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: 30 September 2008

Reviewer: Els Clays

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

Although the manuscript is very well written, I am not convinced about the added value of the paper in light of the available literature on the topic. The paper reports on associations between work-related stress and health indicators, but this subject has been abundantly described in literature. Moreover, the results are based on a cross-sectional study design and only a small sample size. New studies in the domain of work stress and health should have a certain added value in terms of for instance a prospective cohort design or the examination of mechanisms in the relation.

A substantial part of the results section is covered by describing the prevalence of work-related stress in the population. The value of these results is limited because no comparison is possible with other studies due to the instrument used.

It is true that the situation of women in relation to work characteristics and health issues is particular in many ways. However, in order to examine this, a study with both male and female workers would be more suited in my opinion, because this way one could compare the prevalence of work stress and its association with health between men and women.

Methodological concerns:

The instrument was designed to detect sick leave risk, so is it not obvious that associations with sick leave are observed?

Why are different response scales used, sometimes 3 and sometimes 5 categories?

As the authors correctly mention, the grouping of the stress items into categories could be problematic, it could be unreliable.

What is the reason for choosing two specific age groups? It is not clear why the comparison between these groups is important, because this issue is not described in the research questions.

The sick leave outcome is very general and broad; it contains very little specific information about the complex subject (for instance intensity vs. frequency of sick leave).

Is information available on family characteristics (living situation, children) or
private life factors (stress outside work)? These factors could be confounding variables in the stress – health association.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.