

Reviewer's report

Title: More distinct food intake patterns among women than men in northern Sweden: a population-based survey

Version: 1 **Date:** 15 October 2008

Reviewer: Fernanda Scagliusi

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

1) General comments: I was glad to review this interesting paper. I think this is a well-done, important and well-written research. The methods and data are sound and appropriated and the sample size is an important feature. I have some comments and suggestions for additional analyses that would strengthen the paper.

2) Background, page 2: The authors correctly stated that “a prerequisite for planning and evaluating interventions on dietary intake is the existence of valid information on long-term average dietary intake in a population”. I think that the paper would be more appealing if the authors also stated that it is important to know dietary patterns, and not only intake, because dietary patterns more closely resembles the way people actually eat and it is the main measure of the present study.

3) Methods, page 3: Please describe more clearly how portion sizes were quantified for foods other than staple food, meat, and vegetables.

4) Methods, page 7: Please include a table in order to show which foods composed the food groups utilized in the cluster analysis.

5) Results, page 9: I have some questions about the names of the patterns. Three of them received a subjective name and one (coffee and sandwich) received an objective name, based on the most consumed foods. I think that all names should be subjective or objective. Also, since traditional and prudent are names commonly used in the literature while modern is not, I would like to ask you to please clarify why you named this pattern modern.

6) Results, page 11: The authors cite some characteristics of the subjects belonging to each pattern (as BMI, age and low energy reporting), but I would really like to see these numbers in a table.

7) Discussion, page 13: The authors correctly stated that “A typical characteristic of “Prudent” women and men was a higher proportion of underreporting, which may reflect more knowledge about healthy diet and a desire to report only what is healthy”. I think you should explore more this issue. Does the prudent pattern really exist or people just report so? The fact that the subjects from this pattern were heavier may corroborate the second hypothesis.

8) Discussion, page 13: I recommend being a bit more cautious in your statement

that “Traditional” women and men typically were smokers and had a lower educational level, which may indicate less knowledge and less interest in healthy lifestyles”. It is important to note that behaviors and lifestyles are not only rational and individual choices, so maybe it is not only a matter of knowledge and interest, but it is also a matter of culture and conditions. Otherwise we can end up blaming the victims.

Discretionary Revisions

1) Discussion, page 12: The authors did a good job describing the limitations of the FFQ. I would like to know if you repeated the cluster analysis after the exclusion of the low energy reporters, as Bailey did (cited in reference 18). If not, I really think you should do that, especially because you have such a big sample size. I think that would be great if the authors included this analysis in the current paper, but if they do not want to do so right now, I suggest that may do that in another paper.

2) Conclusions, page 14: The authors affirmed that “However, the results on food intake patterns should be valid and useful as a basis for targeting information on healthy diet to groups most in need”. I agree that the results should be valid, but I am not so sure that what people need is more information, since even your results suggest that information may lead to underreporting but not an improve of food intake. I think we need more creative and cultural approaches. I am aware that this is not the focus of the current paper, but I think that this sentence is important, since it is the last one in the article and also the conclusion of the abstract.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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.