Reviewer's report

Title: The Use of Simplified Verbal Autopsy in Identifying Causes of Adult Death in Predominantly Rural Population in Ethiopia

Version: 2 Date: 17 March 2005

Reviewer: Julian L Burton

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors state their belief that during my initial review I had misunderstood the intention of their work. This is untrue. I had fully appreciated the present lack of data regarding causes of death, the difficulties in obtaining death certificates, and the restricted availability of pathological autopsies given the rural location of the population under investigation.

Despite any apparent misconceptions in the original review process, the authors have very eloquently and thoroughly addressed the issues of validity of the Verbal Autopsy (VA) in their revised manuscript, highlighting the reasons why such a tool is appropriate in their environment. While direct comparisons between verbal and pathological autopsies have not been made, the authors present evidence to support their claims that, within defined limits, the VA is a valid tool.

It is now much more apparent from the manuscript that the authors have developed a tool which can be simply applied and which will provide basic, albeit crude information on the categories of causes of death at a population level. It is now appreciable that they do not propose its use to determine the precise cause of death on an individual basis, nor as a replacement for the pathological autopsy.

This resubmitted draft represents a significant clarification on the first version. As now presented, I see no methodological flaws in the study, which is now clearly written. The conclusions drawn are valid on the basis of the data presented, and the limits of that data have been fairly represented and discussed.

Larger studies investigating the use of VA in rural areas of developing countries already exist. The value in this study, as now presented, is that it reports the use of a simple tool that can be administered in rural areas with comparative ease. This tool will provide coarse data on causes of mortality which are of use in population health planning.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. None. The authors have satisfactorily answered my concerns regarding the validity and applicability of the data.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Minor typographical and grammatical errors persist which should be corrected, although this can be left to the authors without need for further review.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None

**What next?**: Accept after minor essential revisions

**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

**Declaration of competing interests**: I declare that I have no competing interests