Reviewer's report

Title: Effect of questionnaire length, personalisation and reminder type on response rate to a complex postal survey: a randomised controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 14 March 2011

Reviewer: Jeanette Ziegenfuss

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review Effect of questionnaire length, personalization and reminder type on response rate to a complex survey: randomized control trial. The manuscript was generally well-written and described a well-designed study. There were a few small areas that could be improved upon that are listed below as minor or discretionary revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions:

• Abstract, background and Background, line 5: You state that minimizing non-response is important to ensure the generalizability of inferences. As nothing short of full participation ensures this absolutely, suggest softening this statement.

• Methods: procedures, line 127: Explain more about the consent form. Is it needed for a survey to be considered a complete? How often, if at all, is a survey returned without a consent form?

• Methods, line 149/Discussion: How sensitive were the results regarding item nonresponse to the assumption that implausible or otherwise errant results were considered missing?

• Discussion: Throughout it would be important to explicitly state the need of additional data included in the longer questionnaire, both with respect to the present study and the importance of this question theoretically. If important data elements are not captured to achieve a shorter questionnaire, the data is rendered less valuable, even with a higher response rate.

• Discussion: Relatively deprived and relatively affluent communities were purposefully sampled. How, if at all, might more mid-range communities have differed?

Discretionary Revisions:

• Background, paragraph 1, line 3: suggest inserting “relatively” before “unobtrusive”


• Background, last paragraph, line 62: suggest construing in terms of unit and
item nonresponse instead of “response rate and quality”

**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