



**Republic of Kenya**

**Ministry of Health**

## **Standard Operating Procedure**

**CONDUCTING VERBAL AUTOPSY FOR COMMUNITY DEATHS**

**Version**

**DATE**



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## **Abbreviations**

CHV	Community Health Volunteer
CHA	Community Health Assistant
DM	Data Manager
FS	Field supervisor
ICF	Informed Consent Form
KEMRI	Kenya Medical Research Institute
LF	Locator Form
MOH	Ministry of Health
PI	Principal Investigator
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
VA	Verbal autopsy
WHO	World Health Organization
ODK	Open Data Kit
TL	Team Leads

## **1. Purpose/ Applicability**

### **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to describe the procedures and provide guidance for conducting verbal autopsy to all in the community. It describes the VA interview procedure, supervision structure, the quality control procedures and VA data handling process.

#### **Introduction:**

Verbal Autopsy, or VA, is a standardized questionnaire administered to caregivers or family members of deceased persons to elicit signs and symptoms and their durations, medical history and other relevant information about the deceased in the period preceding death. VA is used to identify causes of death at community level where medical certification would not be possible. The current questionnaire recommended by WHO is 2016 WHO VA questionnaire (v1.5.3) which is compatible with InterVA 5.0 cause of death algorithm, which is mapped to ICD 10 codes for causes of death. Community death reporters identify and report deaths using serialized death notification form. The forms are submitted to their supervisors, triggering visit to the household for follow up and confirmation of the death and schedule VA interview which will be conducted at the scheduled date, considering various mourning period of the community.

## **2. Equipment and Materials required for VA interview**

- Locator form
- Tablets preloaded with ODK collect
- Field Note books
- Pen
- Phone

## **3. Key roles required in VA implementation**

**3.1 Country/County coordination.** Coordination of activities involved during VA implementation according to the guidelines and SOP and providing administrative and general oversight of VA activities within the region. This involves the implementation and review of this SOP as an approval authority.

**3.2 Quality Assurance.** Providing oversight in data quality control measures to ensure quality data is generated in compliance to this SOP and the data quality protocol.

**3.3 Data Management and VA software Programming:**

3.3.1 Development of VA software and set up of ICT infrastructure to support implementation of VA

3.3.2 Providing remote troubleshooting and user support.

3.3.3 Supporting data query and resolution

3.3.4 Reporting of data collection progress and data analysis results to inform the status and progress of VA implementation.

3.3.5 Identifying and documenting success and gaps in data collection.

3.3.6 Communication with partners in strengthening data quality processes

3.3.7 Ensuring that the ODK tool kit is functional and updated as required.

#### **3.4 Field Coordination:**

3.4.1 Coordination and supervision of operations related to conduct of Verbal Autopsy and other related data collection activities.

3.4.2 Providing the VA team the required logistical and budget planning support

3.4.3 Providing the country/county coordinator with periodic update reports regarding VA field activities.

#### **3.5 Field Supervision**

3.5.1 Supporting preparation of VA training materials and ensuring that the VAI are adequately trained on Verbal Autopsy procedure as per the SOP

3.5.2 Establishing related training and re-training needs for the VAI through supervision of their daily VA activities.

3.5.3 Ensuring that all VAI are equipped with supplies at all times and adhere to all the procedures by reviewing all the logs

#### **3.6 Verbal Autopsy Interviewer (VAI)**

3.6.1 The primary role of the VAI is to visit the families and caregivers in order to schedule and conduct VA interviews within their working areas.

3.6.2 **Holding regular meetings with community** death reports to receive death notification forms and update their respective VA logs to keep track of VAs assigned and conducted.

3.6.3 Ensuring that he/she have an adequate supply of materials for the VA interviews.

3.6.4 Ensuring that he/she understand which deaths are appropriate candidates for VA interview. (some occurred at a health facility/hospital)

3.6.5 Discuss and resolve any problems and challenges encountered with their respective supervisors.

**3.7 Community Death reporter.** Responsible for identifying deaths within their coverage areas, update their death report logs, filling death report forms and submitting them on time to their respective supervisors.

## **4. Procedures-**

### **4.1 Scheduling for VA interviews**

4.1.1 Confirmation of the death in a community will trigger notification to VAI to plan for the VA interview.

4.1.2 The VAI will collect the filled death report forms Locator Forms from the community death reporters during their monthly meetings.

4.1.3 WHO recommends VAI to complete all VA interviews within 1 to 6 months after date of death reporting to avoid recall bias and missing appropriate respondents.

4.1.4 In the event of unavailability of appropriate respondent, a re-visit is scheduled to the homes and if in the third visit the respondent is still not available, then the VAI terminates the case and marks is as not possible.

**N/B:** An appropriate respondent is a person who was present during the illness and at the time of death, was involved in any type of care during the illness upto time of death and knew the deceased very well.

### **4.2 Preparing for the VA interview**

The VAI shall ensure that:

4.2.1 He/she have a compiled list of VA in consultation with their respective supervisors.

4.2.2 He/she keeps at all time the VA required materials which include a fully charged tablet with ODK collect installed, VA manual, CHA logbook, pen and writing material

4.2.3 He/she contact the household head/family/ a suitable respondent before conducting the home visit for VA interview.

### 4.3 Conducting the VA interviews

4.3.1 VAI should ensure they are well conversant with the WHO VA Questions and the manuals provided before conducting any VA interview.

4.3.2 Verbal consent for participation should be obtained from the parents/guardian who meets the criteria outlined for a suitable respondent.

4.3.3 VAI should give a brief explanation about VA to sensitize the respondent on the process and purpose.

4.3.4 The VAI will in consultation with the respondent determine the best private location and the additional person to allow during the interview to ensure confidentiality.

4.3.5 The general structure of the mortality VA questionnaire includes:

5.3.5.1 Information about the date and location of the verbal autopsy interview (such as sex, age and place of death)

5.3.5.2 Specific information about the field site, household, and information related to residency in the assignment area.

5.3.5.3 Information about the primary respondent and the deceased

5.3.5.4 Signs/Symptoms and their durations.

5.3.5.5 Health services used by the deceased during illness in the period before death, including whether a health worker informed the respondent of the cause of death.

4.3.6 VAI should ask questions in a polite and neutral tone, and remain non-judgmental throughout the interview session.

4.3.7 The VAI should ask all the question exactly the way they are worded to ensure all the respondents are asked the questions in the same way (**Each question should be asked exactly as it is written in the questionnaire**).

4.3.8 VAI must ensure that the respondent has understood the questions - if not, questions should be repeated, slowly and clearly.

4.3.9 VAI **should** allow the respondents to answer on their own (**Do not suggest answers to the respondent**)

4.3.10 VAI should take time to allow the respondent to think about his/her answers and to answer completely and accurately as possible ( **Do not rush the respondent**)

4.3.11 General instructions for completing the interview and questionnaire are provided below:

- Some questions allow more than one answer. For these questions, read each answer choice slowly and clearly.

- Some answers request more specific information for example ‘other (specify)’

4.3.12 In the event of a refusal, the VAI will update the logbook and immediately report to the supervisor for call back attempts, atleast three call back attempts will be made before the case is declared complete refusal.

4.3.13 In the event consent is not given the WHO questionnaire gives a provision of marking the interview as a refusal, and this will be an electronic documentation of refusal.

4.3.14 In the event the respondent refuses to continue with the interview in the middle of filling the questionnaire, proceed to complete filling the questionnaire marking the remaining questions as refused.

#### **5.4 VA supervision process**

5.4.4 Every month the field supervisors should verify that all assigned VA, have been conducted by the VAI as scheduled by reviewing the VAI logbook comparing with the VA reports from the Data manager.

5.4.5 Quarterly the field supervisors and team leads will conduct a supervised VA interview session in 5% of all the VA conducted in each subcounty, as per the supervision checklist (**appendix...**) this will be recorded and transmitted electronically to the data manager.

5.4.6 The results of the supervision outcome will be discussed during VAI meetings and VA review meetings, discussion on VA related activities especially the progress and coverage, as well as any problem that threaten the quality of data collection.

#### **5.5 Data processing and management**

5.5.4 Data validation script will be Run daily to check for inconsistencies in the VA data collected, and to confirm that all VAs has been conducted within the 1-3-months window period.

5.5.5 The DM will send a list of all pending VAs that have not been performed from the date of notification to the field supervisors so that they can follow-up with the VAI to allow for completion of the VA within the optimal time window.

5.5.6 The DM will generate queries on submitted data and sends the query reports to the Field Supervisor for follow up.

5.5.7 The DM will ascertain completeness of VAs, run Inter VA5.0 to determine cause of death, and provide monthly summaries to coordinators and supervisors for sharing with stakeholders. This will follow reporting template for mortality surveillance and in reference to data sharing SOP.

5.5.8 Dissemination of VA cause of death report to the community shall be done during refresher training (quarterly) to make the community aware of the leading cause of death in their respective areas.

## **5.6 Quality control and Quality assurance**

The following are the general principles related to QA/QC mortality site procedures:

- 5.6.4** VAI and supervisors should conduct QC on all death report forms to ensure completeness and accuracy of information prior to conducting VA.
- 5.6.5** Error reports will be generated and provided to the field supervisors for required corrections and resubmission to the database.
- 5.6.6** Rates/statistics on supervision outcomes will be recorded and reported to form basis for VA quality audit. The VA quality audit team led by the coordinators will review error type and resolution. Resolution time will typically be measured in the number of QA/QC cycles required to correct a given error.
- 5.6.7** Any physical data collection instruments containing unique identifiers should be stored in closed, locked filing systems with restricted access.
- 5.6.8** VA refresher training should be done frequently as informed by the quality of data and error trends.

## **REFERENCES**

2. Verbal autopsy standards: Manual for the Training of Interviewers on the use of the 2016 WHO VA Instrument V1.0
3. Kenya Verbal Autopsy Training Manual for Supervisor, Trainer, Interviews and data manager, MOH

## **6 APPENDICES**

1. CHV Fact of Death Notification ( locator Form)
2. CHA log register
3. VA supervision checklist

## APPENDIX I

### CHECKLIST FOR THE SUPERVISOR

*For the tasks described below, the Supervisor should attempt to address any issues identified with the Verbal Autopsy interviewers (CHEWs) and CHVs. Any unresolved issues should be referred to the Verbal Autopsy Coordinator.*

#### **A. Attending monthly CHU meetings between CHEWs and CHVs**

1. Confirm that Locator Forms are complete, including D1/D2 number; for incomplete forms, review and troubleshoot issues with relevant CHV. *Special effort should be made to ensure that each death reported through the Locator Form is registered and therefore has a D1/D2 number.* Discuss any remaining issues with VA Coordinator.
2. Identify “community deaths” for which a Verbal Autopsy should be scheduled.
3. Assign interviews to the interviewers. Interviews are ideally assigned to the CHEW who supervises the CHV that visited the household and recorded the death. However, interviews may be reassigned as needed to ensure all are completed in an efficient and timely manner.
4. Check that interviewers update their Interview Tracking Form to indicate which interviews have been assigned to them.

#### **B. Visiting CHEW stations regularly (e.g., every 2 weeks)**

1. Review Interview Tracking Forms to ensure progress in completing interviews:
  - Check that an interview has been scheduled for each Locator Form received.
  - For scheduled interviews, check that they have been completed as scheduled.
  - For completed interviews, check that the data has been submitted/uploaded.
  - Address any comments or issues noted in Column H.
2. For scheduled interviews, check that interviewers know how to locate the household. If not, work with the interviewer (CHEW) and CHV to locate the household. If the interviewer does not know the family, recommend that the CHV attend the interview with the CHEW.
3. Ensure that interviewers (CHEWs) are able to arrange transportation to households for interviews, piggybacking off of other planned travel as available; discuss any problems that cannot be resolved with the VA Coordinator.
4. Discuss any other issues with the interviewer (CHEW). Consult the Verbal Autopsy Coordinator as needed.

### C. Observing Verbal Autopsy interviews

*Supervisors should aim to accompany each Verbal Autopsy interviewer on interviews at least once a month (twice a month, if possible, in the early phases of implementation). Copies of this checklist should be printed, completed, shared, and discussed with the interviewer after the observation visit.*

\*\*\*

*Mark each item completed by the interviewer. For any issues observed, record comments and suggestions to the interviewer in the box below and discuss with the interviewer.*

\_\_\_ 1. The interviewer identified the **best respondent** (an adult knowledgeable about the deceased).

\_\_\_ 2. Consent process; the interviewer:

\_\_\_ **Described the interview process** to the respondent.

\_\_\_ Explained that **participation is voluntary**.

\_\_\_ Explained that all information will be kept **confidential**.

\_\_\_ Gave the respondent a chance to ask questions and **answered all questions**.

\_\_\_ Recorded the **respondent's signature**, indicating participation (or not).

\_\_\_ 3. Interview process (behaviour); during the interview, the interviewer:

\_\_\_ Requested a private location to conduct the interview.

\_\_\_ Maintained **direct engagement and/or eye contact** regularly with the respondent.

\_\_\_ Respected the **sensitive nature** of the interview questions.

\_\_\_ **Answered all questions** raised by the respondent during the interview.

\_\_\_ Use of **mobile device did not stall interview process** (if it did, estimated length of delay: \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_ 4. Interview process (questionnaire); during the interview, the interviewer:

\_\_\_ Asked and documented responses for **all appropriate questions**.

\_\_\_ **Did not lead** or guide respondents to responses.

\_\_\_ Recorded the **narrative** so as to minimize the burden and wait time for the respondent (e.g., recorded written notes and completed the checklist during the interview and entered the

information into the mobile device after concluding the interview).

\_\_\_ 5. IT considerations

\_\_\_ Interviewer uses mobile device case and carries mobile device in protective bag.

\_\_\_ Mobile device was more than 75% charged prior to the start of the interview.

\_\_\_ Interview was completed prior to the depletion of battery charge.

\_\_\_ 6. After the interview; the interviewer:

\_\_\_ Addressed any remaining questions or concerns of the respondent.

\_\_\_ Reviewed the questionnaire to make sure it is complete.

\_\_\_ Uploaded the interview data to the server.

COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR CORRECTIVE ACTION: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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