the two types of matched control periods is not explained until page 12, and that there is no explanation for the decision to have two different periods (one or two days before the case period). As the concepts of case and control periods are the core of the whole article, this should be very clear.

Page 12-3, last paragraph of the Methods section: A number of alternative analyses are mentioned, but the reason for the analyses is not stated here. The last example is “An estimated sick-leave incidence rate was calculated, for participants and non-participants, with person-time based on calendar days, including both the days on sick leave and work-free days”. What was this used for? Are the results reported?

Page 13 top line: “were” should be “where”

Page 13 ff: the word “respective” is used several times without contributing to the meaning.

Page 14, last line before “Discussion”: “The potentially triggering effect of exposure to … was inconsistent and non-significant”. Non-significant is true, but why inconsistent? There are no negative associations and the only OR=1 is based on only 3 cases.

Page 15, second last line: “…we coded uncertain exposure events as unexposed and as missing”. They were probably coded unexposed or missing?

Page 26, bottom line: [HH1] ?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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 interests