

Covid-19 in Gaza

How do refugee camp communities in Gaza respond to public health directives established in response to the pandemic? And how well did public health measures work on the ground?

Health services in Gaza are insufficient to meet the current challenge

People in Gaza are generally drawing upon reliable sources for information about the pandemic and the measures required to prevent transmission. Nevertheless, various social and economic factors serve to discourage adherence to key messages and efforts to access health services. Health services in Gaza are insufficient to deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Background

Nearly 2 million people live in the Gaza Strip: an area of only 365km square. Health services have been severely impacted by 15 years of blockade and by Israeli attacks. In such a setting the consequences of transmission of COVID-19 are potentially dire. This study shed light on issues including efficacy of public health messaging and uptake of services. The results informed the COVID-19 response in Palestinian refugee camps.



Refugee Camp, Gaza. Summer 2020. © Mohammed Zaanoun

How the research was conducted

Research was conducted in communities between July-December 2020, with a cross-section of the population, including groups often at risk of social marginalisation: people with disabilities, women, children and youth. The study team aimed to capture and analyse political and economic considerations, community dynamics and cultural logics.

Three qualitative data collection approaches were used: A youth diary exercise, semi-structured interviews, and WhatsApp voice note surveys. People were asked to reflect upon public health measures implemented.

Key findings

1. Sources of information about the pandemic

- Participants have good knowledge of the virus, its symptoms, modes of transmission and preventative measures.
- They prefer to use social media to follow developments related to the pandemic in Gaza.

2. Accessing health care

- Fear of becoming infected with COVID-19 has negatively affected people's access to healthcare.

3. Implications of the official response

- Widespread concern exists about livelihoods and living costs due to COVID-19 measures. For this reason, many people felt unable to observe lockdown and distancing measures.
- An increase in both depression and sexual and gender-based violence was reported.

4. Reactions to public health measures

- A majority of respondents called for stricter measures to fight the pandemic, while also justifying the need for people in Gaza to break the existing regulations in order to cope with economic insecurity.
- Many participants found public health measures confusing and sometimes contradictory.

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

The research findings lead the team to make the following recommendations:

- End the blockade and work to ensure that all duty bearers meet their obligations under international law.
- Support immediate healthcare and humanitarian response and long-term sustainable development in Gaza.
- Increase the dissemination of information on service provision related to sexual & gender-based violence.
- Understand COVID-19 vulnerability in relation to socio-economic status.
- Increase use of social media in communicating public health measures and available avenues of support for communities.
- Engage with community-based networks.
- Support the monitoring of human rights violations during the pandemic.

Recommendations for future research

Real-time research is required in relation to the following questions:

- Which health services have been disrupted and why?
- What have been the specific localised impacts in locations across Gaza?
- How best to tackle the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic as well as the social and economic barriers to adherence with public health measures?

About the study team

The team was led from the University of Bath, with collaboration from researchers at the European University Institute in Florence, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and IOD Parc. The team was composed of the following individuals:

- Dr Jason Hart (PI), Bath
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Keywords

COVID-19, Gaza, Public Health, Youth, Livelihoods

Further reading

To download the full report of this project go to:

<https://www.elrha.org/project/covid-19-in-gaza-community-practices-in-refugee-camps/>



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<http://www.elrha.org/programme/research-for-health-in-humanitarian-crises/>