Reviewer's report

Title: Survey of public knowledge about Echinococcus multilocularis in four European countries: Need for proactive information

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Reviewer: Peter R Kerndt

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I found this to be an interesting paper but will only be commenting on the methods used.

Methods:

The methods section states that the data was collected through a “representative” telephone survey of 2,041 respondents in four EU countries using commercial marketing firms (Synovate/IHA-GfK AG) as part of a larger “omnibus” survey. A “random –quota method” was used within age and sex strata to the population between 15 and 74 years old. Five questions about knowledge and risk and prevention of alveolar echinococcus were asked in conjunction with an unknown number of other questions asked for other entities.

An attempt to obtain further information on survey methodology at the presumed firm’s website <http://www.synovate.com/whatwedo/other/omnibus/> was not informative. It appears that a random digit dial methodology was used (which is rather standard for these types of survey). However, insufficient information is provided to determine how likely the sample is to be representative despite the assertion to that effect by the commercial firms.

Since the survey methodology relies on phone access to a study population, the response rate overall and country specific response rates should be provided. Methods should provide an estimate by country of those that have phones and would be likely to be included in the random sampling frame. Does the sample include those that have cell phones? Are unlisted numbers excluded? Are there any populations that are likely to be systematically excluded, e.g., persons/households without phones, student populations, incarcerated populations, etc. How likely are these groups to be different in their knowledge of risks and prevention of alveolar echinococcus? How much time did it take to complete the whole survey? Was the ordering of the questions varied? Did these factors effect survey completion rates?