Reviewer's report

Title: Measuring bias in self-reported survey research: validating the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Uganda

Version: 1 Date: 4 May 2011

Reviewer: Carol Bova

Reviewer's report:

Summary: This manuscript describes a revision of the original Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale for us in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Uganda. This is an important paper with implications for future work that uses self-report measures to evaluate outcomes that have inherent social desirability bias. The paper is brief and organized. The following are some issues that the author(s) will need to address before this is ready for publication:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Please clarify –it is more appropriate to calculate a Kuder-Richardson 20 for this scale (not a cronbach’s alpha because the response options are dichotomous (true/false)

2. Need citations in background section – there are multiple assertions presented without citations.

3. There are no validity data provided (so to assert that this scale has not been validated in Africa on p 4 leads the reader to believe that you will also present validity data – so this should be re-worded). This scale is not ready for use until validity data can also be presented.

4. Please clarify whether the scale was administered as an interview or a self-report. If it was administered in an interview – need to indicate how this could have influenced the responses. If this was administered as a self report measure please indicate the literacy level of the population.

5. Was there missing data or problems with certain items in specific populations? How were missing data handled?

6. Please provide more detail about the back-translation procedures used for the short form and full scale used in this study. How did you evaluate cultural congruence of the measure (for example did items such as “practice what I preach” translate adequately to each of the languages?)

7. Please provide data that demonstrated that the short versions were inconsistent

8. Need a section on study limitations

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the abstract specify the four countries that you are referring to
2. The title should indicate the most common name used for the scale – Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale and the abbreviations throughout should be changed to MC-SDS

3. Test-retest reliability procedures would have added strength to this study – the lack of this should be mentioned as a limitation

4. Please provide a reference for the LQAS sampling method used

5. Reporting medians would be helpful to evaluate the distributions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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