Reviewer’s report

Title: Food Consumption Frequency and Perceived Stress and Depressive Symptoms among Students in Three European Countries

Version: 1 Date: 28 January 2009

Reviewer: Craig Gundersen

Reviewer’s report:

Referee Report for “Food Consumption Frequency and Perceived Stress and Depressive Symptoms among Students in Three European Countries”

The methods being used in this paper are appropriate for the questions being asked. The writing is excellent. I just have a few comments in the order in which they appear in the paper. These are by page and paragraph number where a paragraph that began on the previous page is denoted with a “0”.

(Abstract – Conclusion) I think the portion of this sentence that reads “…suggesting that comprehensive health programs may be beneficial for female students” does not accurately portray the policy message that one may take away from this paper. What the article demonstrates is that efforts to help alleviate stress and depression for female students will lead to improved nutrition outcomes and vice-versa while efforts to help alleviate stress and depression for male students will not lead to improved nutrition outcomes and vice-versa. This does not then imply that comprehensive health programs are unimportant for male students – these programs may still be very important on their own grounds (e.g., relieving stress for students is a good thing) or on other indirect grounds (e.g., if relieving stress leads to improved grades). In light of this, one way to rephrase what the authors wrote is something like the following: “…suggesting that efforts to reduce depression and stress for female students will also lead to improved nutrition outcomes and vice-versa.”

(3,2) The following papers are germane to this paragraph:


(3,3) The final sentence does not follow from the analyses being done in this paper. In reality, consistent with my remarks above, the real policy lesson from
this paper is that there may be spillovers from efforts to reduce stress and depression on nutrition outcomes and vice-versa. And, this is what the paper finds. But, then doesn’t lead to the conclusion that there should be comprehensive health programs; in fact, just the opposite may hold insofar due to these spillovers. Of course, comprehensive health programs can be justified on any number of grounds but this paper does not provide such a justification.

(6,3) While the factor analyses being used are probably fine, I would encourage the authors, if possible, to use measures of nutrient intakes that are derived from a priori criteria rather than being driven by the data. An example would be something akin to the Healthy Eating Index in the U.S.

(7,1) Since male is the opposite of female, both percentages are not needed in the opening sentence. (Plus, there is a typo in the sentence.)

(8,3) The final sentence is a source of measurement error and should be noted under limitations.

(9,1; 9,2) There is nothing wrong with these paragraphs but they are not germane to the central points being made in the paper. In other words, these paragraphs deal with the levels of depression/stress and the levels of nutrition, not with the connection between them.

(11,1) The second sentence is definitely understated – without a doubt, this data is not representative.

(Table 1) The p-values for differences between the columns are not particularly interesting insofar as they are conflating information about, say, differences by gender in a country and across countries. I would encourage the authors to drop this column. But, if they are going to keep p-values, I would think more carefully about what exactly sorts of comparisons should be made.

**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.