Reviewer's report

Title: A cross sectional study of Schistosoma japonicum prevalence in 50 villages of Samar Province, the Philippines.

Version: 1 Date: 19 December 2005

Reviewer: Charles King

Reviewer's report:

General
The question is clearly topical for the development of more efficient control strategies for schistosomiasis. While current WHO guidelines recommend varying strategies for low-, moderate-, and high-prevalence villages, there are only limited published data on the actual distribution of these classes of village within S. japonicum-endemic areas. Optimization of control interventions will require more precise knowledge of infection levels across the program territory, and schemes for monitoring program efficacy will need to take into account the underlying heterogeneity of transmission factors. The methods for this study are appropriate, but there are some details that could be better explained (see suggestions for revision, below).

Are the data sound and well controlled? Yes. This study provides better quality sampling and data collection than most studies in the field. The discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data, although the discussion could go a bit further in terms of elaborating the implications of the data. Also, a final summary paragraph would be appropriate to put the study and its conclusions in perspective.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached) None

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

Page 4, Next-to-last sentence beginning "This variation…" is unclear and should be rewritten. What does 'that' refer to in this sentence?

Page 7, 5th line, change 'ocular' to 'visual'

In Introduction or methods, it would be appropriate to explain the underlying rationale for study design and subject selection. That is to say, why did the sampling methods require N households with at least 5 people and one full-time farmer, etc., etc per household? Presumably, there were a priori reasons to select or stratify on this basis, but the reasons are not given here. It is not sufficient to refer to the project's earlier papers viz. study design, because the general reader will not easily be able to follow the presentation, and if it is confusing here, the paper will not stand alone.

Page 9, Statistical analysis- since we are discussing village prevalence, and a sampling strategy was used, are the reported outcomes unweighted estimates, or weighted based on the sampling design? If weighted, this should be stated in the results and tables, and a brief explanation of how the analytic technique performs this adjustment. Most readers would be familiar with a SUDAAN analysis of a stratified survey sample. How does the present Bayesian approach differ from SUDAAN analysis?
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.