Reviewer's report

Title: Assessment of long-term sickness absence: content and face validity of a new questionnaire based on qualitative data from nominal groups

Version: 0 Date: 28 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Katherine Jones

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In general, this paper is difficult to follow due to the limited proficiency of the authors in writing in the English language, poor organization, and inadequate labeling of tables. For example, there are two Tables labeled "1;" the one included in the text and the one that is supplementary material. The supplementary material table does not have a title. Table 2 does not contain column headings. Figure 1 is of such poor quality that it is illegible. Regardless of the poor organization and clarity of the paper, there are three major limitations to this study.

First, I remain confused as to the purpose of the study. The aim stated in the abstract is not the same as the aim stated in the body of the paper (top of p. 2; no line number). Although both aims include establishing content and face validity of a questionnaire, the abstract states that the authors also intend to "investigate the value of the screening tool." The term "screening tool" is only used in the abstract. Are the screening tool and the questionnaire the same? Lack of clarity in the background section contributes substantially to this confusion. Specifically, it seems that predictors of Long-term sickness absence are already known and measurable (p. 2, lines 34-39), and a model already exists (p. 2, lines 40-42). Is it that the authors want to establish the face and content validity of a self-administered questionnaire (is this the Supplementary File?) that is 61 items long? Is it that these 61 items can be loaded on to the 21 predictors of long-term sickness absence in a factor analysis??

Second, the authors did not use grounded theory to analyze the textual data from their focus groups. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to data analysis in which the themes/codes emerge from the data and do not exist a priori. These authors coded their textual data using a combination of a priori codes that originated in the previous work as described above and codes that evolved from constant comparative analysis of the data. See Bradley, Curry, Devers. Qualitative Data Analysis for Health Services Research: Developing Taxonomy, Themes, and Theory. Health Services Research. 2007;1758-1772 https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6773.2006.00684.x ). Bradley et al., identified this combination of approaches as an integrated approach to coding.
Third, the authors only provide one quote from the focus group participants to support their coding and conclusions. Without supporting representative quotes, how is a reader to judge whether the participants perceptions are consistent with the authors coding and conclusions?

Finally, I cannot emphasize enough that the combination of limited English proficiency, poor organization, and inadequate labeling of tables contributes significantly to the difficulty in understanding the contribution of this study to decreasing the prevalence of long-term absence from the work force.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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