Reviewer’s report

Title: Effects of a vocational rehabilitation programme on return to work among sick-listed primary health care patients A population-based matched, case-control study

Version: 0 Date: 10 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Erik L Werner

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper. The subject is constantly of great interest, and it is highly appreciated that also negative findings are reported.

In general, I find the paper well written and in spite of not being designed as a scientific study in origin I think the authors have done a great job to create a meaningful study out of the intervention.

I do miss some information about the intervention. It is referred to a previously published protocol, but it would be very helpful to the reader with some basic information: When did the intervention take place for the individual (from day one or later in the spell)? What consisted the intervention of; physical training, CBT, group sessions?

As the authors state, previous research have found no or limited effect of rehabilitation programs on sick leave. However, there are some interventions taking place at the workplace, which differ from other interventions in the sense that the worker stays at work throughout the sickness period. I miss references to these studies in the present paper.

How was the manual classification validated? It looks very logic how the various items were put together but it would increase the validity of the paper if there were some kind of validation of the classification of the sick listed workers. It would of course have been of great interest to compare the sick leave conclusion of the 773 at low or moderate risk with the 340 controls at high risk also.

In the 2nd paragraph of the Introduction there is an attempt to explain why the authors chose the term ‘sick leave conclusion’ and not the usual 'return to work'. This explanation remains unclear to me and I suggest to the authors to rephrase this.

In the Results section there seems to be either sick leave or not sick leave as categories; how were the workers on graded sick leave assessed. Were there any differences in the groups related to grading of the sick leave?
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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Yes

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I recommend additional statistical review

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