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: 13 February 2011

Reviewer: Jens Peter Bonde

Reviewer's report:

The scientific issue raised by this paper is important considering the increasing international research effort addressing the impact on mental morbidity of psychosocial workplace exposures. The topic has largely been neglected and to my knowledge the authors are right in claiming that this is the first review that systematically examine the relative contributions of work and non-work psychosocial determinants of ill mental health. There is little doubt that research addressing occupational risk factors tend to ignore non-work risk factors (family, network, society) and, opposite, research on for instance life events ignore occupational risk factors. Studies addressing work and non-work domains in a balanced way are few. This review is important in pointing to this critical deficit in the stress research literature.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The term 'occupational mental health' needs to be defined - or perhaps substituted by other terms. This also apply to the title and abstract. It is stated that the review examine the relative contribution of non-work determinants in predicting occupational mental health. There is no such condition 'occupational mental health'. I assume the authors are interested in the relative contributions of work- and non-work determinants of 'mental health' - which by definition implies working people(currently or earlier). I suggest that this is clarified throughout the paper.

2. Inclusion criteria:
   a. Why should sampling be community based? Does this mean that sampling of populations based upon workplaces are not included (which does not seem reasonable)? b. The authors define three non-work domains and three outcomes - how did these become part of the eligibility criteria? Was it a request that each included study was measuring all non-work and work dimensions? In the latter case: exactly which? And what about the three considered outcomes? This information may be in the appendices but needs to be explicitly defined in the main text.
   c. Appraisal and synthesis of the evidence: it is not entirely clear when the authors describe quality rating of the individual studies and when they outline the principles for the evaluation of the evidence across included studies. Criteria 1 and 3 for 'evidence rating', page 9, are not defined clearly: 1) what is meant by a
NOS score > mean NOS score?? 3) OR=0.75 is not correpsonding to OR=2.0? How was the strength criterion applied when several studies where available? Should all studies report OR ratios above 2.0 or below 0.75?? As I understand the criteria, the evidence was considered strong if one high quality study reported a significant association in the anticipated direction with a relative risk of >2.0 (or <0.75). This is hardly reasonable?

Results:
Is it reasonable not to distinguish between the outcomes psychological distress and depression. These conditions are not assumed to have the same determinants. If so they should be treated separately (cf Table 3).

Table 2: not easy to understand. There is a need to define the terms (analytical breadth etc) and explain meaning and range of stars. The TOTAL looks as numbes with decimals even they are not. Please, clarify.

Table 3: an error: NOS>6: 0/5=40% positive.

Discussion
Sound. Conclusions and recommendations are justified by 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 taht I have no competing interests