



Review article

Supply and demand restrictions to education in conflict-affected countries: New research and future agendas



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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews an emerging body of micro-level research on the impact of violent conflict on child educational outcomes, with the aim of identifying key supply- and demand-side bottlenecks that shape the expansion and effectiveness of education systems in conflict-affected countries. Supply-side restrictions include the destruction of infrastructure and resources, displacement and distributional effects. On the demand side, poverty, adverse health shocks, low returns to education, child soldiering and fear and trauma result in severe restrictions to the resumption of child education among those exposed to armed violence. Based on this framework, the paper identifies avenues for future research on key mechanisms that may break through critical supply and demand barriers to education in the aftermath of armed conflict, and support enabling environments for more effective education systems in conflict-affected countries.

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1. Introduction

Over 1.5 billion people live in conflict-affected or fragile countries under considerable levels of insecurity and violence (World Bank, 2011). Children are especially affected by exposure to violent conflict given the age-specific dimension of many human capital investments – particularly in terms of schooling and nutrition. Adverse effects on human capital formation during childhood are, in turn, a well-documented mechanism leading to lower future labor market and health outcomes, and reduced economic productivity (Mincer, 1974; Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1962; Case and Paxson, 2006; Maccini and Young, 2009).

An emerging body of literature has shown that education is one of the most severe and long-lasting legacies of violent conflict, affecting individual human capital accumulation, as well as the stock of talent available to countries affected by political violence across generations (Akresh and de Walque, 2008; Alderman et al., 2006). Conflict-affected countries include over 20% of all children of primary school age, but account for around half of all out-of-school children of primary school age (UNESCO, 2011, 2013). The likelihood of young children dropping out of school is also significantly higher in conflict-affected countries

than elsewhere in the world: only 65% of children in these countries attend the last primary school grade, in comparison to 86% across low-income countries. Given this evidence, many have argued that education should constitute the fourth pillar of humanitarian interventions, alongside food, health care and shelter (UNESCO, 2011).

Improving education systems is, however, a major challenge for countries emerging from sometimes decades of armed violence. Although there is now a well-established literature on the impact of violent conflicts on children education outcomes and the functioning of education systems (Mason, 2014; Justino, 2012), we still have limited knowledge about the causal pathways through which education interventions may mitigate the adverse effects of conflict and create enabling environments for the effective recovery of education systems in conflict-affected contexts. The objective of this paper is to review an emerging body of literature, based largely on the quantitative analysis of the causal impact of violent conflicts on educational outcomes among boys and girls, in order to frame and identify key restrictions to the recovery and expansion of education in conflict-affected settings.

Restrictions to education recovery and expansion in such contexts are likely to emerge from both supply- and demand-side processes. On the supply side, violent conflict is associated with the destruction of infrastructure, social institutions and markets which may, in turn, create important barriers to the

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provision of schooling and the reconstruction of education systems in areas affected by violence. From a demand for education perspective, changes in economic and social structures within families and communities during the conflict, alongside persistent insecurity, may create substantial barriers to children joining schools during and after violent conflicts. Understanding these combined supply- and demand-side restrictions is important because it will allow for a better understanding of potential interactions between the provision of education systems, on the one hand, and the social and economic recovery of individuals and households, on the other hand, in the aftermath of armed conflict. Importantly, it also provides testable hypotheses about potential entry points for policy interventions that may support the recovery of education systems in conflict-affected areas – both from the perspective of rebuilding schooling resources and infrastructure, and from the perspective of encouraging the uptake of schooling and the return to education of children exposed to violence during conflicts.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section reviews in detail several recent micro-level studies that have provided what constitutes now a significant body of quantitative evidence on the causal effects of conflict exposure among individuals and households on educational outcomes among children. The analysis of supply- and demand-side factors that shape education outcomes among conflict-affected populations is developed in the next two sections. The paper concludes by suggesting promising avenues for future research and policy interventions that may break through critical supply and demand barriers to education in the aftermath of armed conflict, and support more enabling environments for the establishment of effective education systems in conflict-affected countries.

2. The impact of violent conflict on education outcomes

Exposure to violent conflict affects children in several ways, ranging from direct killings and injuries, to more subtle, yet persistent and irreversible effects on schooling, health and nutrition outcomes, future employment opportunities and overall well-being. Educational attainment and levels of attendance are particularly compromised by exposure to violence. A body of emerging research in development economics, education research and political science has documented the causal adverse impact of conflict exposure of children and their immediate household on education outcomes – largely formal primary and secondary education attendance in areas affected by armed conflict and violence¹ – and the long-term implications of these effects. A few studies report in contrast some positive effects of conflict on child education outcomes, some of which are highly gender-differentiated. These findings are discussed in more detail below, based on a review of emerging quantitative literature on the effects of violent conflict on education outcomes. While there is a large body of ethnographic and qualitative literature on the relationship between armed conflict and education (see, for instance, studies mentioned in Al-Hroub, 2014; Bekerman et al., 2009; Winthrop and Kirk, 2008), quantitative causal analyses have only recently started to document these effects statistically. This paper focuses on this emerging literature. The analysis was based on an extensive literature review using the wealth of quantitative research on

education and conflict produced in the Households in Conflict Network,² and literature searches using specific keywords.³

2.1. The direct effect of violence exposure on education outcomes

Several studies have examined the impact of individual and household exposure to armed violence on education among girls and boys across a range of different conflict-affected contexts. Despite wide differences in conflict duration, war strategies and other context-specific characteristics, the magnitude of the effects of violence exposure on education are remarkably similar across the various case studies.⁴ Three main findings are prominent in the literature: conflict exposure leads to reductions in school attendance, exposure to armed violence reduces the number of years children spend in school, and children in areas affected by armed conflict progress more slowly through grades and are less likely to complete their education.

Akresh and de Walque (2008) have calculated that exposure to the 1994 Rwanda genocide led to a loss of 0.5 years of schooling among children affected by the violence when they were aged 6–15 years old. Alderman et al. (2006) investigated the effect of the civil war in Zimbabwe in the 1970s and 1980s and the subsequent drought. They found that exposure to the shocks were associated with a loss of 0.85 years of schooling among affected children. Alva et al. (2002) report a loss of between 1 and 1.3 years of schooling among children exposed to the ethnic tensions that erupted in Kosovo in the 1990s, alongside reductions in school enrolment of 10 percentage points for boys and 9 percentage points for girls. Similar results have been found across other conflicts. Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011), Dabalen and Saumik (2012), León (2010), Merrouche (2006), Parlow (2012) and Rodriguez and Sanchez (2009) report reductions in school attainment among violence-affected children in Guatemala (0.47–0.71 years), Cote d'Ivoire (0.2–0.9 years), Peru (0.21–0.5 years), Cambodia (0.4 years), Kashmir (3.5 years) and Colombia (1 year),⁵ respectively. Similar results have also been found among populations affected by other dimensions of violent conflicts. Baez (2011) shows that children in Tanzania living in areas affected by flows of refugees from border countries lost 0.2 years of schooling in

² The Households in Conflict Network (www.hicn.org) brings together world leading researchers working on the micro level analysis of violent conflict. The purpose of HiCN is to undertake collaborative research into the causes and effects of violent conflict at the household level, including (i) characterizing the various forms of conflict from a household level perspective; (ii) identifying channels through which households are affected by conflict-induced shocks; (iii) quantifying the impact of conflict at the household level, such as the loss of household members, livestock and land; (iv) analyzing the feedback mechanism from household welfare to violent conflict, such as the effects of inequality and poverty on the incidence of conflict; (v) developing methods best suited to analyze the impact of conflict on household welfare; and (vi) deriving policy recommendations based on research findings for supporting households and communities affected by conflict. The website of HiCN offers open access to over 200 working papers on these important issues – including a large number that focus on the relationship between conflict and education.

³ Keywords included 'conflict/violence' and 'education', 'school(ing)', 'child education', 'primary school', 'secondary school', 'education barriers', and 'education systems'. Literature search sources included the *Social Science Citation Index*, *Ingenta Connect* and *Google Scholar*, and pertinent literature produced by international organizations.

⁴ It is important to note that rarely are whole countries affected by violent conflict. The analysis in the papers reviewed in this section refers to the education effects of sub-national patterns of conflict – as they take place across different sub-regions and among different communities. The identification strategy of most of the papers reviewed relies on comparing individuals or groups of individuals directly exposed to different patterns of armed violence during childhood, with comparable individuals living in same area (sometimes in the same sub-national district) but not affected by violence (or not to the same extent).

⁵ Wharton and Uwaifo Oyelere (2011) report a lower loss in education attainment in Colombia (between 0.2 and 0.5 years) but their sample is restricted to displaced children.

¹ Other bodies of literature have emphasized the role of informal education processes in conflict-affected contexts. This important dimension is outside the scope of this paper but excellent discussions are provided in van der Linden (2015) and UNICEF (2015).

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