Author's response to reviews

Title: The effect of an internet option and single-sided printing format to increase the response rate to a population-based study: A randomized controlled trial

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Re: “The effect of an internet option and single-sided printing format to increase the response rate to a population-based study: A randomized controlled trial” – Response to reviewers

Please find below our revision of the article entitled “The effect of an internet option and single-sided printing format to increase the response rate to a population-based study: A randomized controlled trial”. We have considered the comments of the reviewers and made respective changes which are listed below. We thank the reviewers for their input, which we believe has made a better manuscript.

Reviewer 1:

1. Authors need to include information on validity and reliability of questionnaires used

   The questionnaires and the corresponding references have been added (L 143-L 151).

2. Claims made in the first paragraph of the paper should be supported by relevant literature

   References have been added in the first paragraph (L 57-L 63).

3. Conclusion is too short and do not actually tie up what was presented in the main body of the paper

4. Authors should include implications of the study and make relevant recommendations emanating from findings of the study

   The conclusion section has been expanded and includes future recommendations for researchers (L 322-L 333).

Reviewer 2:

1. A new Table 1 should present the four groups by gender, age, number of deceased and invalid addresses. Tables should also provide information on the distribution of response rates with respect to age and gender

   A new Table 1 containing the requested information has been included. However, deceased and invalid addresses were merged and presented under “invalid addresses” since that information was not separated out during data collection. References to Table 1 have been made in L 195 and L 203.

2. The analyses should include if age or gender have any interactive effect

   An interaction between age and gender has been determined. The positive effect of female gender on response reduces with older age. This was added to the results (L 191-L192)
3. **L 59: A lot of epidemiologists would say that internet based data collection is most feasible**

   The sentence has been changed (L 59). Nevertheless, while it is true that online questionnaires can be a feasible way to collect data in epidemiological studies, it is less feasible for population-based studies in the UK since there is no sampling frame available for e-mail addresses.

4. **L 109: An “internet-fatigue” could also be hypothesized. The internet is not so new anymore**

   The sentence has been changed. It now reads that it is possible (rather than likely) that response rates could be increased as a result of the internet becoming more acceptable to people (L 110).

5. **L 136: The exact URL should be presented. URL’s may be very long and difficult to type**

   The URL has been added (L 138). Furthermore, its potential effect on participants’ decision to respond to the online questionnaire has been discussed (L 295-L299).

6. **L 167: Response rate before reminders should be reported**

   This information has been added (L 172-L173).

7. **L 218: Better if costs were divided into fixed and per questionnaire costs**

8. **L 225: Reduced data entry cost is important and should be included**

   Conceptually, both comments are correct. Nevertheless, the results on the cost-effectiveness were presented in the most appropriate way for the current study. The fixed costs were only the set up costs for the internet version of the questionnaire which was only used by 60 participants. As a result of a somewhat increased number of respondents in the internet groups and a very small number of online respondents, the data entry costs between the groups only differed marginally. In fact, 780 questionnaires of those who did not receive a web option and 764 of those who received a web option were entered by data entry clerks. The difference of 16 questionnaires (which equals a data entry time of less than two hours) would not have had an effect on the costs per questionnaire. For the given reasons, it was decided not to make the changes requested by the reviewer. However, we would be happy to take editorial advice on this.

9. **L 211: The “summary of evidence” and figure 2 is a relevant way to compare the results with previous studies. However, this is an essential part in any discussion section. It should be moved to the discussion section and the reference to this update should also be deleted from the aim (L117)**

   We respectfully disagree with that. The “summary of evidence” was part of the aims and therefore included in the results and discussion. Hence, we decided to retain the current structure of the manuscript.