

UN cuts by more than half the number of women, children 'identified' as killed in Gaza

New data on Gazan fatalities cited by UN agency separates 'identified' deaths in hospitals from some 10,000 alleged deaths based on Hamas 'media sources'

By [JEREMY SHARON](#) May 13, 2024



A woman and boy walk with belongings past barbed-wire fences as they flee from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on May 11, 2024, during the ongoing conflict in the Palestinian territory between Israel and terror group Hamas. (AFP)

In a dramatic development, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has sharply revised downward the number of "identified" female and child fatalities in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

The data now differentiates between the total number of deaths reported by Hamas (over 34,000) and the number of "identified" fatalities (over 24,000).

The new figures reported by OCHA reduce by more than half the number of women and children that it previously said had been killed during the war, though other “unregistered” deaths may be pending.

“Unregistered” deaths refers not to unidentified bodies held by hospitals, but mostly to more vague figures reported by Hamas as coming from “reliable media sources.”

All numbers continue to be based on reporting from the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry, and not on independent data.

Having previously reported that 9,500 women and 14,500 children had died during the war (some 69% of all fatalities), OCHA is now reporting far lower numbers, stating that among “identified” deaths, 4,959 women have died, along with 7,797 children (or 52% of the total number of identified deaths in the war).

Of note, the Hamas ministry counts all those under the age of 18 as children, while commentators note that a not-insignificant number of combatants are in their teens.

According to a recent statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli agencies believe that some 14,000 terror operatives have been killed in the fighting (the IDF has given that number as 15,000), along with some 16,000 civilians, which would give a civilian casualty figure of 53%. In an [interview](#) released Sunday, Netanyahu said the ratio of Hamas combatants to Gazan civilians killed was about one-to-one.



IDF soldiers operate inside the Gaza Strip in an undated handout photo published April 10, 2024. (Israel Defense Forces)

Until May 6, OCHA was citing only the over-34,000 death toll, and the far higher figures for women and children fatalities which were reported by the Hamas-controlled Government Media Office (GMO) organization in Gaza.

According to those figures, the total death toll was 34,735, of whom 9,500, or 27%, were women and over 14,500, or 42%, were children.

But on May 8, the agency adopted new figures. While it still kept the higher “reported” death toll (now at 34,844), it said “identified” fatalities stood at 24,686, of whom 4,959 (20%) were women and 7,797 (32%) were children.

Those revised figures constitute a 52% reduction in the reported number of women killed and a 53% reduction in the reported number of children killed during the war.

What accounts for these drastic changes?

As noted in a [study published](#) in Fathom Journal in March by academics Dr. Tom Simpson, Prof. Lewi Stone, and Prof. Gregory Rose, on December 11, the

Hamas-run Gaza health ministry began differentiating between two different categories in its fatality data: “identified” deaths and “unregistered” deaths.

Simpson is a generalist economist with a PhD from the University of Western Australia, Stone is a biomathematician at Tel Aviv University and RMIT University in Melbourne, and Rose is an expert in international law at the University of Wollongong.

Speaking to The Times of Israel, Lewi and Rose explained that the “identified” deaths were those fatalities registered in Gaza hospitals, while the “unregistered” deaths were reports of fatalities supposedly collected from “reliable media sources,” according to the Gazan Ministry of Health.

But those “unregistered” figures appear to have been anything but reliable.



People walk amid the rubble of buildings destroyed during the Israeli bombardment of Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on April 16, 2024. (AFP)

In their Fathom article, Simpson, Lewi and Rose pointed out that the ratio of women and children in the hospital-registered deaths was significantly lower than in the unregistered category.

As an example, they noted that according to the ministry, 21,978 Gazans died between October 7 and December 31. Of those, 15,349, or 70%, were

registered at hospitals and 6,629, or 30%, were unregistered deaths recorded from “media reports.”

The researchers found that 60% of the hospital-registered deaths were women and children. But that meant that in order to reach the Ministry of Health’s claim at the time that 70% of all deaths were women and children, fully 92% of the unregistered deaths must have also been women and children. This would be “statistically absurd,” the authors said.

Critically, the differentiation between hospital-registered deaths and those based on “media reports” was not explained by the ministry. The Fathom article authors had to dig down into the data to discern that differentiation.

As pointed out by David Adesnik from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies organization, at the beginning of April the ministry changed its categories into those for whom there was complete data and those for whom there was only “incomplete data” — some 11,300 of the total 33,000 fatalities at the time.

The ministry appeared essentially to relabel the unregistered deaths from “media reports” to fatalities with “incomplete data” — lacking either an ID number, full name, sex, date of birth, date of death, or a combination of those data points.

OCHA, in its post-May 8 figures, has essentially stopped lumping those two categories together, stressing those figures on which there is solid information.

David Adesnik @adesnik · Follow

This is an important point, so I'd like to address it in detail. What does it mean that the UN switched from reporting >14,500 children and >9,500 women killed in Gaza, to reporting only 7,797 "identified" children and 4,959 "identified" women?

Yes, this is going to be a **I** 1/

Tal Hagin @talhagin

Update:
A similar issue has arisen with an incorrect assessment of the recent Gaza casualty figures as reported by @ochaopt.
OCHA didn't report a dramatic decrease in the casualty figures of women and children, it just now only reports identified victims.
Explanation:

Category	Before May 8, 2024	As of 30 April 2024
Reported fatalities (including children and women)	34,735	34,844
Reported fatalities (identified)	-	24,884
Reported injuries	78,108	78,404

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“The radical change in figures released by OCHA are an admission that their previously published figures were unreliable at best and manipulated false figures at most likely,” argued Rose. “The change of policy is just to save face.”



A salvo of rockets being fired from inside the Gaza Strip towards Israel, during ongoing battles between Israeli forces and the Palestinian Hamas movement. (Menahem KAHANA / AFP)

For example, in December 2023, the recorded number of adult male casualties (a demographic far more likely to be combatants) declined between December 1-8 by over 1,300 individuals.

“These mass resurrections of Gazan men blew out the women and children death ratio from supposedly 68% to 80%,” the Fathom authors wrote.

In response to a request for comment by The Times of Israel, OCHA stated: “The overall number of fatalities tallied by the Ministry of Health in Gaza remain unchanged, at more than 35,000 people since October 7. However, the ministry has updated the breakdown of fatalities for whom full details have been documented... The Ministry of Health notes that the documentation process of casualties’ full identification details is ongoing.

“United Nations teams in Gaza are unable to independently verify these figures, given the prevailing situation on the ground and the sheer number of fatalities. For this reason, all figures used by the UN clearly cite the Ministry of Health in Gaza as the source. The UN will verify these figures to the extent possible when conditions permit.”

On Tuesday, in response to reporting on the issue, the World Health Organization voiced full confidence in Hamas’s death toll figures.

“The fact we now have 25,000 identified people is a step forward,” said WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier at a Geneva press briefing, adding that there was “nothing wrong” with health ministry data.

Reuters contributed to this report.