Reviewer’s report

Title: Social autopsy: INDEPTH Network experiences of utility, process, practices and challenges in investigating causes and contributors to mortality

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Reviewer: Maria de Fatima Marinho de Souza

Reviewer’s report:

Minor Essential Revisions

In general, I would suggest that the article be shortened. Considering the significance of the article’s contribution, revision and editing are essential. The text could be more objective, since there are too many details in the methods, results and discussion portions that could be edited so the text overall could gain more flow to it. The excess of repetitive words makes the flow of the different sections of the paper more difficult. This way, the reading and comprehension of the text becomes harder.

For example, in methods it is not relevant to the readers to know that “the results from the literature search were compiled by the lead author (KK)…” or if the workshop was in Nairobi or other city. In the results there are similar issues with too many details.

Other example is “A second SAWG meeting, sponsored by the INDEPTH network, was organised in Pune, India in 2009, to finalise the analysis plan for the SA data collected…” It could be more objective summarizing the amount of meetings, the goals and results.

Discretionary Revisions

The article shows that in the path to a child death there are barriers in the access to health care services such as cultural, geographic and institutional barriers. It is a fact that any delay in a child death pathway contributes to a fatality. Even worst is a sequence of delays. In the social autopsy attributing the child death to these delays could generate bias in the social interpretation.

In the social autopsy, it would be important to explain the culture related delay and the experience in perceiving symptoms as well as the gravity signs for a child at home. For example, in the case of Uganda a high variance (Mean 24.5 days; SD 50.3) was observed in the delay to seek the care, which could be related to different cultural perceptions. Even delays at a facility level could be explained using a social-cultural approach.

Understanding cultural issues is fundamental to local health authorities in order to improve policies, programs and services when taking into account cultural issues related to premature deaths.

It is important to be careful with some of the conclusions. It is too easy to
attribute to the caretaker a poor behavior when seeking care. In Ghana, for example, the geographical and institutional barriers were so difficult to overcome that the result was the same for the child who stayed at home or not. Moreover, it is important to deepen more the cultural barriers and knowledge to explain better this problem. For example, if there is a social belief that is common to a community, seeking care or staying home would not make a difference since the child would not survive it according to this belief. Therefore there would be no outside expectations for the caretaker to act on it.

To deepen the cultural issues related to premature deaths is an important contribution that a social autopsy research could bring.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.