



In Search of a Safe Place in Gaza for Children Stop Violence Against Children

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Received: Nov 20 2023

Accepted: Nov 20 2023

Citation to this article:

Kadivar M. In Search of a Safe Place in Gaza for Children Stop Violence Against Children. *J Iran Med Council.* 2024;7(1):2-4.

The Gaza Strip:

The tough situation in the Gaza Strip and the violence against children in this crowded area appears as the headline of different news agencies these days. The related news, pictures and clips of children from the Gaza Strip that are broadcasted these days are heart breaking. As the most crowded area in the world, the Gaza Strip population is mainly young. The median age of people in the Gaza Strip is just 18 years and some 65% of the population is under 24. It is estimated that 1 million people living in the Gaza Strip are children and adolescents (1). Unfortunately, more than 11,000 people have been killed in Gaza, among which 4500 are children during the recent war (2).

Importance of childhood:

Childhood period is very important in raising children and formation of their future. This period should involve love and hope, and the future of children and their families require a safe area to live and safety for survival. However, during war time, children, directly or indirectly, suffer from war and armed conflict not only affects children both physically and/or mentally, several disorders and infectious problems, malnutrition, stunted development, family loss, and death are the consequences of wars and conflicts (1,2).

The Post Stress Traumatic Disorders (PSTD) destroy the child and her/his future (3). Witnessing the injuries and death of beloved, the load noise of heavy bombardments and the destruction of buildings are not tolerable for people especially children. During wartime, violence leads to a cycle of violence and hate leads to a sequence of hate. The viscous cycle of violence and hate destroys the future of children and ultimately, children become victims of violence and hate. These catastrophes raise a fundamental question: "Why, in this modern world, do we find ourselves still fighting for basic rights for children in 2023?" Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF) President/CEO Maria Elfriede Pradervand' message (4).

Although all the above-mentioned sufferings of children in the Gaza Strip is not new, but war and various problems such as malnutrition, safety and proper access to clean water and health care facilities especially in

chronic diseases and cancers is larger than ever due to extensive dimensions of the recent war compared to previous conflicts (1,3,5).

Obviously, the shortage of food, the restrictions of the medical facilities and supplies, poor sanitary situations, access to clean water and fuel have had significant influences and consequences in the children in this area (2). However, the children and their family in the Gaza Strip desperately need lifesaving support, humanitarian assistance and urgent protection as it appears in the statement of the UNICEF (6). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund has claimed that the Gaza Strip is turning into a "graveyard of children" (7). The children in Gaza are not safe in the hospitals, the assigned United Nation (UN) schools, chaplains, or even in the ambulances (8). The overall situation seems to resemble some kind of *mass punishment* of the civilians in the Gaza Strip, especially the Gaza's children. And this situation is not acceptable based on the international law and conventions such as the Geneva Convention and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (9). November 17th has been named as the international prematurity day for raising awareness about preterm birth and premature babies. Sadly, on the same day 37 premature babies were struggling for their survival in Gaza hospitals due to the shortage of oxygen, medical supplies, and electricity (10).

According to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War or armed conflicts, the civilians should be protected and the children are to be evacuated to safe areas when possible and reunited with their families (10-12). And based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Every Child has right to survival, protection, and education (13). All children, without any exception, should feel safe, not fear.

On the other hand, the international humanitarian law, the medical ethics, and humanitarians law addressed the "medical neutrality" during the war and armed conflicts declares that the medical services and buildings, ambulances and related facilities should be safe and protected. The violence against *medical neutrality* is considered as war crime according to the Geneva convention (14).

Respecting humanity during wars is vital and regarding safety of civilians is an important issue. While wars

are considered to be an adult adventure, civilians and mostly the children are the main sufferers of wars.

And finally, the 19 days events:

19 Days: 1-19 November 2023 is named the "Prevention of Violence & Abuse against Children & Youth" by the Women's World Summit Foundation / Children-Youth Section (4). During these nineteen days, a campaign for the visibility of children is organized, reminding the world leaders of regarding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some relevant targets of this campaign are highlighted as: eliminations of all type of violences, eradication all harmful practices, reduction impact of violence in the children's families and communities, prevention of child abuse, promotion of law and justice nationally and internationally, establishment of safety, provision safe and non-violent spaces, and effective learning environments and strengthening relevant institutions to prevent violence, and spread peace and justice and maintain strong institutions (4).

Nov 20, 2023 is regarded as the *Universal Children's Day* to remind all the world leaders of their moral responsibility to stop wars and provide a safe environment for the children and respect children's right. Let's take advantage of this occasion and ask the main stakeholders of the Gaza Strip conflict to compensate their previous errors and shortcomings in Gaza, especially their tremendous debt of neglecting the rights of children in this war disaster area.

In conclusion, as UNICEF (United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund) Executive Director, Catherine Russell, stated recently; "A child is a child. Children everywhere must be protected at all times and must never come under attack" (15).



Figure 1. 2023 Campaign Kit: "19 Days of Activism for Prevention of Violence and Abuse Against Children and Youth 1-19. <https://www.woman.ch/19-days-of-activism-prevention-kit/>. (accessed Nov 16, 2023).

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