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The right to reproductive health is one of inalienable human rights. How is it being implemented in Ukraine during a large-scale invasion, air strikes and bombings, capturing of the civilian population and destruction of infrastructure?

In the first four months of Russian invasion, 102,575 babies were registered born in Ukraine. Many children received unusual names during state birth registration. Among them are Jan Javelin (a boy born in Vinnytsia region) and Javelina (a girl from Kyiv). Such names are given in honour of foreign weapons provided to Ukraine’s defence.

Here we share several stories of pregnancy during wartime, based on the experiences of several Ukrainian women.

**The first story**

In the eighth month of pregnancy, Daryna survived constant shelling in a city without water, electricity, or gas. The online media outlet Ukrainian Pravda-Life interviewed Daryna about her experiences of living under occupation while pregnant, evacuation from Bucha (Kyiv region) and returning home after the birth of her son.

“I was seven months pregnant when the war started. On February 24, I woke up from a very strong roar. I thought that something had fallen on the nearby construction site, blown away by the wind. We could not even think that a war had started. I couldn’t believe it until the last moment. It was like a bad dream. Our water and electricity were immediately cut off. For the first two days we were running down to the shelter. But running from the seventh floor in darkness is not very convenient, especially with a belly and after the coronavirus. That’s why from the third day on we were staying at home, hiding there instead.”

At some point, evacuation from Kyiv, Lviv, and Irshava (Transcarpathia) occurred.

“For two weeks we would get scared hearing or seeing a car pass by. We thought it was tanks coming. We lived in a one-room apartment together: me and my husband, my dog, and my parents. It was difficult because we are used to different conditions.”

Now Daryna and her family have already returned home.

**The second story**

45 babies were born in Izyum, Kharkiv region, during the occupation. One midwife died, the others left the city. The first child, born on the first days of the occupation, today is already more than six months old.

One midwife remained in the city, helping several women. The hospital had been destroyed. Volunteers found a gynecological chair among the rubble. The midwife’s husband is a yachtsman. Giving her threads from sails, he said: “It can withstand the winds, so it will work fine here.” Those threads were treated with alcohol and used to sew women after a cesarean section. The child would be weighed on hanging scales.

**The third story**

Maryana Mamonova is now known to many. She had four rotations to ATO/OOS. She served as the head of the medical service of the 501st separate marine infantry battalion of the 36th separate marine infantry brigade named after Rear Admiral Mykhailo Bilynsky. From the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, she served in Mariupol. When it got really dangerous, she with her friends and dozens of civilians hid for a long time at the metallurgical plant named after Ilyich (a Russian politician who currently serves as the Head of the Chechen Republic). However, in April 2022, Maryana and part of her brigade were captured by the Kadyrovs (the Chechen army). Before her capture, Maryana had informed her family that she was pregnant. She was held captive by the Russian occupiers from April 4, 2022, and was released on September 21. Maryana gave birth to a girl on September 25. She named her daughter Anna.

Here is one of Maryana’s relatives talking about her pregnancy in captivity:

“Maryana and other women in captivity were treated differently. When she was in Olenivka [place of captivity in occupied territory], she and the other prisoners were treated differently, but there were no situations that would have threatened her life. When she was captured, her commander immediately reported that she was pregnant. She already knew about it then. She was treated correctly and was not insulted, but she lived under the same conditions as everyone else. That is, she was no different, only that she was not touched.”

**The fourth story**

Pregnancy can be one of the grave consequences of rape, which occupiers use as a tool of violence against civilian populations during wartime. However, many incidents of sexual violence remain hidden from the public. Not often do survivors or their relatives turn to psychologists, doctors, and law enforcement officers for help. For a woman who has survived sexual violence, pregnancy can become yet another layer of physical and psychological torture.

Girls and women who have been raped have to go through a mandatory medical examination, but safe opportunities for this are limited under occupation. Pregnancy after rape should be distinguished from a woman's reproductive function under regular conditions, since it was an act of violence where the victim had no choice. When a woman decides that she doesn't want to exercise her reproductive function of being a mother and has an abortion, that's one thing; but when she's been raped, it's not about reproductive functions at all. It was an act of violence.

In the period between March 1 and April 12, the network of human rights organisations Abortion Without Borders received information about more than 200 women from Ukraine who were looking for an opportunity to have a safe abortion. Most of them were temporarily based in Poland, where the state allows abortion only in cases of pregnancy as a result of a criminal act or when the woman's life is in danger, but Ukrainian refugees have also fled to other countries that have strict abortion laws, such as Hungary and Romania.

"Most of the people who came to us were able to get an abortion thanks to abortion pills," Mara Clarke, founder and director of the Abortion Support Network, which is also part of the Abortion Without Borders, told Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty.

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2 ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation; OOS – Joint Forces Operation (Operatsiya ob’yednannykh syl in Ukrainian). It is a status of Ukrainian defence operations before the invasion.
3 https://abortion.eu/
4 https://www.asn.org.uk/