

EMPHNET Emergency Bulletin

March 17, 2024

The Health Status in Gaza and Sudan

The Impact of Emergencies on the Health and Safety of Women and Girls

The Eastern Mediterranean Region suffers the impacts of some of the world's most protracted and complex humanitarian crises. Now, through almost five months of war in Gaza and ten months of armed conflict in Sudan, women and girls are facing disproportionate health challenges. Their hardships are further heightened by an interruption of health care service delivery and restricted access to humanitarian aid. Despite these challenges, women still play a major and prominent role in responding to emergencies, all while putting their health and well-being at risk.

In recognition of Women's Day, observed annually on March 8, this issue of the EMPHNET Emergency Bulletin sheds light on the health status of women in Gaza and Sudan.

Women and Girls' Vulnerability Areas

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

During public health emergencies, women and girls are at increased risk of gender-based violence.

Sexual Acts as a Weapon of War

Sexual Acts may be used as a form of violence and an intimidation tactic during conflict.

Healthcare Access

Primary, secondary, and tertiary care, including reproductive health and family planning services become scarce, leading to increased mortality and morbidity from preventable diseases, and unsafe deliveries.

Economic Insecurity

Loss of jobs and price inflation can lead to economic insecurity among women, households that are headed by women.

Food Insecurity

Food scarcity can lead to widespread malnutrition among women and negative coping mechanisms and behaviors.

Education

The lack of access to education increases vulnerability to exploitation, child marriage, and abuse in the long run.

Displacement and Privacy

Most refugees in camps are women and girls. They usually face overcrowded living conditions and a lack of privacy.

Menstrual Health and Hygiene

Emergencies disrupt accessibility to private and safe Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities. They also result in a lack of menstrual Health Education and menstrual Products.



Situation Overview in the Gaza Strip and Sudan

Gaza Strip

As of March 5, 2024

9000+
women killed

19,000+
women injured

155,000
women currently
pregnant or breastfeeding

~37
mothers are being
killed each day

951,490+
women and girls
were displaced*

5,500
women are expected to
give birth in the next month

Source: UN Women *Source: United Nations, 19 Jan, 24

The Threats to Women's Health in Gaza

In light of the siege and continuous bombardment by the Israeli Army in Gaza, Palestinian women endure a daily reality of trauma and fear. They are deprived of access to health services including antenatal care, deliveries and postnatal care. Their living conditions in temporary shelters such as tents and schoolrooms make the threats to their health and well-being more dire. Harsh winter conditions further intensify their suffering, as they lack sufficient winter clothing and blankets.

Access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene products is also limited. The shortage of pain relief medications and other essential treatments, coupled with the overwhelming demand for medical attention among displaced individuals, all contribute to putting women's lives and health at risk.

We receive around 50-60 cases per day, seeking pregnancy and family planning services. At the Primary health clinic in Deir Al Balah, we have run out of family planning services since 12th of December.

Samah, a midwifery working in the Primary health clinic in Deir Al Balah

More specifically, the lack of health services is putting the lives of 50,000 pregnant women in danger, thus increasing their chances for pregnancy complications, while the rate of maternal mortality is also increasing. From another angle, the increased food insecurity and malnutrition spread across the population of the Gaza Strip is preventing the mothers' ability to breastfeed their newborns.

I was eight months pregnant when I was forced to flee Bureij camp to reside with my brother's wife in Nuseirat camp. I delivered my child prematurely due to the tremendous stress and anxiety I faced due to continuous airstrikes. Right now, I am unable to breastfeed my child because I am not eating enough, nor am I able to afford milk.

Haneen, a Palestinian refugee from Bureij camp, forced to flee their home

According to UN Women, more than 3000 women have become widows and heads of households as of March 5, 2023. This new reality places tremendous pressure on them to provide food and essential supplies for their families in a context where limited supplies are available.

The Threats to Women's Health in Sudan

Similarly, Sudan has faced a protracted emergency since April 15, 2023. The conflict between Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has caused tremendous suffering among women and girls alike. In fact, it has heightened their humanitarian needs, and it has increased gender equity gaps. According to OCHA's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, an estimated 24.8 million Sudanese across 17 localities will

require humanitarian assistance, of which 26% (n= ~6.5 million) are women. The protracted emergency has also restricted the delivery of sexual and reproductive health to women, in addition to social protection services. All these factors increase the chances of unsafe delivery and abortion, as well as deaths and complications from gender-based violence.

Sudan

24.8 million
Sudanese across 17
localities will require
humanitarian assistance

~23%
women and girls
of reproductive
age were displaced

4.2 million
women and girls
are at risk of gender-
based violence

26%
(n= ~6.5 million) women
require humanitarian
assistance

~150,000
pregnant women
were displaced

40%
(n=1.2 million) increase
in gender-based violence
from the start of the war

44
reported incidents of
gender-based violence
between the period of
February and March 2024

Within these dire realities, we reiterate the cruciality and urgency of a humanitarian ceasefire and the endorsement of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) under all circumstances. Humanitarian corridors should be opened for the safe and continuous passage

of humanitarian aid and international support. In addition, adequately equipped shelters and sanitation infrastructure should be rebuilt to avert the spread of infectious disease and to ensure better health for women and girls in both Sudan and Gaza.



Hind Khoudary, 29, a Palestinian journalist reporting on Gaza is pictured with a group of girls, Gaza Strip, December 29, 2023. @hindkhoudary Instagram



Hawa Omar, 23, a Sudanese woman who fled the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, is pictured at her temporary shelter in Adre, Chad, July 19. REUTERS/Zohra Bensemra

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