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: 13 October 2007

Reviewer: Radoslaw Wasiak

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting paper that addresses an issue of increased relevance in low back pain research, one of the role of prior history of problems with low back as a predictor of future occurrences. It is well written and for the most part, the methods address the research question appropriately.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The authors have to work on the rationale for linking prior history of work-related low back pain and future prevalence. Why not history of low back pain period? Is this due to data limitations? In either case, the linkage between the two on the theoretical level should be explained better.

2. The danger of choosing variables based on univariate relationships is that important interactions between independent variables may be missed. In addition, not including an important variable can create an omitted variable bias. I recommend the authors run the multivariate analysis with ALL variables and report the results in addition to their final model.

3. Low back pain is considered 'an injury' only in the North American context (maybe Australia subscribes to this view due to their compensation scheme as well). Replacing this with another term is desirable. Health condition is one possibility.

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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)

1. page 4, edit 'of us' out

2. Page 7: independent measure. The two questions do not measure the same construct so it is difficult to say that the second question validates the first one, especially given only a quarter of work time lost cases. I suggest editing this.

3. page 17 – ‘the role of injury’ what does that mean?
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Obviously, the data are quite old. Is it possible to add a sentence regarding changes in the population since then?

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

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.