

21 March 2024

ALARMING SURGE OF MALNUTRITION AMONG CHILDREN IN GAZA A CAUSE FOR GLOBAL CONCERN

Juzoor for Health and Social Development urgently raises the alarm on the catastrophic malnutrition crisis and looming risk of famine in Gaza

The current death toll due to the forced starvation and dehydration in the Gaza Strip has risen to at least 30, marking this as one of the worst man-made catastrophes in modern history.

The unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza is beyond the imaginable level of suffering and mortality that a human mind can bear. For more than 160 days, the people of Gaza have been pushed into starvation and malnutrition at a faster rate than the world has ever seen. Now, those left alive in Gaza are facing a slow, unbearable death, and it is only a matter of time before this becomes irreversible.

Unfortunately, children are famine's first victims and already make up the majority of those killed due to malnutrition. According to many sources and confirmed by Juzoor, 1 in 3 children under 2 are acutely malnourished in the North. Unfortunately, risk of famine is now not imminent, as was previously reported and feared, but likely already underway, especially in the North.

Juzoor has headed a nutrition screening campaign in North Gaza since January 13, which aims to identify and detect instances of wasting and malnutrition among children and facilitate immediate interventions.

Our emergency immunization team in Gaza, previously trained on taking children's mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements, has been in charge of this campaign and has reported devastating outcomes of starvation and malnutrition among children in the North, noting a twofold increase in cases from January to February alone.

Juzoor's findings reveal that 30% of children under two suffer from acute malnutrition in North Gaza

In February, the team conducted MUAC measurements for 1,329 children aged 6 months to 2 years. 328 children screened positive for acute malnutrition, compared to 209 in January, while 60 children screened positive for severe malnutrition, compared to 40 in January.

Our data revealed an alarming and extremely dangerous surge in malnutrition among children, nearly doubling from 16.1% to approximately 30% from January to February. The MUAC measurement for children averaged 12.9 cm in February, with some children displaying severe malnutrition registering as low as 8.5 cm.

Incidences of malnutrition were substantially higher and more common in the 6-12 months age range, with cases of severe malnutrition being four times higher in this group compared to that of the 12+ months category. Girls were also shown to be more vulnerable to malnutrition. These malnourished children face immediate and imminent risks of death, or, at the very least, long-term disabilities and developmental challenges due to underdevelopment and health complications. Even if they survive and receive immediate assistance, they are at risk of experiencing lifelong stunting and cognitive and health deficits.

Juzoor remains committed and dedicated to broadening its humanitarian operations, striving to improve the health and well-being of Gaza's population and alleviate some of the deteriorating conditions they endure. Unfortunately, our efforts are hindered by lack of resources and the restriction of food and aid, particularly in the North.

Food insecurity has reached a breaking point in Gaza. The deliberate and engineered starvation is a death sentence for the entire population. In the words of our staff on the ground, "starvation is the major problem not only for children but for all." Urgent action from the international community is already overdue to prevent a looming catastrophe. If the world does not take action, we stand on the brink of witnessing a devastating loss of life due to starvation.

The time is now for the global community to act and save the people of Gaza.

Juzoor renews its calls for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of a safe, unimpeded, and sustainable pathway for humanitarian operations and aid flow to Gaza.

