Reviewer's report

Title: Duration of unemployment and depression: a cross-sectional survey in Lithuania

Version: Date: 15 March 2006

Reviewer: Mel Bartley

Reviewer's report:

General

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

1. By inviting twice the number needed for their sample, the authors have not conducted their survey according to the principals of random sampling. They should comment on likely biases that may have arisen from this.

2. We should be given some estimates of unemployment rates in Kaunas from national statistical sources rather than just from the respondents to this one survey, so as to be able to see how these compare. It is very strange that so high a proportion of respondents are female for example. I realise the authors think that official figures are inaccurate. But what makes them think their sample is more accurate, given that it is not taken from a household survey but from a Labour Market office (presumably an official institution)? At least we need to be able to see how the sample in the study compares to national labour market data.

3. Pp 12-13
   There is some controversy over the validity of the ‘culture of poverty’ idea that the authors should mention. ‘Culture of poverty’ was a theory that certain groups and individuals tend to persist in a state of poverty because they have distinct beliefs, values and ways of behaving that are incompatible with economic success. The thesis is controversial and is opposed by situational theory, which locates the genesis of poverty in economic and social structures of society rather than in the value orientations of individuals or groups. In particular, the strong value placed on having a job amongst the older citizens who then were very badly affected when made unemployed is actually the opposite of the ‘culture of poverty’. In the USA context, this ‘culture’ was held to be one in which steady work was not valued highly. There is actually an argument that says where unemployment is high and endemic, it may be protective to have a ‘culture’ in which stable work is less valued and unemployment less shameful. In Platt’s work in the 1980s, he found that parasuicide among unemployed people was highest if they lived in more prosperous areas where there was less unemployment, and lower in the poorer areas

4. P 13
   The unemployed are not a ‘social class’. ‘Social category’ would be better.

Is there any evidence that smoking and heavy drinking increased in Lithuania as unemployment increased?

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. One needs to be careful about whether there may be socially marginal groups already, who are at most danger to lose their jobs and/or have the biggest problems in finding new ones or otherwise adapting to economic changes.

2. I would support the call for more research on unemployment and health in Lithuania, which seems to be a society in great upheaval with a lot to tell us. However, the culture of poverty theory needs to be only one approach. There are many articles in the literature that would show different ways in which to theorize what is happening to social and individual behaviour.

2. In the UK in the 1980s, we had a lot of experience with unemployment and associated health problems. What we found on the whole was the unemployed people did not like to be targeted for health interventions. They had enough to worry about already without being told they were at higher health risk. What they wanted was work. At the present time, we are not quite finished with the ideology that economic efficiency is promoted by cutting workforces (rather than by increasing education and training opportunities, and by policies that encourage creative enterprises and self-employment). But I am not sure that policy should waste more money on health interventions targeted at the unemployed.

**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 limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests