

# Gaza's children and the unbearable cost of war — a pediatric perspective on a public health emergency

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In armed conflict, children are often portrayed as innocent bystanders. Yet data from Gaza reveal they are not only victims—they are among the primary casualties. As pediatric professionals, we have a duty to both bear witness and act.

In this issue of *The Turkish Journal of Pediatrics*, we publish a critical contribution: “Excess mortality and disease burden due to conflict in Gaza: focus on the 0–14 age group” written by Gökler ME. This study quantifies the impact of the post-October 7, 2023 conflict on child health using disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). The results are staggering, revealing an overwhelming rise in the burden of disease and premature death among children. The analysis shows a dramatic surge in the loss of healthy life years, emphasizing the severe impact of the conflict on child survival and long-term well-being.<sup>1</sup>

This context is critical: recent conflicts in Gaza have produced the highest child casualty rates recorded in modern times.<sup>2</sup> According to data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as of July 23, 2025, the military offensive in Gaza has resulted in the deaths of more than 59,000 Palestinians, injured over 143,000 individuals, and led to the displacement of nearly the entire population of 2.1 million residents.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the actual burden may be even higher than reported. Due to the extensive

destruction of infrastructure, the Gaza Health Ministry faces increasing challenges in data collection, which likely results in underreporting of both mortality and morbidity figures.<sup>4</sup> Since March 2, 2025, humanitarian aid access to Gaza has been severely restricted, with a complete blockade in place until May 19. Following the breakdown of a ceasefire on March 18, Israeli forces have resumed the use of explosive weaponry in their operations targeting Gaza.<sup>5</sup>

The conflict's impact extends beyond injury and mortality to include the systemic breakdown of health service delivery. Reports from humanitarian organizations operating in Gaza indicate that hospitals are now rationing food for inpatients, with only one or two meals provided per day—and expectations that food services may be entirely suspended in the coming weeks.<sup>5</sup> This level of deprivation not only compounds the physical and psychological toll on children but also reflects the collapse of basic care standards amid siege conditions.

When viewed together, the DALY analysis and the data being reported from the area illustrate both the quantitative scale and qualitative depth of suffering among Gaza's children. Beyond immediate injuries and mortality, the long-term implications for child development, mental health, and community resilience are incalculable.

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We urge the pediatric community, global health institutions, and humanitarian actors to amplify these data. This is not just a regional crisis—it is a global moral and public health emergency. A lasting and effective response must center on children's rights to health, protection, and recovery, and must be accompanied by a ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian access, and sustainable rebuilding of Gaza's health infrastructure.

We commend the authors of the DALY study and other teams who continue to document and deliver care under unimaginable conditions. Their work ensures that the pediatric burden of war is no longer invisible.

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