



The Impact of War in Sudan on Maternal Health

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Introduction

The war in Sudan, which began on April 15, 2023, between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia and the Sudanese government, has led to widespread devastation across multiple states, including Khartoum, Al Jazira, Darfur, and Kordofan. Thousands have been killed, injured, displaced, or forced to migrate. Among the most vulnerable are pregnant women, who face severe risks to their maternal and perinatal health.

The ongoing conflict in Sudan, has precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis, profoundly affecting maternal health services. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have reported that attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel have disproportionately harmed women and girls, particularly pregnant women [1].

Healthcare Infrastructure Destruction

The conflict has led to the closure of approximately 67% of hospitals in affected areas, including key maternity hospitals such as Omdurman Hospital, the largest referral hospital in Sudan.

Among the 11 million people in Sudan who need urgent health assistance are 2.64 million women and girls of reproductive age. Some 262 880 of them are pregnant and over 90 000 will give birth in the next three months. All of them need access to critical reproductive health services [1].

This widespread destruction has severely limited access to essential maternal healthcare services, forcing many women to give birth in unsafe conditions without skilled assistance [1].

Shortage of Medical Supplies and Personnel

The war has disrupted supply chains, leading to critical shortages of medical supplies, including medications and sterile equipment necessary for safe deliveries. The displacement of healthcare workers has exacerbated these challenges, leaving many regions without skilled birth attendants. In South Darfur, Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) reported 46 maternal deaths and 48 neonatal sepsis deaths in the first half of 2024, highlighting the dire situation.

Impact on Displaced Pregnant Women

The conflict has displaced millions, with South Darfur experiencing the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Displaced pregnant women often lack access to prenatal and postnatal care, increasing the risks of complications. MSF has described the maternal and child health emergency in South Darfur as one of the worst globally, with severe malnutrition. Some 15% of pregnant women experience pregnancy- and birth-related complications and need access to emergency obstetric and newborn care. Further evidence suggested an increase in the incidence of miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, congenital abnormalities, miscarriage and premature rupture of membranes among mothers exposed to armed conflict [2].

Psychological and Emotional Impact

The war has also taken a psychological toll on pregnant women, increasing stress, anxiety, and depression. Exposure to conflict-related trauma is associated with higher risks of adverse pregnancy outcomes, including miscarriage and stillbirth.

A study conducted about Impact of Conflict on Maternal Health in Sudan

A mixed-methods study examined the effects of military conflict on maternal health in Sudan. The research highlighted increased maternal mortality rates due to limited access to healthcare services, inadequate prenatal care, and unsafe delivery conditions. The study emphasized that the ongoing war has significantly disrupted maternal health services, leaving pregnant women without proper medical care [3].

According to study about Maternal Health in Conflict Zones: A Global Perspective

This study explored the broader impact of war on maternal health across African conflict zones. It

identified key issues such as increased maternal mortality, higher rates of sexual violence, malnutrition, and insufficient access to reproductive health services. The findings underscored the long-term consequences of war on women's health and the need for humanitarian interventions [4].

In Sudan, the situation of maternal health has worsened even further since the war began. Immediate action is essential to address the maternal health crisis in Sudan. Priorities of recommendations include:

- Re-establishing Maternal Health Services: Rebuilding healthcare infrastructure and ensuring the availability of essential medical supplies.
- Supporting Healthcare Workers: Providing resources and safe working conditions for healthcare professionals.
- Ensuring Safe Delivery Options: Establishing emergency obstetric care units in IDP camps and providing clean delivery kits.
- Addressing Malnutrition: Distributing food aid and nutritional supplements to pregnant and lactating women.
- Providing Mental Health Support: Implementing counseling and psychological support programs for affected women.

Conclusion

The conflict in Sudan has severely compromised maternal health, leading to increased morbidity and mortality among mothers and newborns. The international community must act urgently to restore and support maternal health services to prevent further loss of life.

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