



Women
Journalists
Without
Chains



**COULD IT TRULY BE THAT WE ARE
STILL ALIVE!?**

Violations Against Girls and Women in
Gaza Amid Israel's Acts of Genocide



Contents

Executive summary	4
Methodology	6
Challenges Encountered During Report Preparation	6
Report Summary	7
Direct Killing of Pregnant and Lactating Women	7
• Effects of Explosives	7
• Impact of Living Conditions.....	8
• Deprivation of Women from Childbearing	8
• International Legal Violations	8
Right-to-life Violations	10
Women and Families Killed in Targeted Home Attacks	12
Women Enduring Inhumane Conditions	16
• Deprivation of Privacy	16
• Deliberate Incitement of Diseases and Epidemics	17
• Famine as a Tool of Genocide	17
• Water and Sanitation	18
Health Care Crisis in Gaza	18
• Systematic Destruction of Healthcare Infrastructure.....	19
• Disproportionate Impact on Women's Health	19
Systematic Extermination Strategy Against Pregnant and Lactating Women 21	
• Killing Pregnant and Lactating Mothers & Their Babies	22
• Miscarriages and Birth Defects	24
• Living Conditions and Their Impact on Pregnant and Lactating Women.....	26
• The Deprivation of Parenthood	28
Conclusion	29
Recommendations	30
• Accountability & Legal Action	30
• Ending Violations & Humanitarian Access	30
• Condemning War Crimes & Protecting Women.....	31
• Pressuring Supporting Nations	31
• Strengthening International Justice	31



Executive summary

"Could it truly be that we are still alive!?" wrote Palestinian journalist Iman Al-Shanti, struggling to comprehend that she and her family had survived the bombing in Gaza on the night of Wednesday, December 11, 2024. Just six hours later, Israeli airstrikes hit her apartment, killing Iman, her three children, and her husband. This tragic event is a reality shared by thousands of Palestinian women.



Since October 7, 2023, Israeli occupation forces have unleashed a devastating assault on the Gaza Strip, carrying out indiscriminate and direct attacks with powerful explosive shells and weapons. Bombings have buried displaced people beneath the sand along with their tents, while entire families have been wiped from civil records due to strikes on residential buildings using inappropriate weaponry, including dumb bombs and American-made Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM).

Israel's strategy is clear: to maximize civilian casualties. The use of explosive robots incapable of distinguishing between civilians and combatants, as well as multi-purpose drones deployed for terror, evacuation orders, and deliberate killings, underscores this approach.

In the past fourteen months, Israel has killed over 45,000 people in Gaza, the vast majority of whom are women and children. Gaza, one of the most densely populated regions in the world, is home to more than 2.3 million people in an area of just 365 square kilometers. Population density averages around 26,000 per square kilometer, with some areas exceeding 50,000.

Since 2007, Israel has maintained a strict blockade on Gaza, and the ongoing 2023 war has pushed civilians to face some of the most horrific conditions in history. Gaza's fragmentation into small, densely populated zones under Israeli control has subjected its residents to relentless bombings, evacuation orders, and forced displacements. These overcrowded areas lack even the most basic necessities of life. Despite efforts to comply with evacuation orders, even supposed safe havens—often makeshift tents—are targeted and bombed.

Israel's assault has caused catastrophic physical and psychological harm, destroying essential infrastructure, including health services, educational institutions, and basic



utilities like water and sewage networks. Access to drinking water has been denied, and severe restrictions have hindered the entry of humanitarian aid.

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) has uncovered evidence suggesting that Israel has used illegal tactics targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women, directly affecting their unborn children, as well as embryos stored in Gaza's sole fertility center. This report documents the dire conditions faced by women amid a genocide targeting civilians and protected infrastructure.

Between October 7, 2023, and December 30, 2024, over **15,000** women were killed in indiscriminate attacks on residential buildings and family homes, despite these being civilian spaces. The Israeli military used large-scale destructive munitions that were unsuitable for densely populated areas, with no military justification, strongly indicating a policy of mass killings. Israel's systematic demolition of residential buildings has led to the displacement of Gaza's population, with over **350,000** housing units destroyed or damaged.

In addition, approximately **700,000** menstruating women and girls in Gaza have been deprived of basic hygiene supplies, violating international laws protecting women's dignity during conflicts. Overcrowded shelters with mixed-gender settings have stripped women of their privacy, leading to health complications and further trauma. The lack of personal hygiene supplies, clean water, and healthcare, combined with food shortages, has fueled the spread of infectious diseases among the displaced.

Women and girls in Gaza urgently need psychological care due to the trauma of war and the loss of loved ones. However, the Israeli attacks have devastated the health system, leaving many civilians, especially women, without treatment for panic attacks and post-traumatic stress. The destruction of Gaza's only cancer treatment facility and the systematic blockage of life-saving medications have worsened conditions for women with serious illnesses. Over **10,000** cancer cases have been documented, with women accounting for more than **54%**, meaning over **5,000** women are battling cancer without access to care.

The report also highlights the severe impact of Israel's military strategy on pregnant and lactating women, who are specifically protected under international law. The violation of these protections is part of a broader strategy to target specific populations, undermining demographic growth and inflicting societal harm, potentially qualifying as a form of extermination.



Methodology

This report follows a descriptive-analytical approach, based on desk research conducted by Women Journalists Without Chains from October 7, 2023, to December 30, 2024. It utilizes investigative methods to track and compile data from various open sources, including international, regional, and local platforms. Due to the scale and gravity of the violations committed by the Israeli army and the ongoing conflict, international organizations and human rights groups face significant challenges in investigating all the incidents, as the situation far exceeds their capacity.

Furthermore, Israel restricts access for international journalists and researchers to Gaza, making it difficult to study the full extent of the war's effects and investigate acts of genocide. In response, WJWC has relied on numerous testimonies documented by Palestinian activists, verification of visual evidence—including materials aired by Israeli occupation soldiers—and statements from Israeli military and government officials that incite acts of genocide. These sources have been analyzed to assess the impact on women in Gaza, particularly concerning actions prohibited under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The data and statistics presented in this report are based on reports from reputable international organizations, including the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, and the World Health Organization. Additionally, information has been sourced from Palestinian governmental institutions such as the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Palestinian News Agency, and local humanitarian and human rights organizations.

Challenges Encountered During Report Preparation

A key challenge in preparing this report was the difficulty in establishing communication with field researchers in Gaza to monitor violations committed by Israeli occupation forces and gather testimonies from affected individuals and survivors. To address this, a rigorous and objective methodology was employed to verify reliable sources of information. However, the overwhelming volume of data and fluctuating statistics, due to the ongoing conflict, required significant time and effort to thoroughly analyze each case.

Another challenge stemmed from the report's broad focus on the wide range of violations faced by women in Gaza, rather than a single pattern. Researchers had to navigate immense devastation, with thousands of victims enduring unspeakable atrocities. In



In addition to the psychological toll, they worked diligently to examine the details of these crimes, analyze them, and connect them to international laws and conventions.

The crimes committed by Israeli forces in Gaza are classified as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide under international law, highlighting the significant challenges researchers face in documenting and addressing these violations.

Report Summary

This report examines the devastating impact of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, focusing on the violations committed against women and girls. It begins by detailing the direct killings of women, particularly through the targeted destruction of family homes and shelters by Israeli forces, which have caused a significant number of female casualties. The report also explores the harsh living conditions imposed on displaced women and girls in Gaza, where the loss of privacy, overcrowding, and lack of access to basic necessities like clean water, food, and medical care have led to widespread suffering.

The destruction of healthcare infrastructure has exacerbated the situation, leaving women vulnerable to untreated illnesses and preventing access to critical life-saving treatments. Additionally, the report highlights the specific targeting of pregnant and breastfeeding women, discussing how the conflict has led to an alarming rise in miscarriages, deformities in newborns, and the loss of embryos from Gaza's only fertility center. This systematic attack on women, aimed at disrupting population growth and future reproductive health, points to a deliberate strategy of targeting vulnerable groups as part of a broader genocidal campaign.

Direct Killing of Pregnant and Lactating Women

While final statistics on the number of pregnant and lactating women killed are not available, the report documents numerous cases of direct targeting, including women killed alongside their newborns. Between October 7, 2023, and August 2024, approximately 17,000 children were killed, including 2,100 infants. This highlights the disproportionate toll on pregnant women and mothers, pointing to an intentional strategy to undermine population growth.

- **Effects of Explosives**

Indiscriminate shelling with toxic munitions has led to a 300% increase in miscarriage rates and premature births due to panic attacks. Additionally, there has been a significant rise in newborns with deformities, with Nasser Medical Complex recording



172 cases of congenital deformities in just three months.

- **Impact of Living Conditions**

Over 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women in Gaza are at severe risk of malnutrition, and due to the destruction of the healthcare system, many have not received adequate prenatal or postnatal care. Each day, 183 women give birth in shelters or tents without anesthesia, and the report documents the deaths of children and infants due to hunger and cold.

- **Deprivation of Women from Childbearing**

As part of Israel's genocidal tactics to prevent childbirth and affect population growth, the Israeli army bombed Gaza's only fertility center, resulting in the loss of 5,000 fetuses and depriving thousands of women and couples of their ability to conceive.

The report concludes that Israel systematically targets women, fully aware of the overcrowded shelters filled with displaced persons, mostly women and children, and the deliberate targeting of family homes. Israeli leaders have repeatedly claimed there are no civilians in Gaza. The occupying forces have intentionally imposed conditions that strip women of their privacy and deny them healthcare. Evidence from occupation soldiers shows deliberate psychological harm inflicted on women by exploiting their privacy, such as tampering with women's belongings and using their personal items in a humiliating manner.

- **International Legal Violations**

International humanitarian law protects civilians and civilian facilities during armed conflicts, and the use of excessive and inappropriate force against civilians, without military justification, constitutes a war crime. Targeting civilians with the intent to destroy them based on nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion is genocide. The targeting of women in Gaza by Israel is driven by their Palestinian identity.

Customary international law and UN protocols recognize the specific needs of women and girls in armed conflicts. International humanitarian law provides special protections for pregnant and breastfeeding women, as affirmed by the Fourth Geneva Convention. Women Journalists Without Chains believes that international complicity with Israel and continued support have emboldened Israeli leaders to persist in acts of genocide, violating international laws and protocols, and openly defying the decisions and orders of the International Court of Justice.



FEMALE POPULATION IN GAZA
Over 1.1 Million Women and Girls

Violations of the Right to Life - Killings: At Least 14,500 Women and Girls

Mothers:

- ◆ **Among the 63**
women killed in Gaza, 37 were mothers
- ◆ **Nearly 3,000**
women have assumed the role of heads of households
- ◆ **4**
out of five mothers have sacrificed their own meals, prioritizing the feeding of their children

 wjwcorg

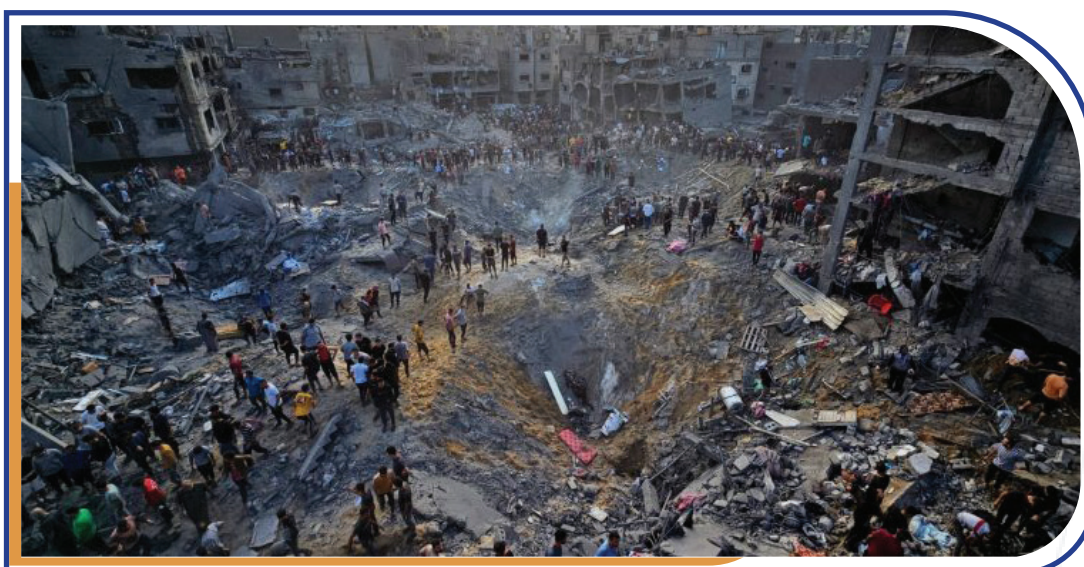
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Figure 1 The impact of violence on Gaza's female population



Figure 2 Impact of Israeli-imposed living conditions on women and girls in Gaza

Right-to-life Violations





Women Journalists Without Chains

Since October 7, 2023, women and girls in the Gaza Strip have been subjected to conditions amounting to genocide, as the Israeli occupation forces violate the protections granted to civilians under international law. In one year, Israel's actions led to more than **30,105** women and children being killed, surpassing the number of casualties from all other conflicts in the same period over the past two decades. From October 7, 2023, to December 30, 2024, civilian deaths exceeded **45,541**, including **15,200** females.

On January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice issued an order demanding that Israel take measures to prevent genocide in Gaza, specifically regarding acts that result in death, bodily or mental harm, destruction of living conditions, or actions aimed at preventing births. The Court required Israel to report the steps taken within one month. However, instead of halting its genocidal practices, Israel escalated its actions, resulting in over **20,000** additional deaths—primarily women and children—following the Court's ruling.

Over the course of **14** months, Israeli airstrikes in Gaza predominantly targeted civilian areas, resulting in a high number of women and children casualties. These bombings hit family homes, displacement centers, hospitals, UNRWA schools, and areas the occupation forces deemed "safe" despite a lack of basic necessities. There were several documented cases of deliberate attacks where the presence of women and children was either known or foreseeable by the Israeli military. Women Journalists Without Chains found that these strikes, using excessive explosives for minimal military gain, seemed designed to cause maximum civilian harm and widespread destruction. On October 31, 2023, a **2,000**-pound bomb dropped on a residential area in Jabalia camp killed or injured over **400** civilians, leaving vast destruction behind.



Women and Families Killed in Targeted Home Attacks



There are no official statistics on the number of women killed by direct shelling of family homes. However, an analysis by Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) indicates a significant loss of life among women due to brutal and indiscriminate attacks on residential buildings. In three massacres investigated by WJWC for this report, at least **44 women and 69 children** were killed in Gaza in **2023**. The Israeli occupation forces conducted two airstrikes that resulted in the deaths of **14 women, 19 children, and 10 men**.

The first strike hit the al-Najjar family home in Deir al-Balah on **October 10, 2023**, followed by a second attack on the Abu Ma'leq family home on **October 22, 2023**. Survivors reported that civilians received no prior warnings, and shrapnel analysis confirmed the use of American-made Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) by the Israeli army. This raises serious concerns about the targeting of non-combatants in these operations.

Amnesty International has documented acts of genocide in Gaza and investigated **15** airstrikes between **October 7, 2023**, and **April 20, 2024**. These investigations revealed at least **334** civilian deaths, including **141** children, highlighting a troubling pattern of deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure. The organization found no evidence that these airstrikes targeted military objectives, emphasizing that all victims were civilians not involved in hostilities.

On **December 2, 2023**, a devastating airstrike on a residential building in the al-Faluja



area of Jabalia camp resulted in the deaths of over **100** Palestinian civilians, including **30** women and **50** children. Visual evidence captured the scale of destruction, as medical teams and civilians struggled to rescue victims, digging through rubble without proper equipment. These findings underscore a systematic pattern of targeting civilian populations, emphasizing the urgent need for accountability and justice for the victims of these atrocities.

The massacres targeting families in residential units did not cease in **2024**. According to statistics from the Information Unit of the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Israeli occupation committed approximately **10,000** massacres against the population, erasing **1,600** Palestinian families from the civil registry by the end of December **2024**.

In December **2024** alone, Journalists Without Chains documented three illustrative cases in which at least **33** civilians, including **15** women and girls, lost their lives. During the same month, the Israeli occupation army conducted over **1,400** airstrikes, further underscoring the scale of the attacks against civilian targets.

On December **11, 2024**, the Israeli occupation targeted the Abu Tarabesh family home, a three-story building located near Kamal Adwan Hospital in the Beit Lahia project. This attack resulted in the deaths of **22** family members, including five women and eight children, comprising five girls and three boys.

On the same day, journalist Iman al-Shanti, along with her three children—Alma, Omar, Bilal—and her husband Helmi Abed, were killed when an airstrike targeted their apartment in the al-Malsh building in the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, northwest of Gaza City. Iman, **36**, was a program presenter at Al-Aqsa Voice Radio.

Her last Facebook post poignantly questioned the possibility of survival amidst such violence. Just two days later, on December **13**, the home of journalist Mohammed Jaber al-Qurainawi in al-Bureij camp was bombed, killing his family of five. Maram Dhiban and her husband, previously injured in a bombing, had returned to work.



Among the patterns of mass killing employed by Israeli occupation forces as part of acts of genocide is the targeting of civilians in shelters that house large numbers of forcibly displaced women and children. Direct attacks aimed at killing civilians or inflicting physical and psychological harm on members of the community are considered fundamental elements of genocide.

More than **160,000** housing units have been completely destroyed, with an additional **194,000** partially damaged, forcing over a million civilians—primarily women and children—into repeated displacement. Despite these dire circumstances, Israeli forces persist in striking shelters where women and children seek refuge.

Final statistics on the number of women and girls killed during displacement remain unavailable. However, consistent reports indicate that they constitute the majority of victims in these massacres. According to the UN, an average of **63** women are killed daily in Gaza, including **37** mothers. Furthermore, WJWC has documented cases of mothers and their children being deliberately targeted in displacement centers, such as UNRWA schools, despite Israeli forces being fully aware that these were civilian shelters.

One case highlighted in the report is the attack on the al-Ajla family, who sought refuge in a warehouse in August **2024**. Israeli aircraft bombed their shelter in Az-Zawayda, central Gaza, at dawn on August **17** with three missiles, killing **15** family members, including **12** women and girls. The victims included four women over **20**, seven girls aged **2** to **17**, two boys aged **14** and **16**, and their **45**-year-old father.



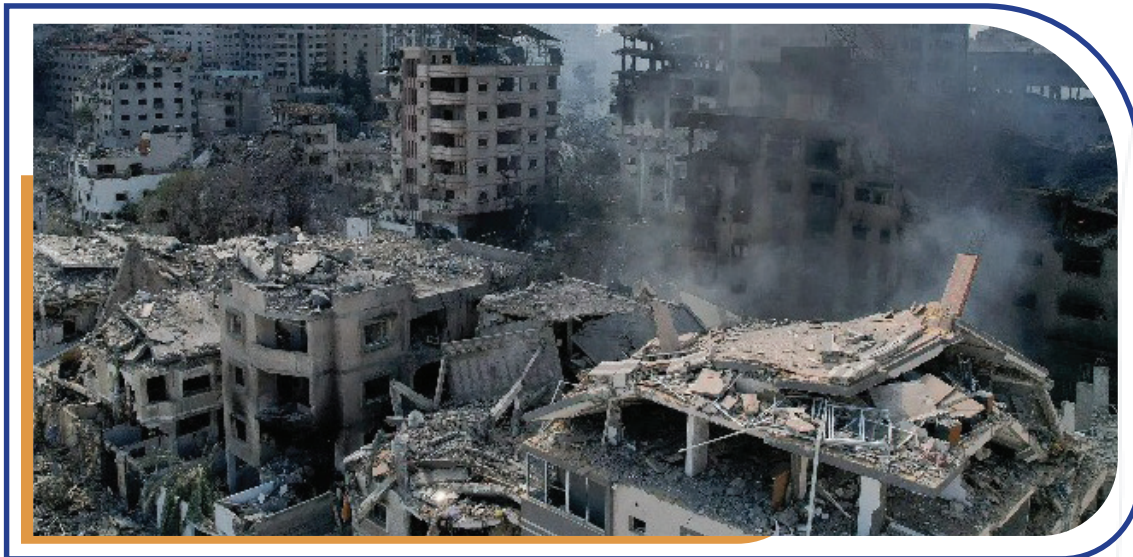
Women Journalists Without Chains

On September 10, Israeli warplanes dropped three American-made MK-84 bombs on a gathering of displacement tents in Mawasi Khan Younis. The attack created deep craters, burying about 20 tents with families inside. Civil defense teams recovered 40 bodies, while 20 others were lost due to the impact. The site had been designated as a safe area by Israeli forces.

Displacement camps in Mawasi Khan Younis have been bombed over 213 times. On December 5, Israeli forces attacked displacement tents, burning several people alive. The bombing killed 20 civilians, including a mother and her two daughters, their bodies charred beyond recognition.

On December 15, at around 21:15, Israeli warplanes struck a classroom in a displacement shelter at Khan Younis Boys' Elementary School, killing 13 Palestinians. That same day, at least 15 displaced persons were killed at Khalil Awaida School in Beit Hanoun. The school housed 1,500 displaced persons and was heavily bombed, trapping civilians inside. Survivors described seeing 10 to 15 charred bodies.

On December 5, Israeli airstrikes destroyed a house in Beit Lahia belonging to the al-Muqayid family, sheltering displaced persons from the al-Shalfooh family. The attack killed 10 women and girls, including four daughters of Dr. Abdul Latif al-Shalfooh, his mother, and several sisters. These attacks highlight a deliberate pattern of targeting civilians, particularly women and children, in designated shelters. The systematic destruction and forced displacement constitute ongoing crimes against humanity.





Women Enduring Inhumane Conditions

Israel has imposed measures on Gaza's residents that blatantly violate international law, constituting war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide. The occupation forces have disregarded the specific protections afforded to women in armed conflicts, depriving pregnant and lactating women of their rights under international law, including those enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Palestinian women have borne the heaviest burden of these atrocities, suffering the most severe physical and psychological harm—often leading to death. According to WJWC, documented violations include breaches of privacy, the deliberate use of famine, water deprivation, and poor sanitation to trigger health crises, as well as the denial of life-saving medical care. These systematic abuses particularly target pregnant and lactating women, amplifying their suffering under a policy of destruction.

- **Deprivation of Privacy**



The Israeli occupation army has forcibly displaced over 90% of Gaza's population, ordering residents to evacuate their homes. Nearly one million women and girls, alongside an equal number of men and boys, have been left homeless, constantly moving in mixed groups from one area to another in search of safety.

In Al-Mawasi, west of Khan Yunis and Rafah—an area declared "safe" by Israeli forces—over 750,000 displaced people were crammed together by August 2024. Originally spanning 230 square kilometers before the war, Israel has now reduced the area to just 35 square kilometers. Women endure dire conditions with no access to



basic necessities, facing severe overcrowding that strips them of privacy in sleeping arrangements and access to sanitation facilities.

The lack of adequate bathroom facilities has left many women unable to use restrooms without standing in long, mixed-gender queues. Out of embarrassment and fear, many avoid using the facilities altogether, leading to serious health complications such as abdominal and kidney pain.

Additionally, personal hygiene products for women ran out in the early months of the war. Due to Israeli-imposed restrictions on humanitarian aid, approximately **700,000** menstruating women and girls have been deprived of sanitary products, compounding their suffering amid inhumane living conditions.

- **Deliberate Incitement of Diseases and Epidemics**

The Israeli occupation army has systematically imposed living conditions that devastate civilian populations, constituting acts of genocide. Women Journalists Without Chains has documented that these conditions are intentionally engineered to incite diseases and epidemics, thereby increasing mortality rates, jeopardizing public health, and systematically reducing life expectancy.

Key factors exacerbating this health crisis include widespread famine, lack of access to clean drinking water, destruction of sewage systems, and inadequate hygiene supplies. These dire circumstances have facilitated the spread of both infectious and non-infectious diseases, disproportionately impacting displaced women and children, who suffer the most from this humanitarian catastrophe.

- **Famine as a Tool of Genocide**

Israel has adopted a tactic contributing to genocide by creating conditions that lead to widespread famine. This includes the destruction of agricultural land, livestock, and the fishing industry, forcing about two million people—**90%** of the population—to rely on aid.

The Israeli military has imposed strict restrictions on the entry of essential humanitarian aid and commercial goods into Gaza. No food rations were received in the first half of October **2024**, with **1.7** million people—around **80%** of the population—not receiving supplies, worsening acute malnutrition.

In December, Oxfam reported that only **12** trucks of humanitarian aid were allowed into northern Gaza over two and a half months, reflecting a policy of starving the



population. Previously, Gaza received around **500** trucks daily. This has led to severe food shortages, with **96%** of the population facing acute food insecurity, and about **1.1** million people experiencing catastrophic hunger. This crisis has a particularly devastating impact on women, who often skip meals to feed their children.

- **Water and Sanitation**

The occupation has severely damaged Gaza's water infrastructure, obstructed its repair, and deliberately targeted sewage treatment facilities, aiming to instigate health crises and increase mortality among the displaced. Reports indicate that **97%** of the water in Gaza is unsafe for human consumption, leaving approximately **1.1** million women and girls in need of potable water for drinking and domestic use.

These dire conditions have led to the rapid spread of infectious diseases among the displaced population, primarily affecting women and children. The occupation's assault on the sewage network has created a critical public health environment. An assessment by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in eastern Khan Yunis revealed alarming sanitation and hygiene conditions, particularly in the Ma'an area, where many rely on pit latrines. In Bani Suhaila, the sewage system has been destroyed, resulting in sewage pooling in the streets.

As a consequence of these living conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation, the civilian population in the Gaza Strip faces a continuous threat of infectious diseases and epidemics. The number of infected individuals has surpassed one million. From October 7, 2023, to December 2024, there have been **669,000** reported cases of acute watery diarrhea, **132,000** cases of jaundice, which is a symptom of hepatitis A, and over **225,000** cases of skin diseases due to inadequate sanitation and hygiene. Additionally, more than one million cases of acute respiratory infections have been documented according to the World Health Organization.

Health Care Crisis in Gaza

Israel has repeatedly violated international law by launching indiscriminate and targeted attacks on hospitals, medical facilities, and humanitarian personnel, as outlined in UN Resolution 2675. The Israeli military has pursued a systematic policy to dismantle Gaza's healthcare system, depriving hundreds of thousands of residents, including women and children, of their right to medical treatment.



- **Systematic Destruction of Healthcare Infrastructure**

The deliberate targeting of healthcare facilities has resulted in catastrophic damage:

- 34 hospitals have been rendered completely or partially inoperable.
- Over 162 health facilities have sustained damage.
- 80 out of 90 health centers have been completely destroyed.
- 131 ambulances have been attacked.
- 1,068 medical personnel have lost their lives.

This widespread destruction of Gaza's healthcare system has severely impacted public health, exacerbating mortality rates and contributing to what many describe as a strategy of genocide.

- **Disproportionate Impact on Women's Health**

Women are particularly vulnerable to the worsening health crisis. Due to unsanitary conditions and a lack of medical resources, they face increased risks of chronic and severe illnesses. Restricted access to essential medicines and the denial of life-saving treatments outside Gaza have further deepened their suffering.

A. Effects of Healthcare System Collapse on Women

Over 177,000 women in Gaza face life-threatening health challenges:

- More than 162,000 are at risk of or suffering from chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.
- The destruction of healthcare infrastructure has left tens of thousands of women unable to access necessary medical care.
- The ongoing war has led to widespread mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, affecting hundreds of thousands of women.

B. Shortages of Life-Saving Supplies and Medications

Over 300,000 individuals in Gaza suffer from chronic diseases, and many require urgent medical intervention. However, Israeli-imposed restrictions have obstructed



the entry of critical humanitarian aid, leading to numerous preventable deaths.

- Cancer was a leading cause of death in Palestine even before the conflict, with over **10,000** registered cases in Gaza, **54%** of which involve women.
- In November **2023**, Israel targeted Al-Sadaqa Hospital, the only facility in Gaza dedicated to cancer and tumor treatment.
- Severe shortages of life-saving cancer medications—including Herceptin, Glivec, Taxol, and Neupogen—have left over **5,000** cancer patients in life-threatening conditions.

C. Denial of Medical Treatment Outside Gaza

According to estimates from the Palestinian Red Crescent, over **25,000** critically ill patients require urgent treatment outside Gaza. However, the Israeli military systematically obstructs their medical travel, effectively sentencing many to death.

The standard process for medical transfers involves **multiple approvals**, including:

- Authorization from a specialist doctor.
- Approval from the medical committee within the Ministry of Health.
- Confirmation of an appointment at an external hospital.
- Submission of a permit request to Israeli authorities.

Yet, Israel imposes **numerous obstacles**, including:

- Delaying or failing to respond to permit requests, citing bureaucratic excuses.
- Denying women the right to travel for treatment under arbitrary pretexts, such as alleged family affiliations with resistance groups.
- Pressuring patients to provide intelligence information in exchange for travel permits.

This systematic obstruction of medical care contributes to preventable deaths, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



Systematic Extermination Strategy Against Pregnant and Lactating Women



IMPACT OF GENOCIDE ON PREGNANT AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN

Over 155,000 women in the Gaza Strip are pregnant or breastfeeding

Most pregnant and breastfeeding women have been denied access to prenatal and postnatal healthcare

◆ **60000**

pregnant women are at risk due to insufficient healthcare

◆ **15000**

pregnant women face severe mal-nutrition risks

◆ **3000**

pregnant women are experiencing catastrophic hunger as a result of shelling and toxins from Israeli explosives

◆ **Around 2,500**

breastfeeding women either lost their children or died alongside them due to direct attacks, hunger, or cold

◆ **Approximately 5,000**

couples in Gaza dealing with fertility issues saw their hopes dashed as Israel targeted in vitro embryos

◆ **300%**

The incidence of miscarriages and premature births has surged

◆ **20%**

women are losing their newborns due to deformities



As part of a systematic effort to depopulate Gaza and suppress population growth, the Israeli occupation has waged a specialized war against pregnant and lactating women—an extension of its broader campaign of civilian extermination, with a particular focus on women and children.

International law explicitly mandates the protection of pregnant women, postpartum mothers, and infants during armed conflicts. Yet, Israel has employed a range of tactics designed to prevent childbirth, which aligns with recognized elements of genocide. Jurisprudence establishes that targeting a population's birth rates—whether through direct measures or conditions that hinder childbirth—constitutes an act of genocide.

Israel's deliberate policies have targeted reproductive health by directly killing pregnant and nursing mothers through indiscriminate or targeted attacks. The use of toxic projectiles has led to fetal mutilation and long-term reproductive harm. Additionally, living conditions have been engineered to increase mortality among women and newborns by denying access to food, medical care, and shelter. The destruction of fertility centers has also dashed the hopes of countless families facing infertility.

- **Killing Pregnant and Lactating Mothers & Their Babies**



By August 2024, more than 17,000 children had lost their lives in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, including 2,100 newborns. A significant number of these young victims, including infants, were killed in horrific ways, exposing the Israeli occupation's



intentional targeting of civilians despite knowing that women and children were present.¹ Israeli military vehicles launched attacks on residential homes, shelters, and displacement centers, leading to the brutal dismemberment and incineration of children's bodies alongside their mothers. Pregnant women were not spared from these assaults either.

The report highlights four incidents that provide only a glimpse into the systematic violations carried out by Israeli forces against pregnant and nursing women in Gaza. One such case occurred on December 21, 2023, when Ahmed Al-Khalidi's family found their home surrounded by tanks. Cut off from food and water for over 24 hours, they were trapped in an increasingly dire situation. During the raid, Umm Faisal was wounded, and soldiers forced their way through the main gate, hurling explosives inside.

Desperately trying to shield her two sons, she was fatally shot in the stomach by Israeli forces, dying in front of her five-year-old son, Faisal. Mona Al-Khalidi, the aunt of Faisal and his brother Adam, described the unbearable trauma,² stating that the children would never recover from the horror they had witnessed. She further emphasized that the soldiers deliberately ended her unborn child's life, as they sought to prevent new generations from being born in Gaza.

Another tragic example unfolded on April 21, 2024, when Sabreen Al-Ruh, an infant, died just four days after being delivered via emergency caesarean section. Her mother, Sabreen Al-Sakani, had fled from Gaza City to Rafah with her three-year-old daughter Malak and her husband, Shukri Joda, in search of safety. At 30 weeks pregnant, she suffered severe injuries when Israeli airstrikes struck their home. Rushed to the Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah, she clung to life as doctors attempted to save her unborn child. Though they managed to deliver the baby, Sabreen succumbed to her injuries³ before ever meeting her daughter. The newborn, initially hailed as a miracle survivor and widely covered by international media, became the sole remaining member of the family after the father and sister died from their wounds. However, the infant also passed away just

1 Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor. (2024, August 13). Gaza: The bloodiest face of genocide. Israel killed 2,100 Palestinian infants. <https://tinyurl.com/2jd32x7s>.

2 Al-Araby TV. (2024, March 10). They shot his pregnant mother's belly: A child witnessed the killing of his parents by the occupation in Gaza. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/ykwvzvpy>.

3 CNN Arabic. (2024, April 26). Palestinian doctor: Death of the 'miracle baby' four days after birth and her mother is dying in Gaza. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/23yennc5>.



days later, effectively erasing the entire family from existence.

On July 20, 2024, al-Awda Hospital in central Gaza received 25-year-old Ola Al-Kurd, who was barely alive after an Israeli airstrike devastated her family home, leaving multiple relatives injured. Doctors performed an urgent cesarean section,⁴ managing to deliver the baby before Ola took her last breath.

A similar tragedy was documented by Women Journalists Without Chains on December 14, 2024. That day, Israeli airstrikes targeted al-Majida Wasila School, a shelter for displaced civilians, killing seven people, including Suzan al-Aklouk, her newborn son Izz Al-Din al-Ghara, as well as Jinan Ahmed al-Ghara, a three-day-old infant, and her cousin, young Mansour al-Ghara. Suzan had endured the agony of childbirth under dire conditions, with no access to anesthesia or medical care, within a displacement shelter.



- **Miscarriages and Birth Defects**

Women in the Gaza Strip endure unimaginable suffering due to the ongoing war. For pregnant women, constant fear and severe anxiety have led to a sharp rise in premature births, while miscarriages have surged by nearly 300%⁵ by the third month of the war. Factors such as food scarcity, extreme psychological distress, and forced

4 Al-Araby Al-Jadid. (2024, July 20). Rescue of a Palestinian fetus from the womb of its martyred mother in Gaza. <https://tinyurl.com/mskfrc2>.

5 Baydoun, N. (2024, January 17). Statement by CARE Regional Adviser for Protection and Gender in Emergencies. Interviewed by Jezebel.



displacement have contributed to this alarming trend. Additionally, the number of newborns with birth defects saw a significant rise in the latter half of **2024**.

According to medical professionals, these cases require in-depth research by specialists to identify the primary causes behind the surge in congenital abnormalities and disorders. Between June and August **2024** alone, Nasser Medical Complex recorded **172** cases of newborns with congenital deformities, **20%** of whom did not survive.⁶ These conditions frequently affect vital organs, including the heart, lungs, and reproductive system.

Experts have identified several contributing factors leading to the rise in miscarriages and birth defects, including:

- The use of explosives by Israeli forces, which contain and release toxic substances.
- Limited access to clean drinking water for expectant mothers.
- The spread of diseases and infections among displaced populations.
- The collapse of healthcare services.
- Severe malnutrition among pregnant women due to a lack of essential nutrients, supplements, and vitamins.

Infants born with congenital conditions, particularly those with heart defects, require specialized medical care and surgical procedures to survive. However, due to the harsh living conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation and the devastation of Gaza's healthcare system,⁷ hospitals are unable to provide the necessary treatment, leaving these newborns with little chance of survival.

⁶ Al Jazeera Net. (2024, September 29). Investigation reveals rise in birth defects in Gaza. Available at <https://tinyurl.com/bdu7pjnc>.

⁷ The report followed statements by 6 doctors and heads of obstetrics and gynecology departments in a number of Gaza hospitals, to summarize these findings.



- Living Conditions and Their Impact on Pregnant and Lactating Women



The systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare system, coupled with the targeting of civilians as they seek medical assistance, has deprived most pregnant and breastfeeding women of essential healthcare services. Many are unable to receive proper medical care before childbirth or undergo necessary postnatal check-ups. Currently, an estimated 50,000 pregnant Palestinian women and 20,000 newborns face extreme and life-threatening conditions.

With healthcare facilities in ruins, the situation for expectant and nursing mothers in Gaza remains dire. Most are forced to give birth in overcrowded displacement camps under unthinkable conditions. Every day, 183 women endure labor without anesthesia,⁸ suffering from severe complications such as excessive bleeding, high fever, urinary tract infections, anemia, and dangerously high blood pressure. Some do not survive childbirth, while many newborns perish simply because their mothers had no access to prenatal care.

By December 2023, over 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women in Gaza were at high risk of malnutrition.⁹ Due to Israel's blockade on humanitarian aid, this number

8 2. United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024, May 6). UN experts: Violent and brutal attacks on women and children in Gaza are completely unacceptable. <https://www.ohchr.org/ar/press-releases/2024/05/onslaught-violence-against-women-and-children-gaza-unacceptable-un-experts>.

9 UNICEF. (2023, December). UNICEF statement on the risk of famine in the Gaza Strip [Arabic version]. <https://tinyurl.com/46yfw27z>.



continues to rise as the war drags on. According to UNICEF, 96% of women and children in Gaza are unable to meet their basic nutritional needs. At Kamal Adwan Hospital alone, between 70 and 100 children arrive daily suffering from moderate to severe malnutrition.¹⁰

The blockade's impact extends beyond food shortages. Breastfeeding mothers, who rely on proper nutrition to produce milk, struggle to feed their infants. Malnutrition weakens breastfeeding rates, leaving more babies vulnerable to starvation and fatal diseases. Women Journalists Without Chains has documented the deaths of multiple children due to the deteriorating living conditions imposed by Israel. Many mothers, already sacrificing their own meals to feed their families, are devastated by the loss of their children, enduring severe psychological distress.

The exact number of child deaths due to hunger and disease since October 7, 2023, remains unknown. However, by early April 2024, the Ministry of Health in Gaza confirmed that at least 28 children had died from malnutrition and dehydration in hospitals across northern Gaza. World Health Organization officials reported witnessing children dying of starvation at Kamal Adwan and Al-Awda hospitals.¹¹

On February 14, 2024, three-month-old Anwar Al-Khudari died from hunger. His mother recounted, "There was no formula milk because of the blockade, and I couldn't breastfeed because I had no food. My son cried all night from hunger, his fever spiked, and four days later, he was gone."¹²

Beyond starvation, the lack of essential living supplies also endangers both mothers and infants. Pregnant and breastfeeding women lack even the most basic necessities to care for their newborns, leaving them exposed to deadly conditions. In December 2024, WJWC documented the deaths of five infants due to extreme cold.

Among them was Aisha Adnan Al-Qassas, who died inside a tent in the Mawasi area

10 Abu Safia, H. (2024, August 7). According to the Director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, to the Defense for Children International Movement. Report published in the Palestinian News and Information Agency, WAFA. <https://tinyurl.com/36enbw7j>.

11 Human Rights Watch. (2024, April). Gaza: Israeli-imposed starvation kills children. <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2024/04/09/gaza-israels-imposed-starvation-deadly-children>.

12 Defense for Children International Movement. (2024, August 7). Children in Gaza have died of starvation due to the ongoing Israeli blockade and aggression. https://www.arabic.dci-pal.org/archives/3309?fbclid=IwY2xjawH4nn1leHRuA2FibQlxMQABHULuwcaflu2Or6tk7yV9u4dVmAt_TGg-Fbp62rdBw4JvpEhEn0X9ZAsPqIg_aem_ZGp08qkgxtRVRBZ02UJOnA.



of Khan Yunis. Medical sources confirmed that her death resulted from severe cold, as displaced families in the coastal area—already vulnerable to flooding—were left without heating supplies.

The obstruction of humanitarian aid, which has deprived hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians of essential survival resources, has been condemned by WJWC. The organization asserts that Israel's deliberate restrictions on relief supplies amid the ongoing war constitute an unlawful strategy aimed at subjecting civilians to conditions that could lead to their total or partial extermination.¹³

- **The Deprivation of Parenthood**

In December 2023, Israeli artillery strikes targeted the only fertility center in the Gaza Strip, reducing to rubble a facility that had been a beacon of hope for hundreds of Palestinian couples struggling with infertility. Located on al-Jalaa Street, the al-Basma Fertility Center suffered catastrophic damage, including the destruction of five liquid nitrogen tanks in the embryo unit—wiping out more than 5,000 stored embryos.

In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a complex, costly, and emotionally draining process. It involves ovarian stimulation through medication, the surgical retrieval of eggs, fertilization with the husband's sperm in a laboratory, and the implantation of embryos into the woman's uterus. Beyond the financial burden, women undergoing IVF endure intense physical pain and psychological stress.

Saba Jafrawi, one of the affected women, had spent three years undergoing fertility treatments. She described the journey as mentally and physically exhausting, recalling the pain of egg retrieval and the harsh side effects of hormone injections. After enduring the heartbreak of two failed pregnancy attempts, she had placed all her hopes in the embryos stored at al-Basma.¹⁴

Dr. Bahaa al-Din al-Ghalayini, a 73-year-old consultant in obstetrics and gynecology and the founder of the Al-Basma Center in 1997, expressed deep empathy regarding the loss of 5,000 lives, or potential lives, saying, "We know with all our hearts what those

¹³ Women Journalists Without Chains. (2024, December 22). Gaza: Israel imposes genocidal living conditions. <https://www.wjwc.org/ar/newsar/2024-12-22-12-39-50>.

¹⁴ Al Jazeera. (2024, April 17). A single Israeli strike kills 5,000 IVF embryos in Gaza. Al Jazeera Net. <https://tinyurl.com/r8mdnbyz>.



lives meant to the parents, both in the past and for the future." He further noted that at least half of the couples affected will likely not have another opportunity to conceive, as they are no longer able to produce viable sperm or eggs.

Abdulqader Malqat, a staff member at the center, lamented, "The efforts and resources of many were lost, along with the futures and dreams of these individuals—Palestinian couples facing fertility issues." He further emphasized, "Some families had waited 20 to 30 years to realize their dream of having children, and they had just begun the embryo implantation process."¹⁵

The destruction of the Al-Basma Fertility Center was not just an attack on a medical facility—it was an assault on the hopes, struggles, and futures of countless Palestinian families who had long yearned for the joy of parenthood.

Conclusion

Despite the protections outlined in international humanitarian law (IHL), women in Gaza continue to face devastating consequences of ongoing Israeli military attacks. The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I explicitly mandate special safeguards for women in conflict zones, emphasizing their right to dignity and protection from harm. However, the reality on the ground tells a different story, with women and children making up the majority of civilian casualties in Israeli military operations.

Reports from Gaza highlight repeated violations of international law, including the use of excessive force and indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas. Residential neighborhoods, hospitals, and shelters have been targeted without adequate precautions, leading to mass displacement and loss of life. Such actions, deemed grave breaches under Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, should trigger international accountability, yet Israeli violations continue unchecked.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has exacerbated the suffering of women, particularly pregnant women and nursing mothers, who struggle to access basic medical care. Restrictions on movement prevent many from seeking life-saving treatment outside the Strip, while shortages of clean water, food, and essential healthcare pose severe

15 Anadolu Agency. (2024, May 8). Some of them waited 30 years.. Israel destroys the dream of hundreds of Gazans to have children. <https://tinyurl.com/4taty28b>.



risks to public health. Legal experts argue that these conditions align with the definition of genocide under Article 6 of the Genocide Convention.

Inside overcrowded shelters, displaced women endure inhumane conditions, with limited access to hygiene facilities and no privacy. Such neglect directly contradicts Article 75 of Additional Protocol I, which obligates warring parties to uphold the dignity and well-being of women. Meanwhile, the psychological toll of war, combined with ongoing social and economic hardship, continues to take a devastating toll on Gaza's female population.

As violations of IHL and human rights law persist, calls for urgent international intervention grow louder. Legal experts and humanitarian organizations warn that without concrete action to hold perpetrators accountable, the suffering of Palestinian women will only deepen, turning their struggle into yet another overlooked tragedy of war.

Recommendations

Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) calls for urgent international action to address the grave human rights violations committed against civilians in Gaza, particularly women. The organization urges global institutions, human rights bodies, and key governments to uphold their legal and moral responsibilities in ensuring justice, accountability, and humanitarian relief. To this end, WJWC presents the following key recommendations:

- **Accountability & Legal Action**
 - Urge the UN, ICJ, and ICC to investigate Israeli violations in Gaza since October 7, 2023, including mass killings, psychological harm, and attacks on women's reproductive health.
 - Allow independent monitoring teams access to Gaza to document crimes and ensure accountability under international law.
- **Ending Violations & Humanitarian Access**
 - Demand an end to genocidal acts and the blockade on Gaza.
 - Ensure unrestricted entry of humanitarian aid, including food, medical supplies, hygiene products for women, and heating provisions.
 - Guarantee access to essential health services, particularly maternity care and



treatment for chronic diseases like cancer.

- Remove restrictions on medical equipment and fast-track the evacuation of critically ill patients for treatment abroad.
- **Condemning War Crimes & Protecting Women**
- Call on human rights organizations to document and publicly condemn violations against women, including privacy breaches and neglect of pregnant and nursing mothers.
- Hold Israel accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.
- **Pressuring Supporting Nations**
- Urge the U.S., U.K., and other Israeli allies to stop supporting indiscriminate attacks and the use of banned weapons in civilian areas.
- Warn that backing such policies exposes these countries to legal and ethical liability.
- **Strengthening International Justice**
- Support the ICJ in fulfilling its mandate, condemning any attempts to interfere with its work.
- Enforce ICJ rulings from January 26, 2024, and prosecute Israeli leaders implicated in genocide to uphold international justice.