

# QUESTIONABLE COUNTING: ANALYSING THE DEATH TOLL FROM THE HAMAS-RUN MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN GAZA

BY ANDREW FOX



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CENTRE  
FOR NEW  
MIDDLE  
EAST

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## About Us

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### About The Henry Jackson Society

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**The Henry Jackson Society** is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



### About the Centre for New Middle East

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The **Centre for New Middle East** is a one-stop shop designed to provide opinion-leaders and policy-makers with the fresh thinking, analytical research and policy solutions required to make geopolitical progress in one of the world's most complicated and fluid regions.

Established following the fallout from the Arab Spring, the Centre is dedicated to monitoring political, ideological, and military and security developments across the Middle East and providing informed assessments of their wide-ranging implications to key decision makers.

## About the Author

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**Andrew Fox** is a research fellow at the Henry Jackson Society. He served for 16 years in the British Army, leaving the Parachute Regiment with the rank of Major. He completed 3 tours in Afghanistan including one attached to US Army Special Forces, as well as further tours of Bosnia, Northern Ireland and the Middle East. He was a senior lecturer at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, teaching in the War Studies and Behavioural Science departments. In the last year he has visited Gaza twice as well as Hezbollah tunnels in Lebanon. Andrew is a regular Middle East commentator on GB News, TalkTV and LBC radio, and has been published in *The Spectator*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *New York Post* and *The Tablet*, amongst others.

## Acknowledgments

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This report is the culmination of a comprehensive effort by the Henry Jackson Society to address the critical issue of reliability in fatality reporting of the ongoing Gaza War.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the dedicated researchers, analysts and contributors who have rigorously examined the data presented by the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health: Salo Aizenberg, Elliot Malin, Dr Mark Zlochin, Patrick Schneck, Jacob Haddo and Tatiana Glezer, Head of Fifty.global research group, and the International Institute of Social and Legal Studies. Their meticulous work has shed light on the numerous statistical issues, methodological flaws and distortions that significantly impact the global understanding of conflict dynamics.

We also acknowledge the invaluable support and cooperation of various international scholars, independent experts and media analysts who contributed to this project. Their expertise and commitment to data integrity and transparency have been instrumental in challenging widely accepted narratives and fostering a more nuanced and evidence-based discourse on the complexities of reporting in conflict zones. This report would not have been possible without their dedication to truth and their unwavering pursuit of accuracy in the face of significant challenges.



## Contents

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<b>About The Henry Jackson Society .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>About the Centre for New Middle East .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>About the Author .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Findings.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Methodology of Fatality Reporting in Gaza .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Men recorded as women.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The demographic breakdown of family reports vs Ministry of Health records .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>2. Statistical Concerns .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Demographics .....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Hospital Records vs Family Reports.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Age Variation .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<b>3. Deaths Unrelated to IDF Action.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Hamas-Related deaths.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Failed Rocket Launches.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Natural Deaths.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Cancer Patients recorded as War Fatalities .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<b>4. IDF-Reported Militant Deaths .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>5. Reliability of Hamas Fatality Data in Previous Conflicts.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<i>Operation Cast Lead, December 2008 – January 2009 .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Operation Protective Edge, July – August 2014 .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>IDF Reports .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Concealment of Fighter Deaths.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Other Incidents .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<b>6. International Misrepresentation of Combatants as Civilians .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<i>Key Findings of the Research.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Methodology.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<b>7. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>36</b>

## Key Findings

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**Men listed as women to inflate female fatalities.** Analysis of Gaza Ministry of Health (MoH) fatality data reveals repeated instances of men being misclassified as women. Examples include individuals with male first names (e.g. Mohammed) being recorded as female. This misclassification contributes to the narrative that civilian populations, particularly women and children, bear the brunt of the conflict, potentially influencing international sentiment and media coverage.

**Adults registered as children.** Significant discrepancies have been uncovered where adult fatalities are reclassified as children. For instance, an individual aged 22 was listed as a four-year-old and a 31-year-old was listed as an infant. Such distortions inflate the number of child casualties, which is emotionally impactful and heavily emphasised in global reporting. These misrepresentations suggest a deliberate attempt to frame the conflict as disproportionately affecting children, undermining the credibility of the fatality data.

**Disproportionate deaths of fighting-age men.** Data analysis indicates that proportionally most fatalities are men aged 15–45, contradicting claims that civilian populations are being disproportionately targeted.\* This age demographic aligns closely with the expected profile of combatants, further supported by spikes in deaths of men reported by family sources rather than hospitals. This evidence suggests that many fatalities classified as civilian may be combatants, a distinction omitted from official reporting.

**Inclusion of natural deaths in reporting.** Despite the typical annual rate of 5,000 natural deaths in Gaza, the fatality data provides no accounting for such figures. This omission raises concerns that natural deaths, as well as deaths caused by internal violence or misfired rockets, are being included in war-related fatality counts. Instances of cancer patients, previously registered for treatment, appearing on war fatality lists further support this assertion. Such practices inflate the reported civilian death toll, complicating accurate assessments of the conflict's impact.

**Media underreporting of combatant deaths.** Analysis of media coverage reveals that only 3% of news stories reference combatant deaths, with outlets like the BBC, CNN, Reuters and The New York Times primarily relying on Gaza Ministry of Health figures. These figures often lack verification and fail to distinguish between combatants and civilians. The omission creates a skewed narrative that portrays all casualties as civilian, thus shaping public opinion and international policy based on incomplete or manipulated data. For example, more than 17,000 Hamas combatants are estimated to have been killed, yet these figures are largely excluded from global reporting.

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\*This sentence was updated on 23 December 2024 to include the word 'proportionally.'

## Executive Summary

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On 7 October 2023, Hamas militants launched a war on Israel. After Israel launched its military response, media outlets around the world began to report on death tolls in Gaza, frequently citing numbers from the 'Gaza Ministry of Health' as though it was a fully independent, unbiased source.

In reality, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is under the full control of Hamas. It was established by Hamas in 2007 after it took full control of the Gaza Strip following its violent clashes with the Fatah faction of the Palestinian Authority. Since then, Hamas has managed governmental functions in Gaza, including health care services through the MoH.

Given that Hamas is a direct party to the conflict, this creates an obvious conflict of interest.

These MoH figures have been repeatedly cited by major news organisations throughout this conflict. For example, an April 2024 headline in *The Observer* stated: 'Gaza death toll passes 34,000 as Israel and Iran missile strikes grab global attention'.<sup>1</sup> In August 2024, this toll passing 40,000 was the focal point of much of the day's BBC News coverage, as catalogued by the Cohen report of September 2024.<sup>2</sup>

The reporting of these figures has been analysed by a group of international scholars, who meticulously analysed reports of Gaza war fatalities from February 2024 through May 2024. They examined 1,378 articles from major English-language newspapers and media outlets, specifically *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, CNN, the BBC, Reuters, The Associated Press and the Australian ABC.

Over that four-month period, 84% of those publications failed to make the critical distinction in total numbers between combatant deaths and civilian deaths.

Only 5% of the surveyed media organisations cited numbers released by the Israeli authorities, while 98% cited fatality figures provided by the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health.

In 19% of media reports examined, numbers provided by Hamas-run institutions were used without citing any source, thereby suggesting those figures were undisputed.

Furthermore, fewer than one in every 50 articles mentioned that the figures provided by the MoH were unverifiable or controversial. Strikingly, the Israeli statistics had their credibility questioned in half of the few articles that incorporated them.

This report raises serious concerns that the Gaza MoH figures have been overstated. The data behind their figures contains natural deaths, deaths from before this conflict began and deaths of those killed by Hamas itself; it contains no mention of Hamas combatant fatalities; and it overstates the number of women and children killed.

Serious errors have been discovered on the Ministry's lists of fatalities. These errors include a 22-year-old registered as a four-year-old, a 31-year-old registered as a one-year-old and several men with male first names registered as female – artificially increasing the numbers of women and children reported killed. The lists also include people who died before the war and people who died from attacks by Hamas rather than the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, "Gaza death toll passes 34,000 as Israel and Iran missile strikes grab global attention", *The Observer*, 20 April 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/20/gaza-death-toll-passes-34000-israel-iran>.

<sup>2</sup> Danny Cohen, "BBC Coverage of the Israel-Hamas war", *CAMERA UK*, 30 September 2024, <https://camera-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BBC-ISRAEL-GAZA-BIAS-06b.pdf>.



They likely include around 5,000 natural deaths per year, including cancer patients who were listed by the Ministry for hospital treatment after they had already appeared on fatality lists. Hamas also claimed hundreds of fatalities from attacks which turned out to be misfired rocket launches by Gaza factions.

It is indisputable that natural deaths which occur in times of peace would also occur during a war. The pre-war rate of natural deaths in Gaza is known from relevant mortality data presented by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, based in Ramallah in the West Bank.<sup>3</sup>

Media reports claiming totals killed in Gaza by IDF action have not verified the figures cited and fail to account for the deaths of upwards of 17,000 Hamas and affiliated combatants as part of that toll.

This report also shows that the methodology of data collection by the Ministry of Health is not scientifically valid, and that its reports from previous conflicts have also concealed combatant deaths.

This fatality analysis recognises the immense toll of the war on Palestinians in Gaza. Even as fatalities are discussed as quantifiable numbers, it is important to remember that innocent people are suffering, and each number represents a human life. Many of those lives were innocent people caught in the middle of a brutal war started by Hamas on 7 October. The suffering, death and destruction are very real for actual human beings.

An understanding of the Gaza fatality data is critical in understanding the conduct of the war by the Israel Defense Forces and the State of Israel's leadership. International humanitarian law does not require that no harm happen to civilians. Rather, it demands that parties to war use their best efforts to mitigate harm to civilians. All parties to a war are required to adhere to certain rules of war. As the United Nations frequently posits: "even war has rules".<sup>4</sup> When one party in a war disregards the rules, the consequences do not convict the other party or prevent them from prosecuting the war.<sup>5</sup>

Global media outlets have, understandably, focused on the number of deaths in Gaza as a lens of critique of Israeli operations. Many media outlets give the proviso that the Gaza Ministry of Health is Hamas-run, but few give the same level of attention to IDF reports of the numbers of fighters killed as part of the overall Israeli fatality total. Nor do media outlets give the methodology, reporting or content of the lists of names the scrutiny they deserve.

A definitive figure of fatalities is impossible, due to the lack of transparency from the MoH, a general lack of access to the Palestinian Population Registry and the challenges of counting militants killed in combat. However, this report finds numerous errors that cannot be explained by a lack of access to the Ministry of Health computer network that went offline in November 2023.

We have identified distortion of statistics, misreporting of natural deaths, deaths from before the war started and a high likelihood of combatant deaths being included on the list. This report also challenges the assumption that MoH fatality reports from previous conflicts are reliable and reveals evidence of efforts to hide militant fatalities. We also identify critical differences in the demographic breakdowns reported by the MoH and the Hamas Government Media Office.

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<sup>3</sup> "Palestine in Figures 2022", State of Palestine, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, March 2023, p.16, <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2654.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (@UN), X post, 26 October 2023, 8:59 am, <https://x.com/UN/status/1717450868143141359>.

<sup>5</sup> "Article 28 - Treatment II. Danger zones", Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, IV Geneva Conventions, 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949/article-28>.

## 1. Methodology of Fatality Reporting in Gaza

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The Ministry of Health (MoH) has published its fatality data in two formats: regular statistical fatality reports and infrequent lists of named fatalities, with six lists published as of publication: October 2023 and January, April, May, June and August 2024.

All fatalities in the regular reports are referred to as “murdered by IDF action” and no information regarding the identities of casualties, circumstances of death or their status as civilian or militant are included. However, analysis of these reports strongly suggests that their fatality figures incorporate militants, as the lists show that lives lost are disproportionately young adult men of fighting age. Evidence also reveals that, despite having explicitly claimed otherwise since 1 April 2024, these figures incorporate natural deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Infographics regularly specify that a certain percentage of the fatalities are women and children. For most of the conflict, this figure has stood at 70% according to Hamas’s Government Media Office, even though this directly contradicts the MoH reports, where the data sits at 55% women and under-18s and 45% men.

Up to March 2024, the statistical difference between reports did not exist. Hospital-registered deaths in the first three months of 2024 are very similar to the statistics of ‘family notification’ reports.

At the beginning of April 2024, this changed. The threshold for reporting quality was reduced, becoming even lower than it was before. Before, the Government Media Office would accept “reliable information sources” towards their death tolls, but now “records with incomplete data” would count towards them as well.

This change injected significant numbers of new deaths of under-18s, supposedly coming from hospitals, and since then, the MoH and Government Media Office have significantly diverged. This report therefore suggests that the family reports provide a significantly more reliable estimate of the actual demographic breakdown than those provided by ‘medical staff’.

### **Methodology**

The varying methodology of fatality recording is a key criticism of the reports published by the MoH. Three different sources are reported, with limited transparency and no scientific validation. They are:

1. Hospital records, registered by ‘medical staff’.
2. Unknown ‘information sources’, including media and social media reports.
3. Public submission of information or ‘family notification’.

The Gaza Health Ministry has issued its ‘Martyrs to date’ fatality lists of the people killed in the conflict periodically since 27 October 2023, listing the name, age, sex and national ID number of each fatality. These ID numbers derive from the Gazan population register and are issued to anyone born inside Gaza.

At the start of the war, the MoH used its existing collection system, the Health Information Centre. This relied on hospitals and morgues to certify deaths. However, as the ground invasion

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<sup>6</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 3 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5258>; “Health Sector Emergency Report,” Palestinian Ministry of Health, 1 April 2024, <https://archive.org/details/moh-gaza-health-sector-emergency-reports/MOH%20-%20Gaza%20-%202024-1/page/n7/mode/2up>.

progressed, the MoH network connecting hospitals collapsed in November 2023.<sup>7</sup> This meant that hospitals lost access to the civil registry. Details had to be entered by hand. This led to thousands of recording errors.

The network was restored from February 2024, meaning that the Health Information Centre had the opportunity to correct these errors, such as missing identity numbers or birth dates. The August 2024 list saw a significant improvement in terms of corrected data. However, throughout the process, where a date of birth has been missing, that death has been recorded and therefore reported as a child.

For example:

- A man on row 7,051 of the 30 April 2024 fatality list was identified as an infant named Mahmoud Fahed Zakariah Alkafarnah (محمد فهد زكريا الكفارنة). This identity number matches in the population registry against a different adult male named Wassim Ashraf Omar Abu El-Mazah (وسيم اشرف عمر ابو المعزة), age 31. The entire entry, including both the identity number and the name, has disappeared completely from the 31 August 2024 fatality list.

ذكر		1	804674604	محمد فهد زكريا الكفارنة	7051
-----	--	---	-----------	-------------------------	------

30 April 2024 Ministry of Health Register of Gaza Deaths

There is no plausible explanation for recording a 31-year-old man as a one-year-old baby other than faulty methodology, either through misidentification of a body, media report or family referral.

- The following man on row 7,648 of the 30 April 2024 list was identified as a four-year-old child named Ali Dahem Mahmoud Hathat (علي دهام محمود حثت). He is recorded in the population registry as a male adult aged 23. This has been corrected to age 22 in the 31 August 2024 list.

ذكر		4	407901438	علي دهام محمود حثت	7648
-----	--	---	-----------	--------------------	------

30 April 2024 Ministry of Health Register of Gaza Deaths

22	ذكر	27-12-01	407901438	علي دهام محمود حثت	14059
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31 August 2024 Ministry of Health Register of Gaza Deaths

## Men recorded as women

In addition, men have been recorded in the fatality lists as female, when the same individuals appear as male in the Palestinian Population Registry. In the August 2024 list, 103 names were marked as female who had a male first name (e.g. Mohammed). For example, these men were recorded as female in the 31 August fatality list:

ID number			Sex in Population Registry		Sex Published in Report	
انثى		21	408536233	رضوان ابراهيم رضوان لولح		12897
408536233			Male		Female	

<sup>7</sup> Ben van der Merwe, "Gaza conflict: Thousands remain unidentified as death toll reaches 40,000", *Sky News*, 15 August 2024, <https://news.sky.com/story/gaza-conflict-thousands-remain-unidentified-as-death-toll-reaches-40-000-13197287>.

6108	فادي عبد الرؤوف محمد الزيان	800889917	39	انثى
		800889917	Male	Female
4897	نضال محمد محمد ابو ججوح	802983346	33	غزة
		802983346	Male	Female
11004	علي ابراهيم محمد ابو فسيفس	900506205	46	انثى
		900506205	Male	Female
6964	ونام مصطفى محي الدين مطر	958989139		انثى
		958989139	Male	Female

These errors serve to artificially increase the numbers of women and children who are reported as killed. Such basic errors demonstrate the unreliability of the collection methodology – which places a responsibility on the world’s media not to report the numbers of men, women and children killed as unquestioned fact.

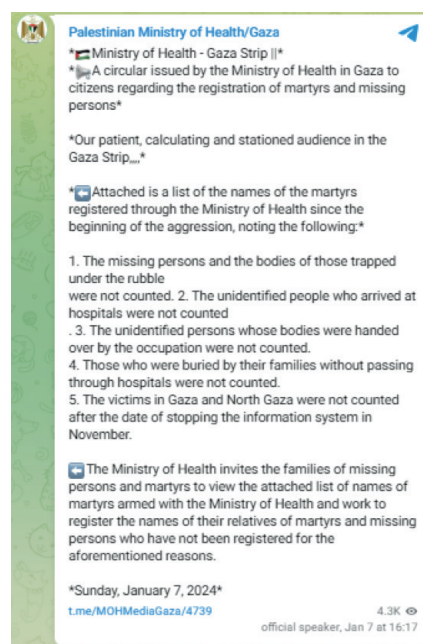
Following the collapse of the Health Information Centre’s network in November 2023, the Health Ministry turned to the following varying methods of data collection to compile its fatality lists:

### • Hospital records

The MoH has stated that fatalities are recorded by name and number through the Health Information Centre. This registration procedure was predicated on the receipt of identified bodies at hospitals in Gaza. The Ministry claimed to have ceased using this method in northern Gaza – in the Indonesian, Kamal Adwan and Al-Shifa hospitals – on 11 November 2023,<sup>8</sup> in the Al-Aqsa hospital on 20 January 2024 and in the Nasser hospital on 13 February 2024.



*Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza  
Telegram Post (above, Arabic original;  
right, English translation by Google)<sup>9</sup>*



<sup>8</sup> Or 12 November 2023. The date changes in the Ministry of Health’s Emergency Reports.

<sup>9</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, Telegram post, 7 January 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/4739>.

## • Media and Social Media Reports

On 11 December 2023, the MoH stated that as of 11 November 2023, fatalities in northern Gaza were no longer registered through a hospital information system, but collated via “reliable media sources”, primarily news sites and TV reports. The Ministry has explicitly relied on such sources.<sup>10</sup> However, Sky News reported on an interview with Zaher Al Wahaidi, Director of the Ministry’s Health Information Centre:<sup>11</sup>

In the health ministry’s reports, these body counts were attributed to “reliable sources” – a phrase which has previously been mistranslated as “reliable media sources”. “It’s not from journalists,” says Mr Al Wahaidi. “We don’t depend on any press sources for data – this is the policy of the Ministry of Health.”

This statement is explicitly contradicted by the Ministry of Health’s own reporting (see below). It is extremely concerning that the Director of the Health Information Centre made a false statement to international media, and that this statement was reported verbatim by Sky News without question.

The Henry Jackson Society does not know if Zaher Al Wahaidi believes these statements or is being compelled by Hamas to give them to journalists. Whichever it may be, the result is a falsehood.

In addition, in February, the MoH spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra also used the term “reliable media sources” in his interview with the US broadcaster NPR and explicitly talked about “reliance on public sources of information”<sup>12</sup> which contradicts claims about “mistranslation”. The Ministry provides no public guidance on what these sources are.

\*ملاحظات/

- تم اعتماد أرقام المستشفيات (الاندونيسي، كمال عدوان، الشفاء) وفق آخر تحديث للبيانات قبل انقطاع التواصل عبر نظام المعلومات الخاص بالمستشفيات بتاريخ ٢٠٢٣/١١/١١.
- وفق البلاغات والمصادر الإعلامية تم رصد المجازر بحق العائلات لتكون الزيادة في أعداد الشهداء لا تقل عن 4143 شهيد حتى تاريخ ٢٠٢٣/١٢/١١.

### \* Comments

- The hospital [fatality] numbers (the Indonesian, Kamal Adwan, Al-Shifa) were approved according to the latest data update before the interruption of communication through the hospitals’ information system on 11 November 2023.
- According to reports and information sources, massacres against families were monitored, so that the increase in the number of martyrs was no less than 4,143 martyrs as of 11 December 2023.

*Gaza Ministry of Health Emergency Report, 11 December 2023, page 5 (highlight not in original)*

<sup>10</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 12 December 2023, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/4576>; “Gaza Fatality Figures Repository”, Palestinian Ministry of Health, 12 December 2023, <https://ia601203.us.archive.org/14/items/moh-ramallah-11-3/MOH%20-%20Gaza%20-%202012-11.pdf>; Health Sector Emergency Report, Palestinian Ministry of Health, 1 March 2024, <https://ia600208.us.archive.org/23/items/moh-gaza-health-sector-emergency-reports/MOH%20-%20Gaza%20-%202-29.pdf>; Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 1 March 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5098>.

<sup>11</sup> van der Merwe, “Gaza conflict: Thousands remain unidentified”.

<sup>12</sup> Aya Batrawy, “Gaza’s death toll now exceeds 30,000. Here’s why it’s an incomplete count”, *NPR*, 29 February 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/29/1234159514/gaza-death-toll-30000-palestinians-israel-hamas-war>.



✓ التقرير التراكمي للشهداء						
<p>■ بلغ تراكمي عدد الشهداء منذ بداية العدوان 30.228 شهيداً (17.285 منهم مسجلين، فيما تم رصد أكثر من 12.943 شهيداً وفق المصادر الإعلامية الموثوقة بسبب انقطاع التواصل مع مستشفيات غزة والشمال)</p>						
تصنيف حسب الفئة			تصنيف حسب الجنس		تراكمي شهداء	المستشفى
أطفال	نساء	رجال	إناث	ذكور		
452	620	710	832	950	1782	الإندونيسي*
152	207	345	304	400	704	كمال عدوان*
1541	1150	1425	2014	2102	4116	الشفاء*
1294	1608	2092	2335	2659	4994	شهداء الأقصى
656	711	1233	1022	1580	2602	ناصر
216	214	560	321	668	988	الأوروبي
640	539	812	833	1157	1991	النجار
50	29	29	59	49	108	الإماراتي
5001	5078	7206	7720	9565	17285	الإجمالي
<p>■ تم اعتماد أرقام المستشفيات (الإندونيسي، كمال عدوان، الشفاء) وفق آخر تحديث للبيانات قبل انقطاع التواصل عبر نظام المعلومات الخاص بالمستشفيات بتاريخ ٢٠٢٣/١١/١٢.</p> <p>■ تم اعتماد أرقام مستشفى الأقصى وفق آخر تحديث للبيانات قبل انقطاع التواصل عبر نظام المعلومات الخاص بالمستشفيات بتاريخ ٢٠٢٤/٠١/٢٠.</p> <p>■ تم اعتماد أرقام مستشفى ناصر الطبي وفق آخر تحديث للبيانات قبل انقطاع التواصل عبر نظام المعلومات الخاص بالمستشفيات بتاريخ ٢٠٢٤/٠٢/١٣.</p> <p>■ هذه الأرقام لا تشمل المفقودين والجثث العالقة تحت الأنقاض.</p>						ملاحظة

Gaza Ministry of Health Emergency Report, 29 February 2024, page 8

Translation of text preceding the table:

✓ Cumulative Report of Martyrs

- The cumulative number of martyrs since the beginning of the aggression reached 30,228 martyrs (17,285 of whom were registered, more than 12,943 martyrs were recorded according to **reliable media sources** due to the lack of communication with hospitals in Gaza and the North).

Translation of text following the table:

- The hospital [fatality] numbers (the Indonesian, Kamal Adwan, Al-Shifa) were approved according to the latest data update before the interruption of communication through the hospitals' information system on November 12, 2023.
- Al-Aqsa Hospital numbers were approved according to the latest data update before the interruption of communication through the hospitals' information system on January 20, 2024.
- Nasser Medical Hospital numbers were approved according to the latest data update before the interruption of communication through the hospitals' information system on February 13, 2024.
- These numbers do not include missing persons and bodies trapped under the rubble.

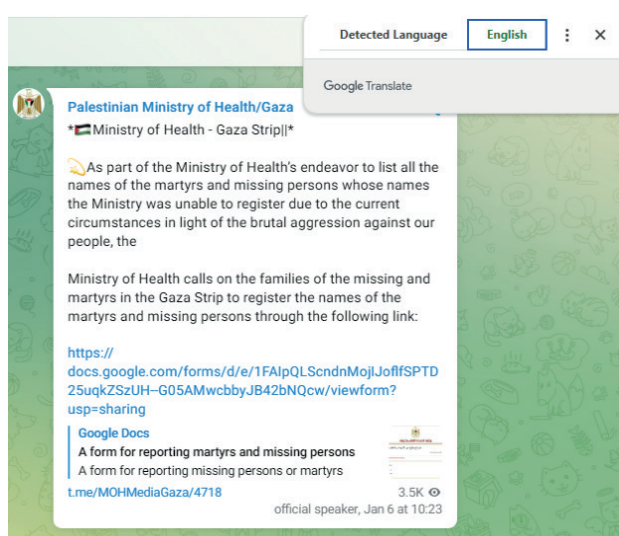
Despite the Ministry of Health's explicit use of data from unspecified information sources for its fatality reports, Hamas's Government Media Office either exhibits no methodology or declares the total claimed fatality figure as counting "martyrs who arrived at hospitals".<sup>13</sup> On 23 March 2024, for example, the Government Media Office repeated this claim. Concurrently, the MoH stated that 45% of all claimed fatalities were from media sources.<sup>14</sup> As already shown, the Government Media Office and the MoH often release contradictory figures.

### • Public Submission of Information

On 6 January 2024, the MoH published a public Google Form via social media. It called for online reports of "martyrs" or missing persons.<sup>15</sup> This was one day before the Health Ministry published its second periodical fatality list, after the first on 26 October 2023. The form was republished on 5 February 2024,<sup>16</sup> then again during March and has been a daily fixture from 18 April 2024 onwards.<sup>17</sup> Despite this additional data source, it was not mentioned in the fatality reports until 1 April 2024 (see below). This form was updated for the 31 August 2024 list.<sup>18</sup>



*Gaza Ministry of Health's Telegram post (above), Arabic original; right, English translation by Google)*



*Screenshot of Gaza Ministry of Health's Public Google Form (as translated by Google)*

<sup>13</sup> [Hamas] Government Media Office, *Telegram* post, 24 March 2024, <https://t.me/mediagovps/2598>.

<sup>14</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 24 March 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5224>; "Health Sector Emergency Report", Palestinian Ministry of Health, 24 March 2024, <https://ia800208.us.archive.org/23/items/moh-gaza-health-sector-emergency-reports/MOH%20-%20Gaza%20-%20203-23.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 6 January 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/4718>.

<sup>16</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 5 February 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/4922>; Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 18 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5318>.

<sup>17</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 18 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5318>.

<sup>18</sup> "Reporting martyrs and missing persons", Palestinian Ministry of Health, <https://sehatty.ps/moh-registration/public/add-order>, accessed 21 November 2024.

The form did not include fields for whether the reported fatality was a civilian or a militant belonging to Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad or another armed group engaged in hostilities, nor for the circumstances of the reported death (either as the result of IDF action or otherwise).<sup>19</sup> It also requires no proof of death, allowing families to report missing relatives as dead.

### • Incomplete Data and Family Reporting

On 1 April 2024,<sup>20</sup> the MoH changed the way it reported fatality data sources. It began distinguishing between ‘complete’ and ‘incomplete’ data, depending on whether the record included their ID number, full name, sex and date of birth.

This ‘incomplete’ data is reportedly reviewed by a judicial committee before being added to the fatality lists. In the August 2024 list, there are only 1,910 entries marked as approved by a decision of the judicial committee, as opposed to 9,817 marked simply as ‘family notification’.

This distinction makes it unclear whether the latter have been approved by the judicial committee. If we interpret that those marked simply as ‘family notification’ have not been reviewed by the judicial committee, then as of November 2024, most of them still do not appear to have been reviewed.

The judiciary in Gaza is run by Hamas, and this has brought its credibility and impartiality into question.<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental organisation, has repeatedly criticised the bias of the judiciary in Gaza and has detailed the extensive links of judges to Hamas militants.<sup>22</sup> The screenshots and translation below show the MoH explanation:

- الشهداء مستوفو البيانات هم الشهداء المدرجون في سجلات وزارة الصحة الذين تم تسجيلهم من خلال الكادر الطبي بشكل مباشر، أو من خلال إبلاغ ذوي الشهداء.
- الشهداء غير مستوفي البيانات التي تضم (رقم الهوية، الاسم رباعي، الجنس، تاريخ الميلاد، تاريخ الاستشهاد) وفقدان أي من هذه البيانات يعتبر غير مستوفي البيانات.
- هذه الأعداد للشهداء مرتبطة بشكل مباشر بالإصابات الناجمة عن الاعتداءات المباشرة للحرب ولا تشمل الوفيات الطبيعية.
- هذه الأرقام لا تشمل المفقودين والجثث العالقة تحت الأنقاض.

*Translation:*

- Martyrs with complete information are martyrs listed in the records of the Ministry of Health who have been registered through the medical staff directly, or by reporting of the families of the martyrs.
- Martyrs do not have complete data that includes (identity number, full name, sex, date of birth, date of martyrdom), lacking any of this data is considered incomplete data.
- These numbers of martyrs are directly related to injuries resulting from direct attacks of war and does not include natural deaths.
- These numbers do not include missing persons and bodies trapped under the rubble.

*Gaza Ministry of Health Emergency Report, 1 April 2024, page 7*

<sup>19</sup> “Martyrs and Missing Persons Reporting Form”, Palestinian Ministry of Health, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240502144035/https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScndnMojJofIfSPTD25uqkZSsUH--G05AMwcbbyJB42bNQcw/viewform>, accessed 2 May 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 3 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5258>; “Health Sector Emergency Report”.

<sup>21</sup> van der Merwe, “Gaza conflict: Thousands remain unidentified”.

<sup>22</sup> “Abusive System: Failures of Criminal Justice in Gaza”, Human Rights Watch, 3 October 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/03/abusive-system/failures-criminal-justice-gaza>.

In many entries in the list that supposedly contained only “martyrs with complete data”, some data was missing or invalid. None of the published lists included the date of deaths, which by the Ministry of Health’s own definition would render all of the data ‘incomplete’.

### ***The demographic breakdown of family reports vs Ministry of Health records***

One of the key questions discussed in this report is the reliability of the claims about demographic breakdown of the fatalities data, in particular, the percentage of women and children. Many of the more recent claims regarding those figures are based on the named fatality lists.

However, analysis of those lists reveals another major anomaly that raises serious questions about the reliability of those claims.

The most recent list, published in September 2024, contains 34,344 names and every entry states the channel through which the name was recorded:

- Ministry of Health records account for 27,445 names (80% of the list)
- Public reports by family members – 5,480 names (16% of the list)
- Reports approved by the ‘judicial committee’ – 1,103 names (3% of the list)
- ‘House committee’ – we were unable to find any information about the nature of this source, but in any case, it accounts for only 316 names – less than 1% of the list.

In his recent Sky interview, Zaher Al Wahaidi, Director of the Health Information Centre, claimed that for a death to be confirmed, it needs to be approved by a judicial committee.<sup>23</sup> And yet, as this list shows, 5,480 out of 6,583 of those family reports appear to have been included in the list ‘as is’, without being examined by the judicial committee.

If we examine the data coming from each of those channels, we may see that there are dramatic differences in their demographic breakdown.

In particular, men accounted for 62% of the family reports vs 42% in MoH records, while children (i.e. anyone under 18) accounted for 22% of family reports vs 35% in MoH records (see Figure 1).

Could those dramatic differences be explained by what is known as ‘selection bias’, making deaths of men more likely to be reported by their relatives? In fact, this is exactly what Zaher Al Wahaidi claimed in another *Sky News* interview in April, when he said that the family notification system is mainly used by widows, who must formally register their husbands’ deaths to obtain government assistance.<sup>24</sup>

However, we can test this claim against the data that is available. At the beginning of 2024, when the family reporting system was introduced, the MoH was occasionally publishing updates about hospital-recorded deaths. If we compare the demographic breakdown of the family reports submitted in the first three months of 2024 with the breakdown of new hospital-registered deaths, the results are very similar/almost identical (see Figure 2).

In other words, the high percentage of men among the reported fatalities is not a result of a selection bias, but a reflection of the actual percentage of men among those who were killed during that period. However, in the first week of April 2024, the data published by the MoH underwent a series of drastic ‘adjustments’ that led to an increasing divergence between the demographic breakdown of family reports and the remaining data.

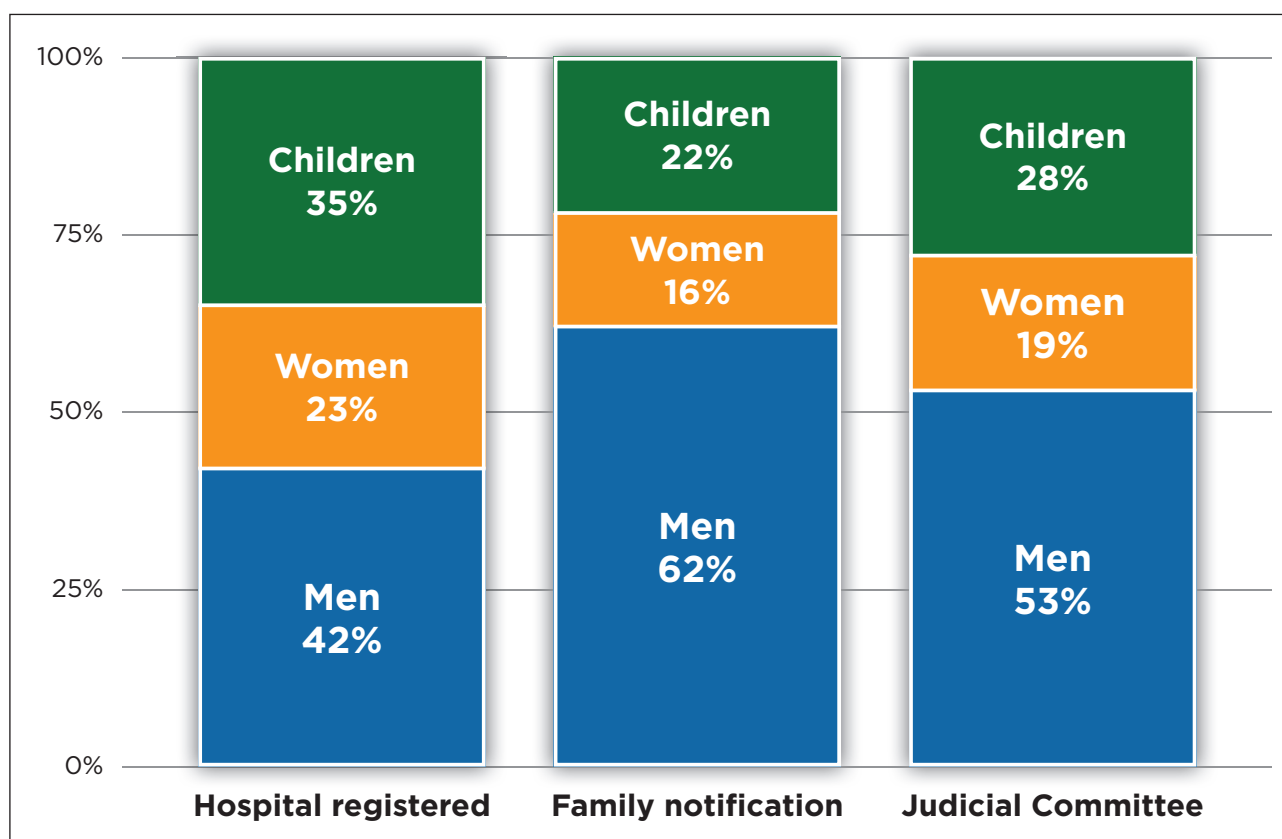
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<sup>23</sup> van der Merwe, “Gaza conflict: Thousands remain unidentified”.

<sup>24</sup> Ben van der Merwe, “Israel-Hamas war: Gaza’s morgue network has effectively collapsed – how are they recording their dead?”, *Sky News*, 4 April 2024, <https://news.sky.com/story/israel-hamas-war-health-system-collapse-in-gaza-leaves-authorities-struggling-to-count-the-dead-13107279>.

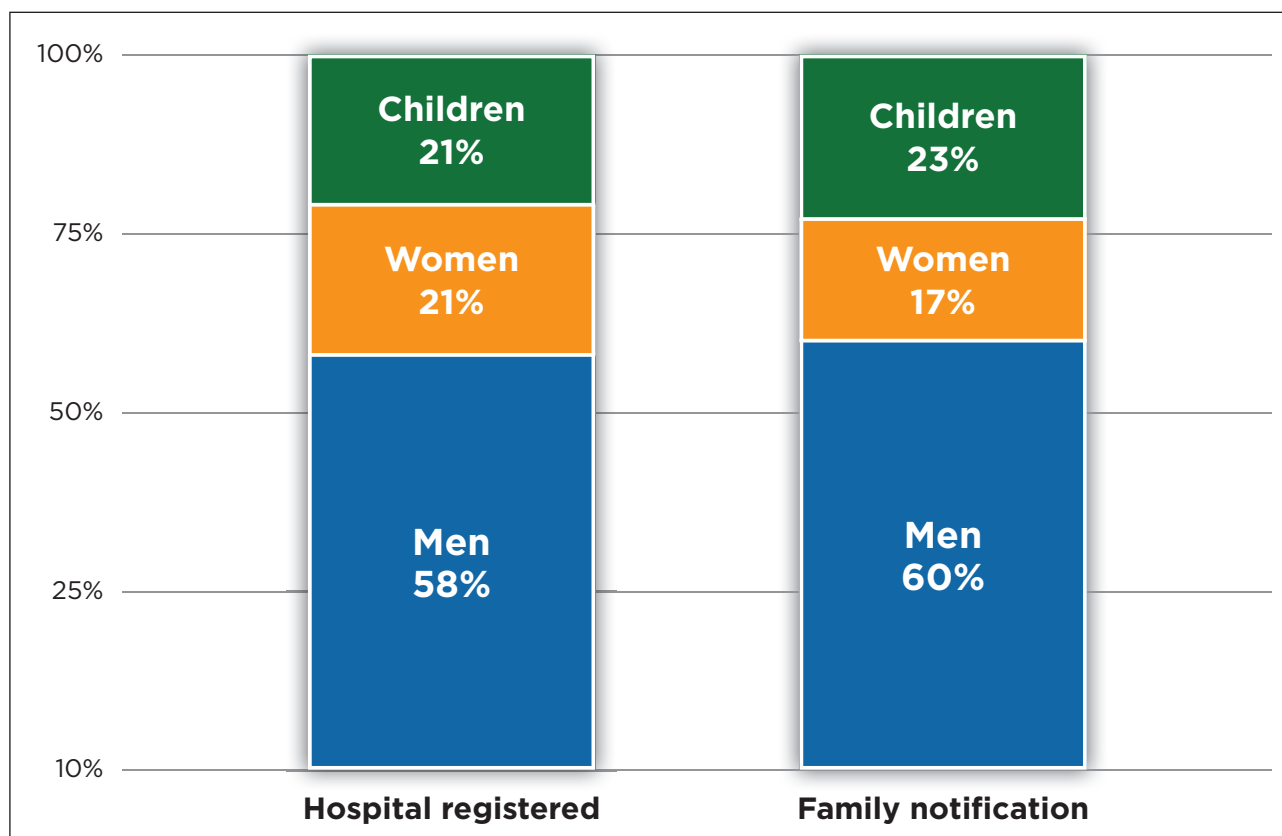


**Figure 1:** Demographic breakdown of different fatality record sources



*Source: HJS analysis of August 2024 fatality list*

**Figure 2:** Demographic breakdown of fatality record sources (January-March 2024)



*Source: HJS analysis of August 2024 fatality list*

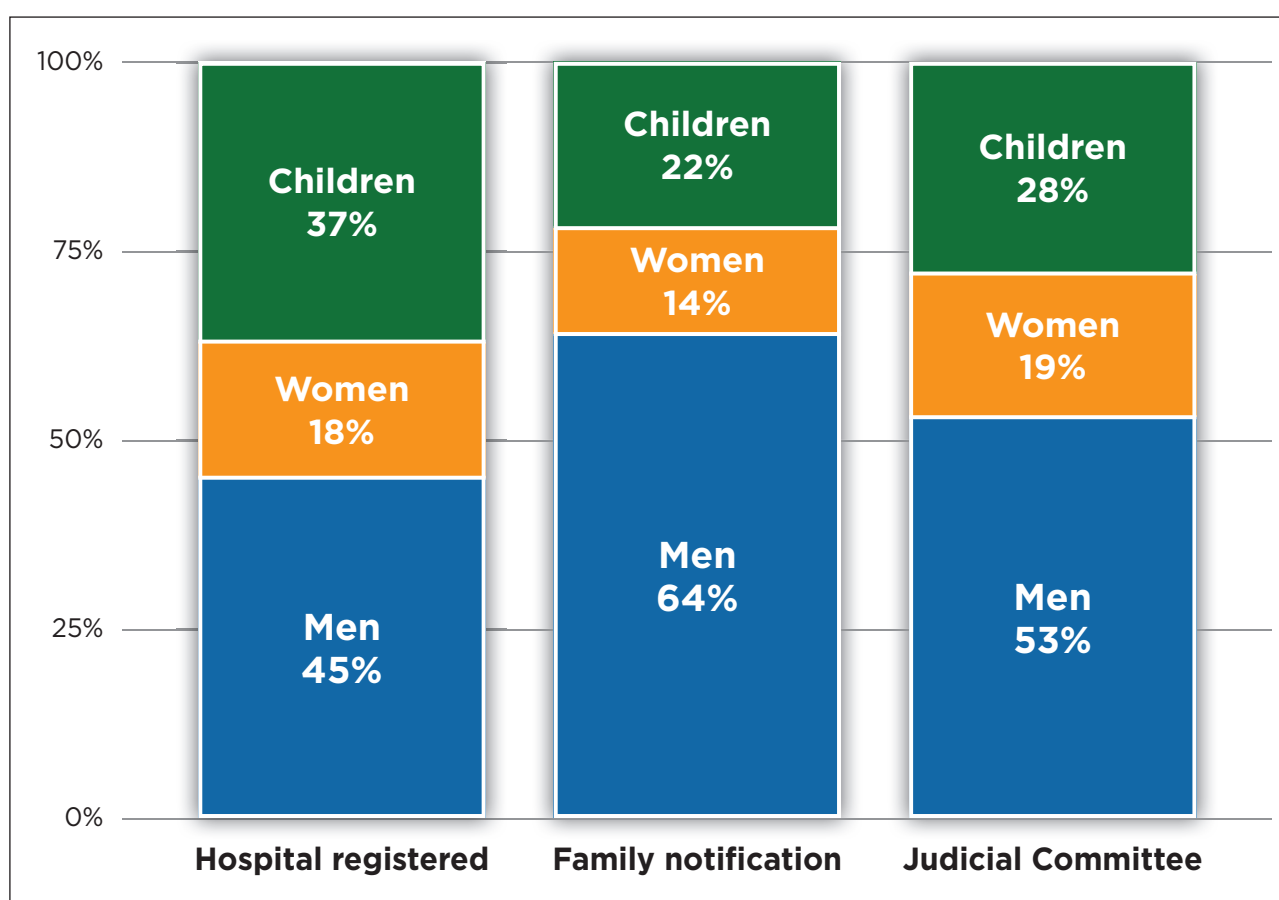


The most dramatic change happened in reports from al-Aqsa hospital, where the claimed number of fatalities jumped from 4,994, as per the 31 March 2024 report, to 6,608 just a week later. At the same time, the number of children jumped from 1,294 to 2,142, meaning children were responsible for 52.5% of the sharp increase.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, there are major inconsistencies between the reports about hospital-recorded deaths and the 'Ministry of Health records' section of the fatality list released on 3 April 2024, which raises the question as to the real source of those 'records'.

As a result, from April 2024, the demographic composition of fatality reports coming from 'Ministry of Health records' changed dramatically, while the demographics of the family notification reports remained virtually the same as before (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Demographic breakdown of death record sources (April-August 2024)



*Source: HJS analysis of August 2024 fatality list*

Together, these anomalies provide a strong indication that at least some aspects of the 'Ministry of Health records' are distorted, and the actual demographic breakdown of the fatalities data is much closer to that of the family reports – that is, around 60% men, 16% women and 24% children – at least during the period starting from January 2024, when the family report submissions began.

<sup>25</sup> Gaza Ministry of Health Emergency Report, 31 March 2024.

## 2. Statistical Concerns

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A series of statistical anomalies in the first few months of the war appear to show an over-representation of women and children in the fatality figures from the Gaza Ministry of Health:

- On 19 October 2023, the MoH reported that there had been 3,785 cumulative fatalities in Gaza,<sup>26</sup> compared to 3,000 two days prior,<sup>27</sup> a 785 increase. But the cumulative number of children reported killed increased by 671 on the same day, from 853 to 1,524 – meaning that the percentage of total deaths comprised of minors jumped from 28% to 40% in a two-day period.<sup>28</sup>
- Similarly, on 26 October 2023, the MoH reported 7,028 cumulative fatalities<sup>29</sup> versus 6,547 the prior day,<sup>30</sup> an increase of 481. But the number of newly reported women and children killed increased by 626 (417 women and 209 children) on the same day, which was more than the increase in total fatalities.
- On 29 October 2023, the MoH reported 8,005 cumulative fatalities<sup>31</sup> versus 7,703 the prior day,<sup>32</sup> an increase of 302. But the number of women and children reported killed increased by 328 (199 women and 129 children) on the same day – again, more than the increase in total fatalities.
- On 31 October 2023, the MoH reported 8,525 cumulative fatalities<sup>33</sup> versus 8,309 the prior day,<sup>34</sup> an increase of 216. The number of women and children reported killed increased by 210 on the same day – which would imply that 97% of the people who died that day were women and children.
- On 7 November 2023, the MoH reported 10,328 cumulative fatalities<sup>35</sup> versus 10,022 the prior day, an increase of 306.<sup>36</sup> The number of women and children reported killed increased by 302, which would represent 99% of the increase.
- On 5 December 2023, the MoH reported 16,248 cumulative fatalities<sup>37</sup> which, compared to 15,207 reported three days earlier, on 2 December 2023,<sup>38</sup> shows an

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<sup>26</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #13”, UN OCHA, 19 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-13>.

<sup>27</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #11”, UN OCHA, 17 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-11>.

<sup>28</sup> Note: the 18 October 2023 update did not include an updated figure for children.

<sup>29</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #20”, UN OCHA, 26 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-20>.

<sup>30</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #19”, UN OCHA, 25 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-19>.

<sup>31</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #23”, UN OCHA, 29 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-23>.

<sup>32</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #22”, UN OCHA, 28 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-22>.

<sup>33</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #25”, UN OCHA, 31 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-25>.

<sup>34</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #24”, UN OCHA, 30 October 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-24>.

<sup>35</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – reported impact | Day 32”, UN OCHA, 7 November 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-32>.

<sup>36</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – reported impact | Day 31”, UN OCHA, 6 November 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-31>.

<sup>37</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – reported impact | Day 60”, UN OCHA, 5 December 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-60>.

<sup>38</sup> “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel – reported impact | Day 57”, UN OCHA, 2 December 2023, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-57>.

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increase of 1,041. But the number of newly reported women and children killed was reported to have increased by 1,353 over the same time period (628 women and 725 children). Taken at face value, these figures would suggest the number of men killed in Gaza actually declined over those days, despite heavy combat action in Gaza.

On the face of it, these statistical releases appear to be inconsistent and implausible. There may be a reasonable explanation for these anomalies – for example, it may be that there is a time lag between different aspects of the reporting – but such an explanation has not been forthcoming. It is also possible that these figures have been manipulated to over-report the number of women and children.

The table below shows the steady increase in the proportion of women and children killed, per the Health Ministry's reports, reaching an implausibly high 74% by 5 December 2023. If accepted as correct, and that males made up 26% of fatalities, this would imply that few, if any, persons killed in Gaza were combatants.

	Women & Children	Children Only
Ministry of Health reports	% of total killed	% of total killed
Reported 18 Oct 23	<i>Women not reported</i>	<b>24.5%</b>
Reported 21 Oct 23	<b>62.0%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>
Reported 26 Oct 23	<b>65.8%</b>	<b>41.5%</b>
Overall November	<b>67-68%</b>	<b>40-41%</b>
Reported 2 Dec 23	<b>68.6%</b>	<b>42.0%</b>
Reported 5 Dec 23	<b>73.8%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>

No evidence has been produced to show that the IDF has deliberately targeted civilians, which is what casualty outcomes of the type generated by the Ministry imply was happening. In fact, if the figures are taken on face value, they would suggest the IDF was actively choosing to prioritise the killing of civilians rather than armed combatants. That the IDF is in combat with militant groups is unquestionable: up to 27 October 2024, 368 IDF soldiers were listed as killed in action, with a further 2,394 listed as wounded since the start of ground operations.<sup>39</sup>

## Demographics

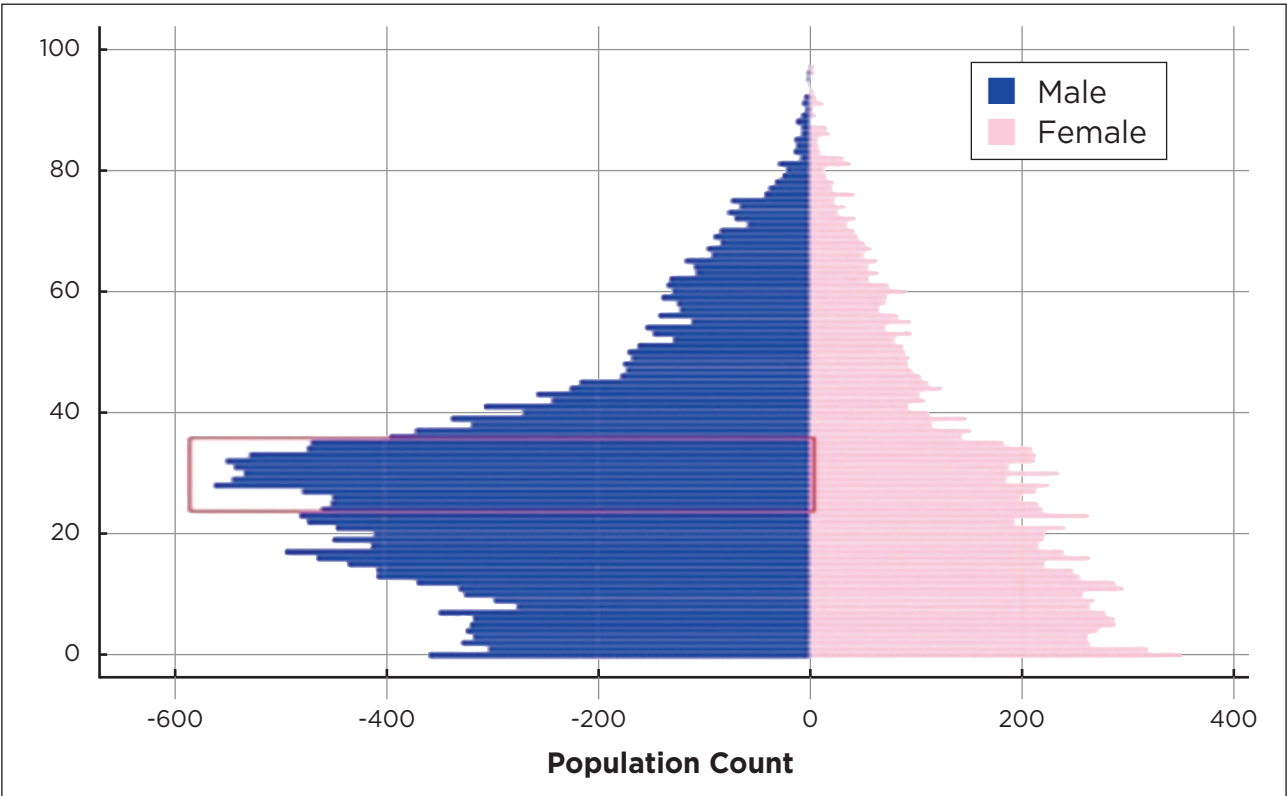
### Age and Sex Distribution

According to the Ministry's fatality lists, as opposed to their headline reports, men have been killed in higher rates than women. As a percentage of the total fatalities, men have been killed at significantly higher rates. There is a significant spike in the rate of male deaths (as a percentage of Gaza's total population) between the ages of 15 and 40 (see Figure 4 below). This is in line with the expected ages of combatants, suggesting that Israel has targeted Hamas fighters, not civilians.

The death rate of women is almost completely static at around 0.4% between the ages of 0 and 60, and well below the comparative levels for men. The death rates for children are well below that of any other age group. This is concrete evidence that neither of these demographic groups have been targeted.

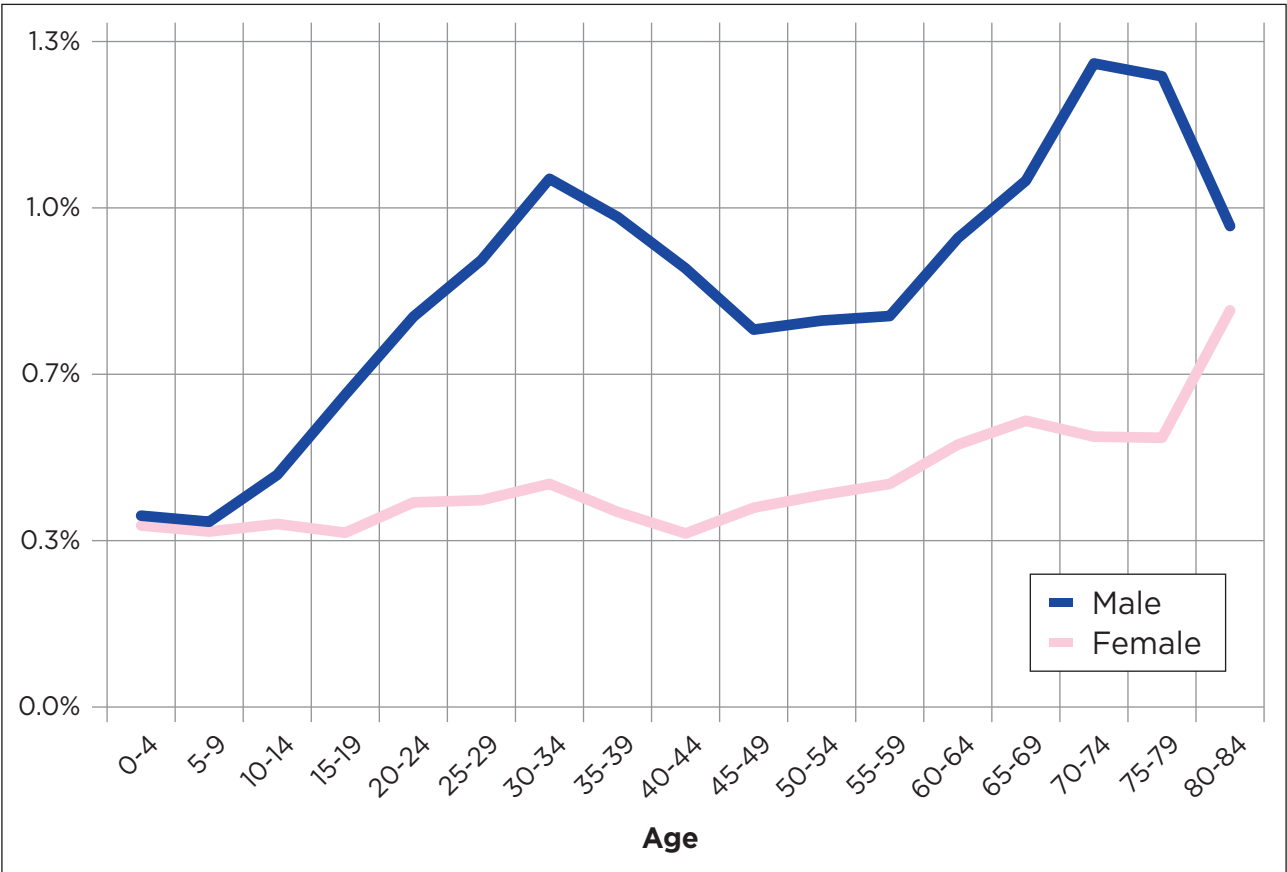
<sup>39</sup> "Swords of Iron: IDF Casualties", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 5 November 2024, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/swords-of-iron-idf-casualties>.

**Figure 4:** Population Pyramid of Fatalities by Age and Sex

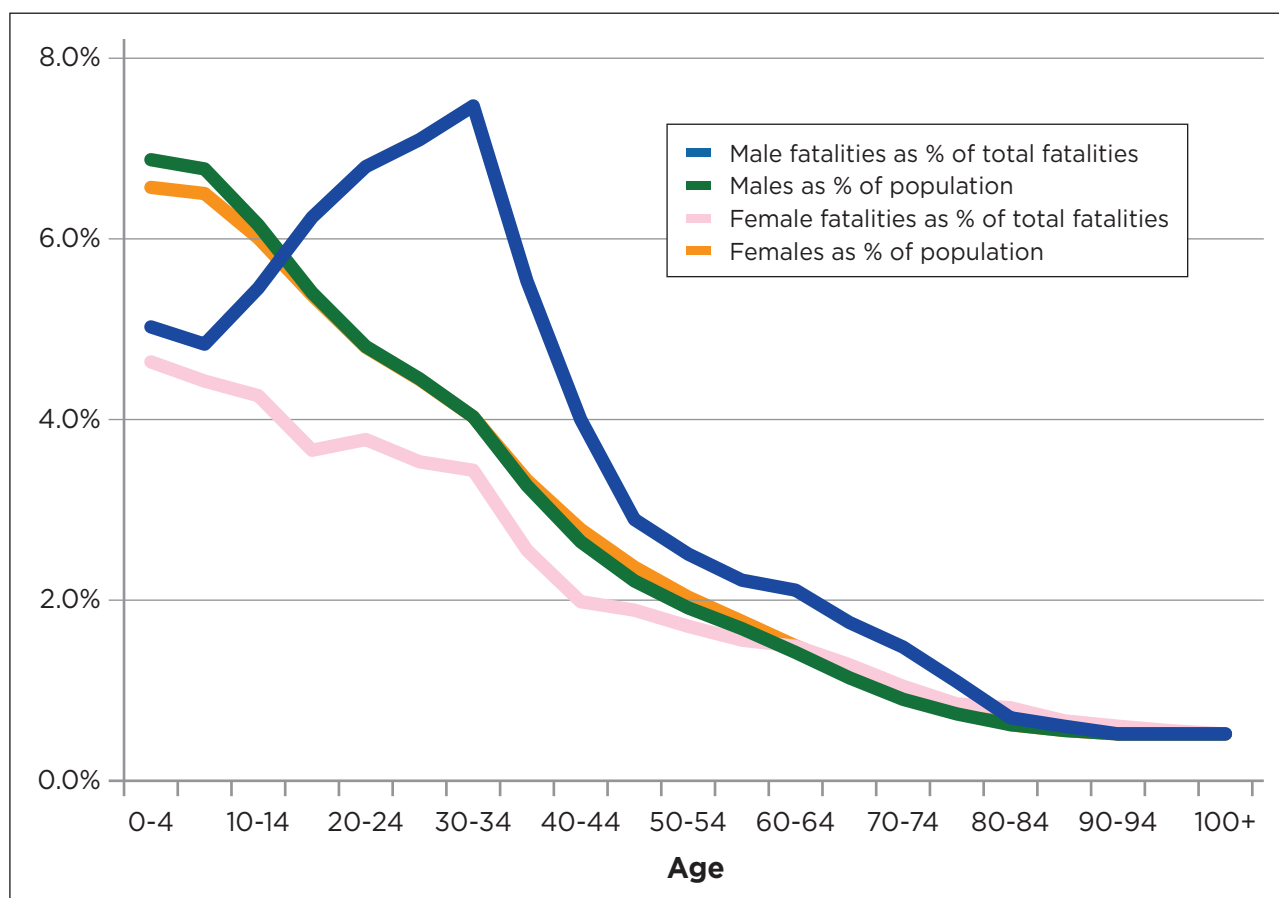


Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 5:** Fatality rate as a proportion of population by age and sex



Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 6:** Fatalities by age and sex as proportion of total fatalities

Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

### **Hospital Records vs Family Reports**

As discussed, the Gazan Health Ministry fatality lists offer two sources of death reporting: hospital reporting and family notification. There is a clear spike in the number of family-reported deaths in the total population of male fatalities (see chart below).

The deaths recorded from family reports in the July 2024 list show a significant spike in the male category between the ages of 15 and 50.

The nature of warfare that uses explosive munitions suggests that bodies will be more challenging to recover where they are trapped under buildings turned to rubble by air strikes. It is therefore logical that these bodies will not have been seen and recorded by the MoH at hospitals and are instead recorded as missing by families using the online reporting form.

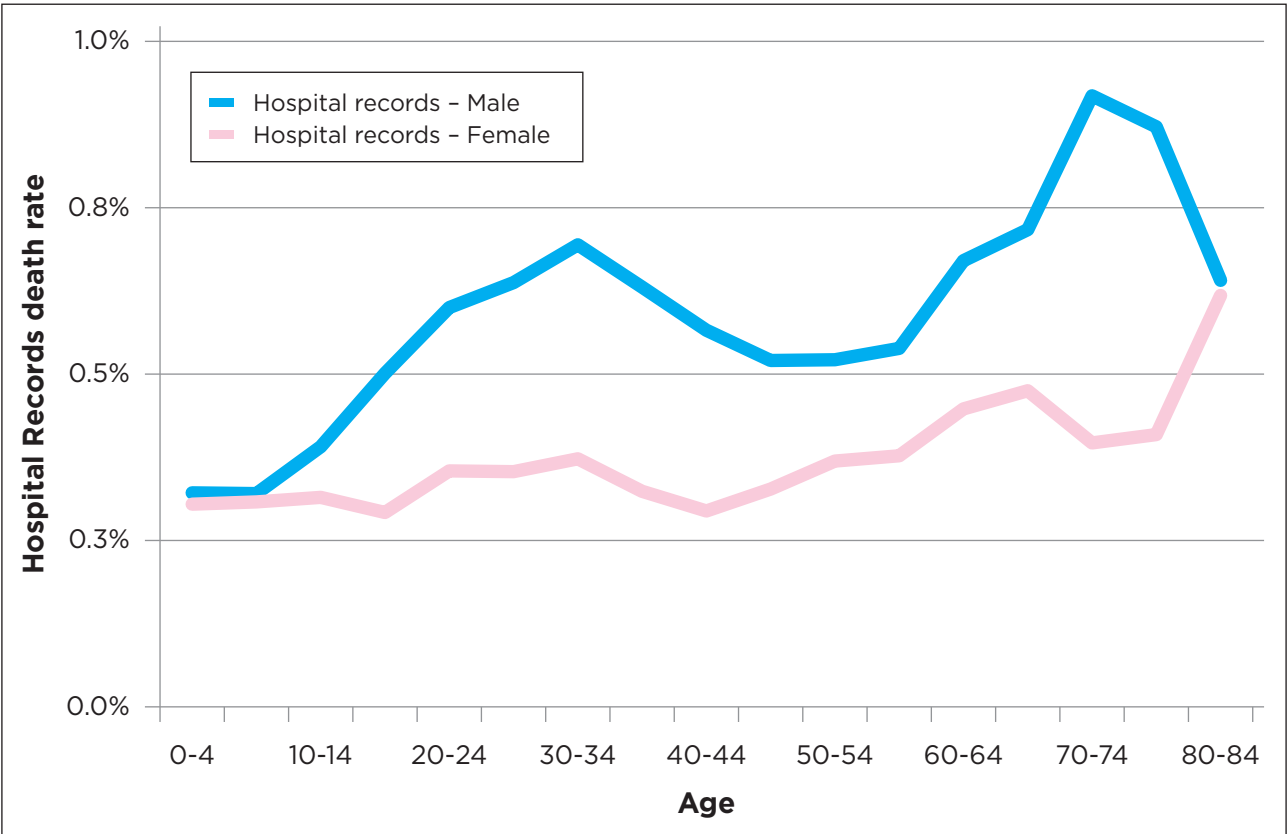
In all recent conflicts in Gaza, documented Hamas tactics are to use buildings and tunnels as cover from IDF fire.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore also logical to suggest that this statistically significant spike of men reported killed by families could be Hamas fighters whose bodies are buried in rubble after air strikes.

**There is a clear spike in deaths of ‘fighting age’ men aged 25 to 40** reported by families, in comparison with any other age group. There also appear to be disproportionate numbers of child and women deaths registered in hospital records, compared to the family reports.

<sup>40</sup> James Pamment, et al., “Hybrid Threats: Hamas’ use of human shields in Gaza”, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 6 June 2019, p.148, <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/hybrid-threats-hamas-use-of-human-shields-in-gaza/87>.

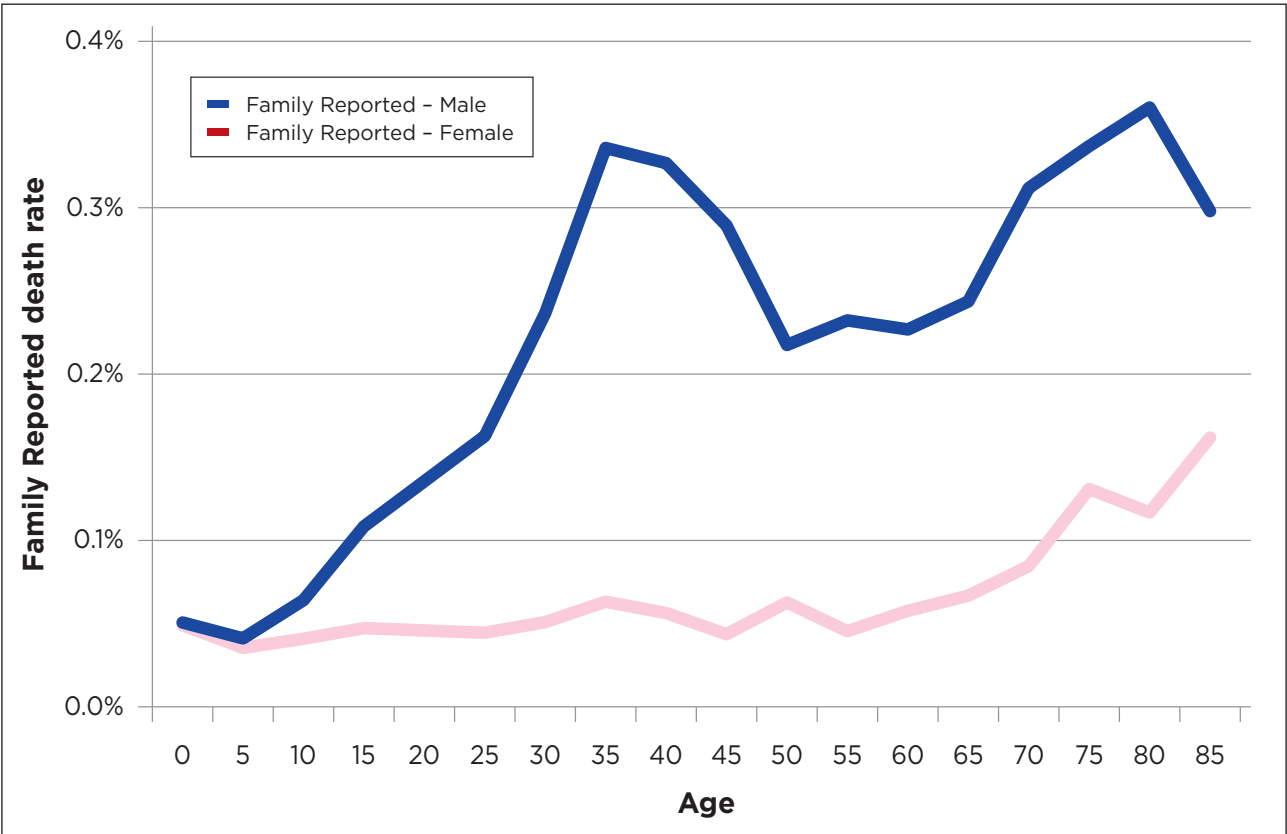


**Figure 7:** Fatality rate of hospital records (as a proportion of population by age and sex)

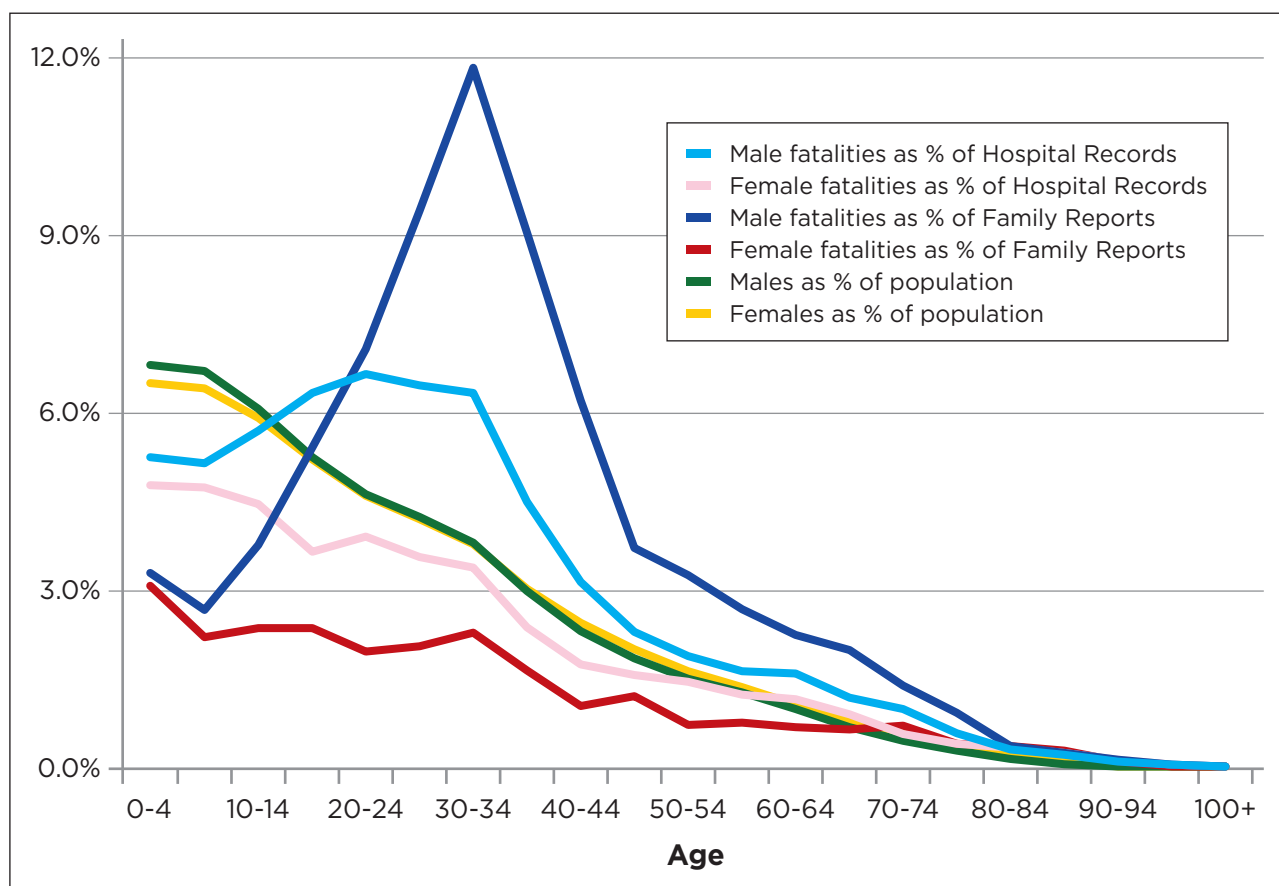


Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 8:** Fatality rate of family reports (as a proportion of population by age and sex)



Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

**Figure 9:** Fatalities by source, age and sex (as proportion of each source)

Source: Ministry of Health Fatality List, 31 August 2024 and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

## Age Variation

Several people were wrongly recorded as children and reported as such in the monthly reports by the MoH and therefore also by international media.

In addition, there has been a pattern of ages being revised downwards by one year. As identified earlier, this puts a number of listed ages at odds with ages recorded in the Palestinian Population Register.

A comparison of the first 1,000 names in the October 2023 and July 2024 lists revealed several inconsistencies in the data, including eight people disappearing between lists, a duplicate on the October list and, most pertinently, over 100 people whose ages had been reduced by one year between the October and July lists.

Fatality figures for children play a prominent part in reporting of this war, but a pattern of age inconsistencies between lists casts significant doubt on these numbers. To test whether these figures, regularly quoted by the media, were reliable, we examined every fatality listed at 18 years old in the August 2024 list and compared the entry to entries in the October 2023 and February 2024 lists.

In the October 2023 list, there were 117 people listed at 18 years old. Of these, 25 were listed as aged 17 in the August 2024 list. This is 21.4%. An even more dramatic statistic comes from repeating the process with the February 2024 list, compared with August 2024. There were 265 names listed as 18 years old in the February list. Of these, 144 were listed as 17 years old in the August list. This is approximately 54.3%.

The Ministry of Health's 30 April list had 406 fatalities aged 19, male and female. 284 of these 19-year-olds, or 70%, were listed as 18 in the 30 June list (sample of five shown below).

11079	الاء ابراهيم حمدان ابو عقل	421348459	19	انثى	Apr 30
10831	الاء ابراهيم حمدان ابو عقل	421348459	18	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30
1218	الاء عاطف طه خضر	421288556	19	جباليا البلد	Apr 30
10912	الاء عاطف طه خضر	421288556	18	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30
10218	الاء مازن يوسف السالك	421382532	19	انثى	Apr 30
10840	الاء مازن يوسف السالك	421382532	18	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30
2842	ريا بلال محمد الرمالوي	421131731	19	غزة	Apr 30
257	ريا بلال محمد الرمالوي	421131731	18	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30
3011	ريا ايداد شعبان عوده	421292632	19	غزة	Apr 30
10907	ريا ايداد شعبان عوده	421292632	18	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30

The records of deaths of 18-year-olds were also altered. In the reporting, 305 of 311 aged 18 on 30 April became younger, down to age 17, for the 30 June list (sample below).

1995	محمود محمد عثمان طالب	424370666	18	غزة	Apr 30
10508	محمود محمد عثمان طالب	424370666	17	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30
23770	يزن سامي محمد العجل	424363638	18	ذكر	Apr 30
10527	يزن سامي محمد العجل	424363638	17	تبلغ ذوي الشهداء	Jun 30
17458	سجى عماد ياسين طه	424326957	18	غزة - الشاطئ	Apr 30
10401	سجى عماد ياسين طه	424326957	17	سجلات وزارة الصحة	Jun 30

In the most charitable interpretation of this data, these names were incorrectly labelled as 18-year-olds in the previous lists and reverted to their true ages in the August list. However, even if this is true, it means that the data in those previous lists released by the MoH was highly inaccurate and should never have been used uncritically by media outlets. It casts significant doubt on the reliability of current and future MoH lists.

Less charitably, this data could be interpreted as incorrectly inflating the number of 17-year-olds in official statistics, which would have the knock-on effect of inflating the number of children reported killed. This would benefit the anti-Israel messaging of Hamas and other groups. Either way, the fact that major media outlets reported these demonstrably inconsistent numbers without any question is highly concerning.

### 3. Deaths Unrelated to IDF Action

#### ***Hamas-Related Deaths***

Since the start of the war, the IDF has reported numerous incidents of accidental or purposeful detonation of booby-trapped houses in Gaza. There are reports of secondary explosions from IDF attacks on military objectives that were not known to contain rockets or other explosive materials at the time of attack. There is evidence of accidental or purposeful detonation of mines laid under roads. Hamas itself has shared video of deliberate direct and indirect fire (such as anti-tank or mortar fire) aimed at IDF forces in urban areas within Gaza.

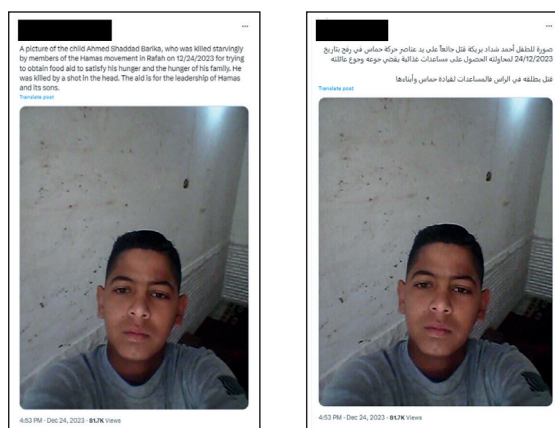
The published fatality lists do not distinguish fatalities that are the result of such actions. They do not identify those killed by Hamas to prevent evacuation from areas in which the IDF has called for such evacuation,<sup>41</sup> or those killed by Hamas or other militants during aid distribution.<sup>42</sup>

The lists do not identify those who have died of causes other than those directly related to hostilities, such as accidents or criminal activity. Incidents of injuries and death occurring due to criminal activity (including violence between clans) and accidents have been publicly reported; for example, dozens of Gazans were reportedly crushed and trampled to death during a riot that erupted following the entry of aid trucks in February 2024.<sup>43</sup> In the aftermath of an attack on a Palestinian activist by a “masked man”, the Fatah opposition party accused Gaza authorities of allowing “criminality” to spread within its borders.<sup>44</sup>

The MoH reports include those known to have died by means other than claimed “Israeli aggression”. One example, Ahmed Shaddad Halmy Brikeh (احمد شداد حلمي بريكه), identity number 424185668, age 13, appears in the August fatality list on row number 10,869.

17	نكر	08-08-06	424185668	احمد شداد حلمي بريكه	10869
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Mr Brika was reported as having been shot dead by Hamas during his attempt to obtain food for himself and his family from a humanitarian aid shipment on 24 December 2023.<sup>45</sup> This is supported by social media posts (below), since deleted.



*One example of a report concerning Mr Brikeh's death on X (original and Google translation)*

<sup>41</sup> “Hamas Terrorists Continue to Prevent Civilian Evacuation in Gaza”, IDF, 26 October 2023, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/october-23-pr/hamas-terrorists-continue-to-prevent-civilian-evacuation/>.

<sup>42</sup> Israel Defense Forces (@IDF), X post, 15 March 2024, 11:11 am, <https://x.com/IDF/status/1768595849385279673>.

<sup>43</sup> “Dozens of Gaza civilians reportedly killed during aid riot”, *Jewish News Syndicate*, 29 February 2024, <https://www.jns.org/dozens-of-gazans-reportedly-killed-during-aid-riot/>.

<sup>44</sup> Tom Bennett, “Hamas critic beaten by masked men in Gaza”, *BBC News*, 9 July 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx82xx9pj5do>.

<sup>45</sup> “Israel, Hamas don't jump at Egypt's plan to end their war”, *Politico*, 25 December 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/12/25/israel-hamas-egypt-gaza-plan-00133179>; “The martyr Ahmed Shaddad Helmy Brika”, *Genocide in Palestine*, 24 December 2023, <https://genopal.net/ar/martyrs/show/9821>.

## **Failed Rocket Launches**

Israel has identified thousands of failed rocket launches from inside Gaza, many of which have landed directly inside populated areas in Gaza, causing untold harm. One of the most prominent examples is the Al-Ahli Hospital incident, when on 17 October 2023, a rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad landed in the Al-Ahli Hospital complex.<sup>46</sup> The true number of fatalities from this incident is unknown. The MoH stated that the blast caused 471 fatalities, however this figure has been widely contested, and Western intelligence agencies including France and the United States have indicated that fatalities from the misfired rocket were far lower than 471.<sup>47</sup>

Research regarding rocket fire from Gaza has shown that 10 to 20% of these rockets fall inside Gaza itself, never reaching Israeli territory.<sup>48</sup> With over 9,000 rockets fired at Israel from Gaza since 7 October 2023,<sup>49</sup> our analysis suggests that over 1,000 rockets have fallen inside Gaza. Even with areas evacuated, it is certain that these will have caused Gazan fatalities. The IDF estimated that from the start of the conflict up to July 2024, 1,750 fired rockets fell short within the Gaza Strip, representing 13% of all Hamas rockets fired at Israel since 7 October 2023.<sup>50</sup>

In 2021, there were also verified fatalities from misfired Palestinian rockets.<sup>51</sup> There is no way in the current ongoing conflict to verify how many and which fatalities listed by the MoH were caused by non-IDF action such as errant rockets. However, it is certain to be a significant number given the number of rockets fired at Israel by Hamas and other groups, the known failure rate and the documented example at the Al-Ahli Hospital.

## **Natural Deaths**

To best understand the total death toll and its real impact on the population in Gaza, it is useful to examine the usual death rates during normal times, prior to the war, in order to estimate what would be expected if the war had not been happening.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 5,225 natural deaths in Gaza in 2018, 5,014 in 2019, 5,552 in 2020 and 6,807 in 2021. If we allow for the impact of the pandemic, and generously use the lowest of those figures, you could average out an annual total of 5,014 natural deaths to a monthly expected natural death toll of 418 people.

It is therefore estimated that since 7 October 2023, there have been over 5,000 natural deaths in Gaza, unrelated to any direct aspect of the war. The MoH has not issued any information regarding natural deaths in Gaza and has not issued a separate list of deaths in Gaza due to natural causes. But there is evidence that deaths from natural causes have been included in the civilian war fatality data – having the effect of inflating the overall figures.

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<sup>46</sup> “US has ‘high confidence’ Palestinian rocket caused Gaza hospital blast – official”, *Reuters*, 25 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-has-high-confidence-palestinian-rocket-caused-gaza-hospital-blast-official-2023-10-25/>; Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, “U.S. Cites ‘High Confidence’ That Palestinian Rocket Caused Hospital Blast”, *The New York Times*, 24 October 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/24/us/politics/intel-rocket-gaza-hospital-blast.html>; Divya Rajagopal and Jose Joseph, “Israel did not strike Gaza hospital, Canada says”, *Reuters*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-did-not-strike-gaza-hospital-canada-says-2023-10-22/>.

<sup>47</sup> John Leicester, “French intelligence points to Palestinian rocket, not Israeli airstrike, for Gaza hospital blast”, *AP*, 20 October 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-france-intelligence-7be0d59b9ceb58bbf2f03c5dc8222356>.

<sup>48</sup> Nadav Gavrielov, “Hamas and Other Militant Groups Are Firing Rockets Into Israel Every Day”, *The New York Times*, 27 December 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-gaza-rockets.html>.

<sup>49</sup> “Rocketfire”, IDF, 6 April 2024, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/idf-press-releases-israel-at-war/april-24-press-releases/war-against-hamas-6-months-operational-update/rocketfire/>.

<sup>50</sup> Author’s interview with MG Finkelman, IDF Commander of Southern Command, July 2024.

<sup>51</sup> “Hamas rocket fire a war crime, Human Rights Watch says”, *BBC News*, 12 August 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-58183968>.



The Hamas Government has stated when issuing fatality reports that fatalities are directly from war-related activities and not natural deaths.<sup>52</sup> However, the Government has not provided any separate data regarding natural deaths in the last year that could have dispelled any possibility that they have been used to inflate war fatality numbers. The number of expected natural deaths would reduce the number of claimed identified fatalities, which as of 10 December 2024 stood at 44,786.<sup>53</sup>

### Cancer Patients recorded as War Fatalities

The MoH regularly issues lists of patients who have been approved to travel outside the Gaza Strip for medical treatment. There are several examples of cancer patients who were listed as requiring treatment on these lists, lists which were issued weeks after they had already appeared on the Ministry's lists of war fatalities.

Jihad Mahmoud Adeeb Al-Taweel (جهاد محمود أديب الطويل), ID number 950130153, was described in the 15 April 2024 list as a patient with laryngeal cancer.<sup>54</sup> He had featured in the 29 March 2024 fatality list, more than a fortnight earlier, as a war fatality.

15551	جهاد محمود اديب الطويل	950130153	01-01-64	ذكر	60	سجلات وزارة الصحة
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Entry in the Health Ministry's 29 March 2024 fatality list

15912	جهاد محمود اديب الطويل	950130153	60	خان يونس - خان يو	ذكر
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Entry in the Health Ministry's 30 April 2024 fatality list

الرقم	المستشفى	الاسم	الجنس	العمر	التشخيص+الاجراء الطبي المطلوب	رقم الهوية	القسمة	رقم الجوال	العنوان	اسم المرافق	هوية المرافق	رقم الجوال
32	الصادقة التركي	جهاد محمود اديب الطويل	ذكر	01/01/1964	LARYNGEAL CANCER	950130153	اورام	599570554		تهاني حسن محمد الطويل	912294733	599451336

Entry in the Health Ministry's 15 April 2024 list for medical treatment out of the Gaza Strip

Youssef Muhammad Mabrouk Abu Khousa (يوسف محمد مبروك أبو خوصة), ID number 976372680, was described in the 17 April 2024 list as a patient with right lung upper lobe carcinoma and liver metastases.<sup>55</sup> He had featured in the 29 March 2024 fatality list, three weeks earlier, as a war fatality.

18859	يوسف محمد مبروك أبوخوصة	976372680	56	ذكر	56	تبليغ ذوي الشهداء
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Entry in the Health Ministry's 29 March fatality list

20666	يوسف محمد مبروك أبوخوصة	976372680	56		ذكر
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Entry in the Health Ministry's 30 April fatality list

الرقم	المستشفى	الاسم	الجنس	العمر	التشخيص+الاجراء الطبي المطلوب	رقم الهوية	القسمة	رقم الجوال	العنوان	اسم المرافق	هوية المرافق	رقم الجوال
22		يوسف محمد مبروك أبو خوصة	ذكر	09/03/1966	Right lung upper lobe carcinoma, liver metastases.	976372680		593011878/		سحر صبحي سليم ن أبو خوصة	410160485	593011878

Entry in the Health Ministry's 17 April list for medical treatment out of the Gaza Strip

<sup>52</sup> van der Merwe, "Gaza conflict: Thousands remain unidentified".

<sup>53</sup> "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Reported Impact Snapshot", UN OCHA, 10 December 2024, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-10-december-2024>.

<sup>54</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, Telegram post, 15 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5306>.

<sup>55</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, Telegram post, 17 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5317>.

Abeer Muhammad Abu Ghaben (عبيير محمد محمد ابو غبن), ID number 921692737, was described in the 21 April 2024 list as a patient with multiple myeloma.<sup>56</sup> He had featured in the 29 March 2024 fatality list, more than three weeks earlier, as a war fatality.

16964	عبيير محمد محمد ابو غبن	921692737	12-08-73	انثى	51	سجلات وزارة الصحة
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*Entry in the Health Ministry's 29 March fatality list*

17810	عبيير محمد محمد ابو غبن	921692737	51	جباليا - جباليا	انثى
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*Entry in the Health Ministry's 30 April fatality list*

رقم م	المستشفى	الاسم	الجنس	العمر	التشخيص +الاجراء الطبي المطلوب	رقم الهوية	القسمة	رقم الجوال	العنوان	اسم المرافق	هوية المرافق	رقم الجوال
41	التركي	باسم اسماعيل ل اسماعيل ل ابو غبن	ذكر	30/06/1966	Multiple Myeloma	91719197 5		59988266 2	غزة	عبيير محمد محمد ابو غبن	921692737	562773448

*Entry in the Health Ministry's 21 April list for medical treatment out of the Gaza Strip*

All three of these people were apparently alive in the middle of April, when their names were included in the medical treatment list, so the inclusion of their names in the March fatality list is an obvious error. This is a small sample but corroborates the wider patterns of fabrication identified in this report.

<sup>56</sup> Palestinian Ministry of Health/Gaza, *Telegram* post, 21 April 2024, <https://t.me/MOHMediaGaza/5333>.

## 4. IDF-Reported Militant Deaths

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During this war, it has been assessed that Hamas's true strength is 40,000 or more combatants.<sup>57</sup> In January 2024, the United States intelligence community estimated that Israel had killed between 20 and 30% of Hamas combatants, so between 8,000 and 12,000 combatants.<sup>58</sup>

In May 2024, the United States intelligence community estimated that Israel had killed 30 to 35% of Hamas's combatants. This range by American intelligence would equate to 12,000–14,000 combatants.<sup>59</sup> The current official IDF estimate is that 17,000–20,000 militants have been killed inside Gaza.<sup>60</sup>

The IDF has carefully reported these numbers over time based on field reports and various sources of intelligence. 10,000 of the 17,000 have been identified by name, which is a large number in the midst of war.

The highly regarded Institute for the Study of War corroborated IDF reports of the defeat of Hamas. Only three out of 24 brigades were not classified as “defeated”. Only small groups remain. There is a “severely degraded tunnel network”. The Institute confirms a 50 to 75% fatality rate in Khan Younis.<sup>61</sup> This all supports claims that at least 40% of Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad members have been killed.

Progression of IDF claims of combatants killed has matched war activity and intensity, with higher volumes of killing in the first few months of the war and markedly fewer during most of 2024. The ratio of the IDF's own fatalities to enemy combatants is also broadly consistent with its figures against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which are not really disputed. In November 2024, the IDF reported that it had killed 1,300 combatants since early October.<sup>62</sup> UN OCHA reported 1,962 additional fatalities in the Gaza Strip over that period (9 October to 19 November), so these figures are consistent across both IDF and UN reporting chains.<sup>63</sup>

It is believed that Hamas is recruiting new fighters, which suggests they have taken significant casualties that need replacing.<sup>64</sup> This is corroborated by reports of massive defeats of brigades, deaths of senior commanders and destruction of tunnels. Hamas itself has admitted to massive losses. The IDF released a letter by Rafa'a Salameh, commander of Khan Younis brigade, admitting to a 50% fatality rate, which has not been disputed.<sup>65</sup> According to third party assessments, the IDF has reduced nearly all Hamas brigades by about half.

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<sup>57</sup> Yonah Jeremy Bob, “Surprise! Hamas has thousands more fighters than Israel initially thought – analysis”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 March 2024, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-hamas-war/article-794045>.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy A. Youssef, Jared Malsin and Carrie Keller-Lynn, “Hamas Toll Thus Far Falls Short of Israel's War Aim, U.S. Says”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 January 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-toll-thus-far-falls-short-of-israels-war-aims-u-s-says-d1c43164>.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Ward, Erin Banco and Lara Seligman, “Biden admin openly hammering Israel's military strategy in Gaza”, *Politico*, 21 May 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/21/biden-admin-hammering-israel-military-strategy-gaza-00159262>.

<sup>60</sup> Author's interview with IDF Spokesman Lt Col Peter Lerner, 11 October 2024.

<sup>61</sup> Andie Parry, “Israel is defeating Hamas, but destroying Hamas will require a post-war vision”, Institute for the Study of War, 19 September 2024, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/israel-defeating-hamas-destroying-hamas-will-require-post-war-vision>.

<sup>62</sup> Yonah Jeremy Bob, “IDF intensifies operations in Gaza and Lebanon, kills hundreds of Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 November 2024, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-829846>.

<sup>63</sup> UN OCHA reports, 9 October–19 November 2024, <https://www.ochaopt.org/crisis>.

<sup>64</sup> Isabel Marques da Silva, “Analysis: Hamas regenerates in Gaza, recruiting fighters despite Israeli defeat claims”, *Euronews*, 7 October 2024, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/10/07/analysis-hamas-regenerates-in-gaza-recruiting-fighters-despite-israeli-defeat-claims>.

<sup>65</sup> Emanuel Fabian, “Gallant reveals document from top Hamas commander warning Sinwar of dire losses”, *Times of Israel*, 11 September 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/gallant-reveals-document-from-top-hamas-commander-warning-sinwar-of-dire-losses/>.

The IDF is better able to identify combatants than civilians because it targets combatants and invests resources in assessing enemy casualties. It is common for a military operation to know who the killed combatants are but not the civilians, due to the difficulties in counting the dead from air strikes and chaotic, dynamic close-quarter combat. The IDF is similar to comparable militaries and carries out post-mission battle damage assessments and team debriefs, where the numbers of enemy combatants killed are reported.

## 5. Reliability of Hamas Fatality Data in Previous Conflicts

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There have been major issues with the data shared by Hamas in previous conflicts.

### ***Operation Cast Lead, December 2008 – January 2009***

At the end of Operation Cast Lead, Hamas claimed that 1,300 Gazans were killed, and only 48 were combatants – meaning 95% of the total death toll was made up of civilians.<sup>66</sup> Hamas's overall fatality figure was within range of Israeli estimates, but after an IDF investigation, where the IDF gathered full names and IDs of individuals killed using the Palestinian Population Registry, Israel concluded that 709 Hamas fighters died, out of a total of 1,166 IDF-identified fatalities.<sup>67</sup>

In November 2009, Hamas admitted that around 600–700 of its fighters were killed during Operation Cast Lead. This was covered in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*<sup>68</sup> but was ignored by English-speaking mainstream media outlets.

### ***Operation Protective Edge, July – August 2014***

The course of the conflict saw inconsistent reporting.<sup>69</sup> During the early stages of the conflict, in July 2014, the Gaza Ministry of Health published daily fatality lists, and the names, ages and circumstances of death of the deceased to a limited extent.

For the first few weeks of the conflict, the MoH also regularly updated a list of total fatalities.

By August 2014, the MoH had stopped publishing lists of total fatalities and reverted to issuing daily reports on fatalities that had occurred that day. The Ministry compiled additional lists retrospectively to include total fatalities. These lists often lacked names, identifying details and circumstances of death.

As reported by UN OCHA, the Ministry of Health claimed that 2,131 Gazans were killed, including 1,473 civilians – accounting for 70% of the death toll.<sup>70</sup> The fatality figures were broadly in line with the IDF's estimated range, but combatant deaths were vastly undercounted.

### ***IDF Reports***

IDF analysis of fatalities suggests that 2,125 Palestinians were killed during the 2014 Gaza Conflict, with at least 936 (44% of the total) verified militants and 761 (36%) civilians (the other 20% could not be classified). 886 Hamas fighters were identified by name.<sup>71</sup> Other estimates suggest 52% of deaths were combatants.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> "Hamas says only 48 fighters slain in Israel war", *AlArabiya News*, 19 January 2009, <https://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2009%2F01%2F19%2F64513>.

<sup>67</sup> Yaakov Lappin, "IDF releases Cast Lead casualty numbers", *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 March 2009, <https://www.jpost.com/israel/idf-releases-cast-lead-casualty-numbers>.

<sup>68</sup> "Hamas Admits 600-700 of Its Men Were Killed in Cast Lead", *Haaretz*, 9 November 2009, <https://www.haaretz.com/2010-11-09/ty-article/hamas-admits-600-700-of-its-men-were-killed-in-cast-lead/0000017f-ee02-ddba-a37f-ee6edc3f0000>.

<sup>69</sup> For more details on this conflict, see: "Operation Protective Edge-Full Report – Annex: Palestinian Fatality Figures in the 2014 Gaza Conflict", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2015, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/operation-protective-edge-full-report>; "The 2014 Gaza Conflict: Factual and Legal Aspects", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 June 2015, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/2014-gaza-conflict-factual-and-legal-aspects>.

<sup>70</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 4 September 2014, 08:00 hrs)", UN OCHA, 4 September 2014, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/occupied-palestinian-territory-gaza-emergency-situation-report-4-september-2014-0800-hrs>.

<sup>71</sup> Author's interview with IDF source, July 2024.

<sup>72</sup> "Additional findings in the examination of the names of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge – Part Eight", The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 31 December 2014, <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/20753/>.



Hamas did not distinguish between combatant and civilian fatalities either in its reports or in its named lists of fatalities. A review revealed the inclusion of repeated entries, non-combat related deaths, combat-related deaths attributable to Palestinian armed groups rather than the IDF and incorrect ages. The names of at least 50 Hamas militants who were killed during the 2014 Gaza Conflict did not appear on any Hamas fatality list.

## Concealment of Fighter Deaths

Hamas enlisted the wider Gazan public to help conceal the combatant status of dead fighters. For example, on 5 August 2014, the Ministry of Interior in the Gaza Strip posted the following notice through social media:<sup>73</sup>

*“The Ministry of the Interior and National Security [in the Gaza Strip] calls on all our [Palestinian] people and the resistance factions to be wary of disseminating information and pictures of fatalities of the resistance, and [about] mentioning details about [the circumstances of] their deaths as martyrs and where they died.”*



On 11 July 2014, the Ministry uploaded guidelines for “social media activists” in the Gaza Strip to its website, Facebook and Twitter pages. An excerpt from the guidelines states that:<sup>74</sup>

Anyone killed or martyred is to be called a civilian from Gaza or Palestine, before we talk about his status in jihad or his military rank. Don't forget to always add “innocent civilian” [Arabic] or “innocent citizen” [English] in your description of those killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza ... Do not publish photos of military commanders. Do not mention their names in public, and do not praise their achievements in conversations with foreign friends!

Right: Messages posted on the Ministry of Interior's website referring to the social media guidelines.



Left: an excerpt from the social media guidelines, as translated above

<sup>73</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “Hamas Interior Ministry to Social Media Activists: Always Call the Dead ‘Innocent Civilians’; Don’t Post Photos Of Rockets Being Fired From Civilian Population Centers”, 7 July 2014, <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-interior-ministry-social-media-activists-always-call-dead-innocent-civilians-dont-post>.

<sup>74</sup> For the full text of the social media guidelines, see: “Hamas Interior Ministry To Social Media Activists: Always Call the Dead ‘Innocent Civilians’; Don’t Post Photos Of Rockets Being Fired From Civilian Population Centers”, Middle East Media Research Institute, 17 July 2014, <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-interior-ministry-social-media-activists-always-call-dead-innocent-civilians-dont-post>. In the Gaza conflict of 2008–2009, Hamas prohibited users of its web-forum PALDF.net from posting pictures, names or information about militants killed or injured while hostilities were ongoing. See: “Examination of the names of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge – Part Three”, Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 17 August 2014, p.7, [https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art\\_20704/E\\_147\\_14\\_1542981406.pdf](https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/articles/Art_20704/E_147_14_1542981406.pdf).

## ***Other Incidents***

There are questions over the reporting of fatalities from other flashpoints in recent history. After the border protest incident on 14 May 2018, the MoH reported that 55 protestors were killed during the protest, which was accepted as fact by OCHA.<sup>75</sup> However, after receiving criticism from a Palestinian interviewer that Hamas had allowed so many civilian protestors to be killed, a Hamas official revised the numbers and stated that 50 of the approximately 60 killed were Hamas members.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> “Fifty-five Palestinians killed and thousands injured in Gaza”, UN OCHA, 14 May 2018, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/fifty-five-palestinians-killed-and-thousands-injured-gaza>.

<sup>76</sup> “udah Ari Gross and Toi Staff, “Hamas official: 50 of the 62 Gazans killed in border violence were our members”, *The Times of Israel*, 16 May 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-official-50-of-the-people-killed-in-gaza-riots-were-members/>.

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## 6. International Misrepresentation of Combatants as Civilians

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A study of leading global English-language media outlets shows that they have systematically failed to distinguish between civilian and combatant fatalities. This failure means that the narrative has been distorted into something that misrepresents the situation in Gaza. This affects public opinion, influences policy-making and has broader implications for international relations and conflict resolution.

An analysis of 1,378 articles from eight leading English-language media organisations between February and May 2024 revealed that combatant fatalities are almost entirely excluded from reported totals, with most outlets relying heavily on data from Hamas-controlled sources like the Gaza Ministry of Health and marginalising information provided by Israeli sources.

The outlets studied were CNN, BBC News, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, Associated Press, Reuters and the Australian ABC.

The MoH, which does not differentiate between combatant and civilian fatalities in its reporting, claims that the conflict has taken over 44,786 total fatalities in Gaza as of December 2024.<sup>77</sup> In contrast, Israel specifically tracks combatant fatalities and reports that over 17,000 fighters have been killed during the conflict (as of August 2024). Excluding combatant fatalities from reports creates a misleading narrative that disproportionately portrays Israeli actions as targeting civilians.

For example, TV host Fareed Zakaria told CNN audiences in April that the cost of the war was “35,000 civilians dying”,<sup>78</sup> mistakenly presenting the total number of fatalities as civilian deaths – and including more than 10,000 militants. The CNN audience on *YouTube* exceeds 17 million viewers. Another example from the wider media is an exclusive interview aired by CBS in June 2024 featuring Army Major Harrison Mann, a 13-year veteran who resigned in protest against US support for Israel’s war in Gaza. During the interview with CBS’s Jim Axelrod, Mann said, “I don’t know how you kill 35,000 civilians by accident”.<sup>79</sup> CBS has more than six million viewers on *YouTube*.

Journalists’ mistakes are often fuelled by the failure of international organisations to provide accurate data. The UN also regularly cites Hamas’s fatality figures. One striking example is a UN video from January 2024 entitled “25,000 civilians killed in Gaza war as humanitarian needs go on rising” and featuring interviews with UN Relief and Works Agency workers.<sup>80</sup> The figure of 25,000 fatalities was the total number reported by the MoH at the time.

The UN’s regular and unfiltered use of these Health Ministry statistics, even though they come directly from a Hamas-controlled organisation, legitimises them in the eyes of journalists. The UN channel’s audience, which had access to this video, exceeds three million viewers.

All these examples demonstrate how fatality figures are selectively reported and framed. This approach dramatically risks misleading public opinion and influencing policy decisions based on incomplete or skewed information.

Furthermore, these examples raise significant concerns about journalistic ethics in reporting on armed conflicts. In the case of Gaza, the principle of neutrality – which requires journalists to cite both sides – has been compromised. Our efforts to locate clear ethical guidelines

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<sup>77</sup> Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Reported Impact Snapshot”, UN OCHA, 10 December 2024 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-10-december-2024>.

<sup>78</sup> Fareed Zakaria (@FareedZakaria), X post, 7 April 2024, 7:15 pm, <https://x.com/FareedZakaria/status/1777037486704795680>.

<sup>79</sup> John Spencer (@SpencerGuard), X post, 7 June 2024, <https://x.com/SpencerGuard/status/1799158424023765102>.

<sup>80</sup> United Nations, *YouTube* video, 22 January 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7zhSn8aFIZk>.

or recommendations addressing this issue have been unsuccessful. The lack of established standards further highlights the need for greater accountability and transparency in media practices, especially when reporting on sensitive and polarising topics like war.

## ***Key Findings of the Research***

### **1. Neglect of Combatant Fatalities**

- Only 3% of articles included the number of combatants in reported fatality totals.
- Just 16% of articles mentioned that the Health Ministry's figures fail to distinguish between combatants and civilians.
- The failure to report combatant deaths perpetuates the narrative that all fatalities are civilian, reinforcing claims of disproportionate force.

### **2. Underrepresentation of Israeli Sources**

- Only 5% of the analysed articles cited Israeli sources for fatality data.
- In contrast, figures from Hamas-controlled organisations appeared in 98% of the articles studied, often without scrutiny or context.

### **3. Limited Critical Analysis of Hamas Data**

- 19% of articles treated figures provided by Hamas-controlled organisations as established fact without attributing the figures to anyone.
- Less than 2% of the media sources that used the Ministry of Health's statistics acknowledged that they are unverifiable or contested.
- Conversely, of the smaller number of articles which used Israeli-sourced statistics, 50% questioned their credibility.

The framing of fatality data in international conflicts significantly impacts public perception and policymaking. Media outlets serve as primary sources of information for the global audience, shaping narratives about the causes, consequences and responsibilities of conflict.

## ***Methodology***

The media research was conducted by Fifty.Global research group with the support of the International Institute for Social and Legal Studies. The study employed Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) methodologies. Key elements of the methodology included:

### **1. Exhaustive Sampling**

- Analysis of all articles with Gaza total fatalities statistics published from February through May 2024 across eight major outlets: CNN, BBC News, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, Associated Press, Reuters and the Australian ABC.
- Sample sizes ranged from 111 articles (ABC) to 246 articles (*The Guardian*), ensuring statistical significance with a confidence interval of  $\pm 4\%$  or less.

### **2. Rigorous Coding, Verification and Bias Prevention**

- Quotes were categorised into 76 distinct codes, with a final selection of 39 codes focusing on fatality reporting and source attribution.
- All quotes underwent double verification by independent researchers to ensure neutrality, accuracy and validity.
- Coding underwent triple verification by independent researchers.
- Strict exclusion criteria were applied for ambiguous data to maintain objectivity.
- Diverse research team composition was implemented to avoid regional or organisational biases.

## 7. Conclusion

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Our investigation into the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health's fatality reports during the conflict reveals widespread inaccuracies and distortion in the data collection process.

These distortions primarily result from flawed methodologies, including reliance on media reports and incomplete family submissions and the inclusion of non-conflict-related deaths such as natural causes and accidental fatalities. The MoH, operating under Hamas, the perpetrators of the 7 October massacre in Israel, has systematically inflated the death toll by failing to distinguish between civilian and combatant deaths, over-reporting fatalities among women and children and even including individuals who died before the conflict began.

This distortion of data not only creates a misleading picture of the conflict but also raises significant concerns about the credibility of the numbers being reported across the world.

The global media's uncritical acceptance and dissemination of these unreliable figures has compounded the issue, shaping public opinion and international discourse on the conflict in ways that may not reflect the reality on the ground. Many media outlets fail to scrutinise the sources of the fatality data, often presenting the MoH figures as authoritative without question.

This has led to a narrative where the IDF is portrayed as disproportionately targeting civilians, while the actual numbers suggest a significant proportion of the dead are combatants. This lack of transparency and clear attempts to inflate the civilian death toll further erode the credibility of the reporting.

Our investigation found numerous statistical anomalies in the MoH's fatality lists, including significant daily increases in the reported deaths of women and children that are mathematically impossible. Furthermore, the inclusion of natural deaths in war-related fatality counts, the erroneous categorisation of men as women and children, and the failure to account for deaths caused by internal Palestinian violence or misfired rockets from Gaza have all contributed to inflated and misleading numbers.

This report highlights the broader implications of such data distortion. International Humanitarian Law requires that warring parties take measures to minimise civilian harm, but the distortion of fatality data undermines efforts to assess compliance with these laws. The absence of credible data also hampers international responses, humanitarian aid efforts and peace negotiations. Without accurate and reliable figures, it becomes nearly impossible to understand the full scope of the conflict's impact or to hold parties accountable for their actions.

While it is crucial to acknowledge the suffering and loss of life in Gaza, the uncritical repetition of unverified fatality figures serves to obscure the truth rather than illuminate it. The MoH's fatality reports, in their current form, should not be treated as definitive, nor should they be used as the primary basis for international discourse on the conflict. This situation calls for a more measured approach in reporting and analysis, one that critically examines sources of information and distinguishes between legitimate and manipulated data.

Responsible reporting requires more than simply relaying numbers. It demands a critical assessment of the data, an understanding of the context and a commitment to accuracy. The international media plays a crucial role in shaping global perceptions of the conflict. Only by approaching these figures with a critical eye can the media help uncover the truth behind the war's human cost, ensuring that the true nature of the conflict is represented in the international arena.





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By Andrew Fox

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