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Israel's Unlawful Blockade of Gaza Sparks Women's Rights Crisis

The humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza is affecting women and girls in specific and devastating ways.

On October 7, Hamas-led gunmen launched the worst massacre of civilians in Israeli history, killing an estimated 1,400 people and taking more than 200 hostage. The Israeli military then launched airstrikes unprecedented in intensity on Gaza, killing an estimated more than 5,900 Palestinians, including over 1,300 women, and exacerbating the [already dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza after more than 16 years of Israel's closure](#).

The Israeli government has cut supplies to Gaza and hospitals have been both deprived of essential supplies [and](#) damaged by airstrikes. The estimated [50,000](#) pregnant women and girls in Gaza risk missing antenatal care and giving birth without electricity or medical supplies. A United Nations rapid gender [analysis](#) of the situation echoes these concerns. The crisis will likely result in increased maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, undermining health gains previously made in Palestine.

Although there is little data on current trends in Gaza, women and girls typically are at increased risk of [sexual violence](#) in times of [armed conflict](#). Survivors of sexual violence need immediate support, including medical assistance. They need treatment for injuries and sexually transmitted diseases and access to medical supplies, including emergency contraception and treatment, to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. They also need comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services as well as psychosocial support. As Gaza struggles to treat thousands of people injured by Israeli airstrikes, these needs will likely go largely unmet.

Families are rationing water because Israel has cut off water supplies and electricity to Gaza's civilian population, which amounts to collective punishment, a war crime. According to the UN, only a small fraction of the water supplied by Israel is getting through, and only in southern Gaza. People are getting about [three](#) liters of water per day; the World Health Organization recommends between [50 and 100](#). No more than 20 trucks of humanitarian aid, including bottled water, entered Gaza via Egypt between October 21 and 23, only four percent of the daily average prior to October 7.

Lack of clean water is a crisis for parents – usually mothers – trying to feed babies.

Access to water and to safe sanitation facilities is also essential for women and girls managing their menstrual hygiene. When those needs are unmet it can lead to serious [infections](#), including hepatitis B and thrush. Women and girls in shelters face particular difficulty accessing supplies and facilities, and lack of [awareness](#) about menstrual health, especially among men and boys, likely compounds difficulties they face.

All of this poses additional risks to health and life for women and girls. Their suffering is one more reason that Israel's allies, especially the United States, should press it restore the flow of electricity and water, allow fuel into Gaza, and open its crossings for humanitarian aid.

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Gaza strip: Article on the humanitarian impacts of the cut of supplies by the Israeli government with a focus on the consequences for women and girls (as of October 2023)

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State of Palestine

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