Reviewer's report

Title: Levels, Timing, and Etiology of Stillbirths in Sylhet District of Bangladesh

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Reviewer: Russell Kirby

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript provides some interesting information on the prevalence and characteristics of stillbirth in a predominantly rural area of Bangladesh. There are a limited number of reports of this nature, and the data here are of interest from an international perspective on stillbirth assessment and prevention. However, there are some significant omissions from the manuscript that require correction.

First, as presently written, the manuscript is entirely descriptive in nature. It would be preferable if the authors could frame the study objectives in terms of specific research questions, and preferably in the form of hypotheses testable using statistical inference.

Second, throughout, the authors refer to ‘pre-defined case definitions and computer programs’ (p 2, p 7 in two places, etc) used to assign causes and categorize multiple cases of stillbirth. What are these algorithms, have they been published or previously validated? At minimum a link to a URL from which readers can access these materials would be desirable, but preferably they could be referenced, and provided as supplemental material along with the manuscript. It would be very interesting to compare these data with the results from CODAC (BMC Pg Child 2009).

These suggestions may require reframing the data presentation somewhat, depending on what study questions the authors wish to pose.

Minor questions:

Table 3 - How can the authors know that a stillbirth occurred (whether the verbal autopsy was complete or now) and not know the information about place, attendant, mode of delivery? Table 3 shows however that in most respects other than gender there is little difference between complete and incomplete verbal autopsy cases, but we would like to know also about factors such as parity or gravidity and also whether the mother has more urban or rural residence.

Tables 4 and 5, which should be the heart of the analysis, are entirely descriptive in nature. The prevalence of congenital anomalies as case of SB seems far too low, even allowing for differences in context between developed and developing settings.

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'