Reviewer's report

Title: Coping and back problems: Part 1. Analysis of multiple data sources on an entire cross-sectional cohort of Swedish military recruits.

Version: 1 Date: 16 November 2005

Reviewer: Alex Burdorf

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The content of the coping variable should be presented, otherwise the results cannot be interpreted (this is a black-box model approach).
2. Although the authors point at the cross-sectional design in the discussion, the text used words as predictor etc incorrectly.
3. In the introduction the onset, aggravation and consequences of back pain are mixed up. Coping has been demonstrated to affect chronicity and consequences but not onset of LBP.
4. The terminology is sometimes rather sloppy, eg psychosocial factors include intellectual capacity and education on page 1, and are defined differently on page 2. (in my opinion capacity and education are NOT psychosocial factors)
5. The statistical analysis is very troublesome. The 5 determinants have pre-defined cut-off points and a polynomial analysis was only used to evaluate whether this seems reasonable, since there is no formal evaluation whether fit increases significantly etc, I cannot see the use of it.
6. The results are not well presented:
   - confidence intervals are lacking
   - number of cases across levels of determinants are missing
   - ill health cases et are unknown (the definition is also a concern given the association with coping: I expect that ill health and coping have a strong common underlying concept by definition)
7. An OR of 134 is very troublesome when we do not know the content of both the determinant and the outcome.
8. The rationale about differences in importance of psychosocial factors and occupational exposure strikes me as odd, when one selects a study population without any occupational exposure! The fact that LBP occurs at early age, does not say anything about association between MMH and LBP (that depends on the increase of LBP among exposed)
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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal.
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests