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: 4 November 2009

Reviewer: Katrina Giskes

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript is clearly written and addresses an important issue of the measurement of household food environments. There are a number of issues with the current draft of this manuscript that need to be addressed. These are detailed below:

Introduction

• The research questions posed by the Authors are not well defined- the research questions or hypotheses driving this research is not clearly articulated.
• Further to the point above, the reasons for adding some aspects of the data collection to the manuscript (measures of the perceptions of the environment, cooking/preparation tools) are not mentioned in this section.
• In second paragraph of the Background a statement is made, “Especially among limited resource families, neighbourhood and household access to healthy foods may be a key factor. A statement is missing explaining why this may be so.

Methods

• Food accessibility/availability/affordability are measured in the study- the items that assess this mainly relate to the external food environment. What was the rationale for including the external food environment?
• Further, the rationale for the kitchen appliance inventory is not provided. It would help if a conceptualisation of what constitutes the household food environment would be defined in the study.
• The rationale for multiple measures of the same households is currently weak. Quantitative researchers would argue that with adequate sample size, we would get adequate representation of people in different ‘cycles’ of household food availability in studies, so a global picture of the household food environment can be derived from this.

Results

• There are many detailed results relating to individuals in the study and individual food items- the number of tables exceeds that conventionally presented in a manuscript. It is therefore difficult for the reader to get the ‘main message’ from the results. It may be an idea to condense the results into an index of availability across the food items (rather than individual foods) and
present summary statistics across the respondents.

• The conceptual diagram is a little simplistic and could be removed from the paper- it also does not have a title.
• The photographs are not titled and are also not alluded to in the Results.

Discussion

• The issue of the implications of this research in terms of the measurement of the household food environment is missed in the Discussion. Further the implication of using multiple measures is missing.