Author's response to reviews

Title: Validation of sick leave measures: Self-reported sick leave and sickness benefit data from a Danish national register compared to multiple workplace-registered sick leave spells in a Danish municipality.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Cover letter

Again, we want to thank you for the constructive feedback. We hope our revisions have clarified the text as well as the grammar.

To ease the identification of revisions made in the article, we have underscored sentences and copied-pasted the deletions into the cover letter. Elsewise it is explained in the responses below.

Due to summer vacation I will be out of office from the 19th of July to the 12th of August 2012. In case of additional revisions I will be unable to read my e-mail in this period.

Point-by-point response to the editor:

Comment: “Abstract
* Delete semicolon (;) in line 6; replace by comma (,)
* Delete capitals in the aims
* Put a semicolon between the two aims”
Response: The corrections are underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “The following sentence is incorrect regarding grammar: 'Weekly agreement between the workplace register and DREAM was reported as sensitivities, specificities and positive predictive values”
Response: The sentence has been corrected grammatically and is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “Odd English in: 'Sensitivity and specificity were calculated in the analysis of agreement between self-reported and workplace-registered sick leave.' Change into e.g. 'The sensitivity and specificity of self-reported sick leave compared to workplace-registered sick leave was calculated.”
Response: The sentence has been replaced with “By means of an analysis of agreement between self-reported and workplace-registered sick leave sensitivity and specificity was calculated.” The sentence is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “Change 'The probability that DREAM agrees....' into 'The probability that registered DREAM data on sick leave agrees......”
Response: The correction is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “Delete sentence on non-significant results from the abstract”
Response: The sentence “Agreement was not statistically significantly associated with age, profession and workplace.” has been deleted.

Comment: “Change 'DREAM overestimated....' Into 'The registered DREAM data on sick leave overestimated....”
Response: The correction is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “Results regarding self-reported sick leave are not mentioned in the abstract.”
Response: The sentences “The sensitivity of reporting at least one or at least 56 sick leave day/s was 94.5 (95% CI: 93.4 – 95.5) % and 58.5 (95% CI: 51.1 – 65.6) % respectively. The corresponding
specificities were 85.3 (95% CI: 81.4 – 88.6) % and 98.9 (95% CI: 98.3 – 99.3) %.” are regarding self-reports. I have added “self-” to “reporting” to clarify the source of results. It is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: ”Odd English in: 'Self-reported sick leave became more imprecise the longer the workplace-registered total length per year, but acceptable sensitivities and specificities were seen for annual lengths not exceeding one week.' Change into for example: 'Self-reported sick leave became more imprecise when sick leave spells increased, but the sensitivity and specificity were acceptable for spells not exceeding one week.' Response: I have replaced the sentence with “Self-reported sick leave became more imprecise when number of absence days increased, but the sensitivity and specificity were acceptable for lengths not exceeding one week.” The sentence is underscored in the abstract.

Comment: “Introduction * The aims in the abstract and introduction are not similar.” Response: The aims “1) To study the agreement between sickness benefits registered in DREAM and workplace-registered sick leave spells of at least 15 days. 2) To study the agreement between self-reported and workplace-registered sick leave with a one-year recall period.” have been replaced by those in the abstract. The correction is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “Discussion * The ability to recall accurately compared to the workplace register declined when absence spells lasted longer.” Response: The sentence has been replaced by “The ability to recall accurately declined the higher number of workplace-registered absence days.” The sentence is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “P. 17 line 6: delete '.'” Response: “.” Has been deleted

Comment: “Not clear what you mean with: 'We were able to reproduce the results from the self-reported sickness absence in our study.' Do you mean 'We were able to reproduce the results from earlier studies on self-reported sickness absence in our study.'” Response: I mean that we were able to reproduce the results of Voss et al (reference 13). The sentence has been corrected and is underscored.

Comment: “You speak about validation of DREAM, but I would prefer to speak about validation of the sick leave data of DREAM, DREAM sick leave data, or a phrasing alike. DREAM itself is a register, not a variable / data. If you refer to DREAM as a register, use 'the DREAM register'.” Response: I have clarified if it is the DREAM register or DREAM data that is referred to throughout the manuscript. All corrections are underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “P. 18, 3rd line from below says 'This was also the case in our self-reported data.' This should be 'this was also the case regarding our self-reported data'” Response: The correction is underscored in the manuscript.
Comment: “P. 19, 4th line. What do you mean with: 'annually lengths of absence', is 'annually' necessary here?
Response: I mean that recall precision is decreasing when the total number of sick leave days per year is increasing (per year is mentioned because that is the time span in which the data has been collected). But annually is not necessary. It has been deleted.
I have replaced “longer” with “increased” it is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “P.20 middle: 'Bias is likely to have caused overestimated results regarding agreement.'”
Response: Non-responders had a mean absence length of 4.2 (SD: 8.0) weeks compared to responders, who’s mean absence length were 2.5 (SD: 5.0) weeks. We expect those with increased absence lengths to recall with less precision compared to those with shorter lengths. Therefore selection bias may have caused overestimated results regarding agreement.
The explanation has been added and is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “P.20-21: The ability of DREAM to correctly discriminate between workplace derived spells of > 8 weeks was found to be optimal when a cut-off point of nine weeks was used for the DREAM data.”
Response: The sentence has been deleted and replaced by “When a cut-off point of nine DREAM-registered weeks of sickness benefit was chosen, the ability to discriminate workplace-registered spells of > 8 weeks was optimal.” This sentence is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “P.21: In comparative register studies on sickness absence considering the use of DREAM... Do you mean the DREAM register system or DREAM data?" Response: I mean the DREAM register. The sentence has been replaced by “In comparative register studies on sickness absence where the DREAM register is considered for use; it will be of great importance to recognise the recoding of pregnancy related sickness absence into maternity benefits, because it is reducing the validity in fertile-aged women.” The sentence is underscored in the manuscript.

Comment: “However, the duration of sick leave spells from the DREAM register should be interpreted cautiously. DREAM data is not valid in relation to pregnancy-related sick leave.”
Response: The corrections are underscored in the manuscript.
Point-by-point response to reviewer 1:

Response: Reviewer 1 declared “No more revising needed”.

Point-by-point response to reviewer 2:

Comment:

You have to correct the sentence in conclusion and abstract “Self-reported sick leave becomes more imprecise the longer work-place-registered total length per year.”

Response: The sentence has been replaced by “Self-reported sick leave becomes more imprecise when number of absence days increases, but the sensitivity and specificity are acceptable for lengths not exceeding one week.” The correction is underscored in the manuscript.

With best wishes
Christina Malmose Stapelfeldt