Reviewer's report

Title: Systematic Analysis of Four Studies in a Comparative Framework Reveals: Consent Rates on British Cohort Studies Higher than on UK Household Panel Surveys

Version: 3  Date: 22 July 2014

Reviewer: Dermot O'Reilly

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This is a well-structured paper from authors with an established record and expertise in this area. As the authors state, record linkage is an increasingly important aspect of surveys and I support their contention that not a lot is known about the causes (or effects) of variation in consent to record linkage. The paper therefore addresses an important topic and the findings add new knowledge to the field: I therefore recommend publication.

I have only a few minor points (and one small quibble) to make about the paper. The quibble relates to the use of the phrase 'systematic' in the title: I think it may be redundant in that presumably most analysis is systematic?

Methods: The only suggestion I have here is that the authors may need to provide a greater demonstration of the variance in health focus between the studies in order to satisfy readers who are not as acquainted with these studies.

My main comments relate to the discussion section: This reiterates the differences between studies in the demographic and socio-economic factors that are associated with consent to follow-up but does not offer suggestions as to why this variation in the strength and direction of association may have occurred. This is reasonable as the surveys do not contain the relevant data to answer this question, but it does rather highlight and reemphasise how little is known about the factors influencing consent and why these vary so much between studies. It does however perhaps offer the alternative suggestion that the variation in consent between studies arises not primarily from a focus on health but on other socio-demographic factors, whether measured or unmeasured.

Another interesting factor that perhaps could be commented on is the apparent inverse relationship between participation and consent rates in the BHPS and UKHPS. This leads to the interesting question as to whether it is better to have a high consent rate amongst a select group of participants or a highly select consent rate amongst a more generally representative group of participants.