
The Long Shadow of Conflict on Population Health

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Abstract Armed conflicts are increasingly recognised as having impacts that are more than battle related deaths and a temporary interruption to economic activity. This paper investigates the potentially most important structural and persistent effect, the long-run effects of armed conflict on population health. We develop a conditional-convergence framework in which conflict operates as a persistent shock to health outcomes and estimate a dynamic ARDL model on a cross-country panel for 1990-2019. Using conflict data from UCDP/PRIO and health indicators from the Global Burden of Disease database, we examine life expectancy, healthy life expectancy, disability-adjusted life years, and years of life lost. The results show that conflict significantly worsens health in both the short and long run, with long-run effects notably larger, implying substantial and lasting welfare losses even after hostilities end. The effects are strongest in poorer and institutionally fragile countries, and spillover estimates suggest meaningful cross-border health costs. The findings identify conflict as a persistent public-health shock with important implications for post-conflict recovery policy.

Keywords: Armed conflict; population health; burden of disease; longevity losses; dynamic panel.

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