Reviewer’s report

Title: Demographic and occupational predictors of early response to a mailed invitation to enroll in a longitudinal health study

Version: 1 Date: 25 November 2006

Reviewer: Tim Allison

Reviewer’s report:

General

This is an interesting paper that covers an area where there has been little previous work. The paper is well written and the methodology appears to be sound. The issues that give rise to comment relate to the generalisability of the results and their practical significance.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

I would like the authors to make some comment on how representative is their sample of the wider population. In particular I would like comments on whether a sample taken from a military population can be equated with a non-military population. It is possible for example that people who have served in the armed forces have a systematically different approach to answering requests for information.

I would also like to see some comments about the practical significance of the number of people positively signalling refusal to participate. In their study the authors noted 704 out of 214,391 people which is 0.3%. Statistical inference can certainly be made from this number given the very large sample size, but in much smaller studies I am uncertain about the effect of such a small proportion on the practical process of the study and I think some comment on this would be appropriate. Should study methods be changed to take into account refusers and avoid unnecessary attempts to elicit response when the absolute number of such people may be small?

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

None

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests