

CROSSROADS AT CHILDBIRTH

THE CONFLICT IN YEMEN HAS A MOUNTING COST TO THE LIVES OF MOTHERS AND NEWBORNS

More than four years of armed conflict in Yemen have served to worsen the situation of women and children at birth within a country that was already the poorest in the Middle East and one of the world's most impoverished even before the war escalated early in 2015. For many, the war's devastating toll on human life means that, as the world approaches the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), few have much to celebrate.

Today, Yemen's brutal conflict continues to rob children of their right to life and, for the survivors, to the best healthcare possible. This includes prenatal and postnatal care for their mothers (CRC Article 24). One consequence of the war in Yemen is manifested as an evident attack on parenting.



Mothers and babies are amongst the most highly vulnerable in Yemen

EVERY
TWO
HOURS



1 MOTHER + 6 NEW-BORNS

DIE IN YEMEN

because of complications during pregnancy or birth.

#EarlyMomentsMatter

#ChildrenUnderAttack #ParentsOfWar

KHAIZARAN'S TALE

Ali, born at home in Dhula' Hamdan in December 2018 and without the assistance of a midwife, lost his mother, Khaizaran, to severe bleeding within five hours of his birth. A catastrophic loss for the family.

Yahya, Khaizaran's husband, had no means of transportation nor sufficient funds to take his wife to a hospital or health centre once her labour began. This is a common situation in Yemen, one which leads to only less than one-third of babies being born in health facilities. Had Yahya been able to get her to hospital in time for emergency obstetric care, Khaizaran's life could have been saved, but, unable to find transport, she died in his arms.

Now living with his aunt, Ali's fate hangs in the balance as she tries to breastfeed him in addition to her own 3-year-old child. Khaizaran and Yahya's seven other children, all under 16, are devastated by the loss of their mother and have dropped out of school.



ALI'S FATE HANGS IN THE BALANCE AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER, KHAIZARAN.

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FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Maternal and child survival are closely linked. When a mother dies, this significantly increases the risk of her children dying. Most maternal deaths are associated with conditions that could have been prevented if the woman had access to family planning and quality healthcare before and during pregnancy, and at birth.

MOTHERS AND BABIES ARE AT GREAT RISK IN YEMEN

(STATISTICS FOR THE PERIOD 2018–2015)

- 
1 OUT OF EVERY 260 WOMEN dies in pregnancy or childbirth
- 
1 IN 37 NEWBORNS die in the first month of life
- 
1.1 MILLION PREGNANT AND LACTATING WOMEN need treatment for severe acute malnutrition
- 
ONLY 3 OUT OF 10 BIRTHS take place in health facilities
- 
1 IN 15 TEENAGE GIRLS (15–19) has given birth

SOURCE: Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2015–1990 Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNPD; Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey 2015–2013; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018; EMRO 2017, Framework for Health Information Systems and Core Indicators for Monitoring the Health Situation and Health System Performance.

Essential public services, including healthcare crucial to support mothers and childbirth are on the brink of total collapse. Only 51 per cent of all health facilities are fully functional, and even these face severe shortages in medicines, equipment, and staff.

In a country profoundly affected by the humanitarian crisis, delivery of routine primary healthcare services has also been overshadowed by the urgency of responding to the cholera epidemic and starvation. This leaves pregnant women and neonatal with limited access to a broader range of maternal and child health services, including antenatal and emergency obstetric and new-born care.

According to accounts by women interviewed in an ongoing qualitative study on health services in Sana'a, Taiz and Aden, home births are also on the rise¹. They reported that because families are getting poorer by the day, an increasing number of women are opting to have their babies at home, and only seek medical care if they experience complications.

¹ These governorates were not selected based on the conflict situation. It was convenient to conduct the study in these areas.

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