Reviewer's report

Title: The 18 Household Food Security Survey items provide valid food security classifications for adults and children in the Caribbean

Version: 1 Date: 14 September 2005

Reviewer: Rafael Perez-Escamilla

Reviewer's report:

General
This study examines the validity of the 18-item USDA Household Food Security Survey Module in Trinidad and Tobago. The questionnaire was filled out by parents of school aged children. The study design, sampling methodology, and statistical methods used are appropriate. Conclusions reached are faithful to the empirical data results. The manuscript is very well written and the tables and figures are necessary and efficient. The following comments may help the authors increase even more the value of their contribution.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The first paragraph of the “Background” section needs to be rewritten. Food insecurity is not only a problem of lack of calories. In fact, in a country like Trinidad & Tobago (T & T) it is quite likely that the FI problem is more related to poor dietary quality and even overweight rather than undernutrition (although obviously undernutrition is still an important component of food and nutrition security in T & T). This paragraph should start with the definition of household food insecurity, followed by a more comprehensive epidemiological description of the FI problem in T & T, and then by the rationale as to why the measurement of FI is an important topic to study in T & T.
2. As the authors indicate in page 4 (end of first paragraph) this work extends their previous validation work of the short version (six-item version) of the scale of interest. Thus, it is important that in the “conclusions” section they make a statement about how the six-item results compare to the 18-item results. Also, what is their recommendation? Should we use the 18-item version whenever possible or is the six-item version good enough for most applications?
3. On page 4 (second paragraph), the authors state that “Within each school we measured all children...” What measurements were taken and who took the measurements. Has these data been examined in relationship to FI?
4. Page 4 (second paragraph): Who (which institution(s)) provided the human subjects ethics approval?
5. Page 5 (second paragraph, first line): Even though it is stated that “Items were analyzed without imputing missing values”, on page 7 (first paragraph) the authors describe how they imputed missing values. Please clarify.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
1. Figures 1a and 1b need to describe the items/questions in the order in which they appear. This could be done in the legends or right under the item calibration score in the X-axis.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1. In the US it has been suggested that it may not be optimal to combine child and adult items for
coming up with a single overall household FI score. Consistent with this, the authors separated their analyses based on adult and child items. However, there is no conclusion or recommendation regarding this unresolved issue. The authors may want to consider doing misclassification analysis to find out if the household FI classification rankings would differ substantially or not when analyses are done based only on adult vs. child items.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests