Reviewer's report

Title: Low back pain and widespread pain predict sickness absence among industrial workers

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Reviewer: Istvan Balogh

Level of interest: A paper of considerable general medical or scientific interest

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

Compulsory revision
Methods
I. The questionnaire used must be described more precise; of the 13 aspects some (age, gender, height and weight) are unproblematic, but other needs to clarify (smoking) and the scales in the MSD questions to be added.
II. The number of employees off work not included in the study have to be specified, and discussed in order to make it possible to correct value the findings.
III. The index "widespread pain" based on 9 body parts -- ranged 0-10?

Results
IV. A simple comparison (besides age and gender) of the groups included/not included in the follow up 2000 regarding occurrence of musculoskeletal complaints would give proper information about the risk of underestimation.
V. In table 1, the column "% of total days of sickness absence is not correct for the MSD (can not be 100; in the text are 45 % mentioned.
VI. Further, in my opinion the number of days are important in relation to the mentioned "the prevalence of MSD in the aluminium industry is high".

Discussion
VII. In discussion, the importance of physical exposure should be considered, according to S2, line 3 in background and found by the authors in ref 17.
VIII. According to remark IV, and the accounted 3036 workers the falling off would be relevant.

Discretionary revision
IX. Table 1. The title should be more adequate; Sickness absence....
X. In the title and in the aim "industrial workers" are used, in spite of that the study is taken place in
the aluminium industry. The results might not be relevant for the total industry - not discussed in the study.

**Competing interests:**

None declared.