

Title: Are Some Strategies For Telephone Contact More Effective Than Others? A Systematic Review of Randomized Evidence

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ABSTRACT

Context: With rapid proliferation of cell phone and message screening technologies, researchers have encountered declining response rates in conducting telephone surveys.

Objective: We sought to examine published evidence of strategies that increase efficiency and effectiveness of telephone contact among participants in epidemiology cohort studies.

Methods: A search was conducted in PubMed (1950 to July 1, 2011), The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (*The Cochrane Library*, Issue 8, 2011), and *Public Opinion Quarterly*. All randomized controlled trials and quasi-randomized controlled trials that assessed the efficiency and the effectiveness of telephone survey methodology were included. Case series, observational studies, and study designs using historical cohorts or controls for comparison were excluded. Validity was assessed according to the "Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials" criteria and a clearly defined outcome measurement.

Results: Five studies reported improved contact by use of advance letters and/or incentives. Two studies reported improved contact by using voicemails and/or follow-up calls. Two studies gave conflicting results regarding the effectiveness of the title displayed on caller ID, and one study from the early 1970s investigated the optimal time of the day and day of the week to conduct a telephone survey.

Conclusion: There is considerable heterogeneity among studies; however, the combined strategies of performing follow-up calls and utilizing interventions such as incentives, advance letters, and voicemails appear to improve response rates. It is unclear if the nature of the title displayed on caller ID makes a difference. There is not enough evidence-based information to determine the optimal calling time to maximize response rate. More studies need to be conducted to further investigate the efficiency and effectiveness of telephone survey methodology in the 21st century.