Reviewer's report

Title: Are environmental characteristics in the municipal eldercare, more closely associated with frequent short sick leave spells among employees than with total sick leave? A cross-sectional study.

Version: 1 Date: 24 March 2013

Reviewer: Martin Lindhardt L Nielsen

Reviewer's report:

Comments on the manuscript.

The editors ask reviewers to consider the following questions:
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
3. Are the data sound?
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
9. Is the writing acceptable?

The answers are generally positive. The research question, methods and findings are clearly stated and thoroughly analysed and discussed. There are a few language peculiarities like: “..more associated with..” but in general the writing is clear and very understandable.

There are a few discretionary/minor essential comments on the content:

1) Page 6: “According to the literature, an association between total sick leave length and a poor working environment is more likely to be due to a frequent short-term sick leave pattern than a non-frequent long-term sick leave pattern.” References about this? Or is it really more hear-say than based on literature?

2) Page 16-17: The difference between measures of sick leave may be less than argued. E.g. the measure of short term absence in reference 12 is intended to be 10 working days, which is very similar to 14 calendar days.

3) Page 20: The connection is not clear from the findings to the statement that
the study can inform interventions to improve occupational health care.

4) Page 26, table 2: a single line starts with a capital letter (Male) as opposed to the rest. In the columns describing participants with at least one spell of absence, it is not possible to have 0 absence days. Thus, the “result” should rather be “not available” or “-” than “0 (0)”.

5) Page 29, table 5: “test for overall difference”. Could this be specified more precisely?

6) Page 30, table 6: The limit between “young” and “old” (i.e. 40 years) is not given here or in the abstract.

When these minor things are taken care of, I find the manuscript acceptable for publication, as it contributes to the quite specific topic that it deals with. I have no reason to think that there is any kind of misconduct.

**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:**

Conflict of interest: I have been working in the same research department as Vilhelm Borg and Chris Jensen who are co-authors of the present manuscript during 1996-2004, and Borg and I have both been co-authors on an article by Albertsen in 2001, but otherwise we have not published together.