Conducting Surveys in Areas of Armed Conflict

Comparative Survey Design and Implementation
Stockholm, Sweden
March 21, 2013

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Presentation Outline

1. Background
   - Definition of surveys in armed conflict
   - Unique dimensions of armed conflict settings

2. Overarching principles for surveys in conflict

3. Challenges and potential solutions
   - Questionnaire design and pretesting
   - Interviewer recruitment and training
   - Data collection

4. Ethical considerations

5. Future directions
Definition of Armed Conflict

• We define armed conflict broadly as a situation in which governmental, local or external groups resort to violent confrontation causing aggression, social disruption, political upheaval, and casualties.

• Surveys have been conducted during various stages of conflict → Our focus is “active armed conflict”

• Lacunae of empirical evidence - We therefore draw on the research literature and our experiences
Dimensions of Armed Conflict

Violence and insecurity

Political dynamics

Emotional stress

Compromised infrastructure

Urgency

National Turk 2/13/13
Joseph Eid/AFP/Getty Images 10/22/13
Reuters 12/30/12
Asmaa Waguih/Reuters 10/19/12
Muzaffar Salman/Reuters 2/20/13
Violence and Insecurity

- Unpredictable
- Varying types and levels of intensity
- Threat of violence

Population mobility and casualties, need to exclude areas, uncertainty.
Political Dynamics

- Legal authority contested and changeable
- Break down of law and order
- Pressure and manipulation

Rapidly fluctuating events (ex. Uganda)
Emotional Stress

- Tense, emotionally charged atmosphere
- Preoccupations with basic needs, survival
- Traumatic events and loss

Retraumatization, stress for interviewers and the researcher
Compromised Infrastructure

- Essential infrastructure compromised or destroyed
- Limits to transportation, communication, goods and services

Remote areas may be difficult or impossible to reach, logistical challenges (ex. Burma)
Urgency

- Pressure for timely information and implementation
- Hard to foresee problems, plan contingencies

Pretesting can be seen as an added burden
Overarching Principles

- Adaptive/Flexible Design
- Mixed Methods
- Unconventional Approaches to Interviewer Recruitment and Training
- Data Collection Tailoring
# Questionnaire Design and Pretesting

**Overarching principles:** Adaptive/Flexible Design and Mixed Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urgency, Political Dynamics</td>
<td>Different culture/language, complexity, lack of time</td>
<td>- Translation and adaptation best practices</td>
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<td>- Use small, adaptive, sequential pretests (ex. Nepal)</td>
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<td>- Integration of qualitative methods (focus groups, in-depth interviews)</td>
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<td>Fluctuating events</td>
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<td>- Collect supplementary data on conflict events (ex. Nepal)</td>
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<td>- Adjust questionnaire, redefine terms</td>
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## Interviewer Recruitment

### Overarching principle: Unconventional approaches

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<tr>
<td>Violence and Insecurity, Political Dynamics</td>
<td>Limited human resources</td>
<td>- Seek interviewers who are willing to work in difficult conditions, with local knowledge, trust and access to communities, seen as impartial</td>
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<td>- Recruit interviewers with complementary professional backgrounds (ex. Medical field, social work, midwives in Afghanistan)</td>
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# Interviewer Training

**Overarching principle: Unconventional approaches**

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| Violence and Insecurity, Political Dynamics | Interviewers inexperienced, may struggle with objectivity | - Highlight difference between surveys and previous work  
- How to process their own exposure  
- Special training if interviewing specific victims of violence (ex. Sierra Leone) |
Data Collection (1)

Overarching principle: Data collection tailoring

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<td>Violence and Insecurity, Political Dynamics, Urgency, Emotional Stress, and Compromised Infrastructure</td>
<td>Insecure conditions</td>
<td>- Adjust fieldwork operations, structure (ex. Lebanon)</td>
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<td>Noncontact</td>
<td>- Ask neighbors or other community members about respondent’s whereabouts</td>
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<td>- Use GIS information to stratify based on mobility and sample within strata accordingly</td>
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</table>
## Overarching principle: Data collection tailoring

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<td>Violence and Insecurity, Political Dynamics, Urgency, Emotional Stress, and Compromised Infrastructure</td>
<td>Refusals due to concerns related to conflict</td>
<td>- Broadcast via neutral outlets (ex. Sierra Leone)</td>
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<td>- Be aware of likely concerns, train interviewers to address</td>
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<td>Lack of privacy in crowded households, shelters or camps</td>
<td>- Conduct multiple interviews or conversations simultaneously (ex. Afghanistan)</td>
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<td>- Use neutral private sites such as a clinic or NGO office with a private space for interviews (if feasible)</td>
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Ethical Considerations

• Risks to respondents
  ▪ Ensure data security and confidentiality; Limit personally identifying information; Avoid asking sensitive conflict-related information.

• Risks to interviewers and field staff
  ▪ May need to accept higher rates of nonresponse, item missing data; Limit follow-up.

• Sensitivity of releasing results
  ▪ Clearly address how and to whom findings will be disseminated and how they will be used.
Future Directions

Methodological Research

• Adaptive and mixed-method sample designs
  ▪ Guidance on how to implement in conflict settings; assessing the quality of supplementary data

• Interviewer training
  ▪ Effectiveness of unconventional training components
Future Directions

Practical Directions:

• Increase **transparency and documentation**

• Establish a **bank of tools** accessible for researchers to draw upon at the design stage of conflict area studies

• Create a **task force** of researchers and a team of people to maintain the bank of tools and provide guidance to researchers via an online forum, bulletin board, etc.
Thank you!

Queries or suggestions? -- Please contact
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