On 12 May 2020, gunmen attacked an MSF-supported hospital in Kabul that houses a maternity clinic, killing at least 16 people including two newborn babies. The assault began with an explosion at the entrance to the 100-bed hospital in Dasht-e-Barchi, in the west of the capital, at about 10am local time. Three gunmen burst inside and began shooting, apparently indiscriminately. A reporter who was able to access the hospital soon after the attack said gunmen appeared to have opened fire in every room and on everyone inside, with some bodies still lying in the recovery room where women are taken after giving birth. The dead included mothers, nurses, and infants, the interior ministry said. Officials shared a photo of two young children lying dead inside the hospital. About 100 people were rescued from the building, including three foreigners.

No armed group has claimed responsibility for the attack as of 18 May 2020. The Afghan Taliban have denied involvement. The Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood in Kabul, where the hospital is located, is predominantly Shia and has been the location of a number of attacks by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province, a group affiliated with the Islamic State (also known as ISIS).

**Summary**

The vicious attack on the maternity hospital in Kabul is shocking for its brutality and violence against young mothers and newborn babies. Such tragic attacks are sadly not an exception.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported 119 attacks on health care in Afghanistan in 2019. Using different sources, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) identified 101 reported attacks in the same period.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) verified 75 incidents that impacted health care in 2019, including direct attacks or threats of attacks against health care facilities and personnel, and incidental damage to health care facilities. 57 incidents were attributed to anti-government elements, including 53 to the Taliban, two to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL-KP), and two to undetermined anti-government elements. UNAMA attributed 17 incidents to pro-government forces and one jointly to pro-government forces and anti-government elements. While not all were as lethal or brutal, the cumulative impact of these events continues to weaken the health system, with devastating consequences for the people of Afghanistan.

In 2019, incidents were documented in 14 out of 34 provinces (Balkh, Farah, Faryab, Ghor, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Nangarhar, Paktika, Panjshir, Samangan, Takhar, Wardak, and Zabul). These often take place at health facilities or occur as part of indiscriminate attacks on civilians. They also affect health workers travelling to and from work.

Non-state armed groups killed, kidnapped, injured, and threatened health workers; damaged health facilities; and looted or robbed ambulances. According to available reports, Islamic State and the Afghan Taliban are among the suspected non-state armed groups behind attacks on health care in 2019.

As well as violent incidents against health care, non-state armed groups restricted health providers’ ability to deliver services. In April, for example, the Afghan Taliban announced and subsequently revoked a temporary ban on the ICRC and the WHO in areas under its rule, citing unspecified suspicious actions during a vaccination drive. In September, a health facility in Zabul province was closed down by an armed group. It was reopened following mediation involving the town’s elders.

At least three health workers were killed in incidents attributed to state forces. On July 8, Afghan Special Forces raided a Swedish Committee for Afghanistan clinic in Wardak province treating Afghan Taliban fighters. According to Human Rights Watch, the Special Forces killed a patient caregiver, then detained health workers and family of patients, and questioned the director of the clinic, a lab worker, a guard, and a family caregiver about the whereabouts of the Afghan Taliban. Local villagers found the dead bodies of the lab worker, guard, and caregiver. The director of the clinic remains missing. In response to the raid, the Afghan Taliban forced the INGO to close 42 out of its 77 clinics in the region, affecting over 5,700 patients on a daily basis. The Afghan Taliban reversed its decision on July 19.

This digest was produced by academics from the University of Manchester, Johns Hopkins University, CERAAH at the University of Geneva, and by Insecurity Insight, in response to a request from the EU-initiated Platform ‘Protect Medics - Save Lives’. The compilation and publication of the digest was funded by UK Aid as part of the RIAH project, using data compiled for the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC). The digest does not represent the views of any institutions associated with the RIAH project.
At least 25 health workers were violently killed in 2019. In February, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device planted by the Islamic State killed a doctor as he was returning home from his private clinic in Kabul. In Nangarhar province in December, unidentified perpetrators opened fire at a vehicle carrying a Japanese INGO physician, severely wounding him and killing the driver, two bodyguards, and another passenger. The physician later died at a local hospital.

At least six health workers were kidnapped by non-state actor groups from health facilities or other places of work in 2019. Four NGO health workers were kidnapped by an armed group during a vaccine survey in May in Faryab Province. Two female health workers were released shortly after, while the two remaining male health workers are believed to remain in captivity.

Health facilities or warehouses were damaged by firearms and explosive weapons, including rockets, suicide vest IEDs and vehicle-borne IEDs, at least ten times in 2019. These incidents occurred during attacks on civilians, during fighting between Afghan forces and opposition groups, and in direct attacks on, or occupations of, health facilities.

The Afghan Taliban were named as one of the non-state armed groups behind four of the incidents. During one incident in September, an Afghan Taliban car bomb targeting an intelligence services building in Zabul province severely damaged the nearby Sultan Malakhi Tokhi hospital, killing at least 20 people and injuring 97 others, including patients and health workers. Damage to the facility meant it was no longer possible to provide services.

According to the WHO, 192 health facilities were closed in 2019 as a result of violence or threats of violence. From January to November 2019, approximately 24,000 hours of health care delivery were lost, and 41,000 consultations missed due to the forced closure and destruction of health facilities from incidents related to the armed conflict. While the impacts of such closures on affected populations are complex, such closures can affect maternal and infant mortality rates, treatment of injury and disease, as well as vaccination coverage, with long term consequences for the people of Afghanistan.

Data and Limitations
The data presented above are neither complete nor comprehensive, and may differ from other sources. The purpose of the digest is not to present definitive figures but rather to highlight issues of concern that emerge from the data. The data summarised above have been systematically compiled from two categories of sources: (a) verified security incidents submitted to Insecurity Insight by Aid in Danger partner agencies and by the Afghanistan Ministry of Health, and confirmed incidents published on the publicly available WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA) dashboard; and (b) open-source information, as published in the Attacks on Health Care Monthly News Brief and ACLED, by UNAMA, and other sources. Note that these sources adopt different methodologies, which are summarised and available on the source websites.