



# Conflicts Compromise Health

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## Introduction

In recent years, a series of high-intensity and wide-ranging conflicts of various types have escalated, with massive human loss, extensive suffering, large-scale destruction, and severe environmental pollution—perhaps on a scale not seen since the Second World War.

The largest conflict in Europe, the Ukraine- Russia War since the Second World War, killed at least 350 thousand people directly since 2022, with at least 1.5 million casualties and economic loss of 590 billion US dollars. In Palestine, over 60 thousand Palestinians with 17 hundred Israelis lost their lives in Israel's 20-month invasion of the Gaza Strip. In Gaza, numbers of casualties is undercount. The destruction of health infrastructure and Israeli blockade of humanitarian aid have created one of the worst man-made humanitarian crises in the world, where more than 70 thousand women and 20 thousand children have been killed. Reports further clarify that at least one thousand children killed were under one year of age. Additionally, thousands have been killed, and tens of thousands are injured in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen across the Middle East. The Sudanese Civil War, now the world's largest humanitarian crisis, claimed more than 150 thousand civilian deaths, and over nine million people were displaced internally. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in January and February 2025 only, over seven thousand people were killed in insurgencies, displacing almost 7 million people. In Asian countries, many countries are in conflicts and insurgencies that have killed thousands of people and tens of thousands of people have been displaced. For example, since 2021, in Myanmar only, 80 thousand people were killed, with the displacement of three million people. India and Pakistan have been in conflict for many years. In 2025, there was a terror attack in India-administered Kashmir killing 26 civilians, and in a counterattack, more than 100 people were killed<sup>(1,2)</sup>. In recent years, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal went through violent protests that have claimed hundreds of human lives with millions of dollars lost due to the destruction of public infrastructures.

The conflicts and war harm health directly due injuries, deaths, whereas disease outbreaks, famine, malnutrition, mental illness, and weakened health systems. These effects last long after fighting stops and are worse for the most vulnerable people (3). In a nutshell, not only is there a high number of deaths and severe injuries due to bombing and shelling during armed conflicts, but also there is long-term disability due to delayed or limited medical and rehabilitation services, resulting in high Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) loss. The conflicts increase the risk of outbreaks of infectious diseases outbreaks such as Cholera, due to displacement, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and disrupted vaccination services. Malnutrition further worsens the spread and severity of infections. Poor nutrition increases deaths, mainly by worsening infections and reducing recovery. Wars and conflicts disrupt the regular services for chronic diseases,

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including HIV and TB, resulting in high mortality and morbidity from non-communicable diseases and chronic infectious diseases (4,5). Conflict disrupts maternal and reproductive health services, leading to higher maternal and newborn complications. Sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and forced marriage, increases during wars. Children experience higher illness and death rates from preventable diseases during conflict. Exposure to violence, displacement, and loss leads to widespread mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, depression, and anxiety. People with mental illness face higher risks of exploitation and poor well-being (6,7).

On top of all these, conflict destroys basic determinants of health such as food security, income, shelter, clean water, and social support. Vulnerable groups suffer the most, and pre-existing inequalities become worse (4,8–10).

If conflict persists, all health agendas are severely troubled that obstruct the functioning health systems, resulting in no stable supply chains, no medicines, and no services. Therefore, there is no health without peace (11).

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