

BRIEF #3

YOUTH AND ADOLESCENTS' PLIGHT AMIDST GENOCIDE IN GAZA: ENDURING NUTRITIONAL DEVASTATION

Issued in January 2025

Juzoor for Health and Social Development is Launching a Series of Brief Reports on the Impact of Genocide on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing in Gaza: Findings from a Comprehensive Study of 1,011 Youth Aged 10–24, Conducted in August–September 2024

A generation of young people, who have been grappling with the brutal violence of the genocide, now face a full-blown nutrition crisis in Gaza. With food supplies dwindling, meal frequencies dropping, and nutritional quality plummeting, Gaza's adolescents are trapped in a vicious cycle of hunger and malnutrition. This brief unveils the alarming figures of food insecurity—where almost three-quarters of adolescents reported feeling more hungry during the war than before, and many had been forced to rely on scraps to survive. As families face the grim reality of shrinking resources, the resilience of Gaza's youth is being tested in unimaginable ways. The consequences of this food crisis are not just about missing meals—they are about the health and future of an entire generation.

Hunger and Food Insecurity: A Stark Reality

A critical finding of the study is the significant increase in food insecurity among adolescents in Gaza. Nearly 75% of adolescents reported experiencing hunger more frequently due to food insecurity since the war escalated. This significant increase highlights the widespread lack of access to sufficient food. Over 50% of participants reported experiencing hunger more than twice in the past four weeks, a stark reflection of the unprecedented level of food scarcity. Many households are struggling to provide basic meals, a situation worsened by restrictions on movement and the destruction of essential services.

Dramatic Decline in Meal Quality and Quantity

The nutritional content of meals has also significantly declined. Almost all of adolescents reported eating less animal protein (such as meat, chicken, fish, or eggs) compared to before the war. Animal protein, which is a crucial component of a balanced diet, has become inaccessible for most families due to the economic and logistical challenges posed by the war. More than 80% of adolescents reported that their meals now contain more non-animal protein, such as lentils, as a coping strategy. While lentils are an affordable protein source, they lack the essential amino acids found in animal proteins and are not sufficient for the growth and development of adolescents.

Furthermore, the average number of meals consumed per day has drastically reduced. The study found that the mean number of meals eaten per day by adolescents is just 1.92, with a median of 2. This is far below the recommended daily intake of three meals, and it underscores the extent of food scarcity faced by adolescents in Gaza. Around 30% of adolescents reported eating just one meal and 48.2% reported eating only two meals the day before. This significant reduction in meal frequency is a direct result of the war, limited food availability, and the inability of many families to afford enough food to meet basic dietary needs.

Adolescents' Coping Strategies: A Struggle for Survival

In response to the food shortage, adolescents and their families have adopted various coping strategies. Using the Food Reduced Coping Strategy Index, the study shows a heavy reliance on negative mechanisms among households, worsening adolescent health and well-being:

- The largest proportion of households (38.1%) rely heavily on cheaper, less preferred foods like grains and processed items, which lack essential nutrients
- Nearly half of households borrowed food or relied on support from friends and relatives to a certain extent, highlighting the urgent need for humanitarian aid
- 78% of households have reduced the number of meals they eat per day to some extent, with nearly 33% reducing it significantly
- 20.5% of households reported significantly restricting adult food consumption so that small children could have more to eat

The Staggering Impact of Food Insecurity: Crisis Levels

The study further reveals the severity of the food insecurity crisis:

- Over half of the households are experiencing a "crisis" or "catastrophic" level of food insecurity, signaling that food is critically scarce and that families are employing extreme coping strategies
- 37% of households are classified as "stressed," facing major difficulty accessing enough food
- Only 12.4% of households are in a "none" or low insecurity phase, highlighting the widespread crisis



74.9% of adolescents reported feeling hunger more frequently than before the war



44.8% of households borrowing food or relying on help from friends and relatives



78.5% consumed two or fewer meals, or none at all, the day before



44.5% of families have significantly reduced portion sizes of meals



97.6% reported their meals containing less animal protein compared to before the war



50.6% of households in a crisis or catastrophic phase of food insecurity

Immediate Action Required

The findings highlight the devastating impact of the war on adolescent nutrition in Gaza, with a sharp decline in food security, reduced meal frequency, and worsening nutritional quality, all of which pose serious risks to both physical and mental health. Harmful coping strategies, such as smaller portions and reliance on low-quality food, increase the likelihood of malnutrition, stunting, and long-term developmental challenges. Urgent action from the international community is needed to provide food assistance and humanitarian aid, along with long-term efforts to rebuild Gaza's food systems and ensure sustainable access to nutritious food. Protecting the health and future of Gaza's youth is a moral obligation and essential for the region's recovery and stability.