Putting names to numbers

The creation of a systematic casualty recording database for the ongoing Russian aggression within Ukraine

Emily Ward

Abstract

This research aims to help create a systematic casualty recording database for the civilian casualties of the Russian aggression within Ukraine. It looks at the definitions surrounding casualty recording and human security to help create a baseline for the project. It examines the Register of the Holodomor Victims, the Bosnian Book of the Dead, the Kosovo Memorial Book, and the casualty recording of Iraq Body Count and the Bouderbala Commission, in terms of their recording systems and public databases. The live project is also informed by the work of Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), the United Nations, Children of War, and the Memorial Platform.

Keywords: casualty recording, security, identity, data, Ukraine, war

Introduction

The aim of this project is to create a systematic casualty recording website which shows the names of the people who have had their lives changed by the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Officially the illegal invasion of Ukraine started on 24 February 2022, but the Ukrainian crisis is thought to have truly started when President Viktor Yanukovych rejected the Free Trade Agreement on 26 November 2013. The event known as Euromaidan was a revolution for the dignity of the people of Ukraine which lasted 93 days and caused 125 deaths. Although thought to be successful when the pro-Russian Yanukovych fled to Russia, in March 2014 Russia annexed Crimea. It is estimated that from Spring 2014 to Autumn 2015 over 6,000 people were killed in the conflict (Afineevsky, 2015). Data on military deaths is easy to collect, but data and documentation for civilian deaths is more difficult and time-consuming. The creation of
a searchable database will help to record names, ages, causes, locations, and dates surrounding civilian deaths. It will allow an accurate display of Russia’s disregard for human life and human security, shown by targeting civilian buildings and by committing mass murders, as seen in Bucha and Mariupol. It is believed by 28 November 2022, 97% of Russian targets were civilian (Reznikov, 2022). People in Ukraine might have died, but they had a name, a family, and a place they called home.

The ethical basis of the project is the victim-focused approach of the researcher, or her “victim bias”. As Bryman writes, “Values intrude in all phases of the research process – from the choice of a research area to the formulation of conclusions … the social researcher is never conducting an investigation in a moral vacuum” (Bryman, 2012: 149). For some writers, a conscious bias is celebrated, as the social researcher “takes sides”. This research is driven by the researcher’s ethical concerns around civilian casualties in war and the moral imperative to document each death.

First of all, this project will look at definitions: what is human security, what is casualty recording, and who is a civilian? It will explore how different organizations define a casualty, who is a civilian and what is good practice for casualty recording.

The project will be informed by ways conflicts have been recorded in the past and why it is important to remember. Unified Register of the Holodomor Victims, the Bosnian Book of the Dead, and the Kosovo Memorial Book are all memorials for victims of conflict or destruction from another state. Iraq Body Count is an ongoing database which collects names of those who have died from violent deaths due to the 2003 military intervention in Iraq. The Bouderbala Commission was created in 2011 to investigate the deaths and injuries of people who were around during the time of the Tunisian uprising or the Jasmin revolution. What are the benefits of successful casualty recording?

The third step is to examine how casualties are currently being recorded in the Russia–Ukraine war. There are a number of sources and methods that will be evaluated: statistics provided by Action on Armed Violence, United Nations figures, data provided by Children of War, and, finally, the Memorial Platform, which collect reports and publishes details surrounding the deaths of individuals who have lost their lives because of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

**Human security and casualty counting**

What is human security? It is a rather new security approach that focuses on how insecurity in the world can affect the people, rather than states and institutions. Human security was first referenced by the United Nations (UN) in “The Human Development Report 1994” where it speaks of the idea surrounding human security, but it was not until 12 September 2012 with the realization that war and conflict is not the only cause of human insecurity. A statement from the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon on 20 September 2012 shows how different insecurities can be considered a threat to human security. “Today’s complex and interrelated threats – natural disasters, violent conflicts, crises in the food, health and economic sectors – pose enormous challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of millions of people across the globe” (UN, 2012). “Survival, livelihood and dignity of millions” puts it perfectly. It is not just those in power, it is not just those looking for change, it is the everyday person just wanting the right to live and the freedom to be. Within human security, it looks at seven aspects that can affect the security or insecurity of the world. Those seven aspects of security are economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. Instability with one or more of these aspects can cause personal or community insecurity and on a global scale could be detrimental to millions of lives.

With the Russian aggression in Ukraine, all the aspects of human security have been affected, but outside Ukraine it is the food insecurity that has been felt hard globally in 2022. Dr. Arif Husain, Chief Economist at the UN World Food Programme, on 16 May 2022
expanded on the effect that the Russian aggression in Ukraine will have on the people in low-income and developing countries, even more so with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Ukraine supplied about 30% of the world’s wheat and barley before the war. Thirty-six countries, including some of the world’s most vulnerable and impoverished, relied on them for more than half of their wheat imports ...” (Husain, 2022). This is a clear example that the Russian aggression in Ukraine has not just affected Ukraine, but it has also affected the security of other states too. The seven categories of human security are not just about what each state should provide for its own people, but how interconnected we all are for supplies and services and if something happens in one state this can affect others too.

With a basic understanding of what human security is under the UN definition, it is time to look at what a civilian is. International Committee of The Red Cross has the definition: “Any person not belonging to armed forces or armed groups”. The Geneva Convention has placed indiscriminatory protection of those people who come under the definition and International Humanitarian Law states that “They must be protected against all forms of violence and degrading treatment, including murder and torture” (Civilians Protected Under International Humanitarian Law, 2010). Evidence coming from the Russian aggression within Ukraine has shown civilian harm and deaths as with many other conflicts, but until the conflict is over, it the true extent of how much harm has been committed against the Ukrainian people will not be known. A casualty is someone who has been injured or killed as a result of war or accident (Britannica, 2023). For the purpose of this project a casualty will be in reference to those who have died, unless stated otherwise.

The Oxford Research Group has compiled a list of legal obligations for states during armed conflicts, based on International Customary Humanitarian Law, International Humanitarian Law, and International Human Rights Law. The Oxford Research Group found that governments are legally obliged to record casualties, but this has been mostly left to civil society organizations. The obligations are as follows:

- Search for all missing civilians as a result of hostilities, occupation or detention.
- Collect all of the casualties of armed conflict from the area of hostilities as soon as circumstances permit.
- The remains of those killed are to be returned to their relatives.
- The remains of the dead are not to be despoiled.
- Any property found with the bodies of the dead is to be returned to the relatives of the deceased.
- The dead are to be buried with dignity and in accordance with their religious or cultural beliefs.
- The dead are to be buried individually and not in mass graves.
- The graves are to be maintained and protected.
- Exhumation of dead bodies is only to be permitted in circumstances of public necessity which will include identifying cause of death (Breau, 2011: 1).

The legal obligation also extends to recording the details of the individual casualty. Record keeping during conflicts should be properly standardized by states, to detail all deaths during a conflict and the effects it has on the civilian populations that are living in conflict zones.

When keeping records, it is important to be organized on what kind of deaths are to be included. This is something that many organizations struggle to agree on, whether the death was caused by a conflict directly or indirectly. An example of this would be 6-year-old Elya who lived 5 km from the front line for 11 months under constant shelling and finally died of a heart attack on 11 January 2023 (Trybushna, 2023). As Elya’s death was not directly caused by a missile or shooting, some organizations would not count this death as resulting from armed conflict, even though it is an indirect death caused by the ongoing conflict. Action on Armed Violence is a good example of this. They are currently recording civilian
Putting names to numbers
Emily Ward

Deaths from reputable English-language media and only record civilians killed or injured by explosive weapons (AOAV n.d.). This shows a missing link to recording the victims of armed conflicts, because it fails to record the true level of destruction caused by the Russian aggression within Ukraine.

Every Casualty Worldwide is a non-governmental organization that wants to help create a universal standard when it comes to casualty recording during conflicts. Every Casualty believes casualty recording is a “crucial practice for the respect of human dignity, for the sake of surviving family members, and for the establishment of facts” (SCR, 2016: 10). This idea goes beyond collecting statistics to help count the people lost during the conflict. It is meant to humanize and find the true cost during a conflict and ultimately help reconcile surviving family members. The standardization of casualty recording will help create a baseline of key aspects that can be built upon. The aim is to create an inclusive and consistent process that will give higher levels of legitimacy and trust with the data it has collected. There are some minimum requirements that should be done by every casualty recording organization to find basic information surrounding a violent event. The basics being the location of the incident, date/time of the incident, source, numbers killed, name, age, gender, type of death, and involved actor/s.

Those basics are often already being carried out by organizations to help in the collection of statistics and also a possible way to help with reparations after the conflict is over. A way to help gain better support from governments and the survivors of a conflict is important to follow the principles of good practice. There are five different principles that organizations should follow. While working during or after a conflict it is important to remember that the organizations will be working with vulnerable people throughout the collection of casualty data. Do no harm is the first principle to prevent further harm to the populations. This principle’s origin is from the four pillars of medical ethics, according to which, if a treatment causes more harm than good, then it should not be considered (GMC, 2015). Although casualty recording is considered a good thing, if a family do not want to discuss or disclose a lost family member then they should not be interrogated. Keeping the survivors in mind, another principle is transparency. By being open and understanding about why this data is important, who is collecting it, discussing security policies of the data, and making sure to update families about sharing and publishing the data creates trust between the people who have lost and the people who are collecting this data. An organization should be as inclusive as possible, and clearly state why they choose to exclude other data. Ideally it should include every casualty from every event and not just to support an organization’s cause, so as to show the true cost of the conflict. If a conflict is still ongoing, it can be difficult for a casualty recorder to always collect all the information in one go. Consistency in collecting casualty information is important in an ever-changing environment and it is considered a minimum that a casualty recorder can do. Finally taking responsibility. The rights and needs of different people involved within the project need to be taken into consideration. Additional support and protection should be in place for any person involved should, they need it (SCR, 2016: 12). Those principles of good practice could be the important steps to creating an efficient casualty recording database.

The importance of remembrance

The Unified Register of the Holodomor victims is a memory book that has 882,510 names of people who died during the Soviet totalitarian regime. Holodomor is now considered a genocide of the Ukrainian people (Holodomor Museum, 2022). The Bosnian Book of the Dead lists 95,940 names of those who have died during the Balkan conflict (Every Casualty Counts, 2013) and the Kosovo Memory Book published more than 13,000 victims of war crimes,
persons killed, and those who were forcibly “disappeared” in Kosovo (Every Casualty, 2011). The Iraq Body Count project has created a public database where hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths are documented, following the 2003 invasion by the US-UK coalition. The Bouderbala Commission is Tunisia’s National Finding Commission to record all victims of the violence related to protests. All these casualty recording bodies help to honor the memory of the victims, and to make the warring parties acknowledge what has been lost.

The Unified Register of the Holodomor Victims is an ongoing register that wants to record the names of those who have died as a result of the famine that happened in Ukraine because of Soviet influence from 1932–1933. This event is recognized as a genocide by Ukraine, 23 of the United Nations states, and the Vatican City (Shandra, 2022). The Unified Register of the Holodomor Victims has 882,510 names of people who died from this starvation which is a small amount compared to the estimated deaths. It is believed that nearly 4 million Ukrainians died during this time (BBC, 2022), but the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide estimated it could be up to seven million people. This is theorized due to the 1926 census, as the population was 87% peasants who did not have access to proper documentation (Holodomor Museum, 2019). Failure to register a person’s death properly was most likely the cause of the low estimates. Due to the masses of deaths occurring at the time, particularly within small villages the death registrations, when done, commonly had falsifications such as exhaustion or weakness as a cause of death rather than hunger or malnutrition. As we see today within Ukraine, the attempt of Russification is not new. The removal of the Ukrainian people, language, traditions, and religions and considered it as unity of nations can only be considered the destruction of a culture and a nation (Lemkin, 2009). The importance of investigating and remembering all the people who died during 1932–1933 helps to preserve the Ukrainian State. Remembrance Day for the Ukrainians of this event is on the fourth Saturday of November every year.

The Bosnian Book of the Dead and the Kosovo Memory Book are similar books to the Register of the Holodomor Victims, collecting the names of casualties during conflicts and exposing crimes against humanity. The Balkan Wars 1991–1999 were a series of complex conflicts for independence by multiple nations and states within the former Yugoslavia. Tension previously suppressed had come out as ethnic cleansing and displacement for thousands of people (BBC, 2016). Mirsad Tokaca, the director of Sarajevo’s Research and Identification Centre, explains how important it is to collect, verify, and publish the Identities of the Bosnian Citizens who were killed during this time, which is around 96,000 verified and another 5,000 unconfirmed names (Džidić & Džidić, 2013). Tokaca has seen organization and government estimations of the numbers killed and uses them for political purposes, but this book was recreated so it can represent the dead, end manipulation of numbers, and the start of reconciliation. Nataša Kandić believes that all countries of the region have an obligation to name all of the victims, which under International Humanitarian Law is a requirement to record the details of the individual casualties (Breau, 2011). Recording the names of those who were killed enables further investigation and ensures that the victims are not forgotten.

The Kosovo Memory Book is for the Kosovo Conflict 1998–1999. In 1998 former Yugoslav armed forces attempted to reassert control over the region and it was not until June 1999 that the conflict ended (Britannica, 2021). The Kosovo Memory Book includes information and names of people from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2000, in an attempt to replace figures with names. The collection of names continued for one year after the conflict ended, in order to show the further impact that armed conflict can have on a society after the conflict has ended. Any homicides committed after the end of the conflict are still considered a result of the original armed conflict (Kosovo Book of Memory, 2011). This book contains everyone who died, Serbs, Albanians, KLA fighters, Serbian police, and soldiers. The total number of people who died is 13,527, with around 1,700 unaccounted for or missing
Putting names to numbers

Emily Ward

(The Economist, 2013). This book, along with the other two presented here, are examples of remembrance of those lost during conflicts and of their suffering.

Iraq Body Count (IBC) is an online database that collects, records, and publishes violent deaths as a result of the 2003 military intervention. Every death record on the IBC site is a fully verified civilian death and IBC currently has over 210,000 records from January 2003 to February 2023 (IBC, 2023a). Along with sharing the facts and data of factual deaths as a result of conflict, this site has another important mission: to share the names of those who died. “Our names are at the core of who we are and of who we are perceived to be by others. When we die, we leave behind something of ourselves through our name” (Hamourtziadou, 2015). The name of a person instead of a number can demonstrate the real cost of conflicts. Every person has a name, it identifies who they are, their family, and their heritage, and to just suddenly lose all that information and place it into a number for “collateral damage” during a conflict is shameful and disrespectful to the humans behind those numbers. The website has a set of beliefs it follows for the importance of collecting and publishing this data.

• The human cost of war must be recorded.
• Knowledge of war deaths must be available to all.
• US and UK citizens bear particular responsibility for events in Iraq.
• Documenting violent civilian deaths is our current focus.
• Media reports are a vital source of casualty data.
• Casualty data can be put to use in many different ways.

(IBC, 2023b)

During any conflict there is a need for public records, based on which states acknowledge civilian harm and are held accountable. This should not be left to outside organizations such as Iraq Body Count, Action on Armed Violence, and many other organizations that feel it is the least a government can do to express compassion and regret for the lives lost due to their own actions.

The United Kingdom and the United States need to have some form of state accountability for the human cost of their military campaigns. Focusing on the United Kingdom, it is easy to see the lack of interest in investigating or reporting of civilian deaths within Iraq. In the “Report of the Iraq Inquiry Volume XII”, the UK government recognizes the organizations IBC and AOAV collecting and publishing civilian casualties, but claims is “beyond the scope and abilities” of the UK government (House of Commons, 2016: 170). The inquiry then goes on to assume the impact of non-intervention on Iraqi civilians. Hypothetical information of course, but still four pages more than acknowledging the actual human cost of intervening. In 2015 the lack of reports and estimates of civilian casualties from airstrikes led the UK government to believe and announce that there were no civilian casualties from UK airstrikes in the 15 months since the UK airstrikes began (MacAskill, 2015).

Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) investigates criminal allegations from Iraq against the UK military. On 31 March 2016, there were 1,374 cases with 1,558 victims to be investigated (Ministry of Defence, 2016). The majority being ill-treatment (1,090 cases), but claims of deaths by airstrike, shooting incidents, rocket/grenade attacks and others are still higher than acknowledged by the UK government (227 cases). Iraq Fatality Investigations looks into all the circumstances surrounding allegations of unlawful killing by British Forces, but the current and concluding cases are few and far between. From 2015 to 2022 there were only eight cases of unlawful killings that were accepted, while in 2023 there is only one case of two individuals currently being investigated (Ministry of Defence, 2022). Although this shows the government’s interest in investigating civilian killings committed by the UK military, compared to the numbers seen in IBC, it can be considered no more than a futile attempt to recognize the actual human cost.

When casualty recording data is done correctly and continuously to its full power, it can have benefits for governments. Casualty information to leverage change from actors
within conflict-affected countries, including all conflict parties, is also seen as a key activity (Olgiati, 2014: 3). This is seen in Tunisia. The Bouderbala Commission was created in 2011 to investigate abuses committed during the uprising, also known as the “Jasmine Revolution”, to protest against high unemployment, poverty, and political repression. Every Casualty Worldwide has seen this commission as a successful effort made by Tunisia to promptly record, correctly identify, and publicly acknowledge casualties during the revolution (Patel & Giger, 2015: 1). Three of the principles of good practice were followed meticulously: inclusiveness, confidentiality and transparency. Every member of society had an opportunity to contribute, including state officials, and all cases from 17 December 2010 to 23 October 2011 were investigated in relation to the revolution. There were efforts made to allow multiple ways to be able to report: there was a free telephone line, consultation hours within city centers, visiting and meeting those who could not travel, and an online site too. In addition, there was a guarantee of safety for those who contributed any information to the commission. All information, once verified, was made public and compiled into a national archive where anyone could go to view it. The methodology was also published, allowing an understanding of how this information was used, how it was collected and verified, and how this could help those who were victims of the revolution.

The overall aim of The Bouderbala Commission was to help its society achieve transitional justice and acknowledge the human rights abuses that were committed during the revolution. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights commends the commission for attending workshops on how to work through transnational justice and to get a better understanding of what they need to do for society to come to terms with a large-scale conflict. The commission had another role of not just identifying the victims of violence, but also “reconstructing the facts” and seeking “to establish the truth” (Patel & Giger, 2015: 13). Seeking the truth was important to help establish facts from the conflict, due to reparations being given. Acknowledging the revolution and creating an accessible memorialization of the revolution allows society to mourn its losses and help prevent similar events in the future, with the understanding of what can happen when the government and the people fight against each other.

Current recording of casualties in Ukraine

Currently, there are several official and unofficial organizations recording the casualties of the Russian aggression within Ukraine. As mentioned before, Action on Armed Violence has created its own database for the collection of civilian casualties to help create estimated statistics using English media reports. Another organization monitoring this conflict is the United Nations. This is through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, using reports from the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine since 2014 (OHCHR, 2023). There are currently two Ukrainian organizations collecting information about casualties. One is Children of War, created by the Ukrainian government to show pictures and names of children who have been killed, displaced/missing, or injured by the Russian aggression. The other is Memorial, which posts names, faces, ages, and circumstances in which the person died. This is collected through a website where someone can send information about who has been killed, Ukrainian and other nationals, civilian or military.

Action on Armed Violence launched in October 2010 collecting reports of explosive violence from English-language media to create a database for civilians killed or injured by explosive weapons around the world. In 2022 it is estimated from the AOAV database that there were 20,877 global civilian casualties from explosive violence (AOAV, 2023a). This is a great source of showing the reported cases of explosive violence and the damage it has done to civilian populations. Collecting this sort of data helps to address the rights and needs of those affected by armed violence (Olgiati, 2014: 1). It also shows that there could be even more that have gone unreported.
Putting names to numbers
Emily Ward

or not seen in English-speaking media. The methodology used by AOAV has been used by other organizations in the past, the method being incident-based. The Taback-Coupland model for human security mapping (2007) is when you draw out important information from media reports of armed violence and bring the information together to create a conclusion of the intent of the perpetrator. Collecting information on the numbers of people killed or wounded, types of weapon used and number of weapons, and other information from the event (Merçay, 2007). This is to help find the risk factors of weapons and the effects on victims of armed violence. Organizations like AOAV and Landmine Action use this method to help collect information on particular weapons to build a database of the effects on the victims, also the scale and patterns of harm committed. It can be difficult to weed through different forms of media and also find reports of incidents that are verifiable.

AOAV use key terms, such as “artillery, bombing, explosion, missile”, to help search for incidents of armed violence. It is important to remember that AOAV makes no claim to capture every incident or casualty of explosive violence as through media alone it is hard to collect every incident if they have not been reported. Along with that one limitation of this methodology, AOAV also acknowledges other limitations along with only using English-speaking media “which does not provide a comprehensive picture of definitive explosive weapon use around the world” (AOAV, 2014). This can mean missing out on important and useful reports. Henry Dodd and Robert Perkins agree with this limitation, especially when it comes to recording locations. “Unclear” and “Not reported as populated area” are not effective categories for analysis and can make the data seem unverified (Dodd & Perkins, 2016). Another limitation is follow-up reports, such as if a victim was injured in an incident and then later died due to their injuries. This means the actual numbers from an explosive violence event could be larger than initially thought. AOAV does try to follow the principles of good practice and it does so by producing “Casualty data that is impartial and reliable. Used effectively to address the rights and needs of those affected by violence” (Olgiati, 2014: 3). The long-term goal is to bring to light the effects that armed violence has on the victims and to bring attention and change in the way conflicts are carried out. Up to March 2023, AOAV recorded 11,564 civilian casualties from the Russian aggression within Ukraine: 3,998 killed and 7,566 injured by explosive weapons since 24 February 2022 (AOAV, 2023b). AOAV states that this estimate should be considered the lowest estimation, as the information during this time is very difficult to verify and collect.

The United Nations has been monitoring and recording data from Ukraine since 2014 (HRMMU) when Russia illegally annexed Crimea. However, the statistics that we are able to see on the current Russian aggression within Ukraine start on 24 February 2022 and are updated regularly. Since 24 February 2022 the HRMMU has been focused on “documenting violations of international human rights law and International Humanitarian Law committed by all parties” (OHCHR, 2022). Through the casualty recording that the UNHR is doing they are also reporting and recording cases of violations of human rights from both sides of this conflict. The casualty recording data collected for the UNHR is on the deaths and injuries of civilians, while also documenting the sex, age, place of incident, type of incident, and weapon involved if known. Public updates are released frequently to show that the information is continuously being collected which creates transparency and consistency for how the data is being used. The reports of civilian deaths or injuries are collected through fieldwork, which includes interviews with victims or families and witnesses to events. The information collected is then verified in a variety of ways to help confirm the reports given by the victim/family/witnesses. Reports would normally be verified by looking into official records; open-source documents, photo and video materials; forensic records and reports; criminal investigation materials; court documents; reports by international and national non-governmental organizations; public reports by law enforcement and military actors; data from medical facilities and local authorities (UNHR, 2023). This can be a lengthy process, especially while
this conflict is still ongoing and it could be hazardous for investigators to travel and so there
is a disclaimer that current statistics that the HRMMU is currently producing are based on
individual civilian casualty records where there is “reasonable grounds to believe” as a stan-
ard of proof (UNHR, 2023). Understandably during a time of active conflict, it is very difficult
and time-consuming to constantly verify records on a large scale, and there is also the pos-
sibility of official records, such as official documents or reports, being unobtainable in some
cases. At the beginning of the conflict, although a lot of information was coming through, it
was easier to verify information with more people placed around the country to help verify
incidents using the network of trustees and partners. One year into the conflict, 21,293 civil-
ian casualties were recorded: 8,006 killed and 13,287 injured. Explosive weapons accounted
for 90.3% of all civilian casualties during this period (UNHR, 2023).

The main reason the United Nations collects the casualty recording data is to show
the disregard for human rights. Matilda Bogner, Head of the Mission in April 2022, believes
that fact-finding missions such as this (HRMMU) can provide justice for victims and hold
perpetrators accountable. Missions like this can also apply pressure to prevent further viola-
tions from being committed (UNHR, 2022, Ukraine: Behind the Numbers). Using Every
Casualty World Wide’s Principles of Good Practice to compare how effectively the UN are
using and collecting their data. Do no harm is the first principle, and it is clear to see that the
HRMMU is respecting that, especially when it comes to the victims of sexual violence.
Matilda Bogner stated that the people collecting the data need to have a victim-centered
approach. “we need to respect the victims. We need to respect the witnesses’ wishes. If they
don’t wish to talk ... we respect their wishes and don’t further stigmatize them” (Bogner,
2022). This alone is very important to remember when working with people who have had
traumatic experiences. The UN is transparent about why it collects the data and regularly
releases new information and totals surrounding the Russian aggression within Ukraine.
Inclusivity, consistency, and responsibility can be hard to see within the data and reports
given by the UNHR and the HRMMU. This is something done behind the scenes and with-
out names or causes (other than from explosive violence) it is hard to see what information
is being left out or what was previously added and then removed from the statistics.

There are many Ukrainians who want to share their family and friends who have been
lost during this conflict and a couple of organizations have come forward, not necessarily to
record but to show the faces and names of those who have died as a result of the Russian
aggression within Ukraine. Memorial (Меморіал.ua 2022) is one of those organizations.
Memorial.ua releases images, names, ages, and locations of people who have died because of
the Russian aggression. The page is very limited in who manages it or how the data is being
used. It is possible that the organization is somewhat connected to Memorial International.
Memorial Russia/International are classed as a movement rather than a single organization,
which usually finds and exposes the historical truth of human rights violations from the USSR
and Russia since 1991 (Memorial, 2021). On 28 February 2023, the official Russian Memorial
was liquidated by Russia’s Supreme Court and the site is no longer updated. Since the liquida-
tion, the Memorial.ua page has not been updated as regularly as it used to.

The Memorial.ua page is continuing this work for current events, documenting and
showing the faces of those who have been killed by the Russian aggression. This includes
military personnel, civilians, and humanitarian workers from any nation. The method of
collecting this information is unclear, but the page provides two links where people are able
to submit information on either civilian or military deaths. It is unknown how the informa-
tion sent is verified or who runs/sorts through the information. The page was created on 14
July 2022. One of the first victims whose information was posted on this page was Liza
Dmitrieva. Liza was four years old when she died just outside her developmental speech
therapy class in Vinnytsia, as a result of an airstrike. The aim of the page is to “help preserve
the memory of everyone whose life was cut short by Russia’s war against Ukraine” (Меморіал.
Children of War is exactly that. The information used here has been collected from 24 February 2022. The site was created on behalf of the Office of the President of Ukraine to help find and rescue children who have been displaced or deported to Russia. It is currently the only platform that provides up-to-date information surrounding children who have suffered because of Russian aggression. With help from law enforcement agencies, the national police of Ukraine, the office of the prosecutor general, and the national information bureau, they have been able to find 10,626 children and return 308 (Children of War, 2023). This website is simple and easy to navigate in three languages and provides multiple PDF files on what a person needs to do to help submit information and additional information on different topics such as security rules during wartime, how to act for people who have met/discovered an unaccompanied child (Person/doctor), and what to do if you know about suspected war crimes committed by Russia against children. They also have multiple PDFs talking about children about the war, safety rules abroad, and how to support a child whose parents are fighting. They have photographs and basic information about current missing/displaced children with a search bar which allows people to help reunite families. One common limitation in casualty recording is to provide an accessible reporting mechanism to help civilians easily report casualties (Bijl & Muste, 2022). Although this is a website that will need internet access to be able to be used, it is well known throughout Ukraine and has helped refugees worldwide to access the site and provide information with links to other informative and reporting sites for other issues. If this site was to be combined with Memorial, it could help produce a similar casualty recording site that this project hopes to achieve.

The best example of casualty recording in Ukraine, the Memorial Platform, started in March 2022. It is a non-governmental, non-commercial initiative owned by the Abo media growth agency which has a network of media partners across Ukraine. This has helped to expand Memorial across Ukraine and internationally. The two goals of the Memorial Platform have been to humanize statistical figures and to form a strong institution of national memory as one of the prerequisites of security in the future (Memorial Platform, 2023). Memorial Platform has a full-time team of over ten people and dozens of freelance authors working in different regions of Ukraine. All have experience with journalism or working as war correspondents. They create documentaries about the victims, cooperate with human rights defenders to prosecute the culprits, and organize exhibitions abroad. By March 2023 they collected information on around 2,300 victims of the conflict, civilian and military (Memorial, 2023). The Memorial Platform became a member of the Casualty Recorders Network, organized by Every Casualty Counts Organisation (Every Casualty, 2023). One goal is to organize a roundtable with experts on the topic of memory politics and publish books about the casualties in Ukraine (Memorial, 2023). Victim data is collected in a variety of ways with at least two stages of verification. An online form which is been shared across different forms of social media platforms is seen as their best method so far. Allowing a victim’s family to fill out the online form helps to minimize re-traumatization for people who are experiencing grief. Another method of collecting is through journalists of partner organizations working in the field. They are able to help by sharing and exchanging collected information surrounding victims or witnesses. Similar to Action on Armed Violence, they monitor social media and media mentions of any victims or large-scale events. Verifications are also conducted by requests for information from state authorities (Memorial, 2023).

The website itself is simple and easy to navigate, although it is only in Ukrainian. It starts with a strong message about preserving the memory of those who have been “killed by the Russian army” (Memorial Platform, 2023). After the introduction of the site, the forms to submit information are clearly visible. Three categories separate the deceased into
military, civilian and children. There are three additional pages dedicated to writings created by victims/journalists to express additional memorial texts about victims/sites/or impactful events. Information on partners and some members of the memorial team are also very well advertised. The different social media platforms are also well-advertised to allow for a large range of people to view them.

The principles of good casualty recording created by Every Casualty would help this site reach its full potential. Do no harm is already being upheld with the recognition of possible re-traumatizing the victims’ families. Re-traumatizing victims’ families is something is should always be avoided and pressing for information during field visits can cause distress. Transparency is lacking within this platform. Information about why this platform is important is stated and it is stated on the victims’ data forms that all information received will be published on different social media platforms. However, how this data is protected is unknown; updates on the published data are also unknown. If there were e-mail updates that could help solve the problem. Another way to help with transparency is to have a page on the website on how this information is being collected, who is collecting the information, how verifying works, and how long it could take before the information is updated. Inclusivity is good on this platform, but it is important to understand how it is determined who is a civilian, who is a combatant and who is considered a child. Also, who – if anyone – is not included. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to judge the consistency of the platform.

The future: challenges and recommendations

One important element for collecting data on casualty recording is money. Funding can be very hard to obtain and without a following of volunteers and supporters, it will be hard to complete and maintain. Establishing a following is important, so a good social media/promotional team is worth having. Another issue is the running of a website. The creation of a website can be a lengthy process, which is difficult for an average person to complete on their own. There are many different options for creating a website to suit the needs of an organization, and multiple different free sites could be tried before committing to a specific model.

The operation needed to collect the information on casualties will have to be on a large scale. Looking at ways casualty recording has been done in Tunisia, it would be important to be able to provide multiple official forms of collecting information. An official office within Kyiv that welcomes all people to visit or share their information, a free phone line, pop-up offices and advertising leaflets within all regions of Ukraine. It would be useful to have managers and properly trained volunteers, when and where needed.

Who will be included in this database? Any civilian who died as a result of the Russian aggression. This could span from indirect deaths such as heart attack or starvation, to direct deaths by missiles, shootings and mines. Russian civilians would also be included. Although not a death, an example of Russian aggression against a Russian civilian in Ukraine is the case of Olga Zenkova, a TV presenter sent to Melitopol to film a story, where she was subjected to sexual and other forms of violence. If this case had resulted in death, then she would have been included in this database. If a person died was not included, it would be important to explain the reasons why.

The website itself will have a main page detailing the reasons why it is important to collect information on casualties, and about the Russian aggression. Links on the home page would be for:

- Civilian deaths – The main reason for the page. A searchable memorial database with names, images, histories, and reasons as to why this person’s life was cut short. It will also have totals and charts to show the variation of the conflict. There could be sub-categories for the civilians to show different dynamics: Ukrainian Adults, Ukrainian
Putting names to numbers
Emily Ward

Children, Russian Adults, Russian Children, Humanitarian Workers, International Adults, International Children, etc.
- Unverified/Uncounted deaths – This will be a memorial to people whose deaths will not be officially counted after verification. This will provide reasoning as to why it has not been officially counted and still allows for the memorialization of the person.
- About us – Information about the organization running the site, and a very brief acknowledgment of the people working on the site. Methodology for how this information is being collected and verified, how this information is used and for what reason. How to contact.
- Media and reports – Any collections of data placed into reports and published or media about the organization will be stored here.
- Help for you – Resources to access help or support during this time. Mental health support and informative PDFs about managing with the stress of conflict, similar to Children of War. Also, information about submitting reports.
- Donations – This would help the running of the website and also help support those caught up in the conflict.

The names of those who have died in any conflict need to be recorded, need to be known, need to be remembered.

References

AOAV (n.d.) “Explosive Violence Monitor”. Available at: https://aoav.org.uk/explosiveviolence/
AOAV. (2023b) “Ukraine: AOAV explosive violence data on harm to civilians”. Available at: https://aoav.org.uk/2023/ukraine-casualty-monitor/
BBC. (2022) “Ukraine’s Great Famine Memories Fuel Resentment of the Kremlin”. BBC, 12 February. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60353677


Memorial Platform. (2023) “Memorial Platform”. Memorial Platform. Available at: https://www.victims.memo.ru/


Reznikov, O. (2022) Twitter, 28 November. Available at: https://twitter.com/oleksiireznikov/status/1597221187213742080


Trybushna, O. (2023 watchers.ie. Available at: https://watchers.ie/2023/01/13/13th-january-2023-war-in-ukraine-driven-my-land-grabbing-russian-federation-witness-putins-palace-all-it-took-was-20-years-and-a-former-mid-ranking-kgb-officer-from-dresden-has-achieved-this/


Меморіал.Уа. (2022, 16 July) Допоможіть зберегти пам’ять кожного та кожної, чиє життя обірвалося через війну росії проти України. Ukraine.