Reviewer's report

**Title:** Using Direct Observations on Multiple Occasions to Measure Household Food Availability among Low-Income Mexicano Residents in Texas Colonias

**Version:** 8  **Date:** 6 September 2009

**Reviewer:** Inge Huybrechts

**Reviewer's report:**

Using Direct Observations on Multiple Occasions to Measure Household Food Availability among Low-Income Mexicano Residents in Texas Colonias

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

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Although the methods (questionnaires used …) are well described, participation rate is missing (reader does not know how many families that were contacted for recruitment). Furthermore is the number of only 6 families very low for performing statistical analyses.

3. Are the data sound?
   Yes that data are sound.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   No

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

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   Insufficiently (limitations of small sample size should be elaborated)

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 Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?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

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

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   No. Some of the sentences are too long and therefore, difficult to interpret and understand.
Revisions

• Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

It could be useful to refer to the Barker theory in the introduction. (Barker 2002): Fetal origins of adult disease: strength of effects and biological basis.

It would be nice to see the dietary reference intake in the figure 2 so that it is clear how low or high they are in comparison with the reference.

• Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

In the methods section you say that the study was completed between July & August, while in the discussion it is written that also the beginning of September was included. Please, try to make this consistent.

In the methods section (under the section ‘Food availability and affordability’, a typing error should be corrected in the sentence “Participants were asked to similarly respond to five statements about the store where they buy most of their groceries.”

Please check the following sentence which is hard to interpret: “Response categories were collapsed into strongly agree/agree versus neither/disagree/strongly disagree.” Are those categories aggregated during analyses or already in the questionnaire # this is very unclear.

The following sentence under the section ‘Food security’ is also very difficult to read and interpret: “During the 12 months prior to the first home visit, food security status was operationalized from the following food security risk situations …”

The last part of your methods section (The promotoras were all fluent Spanish speakers from the local community who shared a common cultural background … each approximately one half-page in length.) does not well fit under the data analyses and should be placed above this section.

Are the analyses of the photographs reported somewhere else or what are they meant to be used for?

On the 4th page of the results section you use the sentence “In data not shown, …”, please adapt this sentence and write ‘data not shown’ between brackets at the end of the sentence.

On the third page of the discussion (in the third last sentence: “A husband or other members of a family … elsewhere for a proportion of the year …”) you better can replace proportion by part of the year.

In the discussion you mention that participants changed their behaviors because of the survey and you are giving some examples. However, I missed the example
that they probably change their food availability at home. When looking at the household availability of participant 2 (table 7) I got the impression that this person started buying more vegetables after the second home visit for instance … so this could also be integrated in the discussion section.

Tables:
Table 1 & 2: please make the categories in this table more straight forward and include the units (e.g. mention in the title that all those characteristics (age …) are for the mother in the family)
In table 2 for instance I was wondering in what currency the amount spent during last food shopping was expressed.

• Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Why did the authors only include 6 participants? How many families did they need to contact to remain those 6 participants? Wasn’t it feasible to recruit more families? How much time took 1 single visit? All those answers should give an indication of the feasibility to use this method in large scale surveys

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Confirmation of your acceptance to review, with links to the manuscript files and upload form, will also be emailed to you at inge.huybrechts@ugent.be.

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that i have no competing interests