Author’s response to reviews

Title: Rehabilitation time before disability pension

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
To the Editorial office, BMC Health Services Research

Dear Editor

We appreciate the opportunity to present a revised version of our paper: “Rehabilitation time before disability pension”. We are grateful for valuable comments from the reviewers, and a response to their comments is presented below.

Yours sincerely,
Morten Støver,
Corresponding author

Reviewer 1:
1. 30% of the study population was excluded because of missing data in one or more variables. Table 1 gives an excellent overview of where the missing data were located. The attrition rate is not alarmingly high but may cause concern. However, all variables included in the analysis of model 1 in Tables 2-5 seem to have complete data. I suggest model 1 be re-analysed based on the full sample, and the differences compared to the revised sample be reported in the manuscript, for instance in the Methods or Results sections.

   Response: In the revised manuscript we have included an appendix table with the information the reviewer is requesting. These sensitivity analyses showed similar results with an exception for the Intra Class Coefficient for psychiatric diagnosis. The ICC for psychiatric diagnosis in appendix table 6 is in line with the ICC estimates for all of our other models. Hence, in the revised manuscript we have not emphasized the larger ICC results in Model 1 and 2 in Table 4. (see abstract, paragraph 1 p 12, paragraph 2 p 17, and appendix table 6).

2. The screening data was collected in 1988-1989 but follow-up data was collected from 1992 and onwards. This means that follow up is left truncated which may cause an analytical problem, since a number of persons may have died or moved out of the area (additional attrition). Why was follow up data truncated? Were they not available before 1992? Please comment on this issue in the text.

   Response: The study did not have complete information on disability pension and unemployment in the years 1990 and 1991. This is now mentioned under the limitations section (paragraph 3 p 14).

3. Page 11, paragraph 3. ‘… ICC was statistically significant …’. Please provide confidence intervals in the Tables or p-value in the text.

   Response: P-values are now given in the text (paragraph 3 p 11)

4. Table 1. The alternatives of alcohol description are not mutually exclusive. ‘Up to 1-2 times per month’ and ‘More than once a week/daily’ leave a gap, for instance 3 or 4 times a month. This problem should be addressed.

   Response: In the revised version we have mentioned the limitation with the alcohol measure (paragraph 3, page 13).
5. Page 8 Unemployment. Does the sentence ‘… whether the respondents had been unemployed throughout the follow-up period’ mean that the respondents must have been unemployed throughout the whole follow-up period or does it mean at any time during the period?

Response: We measured unemployment as whether the respondents had any periods of unemployment throughout the follow-up period. This is now clarified in the revised manuscript (see paragraph 2, page 8).

6. Language. Page 10 line 5. ‘diagnosis’ should be ‘diagnoses’ (plural form). Page 10 line 4 from bottom. I suggest the sentence ‘In figure 1, we have presented …’ is change to ‘In figure 1 a categorical … in months is presented’ (the sentence would be better and you get the right tense). Page 11 first line ‘… rehabilitation time, AS compared …’. Page 11 last line ‘… the ICC is …’ should be ‘… the ICC was … (always past tense in scientific medical texts). Page 16 line 6 missing word ‘This IS also in line …’. Page 18 Acknowledgements. The sentence ‘The study was funded …’ appears twice.

Response: In the revised version, the language shortcomings are corrected as suggested by the reviewer.

7. Table 1. In the legend there is an inconsistency. ‘… dropping out from labour market …’ is at variance with the term used in the text. I suggest the following wording of the legend ‘Descriptive statistics. Mean, median and standard deviation of number of days from first day of work disability to day of granted disability pension’ (then the description of the time interval is consistent with the corresponding description in the text, for instance in page 6 last paragraph).

Response: We agree with the reviewer regarding this point, and this is changed in table 1 in the revised version.

8. Throughout the text the we-form is frequently used. This is unorthodox. In scientific medical writing the passive form is the standard. I suggest the authors adjust the text to passive form to obtain a more professional approach towards the readers.

Response: The revised manuscript does not have the we-form.

Reviewer 2:

2. MCR. Clarify the selection criteria of the cases, which were followed. The authors describe that they have follow-up data for 18 years, but I got the impression that for this article they have first chosen the cases who were granted the disability pension and then gathered the follow-up data-- so they have left out the cases who applied the pension but weren’t granted. If this selection exists, it should be clarified and mentioned also in the limitations of this study.

Response: Only persons who did not have a disability pension at baseline, but ended up with a disability pension between 1992 and 2007 were included. Those already
having a disability at baseline were not included as the disability process itself could have influenced the baseline responses. The reviewer is right pointing out that we do not have information on individuals that had their application for disability pension turned down. In the revised manuscript this limitation is provided on paragraph 3, page 14, and paragraph 2, page 15.

3. MCR. Clarify the criteria for the "has been unemployed during follow-up" f.e.x the length of unemployment, the continuity of the unemployment.

Response: We measured unemployment as whether the respondents had any periods of unemployment throughout the follow-up period. This is now clarified in the revised manuscript on paragraph 2, page 8.

4. MCR. Please check the use of the presence and past tenses and the sentence (page 6/Disability pension) . "and covers all cases of disability pensions of at least 50 % in Norway." I have read it so that the granting criteria is "at least 50%" and the data covers all these cases,

Response: We agree that this sentence is unclear. In the revised version we first explain the inclusion criteria, and point out that our data covers all these cases (paragraph 2, page 6). We have also checked the manuscript regarding past and presence tenses.

5. DR. Two remarks for further discussion: The follow-up data didn’t include return to work or re-employment attempts, could these rehabilitation paths be different, if that information had been available. The complex biopsycosocial arena for work disability and returning to work is quite well discussed here, the authors missed only the information of the work and working conditions - is there something that could be discussed also here.

Response: This information is not available in the Norwegian registry data. However, the Norwegian rehabilitation process, in most cases, includes both re-employment and return to work attempts. In the revised manuscript we have included a brief discussion regarding work and working conditions, as suggested by the reviewer (se paragraph 1, page 17).