Reviewer’s report

Title: Reliable mortality statistics in Myanmar: A qualitative assessment of challenges in two townships

Version: 0 Date: 18 Nov 2018

Reviewer: C Rao

Reviewer's report:

General comments

The article describes a qualitative analysis of the functional status of vital registration system in Myanmar. The objectives, methods and findings are presented well, and the discussion section makes useful and important recommendations to strengthen the system. Please find below several comments and suggestions that could improve the quality of the article.

1. On page 4, the usage of the term 'coverage' is not consistent with the standard definition of this term - coverage is defined as 'the percentage of the national population that is represented in the reported statistics'. Actually, what you mean is the 'completeness' = the proportion of reported deaths out of the total estimated deaths that would have occurred in the study population during the study period'. In fact, in the reference provided in the bibliography (reference 5), the correct term 'completeness' has been used.

The term coverage should be replaced by 'completeness'.

2. Line 101: Edit as follows: '…with each participant was purposively selected based on…'

3. The meaning of the sentence on Line 103-104 'Field notes were taken …' is not clear. If these notes are independent of the FGD/KII audio recordings, then this should be stated clearly. If so, you could move this sentence on field notes lower down in the paragraph, to indicate that these field notes of impressions of the interviewers/facilitators were supplementing the audio transcripts of the interviews.

4. Line 122-124: edit the sentence 'This law should allow states that the local administrators from the General Administrative Department (GAD), Ministry of Home Affairs…'

5. Line 126: mentions that deaths are not reported to health centres.
But the previous text on the law only mentions that deaths need to be reported to the local administrators from the General Administrative Department (GAD), Ministry of Home Affairs, who are the local Ward Administrator or Village Tract Administrator.

Is there a law/guideline that deaths must be reported to health centres? If so, you must mention it. Otherwise, there does not appear to be any legal necessity for the community to report deaths to health centres.

Please clarify the role of the health system in CRVS, and whether there are any legal or administrative rules for such involvement.

6. Similar clarification is required for the section on issuance of death certificates, and the section on notification of household deaths, in regard to whether there are any laws or official instructions on the role of the health system or health personnel for these functions. If there are no official rules, it would be difficult to enforce.

7. The flow chart in figure 1 does not mention anything about the WA or VTA. The chart must show their role. Do the WA or VTA have to report the deaths to the health centre? Also, what about the family, are they supposed to report to the WA/VTA or can they report directly to the health centre? These aspects must be clearly shown in the flow chart.

8. In summary, even if there is no formal rule, then please describe the informal arrangements under which the health centre has a role in death registration. The Discussion section should include detailed comments about how the CRVS system should be revised to formalise the role of the health sector; provide detailed guidelines for health system activities related to CRVS; and ensure that adequate resources (finance, training, IT equipment, and even stationery) provided to the health sector to fulfil its roles in the CRVS.

9. The CRVS system cannot just tell the health sector to perform these roles without any support or financial/technical resources. All these points should be raised and discussed at length in the discussion, with a clear statement that proper resources must be provided to the health system, and workload factor should be accounted for peripheral health staff.

10. In regard to COD certification practices for deaths in the community, the article should mention the role and experience of Verbal Autopsy for this function in Myanmar and/or other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

11. The article should also describe the current practices in Myanmar for the analysis and publication of annual reports on vital statistics from the VRS in Myanmar. In addition to data plausibility, information should also be provided on the adequacy of statistics in terms of
availability of key indicators (life expectancy at birth, risks of under-five and adult mortality, maternal mortality ratios, leading causes of death by sex and age, as well as information on data completeness, and age-standardised death rates by cause.

12. The article should also mention whether the annual reports includes such indicators for sub national level, and the timeliness of such reports. These findings can be obtained from document review, which is also a form of observational analysis/qualitative methodology relevant for such studies. If there are weaknesses in some of the above features, they should be mentioned in the Discussion as areas which need strengthening.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable
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