

GAZA'S SILENT KILLINGS



The destruction of the healthcare system and the struggle for survival in Rafah

Executive summary

(Full version available on MSF website)

Under the threat of aerial bombardment, an estimated 1.7 million men, women and children have been forcibly displaced to Rafah, a tiny sliver of land in the south of the Gaza Strip. However, even in Rafah the civilian population has not found safety. Military operations are ongoing in Rafah and the confirmed threat of a full-scale imminent military incursion by Israeli forces looms over the population, who now face the risk of death by disease or starvation in a place where the healthcare system has been decimated.

On 13 October 2023, MSF medical teams, alongside the civilian population, were forced to evacuate from north to south Gaza, where they rapidly established emergency medical responses in Rafah and Deir Al-Balah. This report draws upon medical data and the testimony of patients to demonstrate that even in Rafah, conditions for survival are not in place.

MSF has observed a stark deterioration in people's health conditions in Rafah. As a result of the siege on Gaza, acute malnutrition is emerging with alarming rapidity, despite being almost entirely absent prior to the current conflict. From January to March 2024, MSF teams registered 216 cases of moderate and severe acute malnutrition in two primary healthcare centres alone.

The mental health of the population is in tatters. MSF mental health teams are dealing with high numbers of individuals who have been exposed to extreme levels of violence and loss. However, working with these patients to build resilience is difficult when insecurity and violence are ongoing. People with severe mental health conditions, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (an estimated 5% of the population), are often left without treatment, as the only specialised psychiatric hospital in the Gaza Strip – in Gaza City – ceased its services on 6 November 2023 due to the conflict. In some cases, people have resorted

to over-sedating family members with severe mental health conditions to keep them safe from harm while living in overcrowded shelters.

The lives of people who fled bombardment are now at risk due to the looming threat of disease outbreaks in Rafah, where living conditions are dire, where there is a desperate shortage of clean water for drinking or bathing, and where rubbish and raw sewage accumulate in the streets. MSF teams are providing more than 5,000 medical consultations every week in two clinics alone. More than 40 per cent of MSF patients have upper respiratory tract infections linked to poor living conditions. Rates of diarrhoea are reportedly 25 times higher than prior to the conflict and hepatitis A is on the rise. As this catastrophe unfolds, the collective capacity of the humanitarian community to respond at the scale required has been hindered by the insecurity and by restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on vital supplies entering the Gaza Strip.

People's needs are skyrocketing and the healthcare system no longer has the capacity to respond. One by one, hospitals in Gaza are being rendered inoperable as they are attacked, damaged or destroyed by Israeli forces, or have insufficient fuel and other supplies to provide services. MSF is gravely concerned about what this devastation of the healthcare system will mean in Gaza for years to come. The few medical facilities that still function are being pushed to the brink, overwhelmed with patients with conflict-related trauma injuries. As a result, people with other types of medical needs, such as pregnant women with complications and people living with chronic conditions, are unable to receive the care they require. Gaza's entire healthcare system has been decimated and the population is under siege. Without access to medical care, thousands more lives will be lost, beyond those killed in the Israeli bombardments seen in the news – these are Gaza's "silent killings".