

Doctors unveil first child blast wound manual

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Doctors and rights activists unveiled on Thursday the world's first field manual for the treatment of child casualties from explosions, which they say cause almost three-quarters of juvenile deaths and injuries in war zones.

The guide was put together by British aid agency Save the Children and experts at Imperial College London at the request of Syrian medics working in the bloody eight-year civil war.

"It starts from the point when something goes 'bang' and a child is exposed to that explosion," former British army surgeon Paul Reavley, one of the manual's authors, told AFP.

"It then follows the child on a care pathway and focuses on the key differences of children compared to adults," Reavley said ahead of a function at the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Save the Children said suicide bombs, landmines, grenades, unexploded ordnance, air strikes and other forms of explosives "account for 72 percent of all child deaths and injuries across the world's deadliest war zones".

In Syria the figure was 83 percent.

The agency used United Nations figures from what it said were the five deadliest conflicts for children, in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and

Yemen.

In 2017, at least 10,677 children were killed or maimed, Save the Children added in a new report on blast injuries, also unveiled on Thursday.

"In reality, that number is likely to be the tip of the iceberg," the agency said.

'Not small adults'

"This manual is a world-first guide to the unique procedures needed to keep children alive and help them recover fully following the catastrophic injuries from explosive weapons," it added.

Written in simple language, the illustrated 176 pages are a step-by-step guide on how to treat children hurt by explosions, from the point of injury to post-treatment psychological and social support.

The pages are designed to be easily photographed on a mobile phone and can be downloaded from the internet for free.

"The Paediatric Blast Injury Field Manual gives medical staff in conflict settings... the knowledge and technical guidance needed specifically to treat children," said Save the Children director Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

"Children's bodies are different. They aren't just small adults," added Major-General Michael von Bertele, former British Army Medical Services director general.

"Their skulls are still not fully formed and their underdeveloped muscles offer less protection. So a blast is more likely to damage their brain and lungs or tear apart organs in their abdomen, even when there's no visible

damage," he said.

Former Sierra Leone child soldier and rights activist Ismael Beah told AFP "this manual is extremely necessary."

"No doubt it will save the lives of countless children in war zones," said Beah, who was wounded several times before managing to flee the war-torn west African nation in 1997.

"It would have saved a lot of lives too in Sierra Leone's wars, had it been around at the time," added Beah.

The first batch of some 500 field manuals is expected to be sent to Syria soon, Save the Children confirmed.

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