

greatly contributed to the existence of a strong network of competence in public health research by bringing together the available institutional and personal resources in a trans-disciplinary approach.

Despite our traditionally – rather individualistic – academic working culture, by collaborating more closely beyond

the boundaries of our disciplines we can help to improve the quality of public health research and its relevance to the promotion of health and the quality of life in Switzerland.

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## War, a major health determinant

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One of the most striking trend of the human cost of wars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the huge proportion of civilians killed<sup>1</sup>. According to Clemens and Singer, half of the 18.7 million deaths from World War I, 73% of the 40.5 million deaths of World War II, about 50% of the 2.7 million deaths of the Vietnam wars were civilians, plus soldiers dying out of combats from wounds, accident, or diseases.

In the Angola and Mozambique conflicts from the 1960s to the 1990s, more than 75% of the victims were civilians. The death toll is only the tip of the iceberg. When battles are over, their visible (physical) and less visible (psychological) wounds persist<sup>2</sup>. Between 1985 and 1995, 2 million children died from warfare, but another 10 to 15 million were maimed physically or psychologically<sup>1</sup>.

War is a major health determinants, which currently affects directly large fractions of the world population and indirectly all of us. Research on the health effects of war has therefore

its place in SPM. In this forum, we have invited three scientists to pinpoint some of the epidemiologic issues associated with studying the consequences of war. Sabina Negovetic describes the effects of war at the population level<sup>3</sup>. Yuval Neria focuses on the posttraumatic stress syndrome and its proposed therapies<sup>4</sup>. Jeanne Mager Stellman and Karestan C. Koenen specifically review the health problems of Vietnam War veterans<sup>5</sup>.

This forum does not pretend to present an exhaustive review of the health consequences of war. These short contributions only reveal a small part of this enormous problem. For example, many people die from malnutrition and disease caused or increased by armed conflicts. This forum can however contribute to demonstrate that, as a major health determinant, war deserves to be studied using apt and rigorous epidemiologic methods. A fuller understanding of the consequences of warfare can eventually bolster efforts of those who fight ... against war.

### References

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- 3 Negovetic S. Consequences of war and disasters on the health of civilian populations. *Soz Präventivmed* 2001; 46: 150–1.
- 4 Neria Y. Prevention of posttraumatic sequelae: therapeutic intervention in trauma survivors. *Soz Präventivmed* 2001; 46: 148–9.
- 5 Mager Stellman S, Koenen KC. War: is a mental health ceasefire possible? *Soz Präventivmed* 2001; 46: 146–7.

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