Reviewer's report

Title: Effectiveness of improving working conditions on employees' health: A systematic review of organizational-level workplace interventions

Version: 1 Date: 12 December 2013

Reviewer: Raymond Randall

Reviewer's report:

Re: 'Effectiveness of improving working conditions on employees' health: A systematic review of organizational-level workplace interventions'
Diego Montano, Hanno Hoven and Johannes Siegrist
BMC Public Health
Research article

Confidential comments to editors

None.

Reviewer's report

Please number your comments and divide them into

- Major Compulsory Revisions

The paper is quite innovative in its approach to the collection and analysis of information for the review. The focus on primary interventions and their relationships to health outcomes is to be commended. The use of analytical techniques that are viable alternatives to meta-analysis is an important step and hence a good amount of research is included. I have some major concerns about the categorisation scheme applied to the interventions — some of these categories (e.g. psychosocial and organizational) are very broad and may mask significant differences in effects within the categories (e.g. previous research has shown interventions improving control are particularly powerful in comparison to other work design interventions). In addition the impact of the interventions on perceived work design / work characteristics is not discussed and this is a theoretically important mediating step in determining the impact of the intervention on employee health. Including some analysis of whether the intervention resulted in a significant change in perceived working conditions would greatly enhance the study and allow a more informative discussion of the results. As it stands my understanding is that interventions that have no impact on working conditions are perhaps being considered alongside those that do.
- Minor Essential Revisions

I did not identify any of these but I am not the best proof reader. The authors should check carefully the manuscript prior to any revision requested by the editor. I found the paper to be very well-presented with good evidence of a diligent and careful approach.

- Discretionary Revisions

See previous comments – the consideration of changes in work design I feel to be essential (even though I may have made it sound discretionary).

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The introduction to the paper is concise and well-written. It sets out both theoretical and practical agendas for the research and includes clear research questions. The links between the study and previous articles is clear.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The literature search and classification process is very thorough and well-described to the point it could be replicated. The ‘scoring’ of the studies reviewed and included in the analysis is a little more difficult to follow. The logic for applying such broad categories to the grouping of interventions is clear but I am not persuaded that it is a good choice – as there is a significant possibility that such broad categories contain very heterogeneous interventions with different working mechanisms and different effects on health outcomes.

3. Are the data sound?
See previous comment.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
To the best of my knowledge it does and this would appear to be a key strength of the paper.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The authors do a good job of extracting the key findings and relating these back to the important issues raised in the introduction.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Partly, yes. But I feel the heterogeneity of interventions within each category classification needs to be considered more fully as a limitation as does the exclusion of changes in working conditions as a contributor to health outcomes. I liked the inclusion of study quality as a variable and felt more could have been made fo how this helped to offset some of the limitations.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes – this has been carefully done.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   It is very good. A clear and conscientious approach is evident.

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

Quality of written English
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- Acceptable

Statistical review
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Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests
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I declare that I have no competing interest

What next?
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Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Open peer review
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Submission of this report is taken as confirmation that you are happy for your signed report to be posted on the BMC Public Health website as part of the pre-publication history of this article.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests