

Briefing Paper

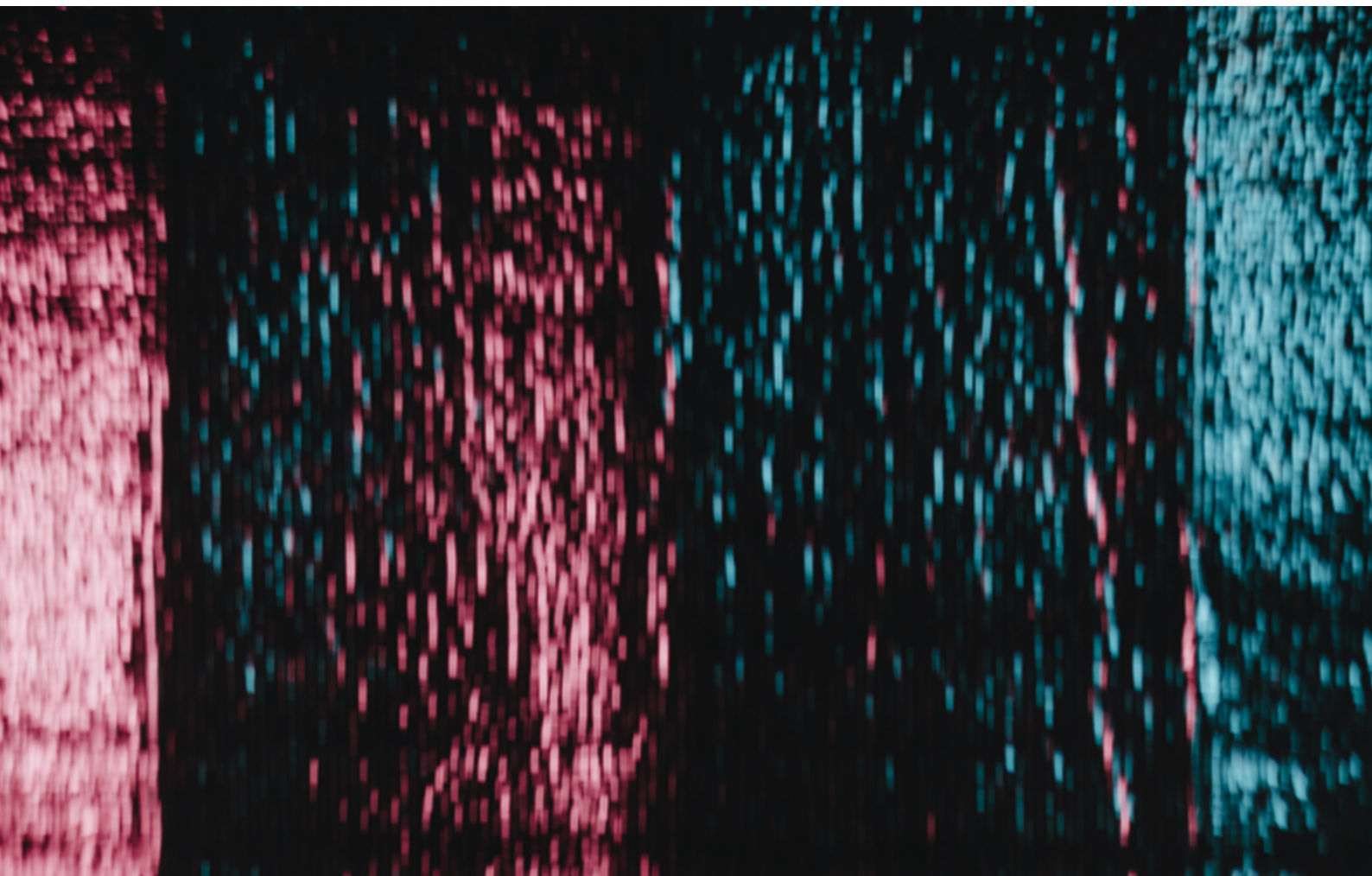
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GENDER COUNTS

Assessing Global Armed Violence Datasets for Gender Relevance

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Overview

Datasets on small arms and armed violence can be key to understanding and responding to the gendered aspects of lethal violence. A wealth of global, regional, and national datasets documenting violent deaths, unplanned explosions at munitions sites (UEMS), firearm holdings, and transparency in the arms trade have the potential to highlight relevant gendered dynamics. But the sex and gender components of these datasets are not well understood. The present study, which is designed to assess this knowledge gap, is conducted in the context of states' recent commitments to enhancing the collection and sharing of data on a number of indicators related to small arms and development—commitments that, if implemented, would allow policymakers and practitioners to better assess and address the gendered aspects of lethal violence.

Key findings

- The gender relevance of most violent deaths datasets is currently low. A majority of countries have only recently started to provide sex-disaggregated homicide data, while the numbers of female fatalities in ongoing armed conflicts are almost completely unknown.
- Increased awareness of the urbanization of conflicts and their impacts on civilians has brought new developments in data collection methods, including work to support measuring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Femicide, which is a specific form of gender-based violence (GBV), is currently the focus of a number of monitoring and advocacy initiatives that are likely to generate relevant data for analysis and policymaking.
- Global multilateral forums increasingly reflect political support for and commitment to better data collection and dissemination for a range of related lethal violence, small arms, and gender indicators. This includes donor-supported initiatives for strengthening relevant capacity.
- Civil society and academia play important roles in collecting and analysing data. Ultimately, both official and independently generated data will be needed to produce more holistic and detailed pictures of the gendered impacts of lethal violence.

Introduction

The collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data on violent deaths is essential for understanding and responding to many kinds of armed violence. Lethal violence, including firearm violence, is highly gendered, with the majority of both victims and perpetrators being male, and with most of the female victims being killed as a result of GBV committed by men. Addressing GBV—that is, violence that is motivated or directed at victims because of their gender—requires data on male and female victimization. Intimate partner violence (IPV)—a widespread form of GBV that occurs across societies worldwide—occurs in both conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected contexts and, in aggregate, has mostly female victims (Mc Evoy and Hideg, 2017, pp. 71–74). Further, as more nuanced understandings of gender become mainstreamed in societies and encompass, for example, new categories (trans, intersex, and non-binary), our assessment of the uses of violence in relation to these gender identities needs to keep up with such developments. The question arises, for example, as to whether trans, intersex, and non-binary persons are more susceptible to suffering lethal violence than others. Sound data will be necessary to answer these and other related questions.

In societies where data on violent deaths (and even non-fatal injuries) is available in sex-disaggregated form, relevant baseline data has contributed to policy responses that address gendered aspects of gun violence, including intimate partner homicides. One prominent example is a set of legal prohibitions on firearm possession and ownership by people (overwhelmingly men) convicted of violence against an intimate partner (overwhelmingly women). Examples of these laws enacted in Australia and the United States¹ show that they are associated with a reduction in intimate partner homicides.²

The benefits of developing and analysing datasets containing sex- and age-disaggregated data include gaining a much more refined and nuanced understanding of violence directed at youths and adults of all genders. Further, because men are by far the major perpetrators of violence against both women and other men, we cannot advance our understanding of how personal and societal perceptions of masculinity relate to violence without rich sources of relevant data being available for analysis. Better data that includes sexual orientation and gender identity information would also allow for more sophisticated research,

for example on (lethal) violence faced by persons who do not conform to mainstream gender norms and expectations.

Within the international small arms control framework, knowledge of the gendered aspects of small arms and armed violence, although relatively modest, is improving. Within the framework of discussions around the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms (PoA),³ for example, experts highlighted the need for more detailed data to assess and address the adverse impacts of illicit small arms on gender equality and called for the development of more capacity for the collection of gender-relevant data to strengthen small arms-related policies and programmes (McDonald, 2018, p. 13). This call resulted in the inclusion in the PoA Third Review Conference (RevCon3) outcome document of an explicit recommendation for the collection of ‘disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons’ (UNGA, 2018, Annex, II.B.2, para. 79).⁴ States’ PoA reports, however, indicate that national authorities generally fail to provide sex-disaggregated data (UN Women, n.d.). For example, only 50 per cent of states account for gender in their small arms control processes; of these countries, only 18.8 per cent reported having female members of national small arms commissions, while less than 10 per cent reported to have collected disaggregated data on gender and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (Renois, 2018). Clearly, there can be no gender-relevant data on lethal violence if little or no data of any kind is collected in the first place.

At the global level, the weak gender relevance of lethal violence data is to some degree structural. Global estimates are produced by aggregating data available at the national level and filling any gaps with extrapolations. But if the building blocks for the analysis lack gender relevance, the globally constructed aggregate can make only tenuous claims to such relevance.

The most robust gender-relevant data is often generated not by the routine gathering of national statistical data, but by carrying out independent, donor-supported surveys. In many countries national household surveys of this kind have generated rich gender-relevant data that policymakers can use to craft and fine-tune a wide range of policies.⁵ But these surveys remain the exception rather than the rule, and are most frequently subject to donors’ willingness to provide resources.

This Briefing Paper attempts to provide a more nuanced assessment of the gender relevance of data that contributes

to our understanding of the scale and scope of global violent deaths, including deaths due to small arms, as well as other small arms-related data. It then reflects on improvements that could be made to enhance the relevance of existing datasets for addressing different types of gender-based violence.⁶

Assessing global violent deaths data

Corresponding to the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030),⁷ data on violence has an important role to play in identifying priorities, monitoring progress, and developing support for evolving norms for violence reduction worldwide. In general, the first step for assessing rates and numbers of violent deaths is the main databases developed for this purpose and which are designed to support measuring progress on the SDGs. The Small Arms Survey’s Global Violent Deaths (GVD) database is the most comprehensive database dealing with violent deaths, and includes a wide range of official data supplemented by estimates of violent deaths in both conflict and non-conflict settings (Small Arms Survey, n.d.b). The GVD database seeks to provide a reliable bird’s-eye view of the global trends in lethal violence by covering direct conflict fatalities,⁸ homicides,⁹ and other violent deaths.¹⁰ The database is not a result of primary data collection, but instead brings together in a single structure the best and most current publicly accessible data on these phenomena. Updated on an annual basis, it has been operational since 2004 and currently collects and analyses data from 223 countries and territories, thus enabling the assessment of global and regional trends.

GVD data aims to achieve the highest standards of disaggregation, but depends on the availability of input data. The database currently contains data disaggregated by sex of victim, by lethal instrument, and by sex of victim and lethal instrument combined.¹¹ This allows some broad global assessments to be made of male and female violent deaths and victimization by firearms, as well as trends over time. For example, an average of 16 per cent of violent deaths in 2017 were of women and girls. This is an important snapshot, but the data available for analysis has some important limitations, since much of it is based on estimates rather than hard data. As of 2018, the GVD database identified only 52 countries and territories (of the 223 covered) that provide any direct sex-disaggregated

homicide statistics (that is, not model-based estimations) for any year between 1990 and 2017.

The discussion below provides an overview of existing data gaps¹² and identifies some challenges and opportunities for developing more reliable sex-disaggregated estimates of global violent deaths.

Gender and homicide statistics

The current reality: sex, not gender

Homicide statistics recorded by criminal justice systems are based on administrative records collected by state or municipal authorities about reported and recorded crimes. These statistics are generated in each country and territory of the world, except for those where government structures have broken down, frequently due to an ongoing or recent severe armed conflict.

When homicide data is generated (generally at or around the time of police discovering the body and after an initial assessment of a possible violent cause of death by forensic services), information about the gender identity of the victims may not be clear, but biological sex is more likely to be identified. The sex of the victim is a mandatory data point and universally recorded for all homicide victims (with rare exceptions), based on biological sex markers, through either visual inspection or laboratory tests (that is, checking the victim’s DNA). Even in cases when, for example, an intersex homicide victim can be identified by inspection of the body or crime scene, it is generally not recorded in any default field of the report card, but is recorded in data on the circumstances of the crime. This is a limitation of current statistical approaches to homicide (and, more generally, violent death) victims.¹³

This does not mean, however, that this data is being captured, recorded, and further analysed or disseminated, even in countries with relatively good systems for recording crime statistics. In fact, the sharing and dissemination of homicide data still remains a serious problem in many countries. Any gaps in national intentional homicide data generate bias, which is multiplied when producing estimates at the regional and global levels. Therefore, the accurate recording and sharing of data at the national level is the most important challenge for producing global estimates, especially when it comes to sex-disaggregated data for emerging understandings of GBV.

Sex disaggregation in GVD data

The GVD database combines data from a multitude of national and international sources to map (victims of) violent deaths in 223 countries and territories. It mitigates as much as possible the reporting gaps and inconsistencies of the various criminal justice, public health, and other sources at the national level by bringing together all reputable sources of information in this domain. While this exercise results in a reasonably high coverage and reliable estimate of global violent deaths data for the past two decades or so, the availability of sex-disaggregated data is very scarce. Criminal justice sources in particular, which represent the bulk of the sources used to compile the database,¹⁴ include police reports and court documents that often lack detailed disaggregation by sex and/or age, and frequently focus more on perpetrators than victims.¹⁵

The source data for the most recently published version of the GVD database offers sex-disaggregated lethal violence estimates for almost all (221 out of 223) countries and territories. Nevertheless, sex-disaggregated data sourced from criminal justice system reports was available only for approximately 10 per cent of the total data points in the period 2004–17.¹⁶ When producing the sex-disaggregated estimates of lethal violence victims, the database has therefore relied on data provided by international public health institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO)¹⁷ and the Global Burden of Disease dataset of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.¹⁸ Public health data includes mortality estimates that may often be based on very few ‘hard’ statistics.¹⁹ Using these resources, 64 per cent of all possible data points had values, enabling a global estimate of the number of female victims of intentional homicides.

The 2019 UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Global Study on Homicide (GSH), which was based on enhanced data collection and the application of better data disaggregation in many countries that share data with the UN, brings important improvements in this regard (UNODC, 2019a; see Box 1). This resulted in a higher number of countries where sex-disaggregated statistics became available, which will also be reflected in the next edition of the GVD database. Nevertheless, national providers of criminal justice statistics must be further encouraged and incentivized to provide sex-disaggregated statistics on criminality, including violent crimes. This is specifically called for in Agenda 2030,²⁰ which mandates the collection of indicators of

Box 1 The UNODC database and sex-disaggregated data on homicide

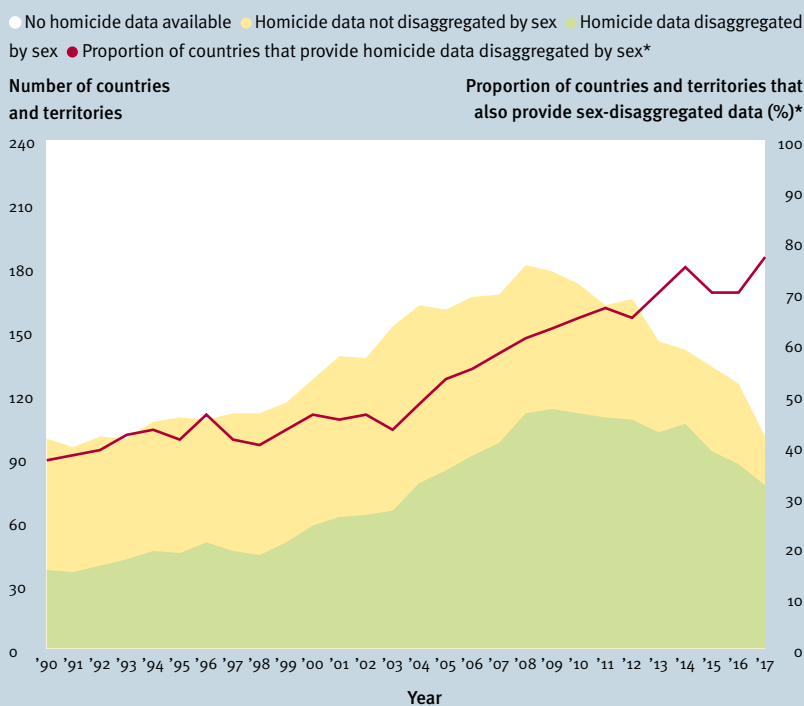
A primary resource for those wishing to compile criminal justice-based international homicide statistics is the UNODC Homicide Statistics dataset of the GSH (UNODC, 2019b). The GSH dataset is updated annually based on the UN Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS), through which states exchange information based on their official (mostly administrative) data. The UN-CTS typically collect police-recorded data on intentional homicides. This data collection process attempts to record the total number of homicide victims, as well as the relevant disaggregation of homicide victims by sex and age, by killing mechanism (firearms, sharp objects, and others), and by perpetrator/context of the crime (family/intimate partner, organized crime, gang, robbery, other, unknown context).

An investigation of this dataset highlights some of the gaps that still exist in our global awareness of the nature and extent of homicides, both in aggregate and by sex of the victims (see Figure 1).

The GSH dataset has at least one homicide data point in each year from 1990 to 2017 for 205 of the 240 countries and territories it covers.²¹ This represents 85 per cent of the world’s countries and territories and more than 95 per cent of the global population. But the closer a year is to the present, the fewer data points are available due to a significant time lag in homicide data dissemination. In the period 2015–17 the number of countries where data is available drops to 142 (or 60 per cent of the countries and territories covered), but in 2017 it was 100 countries (42 per cent). The most complete year for the GSH dataset is 2007, while 2008 is the most complete year for sex-disaggregated data on intentional homicides.

Sex disaggregation has been made increasingly available in national data provided to the UN-CTS over the years. Throughout the 1990s some 30–40 per cent of countries that provided homicide statistics to the UN also disseminated sex-disaggregated data. By 2019 this proportion reached and even surpassed 70 per cent of the countries submitting UN-CTS data in any given year. Despite the fact that 77 per cent of the countries that provided data for 2017 included sex-disaggregated data, globally such data is only available from a minority of countries (77, or 32 per cent of all countries) for a reference year that is already two years prior to the publication date of the database. Nonetheless, this example shows that efforts by the international community have indeed boosted the availability of crucial sex-disaggregated data at the national level, which allows a better (although incomplete) understanding of the gendered nature of the phenomenon of intentional homicide.

Figure 1 Data gaps in criminal justice-sourced homicide statistics in general, and in sex-disaggregated data, 1990–2017



Note: * Among countries that provide homicide data.

Source: Author elaboration based on UNODC (2019b)

“Attempts to provide sex-disaggregated data highlight some of the statistical issues affecting the media-sourced accumulation of records of events.”

lethal²² and non-lethal violence²³ that are disaggregated by both sex and other important criteria (such as age, socio-economic status, citizenship, etc.).

Disaggregated data on the number or proportion of male and female victims by mechanism of killing is key for understanding, preventing, and controlling the gendered dynamics of armed violence. While there is consensus that the presence of firearms aggravates the consequences of any physical conflict or altercation, no reliable gendered statistical information on this issue has appeared. Although some local databases included statistics on the number of male and female victims killed by firearms, countries where such disaggregation has been available (for any year) have been rare exceptions. The subset of countries where national statistics indicated the mechanism of killings either specifically for female victims or in the form of male/female disaggregation has been limited to about a dozen,²⁴ too few to justify applying similar estimates to larger regions or globally.

The 2019 GSH (UNODC, 2019a) includes enhanced sex-disaggregated data (at least one data point between 2003 and 2017) on victims of violence by mechanism (firearms, sharp objects, other) for 105 countries. The increased availability of UNODC data disaggregated

by sex *and* instrument will allow for the inclusion of this additional variable in future updates of the GVD database. Data on this variable will also include any relevant information from countries and territories affected by conflict (although data of this kind also remains extremely sparse; see below). This will represent a major step towards the provision of better regional and global estimates of the gendered impacts of armed violence.

Gender gaps in data on conflict-related fatalities

The GVD database attempts to estimate the sex ratio of direct conflict deaths using resources from conflicts where data was available on the sex of the deceased, either for civilians only (in these cases the estimation considers all non-civilian combatant deaths as male²⁵) or for all fatalities. This is only possible through civil society reporting systems such as the Iraq Body Count project (now discontinued using the original methodology) or the Syrian Network for Human Rights,²⁶ or through the data collection efforts of international field missions, such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; the UN Support Mission in Libya; and the UN Office for the Coordi-

nation of Humanitarian Affairs in Israel/Palestine, which tracks conflict deaths.²⁷ While the GVD database includes conflict fatalities from about 40 countries, sex-disaggregated data is only available in the five locations mentioned above, and the female victimization rate is estimated on the basis of this limited data.

The methodologies of platforms that attempt to systematically record conflict deaths, such as those mentioned above, are typically well standardized and can provide reliable sex disaggregation of the fatality counts, at least for the observed populations (meaning for civilians, generally) and the observed fatalities. Although these organizations strive to record each fatality in the conflicts that they focus on, a certain level of undercount is inevitable, which could be different for men and women. Data on direct conflict deaths is generated based on reports of fatalities in the mainstream local, national, or international media. This is the typical approach of international data collectors, and of social networks in the case of national NGOs that track conflict casualties. These networks can be physical or virtual, and can also include first-person accounts of relevant events. The method of producing event-based statistics is therefore reliant on the reports or observations that can be identified and collected about each incident. These reports and observations are rarely standardized, especially those that appear in media reports.²⁸ This approach generally allows for a large number of individual incidents (“events”) to be identified and fatality/casualty counts to be attributed. Several organizations use this approach to develop estimates of global conflict-related deaths, either in aggregate—such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project—or for specific types of incidents, such as the Global Terrorism Database, which tracks terrorism-

Table 1 Sex disaggregation among casualties of explosive devices in the five most widespread conflicts, 2011–18

Country	Total No. of incidents	No. of incidents with female casualties recorded	Proportion of incidents with female casualties recorded	No. of female casualties*	No. of civilian casualties*	Proportion of female casualties*	Total No. of civilian casualties (all incidents)	Proportion of female casualties (all incidents)
Syria	5,650	1,147	20%	2,621	18,264	14%	69,600	4%
Iraq	4,401	208	5%	494	3,765	13%	57,094	1%
Afghanistan	3,070	308	10%	953	4,510	21%	21,949	4%
Pakistan	2,374	314	13%	830	4,860	17%	20,630	4%
Yemen	1,239	148	12%	460	2,288	20%	15,185	3%

Note: * Among incidents with female casualties recorded.

Source: Day (2019) and author elaboration based on this source

attributed deaths, or the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) Explosive Violence Monitoring Project, which primarily tracks deaths caused by explosives.²⁹

With the exception of some data on violence caused by explosives published by AOAV, there is no systematic recording of the number of male and female victims of conflict, even if such information is sometimes available in the media reports that these organizations use as sources. While most conflict fatalities are male, the progressive urbanization of conflicts means that more knowledge of their gendered impacts on civilians is urgently needed. Media reporters and editors, however, do not systematically address the sex and gender dimensions (or are unaware of these dimensions or do not consider them to be relevant, especially if all the victims of a specific incident are—‘as expected’—men and boys). On occasion, when the sex of casualties is mentioned, it is often unambiguous. For example, a report may refer to an attack that resulted in 20 civilian casualties, ‘including women and children’.³⁰ Unfortunately, this kind of vagueness does not allow for an assessment of the age and sex breakdown of the victims.

As a result, reporting and gender biases and other limitations make information on victims’ sex and gender in data on conflict deaths highly unreliable.

Attempts to provide sex-disaggregated data highlight some of the statistical issues affecting the media-sourced accumulation of records of events. AOAV’s results (see Table 1) suggest that the availability of information on the sex of victims in this type of data collection mechanism may mainly depend on the human factor and sources’ ability or capacity to disaggregate the numbers of casualties of attacks using explosives. These statistics show that only 1 per cent of casualties caused by explosives in Iraq are *documented* as being female, as opposed to about 3–4 per cent in the other four conflicts referred to above, which can equally be true, or merely an unverifiable statistic generated by the different reporting practices used by the organizations covering these conflicts.

Over time, attention to female victims of conflict has increased; thus it is anticipated that the general availability of sex-disaggregated information in reports of fatalities may be increasing (that is, the probability of victims’ sex being men-

tioned in reports of incidents where there were non-male victims). But due to the previously mentioned lack of standardization in reporting, it is impossible to verify this assumption. Ongoing work on the development of SDG Indicator 16.1.2, led by the OHCHR, may ultimately result in improved and standardized reporting.³¹ While no data has yet been collected (or at least disseminated) using the emerging OHCHR fatality recording template, this initiative could institute a true revolution in conflict casualty tracking by providing adequate contextual information on and the characteristics of victims of violence. If it were properly implemented it would facilitate remarkable new types of analyses based on victims’ sex. It remains extremely difficult to statistically disaggregate female and male victims of conflict violence in a reliable way, which is a major limitation that the statistical analysis of conflict fatalities currently faces. As has become apparent from the preceding discussion, overcoming this limitation is fundamental to the issue of the accurate gender disaggregation of victims of violence. Without the controlled standardization of ways of reporting incidents, these reliability problems will persist.

Box 2 Disaggregation by sex of UEMS casualties

The Small Arms Survey’s Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites (UEMS) dataset provides publicly available information on deaths and non-fatal injuries due to explosions at munitions sites across the world by collecting reports of these events from various sources and coding them in detail (Small Arms Survey, 2019). Because it is largely based on media reports, the UEMS dataset has suffered some of the same challenges as datasets of conflict fatalities in terms of the disaggregation of victims by sex. But increased awareness of the impacts of UEMS in populated areas has made it imperative to include more detailed information. The October 2019 edition of the dataset was the first to showcase available data on the number of male, female, and child casualties. By reviewing the source material for all recorded cases in the dataset (more than 600 incidents over the period 1979–2019), the Survey could identify sex-disaggregated casualties for only 13 cases based on these sources. In these cases 12 per cent of casualties were women and nearly half were children of unspecified sex (49 per cent), while the rest were adult men (Small Arms Survey, n.d.d.).

To generate additional sex- and gender-relevant data about these events, ‘the Survey . . . analyses infrastructure and [sources of] livelihoods surrounding UEMS in order to draw conclusions about their gendered impacts’:

Out of the ten worst incidents in terms of casualties ever recorded, eight took place in ammunition depots located within or near residential areas. Most of these accidents affected public buildings—schools, hospitals, and other public institutions—that are both crucial to a society’s functioning and not particularly designed to withstand explosions (Gassmann and Baccini, 2019, p. 1).

It is clear that explosions of this kind in residential areas will affect civilians in particular, and that the gendered analysis of such incidents will more clearly indicate their impact. It is hoped that applying a gender lens will contribute to solutions to mitigate the impacts of UEMS, such as

the improvement of infrastructural conditions that have been implemented . . . at ammunition storage sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina . . . undertaken in the course of a general overhaul of [the life-cycle management of ammunition] in [that country] (Gassmann and Baccini, 2019, p. 1).

From sex to gender: recent data initiatives

As discussed above, national and international statistical systems that record data on lethal violence based on administrative records are ‘by method’ bound to a more biological approach to sex disaggregation and have inherently limited possibilities to encompass the full gender dimensions of the data that they record. Female victims in general and the victims of GBV or IPV in particular are rarely distinguished, and victimization due to non-normative gender expression or sexual orientation is rarely captured in national criminal data systems. As of 2019 even the availability of sex-disaggregated statistical data in the domain of lethal violence statistics remains problematic and needs significant improvements, but some initiatives are under way that look at the gender aspect of lethal violence more explicitly.

Femicide

The disaggregation by sex of victims of lethal violence is only one facet of what is hoped to be a widening aspect of the information-gathering process to inform our understanding of the gender dimensions of violence. For example, when a woman

“As the collection of gender-relevant data improves, it can be connected with other new datasets and used to inform policymaking processes.”

is killed ‘because she is a woman’ (Radford and Russell, 1992, p. xi)—or because of the perceived violation of her expected role(s) as a woman—gender is central to the act of killing. This is the origin of the term ‘femicide’, which was developed to cover a range of types of lethal violence directed at women, including dowry and ‘honour’ killings, intimate partner or spousal violence, murder accompanied by rape, the killing of women engaged in sex work, and other cases in which women are targeted because of their sex (Bloom, 2008, pp. 176–79). Currently, the circumstances captured by most datasets is not specific enough to allow their characterization as GBV. While criminal justice data most frequently originates from police sources, the most rigorous way to identify GBV cases would be a systematic analysis of court documents related to homicides. Yet, such statistics come to light very late in the process, their relevance for prevention and policymaking is low, and the amount of time-consuming work that would be necessary for sourcing them globally is not cost-effective.

Nevertheless, femicides or attempted femicides are the focus of a number of data collection efforts, and the GVD database is exploring the possibility of incorporating some of their results into its global estimates in order to better capture the gendered aspects of lethal violence worldwide. These efforts have allowed researchers to make a global estimate of the number and proportion of female homicide victims, and to recognize that most femicide victims are killed by a current or former intimate partner, and that national femicide victimization is related to the degree of cultural tolerance for violence against women in a particular country (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011, p. 114; UNODC, 2019a). Specialized databases collect data on femicide on the basis of their own definitions, or some shared definition such as those provided by Femicide Watch and referenced by the European Observatory on Femicide.³² The

data collection tool that UNODC uses, which is based on the *International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes* (UNODC, 2015), allows for more details and comparable information to be captured. As a result, however, UNODC’s count of femicides excludes all but intimate partner-related homicides.³³ This excludes many forms of gender-based killings, for example, the misogynist killing of women occurring outside of intimate or family relationships, or honour killings perpetrated by male relatives—as UNODC itself acknowledges.

Femicide is—or may be becoming—a distinct form of violence that is particularly visible in areas or countries that are otherwise relatively peaceful. In several European countries, for example, the number of female victims of homicide exceeds that for males, and the majority of cases when women are killed can be counted as femicides. Nowadays, numerous countries collect data on femicides, either as anonymized statistics or in the form of registries (or memorials) that include victims’ names and the circumstances of the killings, thus acknowledging those who fall victim to such violence. Femicide observatories have been established in many countries, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has called for (ACUNS, 2017, p. 4), and serve a mix of advocacy and monitoring functions. For example, the Femicide Observatory in Argentina Adriana Marisel Zambrano³⁴ documents cases and disseminates aggregate counts of femicides in that country, where official crime statistics fail to record these cases separately.

Firearms and GBV

A number of global datasets not directly concerned with lethal violence can help to improve our understanding of the use of small arms in GBV. As the collection of gender-relevant data improves, it can be

connected with other new datasets and used to inform policymaking processes.

The Small Arms Trade Transparency Barometer assesses the utility of the data that states provide³⁵ for understanding their small arms exports. Among the scoring criteria are (i) timeliness of reporting; (ii) access to and consistency of data; (iii) clarity of the information provided; and (iv) its comprehensiveness, all of which reflect the kind of data needed for effective reporting on lethal violence (Small Arms Survey, n.d.c). The average score for states according to the 2019 Barometer was 12.3 out of 25 points. About half (26) of the 49 major small arms exporters scored above or equal to this average, but the 2019 average was slightly lower than that for 2018 (12.51 points), because 23 countries recorded lower scores in 2019 compared to 2018 (Picard, Holtom, and Mangan, 2019, p. 43).

There are some signs that reporting may improve on a number of other small arms-related indicators that could lead to better knowledge of gender dynamics. In the UN PoA RevCon3 outcome document states parties agreed to increase coordination between authorities responsible for data collection and reporting on small arms policies and programmes and authorities responsible for sustainable development (UNGA, 2018, Annex, II.B.1, para. 70). They also undertook to strengthen coordination among data collection, reporting, and analysis for the measurement of progress in UN PoA and International Tracing Instrument (UNGA, 2005) implementation, on the one hand, and for Target 16.4 of Agenda 2030, on the other hand (UNGA, 2018, Annex, II.B.1, para. 72). Perhaps most importantly for the present study, they encouraged the collection of data disaggregated by gender on the illicit small arms trade, including through national reports, and to increase understanding of the gender-specific impacts of such trade, in particular for the purpose of improving corresponding national policies and programmes (UNGA, 2018, Annex, II.B.2, para. 79).

The Fifth Conference of States Parties of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in 2019 also focused on the connection between arms transfers and GBV, as expressed in ATT Article 7(4) (UNGA, 2013), imparting increased attention and impetus to this theme. Two of the action points in the adopted final report are particularly relevant. Firstly, states parties are encouraged to consider gender aspects, to collect disaggregated data and include it in their national crime and health statistics, including disaggregated data on the gender of victims of armed violence and conflict, and to make this data publicly

available (ATT Secretariat, 2019, III, para. 22.b.ii). Secondly, states are encouraged to support research that helps to increase our understanding of the gendered impact of armed violence in the context of the ATT. These recommendations are echoed in a number of recent UN General Assembly First Committee and UN Security Council resolutions.³⁶ Better data in line with relevant indicators would help ATT states parties to more accurately assess in advance of any arms exports the risk of the arms being used in GBV in the importing country, in line with Article 7.4 of the treaty. While femicide is one obvious indicator that exporting states should consider, the reality is that it is only sporadically reported, making risk assessments of this kind extremely difficult.

Finally, the Small Arms Survey's Global Firearms Holdings dataset tracks the small arms holdings of civilians, armed forces, and law enforcement agencies nationally, regionally, and globally (Small Arms Survey, n.d.a). While the source material for this dataset rarely includes information on the sex of civilian firearms holders,³⁷ the national and regional data on firearms holdings is an important reference point for understanding how the overall availability of firearms in a society may relate to GBV committed both with and without guns. In principle, armed forces and law enforcement agencies could provide sex-disaggregated estimates of the numbers of their armed members, which would provide enough information to generate global estimates of the number of armed men and women in these forces and agencies. Most national authorities do not provide sex-disaggregated information about authorized civilian gun licence holders or gun purchases, so in most cases surveys are the most promising way of increasing the gender relevance of this data.³⁸

Conclusion

Policymakers and practitioners cannot adequately respond to the manifold ways in which lethal violence is gendered without sound and timely gender-relevant data. The current state of official sex-disaggregated and gender-relevant information in global datasets on lethal violence is poor. But this may soon change. In recent years, states have committed in global policy forums to collecting and sharing better data on the gender dimensions of armed violence, including, but not only, as a result of the 'Data Revolution' that Agenda 2030 calls for. Another important feature of Agenda 2030 is its admonition to leave no one behind; better gender

analysis is likely to promote inclusion and advance gender equality.

The same holds true for the collection and dissemination of small arms-related data embedded in the recent outcomes of discussions in the ATT and UN PoA forums. The encouragement to provide more gender-relevant data would logically extend to national reporting on small arms transfers (by improving transparency) and the documentation of the small arms holdings of civilians, armed forces, and law enforcement agencies. Improvements here will be essential because it is at the intersection of sex and weapon type that the data is least robust with regard to, for example, analysing patterns of victimization.

There is also significant movement at the regional level, where states are coming together to pool resources and expertise to specify indicators and targets that would improve both the collection of data and its dissemination. In the future it will firstly be important to determine where the most work is needed to strengthen the collection and analysis of data on the gendered aspects of violent deaths. On a more fundamental level, the timeliness with which global data is made available must be increased in order to reliably track developments in global homicides targeting all genders.

Beyond these important improvements to official reporting, donor-supported independent efforts can continue to fill essential data gaps in specific gender-relevant areas. Civil society and academia play an important role in filling such gaps and advancing knowledge by providing official data with the required depth or context. In many countries, however, there is still a need to establish basic data-gathering systems; the little that is known comes from civil society initiatives. As organizations working on armed violence prevention and small arms control become trained in gender analysis and gender mainstreaming—using tools such as the Small Arms Survey's *Gender-responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide* (LeBrun, 2019) and associated survey instruments—their ability to collect gender-relevant data will increase, which will in turn strengthen national and international datasets.

As official and independent data collection improves, researchers and others will increasingly be able to produce gender-responsive analyses that fulfil the aspirations set out in the SDGs and spur new and innovative interventions to reduce armed violence against people of all genders. While currently information is seldom available to effectively carry out gender analysis of armed violence—in terms of who commits it, against whom, with what weapons, and under what

circumstances—if the current push towards better data collection is sustained, the clouds surrounding the 'who' and 'what' of GBV may soon begin to clear. ●

Abbreviations and acronyms

Agenda 2030 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

AOAV Action on Armed Violence

ATT Arms Trade Treaty

GBV Gender-based violence

GLASS Gender Lens for Arms Control Support and Sustainability

GSH Global Study on Homicide

GVD Global Violent Deaths (database)

IPV Intimate partner violence

NGO Non-governmental organization

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PoA Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

RevCon3 Third Review Conference of the Biennial Meeting of States (of the PoA)

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

UEMS Unplanned explosions at munitions sites/Unplanned Explosions at Munitions Sites (database)

UN United Nations

UN-CTS United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

WHO World Health Organization

Notes

- 1 See US DoJ (2013); for the Australian state of New South Wales, see NSW (2013, ss. 17(1) and 18(1); 2019, ss. 23(1) and 30(4)).
- 2 For a discussion of the effect of such laws in the United States, see Yablon (2018).
- 3 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNGA, 2001).
- 4 'To encourage the collection of data disaggregated by gender on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, including through national reports, and to increase understanding of the gender-specific impacts of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, in particular for the purpose of improving corresponding national policies and programmes.'

- 5 See, for example, the surveys on small arms and security carried out by the Small Arms Survey in Kenya (Wepundi et al., 2012), Nepal (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2013), Nigeria (Small Arms Survey and Nigeria PRESCOM, forthcoming), Somalia, and South Sudan (UNDP and Small Arms Survey, 2017); the OSCE-led Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (OSCE, n.d.); and the numerous victimization surveys that include details of armed violence experienced in a variety of contexts, including domestic violence and the private sphere, as well as (gendered) perceptions of firearms.
- 6 The Small Arms Survey understands ‘sex’ as an assigned biological marker (male, female, intersex) and ‘gender’ as the set of socially constructed ideas about the attributes and opportunities associated with a person based on their assigned sex.
- 7 See UNGA (2015) and, specifically for SDG 16, IAEA (2016).
- 8 Direct conflict deaths are deaths caused by armed conflict-related injuries or attacks.
- 9 Intentional homicide is ‘unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury’ (UNODC, 2015, p. 17).
- 10 Including unintentional homicides and killings due to legal interventions; the latter are defined as the ‘killing of civilians by law enforcement officials, or killings of law enforcement officials on duty’ (Carapic and De Martino, 2015, p. 1).
- 11 Currently the database does not disaggregate by age.
- 12 Space does not allow for a critical review of the quality of the data in various national and international resources, but the point needs to be made that quality issues with regard to this data introduce additional gaps and other types of biases that are harder to assess and quantify. For an analysis of sources of data on conflict-related deaths, see Pavesi (2017).
- 13 See, for instance, the United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UNODC, 2020).
- 14 Since the database’s inception the GVD team has identified national resources for homicide statistics in 132 of the 223 countries and territories that are monitored. The majority of GVD database sources selected for statistics on intentional homicides (82 per cent of the data points) are from the criminal justice sector, while the rest come from public health sources. Although the accuracy of criminal justice statistics certainly varies from one country to another, this approach is better suited to monitoring annual changes in the data. Public health statistics estimates are widely used in the GVD database to calculate the proportion of female victims when this cannot be derived from criminal justice sources.
- 15 The GVD database does not collect data on perpetrators. Further development of the database may lead to the inclusion of such (sex-disaggregated when available) data.
- 16 That is, for 312 out of 3,122 possible data points (considering the data matrix of all reporting countries and territories and all the years). This number improved significantly in the 2019 edition of the GVD database, which will be released later in 2020.
- 17 See WHO (2014; n.d.).
- 18 See IHME GHDx (n.d.).
- 19 For example, WHO calculated these proportions based on the global average of countries where data disaggregated by sex is available (WHO, 2014).
- 20 For more information on the SDGs and their indicators, see UNSTATS (n.d.).
- 21 All GSH dataset references are based on the dataset retrieved on 30 September 2019.
- 22 SGD Indicators 16.1.1 and 16.1.2 (UNSTATS, n.d.).
- 23 SGD Indicators 5.2.1 (specifically violence against women) and 16.1.3 (UNSTATS, n.d.).
- 24 The Dominican Republic, Guyana, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (England and Wales).
- 25 This is a known source of the undercounting of female victims of conflict in the GVD database.
- 26 For more information, see Iraq Body Count (2020) and SNHR (2020).
- 27 For more information, see UN DPA (2020a; 2020b) and UNOCHA (2020).
- 28 See Pavesi (2017).
- 29 For more information, see UCDP (2019), ACLED (2020), START (2018), and AOA (2018).
- 30 The use of the term ‘children’ in references such as these points to another problem: the general practice of treating children as genderless in such reports, which rarely separate boys and girls.
- 31 The recommended disaggregation for SDG Indicator 16.1.2 includes ‘sex of person killed (Man, Woman, Unknown); age group of person killed (Adult (18 and above), Child (below 18), Unknown); Cause of death (Heavy weapons and explosive munitions; Planted explosives and unexploded ordnance (UXO); Small arms and light weapons; Incendiary; Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN); Electromagnetic weapons; Less lethal weapons; Denial of access to/destruction of objects indispensable to survival; Accidents related to conflict; Use of objects and other means; Unknown); Status of the person killed (Civilian, Other protected person, Member of armed forces, Person directly participating in hostilities, Unknown)’ (OHCHR, n.d., p. 8).
- 32 See Femicide Watch (n.d.). The University of Malta established the observatory to monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and to collect data on femicide in Europe (University of Malta, n.d.).
- 33 UNODC’s GSH dataset contains data from 84 countries documenting about 220,000 intimate partner femicides between 2005 and 2017 (UNODC, 2019a).
- 34 See La Casa de Encuentro (n.d.).
- 35 States are assessed on reporting in their national arms export reports; Arms Trade Treaty initial and annual reports; national reports on the implementation of the UN PoA and International Tracing Instrument; submissions to the UN Register of Conventional Arms; and submissions to the UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database.
- 36 For more detail on these resolutions, see Pytlak (2019).
- 37 A few countries break down their civilian firearms licensing and registration data according to gender. Examples are Andorra, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Spain. No African, Asian, or Latin American countries provide such information (author communication with Small Arms Survey researcher Aaron Karp, December 2019).
- 38 See the discussion on gender and household surveys in Dönges and Karp (2014).

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The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policymakers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, and is an associated programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

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