

Health diplomacy as a tool for peacebuilding

Abstract

Peace and health are deeply interconnected, with war and violence posing major threats to public well-being by damaging critical infrastructure like hospitals and schools. In conflict-affected regions such as Sudan and Palestine, millions are displaced, health services collapse, and disease outbreaks surge. Health diplomacy has emerged as a vital approach for fostering collaboration among nations to prioritize health in peacebuilding efforts. However, its application remains limited, especially in chronic crises like Palestine, due to systemic injustices, military occupation, resource shortages, and weak international accountability. Strengthening resilient health systems through frameworks like the WHO's six building blocks and promoting equitable, locally driven global health diplomacy initiatives, such as the Global Health Alliance for Palestine (GHA4P), are essential steps toward achieving sustainable health equity, peace, and justice in conflict-affected areas.

Main body

There is no doubt that peace and health are closely connected. During war, people suffer not just from direct violence but also because essential services like hospitals and schools are damaged or shut down. Natural disasters can make these situations even worse, forcing countries to spend more money on conflict rather than health and well-being. War and violence are major threats to public health, but health can also be a tool for creating peace. Today, more people are working through health diplomacy, where countries and organizations collaborate to solve health problems together (Chattu and Knight, 2019).

Health diplomacy is essential for making health a top priority in discussions on peace and security. It aims to protect health care, strengthen collaboration, and fight poverty and inequality, helping to resolve conflicts and rebuild health systems (Pattanshetty et al., 2023).

Sudan shows how conflict makes life extremely hard. Globally, 1.5 billion people live in conflict zones needing basic health services. In Sudan, fighting displaced 3 million people and pushed

700,000 into nearby countries. Over 3,000 deaths, 6,000 injuries, and the shutting down of half of the capital's hospitals highlight the crisis (Pattanshetty et al., 2023).

Attacks on health workers, hospitals, and aid groups are a serious concern, as they must be protected even during war. Destroyed hospitals limit access to medicine and doctors, endangering civilians and severely harming the economy. Over time, damaged health systems worsen a country's crisis and slow down the recovery progress (Pattanshetty et al., 2023).

Building strong, resilient health systems is very important, especially in conflict-affected areas where 80% of major disease outbreaks occur. The World Health Organization's six building blocks—service delivery, workforce, information systems, medicines and vaccines, and financing—aim to create safer and stronger systems. However, constant instability makes applying this plan in war zones very challenging (Pattanshetty et al., 2023).

Global Health Diplomacy (GHD) is important but often underused in places like Palestine. In Gaza, GHD has failed to prevent major loss of life or repair widespread damage. Difficulties such as military occupation, systemic injustices, limited resources, weak international laws, and broken health systems have restricted its effectiveness. Initiatives like the Global Health Alliance for Palestine (GHA4P), led by Global South countries, plan to reform GHD by prioritizing local voices, addressing inequalities, and promoting better health and justice (Maidah and Alkhaldi, 2025).

In conclusion, enhancing health systems and promoting health diplomacy are important for building resilience and peace in conflict-affected areas. By prioritizing health, countries can support recovery, reduce inequalities, and create a more stable and just future.

Words: 425

Summary

This article explores the link between peace and health, emphasizing that conflict not only causes direct violence but also devastates critical services like healthcare and education. In places like Sudan, ongoing conflict has displaced millions and crippled half of the hospitals in the capital,

leaving civilians vulnerable and damaging the economy. The destruction of health systems makes recovery slower and deepens crises. Given that 80% of major disease outbreaks occur in fragile regions, building strong, resilient health systems is crucial. The World Health Organization's six building blocks—covering service delivery, workforce, information, medicines, financing —aim to support this, but applying them in conflict zones is difficult. Health diplomacy, which encourages collaboration to make health a top priority in peace and security discussions, is essential for protecting health services, rebuilding systems, and supporting global development goals. However, in places like Palestine, GHD has been underused due to occupation, systemic injustice, and weak governance. Initiatives like the Global Health Alliance for Palestine (GHA4P) aim to reform GHD by centering local voices and dismantling inequalities to promote lasting health, fairness, and peace.

Referencing:

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