

CHAPTER 9

SECURITY OF JOURNALISTS: MAKING THE CASE FOR MODELLING ARMED VIOLENCE AS A MEANS TO PROMOTE HUMAN SECURITY

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SUMMARY

Attacks on journalists are worthy of particular attention because, first, this profession constitutes a distinct vulnerable group in conflict areas and, second, there are wider implications for human security because of the importance of media reports pertaining to armed violence. We use a methodology for studying attacks on journalists that builds their “security profile” and which could be applied to any issue relating to both human security and the use of weapons. We conclude, first, that media reports can generate meaningful data about the multiple potential effects of armed violence on any particular vulnerable group (as exemplified by journalists working in conflict areas) and, second, that the method presented could be a useful tool in collective international efforts to enhance human security, including in disarmament, by supplementing field-based studies about the effects of armed violence.

INTRODUCTION

The link between attacks on journalists in conflict zones and the notion of human security² is intuitive. Such attacks are significant because they are directed towards a specific and usually unarmed group; they are equally important because journalists convey information about acts of armed violence—especially politically motivated violence in all its forms—to the rest of the world. Although they may not necessarily acknowledge it, policy makers are influenced by media reports of human *in*security in prioritizing and deciding on foreign policy or national and even international security

matters. It follows that where journalists are most in danger is where journalists' work is most important for promoting human security.

Multilateral disarmament processes have the potential to contribute to human security as the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and the 2001 UN Programme of Action to curb illicit trade in small arms, for instance, have shown. The three strands of the obvious common thread between human security, attacks on journalists and disarmament are weapons, how they are used in violence, and the effects of this violence. And yet there is no international surveillance system for the effects of armed violence on peoples' lives and well-being as there is for infectious diseases, for instance.³

Media reports about armed violence constitute the only day-to-day public source of information about human insecurity available for analysis. This source may be far from comprehensive, but it is the best available. Attacks on journalists are worthy of study because first, this profession constitutes a distinct group in conflict areas and, second, there are wider implications for human security because of the importance of media reports pertaining to armed violence. Furthermore, attacks on journalists tend to be well reported by other journalists. Our method of data gathering about armed violence and its effects as applied to attacks on journalists could be applied to informing policy makers on many aspects of human security, including multilateral disarmament.

HUMAN SECURITY AND THE EFFECTS OF ARMED VIOLENCE

Human security has become the main theme of international humanitarian actors, and for some countries an important element of foreign policy. The "broad definition" of human security is debated but the Human Security Report 2005 says it concerns intersection of economic development, good governance, and military security.⁴ Whether or not one agrees with this definition, most would agree that human security focuses on the notion that peoples' lives and well-being are unnecessarily at risk from other people who resort to violence and that this risk can and must be reduced if not eliminated. Most would also agree that disarmament, when framed as humanitarian action, constitutes an important component of human security.

One advantage of human security as an approach is that it brings together disciplines such as political science, economics, law and public health. However, given the World Health Organization definition of health,⁵ and the accepted definitions of violence⁶ and of weapons,⁷ it is obvious that the effects of violence on peoples' health are the irreducible elements when different disciplines examine human security.

More important than definitions of, and disciplines addressing, human security is the evidence that natural science methodology—in particular those from the domain from public health—are productive ways to investigate human insecurity. In turn, this may lead to proposals about how to improve human security. This is exemplified by publications pertaining to anti-personnel mine injuries,⁸ civilian deaths and injuries from cluster bombs,⁹ the impact on civilians of the availability of small arms,¹⁰ the overall impact of war on civilians,¹¹ weapons injuries following the departure of peacekeepers,¹² mortality among people displaced by conflict,¹³ conflict deaths,¹⁴ the impact on civilians of the 1999 conflict in Kosovo,¹⁵ massacres,¹⁶ the prevalence of war-related sexual violence in Sierra Leone,¹⁷ violence and mortality in Darfur, Sudan,¹⁸ the number of people killed in Iraq since 2003,¹⁹ and, recently, the impact of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo²⁰ (the Congo conflict, in particular, has demonstrated irrefutably how an insecure environment associated with armed conflict has a massive impact on health far beyond the number of deaths and injuries caused by use of weapons). Many of these studies are pertinent to disarmament and can contribute to policy makers framing it in terms of humanitarian action. All these studies, and many more besides, show that credible data can be gathered under difficult conditions.²¹

While it is often difficult for policy makers to make best use of this research, for various reasons, the “data-to-policy” process is an important aspect of devising meaningful responses to problems of armed violence in human security terms. The data generated by the kind of studies cited above may contribute to momentum toward the creation of treaties and policies regarding exports of weapons or destruction of stockpiles. They may provide evidence of war crimes or crimes against humanity. By necessity, field-level interventions such as clearance of mines or explosive remnants of war and firearm destruction programmes, as well as a host of remedial health interventions, are informed by such studies as well. In brief, data

gathering and interpretation is an essential part of ensuring that disarmament contributes to human security.

However, the primary observers in most of the studies cited above were health professionals or academics. They used a variety of methods to gather data regarding the impact of armed violence, direct or indirect, on peoples' health. The things that are detrimental to human security are the stuff of everyday international news and the everyday observers and reporters of human insecurity are journalists and not health professionals or academics. The translation of media reports of individual events into meaningful data has been demonstrated in two independent studies: the first, in relation to Colombia²² and the second in relation to the number of civilian deaths and injuries in Iraq since March 2003.²³ Managing publicly available material in this way has clear and important implications for journalists' work, journalists' security and for human security more widely.

We have published the means by which any report, including media reports of individual events of armed violence, can be translated into meaningful data using a public health methodology.²⁴ This is centred on a model of armed violence which incorporates values pertaining to the effects of the armed violence in question, the kind of weapon, the number of weapons in use, the way the weapon or weapons were used, the vulnerability of the victims to suffer the effects and a variety of context variables. This model has already been invoked as a tool for dialogue to promote disarmament and arms control in the context of the *Disarmament as Humanitarian Action* project's work.²⁵

WHY STUDY ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS IN CONFLICT AREAS?

Journalists and other media workers may, in their professional activities, suffer the effects of various forms of armed violence. This is often related to their reporting of armed conflict or other forms of political violence. Journalists may be "caught in the crossfire" or be specifically targeted. People in positions of power may use violent tactics, including arrest and physical violence, to prevent journalists from communicating information about armed violence and its effects. Journalists may also suffer punishment for having communicated certain information which may be the only information coming out of a certain context. There is anecdotal evidence that journalists reporting on conflict and violence are at increased risk of

becoming victims of violence compared to other civilians since they are often targeted.²⁶

Journalists working in international armed conflict are specifically mentioned in international humanitarian law.²⁷ Their non-combatant status is affirmed and states are obliged to recognize both the dangerous nature of journalists' work in conflict areas and their unambiguous status as civilians. Human rights law, by applying outside armed conflict as well, should ensure that journalists, as other civilians, be accorded the basic rights such as the right to life, freedom of speech and freedom from arbitrary arrest. However, journalists are frequently the principal reporters of violations of these same laws and so the contexts in which journalists are most at risk are likely to be those in which violations of these laws are likely. The reporting of violence often begets violence against journalists. It follows then that promoting journalists' security and ensuring that their reports are as complete and accurate as possible are important means to promote human security.

There are various organizations that document violent events involving journalists and media workers such as the International News Safety Institution (INSI), Reporters Without Borders, and the Committee to Protect Journalists. INSI is the only one of these organizations dedicated to the safety of journalists and media workers, and the two other organizations are more focused on freedom of the press. The data that we have generated from this study has been used as a basis by INSI for part of a global enquiry of journalists' deaths and injuries.

In the study we describe below, our objective was to use media reports of attacks on journalists to create a security profile of journalists. The term "security profile" encompasses the ensemble of the profile of effects of armed violence together with the profile of risk factors. It also shows how the security profile can change with geography or evolve in relation to political events. A security profile carries a potential for prediction of certain effects of armed violence when risk factors are known; likewise, it could clarify contexts about which information is lacking in relation to risk factors when the effects are known or obvious. The power to do so rests on the size and quality of the database from which the security profile is generated.

In a pilot study, we used a methodology that converts qualitative data in media reports of armed violence and its effects into meaningful quantitative

data within a public health model.²⁸ The pilot generated some global data about armed violence and its effects on unarmed people. It showed how the model might predict certain effects of armed violence or clarify questions about contexts.

Using similar methodology to the pilot study, we undertook a study on the effects of armed violence on journalists in areas of armed conflict or political violence *as reported by journalists*. The effects investigated were not only deaths and injuries but also threats, kidnapping or detention, assuming these would lead to psychological “secondary effects.” The first objective was to generate a specific security profile of journalists working in conflict areas. As part of this first objective, we investigated whether the method would indicate where and how the security profile of journalists has changed since 30 September 2001. The second objective was to show the potential of our model to apply to other aspects of human security and, in particular, to how issues relating to disarmament might be framed as contributing to human security.

Box 9.1. Methods

All English language (possibly translated) news reports of events involving armed violence against journalists from 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2003 were collated.

When data errors were suspected we discussed the corresponding reports with the data enterer and then the data was corrected.

Factiva was used to obtain the media reports. The search terms used to construct the database were a combination of the word “journalist” and “effect” terms (for example, killed, injured, arrested) in the article headline only.

The search did not include Australia, Japan or New Zealand, nor countries in Western Europe or North America.

Strict criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of articles were applied. An event involving armed violence (an event) was defined as: at least one act of armed violence (as defined in the pilot²⁹) involving a perpetrator and a victim occurring at a specific place and time.

Each of the five effects was measured as a binary (yes/no) variable (that is, whether the journalist in question was killed, wounded, detained, threatened or kidnapped).

Box 9.1 (continued)

Risk factors of the effects of armed violence can be categorized into four main constructs:³⁰

- weapons involved were quantified as a categorical variable (explosive, firearm, other);
- the potential number of weapons in use was quantified as a categorical variable (military, organized armed group, police, civilian);
- vulnerability was quantified by assessing whether the journalist's vulnerability was increased or not (for example, if the journalist was tied up before being harmed); and
- intentional use of force was quantified as a categorical variable. The intent of the user of the weapon intended to cause "all", "some", or "none" of the effects suffered by the journalists.

According to information in a report, the actor was categorized as: "civilian", "military"—part of a state's armed forces (for example, use of the word "soldiers" or "a military attack"), "organized armed group"—the actor(s) belonged to an identifiable or named armed group (for example, " Hamas claimed responsibility"), or "police".

Whether or not the report included details of the health effects suffered by the journalist and mention of follow-up or investigation of the event were both recorded as binary variables.

The countries were categorized into six regions according to the World Bank definition of regions.³¹ Location of the event was recorded as a categorical variable: "building", "crowded area", "outdoors" or "vehicle". Another context variable was whether the event occurred in a populated area as defined by a "concentration of civilians" as in international law.³² Each event was classified as related to conflict or not according to given details and our understanding of the context.

Statistical Methods

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables. Odds ratios were calculated as an approximation to the relative risk of a particular health effect given an exposure. Median and inter-quartile range (IQR—difference between the 75th and 25th percentile) values were calculated for continuous variables of interest. All reported *p*-values and confidence intervals were calculated using exact methods. Fisher's exact test was used to compare proportions. We consider $p \leq 0.05$ to be statistically significant. All analyses were done using SAS 8.0.

Box 9.1 (continued)**Results**

The search resulted in 511 reports. The median word count was 213 (IQR=169). Effect details were given in 43.05% (n=220) of reports and follow-up was discussed in 77.7% (n=397) of all reports.

By region, 101 (19.8%) originated from sub-Saharan Africa; 45 (8.8%) from East Asia/Pacific; 146 (28.6%) from Eastern Europe/Central Asia; 71 (13.9%) from Latin America/South America; 42 (8.2%) from the Middle East/North Africa; and 106 (20.7%) from South Asia.

The actors were civilian in 182 (36%) events; police in 153 (30%) events; organized armed groups in 80 events (16%) and military in 45 (9%) events. The actors' status was not reported in 51 (10%) events. In 444 of the 511 events, information was available on both the actors' status and whether or not the event was related to a conflict. Among these events when civilians were perpetrators, 83 (49%) were related to conflict; when police were the perpetrators, 77 (51%) related to conflict.

In relation to effects, in 149 events (29%) a journalist was killed; in 131 events (26%) a journalist was wounded; in 32 (6%) a journalist was kidnapped; in 147 events (29%) a journalist was detained; and in 76 (15%) a journalist was threatened.

There is a statistically significant difference in the proportion of deaths according to the status of the actor ($p=0.0000$). Civilians and non-military actors were the most common actors in lethal events (44.30%, $n=66$ and 24.83%, $n=37$ respectively.) A similar relationship ($p=0.0000$) and pattern is found when the effect is wounding of a journalist. The identity of the actor varied significantly in relation to risk of detention ($p<0.001$), threat ($p=0.05$) and kidnapping ($p=0.018$) with, respectively, police, civilians and organized armed groups being the most common actors. The type of weapon was a significant risk factor for a lethal outcome ($p<0.001$), wounding ($p<0.001$), or threat ($p<0.001$). When perpetrators did not intend to cause the health effect suffered by the journalists (that is, the journalist was in the wrong place at the wrong time), the risk of being wounded is 11.52 times higher than being killed (95% CI:[2.96,64.97]; $p<0.001$). Vulnerability was intentionally elevated in 27 events with a 3.54 times increased risk of a lethal outcome (95% CI:[1.52,8.40]; $p=0.002$).

Box 9.1 (continued)

In the 244 events in which the kind of weapon was not reported, 209 (86%) related to journalists being detained, threatened or kidnapped. Combinations of weapons were used in 15 events (2%). In the 152 events where firearms were the only weapons used, journalists were killed in 101 events (67%) and wounded in 36 events (24%). In the 25 events where explosive weapons only were used, eight (32%) were lethal and 12 (48%) resulted in wounds. In terms of lethal events, civilians used firearms in 53 (80.30%) and explosive weapons in one (1.02%); organized armed groups used firearms in 28 (75.68%) and explosive weapons in five (13.51%); and military actors used firearms in eight (57.14%) and explosive weapons in four (28.57%) (and in two events the type of weapon was not reported.)

The risk of the different effects suffered varies significantly according to all chosen context variables. The exception is that kidnappings did not vary significantly by location ($p=0.09$). In events related to conflict, journalists are less likely to be detained (OR=0.63; 95% CI[0.42,0.95]; $p=0.0$) and more likely to be kidnapped (OR=3.63; 95% CI[1.34,12.28]; $p=0.005$). Kidnapping is less likely in populated areas (OR=0.23; 95% CI[0.09,0.61]; $p=0.002$).

The only region where the majority of deaths (63%, $n=7$) were caused by military actors is the Middle East/North Africa region. The only region where the majority of deaths (53%, $n=20$) were caused by organized armed groups is the Latin America/Caribbean region. In all the other regions the majority of deaths were caused by civilians. A similar pattern is manifest for injury of journalists.

The Middle East/North Africa region had 18 events before 30 September 2001 with two events (11.11%) resulting in a journalist's death; after 30 September 2001 the region experienced 24 events with nine (37.50%) resulting in death. This yields a significant difference of 26.39% (95% CI [2.18,50.59]). One of the two deaths before 30 September 2001 was caused by a civilian and the other by a member of an organized armed group; after 30 September 2001, seven of the 11 deaths were caused by military actors.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The principle limitation of this study is that raised in the pilot study, namely, the potential inaccuracy and incompleteness of media reports. The fact that this is a study based on journalists being exposed to armed violence should reduce this limitation. However, as compared with the global overview in the pilot study, journalists do not obviously dedicate a greater word count

to, describe more details of, nor report follow-up more of, an event in which a colleague was subject to armed violence. It is likely though that the number of threats sustained by journalists is underreported.

We do not claim to be able to calculate the absolute risk to journalists because we have no means to know the critical variable—the total number of journalists in a given context. However, this does not preclude the creation of the security profiles of journalists in a given context nor the comparison of security profiles of journalists in different contexts. Furthermore, proving that acts of armed violence constitute a violation of international law or human rights does not normally rely on knowledge of this variable.

DISCUSSION

The study supports the conclusion of our pilot study that qualitative reports about armed violence and its effects can translate into meaningful quantitative data.

The relationships proposed in the pilot between effects of armed violence and the risk factors are supported by the results. Lethality—as the proportion of people injured who are killed—is the effect best measured by both these studies. Specifically, high level of intent, use of firearms, actors in small groups and elevated vulnerability are all significant risk factors for increased lethality of attacks. Likewise, use of explosive weapons is associated with low lethality (this is intuitive as explosive weapons cannot be directed to a vital organ of an individual victim as can a firearm).

This study describes in general terms the security profile for journalists in regions involved in conflict. Overall, deaths and injuries of journalists are most often inflicted by civilians or organized armed groups. The detention of journalists is, not surprisingly, mostly the domain of police. Whether or not events are related to conflict, the risks for journalists of being killed or wounded do not differ. However, those events so related carry less risk of a journalist being detained and a higher risk of kidnapping which tends to take place in areas that are not populated. The number of threats in relation to lethal attack varies by region and actor; therefore, contexts in which threats are more likely to be carried out with lethal effect are identified.

Approximately half of the deaths due to civilian actors and half of the events in which journalists were detained by police are unrelated to conflict. This means there is a background set of risks for journalists through being involved in, or suspected of, ordinary crimes; the risks related to conflict are then superimposed. Except in the Middle East/North Africa region since September 2001, the main risks to journalists *in relation to conflict* do not come from military actors. Military actors in the Middle East/North Africa and organized armed groups in Latin America/Caribbean are more likely to execute a threat as compared with other actors elsewhere. The lethality of attack by military actors in the Middle East/North Africa region did not stand out from all other regions before 30 September 2001, but did afterward (data has not been given for individual countries; the reason is to avoid the political and even security implications if we, or the institutions we represent, work in high-risk countries in the future).

The reporting bias by region noted in the pilot is reflected in this study. Given that sub-Saharan Africa has a number of highly dangerous contexts, the small number of events found in both studies is likely to represent there being few journalists present in the region.

Journalists, and news organizations employing them, could use the information that could be generated by our methodology to gain a deeper understanding of journalists' insecurity in a given context. It might help the creation and implementation of appropriate security policies. Indeed, this study might help news organizations develop dynamic security policies that are as current as the information their journalists are reporting.

Therefore, assuming media reports exist, our method could provide a safe, inexpensive supplement to studies based on primary data collected at field level about the effects of armed violence on a vulnerable group. Importantly, the database could be updated on a real-time basis and so permit "monitoring by newswire." Further study would be required to compare mortality estimates, for example, based on newswire reports and primary data collected in the field.

By extrapolation, using our methodology and journalists' reports, security profiles could be generated for any vulnerable group whether by region, religion or race given a sufficiently large database of events. We therefore propose that, because our primary outcome of interest is the effect on health, accurate and unbiased reporting by journalists and media

organizations of armed violence and its health effects on any vulnerable group could have a protective influence on that group, that is, it could lead to an improvement in human security. This, in turn would make the proposed methodology a more effective tool for dialogue. It could also bring an evidence-based approach to what is really happening to peoples' health as a result of armed violence in the post-11 September 2001 world.³³

The wider implications of this study are that reports originating from journalists or others can be translated into meaningful data and analysed by scientific methods on an open ended, ongoing basis. Qualitative reports such as newswires are the most complete and the most accurate source of data available pertaining to human security and, like it or not, with little or no analysis, this data drives policy at national and international level.

We are proposing that the huge source of qualitative data represented by newswires and other written reports can be turned into quantitative data to investigate contexts of human insecurity and to support disarmament as humanitarian action. The method has already been adopted as a tracking system for sexual violence in conflict areas by the Alliance for Direct Action Against Rape in Conflict, to initiate the Registry of Explosive Force (a collaborative project between Landmine Action and Medact to track the global phenomenon of use of explosions in populated areas as a means to pursue political objectives.) The method was used to conduct a confidential study of security incidents affecting the staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The fact that such data can be gathered on a day-by-day basis would permit tracking of armed violence against any particular vulnerable population chosen. It could, were enough data gathered, permit a degree of forecasting of how, for example, changes in peoples' vulnerabilities or the way weapons are used change in response to political or military events. It would provide important indicators of whether or not an intervention such as a small-arms buy-back programme really was effective in terms of preventing deaths and injuries.

CONCLUSIONS

Human security and using disarmament negotiations to promote human security are aided by data pertaining to human insecurity. Our method translates media reports about individual events of armed violence and its effects into meaningful data.

Using our method, we have created a basic security profile of journalists working in conflict areas. We hope this information could be used for security policies for journalists and the organizations that employ them. The method could be used in a similar way to promote the security of other vulnerable groups working in conflict areas, such as aid workers. In fact, our method could be applied to any other context or vulnerable group. We propose it is a useful tool for those working on human security issues and, in particular, in viewing disarmament as humanitarian action.

Attacks on journalists have a three-fold impact. First, there is the human impact of these attacks, which is noteworthy for any vulnerable group of people. Second, attacks are of particular significance because of the special role journalists play in conveying information about armed violence to the world, including to policy makers, which may be impeded as a result: media reports are, as we have explained, by far the most important means by which acts of armed violence detrimental to human security are conveyed to the rest of the world. A third impact of documenting attacks on journalists is that it could be an important early indicator of trends detrimental to human security in a given context, if decision makers choose to listen.

Notes

- ¹ The views expressed in this publication are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, University of Toronto, St. Michael's Hospital, or the International Committee of the Red Cross. Nathan Taback gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The authors also wish to thank Jean-Luc Metzker for entering the data.

- 2 The concept of human security referred to is related to personal security, and does not include economic development. See the Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 3 See the “Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response” of the World Health Organization, <www.who.int/csr/en/>.
- 4 Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 5 Definition of health—a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease (World Health Organization, *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization*, as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19–22 June 1946.)
- 6 Definition of violence—the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a likelihood to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. See Jeffrey Koplan, Mark Rosenberg and Etienne Krug, *Violence Prevention: a Public Health Policy*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998.
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- 21 David Meddings, "The Value of Credible Data from Under-resourced Areas", *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, vol. 18, 2002, pp. 380–388.
- 22 Jorge Restrepo and Michael Spagat, "Colombia's Tipping Point?", *Survival*, vol. 47, 2005, pp. 131–152.
- 23 See *Iraq Body Count*, <www.iraqbodycount.org/database/> .
- 24 Nathan Taback and Robin Coupland, "Towards Collation and Modelling of the Global Cost of Armed Violence on Civilians", *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, vol. 21, 2005, pp. 19–27.
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- ²⁷ Article 79 of 1977 Additional Protocol I of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.
- ²⁸ See Nathan Taback and Robin Coupland, “Towards Collation and Modelling of the Global Cost of Armed Violence on Civilians”, *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, vol. 21, 2005.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ Robin Coupland, “Armed Violence”, *Medicine and Global Survival*, vol. 7, 2001, pp. 33–37.
- ³¹ <www.worldbank.org>
- ³² Article 1.2 of Protocol III of the 1980 UN Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.
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