Reviewer’s report

Title: Incidence Rates of Sickness Absence Related to Mental Disorders: A Systematic Literature Review

Version: 1  Date: 23 October 2013

Reviewer: Marianna Virtanen

Reviewer’s report:

Review of the manuscript “Incidence rates of sickness absence related to mental disorders: a systematic literature review”

Work disability, in terms of sickness absence due to mental disorders is a major and increasing concern in many countries. Examination of between-country variance is important in order to better understand reasons behind absenteeism despite medical conditions. The aim of the present paper was to examine the association between welfare country type and incidence of psychiatric sickness absence among employed populations. It was hypothesised that the Scandinavian (“social democratic”) type is associated with higher disability rates due to generosity of the compensation policy which was not supported in the analysis. Systematic review was performed well and the results adequately described in the manuscript, however, I have some important points to be addressed.

Major compulsory revisions

1. I was wondering why you ignored “work integration” policy which is active in the Scandinavian countries and therefore may dilute the effect of generous compensation policy? It could be suggested that the disability rates in the Scandinavian countries are not particularly high or low.

2. Page 9: did you include studies that were referred in earlier reviews and editorials and were eligible?

3. Page 12: The 90 days of sickness absence in the Finnish study was not an outcome because such a long absence is needed before compensation. Medical certificate is usually needed from the 4th absence day onwards. The 90+ data were used was because the Social Insurance Institution’s records were (at that time) available for research from 90 days onwards.

4. My major concern is that there seems to be large variation between studies in the definition of sickness absence rate, the study population and study design. In some studies the incidence is number of episodes per number of employees while in other studies number of people having at least one episode per number of employees. Due to these differences I wonder whether it is possible to make any comparison in the incidence rates? Many countries have official statistics for work disability. Could validity of the results be assessed against these statistics?

5. Did you consider including a Swedish study (Mittendorfer-Rutz et al., PlosOne
Minor essential revisions

6. Page 9 eligibility criteria: addiction disorders are mental disorders so there is no need to separately mention “addiction problems”

7. Page 10: You have mistakenly reported that the studies carried out in “Social democratic” countries were from Norway and Sweden; they were from Norway and Finland.

**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