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GOOD PRACTICE IN CONFLICT CASUALTY RECORDING TESTIMONY, DETAILED ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A STUDY OF 40 CASUALTY RECORDERS

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Fieldwork interviews to document human losses in Croatia. (© Igor Roginek/Documenta)

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We welcome feedback and comments on our work. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact Elizabeth Minor, Research Officer at Oxford Research Group elizabeth.minor@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this collection is to help current and future casualty recorders reflect on and develop their work. It also aims to help others interested in recording practice better understand the field. The collection is the outcome of a two-year research project that Oxford Research Group (ORG) began in 2010 to provide a detailed overview of how work to document deaths from armed conflict was being carried out around the world. The issues investigated included what kinds of casualty recording are possible under different circumstances, what the challenges to casualty recording are, and how these challenges could be dealt with. Forty casualty recorders were surveyed for the research. The survey consisted of an online questionnaire and an in-depth interview with each recorder, asking a detailed series of questions about the organisation and their casualty-recording work. For a detailed description of how the study was conducted, see the 'Appendix on Survey Methodology'.

The two major objectives of the project were:

- To build up a knowledge base on practice in casualty recording, that could help current and future casualty recorders with their work
- To gain solid information about the range of casualty recording work, which could be shared with a broader audience including policymakers.

For casualty recorders, the research aims to:

- Provide current practitioners with a reflection of their field, which might help recorders to strengthen their own work further
- Assist discussions on possible standards for the field, and how different practices connect
- Give systematic guidance on the issues to consider when starting or developing a casualty recording project

These aims are being pursued further through the on-going activities of the International Practitioner Network of casualty recording organisations (IPN), convened by ORG. More information on the IPN can be obtained from programme websites² or by contacting Hana Salama, the Networks Officer at ORG who coordinates the IPN hana.salama@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

The five papers making up this collection, which can be read separately or together, are primarily aimed at current or future casualty recording practitioners. The collection may also be of interest to researchers and others who are interested in the practice of casualty recording. The papers are written and structured to be useful as possible to recorders: the intention is that those with different concerns or working under different circumstances can easily access the discussions and topics that are most interesting or useful to them.

The papers in this collection have provided the essential material for a simultaneously published policy paper entitled 'Toward the Recording of Every Casualty: Analysis and Policy Recommendations From a Study of 40 Casualty Recorders'. This paper, which summarises the findings of the research for a broader audience and makes policy recommendations, can be found here:

http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/recording_practice_policy_paper.

The contents of the papers in this collection are as follows:

1. An Overview of the Field

- This paper introduces and defines key concepts in this study
- Based on the 40 recorders interviewed, the paper discusses the range of ways that casualty recording is done in different contexts worldwide. This gives a framework for the more detailed discussions of the following papers on specific common issues in practice
- The paper identifies 5 approaches to casualty recording and explains the circumstances under which they were used. It also describes how the range of practice is connected to constitute a coherent field
- The paper also discusses key issues to consider when developing a casualty recording system

² <http://www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn> or http://oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac/international_practitioner_network

2. Definition and Categorisation

- This paper examines the importance of the definitions and categorisations that casualty recorders use to describe victims and conflict incidents
- It examines two key issues in definition and categorisation – inclusion criteria and status categories (such as civilian/combatant)
- Through this discussion the paper looks at general principles of importance to recorders in this area of practice, including the varied relationship of recorders to international law

3. The Range of Sources in Casualty Recording

- This paper explores the different sources of information that are used by casualty recorders, what they are most useful for, and the circumstances under which recorders are able to use them
- It also describes how recorders access these sources. The paper discusses the relationships recorders established in order to obtain information, and the procedures they used to engage ethically and safely with individual informants

4. Evaluating Sources

- This paper examines the processes and rules that recorders used to confirm information about casualties
- It also draws out the general principles that recorders found important in the evaluation and confirmation of information from sources

5. Why We Record Conflict Casualties: Practitioners Discuss Their Motivations and the Dissemination and Uses of Their Work

- This paper serves as a guide to the best reasons for undertaking and supporting conflict casualty recording, as perceived by those who have put beliefs into action by carrying it out themselves, and have witnessed the value and usefulness of their work to the wider public.
- Principally in the recorder's own words and based entirely on their lived experience, the paper provides insight into:
 - The motivations that prompt recorders to carry out this usually difficult and occasionally dangerous work;
 - The means by which they disseminate their information and maximise its positive effects;
 - The nature and extent of its uses and observed benefits, particularly in conflict-afflicted societies.

The final paper in this collection is an 'Appendix on Survey Methodology', which describes in detail how the study was carried out including the confidentiality procedures used. These procedures mean that there are no references to organisations or the countries in which they work in these reports. We promised full anonymity to all survey participants due to the dangerous environments in which some operated. Any details that could identify casualty recorders, including the country that they worked in, have therefore been removed from the examples and quotes from recorders given in this collection.

This collection will be updated in the future to include further themes of importance to recording practice, using the data collected in this research project and from our other work with casualty recording practitioners. If you would like to be contacted when further papers are published, please email Elizabeth Minor elizabeth.minor@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk

GENERAL GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Armed conflict – ORG uses the definition of armed conflict of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, which states: “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 (UCDP), (Date of retrieval 16 September 2012), www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/, Uppsala University Department of Peace and Conflict Research)

Casualty – for the purpose of this collection the term ‘casualty’ refers to deaths as a result of conflict violence. The term casualty can also refer to those injured in conflict; however this study focused on deaths. Where the term ‘victim’ is used, this will refer to individuals killed (as opposed to their families or wider community, unless the term ‘victim community’ is used).

Casualty recorder – an organisation, individual or group of individuals that do casualty recording. Casualty recorders may also be referred to as ‘casualty recording projects’

Casualty recording – for the sake of this collection, the systematic, continuous documentation of incident or individual level information about deaths from conflict in a way that aims to be comprehensive and, when safe, public (for a full definition see the paper ‘An Overview of the Field’³ in this collection).

Country/countries of conflict – the country/countries containing the conflicts that the recorder was recording the casualties of.

Information system – the tools a casualty recorder uses to process and store the information they collect. This could be a sophisticated custom built database, a series of spreadsheets and other documents, or paper-based records

Pieces of information – the units of data that a casualty recorder collects about each individual death or conflict incident, e.g. name, date, location, weapons, combat status, etc. These pieces of information might be recorded for each case in an information system through standardised categorisations (e.g. combat status could be either ‘civilian’ or ‘combatant’) or with narrative (e.g. name).

³ For other papers in this collection, see www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/briefing_papers_and_reports/casualty_recording_practice_collection

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About the Authors

Elizabeth Minor, Research Officer of the Every Casualty programme at Oxford Research Group, was the principal researcher on the two-year research project (2010-12) from which this collection was produced. The project was directed by Hamit Dardagan and John Sloboda (Co-Directors of the Every Casualty programme at Oxford Research Group) in collaboration with Michael Spagat (Royal Holloway University of London) and Madelyn Hsiao-Rei Hicks (Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London).

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Design

The look of the 'range of casualty recording' and 'country x' diagrams in the paper 'An Overview of the Field' are by Tutaev Design.

A Note on Pictures

Some of the pictures we have used in this collection to illustrate casualty recording are from our partners, including members of the International Practitioner Network (IPN). This does not mean that these organisations or the IPN necessarily endorse this collection, whose content remains entirely the responsibility of ORG. It also does not mean that the organisations who provided pictures participated in the research.

All quotes in this collection are from the survey interviews, used with participants' consent.

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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Directorate of Political Affairs DP
Human Security Division:
Peace, Human Rights, Humanitarian Policy, Migration



ABOUT OXFORD RESEARCH GROUP

Oxford Research Group (ORG) is a leading independent think-tank, non-governmental organisation and registered charity, based in London. ORG has been influential for thirty years in promoting the idea of sustainable approaches to global security as an alternative to violent confrontation, through original research, wide-ranging dialogue, and practical policy recommendations.

ORG is committed to the principle that every life lost to armed violence should be properly recognised. For this to become possible, every casualty of armed violence, throughout the world, must be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. In support of this goal, the Every Casualty programme at ORG (www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac) works to develop an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation. This work has included extensive research into existing casualty recording practice, research which is contributing towards the identification and development of standards and good practice that can be implemented by a range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, states, and intergovernmental organisations alike.

In addition to carrying out research, ORG facilitates an International Practitioner Network of casualty-recording organisations (www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn) and is at the forefront of integrating policy goals into existing policy frameworks at the national and international level.

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