Reviewer's report

Title: Knowledge and attitudes of university students toward pandemic influenza: a crosssectional study from Turkey

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Reviewer: Keith Eastwood

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Review

Knowledge and attitudes of university students toward pandemic influenza: a crosssectional study from Turkey

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1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

YES

It is valuable for the management of future health emergency management to review the strengths and weaknesses of public health response interventions, with the aim of recommending improvements. It would be useful for the authors to indicate why gathering data from first year university students has merit in understanding the broader public knowledge and attitudes, and how these results can be applied.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

NO.

Major compulsory revisions

It is not clear as to how the students were contacted, eg was it by mail. Also considering the high participation rate, the use of a passive contact approach appears to be unlikely, hence the value of providing more details. Was any promotion conducted to encourage student participation eg class announcements, email notice, advertisement in the student magazine? A description of the number and nature of non-responders would be helpful.

It would be appropriate to calculate an actual percentage for the participation rate (402/486 = 82.7%, if this is correct…it does seem unusually high).

3. Are the data sound?
NO

Major compulsory revisions

The results section shows missing data. The data provided on ‘Perception of influenza risk’ totals 86.2% and gives no indication of the missing 13.8%. In addition the tables do not add up to a full sample response of 402. It is important that missing data are explained eg data not reported, unknown, refused etc.

The description of the actual question asked of respondents is vague and it is difficult to determine whether the result relates to the actual response or an interpretation by the authors. For example, the abstract states that “Perception of influenza risk was high in 25.1 % of the study group, and moderate in 40.5% and low in 20.6%.” but it is unclear how the original question was worded to determine perception. Risk perception is a broad concept and capturing this in a single question requires explanation.

Table 6 provides a comprehensive description of the ‘Likert’ questions but again it is not clear whether this is an accurate translation of the original question or a summarized interpretation. It would be preferable wherever possible to state exactly what was asked and allow the reader to interpret the finding. Regardless, the actual wording of these questions does need to be re-visited as there appears to be some grammatical issues with the interpretation (see point 9).

Minor essential revisions

In tables 1 and 2 a response option of “No idea” is reported. It would be preferable to re-code this as “Unknown” or similar if this is an accurate descriptor.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

YES

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

NO

Major compulsory revisions

It is important that the authors provide recommendations that explain clearly what measures should be taken in future health emergencies to improve public understanding and change attitudes with an aim to improving compliance with public health containment measures and reducing unnecessary anxiety. Effectively, the learnings from this study should reflect in future policy and the authors are in a position to provide this level of guidance.

Minor essential revisions

Mention is made in the Background section on the health promotion campaign
that was carried out by the Turkish Government. It would be useful to provide
greater detail of the campaign so that the reader can determine how the nature
and effort of the campaign correlated with the perceived success (ie student
perceptions) noted in this report.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Major compulsory revisions

It would be desirable to expand on the limitations and set the study in context of
the population surveyed, as it is clearly not designed to be representative of the
entire Turkish people. The study methodology (previously noted as needing
further description) should be critiqued.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building,
both published and unpublished?

NOT MENTIONED

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Minor essential revisions

This is generally acceptable but would be enhanced with the addition of the
principle recommendation. Please note that the results reported in the Abstract
do not total 100%.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

NO

Major compulsory revisions

Unfortunately there are many spelling mistakes, grammatical issues and
redundant wording that require attention.

In addition it is recommended that the results are reported in the past tense, eg I
recommend changing “Great majority of the study group (92.8%) declared that
they are not willing to be vaccinated against
H1N1.” to… “The majority of the study group (92.8%) declared that they were not
willing to be vaccinated against H1N1.”

Please note that some references are not in the accepted or consistent format
and should be reviewed.

Minor essential revisions

For scientific and consistency sake the authors should consider using the term
“influenza” instead of “flu”, and it would read better if the words ‘sex’ and
‘sexuality’ were replaced by ‘gender’.

The authors may be interested in considering this recently published work which
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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 declare that I have no competing interests'