



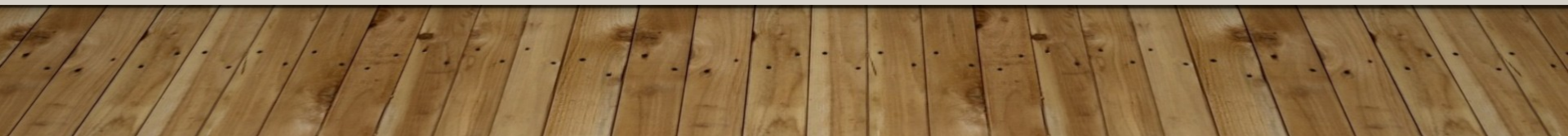
Faculty of Health Sciences

Conducting Research in Conflict Zones- Challenges and Barriers: An Experience from the Middle East

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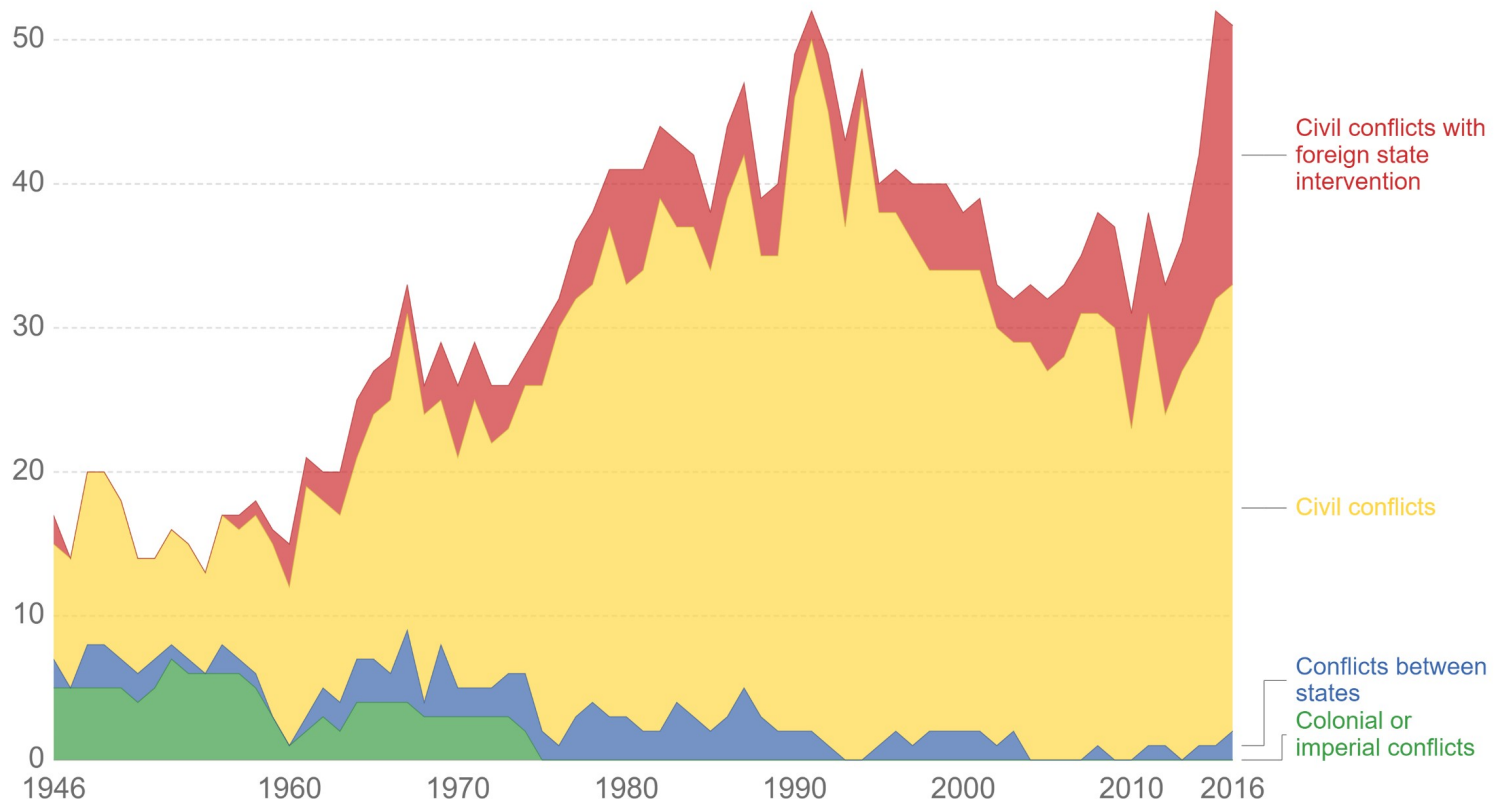
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Children in Armed Conflict
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State-based conflicts since 1946

Only conflicts in which at least one party was the government of a state are included. Ongoing conflicts are represented for every year in which they resulted in at least 25 battle-related deaths.



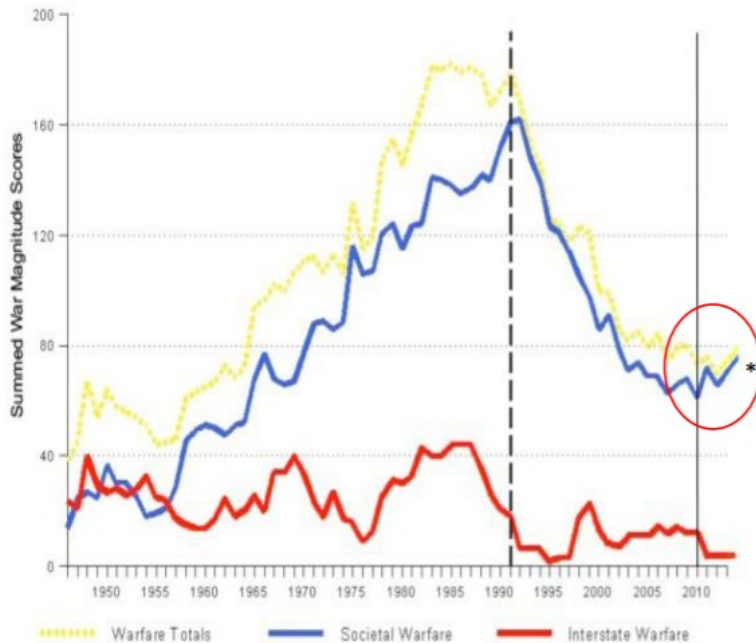
Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset

Note: The war categories paraphrase UCDP/PRIO's technical definitions of 'Extrasystemic', 'Internal', 'Internationalised internal' and 'Interstate' respectively.

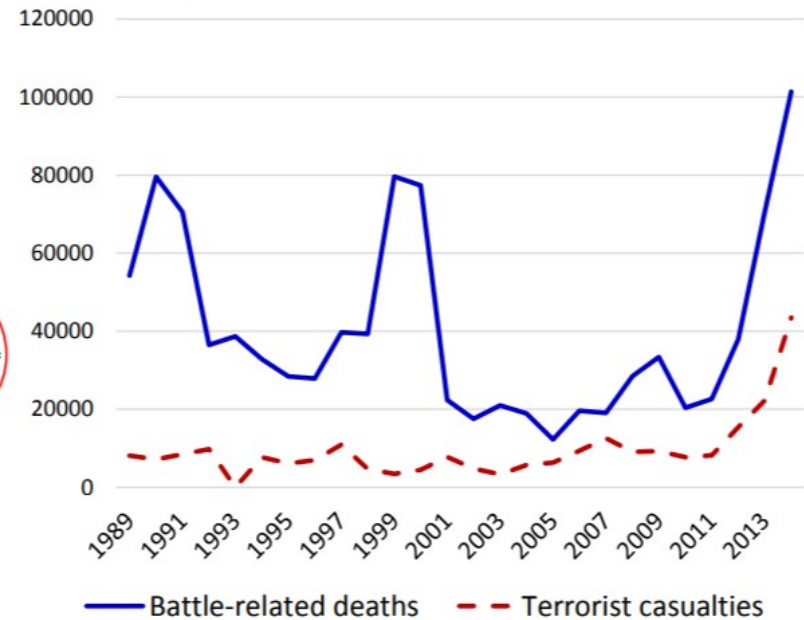
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In the 21st century, conflicts have increased sharply since 2010

Global trends in armed conflict, 1946-2014



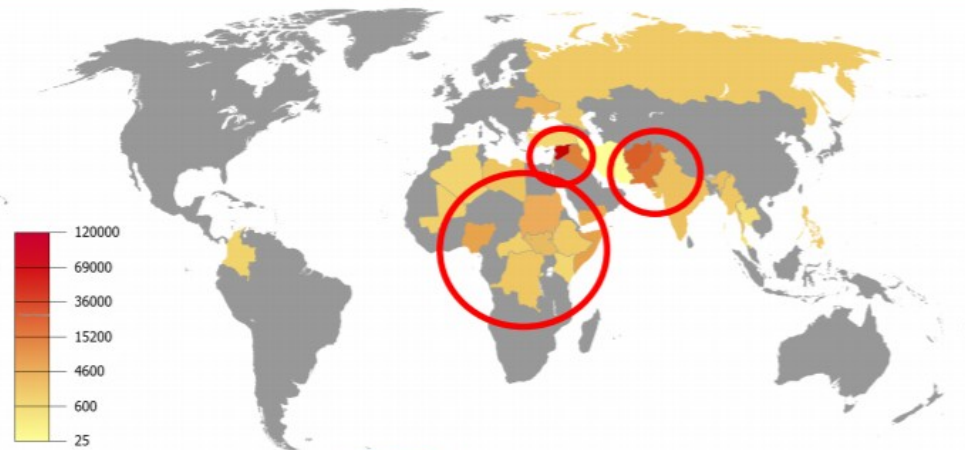
Source: Center for Systemic Peace 2014



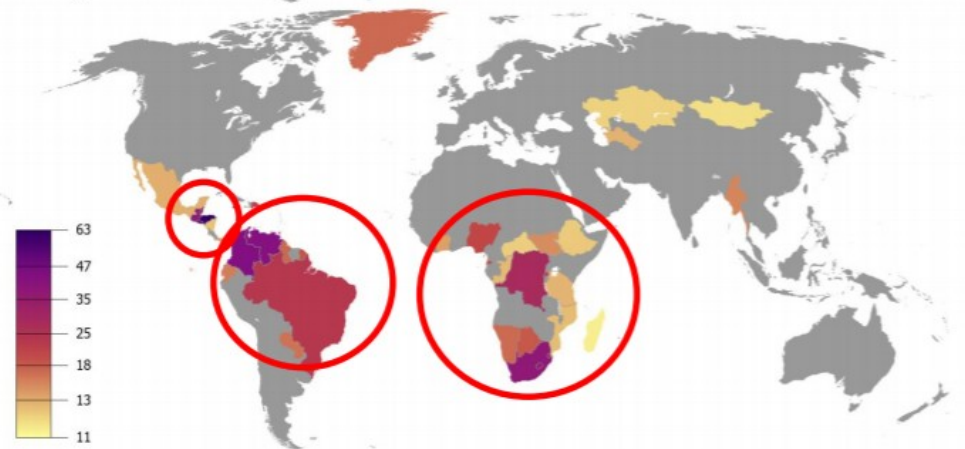
Source: Uppsala Conflict Database and Global Terrorism Database

- In 2015 the number of ongoing conflicts increased to 50 compared to 41 in 2014 (Institute of Economics and Peace)

Violence and conflict do not affect all regions the same way



Battle deaths over 300 from 2010-2014
Source: UCDP data



Homicide rate over 11 (per 100,000 people)
Source: UNODC 2014

Battle deaths are now largely concentrated in Middle East



Figure 4: Bubble map of battle deaths, 2014

Source: Gates et. al. "Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946-2014." (PRIO Conflict Trends, January 2016).

- Conducting research in conflict-affected contexts understanding
 - context,
 - conflict dynamics,
 - potential risks (including logistical challenges)
 - responses to these risks

“Foreign researchers are spies”

Int Arch Occup Environ Health (2005) 78: 547–558
DOI 10.1007/s00420-005-0625-7

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Mapping the health and environmental situation in informal zones in Aleppo, Syria: report from the Aleppo household survey

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Abstract *Objectives:* Despite large communities living in informal zones around major cities in Syria, there is currently no information on the health and environmental situations in these areas. From May to August 2004, the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies (SCTS) conducted the first household survey aiming to provide a baseline map of main health problems and exposures affecting these communities in Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria (2,500,000 inhabitants). *Methods:*

expected access to electricity, piped water, city sewage, and the use of propane for cooking. Particular areas of concern include high fertility rates, overcrowded housing conditions, and gender inequality in education and work. Household features likely to reflect negatively on residents' health include the use of diesel chimneys for heating and lack of smoking restrictions. Overall, residents of informal zones suffer from substantial physical and mental health problems and are exposed to high

Pre-conflict
time
·
Authoritarianis
m

“You can’t go in this settlement–those are under my wing– they do what I want them to do”

Power structures within refugee camps/settlement:
Evolve in refugee settings, particularly camps, where ‘community leaders’ are identified and often given formal roles by UNHCR and NGOs managing the camps– *Shawish* as an example

“How should I answer these questions to go to Germany?”

- Research participants are traumatized and vulnerable
- Desperate for services or eager to leave their temporary living conditions
- Researchers are often perceived as having power to effect change at both an individual and community level
- Confuse researchers with humanitarian workers
 - Refugees constantly approach researchers seeking assistance for themselves or their family, providing what is often compelling evidence of malpractice or neglect in the systems of protection that govern their lives

How to avoid “therapeutic misconceptions”

“How much you pay to participant?”

- Funds available to humanitarian organizations has risen significantly
- Increase in the amount of research projects conducted in conflict settings
- Increasing demand from funders that humanitarian organizations deliver evidence-based interventions
- (publications in conflict and crisis settings has increased 10-fold since 2002)
- Research business
- –

“Sandwich? You don’t give money?”

- There are disagreements among ethicists on what comprises an “appropriate” good to offer research participants. Debates often focus on the type, quantity, timing, and ethical appropriateness of such offers, particularly in settings where participants may be socio–economically vulnerable, such as refugees_

“We are not lab rats”

- Research fatigues– people are tired of being subjects to endless research without seeing any change in their misery life
- Overlapped
- Lack of coordination

“What does ‘informed consent’ mean in an isolated refugee camp with security problems and no proper interpreters?”

- Little understanding of what this might mean
 - People are so desperate for any form of assistance they would agree to anything just on the off-chance that it might be able to assist
 - Participants appeared to self-censor what would not please their gatekeeper
- (a study on IDPS showed that 85% of participants reported being satisfied with the provision of basic services, which did not conform neither to the literature, nor to the observations of field workers who reported many gaps in meeting the basic needs of IDPs *-(Yamout 2010)*)



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Unit name

“Do not harm”
.....*but do little good*

“opportunistic” research

North–South inequities in research
collaboration in humanitarian and conflict
contexts– *FHS/AUB*

To examine the proportion of authorship from the Syrian conflict setting and to understand the nature of between North–South collaboration,

The paper searched six academic databases for original and review journal articles published on the Syrian refugee crisis and health published between 2011 and 2018.

Findings:

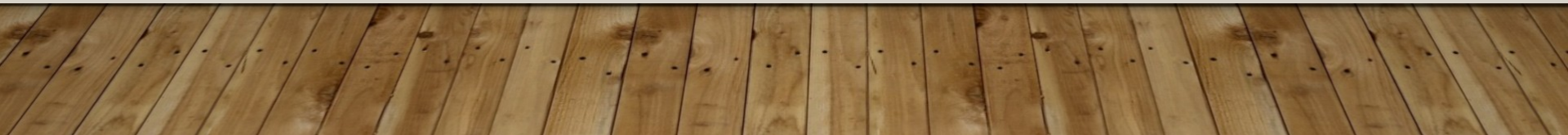
- 92% of the 410 papers published on this subject over this period showed no collaboration with authors affiliated with institutions located in Syria.
- Close to 55% of the authors were based in neighboring countries (Jordan 13%, Lebanon 16% and Turkey 28%)
- 50% were based in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe
- When first authorship was considered, the percentages of Syrian and regional academicians dropped even further (to 3%, 9%, 9%, and 23%, in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, respectively).

No research without action, no action without research

- The perspectives of people living through conflict
 - The power dynamics at play
 - The changes needed to make things better
 - When we speak to participants, we need to be clear about the purpose of our research and involve a range of people in the planning and design to ensure it is relevant and useful to them. Once the research is done, we need to get better at going back to research participants to let them know the outcomes

Practice-based research: what are the challenges and how can we address them?

There are many barriers to consider both for researchers and those participating in the research. From issues of access and security to difficult decisions of sample size and the ethical challenges of asking people to describe experiences that may be traumatic, personal or risky – there is no shortage of factors we need to take into account



Putting people and change at the heart of research

How do we balance the immediate needs of the populations affected by conflict with the often the long time required to do research and see the research results become “translated” into programs and policies that can serve the needs of these populations

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING MORE EQUITABLE AND LONG-TERM RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

- 1. Trust regional research capacity and contribution.
- 2. Recognize structural inequities and power imbalances
- 3. Build long-term sustainable research collaboration



THANK

YOU

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