Reviewer's report

Title: Verbal Autopsy completion rate and factors associated with undetermined cause of death in rural poor resource setting of Tanzania

Version: 1 Date: 30 March 2011

Reviewer: Abraham Herbst

Reviewer's report:

This paper is important in providing insight into factors affecting full coverage of verbal autopsy diagnoses, and limitations to the use of verbal autopsy-based cause of death data from sub-Saharan Africa.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The paper still requires substantial editing before it will be fit for publication.

The methods section is comprehensive, but contains some irrelevant details regarding the study area (e.g. geographic coordinates and extend). Figure 2 is important in understanding the study design and results and should be referred to more prominently. The percentages in Fig 2 are not calculated consistently – the 23% for the undetermined cases is calculated with respect to the overall deaths defined (5027) rather than the number of deaths to which a cause have been assigned (3849) and should be 31%. All the other percentages refer to the preceding step in the VA processing sequence. There is unnecessary repetition of these findings in the result section.

In the regression analysis for indeterminate cause of death in adults, the findings may be confounded by the age at death. If in the elderly the respondent is more likely to be son/daughter rather than the husband/wife and if the elderly is more likely to die from indeterminate causes (as seems likely), it would explain the finding. Age at death should be introduced as an explanatory variable in the multivariate analysis.

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests