Reviewer’s report

Title: The effect of health promoting resources on work participation in population reporting musculoskeletal pain. A sample from the Nord-Trøndelag Health Study, HUNT 3, Norway.

Version: 2 Date: 17 May 2012

Reviewer: Silje Endresen Reme

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the paper titled: “The effect of health promoting resources on work participation in population reporting musculoskeletal pain. A sample from the Nord-Trøndelag health study, HUNT 3”. The paper addresses an important topic and uses a novel approach, namely the salutogenic perspective, as opposed to the pathological perspective that is generally used. The data used are also unique in that it includes a very large sample. However, although interesting and novel, the paper has some severe limitations that will further be considered:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The main problem with this study is that the research question, or hypothesis, is impossible to answer with the study data, at least the way the research question/hypothesis is phrased now. The data are cross-sectional, and it is therefore not possible to measure if “specific health resources strengthen individuals’ health which in turn contributes to work participation” (p4, first paragraph). The whole aim of the study therefore needs to be rephrased.

2. The main outcome used, sick leave, is a very weak and arbitrary outcome. First of all, it is based on retrospective self-report, but more serious is the fact that there is no information about the nature and extent of the sick leave. As the authors note themselves; “it is not possible to differentiate between if participants have been out one day with flu or several months with MSP” (p11, last paragraph). This is a severe limitation that makes the results difficult to interpret and generalize. If possible, the authors should consider identifying more homogenous groups based on length of sick leave and use that as outcome instead.

3. The second paragraph of the discussion is not possible to understand and needs to be phrased and presented differently. This is also true for the last paragraph of the discussion (implications, p12) – it needs to be rephrased to make sense.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. There seems to be an error in the title. It currently reads “in population reporting…” whilst it should read “in a population reporting”. Please consider correcting.
2. Throughout the article, there are several grammatical and typo errors that need to be corrected, e.g. first sentence of the conclusion in the abstract, last paragraph on p3, third sentence of the first paragraph on p7, the whole second paragraph on p7, first paragraph on p9, and the whole second paragraph of the discussion.

Discretionary Revisions

1. I would recommend to expand the first sentence of the introduction, elaborating a little bit more on the dimension from health to disease when it comes to MSP, and to also add a reference.

2. The introduction is very short, and since this is one of relatively few studies on MSP and salutogenesis, I would recommend expanding the intro to include more about the salutogenic model and how it relates to MSP and work.

3. In the result section, when the authors describe the results from the logistic regression analyses, it is recommended that terms such as “independent associations” are used instead of “predictors” due to the cross-sectional nature of the study.

4. In the beginning of second paragraph in the discussion, the authors state that “MSP could be seen as a proxy for attitudes about work” – this statement needs to be explained further, with supporting references.

5. Neuroticism is included as one of the independent variables in the study – since this dimension is considered to be less modifiable than for instance the work variables, I would recommend you include some reflections around the nature of this dimension in the discussion, e.g. if and/or how it potentially could be changed.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests