Reviewer’s report

Title: The impact of economic downturn on maternal and infant mortality: lessons from history

Version: 1 Date: 8 April 2010

Reviewer: Albert Okunade

Reviewer’s report:

Minor essential revisions:
This work (whose interest is on whether maternal mortality and infant mortality rise in protracted recessions, for example) appears to be both timely and interesting on richness of the data analyzed, on methods, and on study inferences for policy. It could also inform health protection policies in times when MDG15 are not being met by a host of developing nations in particular. However, authors need to strengthen the POTENTIAL readers’ confidence in results by also presenting formal econometric tests of robustness of statistical models. Authors should report indicators of fit and other specification tests discussed on page 9 (section before Results and in Results section). Some important citations also appear to be missing. Relevant to your study, somewhere in the 'Background' section is Chris Ruhm's core paper in Quarterly Journal of Economics) on 'Are recessions good for your health?". Moreover, concerning Thailand, one of your middle income developing countries, you should find useful the recent paper by A. Okunade, C. Suraratdecha and D. Benson, "Determinants of Thailand household health care expenditures: The relevance of permanent resources and other correlates," Health Economics (March 2010): 365-76. (This paper is relevant for policy suggestion on the need for health protection of the poor due to Thailand’s economic shock.) Search the journal Health Policy & Planning for additional relevant papers, especially on the middle income countries. Discuss more of the policy suggestions of your findings, especially for some of the major developing countries in your analysis.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have NO competing interests'