Reviewer's report

Title: Preventable maternal mortality: regional disparity and associated factors from the population-based maternal mortality surveillance system in China

Version: 2 Date: 4 October 2010

Reviewer: joke schutte

Reviewer's report:

This research is very important in its field, and I believe this is the first report from China on this subject. It shows the major differences between urban and rural regions, again divided in coastal, inland and remote regions. This question is soundly stated.

The statistics seem sound, but I am not adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Discretionary revisions:
• Background: racial disparity is also seen in the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. These data could be added.
• Results: consider giving exact numbers (instead of ‘exceeding 90%’ for example).

Minor essential revisions:
• Abstract: in conclusions new results are mentioned. Also be aware of repeating conclusions.
• Methods: please explain whether there was a system to check whether cases were underreported. Was the system used a vital statistical system (which often have underreporting, about 50% in the UK and about 30% in the Netherlands).
• Methods: the second half of the methods section is written quite repetitive: consider putting this in a table.
• Methods: sometimes the lines are confusing and repetitive: try to rephrase to make your conclusions more clear.
• Discussion: avoid repeating your conclusions.

Major compulsory revisions:
• The English spelling and sentences should be checked by a native English speaker. This would make the article more clear. It is not suitable for publishing unless extensively edited.
• The definition of preventable maternal mortality is not clear, and this makes this whole article somewhat difficult to interpret. If preventable maternal mortality is assessed because one of the factors mentioned was missing, this does not necessarily mean that this would have prevented the women from dying. For example, if the women would have known she had a certain disease, this
knowledge still could not have saved her. This is why in the reports from the United Kingdom ('why mothers die' by CEMACH) the term suboptimal care is used, and this is divided in major or minor suboptimal care: major for care which could have prevented the woman from dying, and minor for factors that could have been better but probably would not have changed outcome. Is it possible to put this nuance in your article?

I cannot give a review on many of the mentioned references because many are in Chinese.

The next step would be for the authors to respond on the comments above before this article can be accepted.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests