

High mortality and violence among refugees and returnees from West Darfur, Sudan arriving in Chad, 2023: results from three retrospective mortality surveys

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Background

Fighting erupted on 15 April 2023 in Sudan between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. By September 2023, more than 420,000 people had fled to Chad. To describe the health status of the displaced populations in camps in eastern Chad, several surveys were realised. We describe retrospective crude and under five mortality rates, reported causes of death and frequency and type of violence events experienced by displaced populations in three camps in eastern Chad.

Methods

Cross-sectional surveys were carried out in August and September 2023 in Toumtouma, Ourang and Arkoum camps. Each survey included retrospective mortality and frequency and type of violent events experienced. All surveys considered a pre-crisis and crisis phase.

Results

In all sites, the crude mortality rate (CMR) was significantly higher in the crisis phase than in the pre-crisis phase. The CMR was particularly elevated in Ourang camp (CMR: 2.25 deaths/10,000 people/day [95% CI: 1.77 - 2.74] in the crisis phase versus CMR: 0.11 deaths/10,000 people/day [95% CI: 0.02 - 0.20] in the pre-crisis phase). Violence was the leading self-reported cause of death in all sites. Among households in Ourang, more than 90 percent originating from El Geneina, more than 1 in 10 of all men aged 30 and over died of violent causes. In Toumtouma, Ourang and Arkoum camps, the overall frequency of violence among households was 3.3%, 11.7% and 4.4% respectively, with beatings and shooting most frequently cited.

Conclusion

In the three camps investigated, excess mortality was observed among households during the crisis phase, with excess mortality primarily linked to violence among men. The population in Ourang camp, largely from El Geneina, appears to have been particularly affected by the violence, with CMR 20 times higher than in the pre-crisis period and mortality rates exceeding the standard emergency threshold (1 death/10,000 people/day).

Several cross-sectional surveys were carried out among displaced populations arriving in Chad. We provide epidemiological evidence of the high rates of mortality and violence since the start of the conflict in Sudan.

