



Mini Review

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COVID-19 and the Armed Conflict on Gaza, The Palestinian Healthcare System Response

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Gaza Strip is (GS) a 365km² piece of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, inhabited by more than 2 million Palestinians. This open-air enclave has been under siege for the past 14 years, which has left the health system jeopardized by limited resources, failing equipment, and many essential drugs in dangerously low supply [1]. This grim situation was worsened by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic especially with the entrance of the second wave of the virus in GS with propagation spread, [2] threatening health services with collapse. The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex global public health crisis presenting clinical, organizational and system-wide challenges [3].

Beginning on May 9, 2021, the Israeli Government and Hamas launched a military offensive against one another, the severity of which for the GS is believed to be the worst since 2014 [1]. The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) has reported at least 253 Palestinians killed, including 39 women, 66 children and 17 elderlies and about 1948 Palestinians wounded [4]. More than 120,000 citizens left their homes in search of safety, of whom 50,000 went to shelters "UNRWA schools", and 70,000 went to their relatives in a very complex living, human, social and health situation [5].

Rockets from GS have killed ten Israelis, including two children, and wounded at least 300 Israelis [1]. In GS, number of damaged housing units is 16,800 with 1,800 completely demolition [5]. The violations of the health sector amounted to 89 violations, between injuries to workers in the health sector including the martyrdom of two doctors and complete or partial damage to health institutions including, significant damage to the building that houses the central laboratory, in which laboratory tests for Covid-19 are carried out, and led to its cessation of work; In addition to the damage to the mental health clinic in Al-Daraj clinic in Gaza and partial damage to the main two pediatric hospitals in Gaza and the Shifa Medical Complex were also affected; The quarantine center

in Rafah Governorate was affected by the bombing, which affects the MoH efforts to fight Covid-19 pandemic, especially after the quarantine of returnees from India and Bangladesh was approved in the wake of the spread of the Indian strain [6,7]. Electricity was available in the GS on a rotating basis for 8 hours before the recent escalation in the fighting, then due to the heavy bombing, the electricity lines were destroyed, the fuel supply was disrupted, and the electricity became available for only 3 to 4 hours per day [8].

Globally, the total reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 in 220 countries at the day of writing (May 24, 2021), were 167,737,792 cases and Case Fatality Rate (CFR) 2.07 % [9]. The total number of Covid-19 cases in Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt) is 334,618 including 189,783 cases in the West Bank (WB), 28,841 in Al-Quds city and 106,994 in the GS. To-date May 25, 2021, in GS Covid-19 recovery rate 97.7%, the CFR was 1.12%, male to female infection rate was 1:11 [10]. According to the MoH 110,400 dose against Covid-19 were delivered from the MoH- Ramallah to Gaza, 38,809 persons were vaccinated (1.9 %) among Gazans population while it was 4.2% in the WB and 5.1 % globally [11,12].

Armed conflicts have major impacts and immense consequences that are difficult to deal with. War produces a multitude of opportunities for pathogenic microbes and constitutes an extremely effective way to promote microbial traffic and increase human morbidity and mortality [13]. Furthermore, the provision of health care continues is disrupted by the shutting down of 23 out of the 50 primary health care centers, due to the diversion of human resources to respond to Covid-19-related issues [14].

The political upheavals, cycles of violence, Covid-19 pandemic, population displacement, overcrowdings and high population density, poverty and electricity cuts all of these complex situations lead to tearing of the GS including the healthcare system that

brink of collapse and put it in an extraordinarily poor position to confront the Covid-19 pandemic and healthcare services delivery, this heralds a health catastrophe that casts a shadow over the Palestinian healthcare system and causes morbidities, disabilities and mortalities among the Gazans population.

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