

The Relationship of Human Rights and Public Health: Advancing a Collaborative Research Plan

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Abstract

Despite the growing impact of epidemiology on policy discussions related to warfare and human rights, its full potential remains underutilised. Consequently, this essay advocates for more cooperation among academics in the field of public health, analysts specialising in warfare, and human rights monitors, with a particular focus on utilising retrospective, population-based surveys. The present article provides an overview of recent public health research that is pertinent to the subject matter. It elucidates the utility of collaboration in this context and delineates potential avenues for future research. These include investigations into the indirect and enduring ramifications of armed conflict, the interplay between human rights and security in conflict-affected regions, and the intricate relationship between human rights, armed conflict, and International Humanitarian Law.

1. Introduction

The publication of a contentious estimation of Iraqi war casualties in the *Lancet* during the autumn of 2006 garnered significant global attention, reigniting discussions over the ethical implications and repercussions of the United States-led invasion of Iraq. According to the poll, it was estimated that around 650,000 Iraqi individuals lost their lives due to the insurgency and sectarian conflicts that ensued subsequent to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The political implications of this statistic were indisputable, considering the steadfast stance of US policymakers who asserted that their military intervention had been partly driven by humanitarian concerns. However, the research also garnered significant criticism, as several individuals raised concerns with the study's fundamental assumptions, sampling techniques, and protocols for reporting data.

Setting aside methodological objections, the media frenzy sparked by the *Lancet* publication undeniably highlighted the increasing influence of public health research in the fields of conflict and human rights studies. Specifically, it highlighted the ability of "battle epidemiologists" to offer scientifically grounded assessments of the tangible and intangible expenses associated with warfare. One crucial aspect that deserves significant attention is the ongoing revelation by epidemiologists that previous studies tend to significantly underestimate the comprehensive human toll of war due to their failure to adequately account for its indirect and long-term

consequences. From a human rights standpoint, it is important to note that the legal accountability of the commanders and politicians who bear responsibility for the unintended harm caused in such situations has yet to be fully explored.

Epidemiological studies have the potential to yield significant evidence that informs policy decisions, as exemplified by the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In this context, surveys conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have played a crucial role in drawing attention to the persistent humanitarian crisis in the country. These surveys have revealed a substantial number of indirect deaths resulting from the conflict, thereby highlighting the gravity of the situation. Based on the findings of these surveys, it is seen that out of the total of 3.9 million extra fatalities that occurred between 1998 and 2004, a very little fraction may be directly linked to acts of political violence. The majority of these deaths, however, are attributable to various war-related afflictions, mostly diseases. The aforementioned findings have had a significant impact in the realm of policy, elevating the global recognition of the conflict and augmenting the available resources for both peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. This was highlighted by the remarks made by representatives from the International Rescue Committee, Human Rights Watch, and Catholic Relief Services during a workshop titled "Integrating Public Health

Methods and Data into Battle Analysis," which took place in Ottawa on March 9, 2007.

2.Epidemiology's potential contribution

Epidemiology is a scholarly field that encompasses the use of statistical techniques to examine and evaluate the distribution patterns of occurrences, outcomes, and risk factors associated to health. The focus of this study is directed towards a particular research tool referred to as retrospective population-based surveys. The objective of this study is not just to establish a connection between epidemiology and survey methodology, but rather to emphasise the distinct value of surveys in assessing the impacts of wars and human rights abuses. In areas experiencing crises, the accessibility of up-to-date and accurate surveillance data from healthcare facilities, which is often regarded as the most dependable measure of present conditions, is sometimes limited. Retrospective surveys, which include respondents recalling health-related events that occurred within a certain timeframe, are a valuable approach for addressing this discrepancy. Survey research is not just confined to the domain of epidemiology. Human rights organisations commonly utilise retrospective techniques, yet it is important to acknowledge that these groups typically do not largely rely on population-based methodologies.

The emergence of combat epidemiology as a subject of study may be traced back to public health research undertaken in the context of humanitarian crises. This was highlighted by Bradley Woodruff in his presentation during the workshop titled "The Epidemiology of Complex Emergencies," which took place in Ottawa on March 8, 2007. In the early 1970s, there was a growing recognition among researchers about the potential of epidemiology in guiding policy creation based on recognised needs and improving the effectiveness of humanitarian aid efforts. During the 1980s and 1990s, researchers in the field of epidemiology utilised their results to develop comprehensive recommendations with the objective of improving the overall efficacy of humanitarian aid. As a result, practitioner guides have increasingly incorporated guidance about the use of epidemiological methods in humanitarian evaluations. In recent years, there has been a notable emergence of fundamental prerequisites.

3.NGO battle analysis and human rights monitoring

In light of the apparent advantages, prominent military analysts and human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rarely utilise population-based methodologies. Physicians for

Human Rights (PHR), situated in Boston, is considered a comparatively less influential entity in comparison to prominent non-governmental organisations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) or the International Crisis Group (ICG), despite its praiseworthy endeavours in incorporating population-based surveys and human rights inquiries. Based on annual records spanning from 2005, it is evident that the total budget allocated to PHR amounted to around \$4 million. In contrast, the ICG and HRW organisations were endowed with budgets of \$11.4 million and \$26 million, respectively. In the year 2006, it is noteworthy to observe that the individuals hired by PHR totaled 46, a much smaller figure in comparison to the staff sizes of ICG (110) and HRW (233). The comparative media effect of PHR is significantly constrained because of the observed differences in size. A search conducted in the Factiva database using specific keywords yielded results indicating that in the year 2006, The New York Times made mention of PHR on only seven occasions. In contrast, the ICG and HRW were referenced far more frequently, with 63 and 157 mentions respectively. The two aforementioned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have key positions in global policy talks, and their research and lobbying endeavours are widely seen as being at the forefront of their respective domains. To illustrate the increased value derived from joint research endeavours, we conduct a rigorous analysis of a specific and non-random sample of publications generated by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG).

The fieldwork undertaken by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) is distinguished by its cost-effectiveness, as it is frequently executed with a reduced field presence compared to what would typically be required for epidemiological surveys. Human Rights Watch (HRW) often deploys a restricted cohort of researchers from its central organisational headquarters to collect testimonies, often without explicit clearance from the government. Personnel of the International Crisis Group (ICG) are mostly situated within their particular nations of focus, hence augmenting their proximity to the subject matter. Nevertheless, the study approach employed by the researchers remains discreet in its nature. Both firms utilise unstructured interviews as a comprehensive research methodology. The researchers of the International Crisis Group (ICG) prioritise the analysis of broader political and governance structures, in contrast to Human Rights Watch (HRW), which primarily concentrates on the

investigation of specific cases of human rights violations. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is known for generating innovative perspectives on human rights breaches, whereas the International Crisis Group (ICG) views its main role as conducting analytical assessments and providing recommendations. The fieldwork undertaken by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) is distinguished by its cost-effectiveness, as it is frequently executed with a reduced field presence compared to what would typically be required for epidemiological surveys. Human Rights Watch (HRW) often deploys a restricted cohort of researchers from its central organisational headquarters to collect testimonies, often without explicit clearance from the government. Personnel of the International Crisis Group (ICG) are mostly situated within their particular nations of focus, hence augmenting their proximity to the subject matter. Nevertheless, the study approach employed by the researchers remains discreet in its nature. Both firms utilise unstructured interviews as a comprehensive research methodology. The researchers of the International Crisis Group (ICG) prioritise the analysis of broader political and governance structures, in contrast to Human Rights Watch (HRW), which primarily concentrates on the investigation of specific cases of human rights violations. Human Rights Watch (HRW) is known for generating innovative perspectives on human rights breaches, whereas the International Crisis Group (ICG) views its main role as conducting analytical assessments and providing recommendations.

4. Problems of data use

Though the reports produced by the International Crisis Group (ICG) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) are already persuasive, easily understandable, and impactful, their potential might be further enhanced by incorporating methodological insights from public health researchers and other data specialists. The subject under examination is a report published in 2005 by the International Crisis Group (ICG) regarding instances of coerced urban displacements in Zimbabwe. This report references estimations provided by the United Nations (UN), which indicate that around 700,000 individuals were directly relocated, while an additional 2.4 million individuals had indirect repercussions as a result of these displacements. Despite the International Crisis Group (ICG) stating that their thorough analysis did not find any grounds for dispute with the United Nations (UN) statistics, they failed to offer sufficient details regarding the methodologies

employed by either organisation. Regrettably, the UN report exhibits a comparable level of vagueness. Additional investigation of the United Nations' data gathering practises, along with a deeper examination of the International Crisis Group's research methodologies, might have significantly enhanced the Zimbabwe study. If the International Crisis Group (ICG) had desired to extend its analysis, it may have conducted a more comprehensive investigation of the United Nations (UN) statistics. This would involve a thorough examination of the UN's methodologies to determine the reliability and validity of the numerical information. Alternatively, it is possible that the organisation may have engaged in a collaborative effort with survey researchers to provide novel data pertaining to forced displacement, encompassing pertinent details regarding the health status of those affected by this phenomenon. Has the incidence of childhood illness increased following displacement? What was the influence of relocation on livelihoods, gender-based violence, and other significant variables? The inclusion of such information would have significantly contributed to our understanding of the effects of the Zimbabwean displacement.

A decade later, Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted a follow-up investigation on the matter, presenting a study that challenges the accuracy of the official data about the magnitude of villagers' repatriation. The research conducted in this paper is a commendable endeavour to thoroughly examine official data, so showcasing the increasing focus of HRW on the intricacies of quantitative analysis. In order to challenge the statistical data provided by the government, researchers from Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted visits to many villages where individuals had returned. During these visits, the researchers compared the stories provided by local residents regarding the scale of return with the information presented by the government. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the documented data on actual returns were far lower than the amounts asserted by the government.

5. Problems of data collection

However, although the 2005 study on Turkey presented a compelling argument, HRW's assessment of official data might have been enhanced by a more thorough examination of sampling methodology. In the 2005 study, there was a lack of information on the methodology employed by HRW researchers in the selection of their village sample. The report just said that researchers "visited a small sample of villages and hamlets" in three provinces located in the

southeastern region. Consequently, evaluating the extensive application of its conclusions is a challenge. In order to tackle this issue, HRW could have potentially conducted a visitation to a representative sample of Kurdish villages, selected randomly from a pre-existing roster of depopulated communities. Alternatively, if this approach proved to be excessively demanding, the organisation could have employed other recognised sampling methodologies to choose clusters of provincial villages, taking into account the relative population sizes of each province. The implementation of these aforementioned techniques would have enhanced the group's conclusions in terms of credibility and precision. The Human Rights Watch's 2005 study on Nigerian police brutality is a significant document that highlights the issue of human rights violations. This report features compelling accounts from 50 individuals who have experienced torture while in police custody throughout a span of four years prior to the report's publication. The findings unequivocally indicated a significant issue within Nigeria's criminal justice system. However, the study presented the argument that the Nigerian Police Force engages in "widespread and routine" torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. It is important to note that the researchers of the report concentrated their efforts on a restricted number of sites and incidents. The study included limited information about the methodology employed by HRW researchers to choose and interview respondents from three distinct regions of the country, without elaborating on the rationale behind choosing these individuals over other potential victims.

To demonstrate the practicality of collaboration, a comprehensive and conclusive case will be provided. In 2006, Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted an initial assessment following the cessation of hostilities, focusing on the transgressions of international humanitarian law during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in Lebanon. Subsequently, HRW published two further and more comprehensive studies, each examining the breaches committed by Hezbollah and Israel separately. The rules governing armed conflicts impose restrictions on the ability of warring parties to inflict harm against civilians and ban any attempts to destroy objects that are crucial for the survival of the civilian population. The occurrence of unintentional civilian casualties during armed conflicts is a recognised phenomenon, although parties involved in hostilities bear a responsibility to minimise the impact on non-combatants and mitigate collateral harm to the greatest extent possible.

The process of assessing the magnitude of violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) committed by all parties involved was a multifaceted endeavour that presented challenges from both scientific and legal perspectives. Both factions engaged in the deployment of several rockets and shells across the border, with each asserting that its actions were directed towards valid military objectives. In order to carry out its investigation, Human Rights Watch (HRW) compiled comprehensive records documenting instances of Israeli military actions that contributed to the loss of civilian lives in Lebanon. The study subsequently examined media accounts and conducted interviews with relevant individuals in order to identify incidents that were purportedly characterised by indiscriminate firing. These specific incidents were then selected for further in-depth investigation in the field. In the comprehensive and extensive study of 2007, Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted an investigation into the circumstances underlying the deaths of 561 individuals (comprising 500 civilians and 61 combatants) out of a total of 1,109 Lebanese individuals who were murdered as a result of Israeli military actions. According to a research conducted by the Human Rights Watch (HRW), around 60% of civilian fatalities may be attributed to Israeli attacks that were deemed unlawful. Consequently, Human Rights Watch (HRW) to the conclusion that Israeli troops had consistently and deliberately breached International Humanitarian Law (IHL) [personal email communication with Iain Levine (HRW), September 20, 2007].

There is no doubt that the study conducted by HRW in this regard was commendable, since it successfully gathered significant data under challenging circumstances. However, employing a population-based methodology might have potentially enhanced the accuracy of HRW's findings, enabling them to determine with increased certainty whether Israeli breaches were both systematic and widespread during the 2006 summer conflict.

As an illustration, Human Rights Watch (HRW) might have first collaborated with local Lebanese authorities, medical personnel, and other relevant stakeholders to compile a sufficiently inclusive inventory of all communities subjected to Israeli fire, encompassing not only those instances resulting in civilian casualties. Subsequently, HRW may have attempted to ascertain the communities that had incurred civilian fatalities. The researchers at HRW might have then chosen a representative sample from this subset by use recognised sampling procedures, in order to conduct a comprehensive

field investigation. The utilisation of this sequence might have potentially assisted Human Rights Watch (HRW) in enhancing their estimation of the proportion of Israeli assaults that entail violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Subsequently, the data might have been further analysed by temporal and geographical factors, so providing a more comprehensive understanding of Israeli transgressions throughout different periods and locations. This information, in turn, might have aided in determining the degree of Israeli responsibility with more accuracy. For instance, a limited quantity of criminal assaults would imply localised challenges pertaining to coordination and control, but more extensive and regular patterns would signify a higher degree of intentionality at a broader level.

What do battle Epidemiologists do?

Epidemiologists specialising in conflict settings prioritise the study of circumstances that arise during and following complex emergencies. These emergencies are characterised by their relatively sudden occurrence, impacting substantial civilian populations. Typically, they involve a combination of armed conflict or civil unrest, scarcity of food resources, and displacement of people, leading to a notable increase in mortality rates. Mortality serves as a fundamental metric for assessing the general health status of a community. However, epidemiologists may also endeavour to gather data on several other health indicators, encompassing morbidity, malnutrition, sanitation, and the availability of healthcare services. Significantly, the assessment of mortality is methodologically more straightforward compared to other health variables. As previously mentioned, the examination of mortality studies has significance in evaluating the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict. However, this part also encompasses an exploration of additional epidemiological research endeavours that have relevance to the study of armed conflict and the protection of human rights.

1.1 The causes and conditions of displacement

In certain epidemiological investigations, such as the aforementioned Iraq Lancet research, epidemiologists conduct surveys on a nationwide scale to gather data. The majority of research in the field of epidemiology in conflict settings tends to concentrate on smaller and more easily accessible populations, such as refugees or those who have been displaced. Consequently, there exists a scarcity of reliable information pertaining to health issues in regions that are

geographically distant from well-defined urban areas. Retrospective surveys might serve as a valuable tool in bridging this knowledge gap by eliciting responses from refugees or displaced individuals on the circumstances preceding and during their displacement.

Furthermore, it is worth noting a study conducted in 1999 by the Public Health Research (PHR) organisation in Macedonia and Albania. This poll targeted ethnic Albanian refugees who were displaced from Kosovo during the conflict involving Serbia, NATO, and the Kosovo Liberation Army. The objective of this study was to gather data about the temporal aspects and causal factors of displacement, as well as to explore the firsthand accounts of individuals who have endured human rights violations. At the given period, PHR encountered limitations in deploying surveyors to Kosovo. However, via surveys conducted among refugees, substantial evidence emerged indicating the involvement of Serb troops in a methodical campaign of expulsion.

1.2 The civilian impacts of munitions and military tactics

Retrospective surveys have shown to be a valuable tool in the field of munitions impact research. In a study conducted in Mozambique in 1995, researchers discovered that the rates of death and injury caused by landmines were significantly higher than what had been anticipated through prospective surveillance methods. Similarly, in a broader study examining the effects of landmines in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Mozambique, surveyors observed that approximately six percent of households experienced victims of landmines, and that landmine-related impacts affected a range of 25 to 87 percent of these households. In this particular scenario, retrospective surveys provide valuable insights about the effectiveness of a worldwide prohibition on landmines.

These investigations may also provide significant spill-over effects. In the context of Afghanistan, a comprehensive investigation was conducted to examine the effects of landmines and unexploded ordnance. This study played a crucial role in the development of a key informant technique, which was employed by researchers to estimate the number of civilian fatalities over expansive regions. By employing several data sources, researchers conducted surveys in all 747 Afghan settlements that were thought to have been subjected to either air or ground attacks by the coalition forces. The findings revealed that out of these towns, 600 had indeed encountered hostilities. Instead of utilising a household survey, the researchers made the decision to

interview local key informants inside each community. Surprisingly, this approach yielded paradoxical outcomes. A significant proportion of communities, namely 43%, indicated the absence of individuals who had experienced direct violence. Similarly, a majority of communities, precisely 66%, reported no instances of fatalities resulting from landmines or unexploded ordnance. The authors of the study observed that civilian deaths were concentrated in a limited number of areas, indicating a distinct pattern. This observation was further explained by the authors, who distinguished between the effects of aerial and ground strikes. The impact of NATO air operations against Taliban forces seemed to result in the dispersion of their troops, hence reducing the number of civilian casualties. Conversely, NATO ground attacks targeting Taliban soldiers who maintained their positions or reassembled appeared to contribute to an increase in civilian fatalities.

1.3 Battle -related morbidity

Epidemiologists also strive to evaluate the influence of war on disease by doing retrospective mortality studies, commonly known as "verbal autopsies." The studies undertaken by the International Rescue Committee in the Democratic Republic of Congo have indicated that infectious diseases have emerged as the predominant cause of mortality in the country, surpassing the number of deaths and injuries directly attributable to armed hostilities. A comparative analysis of aggregated sickness data from several nations has provided more evidence that civil conflicts greatly increase the probability of infectious illnesses. The main determinants of mortality in complex crises are acute respiratory infections, diarrheal diseases, maternal and neonatal morbidity, tuberculosis, and vector-borne ailments such as malaria. The risk of disease is increased by several factors commonly observed in complex emergencies, including overcrowding and substandard housing, malnutrition, insufficient immunisation, inadequate water and sanitation conditions, vulnerability to unfamiliar diseases due to lack of immunity among affected populations, and limited or delayed access to medical care. In recent times, there has been an increasing scholarly focus on investigating the effects of armed conflict on certain infectious diseases, such as HIV-AIDS. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the correlations between these two occurrences are still a topic of discussion and discord [personal communication with Paul Spiegel (UNHCR), December 5, 2006].

1.4 Battle -related mental health

Population-based surveys have been recognised as effective instruments for assessing the impact of complex humanitarian situations on the mental well-being of individuals. Despite being a field of inquiry that has received limited scholarly focus, the extant body of knowledge suggests, as anticipated, a rise in mental disorders during emergency situations. Moreover, it is apparent that a multitude of violations of human rights can result in cumulative and adverse impacts on mental well-being. Analogous to the collateral damage incurred during armed conflicts, the adverse repercussions on psychological well-being have to be incorporated as an integral facet of the entire human cost of warfare, and should be duly considered when doing complete assessments of its impact.

The potential consequences of mental health issues may potentially yield noteworthy political impacts. One study investigating the correlation between traumatic experiences during the 1994 Rwandan genocide and attitudes towards post-conflict justice may be worth considering. Around a quarter of the individuals had symptoms that were suggestive of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This was associated with a reduced probability of expressing positive attitudes towards the national trials in Rwanda and promoting collaboration across different ethnic groups. Furthermore, individuals who have experienced multiple traumatic events exhibit a greater tendency to hold positive attitudes towards the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Conversely, they demonstrate a reduced inclination to support justice mechanisms and reconciliation initiatives at the domestic and community levels. Moreover, it is imperative to contemplate a scholarly inquiry into the psychological well-being and perspectives of Kosovar Albanians following the 1998-99 battle. This research revealed a significant association between experiences of trauma during the conflict, reduced psychological well-being, impaired social functioning, and strong emotions of hostility and a desire for retaliation towards those of Serbian ethnicity.

1.5 The extent and scope of human rights abuses

As previously stated, PHR has been leading the way in pioneering efforts to utilise population-based surveys for the purpose of assessing the extent of violations of human rights. The efforts of the Public Health Research (PHR) have yielded notable results in certain cases. The examination of sexual assault has inherent difficulties, for example. The research conducted in 2002 by PHR

on the experiences of displaced individuals in Sierra Leone yielded a considerable volume of noteworthy data. This was achieved by the collaborative efforts with the local United Nations mission, utilisation of educated local employees, and the thorough implementation of well-designed surveys. Based on the research results, a significant segment of persons staying in displaced person camps, namely seventeen percent of the participants, reported having encountered at least one occurrence of sexual assault throughout the course of their lifetimes. Furthermore, a somewhat lesser proportion, precisely nine percent, indicated experiencing such acts of aggression within the duration of the fight. In contrast of media assertions of widespread sexual violence during Sierra Leone's civil conflict, the survey done by PHR has indicated that the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the principal rebel faction, was involved in organised sexual assault, but with a very modest number of recorded incidents. The research findings indicate that a notable proportion of women (53%) who engaged in direct, face-to-face interactions with RUF fighters reported experiencing sexual assault. In comparison, a significantly lower percentage (less than six percent) of women who encountered other combatant groups disclosed similar instances. The research conducted by PHR in 2002 exerted a notable influence on the discourse surrounding transitional justice in Sierra Leone, hence prompting heightened focus on the issue of gender-based violence. A noteworthy accomplishment within the realm of Public Health Research (PHR) is the extensive inquiry carried out in the year 2000, with a specific emphasis on the displaced Chechen community. The present study successfully revealed the significant maltreatment endured by individuals at the hands of Russian military personnel. Based on the research conducted by PHR, the primary cause of relocation was attributed to the actions of the Russian government rather than those of Chechen terrorists in nearly all cases. Additionally, PHR has conducted surveys on similar levels of innovativeness about occurrences in Kosovo (as already indicated), Afghanistan, and Iraq.

1.6 post-battle conditions

Population-based surveys have also furnished data concerning circumstances in post-conflict environments. While it is commonly believed that calm is inherently linked to improved physical and mental well-being, this assumption may not always hold true in practise. For instance, a study conducted by PHR examined the health conditions in Chiapas, Mexico, several

years following the cessation of armed rebellion by insurgents. Through a comprehensive survey of 2,997 households across 46 communities, the study revealed a concerning deterioration in health conditions. Notably, certain communities were found to have been deprived of healthcare services due to political motivations. Therefore, although the armed conflict in Chiapas had ceased, it is evident that the state of health was deteriorating rather than improving. Regrettably, researchers may encounter such instances of post-battle degradation in other locations.

At the policy level, the aforementioned findings provide compelling evidence that the United Nations (UN) and other relevant organisations should undertake the task of commissioning prompt post-battle surveys. These surveys would serve the purpose of establishing baseline data pertaining to prevailing human rights and health circumstances. Over the course of time, further research might subsequently monitor advancements, or the absence thereof, for distinct demographic groups. The integration of initial and subsequent research endeavours can furnish scientists, human rights advocates, and policymakers with dependable data regarding the actual effects of post-conflict arrangements on public health and overall welfare.

1.7 The limits of population-based surveys

Similar to other research methods, retrospective surveys have inherent limits, rendering them unsuitable and ineffective in some contexts and circumstances. To begin with, conducting population-based surveys entails significant logistical intricacies and financial expenses, necessitating the deployment of local teams of qualified researchers, as well as meticulous coordination and oversight. Epidemiology necessitates specialised knowledge and expertise in several domains, including sample techniques, questionnaire construction, interview methodologies, and statistical analysis. In light of these intricacies and several other factors, it is unsurprising that field non-governmental organisations' surveys frequently face criticism from specialists. Staying abreast of the current methodological advancements poses challenges, as scholars persistently enhance established procedures. Scholars, in addition, consistently engage in discussions over the most suitable approaches for various contexts. The nature of complex situations exhibits significant variations, rendering a standardised study approach unsuitable.

The implementation of population-based surveys in dangerous places presents considerable obstacles as a result of the vulnerability and

limited monitoring capacities of survey staff and respondents alike. The obstruction of research activities in critical locations is frequently observed through access denial, a practise commonly employed by governments or armed organisation. Surveys performed in politically volatile environments might provide intricate ethical dilemmas due to the possible hazards of retribution or re-experiencing terrible events faced by both respondents and researchers. There is a growing trend towards the incorporation of epidemiology in the examination of human rights issues and its use as a foundation for external interventions. Nevertheless, there exists the potential for governments to obstruct studies pertaining to public health within marginalised populations, thereby exerting a detrimental influence on endeavours aimed at providing humanitarian assistance. [Confidential communication with Francesco Checchi, November 6, 2006]. Nevertheless, ethical concerns arise when influential research methodologies are not utilised in endeavours to promote the interests of marginalised individuals.

One possible constraint of epidemiological research is in the difficulty of properly conveying the importance of its findings to policymakers and the wider public. The discussion around the Iraq Lancet research has generated a contentious debate, in which the media's stance seems to prioritise alleged methodological concerns to an unreasonable degree. This emphasis is seen, even when there is a limited understanding of the technical complexities and the possible consequences of these matters on the credibility of the study's results. Policy-makers who have opposing views to the findings of a certain research study often seek to undermine its credibility by citing its lack of accuracy. However, advocates of the research may fail to acknowledge the existence of biases and substantial margins of error within their quantitative data.

Conclusion

Epidemiology plays a crucial role in generating valuable information pertaining to human suffering, which is of significant importance for war analysts and human rights monitors. Frequently, the available data about the civilian consequences of armed conflict relies heavily on estimations provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and multilateral institutions, rather than being derived from meticulously compiled scientific evidence. This study has discovered issues pertaining to data use and gathering inside two prominent advocate non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It contends that these deficiencies pose significant

challenges, especially when attempting to determine the general incidence of a certain human rights violation or conflict pattern. We contend that the aforementioned limitations in data can be partially resolved by fostering increased collaboration with academics in the field of public health.

The field of epidemiology plays a crucial role in quantifying the distinct direct and indirect effects of conflict on specific populations. By analysing trend data, researchers are able to monitor and assess the long-term consequences of major military campaigns, peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian aid distribution, and peace accords on public health outcomes. This enables a comprehensive mapping of the impact of these events on the well-being of affected communities. This data has the potential to illuminate the effectiveness of foreign involvement in conflict areas, while offering human rights investigators a means of evaluating the scope and consequences of human rights abuses among communities.

The partnership of public health specialists, war analysts, and human rights monitors encounters both practical and ethical challenges. It is essential to recognise and confront these concerns; nevertheless, they should not impede the pursuit of collaborative research endeavours that have the potential to positively impact vulnerable and disadvantaged communities.

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