Reviewer's report

Title: What do we know about the non-work determinants of occupational mental health? A systematic review of longitudinal studies

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Reviewer: Matt Egan

Reviewer's report:

This review is very welcome because of its specific subject matter and because it covers epidemiological evidence and conceptual issues – it’s good to see that some systematic reviewers are paying attention to these areas. I therefore found it of interest from both a methodological and subject point of view. It is generally well written.

I suggest a number of issues to be addressed but I basically think this is a good piece of work.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Page 9 bottom paragraph
As it stands, I don’t agree with your view that different analysis based on the same population sample is ‘independent’ in terms of this review. You may want to make your case for this clearer (either in your response and / or in the text), but I think at the least you need to state in the text how many different cohorts have been included in the review (you nearly do this at the bottom of page 10 but not quite), and refer to this and the risks of duplication in your discussion limitation section.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) Abstract (page 2) you describe this as a ‘qualitative’ systematic review – which may mislead readers into thinking you reviewed qualitative evidence. It would be clearer if you use the term ‘narrative synthesis’ as you do on page 8.

2) You have had to make some arbitrary decisions (e.g. only including studies of 200 workers – page 6). Even if they are unavoidable, I think the text should briefly draw attention to this arbitrary element.

3) ‘To our knowledge, this review represents the first attempt at defining the non-work domain’. Page 7. I suggest you delete this as the following paragraph is about literature searching not defining the non-work domain – and I know (from personal involvement) at least one other review search that also had a non-work focus (BMC Public Health 2008, 8:239 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-8-239 – but if you delete that sentence, I see no need to reference). By the way, I think your search strategy is a real improvement on the one I developed for that.

4) ‘whereas subjective indicators comprised subjective appraisals…’ – page 9 –
could you expand a little on this explanation as at the moment it is rather circular and difficult to understand.

5) Page 9 – 1st full paragraph. There are several issues here that need to be either changed or better explained

a) I think you need to emphasise that ‘high quality studies’ as you define them are only high relative to the other included studies because the distinction is based on their score relative to the mean score of all the studies – so use the term ‘relatively high’. If the NOS score is out of 9, and your top scoring papers only got 7, I think that you need you to be explicit in the text that none of the studies received the highest scores possible.

b) Consistency of findings is based on 75% consistency. I found this idea interesting – but I think you will have to class cases where there is only one study for a particular outcome/level as something like ‘consistency not established’ – and therefore not be considered consistent. Have you done this? If so, make it clearer. If not, I think you need to.

c) “…or a mixture of high and low quality studies independently from the strength of the association” – I didn’t understand this, could you have another go at wording.

6) Figure 1 – your boxes say that some studies were excluded due to ‘publication’ – but your text on page 10 doesn’t seem to mention this. What does publication mean in this context? Does either the figure or the text need changing?

• Discretionary Revisions

1) I would have been interested to see some discussion as to whether there was any evidence that results tended to differ by gender – e.g. are women more likely to be influenced by non-work factors than men?

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