Reviewer's report

Title: Is the core-periphery labour market structure related to perceived health? Analysis of the Northern Swedish Cohort

Version: 1 Date: 2 September 2011

Reviewer: Mikael Rostila

Reviewer's report:

This is a straightforward and distinct paper with clear research questions that are examined with appropriate data. Given the longitudinal character of the data material this paper could provide an important contribution to the field of peripheral employment and health after revision. Yet, I have some concerns related to the background and the empirical analyses that should be considered by the authors.

Major compulsory revisions

• I believe that the causality problem is a major concern in this area as many people with health problems and who has been on sick-leave are left with temporary jobs. For instance, it is actually an active strategy in many countries, including Sweden, to provide employers with benefits (such as wage subsidies) if they employ a person that has been on sick-leave. The possibility to temporary employ an individual with a reduced cost makes it possible for employers to “test” employees. However, it also involves that people with potential physical or psychological health problems are employed on a temporary basis. This issue could be discussed in the paper.

• Page 7: It is mentioned that you use a modified version of Aronsson’s core-periphery model. How was your measure modified? How does it differ from the original version? I think that this information is very important especially for readers not familiar with the Aronsson model. In general I also think that the measurement of the periphery model is somewhat unclear. Please revise the text once more in order to make it clearer for the general reader.

• Page 7: You mention that the peripheral employment score considered both duration and degree. How was the relative contribution of duration and degree calculated?

• The study follows individuals of a specific age-group. It further seems reasonable to expect that age is an important predictor of peripheral employment as well as health consequences by such employment conditions. Younger people are to a greater extent temporary employed but it could also have less detrimental health effects. Younger people may not have a family to provide for, and they may also live a more flexible life. Hence, to many young adults it may rather be an advantage to have a temporary employment. To what extent could the study of a specific age-group have influenced your findings?
Your study is also performed in Luleå which is a city in the Northern part of Sweden with fairly low population density and perhaps a lower supply of available jobs. It could be that being in the periphery of the labour market has different effects on health and wellbeing in Luleå than in a larger city such as Stockholm or Gothenburg. This might relate to the availability of jobs. Having a temporary employment contract could involve higher insecurity (and higher stress etc.) in Luleå because an individual might have greater troubles of receiving another job. The labourmarket in Stockholm, on the other hand, is more flexible with good possibilities to find a new and maybe better job which could imply that being in the periphery of the labour market is not that detrimental for health. The implications of the specific context of study for the findings should be further discussed in the paper.

Page 9: In the abstract and conclusions the authors mention that they measured sociodemographics at baseline. However, in the methods section it is described that SEP is measured at 42-years of age. This is not the baseline?

Page 15: To what extent is your findings representative for the total Swedish population given the very small sample size?

The manuscript would benefit from a language check. There are grammar errors in various parts of the paper.

Minor essential revisions

Page 8: Non-optimal self-rated health sounds arbitrary. Please change to less than good self-rated health or something similar.

Page 6: Please provide any decision number to the ethical approval.

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