Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 4 February 2011

Reviewer: Aleck Ostry

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

This is a well written thoughtful article. The authors have conducted a systematic review of major longitudinal studies to identify the main investigations in the French and English literature about the impact of non-work determinants on occupational mental health. They selected 13 studies for evaluation but found, essentially, that non-work determinants of occupational mental health were very much under-articulated, even in these well designed investigations. The main conclusion of their study is that more research needs to be conducted to better identify and integrate non-work determinants of occupational mental health.

Another positive feature of this study is that it goes beyond the English literature and looks also at the French literature. This model of looking beyond the English literature is key to conducting good systematic reviews as it increases the size of the “net” and the power and global importance of this kind of review.

I have some comments though.

According to authors (page 5) “in the interests of conceptual clarity we have borrowed from our past work and that of Berkman and Glass on social integration to designate these other life environments as the non-work domain. Accordingly, the non-work domain can be posited to shaped mental health through causally and dynamically intertwined mechanisms at three levels of analysis”. They then lay out macrosocial, meso-social, and family levels.

I’d like to know where the individual is in all this? In particular there is a long literature on the role of stressful personal life events (losses etc) in a person’s life on mental health. This seems like a fourth dimension that is missing in their model. I’m not suggesting that they add this back in but that at least in their selection of this 3 level approach they address the issue of why the individual level is not in their model. As well, the selection of their 3 level approach is based on their work and Berkman and Glass. This seems a bit narrow. Is there a bigger set of academic supports they can bring to bear on this (more refs).

Under “Search Strategy” The sentence “To our knowledge this review represents the first attempt at defining the non-work domain”. I don’t think these authors actually mean this. This is the first attempt perhaps, at a systematic review of occupational literature to determine the extent to which the non-work domain is utilized effectively in investigations of occupational mental health it is not the “first
attempt at defining the non-work domain”.

Methods seem fine as did discussion.

But recommendations felt a bit weak. Recommendation 1 is that future longitudinal research consider both work and non-work determinants of occupational mental health. The authors point out that this is important because we need to accumulate more studies of this issue in order to build the evidence base. Ok, but surely, based on this major review of these types of studies the authors have something stronger than “do more studies” to say. For example, based on their review they must have some opinions on what type of approach, conceptually one might take to better incorporate non-work domain into these types of studies.

Again, recommendation number 2 is that “better consideration about conceptualization and operationalization” of non-work domain is needed. This is obvious. The authors have undertaken a major systematic review. Surely they have more to say about how one might conceptualize and operationlize in this way??

I think the authors must be much bolder in their recommendations especially as they have content knowledge from their own research and this fine study to offer.

**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'