Reviewer's report

Title: A telephone survey of factors affecting willingness to participate in health research surveys

Version: 1 Date: 16 February 2015

Reviewer: Kay Teschke

Reviewer's report:

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

Yes. This paper investigates the willingness of various groups (general population, members of an occupational cohort, and cases and controls in a disease study) to participate in health research and factors that affect that willingness. As participation rates in research continue to plummet, it is very worthwhile to discover why, and how to encourage participation.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Yes, in general they are, though more on the following would make it more complete:
- the reasoning for including the cohort and case-control study participants is not explicitly stated, nor is the rationale for the sizes of samples selected for those groups compared to each other and compared to the general population sample.
- there is no indication of the number of call backs made
- the size of the cohort study is indicated in the methods, but there is no comparable data given for the number of cases and controls in the other study.
- lines 98 and 99 don't clearly indicate what the initial approach was for those without addresses.

3. Are the data sound?

They appear reasonable. There does appear to be an error in Table 1. The figure "2,197" for non-contactable in the no letter general population sample must not be correct.

- The number of refusals doesn't seem to be reported in Table 1. Did 49.6% of those contacted actively refuse or are there other reasons for not participating?
- Table 4 doesn't indicate if the results are for the full study (all 3 groups) or the general population only

4. Do the figures appear to be genuine, i.e. without evidence of manipulation?

Yes.

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

Yes. It would be useful to discuss the value of the cohort and case-control samples. It occurs to me that one possible avenue for future studies would be through occupational cohorts. There was excellent participation in the original study, and this group expressed greater willingness for further study participation, so this seems a promising avenue for research in the future.

7. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Yes, the main limitation - the low participation of the population sample is indicated up front. Ironic and worrying in a study trying to gauge determinants of participation.

If there were no call backs, this may have contributed to low participation. This should be explained (and the reason for no call backs explained).

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

It appears so.

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

Yes.

10. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes, generally clear.
- Title of table 1 is not quite right.
- explanation in footnote a of table 1 is not clear. Is this all about mobiles? Were people not recontacted if there was a busy signal?
- Table 2 needs a definition of ATSI

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