Reviewer's report

Title: Behavioral intentions in response to an influenza pandemic

Version: 1 Date: 4 August 2009

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GERJO KOK ET AL: BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS IN RESPONSE TO AN INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

This paper describes a survey of the Dutch population. The aim of the study was to explore people’s intentions about responses to an influenza pandemic. The design was based on Protection Motivation Theory (PMT). Rather than concluding about their own findings, the authors conclude with normative statements about policy responses to a pandemic threat.

The study suffers from several limitations:

• The authors conclude about policy issues (which they have not explored directly) rather than concluding about their own findings
• The research question is fairly broadly described without any hypotheses
• The manuscript could be better structured. Example: In the “Research question” section, the authors describe methods and implications rather than research questions and hypotheses.
• The study population is not described (e.g. people aged 20-79 in the Netherlands). If the target age group was not decided, this should be stated explicitly. The authors state that the sample had slightly more females, elderly, etc. than the Dutch population. Did this include all age groups? Is it surprising that the sample has less education than the general population if children were included in the target group? A table describing the Dutch target population and the sample in terms of distribution of age, sex, education, etc. would be good.
• A full verbatim version of the questionnaire (preferably in English translation) is missing
• The English language needs some polishing. In many places “if” should be replaced by “whether”. On page 17, change “trustful” to “trustworthy”?
• The definition provided to the respondents of pandemic is incorrect. A pandemic is not necessarily caused by a virus, nor need the virus be unknown. Any analysis of respondents understanding of the term pandemic is useless when the authors do not know the term themselves.
• The term “dangerous” may provoke affect and will likely influence the remaining of the responses. It would be good to cite information from WHO/Dutch Health authorities to learn what an influenza pandemic is, and then base the study on this information.
• The question “Are you in general susceptible to influenza” does not make sense medically. If it is genetically a new virus, everyone is susceptible. For each of other viruses, everyone is susceptible if they have not had the infection or have had vaccination.

• The question “How probable is it that you will get influenza ... from a pandemic in the next 12 months?” is less meaningful. Even experts have difficulty judging the probability of a influenza pandemic, and lay people will in general not have information to answer the question. Supposedly, many respondents had an opinion. Is it ethically acceptable to ask people question that they cannot answer in the first place???

• Are the mentioned precautions recommended by Dutch health authorities? The effectiveness of face masks is debated. They are popular in Asia, but hardly seen in Europe, and not recommended by European health authorities as far as I know. The study should be relevant to Dutch pandemic policies.

• From the items that are presented verbatim in English translation I am concerned about the whole questionnaire. Example: Is it meaningful to ask people how many hours they will work during a pandemic? Can people know?

• Is Tamiflu and Relenza really preventing virus from dispersing through the body? What is the medical effect?

• The papers describes a very long list of findings. The reader would need to know some determinants of people’s opinion on this and that, and how responses to different items are related.

• The authors do not cite all papers on behaviour intention in case of influenza pandemic. How did they search the literature???

Conclusion
The paper suffers from several important limitations. The design limitations cannot be eliminated, but they should be discussed explicitly. Also, analyses and presentation could be much improved. Because the questionnaire was so extensive, the authors may do well to omit some aspects to make the paper more focused, or to split it in two independent papers.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no conflict of interest