

Comments on “Essays on Conflict and Human Capital Accumulation” by Dejan Kovac

This thesis provides causal evidence on the long-term effects of the 1991-1995 Croatian-Serbian war on battery of outcomes both on the individuals directly affected by the war and the next generations who lost their fathers at the war combat. Overall, I think this thesis is very interesting and novel in tackling the aspects of the warfare that have not been studied in the economics of conflict literature before. It was truly a pleasure to read this well-crafted and very well-written excellent work. In my opinion, this thesis definitely meets necessary standards for awarding PhD degree and I am very satisfied with the quality and depth of the submitted thesis. Thus, I would recommend the candidate to pass without any reservations. Below, I list my comments and suggestions for clarification.

The first chapter studies the effect of paternal mortality on children’s health and school outcomes relying on quasi-random comparisons of children of fathers fighting in the same military unit. The analysis is made possible by linking administrative data on veterans’ war outcomes with information on grades and other school outcomes of veteran’s children. The second chapter proposes a proxy for values inculcated by parents that lead their sons to participate voluntarily in a deadly war for national independence. The analysis is again based on the administrative Croatian veteran database from the 1991-1995 Croatian-Serbian war and it allows for the study of intergenerational transmission of such patriotic values as well as for the exploration of the effects of the war on political (election) behavior 20 years after the war. The results suggest that a living memory of a previous war is important for countries that deal with the free-riding issue in active war service. The final chapter of the dissertation returns to the effect of the war experiences on the soldiers and their families. The data allow for the analysis of the exact degree of exposure to the carnage of war in one’s military unit on the after-war mortality and suicide rates experienced by soldiers. The analysis then takes the logical next step and asks about the effect that a veteran’s suicide has on his children’s school outcomes. More detailed comments:

1. In Chapter 1, Dejan finds that only *in-utero* exposure to warfare and loss of a father persistently affects the long-term outcomes of children. Moreover, the chapter finds that during the *in-utero* period, girls are affected more by the father’s death than boys. Given the Trivers-Willard hypothesis, girls are indeed more resilient under unfavorable circumstances than boys. Therefore, it would help to provide more discussion on the

gender-specific effects of the early post-natal exposure to warfare and the potential mechanisms driving these differential effects. In this discussion, author can benefit from the earlier work such as Akbulut and Yuksel (2017) on the long-term effects of armed conflict and warfare.

2. Along these lines, as postulated by Trivers-Willard hypothesis, there are well-documented differential in survival rates across genders both in-utero, at birth and during early post-natal period. Is there any information on gender-specific pre-natal or post-natal mortality? This would also help to explain the differential long-term effects among girls and boys.
3. I am also wondering whether there is information on the family structure of the children who lost their father during the war. For instance, are their mother remarried? Do they have support of their grandparents or other extended family? All these support might help mitigate the adverse effects of the warfare and the emotional burden of losing a father for children and a spouse for mothers.
4. For the external validity of the results, it would nice to give some descriptive statistics comparing the outcomes of the children of soldiers to the rest of the population, before and after the conflict, if possible. This comparison would help to discuss the external validity of the results presented.
5. In all chapters, I would also recommend mentioning the magnitude of the point estimates in the abstract.
6. In all chapters, I would also recommend reporting some outcomes such as GPA in standard deviations, which will allow the results to be compared easily to the previous related studies.

“Heterogeneity in the Long Term Effect of the Warfare” (Akbulut-Yuksel and Yuksel, Dalhousie University), *Economics and Human Biology*, 27, Part A, November 2017, pp. 126-136.