Update on the status of health in the occupied territories

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Socio-political determinants of health

- Think about:
  - International law
  - Collective civilian punishment
  - Restrictions of access
  - Ghettoization
  - Incarceration especially children
  - Proportionality in war

- Health care and healing occurs in a socio-political context
- Need for political solutions to health and human rights issues
- Why is life expectancy in Israel 10 years more than WB & Gaza?
Zionism and medicine

• 2018 Nation State Bill-privileges Jewish citizens of Israel over Palestinians

• Institutional racism

• Are Jewish Israeli clinicians able to see Palestinian citizens of Israel, or Palestinians in the oPt as fellow, equal human beings?
Right to health – Physicians for Human Rights

Israel

- Freedom of movement
- Access to health services
- Clean water
- Modern sanitation
- Nutrition
- Housing
- Education
- Employment
- Nonviolence
WHO Report: Right to Health is fundamental human right

- Youssef Abu Zarifa, shot by Israeli forces during protests at the fence separating Israel and Gaza, receives treatment at a hospital in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on 9/28/18 (AFP)

- Key indicators: Accessible high quality health care
- Housing, clean water, food, sanitation, drugs
- 2 issues: access restrictions for pts, companions & staff
- (Gaza- ½ medical permit approval 2020)
- Attacks (violence or obstruction that interferes-on pts or staff)
- Patients delayed, dying
Health care in East Jerusalem

• Pop. Approx. 400,000

• 6 tertiary care hospitals & 6 clinics, (Augusta Victoria, Al-Mokassed)

• Referrals from oPt for cancer care, cardiac and eye surgeries, neonatal intensive care and pediatric cardiology, children’s dialysis and physical rehabilitation of children, critical care (medicine and surgery) for adults

• Residents have full access to Israeli health care system, but less health care centers to get to care
Health care in the West Bank and Gaza ("fragmented and incoherent" Lancet)

- Population of >5.1 million people
- Ministry of Health, est. 1994
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency (care for refugees, approx. 1.5 mil Gazans in 8 camps)
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
- Private providers
- Role of Israeli government (de-development)
Gaza

- UN: “Gaza will not be habitable by 2020”
- Desperate humanitarian catastrophe: siege, water (polluted & salinated), health care, nutrition, fuel, electricity, sewage, housing, environmental contamination, climate crisis, covid 19
Big health issues 2018-2021 Gaza

- Electricity 4-8 hours/d
- Fuel shortages – hospitals closing
- Lack of specialists
- Exhausted medical personnel
- Salaries unpaid
- Restrictions on permits to leave (pts, NGOs, UN)
- 20% of patients denied have cancer
- Covid 19
Depleted supplies

- Dire shortages **Israel controls imports of everything**
- Available drugs often unaffordable
- Great March of Return: **33,141 injuries and 322 deaths.** More than 7,951 suffered from gunshot wounds, and **88% of these presented limb wounds.** WHO
Big issues Gaza-water

- water pollution is main cause of morbidity & mortality in Gaza

- Over-pumping & lack of repair are causes of water crisis unlikely

- 2021: 4-8 hrs water (not drinkable)

-Times of Israel
Slashing of US UNRWA funding – 2018

• > $300 mil annually
• Increasing demand
• World Bank: Gaza economy is collapsing
• Ministry of Health: State of emergency
• Cut aid to Al-Mokassed in East Jerusalem
Biden reversed this policy – 2021

- Starting in March, funding for
- Covid 19
- Food
- Economic development
- Security
- Not enough
Covid 19 Israel/Palestine: 11/6/21

Israel, West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem

- Israel
- West Bank
- Gaza
- East Jerusalem
- oPt (MCH)
Medical Apartheid

- **Oslo**: PA maintains responsibility for management of health care in oPt
- **Geneva Accords**: mandates occupying power to apply "the prophylactic and preventative measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics" in oPt.
- Israel wants Palestinians in the territories to have the responsibilities of sovereignty (providing health care) without the benefits of sovereignty (resources and control over the system).
- Response to pandemic depends on geographic, ethnic, political status
Focus on Gaza: update 11/6/21

Gaza Weekly COVID Cases

Gaza Weekly COVID Cases
Population & health care systems: at risk as CV entered Gaza from abroad (3/20)

- Cheap hi calorie foods (neoliberal economic changes post Oslo) increase in obesity, diabetes, hypertension, CVD
- Hunger – lack of $ for food, 80% rely on aid (no olive oil)
- 2,895 hosp beds (1.3/1,000)
- 60-120 ICU beds, most occupied
- 50-100 ventilators
Prevention, prevention, prepare care...

- Over 5 months, 72 cases, all quarantined on entry: this is a **public health victory**
- 8/24 4 cases refugee **camp** – total lockdown (siege within a siege)
- Mid August - 3 weeks of **nightly Israeli strikes**, in response to incendiary balloons (distress signals)
- **Total closure**, no fuel, electricity 4 hours/day, no fishing

Gaza’s only electrical power station –Hatem Moussa
Lack of electricity & fuel...

- Deficit in electricity jeopardized hospitals, waste, water, refrigeration, etc.
- Israel also continued full maritime closure.
- Qatari intervention 9/1
• Gaza: 1,940 of the healthcare workers have already tested positive.
• Gaza has 60,000 doses of vaccine
• Ministry of Health plans to secure vaccines for 60% of the population.
• But minimal vaccine
April 2021 spike Gaza

- 4/7/21 highest daily number of infections since the start
- **Positivity rate > 1/3**
- Few vaccinated
- Total lockdown (Ramadan)
- 160,000 doses via COVAX & 32,000 Sputnik V & Moderna
- **11/21 - 334,917 fully vaccinated**
As population quarantined...

- Mental health issues spike
- Increased gender based violence
- April, 2020 46% live below poverty line, economy disrupted, and shrinking
- Spike in requests for permits (PA stopped covering costs, refused coordination with Israel- protest against annexation)
- Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, PHR I, UN, August Victoria EJ took over permits
- October Erez crossing: 2% of traffic
Strength & ingenuity of civil society

- Teachers used radio and social media to teach
- Artists launched face mask initiative in April
- Sewing factories making masks and gowns ($8-$12/d) (orders from Israel!)
- 3D printing face shields
- GCMHP crisis response plan
Lack of critical meds, including chemotherapy
- Radioisotopes forbidden entry
- **Gaza’s surgeons** are prevented from travelling to conferences or further develop their skills, freezing surgical practice many years behind the rest of the world.
- A [Harvard Medical School](https://www.harvard.edu) study has shown that **five-year survival rates** for breast cancer patients are as low as 30-40%, **compared with around 85% in England**.
Gaza consequences continue unabated

- **Radiotherapy** completely unavailable. Need permit from Israel to travel to hospitals in East Jerusalem..
- 60% dx late
- Vast majority of women having **full mastectomies** and lymph node dissection, which would be deemed unnecessary in the UK or US
Palestinian Authority – Preppandemic West Bank

- Health sector in state of collapse (lack of supplies, equipment, training, investment. Brain drain, poor pay)
- Doctors Assoc. & health workers on strike
- 120 ventilators for 3.2 million in WB
- PA security sector budget> education, health, & agriculture
- 3/2019 pandemic simulation

Aida Camp, Bethlehem - separation wall
West Bank coronavirus arrived March 5, 2020

- Bethlehem – tourists
- Immediate state of emergency, strict curfew across WB
- Excellent communication, community engagement, Goal: prevention

- Mohammed Tourabi
CV Issues on the West Bank

- 70,000 workers from the West Bank employed in construction, agriculture & factories in Israel, & 10,000 in settlements & workers with illegal entry
- Child and adult prisoners in Israel jails: Supreme Court rules no right to social distancing
- Settler attacks rise by 78%
- Israeli military raids, home demolitions, arrests continue
- Area C (180,000-300,000 Palestinians & 325,500 settlers)

-Middle East Eye
• Israeli authorities: Palestinians with permit requests **download a smartphone application**-includes consent **authorizations** that grant the Israeli security services access to a user’s contacts, microphone, camera, and location data.

• **Covid 19 clinics supported by the PA (EJ, Area C)** were **closed** and testing prohibited; UNRWA delivery of protective kits was obstructed

• CV cases in Israel 40x > Palestinian cases, **Israel closed WB as a “precaution” (not settlers)**
June, 2020 Second Wave – Hebron (workers in Israel)

- PA: quick shut down, securitization of daily life
- Dependent on international aid
- Corruption, stranded international students
- No support for political prisoners
- Loss of public faith
- Local support networks set up + private sector

- Tarqumiya checkpoint near Hebron - Abed al Hashlamoun
March 2021 Third Wave

- West Bank hospitals exceeded 100% capacity
- Most ICUs in the West Bank >100% capacity.
- A significant portion of the new cases are being traced to newer, more deadly variants
- Officials reinstated stringent lockdown measures
- A few thousand Moderna doses sent by Israel for Palestinian medical workers.
- 52,140 vaccine doses to WB.
November - numbers falling

Aida Camp, Bethlehem

- 960,238 fully vaccinated
Humiliation in war & chronic conflict impact on mental health

• Individual & cultural experience for Palestinians
• Occupier also dehumanized
• Palestinians humiliated by degradation in living conditions, loss of employment, at checkpoints, prisons, home invasions
• Children witness shaming & control of their parents by soldiers
Children experience: “...physical and verbal violence, humiliation, painful restraints, hooding of the head and face in a sack, threatened with death, physical violence, and sexual assault against themselves or members of their family, restricted access to toilet, food and water.”

Committee on the Rights of Children urged Israel to honor its responsibility to prevent the torture and ill-treatment of children.
Defense of Children International
Palestine

- Since 2000, 2,193 killed by soldiers/settlers
- 500-700 detained, prosecuted per year
- Impacts mental & physical health, education
- July 29, 2021 offices raided, computers & files confiscated
10/21 Israeli attack on 6 human rights organizations

- **Al-Haq, Addameer, Bisan Center, Defense For Children International-Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees** —

- Accusation: closely linked to the PFLP, involved in financing terrorist activities.

- NO EVIDENCE: assault on international funders
Hamas/Palestinian Authority

• Deepening geographic & ideological split

• PA functions as Israel’s ally, isolating & punishing Hamas

• PA withholds transfer of revenues – markedly reducing public health sector salaries ($1 bil/yr)

Gaza Administrator-Ministry of Health, degree in business administration, no salary
Big picture **structural racism, apartheid, cross generational trauma & local rivalries**

- **Israeli reliance on military solutions**
- **Disregard for the health and lives of Palestinian people** who matter less than their Jewish cohorts in the eyes of the Israeli government.
- **When small tokens of support** - testing, training, and equipment, described as **humanitarian gifts**, **examples of Israeli largesse**, when Israel as the occupying power is actually responsible for the health and well-being of the people it occupies.

- **The rise in digital & algorithmic surveillance systems** in the name of public health - a dangerous example of occupation creep now leaking into Israeli society as well.
Social and political solutions for health

• Man-made inequalities, in intricate and structural ways, purposely diminish people’s chances at survival.

• Covid-19 makes clear that the health of Palestinians is intrinsically linked to their liberation & end to siege
Crux of the problem

• Status quo can only continue if we as human beings see Jews as more human, more deserving, more innocent/honorable than Palestinian Arabs.

• If we as a community are blind to Arab suffering.

• Fundamental issue: racism which potentially leads to ethnic cleansing & genocide.
IF WE WASH OUR HANDS OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE POWERFUL AND THE POWERLESS WE SIDE WITH THE POWERFUL - WE DON'T REMAIN NEUTRAL.