Reviewer’s report

Title: Collecting verbal autopsies: improving and streamlining data collection processes using electronic tablets

Version: 0 Date: 19 Sep 2017

Reviewer: Frank Baiden

Reviewer's report:

General: The paper is well-written and address an important issue in the use of verbal autopsy in the many places in the world were COD data is lacking because no autopsies are conducted to establish causes of death.

My comments are essentially minor

1. In many rural areas where VAs are done, the research centers that currently undertake them use the paper and pen process as avenue for employing members of the local community. This contributes to good community relations. How many jobs could potentially be denied or lost as a transition is made to the electronic format of data collection and management?

2. Tablets can offer collateral good for those who handle them. What was the experience regarding other possible uses the tablets could be put e.g. continuous training for data collectors, games for entertainment, social media etc. Were these enabled in the tablets used in this study? And what will be advice in that regard?

3. There does not appear to be much consideration given to wear and tear, and replacements of tablets over time. How would that factor to influence the analysis, and the findings?

4. The conclusions should stand alone, and without references. They are supposed to be conclusions of this work and ought not to be referring to other work. The place for the relevance of other work (given the findings) is "Discussions"

5. Pg 4, line 16-21:

"....In this study we collected and analyzed data about administering VA studies on paper and electronic instruments at the same two sites. Paper-based collection was conducted using the Population Health Metrics Research Consortium (PHMRC) Full Questionnaire. This instrument is described in detail elsewhere.(27) Tablet-based electronic collection was conducted using the PHMRC Shortened Questionnaire..."
It is unclear why the "paper and pen" used the FULL questionnaire while the "tablet" approach only used the "SHORTENED" form. This is needs to be carefully explained as it has direct impact on the workload and the findings.

6. Related to point 5 above, it is relevant to provide some essential details about the nature of the instruments. The approach of referring to previous work is acceptable. However this is at the core of the work presented here. How many pages approximately? How many questions? All closed-ended? Any narrative sections? This is essential to making the present paper standalone in speaking for itself.

7. Pg. 4 Ln7: PHMRC is used for the first time and has to be in full here and not below

8. Pg. 4 line: 47: This sentence needs revision. Possibly due to a typo

9. Pg. 7 line 49: Check sentence. Possibly a typo

10. There is age-long debate about the usefulness of the narrative section in VAs. Did the instruments in this study have narrative sections? Can the discussion address how the findings may or may not have varied; according to whether narrative sections existed or not?

**Level of interest**
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal