PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Paediatrics Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	Gaza, armed conflict and child health
AUTHORS	Boukari, Yamina
	Kadir, Ayesha
	Waterston, Tony
	Jarrett, Prudence
	Harkensee, Christian
	Dexter, Erin
	Cinar, Erva Nur
	Blackett, Kerry
	Nacer, Hadjer
	Stevens, Amy
	Devakumar, Delanjathan

VERSION 1 REVIEW

REVIEWER	Dr. Nick Spencer
	University of Warwick Warwick Medical School, Division of Mental
	Health and Wellbeing
REVIEW RETURNED	22-Nov-2023

GENERAL COMMENTS	The authors are to be congratulated on a detailed account of the impact of the current conflict on children in Gaza and Israel. The authors stress that children's rights are universal and indivisible and apply to ALL children. Although it is only 5 days (22.11) since the article was submitted, some of the statistics/numbers are already out of date. This is inevitable in a fast-moving conflict characterised by unrelenting bombing of heavily populated areas and communal buildings where large numbers of people including children are sheltering. While I think this article should be fast-tracked and would favour
	acceptance in its current form, I would support insertion of a sentence on the inevitable child deaths which will follow from infectious diseases combined with acute malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and destruction of health infrastructure, even if a ceasefire is secured.

REVIEWER	Dr. Maurizio Bonati
	Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research, Department of
	Public Health, Laboratory for Mother and Child Health
REVIEW RETURNED	02-Dec-2023

GENERAL COMMENTS

- . The text is well written and necessary.
- Just a few comments:
- in all recent wars and conflicts, civilians are the greatest victims, especially children;
- the numbers could be updated;
- children and adolescents have always been victims of the Israeli army and the number of minors detained in Israeli prisons is proof of this;
- compared to other wars and conflicts, this one in Gaza is completely unbalanced between the forces in the field, therefore there is premeditation, a desire for civilians to pay;
- all civilians should be released immediately, even Israeli ones;
- International Conventions and Agencies, once again, have proven inefficient and useless in preventing and containing a conflict: what is it possible and necessary to do by the international medical community, in particular for the health and well-being of child victims of war?
- could/should Scientific Societies do something continuously and formally?

VERSION 1 AUTHOR RESPONSE

The authors are to be congratulated on a detailed account of the impact of the current conflict on children in Gaza and Israel. The authors stress that children's rights are universal and indivisible and apply to ALL children. Although it is only 5 days (22.11) since the article was submitted, some of the statistics/numbers are already out of date. This is inevitable in a fast-moving conflict characterised by unrelenting bombing of heavily populated areas and communal buildings where large numbers of people including children are sheltering.

While I think this article should be fast-tracked and would favour acceptance in its current Thank you for the comments - we have updated the numbers and references throughout the piece in order to reflect the changes since our previous submission.

We have also included the following highlighted text on deaths as a result of disease:

exposure to armed conflict include communicable diseases, a range of non-communicable illnesses that are both the result of and exacerbated by inadequate living conditions and environmental exposures, displacement, family separation, being orphaned, and limited access to basic needs such as safety, shelter, food, clean water, sanitation, healthcare and education.[40] During the short-lived ceasefire, the WHO

P5, lines162 169

form, I would support insertion of a sentence on the inevitable child deaths which will follow from infectious diseases combined with acute malnutrition, lack of access to dean water and destruction of health infrastructure, even if a ceasefire is secured.	stated that disease could kill more people than the war itself and since the resumption of hostilities there have been further increases in infectious diseases. [41,42] The current hostilities have caused disruption to childhood vaccination programmes, hampered the functioning of disease surveillance systems, damaged water and sanitation systems, and reduced access to treatment, which together exacerbate the child popula to communicable diseases. [43] The significant contribute to increased child morbidity and mortality beyond this period of active hostilities.	
The text is well written and necessary. Just a few comments: - in all recent wars and conflicts, civilians are the greatest victims, especially children	Thank you for the comment - in response to the following highlighted sentence, which we also think is relevant in response to your comment: armed conflict and their rights are routinely violated, as has been seen in conflicts in Ukraine, Yemen and Syria.[5 7] However, the rate of child deaths in this recent escalation of the conflict in Gaza when compared with other conflicts has been disproportionately high.[8]	P2, lines 42 45
The numbers could be updated	We agree and have made updates throughout as per sources available on the 9 th December 2023. We will also make sure to update the numbers at the proof stage.	
Children and adolescents have always been victims of the Israeli army and the number of minors detained in Israeli prisons is proof of this	Thank you for highlighting this important point. We have made the following additions: During the humanitarian pause, 86 Israeli and 24 foreign national hostages were released, in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinians	P1, lines34 36

		Т
	held in Israeli prisons, all of whom were children and women. [3] Since the 7th October, the UN Human Rights Office has reported a dramatic increase in the arrest and detention of Palestinians, with no evidence of committing an offence in the majority of cases. Children are not immune to this; it is estimated that the Israeli military arrests and detains 500 700 Palestinian children yearly through military courts without basic safeguards for a fair trial and often via a	P3 4, lines 107 114
	process of administrative detention in which no charge is ever presented. Additionally, on the 7th December, dozens to hundreds of Palestinian males sheltering in a school, including boys aged as young at 15 years were detained, stripped, tied up and transferred to an unknown location. The abduction and detention of children is known to be harmful to oftentimes with lifelong consequences for survivors.	
Compared to other wars and conflicts, this one in Gaza is completely unbalanced between the forces in the field, therefore there is premeditation, a desire for civilians to pay.	We have added the following highlighted sentences regarding the imbalance: The Israeli Defense Force reportedly targeted over 15,000 locations in Gaza during the first 35 days of the onslaught, often using large bombs weighing up to 2000 lbs.[15] This method of combat in a densely populated area inevitably results in staggeringly high civilian casualties.[15] Additionally, the alleged use of white phosphorus by Israeli forces in densely populated urban areas in Gaza has been reported by Human Rights Watch in the current offensive and also reported in previous attacks. 16,17 White phosphorus exposure results in deep thermal and chemical burns, and can	P3, lines 81 84 and 90 91

	cause multiple organ system failure, with survivors facing extensive scarring, physical disabilities, painful treatment, psychological harm and social exclusion. Children are considered more susceptible to harm from chemical weapons due to their physiology and body mass. These assaults on the lives, health and wellbeing of children and young people who have no place in the origins of the conflict is a moral outrage.	
All civilians should be released immediately, even Israeli ones.	We note that point 2 of our urgent recommendations calls for the release of all civilian hostages.	P6, line 194
International Conventions and Agencies, once again, have proven inefficient and useless in preventing and containing a conflict: what is it possible and necessary to do by the international medical community, in particular for the health and well-being of child victims of war?	Thank you for raising this important point. We have expanded upon our proposed actions for the child health community section: Appeal to elected governmental representatives to advocate for the above immediate actions Call for the formal implementation of the United Nations Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism to hold parties accountable for committing grave violations against children Demand equal application of international law to any party suspected rights in conflict Demand objective, needs-based humanitarian aid for children in all conflicts, regardless of scale, political or strategic importance Continue to highlight evidence of the egregious impact of war on children through formal (e.g. publication, news	P6, lines 215 224

	media) and informal channels (e.g. social-media), especially where coordinated, collective actions are possible or where the voices of advocacy, human rights and humanitarian organisations can be amplified Join or develop a coalition of child health advocates in your country or region to work specifically on protecting child health in conflict Stand in solidarity with affected children and young people by joining peace and humanitarian organisations working towards preventing and ending conflict Push to embed data on the adverse effects of conflict on child health into	
Could/should Scientific Societies do something continuously and formally?	This is an important question with which we agree but we consider it beyond the scope of this paper. We would like to see more attention paid to the rights of children in conflict zones and means of protecting them and we think this is something that should be discussed with the societies themselves.	