Reviewer's report

Title: Employment Status and Health: Understanding the Health of the Economically Inactive Population in Scotland.

Version: 1 Date: 8 February 2012

Reviewer: Clare Bambra

Reviewer's report:

This paper examines the health of an under-researched population group and examines the relationship with employment, deprivation etc. It examines a wide range of health outcomes using data from a 2003 cross-sectional study. Whilst broadly supportive of publication in BMC, I would like to suggest the following minor revisions:

1. BMC in an international journal and so the paper would benefit from comparing Scotland to other OECD countries. OECD reports provide good comparative data on worklessness as mentioned in Bambra 'Work, Worklessness and the Political Economy of Health' Oxford 2011. The welfare context of the economically inactive population in Scotland in 2003 should also be briefly summarised. The international relationship between unemployment and health could also be mentioned e.g. Bambra and Eikemo in Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 2008.

2. The issue of association v causation needs to be commented upon in the discussion section and the findings of longitudinal studies such as that by Montgomery showing that health behaviours decline after the onset of unemployment hould be noted.

3. The paper has an important and policy relevant finding that economically inactive do have worse health than the employed but not consistently worse health behaviours (e.g.heavy alcohol use). Same commentary on how this differs from the political debates about the health of this group should be noted (see Bambra 2011 above).

4. Some discussion of the relevance of this study to the 'Scottish health effect' should also be made

5. More detail is needed on the study design. Readers will be unfamiliar with the study and cannot be expected to look at another paper. Reponse rates, design etc could all be summarised in a box.

6. Page 14 - explanation for less alcohol use should also include poverty. Why assume under-reporting? is there evidence in the survey of this? and if so does it apply to the other outcomes?

7. Page 16 discussion of welfare reform would benefit from being more critical and encompassing some of the discussions in the social policy and public health policy literature about the shift from deserving to undeserving poor (as
summarised in Bambra 2011)

8. Page 16 bottom - the extent of ill health shown amongst the EI population by this study suggests that a "health first" approach to welfare reform would be most beneficial. This is something that could be noted - again as advocated by Bambra 2011.

9. Limitations of the study are not addressed including methods, age of the data, response rate, causation v association. A new section on this should be added.

I hope these comments are helpful to the study authors in revising their paper.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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