

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form (<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/site/about/resources/checklist.pdf>) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	To work despite chronic health conditions - A qualitative study of workers at the Swedish Employment Service
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Hjærtström, Carina; Lindahl Norberg, Annika; Johansson, Gun; Bodin, Theo

### VERSION 1 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Alex Burdorf Erasmus MC Rotterdam Netherlands
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	06-Oct-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The introduction could present more results from published studies, eg. Leijten et al J Occup Rehab 2013 has a similar approach with focus on workplace adjustments. another potential source is Reeuwijk BMC Public Health 2013. And there may be others as well. This also will give a better context what is new in this study.</li><li>2. This is a qualitative study with a rather limited number of persons. Some considerations for the study size should be given.</li><li>3. I would like to get more information on the interview guide, eg. the specific topics there were addressed.</li><li>4. Were the ratings done at the start or the end of the interview. This may have had an impact on the interview.</li><li>5. The analysis needs a bit more detail with respect to software used, structure of initial coding (use of a specific scheme or not), and congruence to similarity of topics.</li><li>6. I would want to know some general observations across the main themes, eg with respect to adaptation of work, who initiated this most often, how was perceived support of colleagues or supervisor? This is probably not different across the sub-themes. this is mentioned later, but I would like to see a more integrated approach or cross-reference to important topics.</li><li>7. Work-home balance; is there any information on reducing activities in leisure time in order to keep performance at work? This is an issue patients often mention.</li><li>8. Support; there is no information presented in the time order of recruiting these support troops. Who does one call upon first?</li></ol>
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	<p>9. The discussion starts with a statement on themes that influence opportunities for working. I think this must be stated explicitly in the context of the fact that all 10 persons were still in paid employment. Hence, it is about factors that help them to continue to work (which is something than work or not).</p> <p>10. The discussion repeats quite often results, I would expect more reflection on findings from literature (both other qualitative studies, but also quantitative studies). In addition, has this study offered new insights?</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Andrew Lovell University of Chester England
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	30-Nov-2017

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>A clearly expressed paper describing an interesting study, though it does still require considerable work to be of publishable standard. There are a few minor errors in sentence structure (such as the fourth limitation), though generally it is quite well written. The literature review could be more tightly focused in relation to contextualizing the changing relationship between employment and chronic ill-health in contemporary society. Evidence for 40% of those over 50 suffering a chronic health condition, for example, needs to be explored further for its legitimacy. The aim should set out to explore the relationship between work &amp; chronic ill-health and not just state the number of interviews undertaken.</p> <p>The methodology is limited and needs to be better underpinned with research knowledge, which, in particular examines the appropriateness of the research strategy in terms of qualitative criteria (read Lincoln &amp; Guba, for example, around credibility, transferability, truthfulness) - this is important to determine the rigour of the work. The descriptive style means that the work is quite clearly expressed but there is a clear lack of depth in evidence for publication standard. I would like to see more on specific chronic health conditions in relation to particular individuals in the table shown - with a small sample of 10 it is important to bring the participants alive (you could also give them pseudonyms).</p> <p>The thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke) seems appropriate but the presentation of results and the subsequent discussion are too fragmented, which restricts the elaboration of any clear argument. This ultimately means that there is little here that we don't already know. I think that you really need to return to the data and think about how the themes were produced - what is the key argument? How do the themes work together? I don't think you have to include the sub-themes in the findings section, for example, since they serve to limit the elaboration of a theme. The table provided shows how the sub-themes contributed to the resultant theme (you could include further narrative in the table showing how the sub-themes resulted in the core theme), but there is no real penetration. You could give the participants names and reveal their stories better, but by choosing not to do this, you have to have something more important to say. At the moment you fail to do this - I suspect there might be richer quotes in the transcripts or you could use the narrative between quotes better to develop your argument. The use of sub-titles restricts fluency and ultimately prevents your article achieving publication standard. You need to re-visit, re-work and figure out</p>
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	what you want to say, perhaps using theory to make sense of your findings.
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Review comment	Author response
Reviewer 1	
1. The introduction could present more results from published studies, eg. Leijten et al J Occup Rehab 2013 has a similar approach with focus on workplace adjustments. another potential source is Reeuwijk BMC Public Health 2013. And there may be others as well. This also will give a better context what is new in this study.	The background has been adjusted and complemented with more research and results from published studies. The references suggested by the author has been added to background or discussion (ref #7 and #14)
2. This is a qualitative study with a rather limited number of persons. Some considerations for the study size should be given.	We have elaborated the discussion further on the limitation of single employer and small sample in the second to last paragraph in the discussion on page 17.
3. I would like to get more information on the interview guide, eg. the specific topics there were addressed.	We have made a translation of the interview guide and attached it to the manuscript as an appendix. A reference to the appendix is found in the materials and methods section under interviews, page 7.
4. Were the ratings done at the start or the end of the interview? This may have had an impact on the interview.	The ratings were done at the end of the interviews to avoid interference with the interview. We have clarified this on page 7 "... the interviews ended with"
5. The analysis needs a bit more detail with respect to software used, structure of initial coding (use of a specific scheme or not), and congruence to similarity of topics.	The analysis process are now described more detailed, regarding to the structure of coding and the procedure. This is described in the materials and method section, under analysis, page 7.
6. I would want to know some general observations across the main themes, eg with respect to adaptation of work, who initiated this most often, how was perceived support of	An initial description of general observation is given in the beginning of the result section

colleagues or supervisor? This is probably not different across the sub-themes. this is mentioned later, but I would like to see a more integrated approach or cross-reference to important topics.	
7. Work-home balance; is there any information on reducing activities in leisure time in order to keep performance at work? This is an issue patients often mention.	The subject was discussed during the interviews and several study participants reported reducing activities in leisure time in order to keep on working. We expanded this part in the results section.
8. Support; there is no information presented in the time order of recruiting these support troupes. Who does one call upon first?	How the contact was established with the support troupes is described further in the result section, supporting structures, first paragraph.
9. The discussion starts with a statement on themes that influence opportunities for working. I think this must be stated explicitly in the context of the fact that all 10 persons were still in paid employment. Hence, it is about factors that help them to continue to work (which is something than work or not).	This an important distinction, which now has been clarified in the first paragraph of the discussion.
10. The discussion repeats quite often results, I would expect more reflection on findings from literature (both other qualitative studies, but also quantitative studies). In addition, has this study offered new insights?	We have revisited the results and re-written large parts of the discussion and added several references including the ones suggested by the reviewer in comment #1
Reviewer: 2	
1.A clearly expressed paper describing an interesting study, though it does still require considerable work to be of publishable standard. There are a few minor errors in sentence structure (such as the fourth limitation), though generally it is quite well written.	We have to our best ability improved the language.
2.The literature review could be more tightly focused in relation to contextualizing the changing relationship between employment and chronic ill-health in contemporary society.	The background has been adjusted and supplemented with research and results focusing on the relationship between chronic ill-health and work.
3.Evidence for 40% of those over 50 suffering a	We have penetrated the governmental report without

<p>chronic health condition, for example, needs to be explored further for its legitimacy.</p>	<p>being able to identify</p>
<p>4.The aim should set out to explore the relationship between work &amp; chronic ill-health and not just state the number of interviews undertaken.</p>	<p>The aim is clarified on page 5; “The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between work &amp; chronic ill-health in a group of public sector employees with a focus on the factors which enable them to continue to work”.</p>
<p>5.The methodology is limited and needs to be better underpinned with research knowledge, which, in particular examines the appropriateness of the research strategy in terms of qualitative criteria (read Lincoln &amp; Guba, for example, around credibility, transferability, truthfulness) - this is important to determine the rigour of the work. The descriptive style means that the work is quite clearly expressed but there is a clear lack of depth in evidence for publication standard.</p>	<p>The method is described in more detail in the material and methods section. The research strategy in terms of qualitative criteria’s are more developed and discussed</p>
<p>6.I would like to see more on specific chronic health conditions in relation to particular individuals in the table shown - with a small sample of 10 it is important to bring the participants alive (you could also give them pseudonyms).</p>	<p>Although we agree that this would increase the readability of the paper, our assessment is that the current aggregation of disease data is appropriate in order to guarantee the anonymity of the informants.</p>
<p>7.The thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke) seems appropriate but the presentation of results and the subsequent discussion are too fragmented, which restricts the elaboration of any clear argument. This ultimately means that there is little here that we don't already know. I think that you really need to return to the data and think about how the themes were produced - what is the key argument? How do the themes work together? I don't think you have to include the sub-themes in the findings section, for example, since they serve to limit the elaboration of a theme. The table provided shows how the sub-themes contributed to the resultant theme (you could include further narrative in the table showing how the sub-themes resulted in the core theme), but there is no real penetration. You could give the</p>	<p>We have reworked our discussion and tried to highlight what we believe this paper adds to the current body of knowledge.</p> <p>With regards to how themes were derived, we have expanded this by adding table I in the appendix. We have also tried to integrate the themes more in the results and discussion and we hope you find it less of a “silo” structure.</p> <p>We have also developed the narrative between quotes and edited the text to improve readability and fluency in a way we hope proves satisfactory.</p>

<p>participants names and reveal their stories better, but by choosing not to do this, you have to have something more important to say. At the moment you fail to do this - I suspect there might be richer quotes in the transcripts or you could use the narrative between quotes better to develop your argument. The use of sub-titles restricts fluency and ultimately prevents your article achieving publication standard. You need to re-visit, re-work and figure out what you want to say, perhaps using theory to make sense of your findings.</p>	
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### VERSION 2 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Andrew Lovell University of Chester United Kingdom
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	09-Feb-2018

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>A much improved paper. There are a few minor errors, such as avoiding in-text abbreviations (eg P4 L5), and making sure that sentences fully make sense.</p> <p>The explanation of production of themes is much improved and has improved the quality of the paper, and the limitations section is also stronger. I would like to see the discussion at the same level as the other parts of the article, particularly accentuating how the themes inter-relate. You have contextualized to an extent with regard to re-visiting the literature but you also need a bit more of an overall focus to the discussion - what exactly has the qualitative thematic approach shown?</p>
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### VERSION 2 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Dear Editor,

we have revised the manuscript in line with the reviewers suggestions.

1. We have further improved the language and corrected minor spelling errors and abbreviations
2. We have revised the discussion in order to relate themes better to each other and to existing literature.

We have also added a 'Patient and Public Involvement' statement within the main text of your main document

We hope that you will find it satisfactory

Kind regards  
Theo Bodin