Reviewer’s report

Title: Important work demands for reducing sickness absence among workers with neck or upper back pain: a prospective cohort study

Version: 0 Date: 26 Jul 2019

Reviewer: Tomislav Badel

Reviewer's report:

The author has shown quality in general but some better qualifications are needed before a definitive version.

In Keywords: Work ability, WAI, occupation, occupational health - the term occupational medicine/health implies that already.

A clarification is needed: in Sweden, can you use the sick leave registry to follow an individual for 30 years and more and discern how often the neck pain recurred, on which level and how was it treated?

The methodology does not mention injuries and it is known how common the whiplash neck injuries are these days (not only in traffic but also during recreation and physical confrontations under the influence of alcohol).

The length of sick leave is usually not the best reflection of somatic pathology and the psychosocial factors can sometimes be predominant!

Phone surveys can have several biases!
The text does not state how many people answered in that way and how many did not answer to repeated calls, this is a bias.
Another methodological issue is who was sent the Additional Questionnaire?
Explain from how many questions it consisted and how many subjects answered.

The results in the tables indicate a possible bias because there are many more conducted phone replies from the so-called 'white collar' workers than from 'blue collar' workers - Table 2.

The relation between sick leave and neck pain with vibration is not very convincing, particularly the whole body vibration syndrome! The question of vibration and difficulties and/or disease of cervical spine is stressed too much or the questions are misdirected. This should be explained further in discussion.

It is well known that Sweden has the so-called 'migrant syndrome' for 30 years. It should be noted how many Swedes and how many immigrants were included in the phone survey and the additional questionnaire. The conclusions should be expanded regarding this.
The advantage of this study is its progressiveness so any issues which come up can be resolved in further studies.

The suggestion of the reviewer is that the doctors and the EU do not speak about work competence but instead about medical prognosis of early possibilities taking into account the parameters which they used during examinations (general practitioner, specialist of occupational medicine, neurologist, psychiatrist etc.).

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.

Unable to assess

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

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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