Reviewer's report

Title: Leave entitlements, time off work and the household financial impacts of quarantine compliance during an H1N1 outbreak

Version: 1 Date: 22 April 2012

Reviewer: Roman Perez Velasco

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The manuscript by Kavanagh et al addresses the effect of parental leave entitlements on time taken off work, financial impacts and compliance to quarantine recommendations. Although the research question is of high interest and the manuscript is generally well written, the fact that the survey response rate (27%) is considerably low limits the generalizability of the results. The results from a survey with a low response rate can be questionable because of potentially low representativeness of the participants who responded. It would be advisable to report the differences between respondents and non-respondents in this manuscript as well and not only mention this in the Discussion section.

The previous publication from this study should be introduced in the background of the paper.

Also, it would be helpful to explain whether there was any attempt to calculate an adequate sample size, taking account of an estimate of non-response rate, or discuss whether other measures to obtain higher response rates were considered.

A description of the research tool is lacking. I consider this as equally important to the description of the data collection process. I would like to see a paragraph reporting the steps followed in the development and testing of the tool (including reliability and validity). The addition of the questionnaire as supplementary material would help the reader to appraise the tool as well. Alternately, if the tool is adopted from a previous study, a reference would help.

The wording of the relationship between leave entitlements and time taken off work is misleading both in the abstract, the Results and the Discussion sections, and should be revised.

Minor Essential Revisions

P-values should be shown consistently across the manuscript.

The response rate should be reported in the abstract so that the reader can easily find the limitations of the survey.

The time when the survey was conducted should be reported in the Methods
section. Was it November 2009?

Discretionary Revisions

Abstract:
The objectives of the study are not clearly stated: a rephrasing would make them more straightforward. Also, adding “to quarantine recommendations” after compliance (line 4 in Background) would make it clearer for the reader.

In the methods section, the number of respondents from whom information was collected should be stated.

Background:
I would recommend that you use the name given to the pandemic by the Advisers to the WHO Consultation on the Composition of Influenza Vaccines for the Southern Hemisphere 2012 (26 September 2011): influenza A(H1N1)pdm09. (http://www.who.int/influenza/gisrs_laboratory/terminology_ah1n1pdm09/en/index.html; Van Kerkhove, Ferguson. Bull World Health Organ 2012)

In addition, several organizations define quarantine, isolation and social distancing as different measures. For example Dutta (2008) in the World Bank Policy Research Paper The effectiveness of policies to control a human influenza pandemic: a literature review defines social distancing as “A disease prevention strategy in which public health authorities limit social (face-to-face) interaction to reduce exposure to and transmission of a disease. These limitations could include, but are not limited to, school and work closures, cancellation of public gatherings and closure or limited mass transportation” and quarantine as “The physical separation of healthy people who have been exposed to an infectious disease – for a period of time – from those who have not been exposed” (isolation is also defined in Jefferson et al, Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2011 (7):CD006207, or http://trainingcalendar.ct.train.org/panflu_toolkit/documents/Resilience/PanFluQuarantineIsolation.pdf)

Please clarify, since these terms seem to be considered as interchangeable along the manuscript. If in Australia there are different definitions, it would be recommendable to explain the differences in international definitions here.

Additional studies to [1-4] should be cited to better place this study in context (e.g., Barr et al, BMC Infect Dis 2008; 15:8:117; Eastwood et al, Bull World Health Organ 2009;87(8):588-94 or others). Referring to the cost-effectiveness of physical measures would add valuable information too (e.g., Perlroth et al. Clin Infect Dis 2010 50: 165–174).

Methods:
Paragraph 2: ‘Oseltamivir’ should not be capitalized as it is not a brand name.

Paragraph 2 and 3: ‘(Department of Health Victoria quarantine guidelines, 4 June 2009)’ should be converted in a numeric citation.

Statistical analyses: Add a reference to Stata 11.0. such as ‘(City, State: Name of company)’.
Results:
3rd paragraph: The first appearance of Figure 2 seems unnecessary.

Discussion:
It may be argued that an average parent would prioritize the care of a child for a short period of time over financial losses (and indeed over societal benefit), especially in an uncertain and potentially dangerous situation such as the 2009 pandemic. This could also explain the lack of association between access to leave and compliance with quarantine.

Paragraph 4: As mentioned before, it would have been useful for policymaking to collect cost data as well. With the current results, paragraph 4 may go beyond the scope of the paper. I would present this information in the background of the paper though. In addition, I would cite more recent papers than [12], covering the cost-effectiveness of strategies to tackle influenza pandemics (e.g., Perez Velasco et al. PLoS One 2012; 7(2): e30333; Lugnér, Postma. Expert Rev Pharmacoecon Outcomes Res 2009; 9(6):547-58).

Paragraph 6:
It seems that some limitations are attributed to the previous publication from this research. It would be better to re-write this section to make clear that they are shared by the two reports.

Writing:
There are a small number of errors that need correction (e.g., some punctuation missing).

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.