Reviewer’s report

Title: Effect of paper quality on the response rate to a postal survey: A randomised controlled trial

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Reviewer: Dr C Fischbacher

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after revision, which I do not need to see

This study addresses the important topic of increasing response rates for postal surveys and is clearly written. There is little information available about the target population and no information about the relative characteristics of those in the intervention and control groups. The study reported response rates much lower than expected in both groups. It is not clear why rates were so low nor whether there were other contributing factors which might have influenced rates on this occasion and which might also have a bearing on the results of the study. An appropriate method was used for randomisation but it is not clear how group allocation could have been concealed from the study participants. The intervention and the outcomes were clearly described. I think the relative rate of response should have been 0.75 rather than 0.80, but the p value given is correct. The interpretation of the study results is not correct. The study lacks the power to reliably exclude a 15% increase in response rates. The difference in response rates between the two groups was 7.3% and the 95% confidence interval for this difference was -1.3% to +16.0%. The results are therefore compatible with a true difference (ie benefit) of up to 16% between intervention and control groups. Despite this, it would be fair to conclude (as the authors do) that the benefit of high quality paper is likely to be modest. It would have been of interest to know the relative cost of the intervention.

Competing interests:

None declared.