

CHILDREN DYING IN THEIR FIRST DAYS

A COUNTRY RAVAGED BY THE EFFECTS OF ITS ONGOING WAR, YEMEN FINDS EVERY ASPECT OF ITS CIVIL SOCIETY STRETCHED BEYOND THEIR LIMITS AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES ARE ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL COLLAPSE. THE FIRST TO FEEL THE EFFECTS ARE, INVARIABLY, THE NATION'S MOST VULNERABLE—INCLUDING NEWBORN CHILDREN.

Regular access to skilled attendance during pregnancy and at birth is extremely curtailed due to the conflict. Even if mothers reach referral facilities with functional maternity wards, there is no guarantee that care will be found. Health providers report that there are not enough staff, resources or equipment such as incubators. Pregnant women and new mothers with babies have to share beds, and infection control is poor.

It is within the harsh context of today's Yemen that access to antenatal care and skilled attendance at birth is declining as the war goes on, putting the lives of many mothers and babies in grave danger. A significant proportion of maternal, newborn, and child deaths are in zones of conflict and displacement.



YASMIN'S STORY

At the age of 21, Yasmin Ali has been pregnant three times – yet she lost her first two children shortly after giving birth.

She lives with her husband, Abdulmajeed Sulaiman, in Al-Dhahi district, Hudaydah governorate - one of the most war-ravaged governorates of Yemen. Struggling to find work, Suleiman can barely provide food for his family – including his mother and brother who remain dependent upon him. The World Bank estimates that income poverty had increased from 49 percent before the war (2014) to 81 percent in 2018.

Yasmin first became pregnant in early 2018. She was – and still is – suffering from acute malnutrition. During her antenatal visits, the doctor at the local health centre advised her to take fluids and medicine to help build her strength enough to deliver successfully.

She recalls, "In my eighth month, the doctor told me that, due to problems, I would need to deliver by Caesarean section." The couple could afford neither the treatment for her malnutrition nor the required operation, so she also decided to deliver her baby at home.

Born critically ill, they took their first son to the hospital where he stayed for three days before being discharged; the couple didn't have enough money to continue paying for his treatment and hospitalization. He died half an hour after leaving the hospital.

In a country where access to modern contraception is deficient, Yasmin was quickly pregnant again. Still malnourished, she gave birth to another sickly child. He too died soon after birth; this time because his parents could not afford to take him to a hospital, and the health centre in their village, which provides primary healthcare, was not equipped to look after critically ill babies.

Hanan Ali is the health worker at Yasmin's village health centre and says that most pregnant women are unable to attend the hospital in the nearby city of Al-Hudaydah as they do not have money for medical fees or transportation. "Only around 20 percent of the area's pregnant women manage to visit the hospital. We hear about many mothers and newborns dying shortly after delivery," says Hanan.

Even before the war, only a third of women were using health facilities to give birth. In rural areas, access to maternity services was even lower – only 23 out of 100 pregnant women accessed skilled care.



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YASMIN HOLDING THE CLOTHS OF HER FIRST NEWBORN WHO DIED THREE DAYS AFTER BIRTH.

THE SCALE OF SUFFERING AND NEEDS IN YEMEN

 **11.3 MILLION CHILDREN**
in need of humanitarian assistance

 **24.1 MILLION PEOPLE**
who cannot survive without humanitarian help

 **2 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER 5**
who need treatment for acute malnutrition

 **19.7 MILLION PEOPLE**
who need access to basic healthcare

 **17.8 MILLION PEOPLE**
who need access to safe drinking water,
adequate sanitation and hygiene

SOURCE: UNICEF, Yemen Humanitarian Situation Report, December 2018; Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2019.

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