Reviewer's report

Title: Do health systems delay the treatment of poor children? A qualitative study on child deaths in rural Tanzania.

Version: 4 Date: 27 September 2012

Reviewer: Helen J Smith

Reviewer's report:

The authors have responded to some of the original comments, but there are still problems with the structure of the paper and the internal consistency.

1. The authors still refer to results from their study and comment on their own findings in the background - and this is problematic in an academic paper. Follow the guidelines of the journal and what is actually accepted convention - the background must clearly state - and, if helpful, illustrate - the background to the research and its aims. Please exclude all mention of results.

2. The aim is stated in the abstract, but I couldn't find a clear statement of the aim in the background section of the main paper.

3. It's still not clear if the power-trust-risk nexus is used as an underlying conceptual or theoretical framework for the study? To 'recognize' this framework is still vague - was it used and if so how?

4. The methods section needs more work to make it readable - there are no subheadings; please follow conventions here. The manuscript contains informal / colloquial language, for example, "We went along with them until.." and "As it turned out" and errors in expression.

5. From the description provided I still don't quite understand the link between the two study periods - how and why the studies are linked and it lacks a clear justification for presenting the data together. How does the sample of 1616 mothers relate to the qualitative research presented in this paper? The sample size for the qualitative interviews appears to have reduced from 174 (in the initial draft) to 49 in this draft (but only 16 cases presented in table 1). There was mention of 17 cases in the previous draft too - I don't understand all these discrepancies in sample size and this makes me question the reliability and validity of the research presented.

6. It is usual for study limitations to be presented in the discussion.

7. First sentence of the results contains repetition and does not make sense. The authors state interviews took place with 16 women, while the methods section states 49. There is very little internal consistency and this makes me question the trustworthiness of the research process as a whole and the data presented.

Please can the authors re-visit my previous review and the comments on
analysis and findings; the points raised there do not appear to have been addressed.

7. Given the poor presentation of the manuscript, the authors should consider having any re-submitted manuscript proof read for errors in writing structure, style and spelling and grammar.

8. First sentence of the discussion is vague - "we have here focused on..." what does this mean exactly? If you are referring to your findings, then state them clearly and accurately. Please re-visit the first set of comments on this section - it still needs work to make the main messages clear -and still contains emotive words, like "Precious time". The whole paper needs to be written in academic style and make more use of the active voice.

9. It would be helpful in any re-submission if the authors would respond to reviewers comments point by point.

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

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

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.