Reviewer's report

Title: The prevalence of work-related stress, and its association with self-perceived health and sick-leave, in a cohort of employed Swedish women.

Version: 2 Date: 20 September 2008

Reviewer: Kristina Sundquist

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

This study analyses the association between work-related stress, health and sick-leave. This is a highly important issue because it affects both individuals and the national economics. The data represents a novel contribution because it focuses on both individual and environmental factors. The manuscript is well written, the aims are clear and the methodology is sound. I only have minor comments, which I hope will improve the manuscript.

Minor essential revisions

Background:
1. Please change “working women aged thirty-eight and fifty” to “working women aged thirty-eight OR fifty”

Methods:
2. Please explain in more detail how the Work Stress Questionnaire was developed. What was the rationale for choosing the particular items included in the questionnaire?

3. Page 6: I do not fully understand the question “work to leisure time interference”. Please clarify.

4. Page 6, response alternatives: I suggest that the response alternative “less stressful” is replaced by “slightly stressful”.

5. Page 6: The reliability of the instrument was found to be good. Please explain how this was tested and the result of the test.

6. Page 7: Please justify the choice of cutpoints for the dichotomizations performed.

7. Page 8, last paragraph: I feel that it is awkward to talk about “low self-rated health” and “high self-rated health”. I suggest that the authors use “poor self-rated health” and “good self-rated health” instead.

8. Page 8, last paragraph: Please explain how the validity of self-rated health was tested. For all validity tests, “true” assessments are needed for comparison
and it is not possible to get any “truth” for self-rated health in contrast to, e.g. hypertension or myocardial infarction that can be measured (hypertension) and objectively assessed (myocardial infarction). I think that the authors should rather point out that self-rated health is a good health assessment because of its association with mortality and health care need.

Results:

9. Page 12, second paragraph: Please mention briefly how the magnitude of the ORs changed after the adjustments, e.g. decreased slightly, remained almost unaltered etc.

Discussion:

10. Page 13, second paragraph: Please delete “High workload appears to cause perceived stress”. This is a cross-sectional study, which the authors have properly acknowledged on page 16.

Discretionary revisions

Title:

11. The title includes the two terms prevalence and cohort. I realize that this is a cross-sectional study performed on a larger study represented by a cohort. However, the use of both terms is counterintuitive. The authors could use the term population in the title instead of cohort, which they have done in the abstract section.

Background:

12. In the second paragraph the authors mention the number of persons (half a million) that are on early retirement pension in Sweden. I would suggest that they also mention the percentage of the working population that this number represents.

Methods:

13. Page 5, paragraph 2: Nine of the 433 dropped out… Perhaps change “dropped out” to “were excluded”.

14. Page 5, paragraph 2: The information that the frequency distribution of the 9 drop-outs is equal between the two age groups is unnecessary.

Results:

15. The phrasing “not presented in any table” could be replaced by the more common “data not shown”.

16. Page 10: exact p-values (0.03, 0.03, 0.04) could be replaced by p<0.05.

Discussion:

17. Page 13, second paragraph, third line: “Two other studies…” In what countries where these two studies performed? For comparisons of work-related
stress, it is good to mention the countries because the working conditions vary strongly between countries.

18. Page 14, first paragraph: The last sentence seems to be a conclusion and could be moved to the end of the discussion section.

19. Many results and figures are repeated in the discussion. The authors could exclude some of these figures in order to prevent repetition.

**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.