Reviewer's report

Title: Western Australia (WA) Food Security Project

Version: 2 Date: 27 April 2007

Reviewer: Cliona Ni Mhurchu

Reviewer's report:

General

This manuscript describes an audit of the range, variety and availability of foods sold in a lower socio-economic region within the City of Mandurah, Western Australia. Food security is an important determinant of nutrition and health. To this end, the manuscript provides interesting information on food availability, a factor related to food security.

My major comment regarding this paper is that it is titled a "Food Security Project". However, given that the definition of food security focuses on "access" to food and that no assessment was made of food security per se (using a valid measure), I feel that the paper may overstate its aim and findings somewhat. The audit provides information on food available but does not examine how people living in the region access foods and what level of food security exists there.

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

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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)

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Title: WA should be spelt out in full i.e. Western Australia

Abstract Aim: WA should be spelt out in full with the abbreviation then added in brackets

Abstract Aim: The stated objective was to identify the range, variety and availability of foods "in the region" but this should be amended to "in one lower socio-economic region within the City".

Abstract Methods: Clarify how the food audit was provided to food outlet owner/operators i.e. by mail, in person etc.

Introduction, paragraph 3, line 5: Please explain/simplify the term "culturally linguistic"

Introduction, final paragraph, line 3: "Access" should be altered to "assess"

Methods, paragraph 1, line 1: How was the survey content developed and pre-tested? How many items did it include?

Methods, paragraph 1, line 1: Clarify how the food audit was provided to food outlet owner/operators i.e. by mail, in person etc.

Methods, paragraph 1, line 1: How were the food outlet owner/operators identified i.e. how was the list of 132 obtained?

Methods, final paragraph: Reference is made to the use of GIS but results for the GIS mapping are not reported. Can they be included?

Results, paragraph 1, line 1: Describe the categories of food outlets included in the survey i.e. supermarkets, dairies/delis, cafes, restaurants, takeaways/burger bars etc. This has an important bearing on the type of food you would expect to be available in the region.
Results, Table 1: These results would make more sense if they were presented by category of food outlet.

Results, paragraph 6: Explain how the "most popular" food items were defined. Was it based on sales data or on the opinion of the owner/operator?

Results, paragraph 9: Define soft drinks. Did this category include fruit juices, fruit drinks, carbonated beverages?

Discussion, paragraph 1: The fact that this was a "pilot" project is mentioned for the first time here. Was it designed as a pilot for a larger study or did it become that after the fact? If it was the latter, the term should be avoided.

Discussion, paragraph 1, last sentence: The conclusion that research is needed to determine the impact on health of access to healthy foods at reasonable costs is premature given that this project neither examined "access" of local residents to food available (i.e. taking into account factors such as transport and the cultural acceptability of the foods) nor food costs/affordability. Such research would be a vital intermediate step prior to assess impact on health.

Discussion, paragraph 3, 2nd sentence: One thing that appears to be noticeably absent from both the current research and future planned research is an assessment of food security within the region. This would involve surveying residents using an accepted measure of the various aspects of food security.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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