

Solvay Brussels School
Economics & Management

UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES



Data Collection in Conflict-Affected Areas

Philip Verwimp

ECARES, Solvay School, Université libre de Bruxelles
Households in Conflict Network

Université Paris-Dauphine, Workshop March 10-11,
2020

Key Messages

- We need a more detailed understanding of conflict
- Data collection has not kept pace with incidence of conflict
- There is a survey tool which measures 'conflict exposure'
- Gender is an important dimension of conflict, but not the only one. Other dimensions include age, poverty status, timing and location of conflict

Obvious...but not so obvious

- If we want to understand the effect of conflict on households and individuals, we need to collect data on people exposed to conflict
- This obvious insight is not so obvious if one considers that for decades **very large data collection efforts such as LSMS, DHS and MiCS did not ask questions on conflict in their questionnaires.**
- Researchers and analysts would then end up investigating malnutrition, the effect of health on education, mortality and fertility, assets and wealth,without knowing if the child, woman or men has been a refugee, was forcibly displaced or not, spend time in a camp or not, was heavily beaten or raped, had her cattle stolen by a rebel group,...

This has changed, luckily

- Thanks to giant efforts by research networks such as the Households in Conflict Network (www.hicn.org) this has changed.
- What have we pleaded for:
 - to collect precise information on location of the violence, timing of the violence, duration of the violence and intensity of the violence (*I will come back to each of these*)
 - We have NOT pleaded for questions that identify the perpetrator. For reasons of security of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Academic researchers are not judicial investigators, so we do not do our research to get someone indicted or brought before a tribunal. An existing practice, which I support, is, in case you need in for your research, the ask for broad perpetrator groups such as 'the army' or 'the rebel group' . One nevertheless has to ask if , for analytical purposes, and even from the point of view of the victim, if it matters whether it is the army that stole the cattle or if it was the rebel group.



More Than 70 Million 0–5-Year-Olds Have Only Known Conflict, PRIO Research in Save the Children Report Shows

What does that mean ?

- That you have to put 'exposure to conflict' at the center of your attention.
- In other words: when, how long, where and to what degree has this child, that woman and that men been exposed to conflict/violence
- Examples:
 - a bomb fell on a nearby village or on the own the own village;
 - a group of rebels attacked the village;
 - a battle occurred between the army and the rebels

What do you need to know?

- Have there been casualties, wounded or death
- How many
- What is the exact location and timing of the event
- How long did it last ?
- Have people left the area as a result of the event ?
- Have members of interviewed households fall victim to the attack?
- How frequent does the event occur ?
-

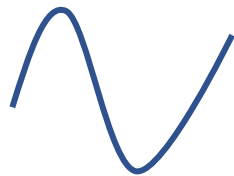
Why do you need to know that?

- When you want to do causal inference, what I believe is one of the key objectives of an applied economist, then we need to link these violent events to key attributes of households and its individual members, such as
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Poverty status
 - location/habitat
 - Occupation/education

----- > **hence the importance
of the household roster**

How to include that in a questionnaire?

Key Characteristics of the individual/household



Key characteristics of the event

When? Questions on timing, date, hour,

Where? Questions on distance, place, area

How much? Questions on casualties, losses, damage,

How long? Questions on frequency, duration, patterns

Conflict Exposure Module

Household in Conflict Network has developed a generic questionnaire that aims at capturing the effects of violent conflict on household welfare

We developed it because we noticed that large-scale standardized questionnaires (DHS, LSMS, MICS,...) did not capture these effects

Available from multiple publications and web resources

Publications

- “Measuring Violent Conflict in Micro-Level Surveys: Current Practices and Methodological Challenges”, 2015, *World Bank Research Observer*, 31(1), pp.29-58, with Tilman Brück, Patricia Justino, Alexandra Advenko and Andrew Tedesco
- “The Microeconomics of Violent Conflict”, *Journal of Development Economics*, with Patricia Justino and Tilman Brück, 2019



Measuring Conflict in Micro-Level Surveys

By Tilman Brück, Patricia Justino, Philip Verwimp and Andrew Tedesco

- Socioeconomic research on conflict has demonstrated that the circumstances of conflict matter greatly to policies designed to overcome legacies of conflict.
- Measuring conflict exposure in micro-surveys

The sourcebook reviews current practices and discusses specific methodologies for empirical research in conflict-affected areas and among conflict-affected populations. The module is particularly useful for researchers interested in developing a conflict typology. It may also be useful for the analysis of violence in other settings such as fragile states or areas suffering from high degrees of violence (such as some urban areas affected by organized crime).

Advantages of the module

- Explicitly identify violent conflict
 - probe deeper into the manifestations, extent and magnitude of group-based violence
 - inter-temporal changes: capture social and political transformations
 - possibility to link different types of violence with specific harm
- Ease of handling a ready-made module allows saving costs
 - is designed to be included - with minor modifications depending on the local context - in future micro-level surveys
- Make surveys and results more comparable
 - helping to set standards in survey development and in conflict research

Actors and nature of conflict in the module

- Measurement of *participation* in conflict
 - this requires additional information
 - may be hard to elicit truthful responses
- Measurement of *victimization*
 - victims of conflict are not random: hence study their characteristics
 - this must be multi-dimensional: political, social, economic etc
 - there are strong ethical implications to ask about victimization
- Measurement of *nature* of conflict (and its legacy)
 - this matters hugely for study of its effects
 - perhaps this differentiates conflict from, e.g., HIV
 - hence harder to develop a standard set of questions
 - 'conflict' is similar to 'trade liberalization'

Key themes in the module

- Identify conflict-induced losses and damages
human capital, physical assets, infrastructure etc (“having”)
- Identify effects of conflict on people
changes in coping strategies (“doing”)
changes in welfare, including food security (“being”)
- Identify effects of conflict on infrastructure and markets
including trust, social capital, exchange etc (“functioning”)

Intensity and timing of conflict in the module

- Measurement of *intensity* of conflict
 - current analysis does not usually account for this
 - conflicts differ widely by intensity and hence impact
- Measurement of *start and end dates* of a conflict
 - what exactly is the conflict period?
 - consider importance of looming and recent violence
- Measurement of *conflict legacies*
 - hence also question long-term effects of conflict
 - what is “the post-war period”?

Types of questions in the module

- Types of conflict questions
 - questions about direct effects of conflict (e.g. asset destruction)
 - questions about indirect effects of conflict (e.g. displacement)
 - most basic option: include additional, conflict-relevant answer codes (e.g.: why did you loose this cattle?)
- Conflict module vs. integration of conflict questions
 - conflict module may help to focus
 - may help to achieve comparability across surveys
 - perhaps better for tracing conflict events and direct effects, less useful for causes and indirect effects
 - but beware of varying local circumstances
 - but the response rates in separate conflict modules may be lower

Using the module in different types of surveys

- “Normal” survey versus conflict survey
 - on the one hand: addition of conflict dimension as a rich source of information in the context of a multi-topic, multi-module survey
 - on the other hand: smaller scale, single-topic surveys on conflict can go into more depth
- Cross-sectional versus panel surveys
 - normally, LSMS and DHS are cross-sectional surveys
 - much can be learned from them by adding a few conflict questions
 - for understanding conflict dynamics and dynamics of coping with conflict, panel data with conflict questions in all waves are needed
- Merge conflict event data with “normal” surveys
 - hence avoid need to have all relevant data in one survey
 - but availability of two such suitable datasets may be low

Three examples (i) child health

Infering the long-term effect of violent conflict on child health in Burundi and Rwanda, I matched the intensity of violence in locations where children were living when they were 0-5 years old and whose health indicators were registered

Result: an additional year of conflict exposure results in height-for-age z-score (stunting) that is 1 standard deviation lower than for non-exposed children

Source: Journal of Human Resources, 2009 and Economic Development and Cultural Change, 2011, with Tom Bundervoet and Richard Akresh

(ii) Refugee impact on the economy

We wanted to know what the impact was of a sudden influx of more than a million refugees on the host economy in a relatively small area in Eastern Tanzania. My co-author and I compared welfare levels by occupation before and after the influx and found a small positive impact on traders and entrepreneurs and a substantial negative impact on labourers.

Source: *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 2014, with Jean-Francois Maystadt

(iii) Conflict and Poverty Transition

We investigate the relationship between exposure to conflict and poverty dynamics over time, using original three-waves panel data for Burundi which tracked individuals and reported local-level violence exposure from 1998 to 2012. Households exposed to the war exhibit a lower level of welfare than non-exposed households, with the difference between the two groups predicted to remain significant at least until 2017, i.e. twelve years after the conflict termination. The correlation between violence exposure and deprivation overtime is confirmed in a household-level panel setting. Our empirical investigation shows how violence exposure over different time spans interacts with households' subsequent welfare

Source: ECARES Working Paper, under submission, with Marion Mercier and Lionel Ngenzebuke

By way of conclusion

- This type of research is based on large scale data collection in conflict-affected areas
- I realize that, because of the nature of violence, the violence specifically targeted at women may remain under the radar or it may not be regarded as gender-specific violence as it may “disappear” into broad category of “conflict”.
- Hence the task of our workshop how to tease out the gender-specific nature of violence when this occurs in a broader, violent context
- Thank you for your attention