Reviewer's report

Title: The effect of mode and context on survey results: Analysis of data from the Health Survey for England 2006 and the Boost Survey for London

Version: 1 Date: 10 June 2010

Reviewer: Jonathan VanGeest

Reviewer's report:

General comments:
The article is well-written and timely, as surveys remain an important tool in health policy, public health, and health services research. Moreover, the need for local data is compelling, as solutions to issues remain more provincial. The questions posed by the authors are suitable and the methods utilized in their analyses are both appropriate and well defined. Discussion and conclusions are also appropriate given the acknowledged strengths and limitations.

Discretionary Revisions:
Survey Descriptions (page 4): I would recommend that the authors include additional description of the Health Survey for England and the Boost Survey for London (i.e., basic sampling methodology, etc.).

Sample Adjustments: I would also recommend that the authors provide additional information on the sample adjustments, particularly the methodology employed in the socio-demographic adjustments. Although this is included in the appendix, additional information, including specific criteria employed would assist the reader.

Minor Essential Revisions:
Abstract provides reference to background issues that are not fully addressed in the text. I would recommend that the Introduction be edited to include some of the existing work on the effect of mode on survey response (see below).

There is also a body of literature on social desirability and mode response that is not cited by the authors.

Strengths and Limitations (page 14): Would address the stated inability to differentiate between mode and other effects in delineating observed differences (as currently stated in conclusion).

Conclusion: The authors should explore the need for further targeted research in this area, including possibly the use of case control studies, etc. to further understand the observed variations in response.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
The primary concern is with the rather cursory review of the literature. Currently, the authors do not cite the growing body of literature on impact of survey mode on data quality. Dillman has published extensively on this issue. Other authors
include, but are not limited to, Beebe, de Leeuw, McGrath, and Johnson. Additionally, the statement in the abstract (background) indicating that the “effect of survey mode on comparability of data is unknown” is a bit overstated and should be reconsidered in light of this growing body of literature. While it may not be fully understood, there is considerable work in this area.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.