

The effect of the 50-day conflict in Gaza on children: a descriptive study

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Abstract

Background The UN has estimated that the conflict in Gaza between July 8 and August 26, 2014, resulted in the deaths of 2204 Palestinians, mostly civilians, and permanent disabilities in thousands of people. The aim of this study was to describe the pattern and extent of effects on children from this attack.

Methods We reviewed surveys and reports from governmental and international bodies (ministry of health and UN) and independent non-governmental organisations to compile statistics. Additionally, we reviewed the findings of 24 researchers who interviewed 430 eye witnesses of 144 Israeli attacks on civilian gatherings (houses, hospitals, schools, mosques, shops, and streets) in which at least two Palestinians were killed. We separated attacks that resulted in death of children (age <18 years). Each attack was categorised as being direct or indirect (direct attack means that bombing was intentional with no fighting in the vicinity) and we recorded whether a child was killed or injured and what the killed children were doing before attack.

Findings 530 children were killed, accounting for 24% of the 2147-total people killed. Children accounted for an estimated 30% (3303) of the 10 870 total people wounded. The field researchers of Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor covered 338 (64%) of the total 530 children killed. They focused extensively on mass attacks because it was difficult to cover hundreds of attacks taking place at the same time for 50 days. 54 597 (90%) of the raids were judged to be direct and 53 990 (89%) of these were in densely populated areas. 297 (88%) of children who were killed died in their homes. 71 (21%) of these were sitting with their families; 95 (28%) were asleep; 34 (10%) were eating; 27 (8%) were watching television or using computers. 41 (12%) of the killed children died while fleeing their houses; 31 (6%) were killed while sheltering in basements or at UN Relief and Works Agency schools; 20 (6%) died while playing; and 31(9%) were killed while doing other activities. Furthermore, the UN reported that 373 000 children needed specialised psychological support and around 1000 children will suffer permanent disabilities.

Interpretation Our findings suggest that children injured or killed accounted for a substantial proportion of civilian casualties during this conflict.

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Contributors

Study design was done by KE, YE, and RA. Data collection was done by YE, RA and OA. Data analysis was done by KE and YE. Results were interpreted by KE and YE. The Abstract was drafted by KE and revised by all authors.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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