Reviewer's report

Title: Emerging advantages and drawbacks of Telephone Surveying in Public Health Research in Ireland and the UK

Version: Date: 12 April 2006

Reviewer: AH Mokdad

Reviewer's report:

Comments to authors:

The manuscript is well written and covers a very important topic for surveillance.

1) The manuscript would benefit from a comparison (in the discussion) to RDD trends in other countries. One possible comparison would be the BRFSS since all response rates and disposition codes are online www.cdc.gov/brfss. Moreover, the author should cite other RDD work in other countries. What they have reported is true everywhere. I strongly recommend that they use some of the published work in the US from CDC and others. BRFSS has done a lot of work to improve its response rate. Moreover, there are lots of publications from the NIS www.cdc.gov/nis.

2) One of the most troubling parts of this manuscript is on page 11, first paragraph. Did these surveys conduct any cognitive testing of their questionnaire and a pre-test (pilot test)? Some of the issues with the introduction and perception of the surveys should have been dealt with before the beginning of the field work. The information in the paragraph is valuable, but I strongly recommend that the authors discuss how these questions were developed and tested and whether they were modified after the pilot test. For example, income is a very sensitive topic in the US and most RDD survey use a cascade approach to deal with non-response.

3) There is a lot of work on multimode techniques for surveillance and the authors should cite some of this work as a possible solution for declining response rates.

4) On page 7, first paragraph, last sentence “In survey 2 a quota...” please explain what do you mean by a “quota technique”. Did you do post-stratification adjustment?

5) Do the authors have any data on the use and trends of caller IDs in the area? Such information would be very helpful.

6) On page 4, second paragraph, first sentence “Telephone surveying...” the statement is true but those in remote areas may well have a much lower telephone coverage. Please address and reword.

7) It would be better if the authors combine table 2 and 3. This will allow the reader to follow the computation of response rates better.

8) The cooperation rate reported in Table 3 needs some clarification. Perhaps the authors could explain it better by adding what numbers they used from table 2. For the first survey, from table 2, 11,782 were eligible and 9,903 were completed interviews.

Minor comments:
1) In abstract under Results, second sentence of the second paragraph, the word “pm” is included twice.

2) In Results, page 6, second paragraph, the example for the 100 numbers, the last 3 digits are underlined, it should be only 2 digits (from 00 to 99).

3) On page 9, first paragraph, second sentence ends by “is impossible to”, it should be “impossible”.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests