Reviewer's report

Title: Mental health: A cause or consequence of injury? A population-based matched cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 2 March 2006

Reviewer: ed F van beeck

Reviewer's report:

General

The paper reports the results of a well-conducted study on the relationships between injury and mental health service use (prior to and after the injury event). The study has compared a large sample of hospitalized injury patients with a matched cohort of noninjured persons. The matched cohort design is adequate, the paper is well-written and it presents interesting results.

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

1. A problem potentially leading to biased results is the operationalisation of 'mental health' by measuring 'use of health services'. This problem should at least be addressed in the discussion. Factors influencing both injury frequency and health service use (e.g. level of education) were not taken into account and could partially explain the observed relation between the two variables. After addressing this problem, the authors should reconsider if all their conclusions are justified.

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

1. I would like an explanation of the terms 'partially adjusted rate ratio' and 'fully adjusted rate ratio'. I observed some inconsistency between the text (stating that full adjustment means adding mental health to the model) and the tables (stating that full adjustment means adding mental health, pre-existing musculoskeletal conditions and previous injuries). I would prefer the strategy mentioned in the text, but what was done? Please add an explanation if the strategy mentioned in the tables was applied.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. I would prefer a brief summary of the study design instead of a reference (page 4, line 3).

2. Interpretation of the results is hampered by pooling all mental health conditions in one group. Comparisons in terms of rate ratios (injured versus noninjured) with respect to specific problems would have been very helpful to the reader (e.g. depression, PTSD, ....). Specification would increase the interest of this paper.

3. Could any information on the validity of the databases on health service use be added? Is anything known on completeness of the data? Is anything known on the relationship between mental health problems and use of health services?
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'