Reviewer's report

Title: Framing Maternal Morbidity: WHO Scoping Exercise

Version: 3 Date: 28 August 2013

Reviewer: Stuart Anderson

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Discretionary Revisions

1. This is a well-written and appropriately constructed paper which reports the results of a scoping study of maternal morbidity. This is part of a much bigger project to develop common definitions, a validated assessment tool and a set off indicators of maternal morbidity. The question posed is original, important and well defined.

2. The scoping study has two components; it would be useful to indicate this early on (e.g. after ‘scoping exercise’, p.4 last para). Likewise it would be helpful to explicitly indicate on page 4 that it has three objectives; to explore, to identify and to determine etc.

3. The literature review and survey of expert opinion are clearly explained. The key words selected are stated, as are the databases accessed (p.5). The review is limited to the last twenty years. However no indication of the number of papers searched is given, and no inclusion/ exclusion criteria are mentioned.

4. A charting approach is used to synthesise and interpret the data collected, which identifies key themes. The data collection process is sound and thorough, although it could usefully be explained in a little more detail. The discussion and conclusion are well balanced and supported by the data.

5. Expert opinion is sought by means of a survey. The questions in the questionnaire were appropriately revised and finalised using a modified Delphi method among ten health experts. The approach used is sound. This provides a robust mechanism for ensuring that the questions asked address the key issues.

6. It was sent to 130 people in all, and replies were received from 55 of them in five regions. The response rate should be stated in the text as well as the box.

7. Use of a scoping study provides valuable information which can be used on the basis of more extensive research designs. The limitations of the study are clearly spelled out on page 15. The paper is well written in good English.

8. It contains a single box which is clear and concise. There is a single additional file which provides the survey questionnaire.

Typos etc

p.2 ‘comprise a continuum’ or ‘consists of a continuum’

p.4 top line, ‘these are: the’

p.4 bottom para, ‘gaps in current research’
Level of interest: An article of importance 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