



# MEASURING CONFLICT EXPOSURE IN MICRO-LEVEL SURVEYS: THE CONFLICT SURVEY SOURCEBOOK

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Violent conflict has significant effects on the welfare, resilience and behaviour of individuals, households and communities. These impacts deserve close study at the micro level, both as a new field of academic inquiry and as an aid to development and poverty reduction policy. Policy practitioners have increasingly realized the importance of understanding, compensating for and overcoming the consequences of violent conflict.<sup>1</sup>

To gather better data on the impacts of such conflict, well-designed surveys need to acknowledge the prior existence of violent conflict in formal questionnaires and survey designs. The present authors' *Conflict Survey Sourcebook* and the accompanying Conflict Exposure Module, both published in August 2013 by the World Bank, serve as a basis for developing techniques for

deployment of a socio-economic survey in conflict-affected contexts.<sup>2</sup>

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 (like some urban areas affected by organized crime).

## CURRENT SURVEY PRACTICES

Some recent surveys focus on investigating conflict, creating new methods for collecting data at the micro level. Examples include surveys on such conflict actors as ex-combatants or child soldiers.

<sup>2</sup> Brück, T. et al., 'Measuring conflict exposure in micro-level surveys', Living Standards Measurement Study: Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA), World Bank, 25 June 2013, <[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSURAGRI/Resources/7420178-1294259038276/Measuring\\_Conflict\\_in\\_Micro\\_Level\\_Surveys.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSURAGRI/Resources/7420178-1294259038276/Measuring_Conflict_in_Micro_Level_Surveys.pdf)>.

<sup>1</sup> European Report on Development, *Overcoming Fragility in Africa: Forging a New European Approach* (European University Institute: San Domenico di Fiesole, 2009); and World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2011).

## SUMMARY

● While violent conflict is a key obstacle to overall human development, and to economic development in particular, the impacts of conflicts on people vary greatly. Conflict exposure may vary by gender, political view, or socio-economic status. Socio-economic research on conflict has demonstrated that the circumstances of conflict matter greatly to policies designed to overcome legacies of conflict. Successful reconstruction policies must therefore build on specific local conflict legacies, considering how people were affected by war and violence.

The Conflict Survey Sourcebook, published in August 2013 by the World Bank, serves as a basis for developing techniques for deployment of socio-economic surveys in conflict-affected contexts. Measuring conflict exposure in micro-surveys also helps to avoid biases in studies of conflict-affected areas not directly focusing on violence or conflict.

Capturing how people experience such conflict dynamics requires increased capacity on the part of researchers and policymakers to identify how violent conflict affects individuals, households and communities along key social and economic dimensions.



This new research details conflict's functions and dynamics. Other research studies the impact of conflict on victims' behaviour and welfare, on institutional change and on overall development outcomes. There is a great need for making existing multipurpose socio-economic surveys more conflict-sensitive, especially to

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improve the latter type of research.

The World Bank and other institutions have developed highly sophisticated surveying techniques, most notably the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS), to collect socio-economic data on the general population at the micro level. Yet these instruments have not been explicitly adapted for use in conflict-affected areas, despite being deployed in several conflict contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Standard household surveys in conflict-affected countries only sporadically feature questions related to the causes and consequences of violence, with conflict being accounted for in an ad hoc and incomparable manner across different settings. Furthermore, the lack of micro-level conflict data from surveys forces researchers to rely on standardized macro-level measures of violent conflict (e.g. number of battle deaths per country per year) or on merging data sources such as survey data with conflict event data. However, even conflict event

data disaggregated by time and space does not help to understand how two similar individuals may experience conflict differently. This lack of data measuring individual conflict exposure makes it hard to build a systematic and comparable understanding of how violence has affected different people, communities and population groups, and constitutes a key gap in current development interventions.

**METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

The first common challenge related to researching in conflict-affected contexts is to agree on a workable definition of conflict. The *Sourcebook* defines conflict broadly as the systematic breakdown of the social contract resulting from or leading to changes in social norms, which involve violence instigated through collective action.<sup>4</sup> Examples of such conflict include genocide, civil war, armed rebellion and terrorism.

Other important methodological points include the choice of the appropriate unit of analysis; how to introduce time variation into surveys (e.g. by asking people about their key movements or locations during the conflict); common biases that often appear in data collected from conflict-affected populations (e.g. priming, various selection biases and recall error); and ethical and security challenges associated with researching in conflict-affected contexts and with populations that have experienced violence.

Surveys in conflict-affected areas need special considerations to reveal

<sup>3</sup> Bozzoli, C. and Brück, T., 'Identifying conflict and its effects using micro-level surveys', Households in Conflict Network (HICN), HICN Research Design Notes no. 13, Apr. 2009, <[http://www.hicn.org/wordpress/?page\\_id=72](http://www.hicn.org/wordpress/?page_id=72)>; and Verwimp, P., Justino, P. and Brück, T., 'The analysis of conflict: a micro-level perspective', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 3 (May 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Justino, P., Brück, T. and Verwimp, P. (eds), *A Micro-Level Perspective on the Dynamics of Conflict, Violence and Development* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, forthcoming).



useful information for conflict analysis. There are two main ways of linking conflict to socio-economic responses: researchers can rely on self-reported answers from respondents themselves or link responses to external conflict event databases. The first requires respondents to have the opportunity to report on how conflict affects them. The second requires surveys to collect detailed time information about when events occur so that they can be better matched to external conflict event databases. Additionally, good conflict analysis requires information not only on whether a respondent was affected by conflict, but also on the severity of the impact.

With these considerations in mind, the following four guidelines would better adapt existing socio-economic surveys for use in conflict-affected contexts.

1. Allow respondents to self-report on conflict events by including conflict scenarios in answer categories.
2. Record the timing of events.
3. Be sensitive to the type and intensity of violence.
4. Be comprehensive by including conflict questions in multiple survey sections and including a range of conflict answer choices in answer categories.

## THE CONFLICT EXPOSURE MODULE

The Conflict Exposure Module aims to identify manifestations of violent conflict at the individual and household level through two types of channel: direct and indirect. Violent conflict may have a direct impact on welfare, through physical and psychological harm, death

or illness of household members, destruction of assets and human capital, and displacement. Conflict may also have an indirect impact through its effects on income, prices, wages; access to markets; access to safety nets; social, economic and political institutions; community relations; and overall levels of insecurity.<sup>5</sup>

The questions in the module have also been designed to be included—with minor modifications depending on the local context—in future micro-level surveys conducted by the World Bank and other stakeholders in government, civil society and academia in conflict-affected contexts. Handling a ready-made module saves upfront costs, makes more efficient use of staff and facilities, and helps to standardize—and hence compare—responses across different contexts of conflict and violence.

The module is not intended to be a ‘one size fits all’ approach. By adapting the module to local needs and realities, micro-level surveys in conflict-affected countries can be more realistic and appropriate. Studies using such conflict-sensitive surveys will be more nuanced and persuasive, whether they aim to explain violence or investigate the legacies of violence. Even studies not directly referring to conflict will be improved if they use some or all of the conflict variables suggested in the module, as they otherwise run the risk of incurring omitted variable bias.

***Conflict should be treated as an important variable in its own right***

<sup>5</sup> Justino, P., ‘Poverty and violent conflict: a micro-level perspective on the causes and duration of warfare’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 3 (May 2009).

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## CONCLUSIONS

The *Sourcebook* maps out a path for building a systematic and comparable understanding of the channels through which different types of violence affect the behaviour and welfare of individuals and households—and thereby their communities and countries.

Conflict should be treated as an important variable in its own right. Many socio-economic surveys in conflict-affected areas ask about conflict only selectively, missing important features in the process, while other surveys specialize in particular conflict features without comprehensively addressing the multifaceted ways that conflict can have an impact on respondents.

Appropriately adapted to local conditions, the *Sourcebook* and its Conflict Exposure Module can serve as a basic model for comprehensively investigating how conflict changes demographics in the household, affects economic welfare, challenges people's ability to cope, causes physical harm, dislocates people, shortens education and alters perceptions.

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