

Review of “Epidemiology of, and Surveillance of, Media Worker Homicide in Iraq (2003-2012)”

By Amy Hagopian, PhD, University of Washington

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### **Overall issues.**

The citations were all missing from my copy. I could see the spaces where they might have gone, and I see the list, but there are no numerical references in my version.

This is a really important and innovative idea for a paper.

I don't love the title. Too clunky. How about: “Deaths of media workers in Iraq associated with the invasion and occupation, 2003 to 2012.”

I see the two authors are from New Zealand. They had no Iraqi partner with whom they'd like to share authorship?

I liked the idea of dividing the deaths into two broad time periods, and the divisions 2003-2007 and 2008-2012 seem exactly right.

Was there a funding source to name? If not, you should say so. Too much of this work (tracing the health effects of war) goes unfunded.

In the introduction, I'd like to know about any other research conducted on journalist deaths in this or previous wars. In the discussion section, it would help to know how the death count in the Iraq war among journalists compares to the counts from other wars.

The discussion of impunity needs more clarity. What would accountability look like? How is impunity tracked and reported? You cite the CPJ impunity index, but you don't describe it. What court or legal systems would prosecute? Has the ICC ever prosecuted journalism assault or death cases? You come back to impunity on page 6 of the discussion section, and it again needs more attention there.

Using media workers as a sentinel population will only work if there is a denominator available. I would make the recording of a denominator an important recommendation to the tracking organizations.

There are many criticisms of the Iraq Body Count as a methodology. You should at least give a nod to that, with a citation or two. I include some criticisms of it in my October 2013 PLOS Medicine paper.

The “collateral murder” video, taped on July 12, 2007, in New Baghdad, showed the deliberate murder of a dozen Iraqis on the ground by U.S. forces in a helicopter, including two Reuters news employees. It's been viewed more than 14 million times. Most readers will want to know how this was dealt with in the paper, how it was

classified. That gives you an opportunity to use an example that everyone will have as a reference point. It raises the possibility of offering another example or two in the paper, as well, with references to stories or video we might view.

How do the authors' recommendations relate to the recommendations by the source organizations themselves?

### **Specific edits.**

Writing could be crisper and clear. For example, first line of abstract: "Media worker homicide is a critical issue worldwide, [being a particular problem] [say simply, *especially*] in areas of political and social instability.

On page 2 Introduction, "homicide among media workers" implies they are killing each other. I'd say homicide of media workers.

You use the term "surveillance" of societal violence. Do you mean proxy? Or sentinel event? Indicator? Marker? I think some thought should go into a more specific term.

On page 2, Methods, you say you excluded drivers and security guards, but you don't mention translators who seem to be included. You should probably mention that in the text.

In general, I wanted to know more about the variables available from the five databases, and how similar they were from one to another. You say you "excluded homicides lacking sufficient evidence," but you didn't really apply your own judgment to that, right? Another example is the "evidence of long-term residence, local extended families or local hometown." Another example: perpetrators of each attack on a media worker were recorded "where possible"—you mean by the source organization, not by the researchers? In all these cases, I'm taking it that you relied on the judgment of the source organization. Could you describe that a little better—what criteria the data source used to judge evidence? Could you give an example? Similarly, the degree of intentionality is a judgment of the source, not the authors, right? Were the categories you named similar across the several sources you used? Examples?

On page 2, you say individuals were included when they appeared in at least 2 of the databases. You show in table 1 the number of cases where this occurred (73), but you should say it in the text too.

When you say media workers were often documented as having more than one occupation, do you mean besides media work or categories within media work?

You should say why you used the least intentional category (e.g., to provide the most conservative estimate...)

Bottom of page 2, you say..."rather than the ratio of the rates of events, i.e. without a denominator. Instead, after the comma I'd say since we had no denominator.

On page 3, results, I found the phrase “motives for the homicides (i.e....” to be confusing. Just say, “unconfirmed judgment of whether...”

I found the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph in results to be confusing. You should include real numbers, not just %ages. Even so, a little confusing.

Fourth paragraph in results, 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence, use a comma, not a semicolon. Same in the next sentence (first of the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph).

7<sup>th</sup> paragraph: put the phrase “there is evidence to suggest the media worker was specifically targeted due to their work” AFTER the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the sentence. As mentioned above, the evidence was judged by the source, not the researcher, right? Clarify.

On page 4, in the perpetrators paragraph, I’d edit the first sentence to say, “Almost one third of the perpetrators (29%) were unknown, while almost half (45%) were political groups...”

The first paragraph of discussion is just a regurgitation of results. Let’s see a synthesizing of the results here.

On page 5 you say, “The poor safety of media workers is heightened by the high levels of impunity for their killers, making media workers relatively easy targets.” I don’t know that poor safety is heightened by impunity, grammatically speaking. Still, here is the issue of impunity again, without really being dealt with or described. Also, a couple of sentences in that paragraph need references.

INSI, referred to at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> full paragraph on page 5, is an “it,” not a “they.”

Next paragraph, name the number of cases excluded.

I’d like all tables to have a caption indicating the source of the data without acronyms.

Table 2 might be enhanced by offering the names of the top 5 employing organizations.

I liked the offering of major events in Table 4.

I can see why you used the shadings you did in Figure 1—trying to make it work in black and white—but I think the candy striped bars for “Iraqi” deaths is very distracting and not visually pleasing. Same in Figures 2 and 3—change that to something less distracting.