Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating housing quality, health and safety using an Internet based data collection and response system (Altti)

Version: 1 Date: 14 July 2010

Reviewer: Matthias Braubach

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1 - The internet-based data collection is only part of a larger survey. During the whole article it remains unclear to me to what extent this paper only addresses the internet data and relevance of the web-based tool (then the focus is on methodology), or whether it addresses the whole survey and its results (more a technical paper).

In the background and aims of study-sections the web application is presented as the tool developed to collect data but during the paper itself it is mostly presented as an add-on to an existing study in order to increase response rate. Thus, it needs to be made more clear whether the paper discusses the web tool per se or the web tool as an addition to standard surveys. For example, in the abstract it is unexpected to read under "Methods" that respondents could choose between paper and web questionnaire after being informed under "Background" that the aim was to develop an internet-based system.

2 - It is unclear whether the feedback to the responses provided by the system is an objective in itself (health promotion, awareness, advice...) or just a means to increase response rates.

3 - the tables present interesting results but if the idea to use the web to collect data is to be tested it would be necessary to split up the results by type of response mechanism. Are the results based on web responses different than the results based on paper questionnaire responses? If so, what does that mean? Unfortunately, the tables do not show these two dimensions and the question is not discussed.

4 - The discussion section can be improved significantly. It too often simply describes the data, partially repeating information provided already in the result section. I`d welcome more in-depth discussion of the results. What does it mean? What can we learn? Any unexpected data? Any health priorities to be identified?

Another relevant aspect: given that a third wanted feedback on their answers, could it be that the option to get such feedback may have especially motivated residents in "bad" housing to participate in the survey? This could be tested by comparing the results of the group asking for feedback with those of the group not wanting feedback. I feel this should be part of the discussion section as it can not be excluded that it may affect the results.
Overall it must be more clear whether the paper focuses on presenting a new technology to collect data, or whether the focus is on presenting the data. In this context, the introduction of the paper is more method-oriented but in results and discussion the web-based data is not featuring anymore and only overall results are shown.

Minor essential revisions

5 - Did the paper questionnaire exist before and the web tool was added later or was both developed in parallel?
6 - Page 5, list of items: how many feedback items? How long did it take to fill the questionnaire?
7 - in text (as well as tables) be more precise on the potential differences between web and paper results.
8 - Page 9: fifth of residents planning to move in next 12 months: is this a result expected? It seems quite high...
9 - Page 10: water supply disruptions in what time window? within a year, a month...? same issue for water damage. Also: signs of rodents are better termed an indicator of a lack of hygiene but it must be kept in mind this could also be an indicator of floor level.
10 - the result section often only gives qualitative information (a small portion of households; the main source was...) and instead the percentages should be given.
11 - The discussion section could benefit from comparing with average national statistics to assess the accuracy of the study.
12 - the discussion section ends with a very short para on the response system. I feel this is something to be discussed in more detail; instead the result discussion could be shortened.

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

**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