Reviewer’s report

Title: Clinical and socio-behavioral correlates of tooth loss: a study of older adults in Tanzania.

Version: 1 Date: 30 January 2006

Reviewer: John J Warren

Reviewer’s report:

General
This paper describes tooth loss and factors related to tooth loss in urban and rural Tanzania. The study appears to be well-designed and the paper is well-written, and I have only relatively minor concerns.

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

None

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

On the bottom of page three/top of page 4, it is not clear what the authors mean by the phrase "...where no exemption system is implemented." The authors need to clarify what they mean by this term.

The authors should include a footnote in Figures 1 & 2 to make clear the tooth numbering system.....that is, that '1' refers to central incisors, '2' to lateral incisors, etc., with '8' referring to third molars. This system, although common, may not be recognized to all readers.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I would suggest that the authors consider eliminating Table 4 and the accompanying text and discussion, as I don't think this adds anything to the paper and given the focus of the paper is tooth loss, may detract from it. The authors' choice to dichotomize the occluding pair variable into 10 vs. 0-9 is not explained or justified in the paper, and the clinical relevance of 10 vs. 9 occluding pairs is questionable.

There are a few items in the methods that should be clarified:

-- The authors should add a sentence to describe how root tips were recorded -- as teeth present or absent? If present, as decayed or other?

-- The authors should make clear in the methods that the dental history was obtained by interviewing the subject and that the information was not able to be verified (This is alluded to in the Discussion, but should be clearly stated in the Methods section)

The first paragraph of the Results section is somewhat confusing regarding the information not presented in Table 1. The paragraph would be better if this information not in Table 1 were separated from the information that is in the table. Moving the two sentences that end in "(not in Table 1)" to the end of the paragraph, perhaps beginning with the phrase "In addition to the data
presented in Table 1, ...." would make this more reader-friendly.

Reference #10 is from 1984, and I'm not sure that it is still relevant...the authors should either remove it and the corresponding text, or acknowledge that the reference is from an older study.

**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:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.