Reviewer’s report

Title: Is a history of work-related low back injury associated with prevalent low back pain and depression in the general population?

Version: 1 Date: 3 October 2007

Reviewer: Peter R Croft

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)

This is a competent clearly written account of a cross-sectional survey that was undertaken in 1995 which has been previously used to investigate a number of questions about musculoskeletal pain. This paper addresses the relation between a recalled history of work injury to the back and current disabling back pain, as well as the interaction with depression. It is well analysed. However for this piece of work to have credibility, there needs to be more upfront justification of precisely what such an analysis of a single recalled question about work injury is adding to the literature in the context of other studies which have looked at a range of work-related physical exposure data including much that is now prospective rather than retrospective.

The authors may be right, that no previous survey has addressed the specific question of the association between a recalled injury at work and current disabling low back pain (although I find this surprising). However the problem with recall (in addition to the cause-effect problems the authors discuss) is that this single question has not been validated in terms of what people mean by it. Many cross-sectional and prospective surveys of back pain have looked in detail at past jobs in relation to their excessive loading etc. Although each of these issues appears a little different to the single question about back injury investigated here, the person’s response to them is likely to be closely linked to it. There needs to be more explicit justification of what exactly this is adding to current knowledge and how this finding relates to previous studies of the effect of physical characteristics of work and long-term back pain.

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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)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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