



The Suffering of Women and Girls in Gaza Since 7 October

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Women and Girls in Gaza: At A Glance



01

Women and Girls in Gaza: At A Glance

70%

of those killed in Gaza since 7 October are women and girls
Source: Sky News

2

mothers killed in Gaza every hour
Source: UN Women

50k

pregnant women in Gaza
Source: WHO



1 million



girls and women displaced
Source: UN Women

At least 10k

children have lost their fathers
Source: UN Women

1 toilet

for every 150 people in some camps
Source: ActionAid



4,600

displaced pregnant women
Source: UNRWA

At least 3,000

women may have become widows and heads of households
Source: UN Women



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Overview of Women and Girls' Suffering in Gaza



02

Overview of Women and Girls' Suffering in Gaza

Since 7 October, women and girls have made up the majority of those killed, wounded, and displaced.¹ Roughly 1 million women and girls are displaced in Gaza, and two mothers killed every hour.²

Whilst everyone in Gaza is suffering, women and girls experience additional suffering due to a lack of basic hygiene products, a lack of privacy, and often greater caring responsibilities.³ Palestinian civil society organisation MIFTAH referred to Gaza as a place where 'womanhood [is] denied' since 7 October.⁴

Food and other essentials are also in short supply, meaning some families in Gaza are eating just one meal a day.⁵ This is especially dangerous for pregnant women, where nutrition can make the difference between life and death for them and their newborns.⁶

Women's deaths during pregnancy are expected to increase given the lack of access to adequate care.⁵² The psychological toll of the hostilities also has direct – and sometimes deadly – consequences on reproductive health, including a rise in stress-induced miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature births.⁵³

“Can you imagine this is the fate of our children? What the mothers of Gaza experience can never be described.”⁷

Barak from Bani Suhaila, near Khan Younis

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Attacks on Maternity Wards and Hospitals



03

Attacks on Maternity Wards and Hospitals

On 1 November, al-Hilo maternity hospital – which had been converted from a cancer hospital during the war – was bombed.⁸ Many of the expecting mothers there had already been injured in previous airstrikes, and were giving birth with broken legs, hands, and even fractured skulls.⁹

On 10 November, al-Shifa hospital, including its maternity department, was hit by Israeli bombs several times, causing several deaths and injuries.¹⁰

On 11 December, Israeli airstrikes targeted the maternity ward at Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya, killing two mothers.¹¹

On 18 December, Israel bombed the maternity ward of Al Nasser medical centre in Khan Younis, killing one child and injuring several others.¹² Four babies in the intensive care unit at Al Nasser died when staff evacuated during the attack.¹³

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Pregnancy During Israel's Attacks



04

Pregnancy During Israel's Attacks

Palestinian women in Gaza are deprived of proper medical care and routine checkups during their pregnancies, which is particularly dangerous for women in their final three months of pregnancy.¹⁴ Newborns are also not given the necessary vaccinations, since they are unavailable in Gaza.¹⁵ The uncertainty and lack of medical care for their babies gives pregnant women and mothers deep anxiety for the future of their children.¹⁶

Furthermore, pregnant and lactating mothers lack access to the nutritious and healthy diet they need.¹⁷ It is estimated that in Gaza, 155,000 women are either

pregnant or lactating, and 135,000 babies are under two years old.¹⁸

Mothers travelling to maternity wards face airstrikes blocking their way to the hospital.¹⁹ For example, when 26-year-old Israa went into labour on 23 November, it took her ambulance more than an hour to reach the nearest maternity ward due to three airstrikes hitting the road on the way.²⁰ Most women cannot get an ambulance or are too scared to travel due to attacks on ambulances and hospitals.²¹

*'My first displacement was on the second day of the Israeli military attack. I was seven months pregnant at the time. Since then, I was forcibly displaced multiple times due to the bombardments and evacuation orders, until I reached southern Gaza. I couldn't do any follow ups with a gynaecologist, and my caesarean was postponed three times because of the difficult situation in hospitals. When the surgery was finally performed, I was only half sedated. I had to leave the hospital before the needed rest time, and I had no clothes for the baby with me whatsoever. I got some later through humanitarian aid. Later, I struggled to acquire a vaccine for the baby and lacked diapers and formula milk for her and her older brother, who is less than two years old. I myself didn't have the food I needed as a lactating mum, and I have anaemia.'*²²

Nuha Hazem Asraf,
A mother of two in Gaza

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Giving Birth Without Medication or Sanitary Conditions



05

Giving Birth Without Medication or Sanitary Conditions

Over 180 women in Gaza are being forced to give birth in inhumane, degrading, and dangerous conditions every day.²³ This includes women giving birth in tents, shelters, in the streets, or in overwhelmed and overcrowded medical facilities where sanitation is poor, and the risk of infection or medical complication is rising.²⁴

UNWRA estimates that around 5,000 pregnant women are sheltering in their makeshift camps in southern Gaza, and around 400 newborn babies in their facilities require additional attention.²⁵

15 percent of women giving birth experience pregnancy or birth-related complications requiring medical attention and care.²⁶ Soraida Hussein-Sabbah, a gender and advocacy specialist at ActionAid UK, reported that: “Every day we hear of doctors delivering the babies of women who are dying in childbirth. It is catastrophic”.⁵⁵ Dr Nasser Fouad Bulbul, head of the premature and neonatal care departments at Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest health facility in Gaza, said his team had recently performed a premature delivery of a baby “from the mother’s womb while she was dying”.⁵⁶

Since supplies of anaesthetics have run out, pregnant women are having C-sections without any anaesthetic.²⁷ Doctors have to perform the operation under torchlight, due to the lack of electricity.⁵⁴ Despite this excruciating pain, all women have to leave the hospital just four hours after giving birth due to the overcrowding.²⁸

Raeda al-Masry on the struggle of giving birth during the Israeli genocide:

“Moath [her baby] was born right here in the classroom about two months ago. When my labour started, we called for an ambulance or something, but there were no resources. Nobody came to help. Oh my goodness, it was such a difficult birth. There’s nothing here that can help during a delivery. I didn’t even have any clothes. People had to rummage around to find something for me to put Moath in. They told me there were no vaccines...but look at where we are. The baby is here in the school where there are all sorts of diseases spreading. Right now, he has something happening with his chest. He’s having a hard time breathing, but there’s nothing I can do. I’m not eating enough either to be able to nurse him. Some people helped me by bringing me some formula.”²⁹

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Premature Births



Premature Births

Juzoor, an Oxfam partner organisation that is supporting hundreds of pregnant women in Gaza, said the number of premature births had risen by 25-30 percent in the month after 7 October.³⁰ They attribute the rise to difficulties faced by mothers who have had to flee their homes due to bombardment and have suffered stress and trauma.³¹

Premature babies are more susceptible to illness and Juzoor said that at least one newborn had died in each of its 13 shelters for displaced people in north Gaza over the first month of Israel's attacks on Gaza.³²

These premature babies also have to be incubated, which is almost impossible due to the displacement of mothers, the destruction of hospitals, and shortages of fuel.³³ When fuel ran out at al-Shifa hospital, 39 premature babies were left at risk of death as a result of incubators being unable to function.³⁴ Despite doctors using aluminium foil to try to keep the babies alive, at least five of these babies died.³⁵

Some women who became pregnant after many painful IVF cycles are worried that they will miscarry.³⁶

Laila Baraka, 30, who is three months pregnant after a successful round of IVF following years of trying for a second child, said:

“All day, I’m scared of the sound of bombings, and at night, it is even more intense and terrifying. I hug my five-year-old son close as I try to swallow my fear, but I cannot. What we hear terrifies stones, not just humans.”³⁷

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Siege-Induced Period Poverty



07

Siege-Induced Period Poverty

Palestinian women in Gaza are suffering from a lack of sanitary pads, sterilizers, and personal hygiene equipment during their period.³⁸ Women have complained about spending long days in pharmacies, shops, and local markets in search of sanitary pads and tissues, in addition to personal hygiene sterilizers, which they have been unable to obtain.³⁹

Some women have had to resort to using their headscarf as a makeshift pad, by cutting it into three pieces in order to use it.⁴⁰ The NGO Action Against Hunger has reported that many women's clothes were stained with menstrual blood, and they were "using period products for longer than anticipated, increasing the risk of infection."⁴¹

The lack of sanitary pads has led to a rise in infections, with one woman contracting a genital bacterial infection that forced her to be admitted to the hospital for several days.⁴² According to Samia Abu Draz, an obstetrician and gynaecologist in Gaza, using any contaminated utensil during menstruation or even using unsanitary bathrooms may cause a bacterial infection that causes infertility: "If this bacterium happens to infect the vagina, the infection can reach the uterus and fallopian tubes, and pelvic inflammation may occur at that time, and this is enough to cause blood poisoning, which then leads to the inability to become pregnant again."⁴³

As a result of the absence of sanitary products, some women have resorted to using contraceptive drugs to postpone their menstrual cycle, causing many of them great pain that has exacerbated their daily suffering.⁴⁴ According to Doctors Without Borders, requests for period-delaying contraceptive pills have quadrupled in Gaza since 7 October as women seek to control their periods.⁴⁵

However, these drugs may have side effects, including irregular vaginal bleeding, nausea, changes to the menstrual cycle, dizziness, and mood swings.⁴⁶

Ruba Seif, a 35-year-old Gazan woman, explained her decision to take period-delaying pills:

"I cannot bear the menstrual cramps on top of the intense fear we experience constantly, the lack of sleep, and the cold since there aren't enough blankets... I know of their negative side effects, but these pills cannot be more harmful than the missiles, death and destruction all around us."⁴⁷

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Women's Health Problems



Women’s Health Problems

Women in Gaza with intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUDs) are experiencing bleeding and infections due to the unhygienic conditions in the camps.⁴⁸ There are currently no options for IUD removal in Gaza, posing long-term risks to women’s reproductive health, including severe bleeding.⁴⁹ Women in Gaza are also experiencing cases of sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections, which are untreated due to Israel’s attacks on hospitals.⁵⁰

UNRWA Director of Communications, Juliette Touma, reported that while she has been in Gaza, “many women told me that they don’t eat and drink, not only because there is not enough to go around, but also to limit the time they have to spend going to use the filthy and unsanitary restroom facilities”.⁵¹

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