Reviewer's report

Title: The publics' understanding of daily caloric recommendations and their perceptions of calorie posting in chain restaurants

Version: 1 Date: 23 October 2009

Reviewer: Rebecca A Krukowski

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) The conclusions in the abstract do not appear to be closely tied to the findings; the authors should revise these conclusions to be more closely tied to the findings.

2) The authors indicate the environment is the primary driver of obesity in the introduction-- I am not sure that all experts would agree on this point. The authors should provide more support for this statement, if they wish to include it.

3) It is essential to report the response rate for a survey-- the authors should include this.

4) Unless someone is preparing food for others, it is only essential that the individual knows how many calories they themselves should eat, rather than how much someone of various characteristics should eat. The authors should address this point in terms of the design of the survey.

5) The range of calories included in the "correct" answers to the survey questions is quite large. The survey only picked up people who had a very inaccurate notion of how many calories should be eaten.

6) The survey questions addressed chain restaurants-- chain restaurants can also be sit down restaurants; however, the authors specified calories being provided on menu boards. This specification is only appropriate for fast food and fast casual restaurants, which biases responses.

7) The respondents were "primed" to think that the answer to the 3rd survey question (inactive adults) would be different from the first two questions. This is a significant limitation to the results.

8) The authors conclude that "mandating calorie reporting in chain restaurants may be an effective tool to promoting [promote] energy balance, particularly among Blacks and Hispanics..." There are others that the authors have reported who would particularly benefit in this article; thus, it seems biased to specifically mention these racial groups. In addition, there is very little research indicating that calorie labeling will change behavior-- which is THE essential component; thus, this conclusion may be overstated, in particular given recently released research indicating the lack of effect of calorie labeling (i.e., Elbel, Kersh,
Brescoll, & Dixon).

Minor Essential Revisions

1) Information that is both in a table and in the text can be cut to make the manuscript more concise.

2) It would be helpful for the authors to guide the reader through some of the results in the tables (e.g., race, gender, and age differences on p. 9)

3) The similarities and differences between the current and previous research should be integrated into the discussion rather than having a separate section for this.

4) The authors should include the limitation of the study that random digit dialing doesn't pick up cell phone numbers, which are often the sole phone line for specific demographic groups.

Discretionary Revisions

1) It may be helpful for the reader for the abstract to include the % of white respondents supported calorie labeling, in order to contrast with the other racial groups.

2) It would be helpful for the authors to give examples of how the research may inform legislation.

3) The authors indicate that "more research is needed to understand whether the most effective mode for presenting consumers with calorie information and whether it varies by sociodemographic characteristics"-- however, what may be more important is finding a modality that transcends most, if not all, sociodemographic characteristics, as public health interventions in this area have limited ability for tailoring. In addition, this sentence is repeated in the last paragraph.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.