

Iraq Mortality Survey in The Lancet

Interview of Dr. Gil Burnham by The Lancet

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<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/iraq-mortality-survey-in-the-lancet-gil-burnham/2541375385>

Interviewer: Earlier I spoke to one of the study authors, Dr. Gilbert Burnham. He's a Professor of Public Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. He explains more about the methodology of the study:

Burnham: We used basically the - the standard cluster sampling method that's used in many developing countries and also used in conflict situations. We used this in a way where we collected information from 50 clusters throughout Iraq, and our intent was to collect the information proportionate to the population size; so larger areas got more clusters than smaller areas. And then we did 40 households in each cluster, and this was larger than we did last time and I think helped bring down the spread of the confidence intervals substantially. We of course would have liked to have done more clusters, but there is a trade off between the sample size that one wants and the risk that one is willing to discuss with the - their survey team.

Interviewer: Presumably again, looking at the methodology, once you've selected a cluster, and you've already explained how you select clusters according to population density in the country so the clusters are representative, you actually have to interview households almost sort of next door to you just to make it easier for the researchers on the ground to gain the confidence of the local community once they start doing the interviews.

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Burnham: Yes, we did 40 households with one start household then we kept going until we did the 40 adjacent households. Now, we probably could have reduced our intra-cluster similarities by taking every second or every third or every fourth household, but that would have spread out the size of the cluster and we felt that would have increased the risk to interviewers.

Interviewer: And in terms of the numbers used through your cluster sampling sampling techniques, interviewed over 1800 households which totaled over 12,000 individuals who were interviewed by your researchers - what were your broad findings?

Burnham: We found that the excess mortality over the 40 months post-invasion was around 654,000, and of those 654,000, 601,000 were due to violent causes. And among the different causes of violent deaths we found that gunfire was the most common right from the beginning, and that has continued.

Interviewer: The 650,000 is a huge figure and even the lower confidence interval around that figure is still a huge figure. Statistically, and obviously the researchers peer-reviewed here in the Lancet, that is an - that is an enormous leap isn't it, 650,000 from the x hundred that you actually found among the households that you surveyed. Are you totally convinced that you can extrapolate in that way?

2:46

Burnham: Yes, because if we look at the - the trends from the invasion to the present time, or at least until we finished the survey in July, for the first 18 months post-invasion the - the numbers were -were virtually the same as what we found last time, and it should

probably not come to surprise - has surprised anyone who's been reading the newspaper or television to see that the number of deaths has been increasing steadily as the time of the war has progressed. One of the things that comes as a surprise to many people is that these numbers are so much more larger than what are reported from various organizations that actually count bodies, and I think the - the organizations that are counting bodies and the - now the US Department of Defense, which also tracks deaths of Iraqis as well, is that these are pretty well confined to certain areas that have ready access to the media and where mortuaries and so forth are easily visited. But our study shows that these violent events are happening throughout the country; it's not just isolated in a - in a few locations. And then if we look at the trends, and that's the final table in the paper, if we look at the trends in the cumulative number of bodies identified or violent deaths reported and we compare that to the trends and the -the change in rates we found in our study, these are virtually identical.

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