Reviewer’s report

Title: Behavioral intentions in response to an influenza pandemic

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Reviewer: Ivar Sonbo Kristiansen

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The concept of pandemic stems from epidemiology. Even though people’s thoughts and behavior in relation to influenza pandemics are dictated by their beliefs more than fact, my position was and is that a good understanding of the pandemic concept is essential for designing and reporting high quality research in this area. From the reporting of the paper, I get the impression that the authors of this paper had a somewhat limited understanding of the concept, and I was consequently skeptical as indicated in the first reviewer report. My position is that we should not ask people questions that do not make sense (for example about the susceptibility of pandemic influenza). An additional reason for my skepticism was the large number of question which may tire the respondents and reduce the validity of the responses. In order for readers, editors and reviewers to better understand the study and its strengths and limitations, I suggested that the authors submit the full questionnaire. Even if the editors would choose not to publish the questionnaire, it would useful for editors and reviewers to scrutinize it. I observe that the authors choose to argue against publishing the questionnaire rather than submitting it to editors who then can decide on publication and to reviewers who can scrutinize it. It is difficult to make a fair judgment of all the results presented without more information about the questionnaire.

Additional comments

1. In the methods section, the authors state that they asked respondents “how many people would get sick if a pandemic were to occur”. In the results section, the authors report that “participants in this study estimated prevalence at 35%....”. Is this result related to the “how many people” question? First, the response to a question about numbers should be reported in numbers. If the results are translated from numbers to proportions, the method for the translation should be indicated. I may have misunderstood the article with respect to this point. Second, and more important, it is inconceivable that the prevalence of pandemic influenza should be 35%. Do they mean attack rate which is another concept? By definition, prevalence is the product of disease incidence and duration. Because the duration of clinical influenza in each patient is a few days, the prevalence will never be as high as 30%. If respondents were asked about prevalence, this should be made clear in the methods section, and commented on in the discussion if it really was perceived to be as high as 35%.

2. Susceptibility is a qualitative term. Responses to the question: “How probable is it that you will get influenza .....” should not be interpreted as an expression of susceptibility, but as a probability or a risk. I would suggest to avoid the term
susceptibility altogether in the article in order to avoid confusion among researchers familiar with the epidemiologic terms. The term probability or risk would be appropriate in the context of the way the question was phrased.

3. At the introduction to the discussion, the authors state that “knowledge levels regarding a possible influenza pandemic were relatively low”. This conclusion is in conflict with the items which tapped perceived knowledge as far as I understand.

This paper presents the results from a lengthy questionnaire, but the data are not explored in detail, and the reader is not fully informed about the design of the study because the questionnaire is not presented. It might be better to present responses to fewer items and explore the data in more depth with regression analyses, etc. The part of the study that explores perceived knowledge and perceived risk is the weakest part of the study, and the authors seem to have limited familiarity with the concept of pandemic. This part could be skipped in order to explore more the part with better data: behavioural intentions. Such a revision would make the content more in line with the title. Finally, the paper should be revised such that epidemiologic terms are correctly used. Even though the paper is about people’s perceptions, the presentation of these perceptions should be made in a way that does not confuse readers who are familiar with epidemiologic terms.