

The Forgotten Victims: The Effects of War on the Elderly Population in Gaza



In the rubble of a devastated Gaza neighborhood, an elderly man mourns the remnants of what once was his family home. "I worked for 40 years to build this home," he laments, "it's all gone." Another elderly woman, now residing in a packed shelter with thousands of other displaced Palestinians, expresses the poor conditions she and her family are living in: "we have no money, we have no food, no electricity... feeling cold."

While media headlines are mainly focusing on the plight of younger generations in the current ongoing war in Gaza, the elderly population – a demographic often overlooked – faces extreme challenges, from health vulnerabilities to the emotional trauma as a result of seeing so much death and destruction. For this particularly vulnerable population, who have lived through multiple wars, trauma is cumulative, and the consequences multifaceted, emphasizing the need for targeted humanitarian interventions.

“ I WORKED FOR 40 YEARS TO BUILD THIS HOME, IT'S ALL GONE. ”

In mid-year 2022, the number of the elderly in the Gaza Strip aged 60 and above was 100,818 persons, constituting 4.7% of the total population, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Since October 7 of this year, Israeli attacks have targeted the Gazan population in its entirety and have left no civilian safe, particularly the vulnerable elderly. These attacks have killed hundreds of this population and have left thousands others living in extremely poor conditions. At the time of this statement's release, over 480 older persons have lost their lives and another 150 are reported missing, presumed under the rubble, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

The war has had a detrimental effect on Gaza's healthcare system. Hospitals, already overworked and overburdened, face shortages in essential supplies and medications. The elderly, many of whom require consistent medical care due to chronic conditions, find it increasingly challenging to access necessary treatments and medications. According to a study by HelpAge in 2021, about 97% of the elderly in Gaza had at least one health condition, 86% had at least one disability, 80% reported that they used or required medicine or medical items, and 44% were completely reliant on family members to reach their basic needs. Another study by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2022 showed that 69% of the elderly in Gaza suffered from chronic diseases and that one out of five households in Gaza was headed by an elderly – 19%, to be exact.

A significant portion of the elderly has been displaced due to evacuation orders, bombings, and destruction. According to reports from Juzoor's team on the ground in Gaza, a distressing situation has unfolded where numerous displaced older persons were compelled to abandon critical items like wheelchairs, medications, and personal belongings, leaving them to sleep on shelter floors and exacerbating their pre-existing health conditions. In the northern region of Gaza, Juzoor has identified over 3000 elderly individuals residing in shelters, among whom 70% lack access to essential medications for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart diseases. This deficiency poses a significant threat to their well-being and quality of life.

The imminent risk is that those who presently have these medications will face shortages in the coming weeks if the supply isn't promptly provided and made accessible. Furthermore, individuals reliant on insulin encounter hurdles in obtaining and properly storing it due to the absence of electricity for refrigeration. The consequences of this situation could lead to severe impacts on their health and livelihoods, emphasizing the urgent need for immediate intervention to ensure the provision and distribution of essential medications and facilities for safe storage, particularly for those dependent on insulin.



Due to Israel's attacks on water and sewage systems and the extreme scarcity of food and drinking water, the people of Gaza also face the risk of infectious and waterborne disease outbreaks, as well as dehydration and starvation, among other health concerns. For an average elderly with – or even without – any health conditions, these circumstances can be extremely life-threatening.

Continuous exposure to violence has undoubtedly left many elderly residents of Gaza traumatized. The loss of family members, coupled with the destruction of homes they've inhabited for decades, has led to feelings of grief and depression. Their constant fear from airstrikes has left them mentally and emotionally struggling and in distress. Many elderly individuals feel isolated due to the loss of community and social structures. The war has also disrupted social routines and has forced many elderly individuals to depend on others, or perhaps only on themselves, leading to a sense of loneliness and helplessness.

“ THE PLIGHT OF OLDER INDIVIDUALS IN GAZA IS A DISTRESSING AND OVERLOOKED ASPECT OF THIS HUMANITARIAN CRISIS. ”

The war's impact on Gaza's elderly population serves as a reminder of the profound and long-lasting consequences of war and conflict on a society's most vulnerable members. Addressing the physical, psychological, and socio-economic needs of the elderly is vital to ensure protection of this vulnerable population, and would help in the broader reconstruction and healing of Gaza and the region.

DONATE NOW:

www.juzoor.org/donate

