Reviewer’s report

Title: Public perceptions of drinking water: a postal survey of residents with private water supplies

Version: 1 Date: 13 February 2006

Reviewer: Kjell Bjorvatn

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General

I have read the above paper with interest, and I have the following comments:

1. The provision of high-quality drinking water is a problem of growing concern. The question posed by the authors of the present paper is hardly new, but it is important – and should be posed world-wide.

2. The methods described are appropriate, and may easily be adapted to replicate the study.

3. The data are sound, and are well controlled. However - as stated in the discussion – findings may possibly be slightly biased. (The response rate was rather low (54%), and the respondents deviated in some respects from the census population).

4. In my opinion, the manuscript adheres to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition

5. The conclusions are balanced, and are well supported by the data. Some additional comments on non-responders would have been of interest. And, as the city of Hamilton probably isn’t lacking in water resources, I would have like some background information on the households preferring (?) private water wells/cisterns to municipal water supply. Furthermore, in order to know whether the “public perception of drinking water” is at all relevant, an objective assessment of the various sources would increase the practical value of the paper.

6. The title and the abstract are in harmony with the findings of the study.

7. The manuscript is well written, and acceptable. A possible blemish may be seen in lines 7 and 8 of the abstract (can “education activities and drinking water policy” be informed ?) and in line 132 I suspect that a word is missing: “to encourage those who had not managed (?) to do so.”

Further comments:
As indicated above, I would like to have more comprehensive analyses of drinking water made available around the world. Thus, high-fluoride concentration in drinking water has proved to cause health problems, especially in areas depending on deep-drill water sources. Likewise, radon and other radioactive elements may unexpectedly contaminate water. Further studies are needed! In fact, public perception based on vague feelings may not be extremely useful for policy makers!

In the text the authors refer to two more unpublished manuscripts dealing with public perception of drinking water among residents relying on municipal water supplies, respectively private water systems in the City of Hamilton. As BMC Public Health has no space constraints, the authors might be asked to consider publishing the three manuscripts together - thereby making life easier for the reader. (If the papers are planned to be part of a PHD thesis, this may not be a good idea!)

In conclusion, I recommend the publication of the submitted manuscript – possibly after considering the enclosed comments.
Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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