Reviewer’s report

Title: Perception of Epidemic Risk in the French General Population: A Cross-sectional study in the Rhone-Alpes Region

Version: 2 Date: 17 January 2010

Reviewer: Arja R R Aro

Reviewer’s report:

The authors have tried to improve the manuscript based on the reviewers’ criticism. However, many major issues are unchanged. Below is my list of them.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The terminology has not been clarified even if the theory-based relevant literature of the terms was pointed out by both reviewers.

   a) E.g. even if now ‘knowledge’ is correctly described as ‘self-reported knowledge’, it is not consistently done so through the manuscript. Further, this limitation in measuring knowledge is not discussed at all. Actual knowledge should be measured with contents questions of which we can say if they are right or wrong.

   b) Risk perception has not actually been asked at all. There is no question about risk perception per se, instead theoretically very different concepts such as threat and anxiety and concern are used for risk perception, e.g. table2.

   c) Table 4: This table presents ‘reported or perceived’ transmission routes – right? Now the table title gives an impression on transmission routes as such.

   d) There are still sentences listing cancer threat and other very different threats like these were epidemics etc without pointing out that these were the reference diseases/incidences.

2. Discussion:

   a) Actually it is not correct to state that ‘epidemics were not perceived as major threat by the study population’ - actually they were seen ‘as a real risk’ by 27%. The correct way to say this would be that about one quarter of the population was concerned etc.

   b) The discussion about government action boosting confidence in its officials is somewhat confusing since only 21% had high trust in the ministry of health. Further, it is not clear how the ‘quick preventive measures implemented by the government’ were communicated – according to the results at least media was not commonly trusted.

   c) It is said (pg 13) that ‘level of concern ... corresponded to the(ir) knowledge’. Was the association between concern and knowledge analyzed?

   d) Page 13: It is said that ‘compliance with advice could also reflect anxiety and psychological distress’. It is not clear from where this statement comes from – not
from this study I assume.
e) Communities’ trust in different sources – there are interesting between country
differences in the issue (e.g. literature pointed out in the earlier review), which
would bring some more light into this.

3. Conclusion:
a) The major conclusion is now about government preventive measures seen as
calming the population. However, this does not come from the results.
b) Also a contradictory result of co-existence of compliance and distrust in the
population is a rather strange conclusion and not very informative.
c) The conclusion in the abstract about H1N1 epidemic is irrelevant.

4. Other: Article summary line is ‘Knowledge of general population fears of
epidemics is essential for suitable intervention by public health and government
bodies’—unfortunately this manuscript does not provide any information for this
claim.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a
scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.