Reviewer’s report

Title: Sampling and coverage issues of telephone surveys used for collecting health information in Australia: results from a face-to-face survey from 1999 to 2008

Version: 3 Date: 10 August 2010

Reviewer: Joanne O’Toole

Reviewer’s report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

These have been detailed in earlier reports and have been addressed.

- Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract - Results section:

1. The second sentence should be altered to omit the reference to ‘people in the normal weight range’. This is because people in the normal weight range are not always the highest proportion; hence the sentence is not factually correct. (I do agree that the proportion of persons in the normal weight range is increasing by year (p<0.001) and this is at the same time that mobile only households increase’. However reference to Table 2 shows that the highest proportion in 2007 were people that were underweight even though the highest proportion in 2008 was those in the normal weight range.

2. The last sentence should read:

a. ‘The proportion of landlines or mobile telephone numbers listed in the White Pages telephone directory was highest among older people, married or in a defacto relationship or widowed, high SES areas, rural areas, people classified as overweight.’

b. Note that I have also deleted reference to ‘those diagnosed with arthritis or osteoporosis’ in the last sentence. This is because when you look at Table 3 you see that this is true for 2006 only. In 2007 the highest proportion was those diagnosed with osteoporosis (78.7%) and diabetes (78.7%) -arthritis lagged behind at 76.2%. In 2008, the highest proportions were arthritis (75.8%) and diabetes (73.9%). If any diagnosed illness is to be included in this sentence it should be qualified by year etc.

Background

3. Page 5, Paragraph 1: First sentence to read: ‘….at a cost, to not have their telephone number have listed in the EWP (also known as silent numbers). ‘

4. Page 5 Paragraph 1, 3rd sentence: This sentence is somewhat difficult to understand as written i.e. ‘This exclusion of unlisted numbers from the sampling frame can have an effect on the estimates for the population in telephone surveys and remains and important concern for researchers’. It is because the
authors are talking about exclusion of something that is not listed in the first place (I know what the authors mean but the use of two negative concepts together is confusing). Perhaps something like: ‘The exclusion of a proportion of telephone numbers (silent numbers) from the sampling frame can have an effect on the estimates for the population in telephone surveys and remains an important concern for researchers’.

Methods
5. Page 6, Paragraph 1 second sentence should read: ‘HOS is a multi-stage, systematic, clustered area sample survey of households conducted face-to-face annually in Spring based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collector districts (CDs).’

Discussion
6. Page 11 First paragraph (this is the first paragraph in the Discussion) discusses phone ownership and type – suggest that the second half of the third sentence is removed (i.e. ‘and there are also changes among a range of demographic, health status and risk behaviours groups’), as demographic, health status and health risk behaviours are discussed later.

7. Page 11 second paragraph (this is the second paragraph in the Discussion) First sentence: This sentence is difficult to digest. The following is suggested, although the sentence could be divided into two: ‘This study showed that when LA-RDD methodology is used to generate a sampling frame to include unlisted landline telephone numbers, approximately 9% of the population, representing mobile only households and households with no landline telephone connections, was excluded.

8. Page 12 first paragraph (this is a continuation of the second paragraph in the discussion), first sentence: In this sentence low SES households is defined (in brackets) to be: ‘Low income households and reside in the most disadvantaged areas’. The use of the word ‘reside’ is somewhat confusing given that following the bracket the text reads ‘living in mobile only households’. This sentence requires rewording.

9. Page 13: Second paragraph, line 12 to read: ‘…telephone need to pay to have their telephone numbers listed in the EWP…”

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests