Reviewer's report

Title: Symptom load and functional ability: Results from the Ullensaker Population Study

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Reviewer: Jostein Holmen

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports on the association between symptom load and functional ability in a cross sectional population based study. The research questions are relevant and might be important to understand more about medically unexplained symptoms. Standardized measures were used, the paper is generally well written, but I have a few remarks:

- Abstract, last sentence before Conclusion: The sentence seems unclear to me.
- Methods, 1. paragraph: The right spelling is “Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics”.
- Statistical analyses, 1. paragraph: The authors report that they have made imputations, but it would be interesting to know how many missing values they found and how may imputations were performed.
- In the analyses they have adjusted for age and sex, but not for SES. Was this information not available? If not: why? Would SES be of interest?
- Results, 1. paragraph/discussion: The response rate was 54.4%. Do the authors know anything about non-responders? How might the selection influence the results?
- Results, 2. paragraph/discussion: A mean number of 2.3 pain sites was found. The authors do not discuss if that was a high or low number. Was it comparable to the mean of 3.6 reported from UK? If yes, was the difference of any significance? What might be the explanation?
- Results, 3. paragraph: Figure 1 and 2: It would be interesting to see these figures for each gender.
- Results, 5. paragraph/discussion: When all 23 symptoms were entered an R 2 of 60,6% was found. Was that a high or low number, - and compared to what?
- Results, 6. paragraph/discussion: In Model II the explanatory power diminished, but the authors do not explain why.
- Discussion, 3 paragraph: The authors have previously shown that number of pain sites predicts future disability pensioning. What is the association between the subjectively reported functional disability and disability pensioning?
- Discussion, last paragraph: It would be interesting if the authors briefly could mention the direction of future research in order to reveal the cause effect.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

No conflicts of interest