Reviewer’s report

Title: Improving performance of the Tariff Method for assigning causes of death to verbal autopsies.

Version: 0 Date: 15 Sep 2015

Reviewer: Michel Garenne

Reviewer’s report:

The paper presents a remake of the Tariff method for assessing causes of death from verbal autopsies. The new Tariff-2.0 method shows some modest improvements when compared with the original Tariff-1.0 method. The new version still has some critical problems (e.g. maternal deaths / diarrheal diseases / pneumonia ALRI etc.). The paper is well written, and the method well explained. The paper deserves to be published, as it displays not only the improvements but also the limitations of the method; it is extensive in its presentation, and answers some of the earlier criticisms made (e.g. by Peter Byass).

Comments:

1. Most readers would like to see as criteria of the performance of the method a simple table displaying, by age group (adults, children, neonates, stillbirths) the exact number of deaths by cause in the hospital file, and the corresponding number of deaths obtained with Tariff 1.0 and with Tariff 2.0, as. For instance: Adult deaths / Pneumonia / N1 deaths in hospital file / N2 deaths with Tariff 1.0 / N3 with deaths Tariff 2.0. Authors could also add the number of changes made from Tariff 1.0 to Tariff 2.0 in each case.

2. Were improvements obtained with Tariff 2.0 the same among the 6 data sets (which had different distribution of causes, and where VA’s data quality also differed? Is not, this could be briefly presented and discussed.

3. Is Table 1 useful? Why in "non-HCE dependent cases" the open-ended narrative was not used?

Typos:

Page 20: CCCSMF: chance-corrected cause-specific mortality fraction

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

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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