Reviewer's report

Title: Changes in physical health among participants in a multidisciplinary health programme for long-term unemployed persons

Version: 1 Date: 18 February 2009

Reviewer: Johan W Groothoff

Reviewer's report:

It is a well-written paper, however, there are several concerns especially with regard to the structure of the manuscript and the methodology.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. A major concern regards the structure of the manuscript is the sequence of the three aims and research questions. Based on the title of the manuscript and the overall topic of this manuscript it would be better to start with the second and third aims/research questions instead of the first aim/research question. In line with this new ordering the whole manuscript needs to be rewritten (especially the results).

2. A second major concern regards the quality of the instruments used to measure several determinants. Especially about the questionnaires no information has been described about validity and reliability. Are these respondents, who were predominantly low educated, able to fill out these type of questionnaires.

3. In the introduction, third paragraph, some other studies have been described about non-participation and drop-out in health programm. No information is given about the 'non-compliers', which is mentioned for the first time as a subgroup in the aim and research questions. The authors should describe whether there is also literature about non-compliers and why this group is important to investigate.

4. In line with concern 3, the authors should discuss why they choose to use 70% attendance of all sessions as a cut-off point for being considered compliant.

5. Page 6, first paragraph, line 6: "Participants were selected.... by a physician or a psychologist". Authors should describe whether this is the same physician or psychologist as included in the fit-to-work test. Than the authors should change the word 'a' in ‘the’ physician / psychologist.

6. Page 6, first paragraph, line 6: understanding and speaking Dutch are inclusion criteria. Why did the research group decide to send an Turkish version of the questionnaire also to those with a Turkish last name?

7. In the results many significant effects were found. In the discussion the authors should discuss in more detail the relevance of the findings.
Minor essential revisions:

8. Page 7, first paragraph: The authors should rewrite more clearly which information belongs to the participants and which information to the non-participants.

9. Page 11, first paragraph: the choice of the dependent measures of physical health used for further analyses should be described in more detail. Please present the data about these correlations in a table. Furthermore, the authors should describe more about the (statistical) reasons to left out some measures in the further analyses. The correlation between self-esteem en mastery is far below 1.0 (0.46), would it be better to use both measures in the further analyses? Moreover, due to the lack of data presented of the SF-36, it is not clear on which correlations the using only the physical functioning subscale of this questionnaire in the analyses.

10. Page 16, In summary: this study...... this paragraph should include all conclusions, not only the results of part of the research questions.

Discretionary revisions:

11. In the discussion part, the authors should not only write down the percentages but also the numbers for each determinant.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.

prof J.W. Groothoff