Web-Appendix 1: Group discussion topic guide

1. What is your experience of conducting verbal autopsies?
2. Can you describe the typical interview process?
3. Thinking specifically about interviews which DID NOT have an open narrative:
    a. How did you establish a rapport with the respondents?
    b. Did you feel the quality of the responses was accurate?
    c. Were there any issues in conducting the interviews?
4. Now thinking specifically about the interviews which DID have an open narrative:
    a. How did you establish a rapport with the respondents?
    b. Did you feel the quality of the responses was accurate?
    c. Were there any issues in conducting the interviews?
5. Overall, what were the biggest challenges in conducting the verbal autopsies?
6. Overall, did you feel there were any positive aspects of conducting these interviews?
7. Did you feel the open narrative improved the interview process for respondents? And for you? Why / Why not?
8. If you could recommend a best practice for conducting verbal autopsies, what would it be? Why?

Web-appendix 2: Comparison of interviews which did not comply with the randomisation protocol

	Interview conducted per protocol (n=2507)	Protocol violation	
		No narrative group (n=22)	Narrative group (n=58)
Respondent			
Mother	1931 (77.0%)	19 (86.4%)	46 (79.3%)
Father	200 (8.0%)	2 (9.1%)	4 (6.9%)
Grandparent	266 (10.6%)	-	6 (10.3%)
Other	110 (4.4%)	1 (4.6%)	2 (3.5%)
Socio-economic status by tercile			
Tercile 1 (Lowest)	838 (33.4%)	6 (27.3%)	20 (34.5%)
Tercile 2 (Middle)	879 (35.1%)	8 (36.4%)	19 (32.8%)
Tercile 3 (Highest)	790 (31.5%)	8 (36.4%)	19 (32.8%)
Child's age			
Neonate (0-4 weeks)	1058 (41.9%)	7 (32.8%)	19 (32.8%)
Infant (5-52 weeks)	654 (26.4%)	10 (45.5%)	18 (31.0%)
Child (12-59 months)	795 (31.7%)	5 (22.7%)	21 (36.2%)
Child's sex*			
Male	1326 (52.9%)	9 (40.1%)	24 (42.1%)
Female	1181 (47.1%)	13 (59.1%)	33 (57.9%)
Location of death			
Home	797 (31.8%)	8 (36.4%)	13 (22.4%)
Health centre	652 (26.0%)	5 (22.7%)	20 (34.5%)
MDH	616 (24.6%)	5 (22.7%)	12 (20.7%)
En-route to hospital	181 (7.2%)	-	6 (10.3%)
Other	261 (10.4%)	4 (18.2%)	7 (12.1%)
Mean (SD)			
Delay between death and VA (weeks)	22.5 (15.5)	25.5 (14.9)	23.0 (14.3)

*One child in the non-compliant narrative group was missing a value for sex.

Web-Appendix 3: Comparison of randomised groups

	No Narrative N = 1265 (51%)	Narrative N = 1242 (49%)	Total N = 2507	*p-value*
Respondent				
Mother	985 (77.9%)	946 (76.2%)	1931 (77.0%)	
Father	95 (7.5%)	105 (8.5%)	200 (8.0%)	
Grandparent	125 (9.9%)	141 (11.4%)	266 (10.6%)	
Other	60 (4.7%)	50 (4.0%)	110 (4.4%)	0.400
Socio-economic status by tercile				
Tercile 1 (Lowest)	408 (32.3%)	430 (34.6%)	838 (33.4%)	
Tercile 2 (Middle)	459 (36.3%)	420 (33.8%)	879 (35.1%)	
Tercile 3 (Highest)	398 (31.5%)	392 (31.6%)	790 (31.5%)	0.343
Child's age				
Neonate (0-4 weeks)	505 (39.9%)	553 (44.5%)	1058 (41.9%)	
Infant (5-52 weeks)	352 (27.8%)	302 (24.3%)	654 (26.4%)	
Child (12-59 months)	408 (32.3%)	387 (31.2%)	795 (31.7%)	0.042
Child's sex				
Male	677 (53.5%)	649 (52.3%)	1326 (52.9%)	
Female	588 (46.5%)	593 (47.8%)	1181 (47.1%)	0.526
Location of death				
Home	408 (32.3%)	389 (31.3%)	797 (31.8%)	
Health centre	327 (26.9%)	325 (26.2%)	652 (26.0%)	
MDH	297 (23.5%)	319 (25.7%)	616 (24.6%)	
En route to hospital	78 (6.2%)	103 (8.3%)	181 (7.2%)	
Other	155 (12.3%)	106 (8.5%)	261 (10.4%)	0.008
	Mean (SD)	**Mean (SD)**		
Delay between death and VA (Weeks)	22.6 (15.5)	22.5 (15.4)	22.5 (15.5)	0.838