

Maternal health in Afghanistan Amidst Current Crises—A Neglected Concern

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Abstract

In the recent past, due to the pandemic and humanitarian crisis, the healthcare system has dived into turmoil, especially regarding core facilities for women and maternal health. Afghanistan has the highest maternal mortality rate globally according to the WHO, with a startling 638 deaths per 100,000 live births. In such a decrepit system, regime changes resulted in major donors withdrawing from the national primary care service program leading to serious consequences for Afghani women such as women being compelled to deliver babies at home instead of hospitals increasing the risk of infections and maternal mortality. Major challenges faced by the Afghan healthcare system include the cessation of international funding due to the humanitarian crisis, the shortage of medicines, and the failure to deliver salaries to healthcare workers. According to the UNFPA, due to these challenges, more than 90% of healthcare facilities are at risk of closure, leading to an estimated 4.8 million unattended pregnancies and 51,000 maternal deaths between 2021 and 2025. To ensure such a catastrophe does not arise, the World Bank, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and UNFPA in collaboration with governments around the world have pledged aid, both monetary and in terms of equipment & resources to Afghanistan. In addition, local Afghan organizations such as the AHDS and JACK must also be supported to further their work in providing healthcare services.

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