Reviewer's report

Title: Medical Care Usage and Self-Rated Mental Health

Version: 1 Date: 17 December 2003

Reviewer: Hynek Pikhart

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General

The author examines possible effects of various risk factors (demographic, socioeconomic and health care) on self-rated mental health. Although the dataset is of appropriate size and the analysis is of standard quality, some sections of the manuscript need to be improved and extended.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Analysis: It seems that all the variables were included in the adjusted analysis but it is not clearly stated. I am not sure that this is totally correct way of the analysis. Several demographic and socioeconomic variables will be probably highly correlated and the number of subjects in some categories of variables such as insurance or ethnicity is very low. It may be useful to exclude some of the variables from multivariate analysis.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Table 2: the title of the table in my copy of the manuscript says “table 3”, this is probably typing mistake.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The background should be more detailed. It is not clearly distinguished which cited studies used measures of self rated physical health and which used measures of self rated mental health. There are more studies using various measures of self rated mental health and more extensive review should be presented.

Because the author uses not frequently used question as an outcome, more detailed description may be given (both in the Background and in the Methods).

Although the description of variables used in the analysis is detailed, I had problems with understanding the description of medical insurance variables used in the analysis. The author could try to clarify the construction of the variables.

Results: Table 1 is the descriptive table of the sample, the title of the table is misleading. Author mentions chi-square analysis but we are not given any details or numbers confirming his statements. I would prefer to be given % of subjects with poor mental health by categories of explanatory variables given in table 1.

Discussion: Given the aims and presented results, one paragraph of discussion (last paragraph on page 5 of my version) is totally inadequate. Length of the Discussion seems to me as the major weakness of this manuscript. The author should compare his results with any previous work on this subject, discuss possible weaknesses of the study and the analysis.

Conclusions: I think the conclusions about anti-depressive programs do not have any basis in the presented data.
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None.