Reviewer’s report

Title: Symptom experience, self-assessed health and mortality: results from the West of Scotland Twenty-07 Study

Version: 1 Date: 6 September 2006

Reviewer: Bo Burstrom

Reviewer’s report:

General
This is an interesting study analysing the relation between symptom experience, self-rated health and mortality. Poor self-rated health seems a better predictor of subsequent mortality than the number of symptoms. The study is based on a rather small sample but still has interesting findings. The small sample limits the possibility of some potentially interesting analyses, but nevertheless is sufficient for what the authors set out to do in this paper. The analyses are sound and appropriate methods have been used.

The literature review relies heavily on rather old studies. Recently there have been quite a few publications on self-rated health and mortality (and the presence of certain symptoms), many of which are not listed in this paper. I would suggest to make another round to browse the literature on this topic to make sure that relevant studies are mentioned.

The importance of limiting longstanding illness for the risk of subsequent mortality could also be further discussed - a similar increase in relative risk of subsequent mortality exists both among those with and without a limiting longstanding illness, but those with an illness have a higher absolute mortality rate. We did a study on a larger sample in Sweden with such an analysis, also looking at socioeconomic differences.

(Burström, Fredlund JECH 2001)

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

The paper is well written as it stands, but I would suggest minor revision along the lines suggested above, before publication

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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?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests