

Addressing Violence by Recording the Casualties of Conflict: A Study of 40 Practitioners

Elizabeth Minor*

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on casualty recording: the attempted comprehensive, systematic and continuous documentation of individual conflict deaths or the incidents in which these occur, as a way of understanding and addressing conflict violence. The paper proposes that there is a broad field of casualty recording, made up of a connected range of different approaches to this kind of documentation, which can operate both during and post conflict for the benefit of conflict-affected communities. This range of approaches produces information that can serve a variety of purposes, from academic analysis and the development of evidence-based violence reduction policies, to supporting justice and accountability procedures. The information and analysis in this paper is drawn from a survey of 40 casualty recorders, mainly civil-society based, who Oxford Research Group (ORG) interviewed about their work in 2011.

KEYWORDS

Casualty recording, armed conflict, documentation, accountability, conflict analysis.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THIS PAPER¹

Oxford Research Group (ORG) is working to develop an improved understanding of the range of available practices for recording deaths from conflict (and armed violence more broadly), along with guidance for their implementation. This work is done towards the goal.

* Elizabeth Minor is the Research Officer of the Every Casualty programme at Oxford Research Group (ORG). She was the principal researcher on a two-year study by ORG to investigate practice in casualty recording worldwide. She was the lead author and editor of the collection 'Good Practice in Casualty Recording', and author of the policy paper 'Towards the Recording of Every Casualty', which were produced from this study. Elizabeth holds an MSc in Comparative Politics (Conflict Studies) from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She can be contacted by email at elizabeth.minor@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

1. This paper contains material and analysis previously published by ORG in Minor et al. (2012) and Minor (2012).

that every casualty of armed violence is recorded as an individual: ORG is committed to the principle that every death from armed violence should be properly recognised.²

Whilst other methods of estimating conflict deaths have been studied in depth,³ the 2011 survey of 40 (mainly civil society-based) casualty recorders that this paper draws from is the largest study of casualty recording practice ever carried out, to our knowledge.⁴ Many of those surveyed reported that they had no precedents or guidance for developing their methodology when they started their work, with some believing that they had been the first project to attempt to record casualties. One aim of study was that casualty recorders in the future would have a stronger basis for the development of their work, and a framework for considering the field of conflict casualty recording. This paper sets out the picture of this field that emerged from the survey. It gives a definition of casualty recording, describes the range of practice seen in the research, and sets out the reasons why casualty recording organisations did this work, by examining the principles that drove their activities and the uses that they reported their work was put to. This analysis examines casualty recording as a way of deepening understandings of conflict violence, and responding to it in a way that hopes to benefit conflict-affected populations either directly or indirectly.

The survey of 40 casualty recorders from which this paper draws consisted of an online questionnaire and an in-depth interview with each casualty recorder, asking a detailed series of questions about the organisation and their work to record casualties. The questions covered areas such as: the definitions used by recorders in their work; their sources and confirmation methods; the challenges they faced and the things that helped them; how they released the information they collected; their aims and audiences; and how their work was used.

The casualty recorders surveyed were almost all civil society organisations. They worked to document deaths from conflicts across the world, in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some worked in conflict zones.

2. For more information about ORG's work, and the Every Casualty campaign, see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac and www.everycasualty.org. ORG uses the definition of armed violence given by the OECD-DAC (2009) p.28, which states that armed violence is 'the use or threatened use of weapons to inflict injury, death, or psychosocial harm'. ORG's focus is on deaths resulting from the use of weapons, in any situation where these go unrecorded.

3. For a discussion of this type of work, see for example Spagat (2012).

4. All analysis and examples given in this paper are drawn directly from the work of the casualty recorders who took part in the survey. This does not mean that they agree with the conclusions we have drawn, for which ORG alone is responsible.

Some worked in conflict zones; some worked from outside them; and some worked towards a full accounting of the deaths from conflicts where violence has now ceased. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's definition of armed conflict was used to identify the casualty recorders that should be included in the study.⁵ ORG promised anonymity to all those that took part in the survey, especially as some faced considerable danger in their work, including hostility to their documentation activities from conflict parties. Therefore, specific details that could identify organisations, including the country in which they operated, have been removed from the analysis.⁶

1. A Definition of Casualty Recording

The survey looked at the recording of *deaths from armed conflict* only, though the term 'casualty' can also include people who are injured.⁷ Within these boundaries, casualty recording has the following fundamental characteristics:

(1) Incident or Individual Level Documentation

Casualty recording involves either:

- Documenting the deaths of individual people from conflict violence (e.g. listing individual victims and the circumstances of their deaths), or
- Documenting separate events or incidents in which deaths from conflict violence occurred (e.g. listing dates and places of separate incidents of violence and the numbers killed in each).

5. 'An armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.' (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2012)

6. For more information on how the study was conducted, please see the 'Appendix on Survey Methodology' of the collection Minor et al. (2012), which was the major output of the study. Along with this collection, ORG also produced a policy paper with recommendations aimed at a wider audience including states, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society (Minor 2012).

7. Most of those surveyed recorded injuries. Injuries are a major part of the overall burden of armed violence, and in some cases lead to death. It is good practice when recording deaths to follow up cases of injury.

Many casualty recorders will document both these kinds of information: the collective picture of all the deaths that occurred in a particular incident, and the details specific to individual deaths.

(2) Minimum Pieces of Information

In terms of the information collected, at a minimum casualty recording means documenting the following details about each incident of violence recorded:

- The date
- The location
- The number of people killed
- A description of the type of violence involved (which will generally relate to the weapons that were used, e.g. bomb, shooting etc.)

Collecting this information (along with the other characteristics of recording listed in this section) should be considered the basic standard in order for an activity to be considered as casualty recording. Many casualty recorders can, and do, consistently record more information than this. There is also a difference between the minimum details that a recorder requires to document a case, and details that they will record where these are available. At its most comprehensive, casualty recording means building a very detailed knowledge of victims (including both personal details and information about affiliations, such as combat status), perpetrators, and incidents for every case. A wide range of specific details will be systematically collected.

(3) Thorough, Consistent, Aiming to be as Comprehensive as Possible

Casualty recording means collecting and confirming information about deaths in a way that is thorough, and with a consistent methodology. It will mean keeping a record of the sources of information used for each case (though these will often remain confidential to protect the safety of individuals).

Recording will aim to give a picture that is as comprehensive as possible of the deaths from the type of violence that is being documented. Some casualty recorders may only record casualties in one particular area of a country in conflict, for example if it is dangerous for them to record in

areas where they are considered outsiders. Others may not cover the whole period of time of a conflict, for example because they did not start their work until some years into a conflict. Some may only record violence committed by one perpetrator or from one type of weapon. Others may only record civilian deaths, or concentrate on establishing and recording the fate of the missing or disappeared, or the identification of unknown victims.

Casualty recording aims not just to produce a snapshot of deaths from violence at any given point, nor does it mean documenting just some cases in order to illustrate a situation. The goal for casualty recorders is a record that is as thorough and complete as possible, given the constraints of the situation that they are working in. Recording will give a continuous, case-by-case record of deaths across the area and time period that a recorder is concerned with.

Casualty recording can be done either during or after a conflict. Some casualty recorders working after violence has ceased will have started their work during conflict. Post-conflict, these recorders will build on the information they have already collected, towards a more detailed and comprehensive record. Others working after conflict will be starting work that was not necessarily possible before, such as establishing the fate of missing or disappeared people. If casualty recording is being done during conflict, it will generally be done continuously as violence occurs. If a more comprehensive record is to be established, recorders will aim to continue until and likely after the conflict ends, if the information available during conflict is not complete. Casualty records produced during conflict may have different qualities to those produced after conflict, and will often have different uses. This is examined later on in this paper.

The numbers produced by casualty recorders about how many people were killed in a conflict (or how many were killed across different areas/periods of time, or how many civilians were killed) will be from a simple count of all the individuals, or deaths from incidents, that have been recorded. Therefore, casualty recording is different to approaches that calculate total numbers of deaths through statistical estimation

based on sampling.⁸ This is a different field that can have different uses and was not ORG's subject of study. Our interest was in approaches to incident or individual level documentation of deaths.

(4) Public Acknowledgment

A key component of casualty recording is that the information produced about incidents or individuals is made public in some way. If there is a threat to safety, releasing casualty information or certain aspects of that information should be delayed (though information might be confidentially shared by recorders for specific purposes that benefit conflict-affected populations). There may be other reasons to delay release, such as to inform families or ensure information is confirmed. However, an assumption of casualty recording is that the information produced is in the public interest (and especially important to the loved ones of those killed), important to the public good, or useful to release for other reasons.

2. The Range of Practice in Casualty Recording

The study found that casualty recording as defined above was attempted by civil society organisations even under very difficult circumstances, such as during intense conflict and in repressive and dangerous environments. There was a range of ways in which casualty recording was done depending on the conditions, and on the goals of the casualty recorder. Important contextual factors that influenced casualty recorders' methodologies included:

- The types of sources of information that they could use and the investigations that it was possible to do given the conditions;
- The intensity or stage of the conflict;
- Geography and infrastructure in the country of conflict, for access to information;
- The capacity and will of the state and different agencies to collect information of use to casualty recording;
- Whether those who have this information about casualties share it;

8. For a discussion of this type of work, see for example Spagat (2012)

- How much political space there is for recording, e.g. whether there are restrictions on information flows, repression or danger for recorders, and whether the rule of law has broken down (if it was strong to start with).

Achieving a comprehensive record of every casualty to a high standard of proof was not often possible immediately for recorders. However, based on the experience of those surveyed, the information that it is possible to collect at any given point in time can still be useful to various actors working in the interests of conflict-affected populations. The work of the casualty recorders surveyed also showed that if a more comprehensive record with all its potential benefits is to be achieved, whatever recording is possible should always be done, and followed up by more detailed investigations later. This section of this paper discusses and illustrates the range of practice in casualty recording, looking at the characteristics and work of the casualty recorders surveyed, and dividing these up into different types.

(1) Recording in Different Conditions: A Model of Five Approaches

Five main approaches to casualty recording were identified from the study. The sources and confirmation methods used by practitioners of these approaches, the circumstances under which they were used, and the uses of the information that they produced (according to respondents), are summarised here. The five approaches are:

1. Document-based recording
2. Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration
3. Recording using an on-the-ground network
4. Multiple source investigation
5. Unknown victim identification

1) Document-based recording

This is casualty recording that uses documentary evidence produced by others as its only source. Evidence might be from NGOs and other civil society organisations, media, social media, state records and inter-governmental organisations, and

accessed publicly or privately. Records are made through crosschecking and evaluating the reliability of different documents. The level of certainty given ultimately depends on the quality of documents available. Most using this model during conflict saw their results as an undercount or a baseline, due to the limitations of the sources available to them. For example, many official documents were not accessible or in the public domain; the coverage and quality of media and social media can vary in extent. However, such a baseline can still be useful for showing patterns in violence over space and time, in the experience of respondents.

This type of casualty recording can be done from both inside and outside the country of conflict, during and post conflict. Many of the documents used will be freely available online: Useful information can be collected whilst avoiding danger to recorders. Where the flow of information is restricted, or the media and the bureaucratic structures of the state give ineffective coverage, this approach will be less useful. Recorders using a document-based approach often did so because it gave maximum coverage on minimal resources.

Casualty recorders using this approach during conflict generally produced records continuously, some in close to real-time (within 24hrs hours of an incident). The majority of documents used were produced in close to real-time (e.g. media reports). Records were therefore used for risk assessment, informing humanitarian response planning, analysis of trends in conflict, and assessing and developing violence reduction policies. Document-based casualty information was used by courts as contextualising material, and to assess the need to investigate possible crimes. It was also used by media organisations. For those using this model in post-conflict situations, the range of documents available was greater, for example with more official records becoming available. A more comprehensive record of casualties was achievable, and these recorders contributed to official counts of the dead.

2) **Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration**

This is casualty recording that mainly uses documentary sources as above, but which gathers some extra information or corroboration from on-the-ground sources or investigators.

Recorders using this approach had field workers or on-the-ground contacts who gave them occasional original information, e.g. on unknown cases in inaccessible areas, and/or an occasional extra layer of checking or verification especially on ambiguous or hard to confirm cases. The coverage given by this model primarily depends on the extent of documentary sources but can give increased coverage or better confirmation of certain cases, depending on the extent or depth of the on-the-ground corroboration available. Added on-the-ground corroboration can be useful in circumstances where, for example, media access is restricted to certain areas but a recorder's contacts can reach information sources.

Like the document-only model, most recorders using this approach during conflict recorded continuously, some in close to real-time. Records were used for informing humanitarian response planning and community early warning, trend analysis, and monitoring and evaluating the actions of conflict parties and the effectiveness of policies to reduce violence. Governments also used the information produced by some using this model to inform their policies. It was also used by media organisations.

3) **Recording using an on-the-ground network**

This is recording that relies on a network of on-the-ground sources or investigators as its main source of information. This information may be checked against or added to by documentary sources.

A network could consist of civil society organisations (religious, NGO) in close contact with witnesses, families and other sources. Or, it could be built from individual paid workers or volunteers recording in their own areas. Some recorders relied on

the workers of various organisations communicating the information about deaths that they routinely collected in the course of their primary work. Information received from on-the-ground sources was corroborated or reconfirmed by the recorder. The extent of coverage this approach gives depends on the reach of the network. Some were very comprehensive, some only operated in certain areas.

Many using this model worked in contexts that were extremely repressive and dangerous for anyone known to be attempting to document casualties. This model can have advantages in such an environment: It can operate with a low profile, and provides a way of documenting casualties if other information flows are restricted, unreliable or do not give good coverage (e.g. media is limited, NGO activity is restricted, official documents are inaccessible). Recorders using this model were based both in and outside the country of conflict. Being based outside the country had advantages for data security. However, deep local connections and high levels of trust are always needed to construct a network and collect information.

Recorders using this approach may be able to produce and share information in close to real time. This depends on the structure of the recorder's communications with the network, which may be slowed in some dangerous environments. Records produced by this approach were used by humanitarian organisations for their assessment of the conflict situation, in legal processes and for compensation, by recorders to make submissions to international courts and Special Rapporteurs in UN system, and by media organisations.

4) Multiple source investigation

This is recording that uses a very wide range of sources with consistent on-the-ground investigation of cases. The aim is a comprehensive and highly detailed record.

All possible documentary and other information are collected in this approach. Collecting information from family members and

eyewitnesses is prioritised. This approach aims to establish a wide range of detailed facts about every casualty to a high standard of proof. Evaluation and corroboration of multiple sources and original investigations are the confirmation procedures. This type of recording prioritises accuracy over speed, and will often have longer-term goals.

Most of those interviewed who were operating this model were working post-conflict, though many started collating information during conflict using other models as listed above. This provided a starting point for more in-depth work. This approach benefits from the availability and accessibility of a wide range of official and other documentary sources. In less heavily documented contexts, those operating this model might rely on having a high profile as an organisation to reach all those with information. One recorder using this approach operated in a country where the state was hostile to such documentation. Some of their work had to be clandestine. Others suffered threats and intimidation from state and other parties. However, all recorders using this approach engaged their governments on the results of their casualty recording, and achieved some kind of response or dialogue. Some political space for recording may be necessary for this model to operate.

Recorders using this model during conflict may release information on casualties as they record it. However, given the depth of investigation involved, this will likely be in terms of weeks after an incident rather than days or hours. Information generated by this approach was used for memorialisation, to contribute evidence on individual cases or regarding patterns of harm to domestic and international courts, to make submissions to processes in the UN system, and by governments to allocate war benefits.

5) Unknown victim identification

This type of recording is separated from the other approaches by the use of forensic techniques to confirm the identities of the dead. The record of the dead created will be made up of these identified

victims only: those who were missing, or buried in mass or clandestine graves. As part of the process of investigation leading to the identification of unknown victims, recorders operating this model will investigate various sources. They will work with eyewitnesses and family members to collect ante-mortem data, and with communities to investigate where and how incidents happened and where graves are. They will establish comprehensive lists of the missing and their characteristics. Confirmation of cases is through the identification of unknown victims by forensic techniques including DNA identification. Their remains are then returned to their loved ones. These recorders will also generate detailed evidence on causes of death.

All those using this model of recording were operating post-conflict (though one operated in a situation of widespread organised criminal violence). An official request or permission from the state was needed by recorders using this approach to carry out certain key functions, such as undertaking exhumations. The work could not be done in a way that these recorders would consider ethical or legal without this cooperation. This approach therefore depends directly on some agreement from state bodies in order to function. Despite such agreements, recorders using this model often reported hostility or obstruction to their work from states, and from other actors unhappy with the threat that recorders' work posed to them.

The core goal of this model is to end families' uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. These recorders invariably contributed their records to legal processes. Their work also contributed to truth and reconciliation commissions, and to memorialisation.

THE QUALITY OF DATA PRODUCED BY CASUALTY RECORDING

Though the levels of detail and certainty provided by the different models set out above vary, it should be clear from the discussion that achieving a lower level of certainty does not mean either that this documentation work cannot be done or that it will serve no function as a response to violence. The study found that

civil society-based casualty recorders produced data that was of a sufficient quality to be useful to other actors irrespective of the range of sources available or the environment that they worked in.

Different types of sources will vary in quality between and within different contexts. For example, the media may extensively report on casualties in one country but have poor access in another; some publications will often be more reliable than others; and publications that are unreliable when reporting on certain areas may report well on others. There are no global rules or requirements for the sources that should always be used in order for recording to be valid. However, there will always be at least some information available, whether through social media, local networks, or official agencies, which, given robust evaluation, can be used to create continuous casualty records. At a minimum, these records can contribute to a greater understanding and analysis of complex situations of conflict, for example by communities, researchers, humanitarian actors, and policy-makers.

THE STATE: A KEY ACTOR IN CASUALTY RECORDING

The capacity and actions of the state in the country of conflict are key influences on the work of casualty recorders, the range of sources and the coverage and depth of information they can generate, and the methodologies that they use.

States participating in conflict will often have access to information that few or no other organisations will. For example, armed forces are sometimes the only witnesses to events. If a comprehensive and robust record of casualties is to be achieved, information from all parts of the state, from local to central institutions, is needed. Data shared across borders is also necessary where conflicts were or became international.

Some casualty recorders across the range of approaches experienced positive information-sharing relationships with the central governments of the country of conflict. Where these positive relationships existed, recorders noted a connection to the exercise of the rule of law. In some cases the governments concerned were interested in developing progressive policies for violence reduction. The sharing of information by states with recorders was seen to be possible where the public interest of recording was accepted.

Most of the casualty recorders surveyed reported secrecy from states, a lack of recording, statements about casualties that the recorders considered propagandistic rather than objective, or having no way of finding out if the government was recording or not. The general observation in these contexts was that the state did not consider the release of data in its interest. These concerns were present even in states which considered themselves open and democratic: there were fears that soldiers might be discouraged from military action, that compensation cases would be generated, or that the state's image would be harmed in other ways. There were also concerns regarding data protection and laws on the release of archives, which are necessary to address. States are not impartial observers to conflict in many circumstances, and will sometimes have a conflict of interests between the possible benefits of releasing and the benefits of withholding or distorting casualty information.⁹

Access to information and the ability to freely go about their work are key challenges for casualty recorders, and the actions and attitudes of states can greatly influence both.

(2) Recording as a Connected Range of Approaches

The study found that the range of approaches in the field of casualty recording is connected. This means that:

- There are different ways to record casualties that are possible under different circumstances, including at different points during or after a conflict;
- These will give different levels of certainty or confirmation;
- They will also give different levels of detail about victims and the circumstances of their deaths;
- All these different types of recording have their uses, which will often be needed at different points in time;
- And, work done at different stages of conflict or through different methods can provide a starting point for or feed into other more detailed types of investigations, which may be done later.

9. For a discussion of the potential advantages to militaries, in certain circumstances, of recording every casualty, see Dardagan et al. (2010)

Further to separate approaches having their own uses, as well as providing a starting point for further investigations, collecting and recording all available evidence at any given time will help prevent information loss. Witnesses or documents may become unavailable, or memories become vague, if documentation is not started as soon as possible. If a robust and comprehensive record is to be achieved, it is also important that casualty recording should continue for as long as necessary. Especially in the case of the identification of unknown victims and the search for the missing, the work of recording can continue for many years. More exact information on victims, perpetrators and the circumstances of deaths can take decades to emerge into the public domain. However long it takes to discover, this information will still be important to families, communities and legal processes as a way to address violence. Other actors with different capacities or expertise, or working at a different point in time, may create the more comprehensive record building on earlier work.

The principle of the interconnection and value of different types of recording was seen in the work of the casualty recorders surveyed. For example, most of those using a 'Multiple source investigation' approach after conflict made efforts to collect what information they could whilst violence was going on. This was done in order to make sure information was not lost; to give a starting point for more in-depth research or confirmation; and in some cases as part of work to raise awareness of the situation and bring about action at the time. Other recorders using a 'Document-based recording' or 'Document-based recording with on-the-ground corroboration' approach expressed the idea that their work could provide a baseline or starting point for others to build up a more comprehensive record. Alternatively, they stated their intention to expand their work in the future to make this more detailed record themselves.

Casualty recording should therefore be seen as a spectrum of approaches that can be and are often linked, including across the time period of a conflict.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF CONFIRMATION OR CERTAINTY IN RECORDING

As seen in the model of five approaches set out above, within the range of approaches to recording there are different degrees of certainty about casualty information that can be achieved. This should not be considered as a simple distinction between records of deaths that are 'verified' and those that are not: There is a scale of confirmation or certainty.

Whether a recorder has robust procedures to weigh up different sources and crosscheck information is the first crucial factor in the level of certainty that their records should be considered to give. More certainty is given by records based on corroborated information and the systematic evaluation of contradictions between different sources, grounded in good knowledge of the context. Seven key elements of good practice that contribute to robust and effective recording that emerged from the study, which might serve as basic indicators of good recording, are that a casualty recorder's work:

- Is, and is seen to be, impartial and reliable,
- Has clear, transparent definitions and inclusion criteria,
- Has a transparent methodology with robust, multiple-stage checking procedures,
- Is connected to local communities,
- Uses multiple sources,
- Publishes disaggregated incident/individual level information,
- Is open to correction, or the addition of new information.

Figure 1 illustrates the multiple-stage procedure that many of the casualty recorders surveyed used, in order to produce the best quality of data from the sources available and reduce human error:

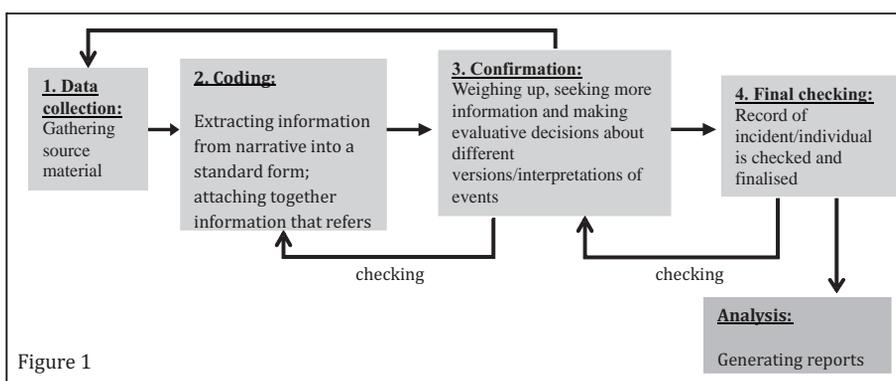


Figure 1

The amount of certainty provided by different casualty records will depend to a great extent on the source material that a casualty recorder had access to. In terms of the certainty of information given by a source, there are two important factors:

- The level of detail given and the closeness to events of the source; and
- The standard of proof that the authors of the source required in order to produce the documents or statements that are then used by a recorder.

When similarly robust evaluation procedures are applied, a record of the death of an individual that is based on a death certificate (in a context where these can be considered trustworthy), the testimony of eyewitnesses and family members, and the judgment of a court, gives more certainty than a record of an incident that is based on the independent reports of two news agencies stating that three individuals died in a certain place on a certain date, for example.

This does not mean that records offering less certainty will not be useful or should be considered 'unconfirmed'. The highest standard of proof is not needed for every purpose aimed at alleviating violence that casualty recording can contribute to. For example: continuous open-source document-based recording during conflict that contributes to humanitarian response planning by giving indications of conflict dynamics does not need the same level of certainty that records contributing expert testimony to legal cases do. The former can also be produced in close to real time, which is necessary for the purpose of response planning, whereas the latter cannot.

A DIAGRAM TO DEMONSTRATE THE RANGE OF CASUALTY RECORDING

The explanation below builds up, step by step, a diagram (Figure 2) that illustrates the range of casualty recording practice and how it is connected. The discussion describes the variables in the range, then different scenarios in recording, and how these can link up. The complete diagram illustrates the idea described above that there are different types of casualty recording possible under different circumstances, all of which can be valuable and can contribute to each other in a connected range of practice.

The diagram simplifies the field of recording, but does reflect real approaches and interconnections. It shows known uses of casualty recording from the work of those surveyed for this study. The explanation below

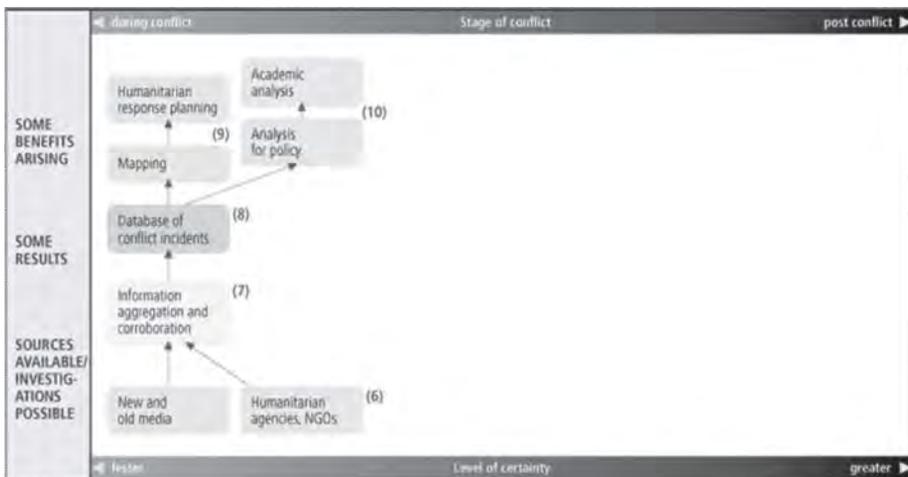
should be read by numbered step with reference to the numbered areas on the illustrations.

Figure 2A The variables in the spectrum:



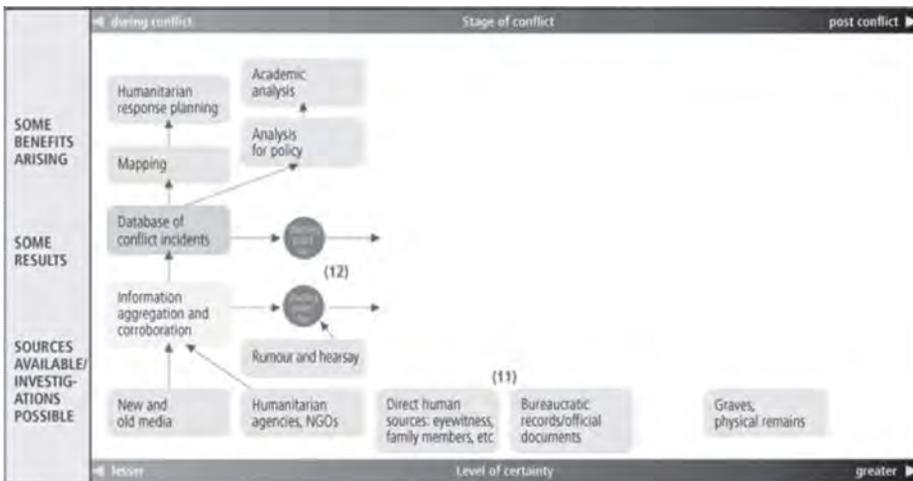
- At different stages during and after conflict(1), different types of recording, which offer different levels of certainty, will be possible(2).
- What is possible will depend on the context, including the types and quality of sources available and types of investigations that recorders are able to do(3).
- These will produce different types of results (4),and so different uses or benefits (5).

Figure 2B A scenario during conflict:



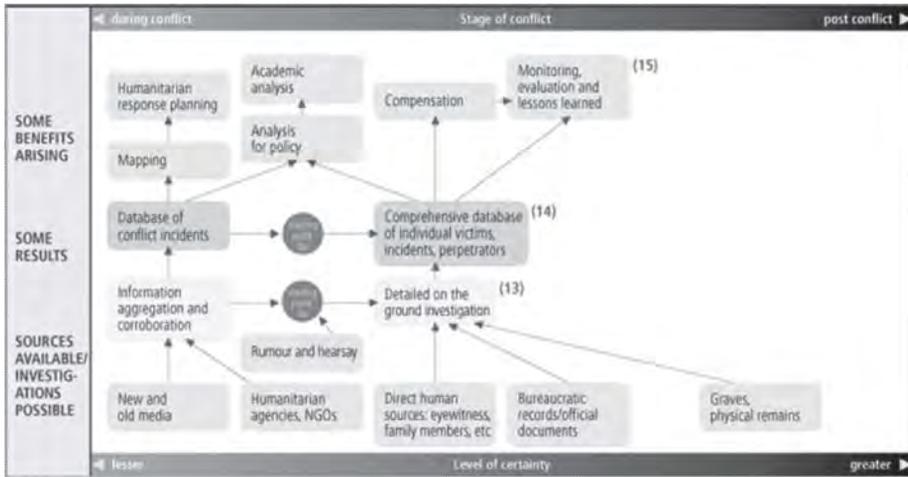
- During intense periods of conflict, a certain range of sources only might be available (6).
- A casualty recorder may not be able to independently investigate the information given by these sources, but can aggregate and corroborate (7) to produce a database of conflict incidents (8).
- Combined for example with mapping technology, such information can be useful to humanitarian response planners and conflict-affected communities for risk and needs assessments (9).
- The database could also provide analysis that is useful for formulating policies to reduce violence, examining the limitations of current policies, and for researchers (10).

Figure 2C When the context changes:



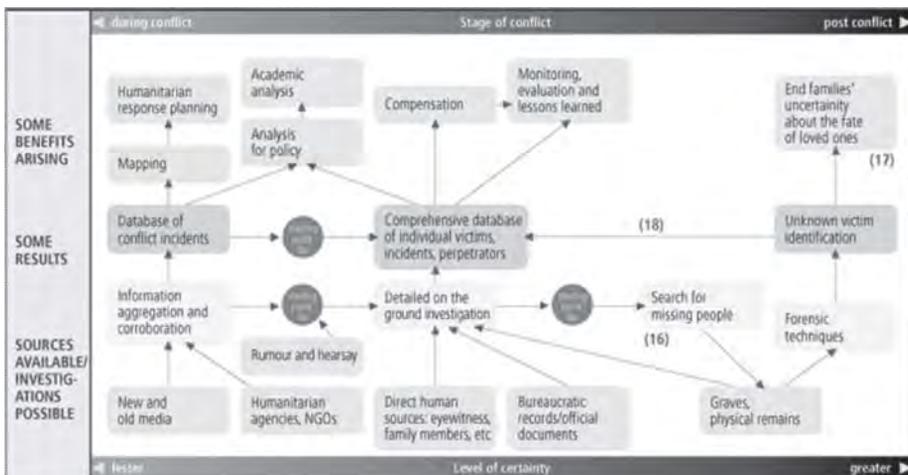
- With a change in the context (for example violence has decreased or stopped) different sources and investigative possibilities will become available (11).
- Work that has already been done, to corroborate information and create a database of conflict incidents, can provide a baseline or starting point for new investigations. For example, this database can provide indications about where further investigations should be directed, and gives records that can be built on and added to (12).

Figure 2D More detailed investigation:



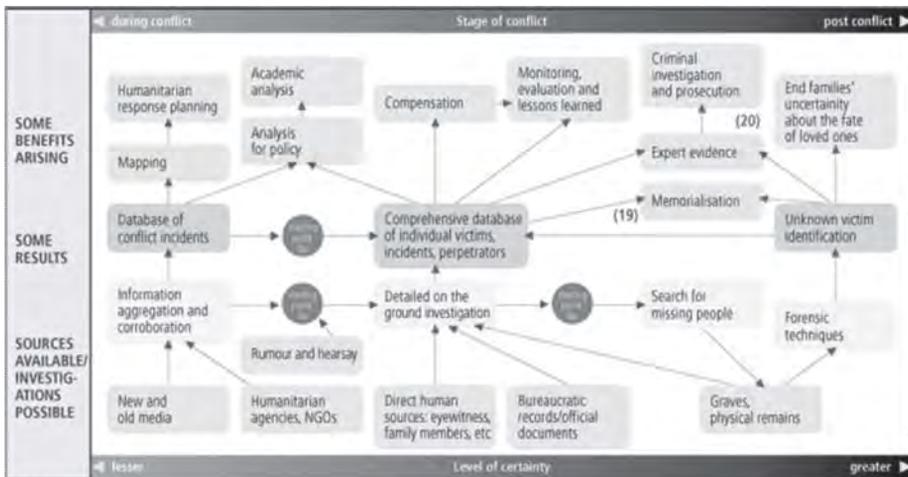
- New investigations may be detailed, on the ground investigations, which use new sources, or seek more detailed information from existing sources, to build a more detailed and certain picture of the human losses from a conflict(13).
- The result of such investigations could be a more comprehensive, detailed database about conflict casualties, building on an existing database of conflict incidents (14).
- This can contribute to more detailed academic and policy analysis. It can also contribute to procedures requiring a greater standard of proof or level of detail, such as assigning compensation, or the evaluation of the conduct of participants to conflict (15).

Figure 2E The search for missing people:



- Post-conflict, previous investigation can assist work to search for and determine the fate of missing people, investigate graves and correctly identify unknown victims(16).
- This work is needed to end families' uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones, and to return their relatives remains to them (17).
- The identification of unknown victims also contributes back to a more comprehensive picture of the human losses from conflicts, which are not limited to the missing(18).

Figure 2F Completing the diagram: memorialisation and legal processes:



- Information from a comprehensive and detailed database of victims or from unknown victim identifications can contribute to memorialisation (19).
- Such information can also form the basis for expert evidence that contributes to investigations and prosecutions for crimes committed during conflict. Casualty records will not provide legal analysis, but they will provide information either on individual cases or on patterns of harm that can be used by others to make legal determinations. The level of detail given and standard of proof achieved by these records will be important for legal purposes(20).

3. Why Casualty Recording?

This section examines why casualty recorders pursue this work and looks in more detail at what its uses can be. This discussion may also give readers some insight into what benefits or uses recording might have that complement other ways of estimating numbers of conflict deaths.

in more detail at what its uses can be. This discussion may also give readers some insight into what benefits or uses recording might have that complement other ways of estimating numbers of conflict deaths.

All the casualty recorders that ORG interviewed aimed to provide information about conflict deaths that was missing from the public record: Recorders saw a need for important documentation that was not being fulfilled. One common objective in generating this new information was to counteract misinformation or ignorance about casualties. Additionally, a shared belief running through the motivations of all the casualty recorders interviewed was that collecting and sharing this accurate knowledge about human losses from conflict can achieve positive change, either in national or international policy, or for victims or communities.

Casualty recorders expressed both practical and moral reasons why they documented deaths from conflict. Together, these form a general rationale of the importance of casualty recording from various perspectives, and correspond to the uses of their work that casualty recorders reported. The main reported reasons to record were:

- To generate data and analysis that could be used for evidence-based policymaking or on the ground action such as early warning or humanitarian response;
- To build and raise awareness of an accurate picture of deaths from conflict, through which changes in discourse, perceptions and policy can occur, and so violence can be reduced or its recurrence prevented;
- For the value of an accurate record to political transition, transitional justice and future conflict prevention;
- Because of the need or right to know about human losses from conflict for societies, communities and families, and the value of transparency when it comes to the consequences of conflict;
- To dignify, recognise and memorialise victims and their families' losses, and give victim communities a voice: some recorders reported the validation that witnesses and families experienced from telling their story to the recorder, and having it re-told by them;
- To inform the creation of a historical record that a post-conflict society can use to address the past, and for young people and future generations to have access to a historical record centred on the victims of conflict;
- For the contribution recording can make to accountability, justice and

upholding human rights: Recording can reveal possible abuses through the comprehensive picture of harm it gives, as well as fulfilling families' right to know the fate of their loved ones.

These reasons to record are about generating important and useful knowledge, the prevention of future harm, and redress for past harm. Several of the casualty recorders interviewed reported that they did this work because of what they saw as the absence of adequate state initiatives to record, despite the clear importance of knowing about conflict deaths from the moral, legal and practical perspectives listed above.

A recorder's motives can determine the methodology or approach they use. For example, recorders focused on analysing trends for policymaking, and so who were not as concerned with victims' identities, may use approaches based on relatively limited but easy to access documentary evidence to record incidents. These methods can generate the information needed in close to real-time without the need for perhaps more expensive modes of investigation. However, the methodology or approach used by a recorder and the limits of the information they produced did not necessarily restrict the broadness of principles behind their work. For example, some recorders that generated mainly incident-based information saw recording as important to the recognition and memorialisation of individual victims, though their work could not give a full contribution to this goal in its present form.

To understand why casualty recorders document the dead, it is important to consider whom their intended audiences were. Recorders had various intended audiences for their work, as seen in the reasons to record. These audiences could be within the country of conflict, international, or in the other countries participating in the conflict. This depended on the conflict dynamics, and the relationship of the recorder to the country of conflict. Some recorders were documenting casualties in their own country, some monitoring the actions of their government abroad, others operating on universal principles such as a concern for human rights worldwide. Ultimately, casualty recording was reported to be important and relevant to many different fields, principles, and groups.

(1) The Reported Uses of Casualty Recording

Casualty recorders did not just aim to uphold important principles. The records they produced were also reported to benefit a number of different objectives, through the detailed case-by-case information they gave. Those surveyed reported that their work was used for the following purposes, within their own organisations and by others:

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE OR PLANNING

Casualty records, when produced in close to real time, can make a useful contribution to the on-going assessment of a conflict environment by humanitarian responders. Some recorders working during conflict reported that the information they collected was used:

- By local communities for their own early warning activities: Recording gave them knowledge about conflict events in their area;
- By UN agencies, international NGOs and others for their assessment of the conflict situation, and to inform response planning through the indications given about areas of danger and need;
- To contribute directly to the monitoring of civilian protection in conflict by UN agencies.

Some of these recorders used mapping software to display their casualty data in a way that was dynamic and relevant to those seeking 'what, where, when'¹⁰ information about conflict incidents. Visualising casualty data dynamically on maps was reported by several recorders to be an important way to bring their work to various audiences.

POLICY AND TREND ANALYSIS

The results of casualty recording can be used for policy evaluation and the systematic analysis of conflicts. Governments and international agencies, media organisations and NGOs, and researchers in universities and think tanks used the casualty data produced by the recorders surveyed.

Recorders frequently analysed patterns and trends in deaths from conflict, to evaluate the impact of the strategies that governments were taking, or to monitor and evaluate policies that were designed to reduce violence or deaths. A small number of recorders reported a positive relationship with governments, to whom they made policy recommendations and who used their casualty data for assessments of the conflict situation.

Recorders also reported that their data were used by international organisations such as the WHO, UNDP, World Bank and EU for research and assessment of conflict dynamics. One recorder also contributed information to the UN Monitoring

10. Casualty recorders across the field used mapping software to display geo-located information, using either custom-built platforms, visualisations developed from Google Earth or tools such as Ushahidi.

and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict, which collects information on grave violations of children's rights, including killings, for action by the UN Security Council.

OFFICIAL PURPOSES OF THE STATE

Casualty recording by non-governmental groups in some cases contributed to official records or counts of the dead. Sometimes a casualty recorder's work contributed to specific official purposes, for example the allocation of war benefits by the state to the families of people who died.

LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE

Casualty recorders working both during and after conflict reported that their work contributed to criminal investigations and prosecutions. Domestic, regional and international courts used information about casualties produced by recorders. By implication, casualty recording can be used to help monitor compliance with the law by parties to conflict.

Recorders have contributed information to courts about individuals and about patterns of harm or victimisation in conflict. Detailed casualty recording gives information that is relevant to prosecutions on victims, perpetrators, and incidents, including forensic analysis in some cases. Casualty recording can help show how violence affects particular communities, or give information that can contribute to an assessment of whether the use of force was proportionate in particular incidents. Recording does not provide a legal analysis, but a body of evidence. The casualty recorders we surveyed contributed information or expert analysis to prosecutions or investigations either on request or on their own initiative.

Casualty recorders that did less detailed recording, or produced records with a lower standard of proof, also reported that their work was useful to courts. This was either to give contextual information to prosecutions about the nature of the conflict, or to indicate where investigation might be directed.

Some casualty recorders undertook legal casework within their organisation, for which they used the information they documented about casualties. Apart from criminal accountability for legal violations, information about casualties and incidents documented by recorders was also used to seek compensation for victims' families.

Recorders also reported submitting the information they collected to Special Rapporteurs in the UN system. The information produced by some was also used by Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (or similar processes).

THE RIGHTS OF FAMILIES AND MEMORIALISATION

Detailed casualty recording can contribute to ending families' uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones. For casualty recorders who worked on the identification of unknown victims this was the core purpose of their work, and realised by every case that they resolved.

Other recorders sought as one of their objectives to generate a comprehensive record of human losses that would give victims and families recognition. The work of non-state casualty recorders has contributed to official memorials. Casualty recorders themselves have also created their own memorials, in the forms of books or online portals, to give a dignified memory to those who have died in conflict.

Just as casualty recording contributes to the activities described above, the results of many of these processes can also feed back into stronger casualty records. Information produced or collected by humanitarian actors can include details about casualties; court decisions can give the most robust confirmation of certain details; truth and reconciliation processes can give a baseline for casualty recorders to work from. Casualty recording and these other processes can be mutually reinforcing.

CONCLUSION

This paper has given an overview of the practice of casualty recording, as shown by a survey of 40 casualty recorders who were mainly civil society organisations. The field is broad but interconnected, containing approaches that can build on each other towards a record of the casualties of conflict that is as comprehensive as possible. Casualty recording can have a variety of functions towards the greater understanding of and alleviation of violence, according to the stage of conflict and the approach that is being used to produce information. It is a field that contains practitioners dedicated to moral, practical and legal goals that are seen as ultimately serving the interests of conflict-affected populations. The field of recording deserves further study from both academic and practitioner points of view, in order to constructively scrutinise its methodologies and understand its potential

contribution better. Developments in practice, including the development of globally applicable standards, are also necessary to make the field more robust, and ORG will be working with practitioners and others to develop these.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank all the reviewers of the research study from which this paper is drawn, both internal and external to Oxford Research Group, who offered useful comments and support. Acknowledgment is also essential for the 40 casualty recorders who gave their time to participate in the study, for the rich and valuable information they provided about their work. Oxford Research Group would like to thank participants at the conference 'Recording Every Casualty' in September 2011 for the inspiration their discussions gave to the section on 'Minimum Pieces of Information' in the definition of casualty recording. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland and the United States Institute of Peace funded the research study. The Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and zivik (part of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (IFA) of Germany) also fund the Every Casualty programme.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dardagan, Hamit, John Sloboda and Richard Iron. 2010. 'In Everyone's Interest: Recording All The Dead, Not Just Our Own', *British Army Review*, 149. Also available at 'www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/reports/everyones_interest_recording_all_dead_not_just_our_own or bit.ly/PEdAl4 (Accessed 14th January 2013)

Minor, Elizabeth, John Sloboda and Hamit Dardagan. 2012. 'Good Practice in Conflict Casualty Recording : Testimony, Detailed Analysis and Recommendations From a Study of 40 Casualty Recorders', Oxford Research Group www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing-papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection (Accessed 14th January 2013)

Minor, Elizabeth. 2012. 'Towards the Recording of Every Casualty', Oxford Research Group www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/recording_practice_policy_paper (Accessed 14th January 2013)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development–Development Assistance Committee (DAC). 2009. 'Conflict and Fragility: Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development'. www.poa-iss.org/kit/2009_OECD-DAC_Guidelines.pdf (Accessed 16th September 2012)

Spagat, Michael. 2012. 'Estimating the Human Costs of War: The Sample Survey Approach', in Seybolt, T., Aronson, J., & Fischhoff, B. (eds.), *Counting civilian casualties: An introduction to recording and estimating non-military deaths in conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also available at www.socsci.uci.edu/~mrgarfin/OUP/papers/Spagat.pdf (Accessed 16th September 2012)

Uppsala Conflict Data Program. 2012. Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research, www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/ (Accessed 16th September 2012)