Reviewer's report

Title: Frequent food insecurity among injection drug users: correlates and concerns

Version: 1 Date: 25 July 2012

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This is an interesting paper, documenting an increased risk of HIV risk behaviors among IDUs that are food insecure. It builds on the previous food security/HIV literature, to further probe the relationship between food security and injection drug use, with a particular emphasis on injection-related risk behaviors.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

This paper provides important information in two areas – risk of malnutrition among IDU because of food insecurity/hunger, and risk of disease transmission among food insecure IDUs because of increased risk behaviors. Clearer presentation of each of these issues in the introduction, results and discussion is needed.

Introduction and discussion would be strengthened by a stronger conceptual framework. You might look at the framework on HIV risk behaviors and food insecurity developed by Weiser & colleagues (AJCN Dec. 2011). They mention that ‘food insecurity may contribute to unsafe injection practices if food insecurity interferes with access to clean syringes, ….’ Use of the Weiser conceptual framework would clarify the importance of this study in the larger context of HIV/STD risk, IDU and food insecurity.

Methods paragraph 4 – a list of co-variates are given, including the Addiction Severity Index composite score, and Addiction Severity psychiatric composite score. Several of the covariates are not mentioned in the results. Were they incorporated into the analysis?

Results paragraph 1 – were any of the descriptive variables (age, marital status, income, education, depression) associated with food insecurity?

Results paragraph 4 – the overall conclusions are somewhat lost in the details.
Food insecurity was associated with increased prevalence of each of the risk behaviors, and being HCV+ was associated with decreased prevalence of each of the risk behaviors.

In the discussion (paragraph 3) you use the terms mild/moderate and severe food insecurity, although those terms are not used in table 2. Please include consistent terminology in the results, table and discussion to refer to your categories of food security.

Table 1 – Please add prevalence of risk behaviors to table 1 (re-use of needles, re-use of cookers, re-use of mixing/rinsing water, re-use of filters), and insert a reference to Table 1 in place of the percentages in paragraph 4 of the results.

Table 3 – Please add a footnote clarifying what is adjusted for in the adjusted ORs.

Minor Essential Revisions:

Table 2 - Consider re-ordering the variables in terms of severity of food insecurity (worry, quality/variety, hunger, drug binge, food program).

Is the average income of $4000 the total for the six months? It’s not clear.

Minor Issues Not for Publication:

First sentence of the abstract provides an abbreviation, ISU, which should be IDU.

Second sentence of abstract – ‘among a sample of IDUs’

Fourth sentence of abstract – ‘who had injected drugs in the past 30 days.’ [omit ‘were recruited’]

Need a stronger start to the article than ‘current research shows’.

Introduction paragraph 3 ‘Although food insecurity does not immediately endanger life, it does lead to diminished physical and mental health status, and influences the social, psychological, and daily functioning of those individuals who experience it.(2,11,15) Increased food insecurity has been associated…’

Introduction paragraph 6 ‘eating a nutritionally adequate diet may not always be a priority.’

Introduction paragraph 9 – ‘determinant of health that affects most aspects’

Methods paragraph 4 - is the comma following ‘need assistance to inject’ meant to be a comma, or should it be a semi-colon?

Results paragraph 3 – ‘Inquiries’; ‘on both a daily/weekly basis’

Discussion paragraph 2 – ‘It is difficult to compare statistics on food insecurity’

Discussion paragraph 4 – you say ‘on the one hand’ but then have no follow up
reference to the other hand.

Food security is misspelled multiple times in the reference list.
Title of Reference 17 should be ‘….the role food stamps may play’
Reference 34 – should be ‘lower percent body fat’
Reference 47 ‘marginally’

**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.