

WOMEN FACING GENOCIDE THE CHALLENGES OF HEALTH AND CARE IN GAZA

Report

November 2024

Women have long been the most vulnerable and adversely affected victims of war and armed conflict. The ongoing war on Gaza—which witnesses some of the most heinous crimes and acts of genocide by the occupying forces—represents a calculated attack on the very fabric of Palestinian society, where women constitute half of its foundation. This reality led this war to be described as a “war on women”, according to UN Women.

Since September 25th, Israel has blocked humanitarian aid to northern Gaza, further restricting the entry of goods on October 1st, followed by a wide-scale military offensive against Jabalia, Beit Lahia, and Beit Hanoun. This effectually isolated northern Gaza from the rest of the Strip.

This siege, combined with a relentless ground invasion, has exacerbated the suffering of women in Gaza, particularly pregnant and nursing women who require constant medical attention, stable nutrition, and adequate services.

This report examines the status of Palestinian women in Gaza amidst the ongoing genocide, focusing on pregnant women, the challenges of childbirth and motherhood, healthcare and emergency services, caregiving duties, detention and getting targeted by occupation forces, and the plight of disabled women. By which we aim to draw connections between the realities of health, reproductive services, and the crime of genocide.

The Life of Women in Gaza

As the Israeli war on Gaza continues, women suffer from a lack of basic services and the deprivation of life’s necessities amid systematic displacement and killings that have erased the identity and landmarks of Gaza.

As of the end of April, over 10,000 women have lost their lives. Survivors endure terror, widowhood, displacement, and deprivation of even the barest essentials¹. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, women and children constitute approximately 70% of the over 43,000 fatalities in Gaza, with an average daily killing toll of 130 over the past 10 months².

In addition to death and displacement, women in Gaza face daily challenges due to limited resources, especially personal care items, which heighten the risk of infectious diseases.

[1] [United Nations](#)

[2] [United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

Nearly 700,000 women and girls lack access to sanitary products. The Gaza Strip requires 10.3 million sanitary pads monthly to meet the needs. Scarcity of hygiene products forces women to resort to primitive methods, increasing the risk of infection³.



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How Pregnant Women Live in Gaza?

The number of pregnant women nearing delivery in Gaza is significant, with estimates indicating that 49,000 women are pregnant in Gaza, 4,000 of whom are expected to give birth soon. The lack of prenatal and postnatal care has heightened the risk of miscarriages and maternal deaths⁴.

Over the past year, the blockade on resources and services has put pregnant women at extreme risk. According to UNFPA, 46,300 pregnant women are facing catastrophic hunger levels, while 155,000 pregnant and nursing women experienced extreme difficulties accessing medical care during the past year⁵.

With the irregular flow of humanitarian aid, 16,500 pregnant and nursing women are anticipated to suffer from acute malnutrition. UNFPA reports that over 17,000 pregnant women are on the brink of starvation, while 11,000 already live in famine-like conditions⁶.

[13] UNFPA

[4] UN

[5] UNFPA

[6] UN Women

Due to limited hospital operations focusing solely on life-saving cases, pregnant women lack routine medical check-ups, leaving them vulnerable to health complications during and after pregnancy. UN Women estimates that 68% of surveyed pregnant women suffer from urinary tract infections, anemia, hypertension, or bleeding disorders.

Childbirth and Motherhood Amid Genocide

UNICEF estimates that at least 4,000 newborns in Gaza were deprived of life-saving neonatal care last year due to attacks on hospitals, power outages, and fuel shortages.

Even before the current war, Gaza's neonatal intensive care facilities were insufficient, now available incubators have decreased by 70%, leaving only about 54 functional incubators across the Strip.

Reports indicate rising maternal deaths during and shortly after childbirth, as women often give birth alone in unsuitable environments, such as their homes or displacement shelters, without medical oversight.

Recent attacks on Kamal Adwan Hospital, the primary provider of emergency obstetric care, have led to the closure of the last neonatal intensive care units in northern Gaza⁷.

According to UNICEF estimates, out of 105 incubators that were available in northern Gaza before the war, only 9 remain, all located in Kamal Adwan Hospital. However, it is unclear whether they are still operational following the recent attacks⁸.

Healthcare and Emergency Services

UN Women estimates that over 177,000 women face life-threatening health risks, including 162,000 suffering from or at risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular conditions, or hypertension.

Additionally, 25% of women in Gaza experience dermatological and other health issues due to water and sanitation shortages. The prices of basic hygiene items, such as soap, have skyrocketed by 1,100%.

[7]UN
[8]UN

Burden of Care and Family Support

Since October 2023, an estimated one million women and girls have been displaced five to seven times without possessions or knowledge of their next destinations⁹. Many were forced to leave destroyed homes under occupation threats, often without any male family members to support them as providers.

Over 3,000 women have become widows in the past year, struggling to provide for their families amidst a severe lack of safe shelters for survivors¹⁰. This suffering is further exacerbated in cases of enforced disappearance of a family member or breadwinner, with no knowledge of their fate. The economic and psychological pressures are immense, especially for women caring for large families, including infants, elderly relatives, injured persons, and individuals with disabilities.

Targeting and Abduction

In addition to the ongoing genocide through targeted attacks by the occupation army's air force and the loss of thousands of women still buried under the rubble, women in Gaza face numerous violations, particularly during their attempts to flee and seek safer locations. The occupation forces have targeted civilian vehicles, often carrying women, with missiles, shells, and live ammunition. Eyewitnesses passing along Salah al-Din Road reported harrowing scenes of women subjected to bombing and direct targeting, with their remains scattered and their bodies decomposing on vehicles.

Testimonies also document instances where women were forcibly stripped of their clothes and headscarves during their displacement journeys. Palestinian women have faced arbitrary arrests and detentions during their attempts to flee, including elderly women and minors. According to witnesses, they endure abuse and mistreatment, with complete secrecy surrounding their fate imposed by the occupation.

Reports indicate that the occupation employs a systematic targeting policy, causing severe physical harm, fatal injuries, and permanent disabilities to both women and men.

[9] Al Jazeera

[10] UN

Additionally, there appears to be a deliberate strategy by the occupation forces to target female journalists, activists, and women working in humanitarian relief and medical sectors. This aims to hinder any efforts to support the resilience of Gaza's population.

According to statistics from the Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees Affairs Commission, since the beginning of the ground invasion until mid-November, approximately 142 women have been detained in various prisons and detention centers, including Damon and Hasharon. Among them are young girls, infants, and elderly women. Many were forced to leave their children behind, often with families to whom they had no familial ties¹¹.

Disabled Women

Before the outbreak of the war on Gaza, approximately 58,000 individuals, constituting 2.6% of the population in the Gaza Strip, were recorded as persons with disabilities in 2023. This percentage has significantly increased, with 10,000 new disability cases documented between October 7, 2023, and October 2024. This number is expected to rise further as the ongoing war makes it impossible to comprehensively account for all cases until its conclusion. Reports indicate that the occupation forces are using internationally banned incendiary weapons and implementing a deliberate policy of targeting civilians, resulting in limb amputations.

Women constitute a significant portion of persons with disabilities in Gaza, and their suffering is exacerbated by displacement, overcrowding, and the lack of privacy and security. These challenges are further intensified as they face continuous displacement, often on foot and without access to food or water.

[11] [Palestine Studies Association](#)

Genocide and Reproductive Health

The crimes committed against women in the Gaza Strip are an inseparable component of the broader genocide targeting all segments of Gaza's population.

Denying women access to medical services, reproductive healthcare, and humanitarian aid constitutes acts of genocide under Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Specifically, such actions align with:

(c)"Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

(d)"Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group."

The Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and the First Additional Protocol (1977) explicitly mandate the protection of women in armed conflicts, prohibiting any form of assault on their dignity or their subjection to cruel or inhumane treatment¹².

The **Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness)** emphasizes the urgent necessity of ensuring women's protection, providing them with dignified living conditions, and safeguarding them from all forms of violence imposed by the occupation.

Moreover, preserving the right to healthcare and medical services which is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), particularly in critical circumstances such as pregnancy and childbirth.

[12] Articles 16 and 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and articles 75 and 76 of the 1st Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions

Conclusion

The Israeli war of extermination against the Gaza Strip signifies a grave escalation in violations against Palestinian women, who represent the most affected group due to systematic destruction and the ongoing blockade. The rising number of casualties and injuries has reached unprecedented levels. Restrictions imposed by Israeli forces further hinder access to humanitarian aid and healthcare, exacerbating the suffering of women, particularly pregnant women, nursing mothers, and women with disabilities.

Additionally, women face direct targeting, deprivation of reproductive health services, and broader systemic challenges stemming from deliberate Israeli policies. These actions may constitute acts of genocide under international law. The persistent targeting of women by Israeli forces represents a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and demands an immediate response from the international community to ensure their protection.



Recommendations

In light of the above, we at the **Palestinian Association for Human Rights (Witness)** call for the following:

1. Enhance the presence of international observers to ensure their safety, and provide safe corridors for them during evacuation orders.
2. We condemn the targeting of Palestinian women by the Israeli occupation, and urge international courts to investigate the crimes committed against them.
3. Provide relief programs focused on rehabilitating women affected psychologically and physically, including pregnant and nursing women.
4. Ensure the provision of reproductive health services for women in Gaza by pressuring the occupation to allow the entry of necessary equipment and medicines, in addition to providing mobile medical care to reach areas lacking infrastructure.
5. Provide legal assistance to women victims, enabling them to seek compensation for the damages caused by the practices of the occupation.
6. Implement an international awareness campaign about the situation of women in Gaza, and submit periodic reports to the United Nations and the Human Rights Council on violations against them to mobilize international solidarity and increase pressure on the Israeli occupation.

For more information visit our webpage at www.pahrw.org

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