

ATTACKING HEALTH: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS AND IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTHCARE

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OUTLINE

Why is it
important
to
understand
attacks on
healthcare?

Immediate consequences

- Definitions
- Data

Longer-term consequences

- Methodological and conceptual challenges
- Evidence of impact
- What this tells us about conflict dynamics

RIAH RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Researching the Impact of Attacks on Healthcare (RIAH), funded by UK FCDO (2019-2026)

Multi-institution and interdisciplinary research programme to improve our understanding of the immediate, long-term, and wider impacts of attacks on healthcare on populations in contexts that have experienced armed conflict

Collecting and collating data on instances of attacks as well as developing methods and documenting evidence of their impact

<https://riah.manchester.ac.uk>

DEFINITIONS



- Occupation
- Bomb/destroy
- Confiscate supplies/equipment
- Access blocked

Facilities

- Bombed/destroyed
 - Confiscated
- Checkpoints/delays

Transports

- Shot
- Beaten
- Kidnapped
- Threats/interrogation
- Tortured
- Rape
- Arrest

Patients

- Shot
- Beaten
- Kidnapped
- Threats/interrogation
- Tortured
- Rape
- Arrest

Health workers

DEFINING ATTACKS ON HEALTHCARE

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

any act of verbal or physical violence or obstruction or threat of violence that interferes with the availability, access and delivery of curative and/or preventive health services during emergencies

SAFEGUARDING HEALTH IN CONFLICT COALITION (SHCC)

incidents of violence against health care in the context of conflict or in situations of severe political volatility and public health programmes, including emergency responses

EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2024



SAFEGUARDING
HEALTH
IN CONFLICT



DATA

A RISING CONCERN

2024



2023



Source: 2023 SHCC Incident Data

2022



2021



2024: 36 COUNTRIES

REPORTED INCIDENTS AND MOST COMMONLY REPORTED CONCERNS



REPORTED
INCIDENTS

3,623



INCIDENTS WHERE
HEALTH FACILITIES
WERE DAMAGED/
DESTROYED

1,111



HEALTH
WORKERS
KILLED

927



HEALTH
WORKERS
ARRESTED

473



HEALTH
WORKERS
KIDNAPPED

140

Reported incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in 2024

AFRICA

Sudan	276
DRC	84
Cameroon	48
Ethiopia	59
Mali	36
Nigeria	32
Burkina Faso	222
CAR	16
Niger	15
Mozambique	12
South Sudan	8

ASIA

Myanmar	308
Pakistan	39
Afghanistan	27
India's Manipur state	8

MIDDLE EAST and EUROPE

OPT	1,361
Lebanon	485
Ukraine	544
Syria	62
Yemen	52

The AMERICAS

Haiti	39
Mexico	28
Colombia	18

Other countries	47
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Spat at, abused, attacked: healthcare staff face rising violence during Covid

Data shows increased danger for those on the frontline in the pandemic, with misinformation, scarce vaccines and fragile health systems blamed

- **'They stormed the ICU and beat the doctor': health workers under attack**



📷 A health worker wearing PPE walks past a mural outside Clinic Ajwa in Shah Alam, Malaysia. Photograph: Annice Lyn/SOPA/REX/Shutterstock

Hundreds of healthcare workers treating Covid patients around the world have experienced verbal, physical, and sometimes life-threatening attacks

In the UK, NHS staff were spat at, patients verbally abused **staff who asked them to wear masks in hospital settings**, and GP surgeries **reported unprecedented abuse and aggression from patients**.

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About this content

Sarah Johnson

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<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/07/spat-at-abused-attacked-healthcare-staff-face-rising-violence-during-covid>

Attacked and Threatened: Health Care at Risk



Incident Category

- ☒ All incidents
- ☐ Conflict
- ☐ COVID
- ☐ Ebola
- ☐ Political
- ☐ Vaccination

Dates

From

01/01/2016



To

17/11/2025



This map shows incidents of violence and threats against health care. [Insecurity Insight](#) prepared the map, with support from [MapAction](#), for the



Health care related incidents reported globally: **17727**

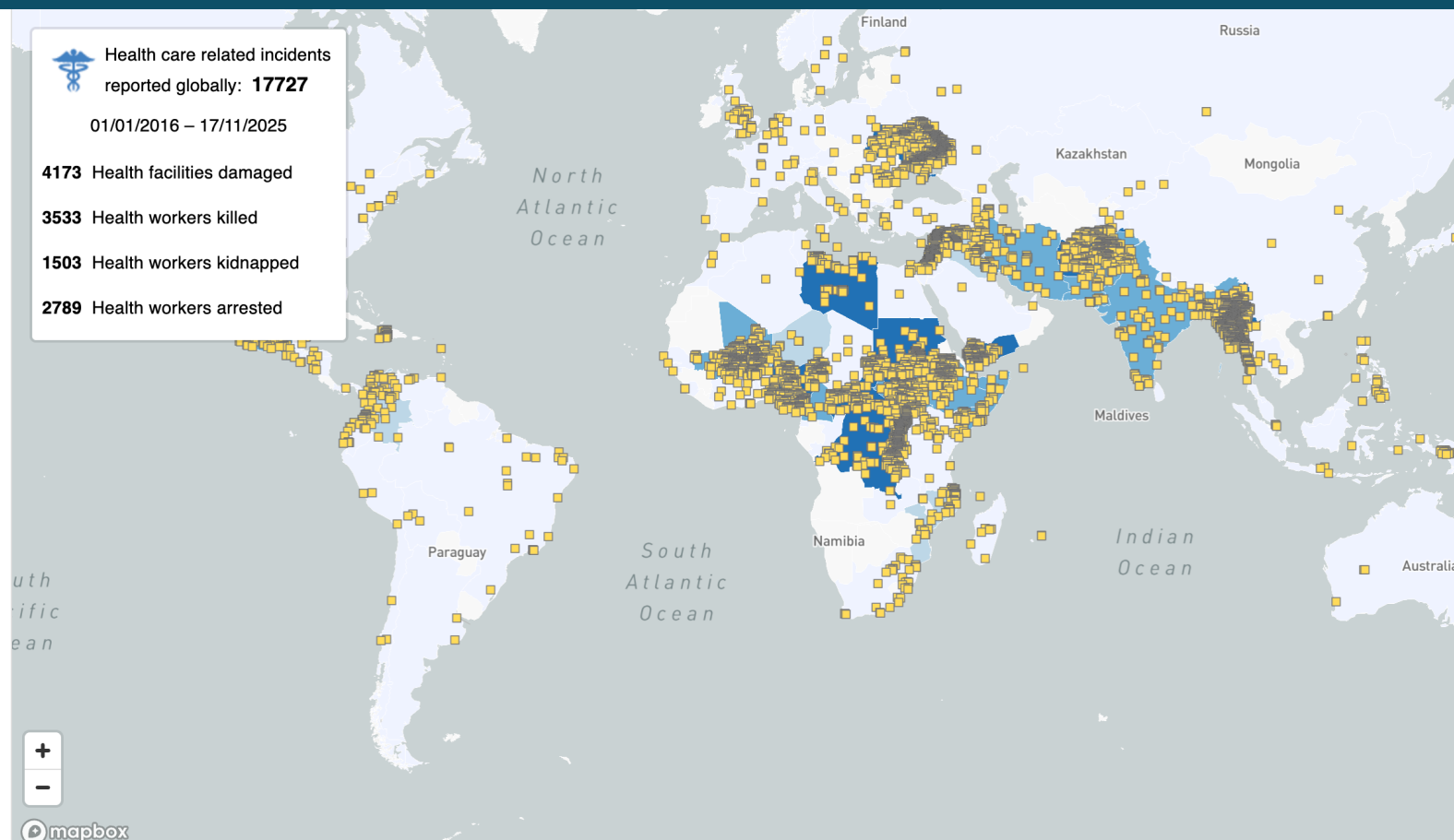
01/01/2016 – 17/11/2025

4173 Health facilities damaged

3533 Health workers killed

1503 Health workers kidnapped

2789 Health workers arrested



Source: Insecurity Insight (<https://mapaction-maps.herokuapp.com/health>)

SOURCES AND CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

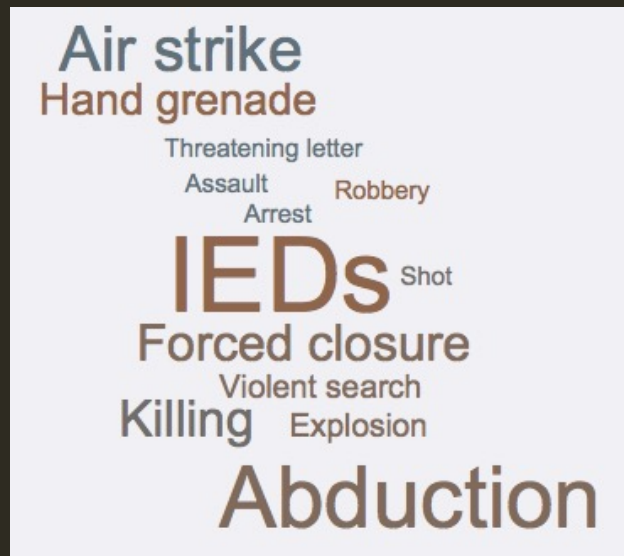
Data sources

- Field reports
- Media reports
- Social media
- Other public sources

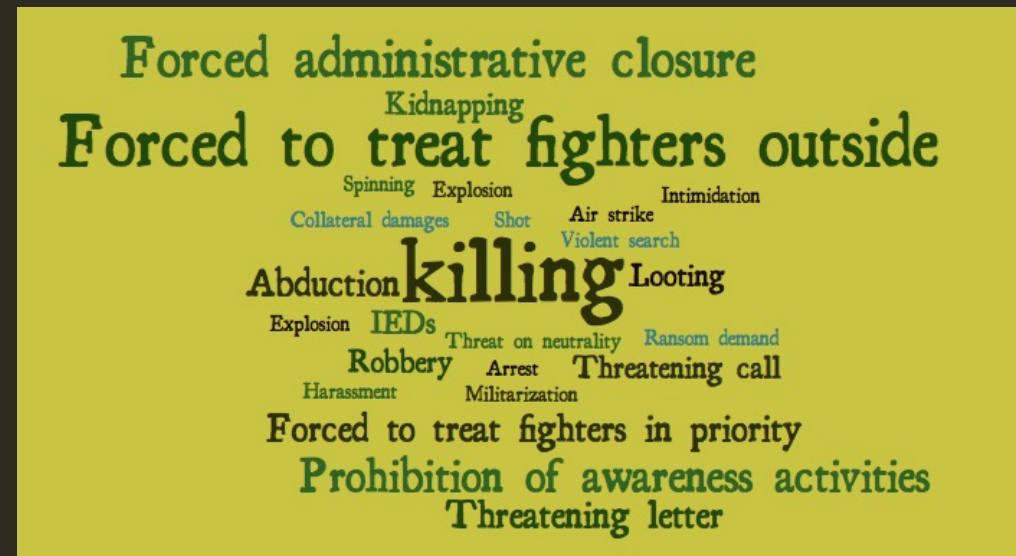
Conceptual challenges

- Definitions determine what to include or exclude
- Consistency of information
- Biases
- Verification

DATA: AFGHANISTAN



Attacks recorded in datasets



Types of attacks reported in interviews

SCALE OF ATTACKS AND UNDERREPORTING

Common dataset of 287 events from 2017, of which only 33 appeared in both datasets

12.9% ($n = 254$) overlap

Significant underreporting of attacks

Dataset definitions and parameters affect data collection

Research | [Open Access](#) | Published: 30 January 2023

Underestimating attacks: comparing two sources of publicly-available data about attacks on health care in 2017

[Vanessa Parada](#), [Larissa Fast](#) , [Carolyn Briody](#), [Christina Wille](#) & [Rudi Coninx](#)

Conflict and Health 17, Article number: 3 (2023) | [Cite this article](#)

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METHODOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

DOCUMENTING IMPACT



Context



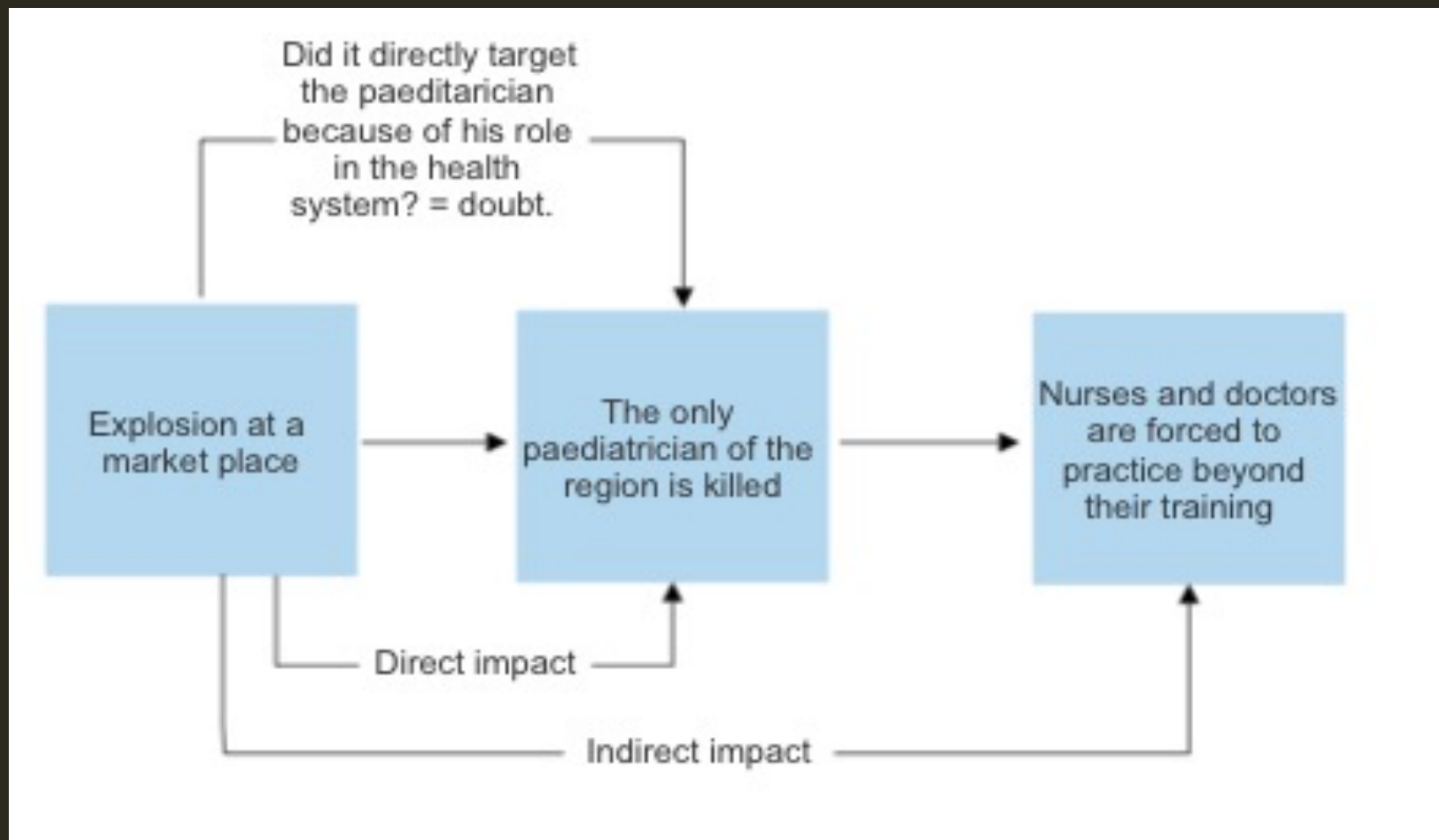
Data



Cumulative
impacts



Adaptation
over time



EVIDENCE ON IMPACT

RIAH KEY INSIGHTS

Differentiating impact of war/conflict from the impact of attacks on health in conflict contexts

Impact is contextual

Reporting attacks, and therefore impact: What isn't counted

Compounding nature of impact

Adaptation under adversity

CONFLICT DYNAMICS

KEY INSIGHT

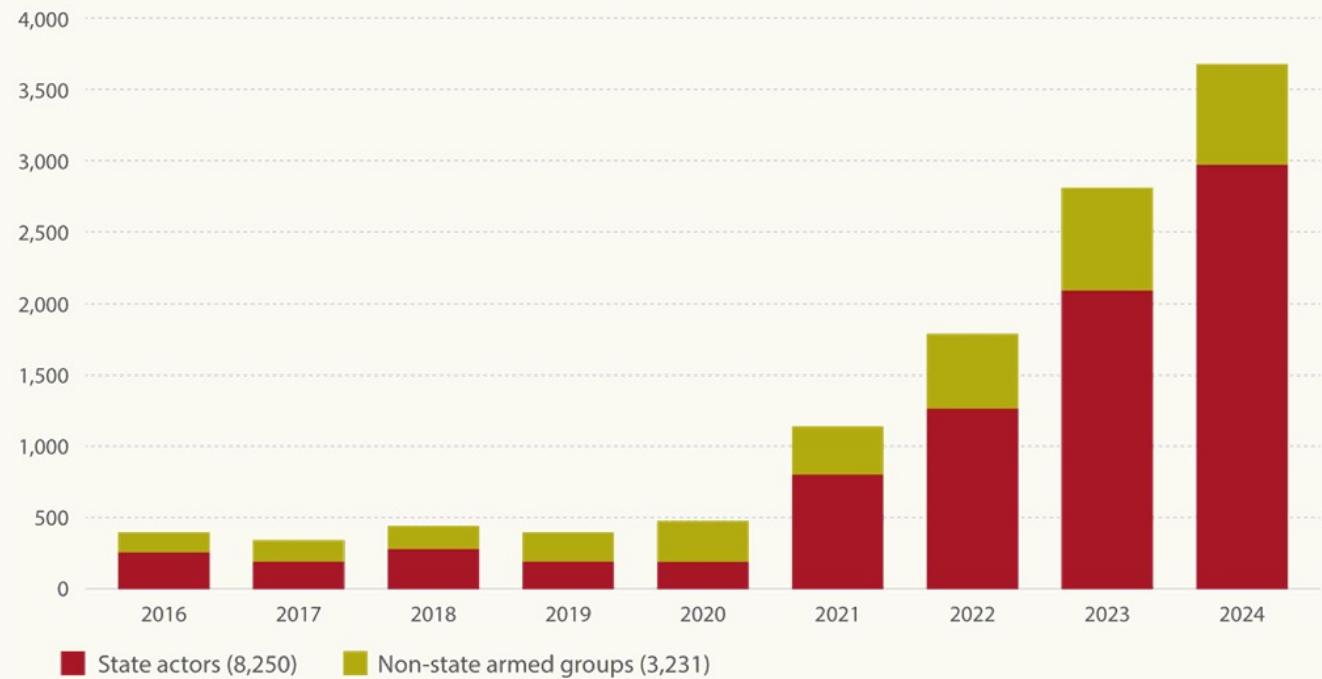
Analyses of attacks on healthcare to be understood in light of broader conflict dynamics

- Strategic logic of violence
- Perpetrators
- Targeting and intentionality

VIOLENCE BY STATE ACTORS

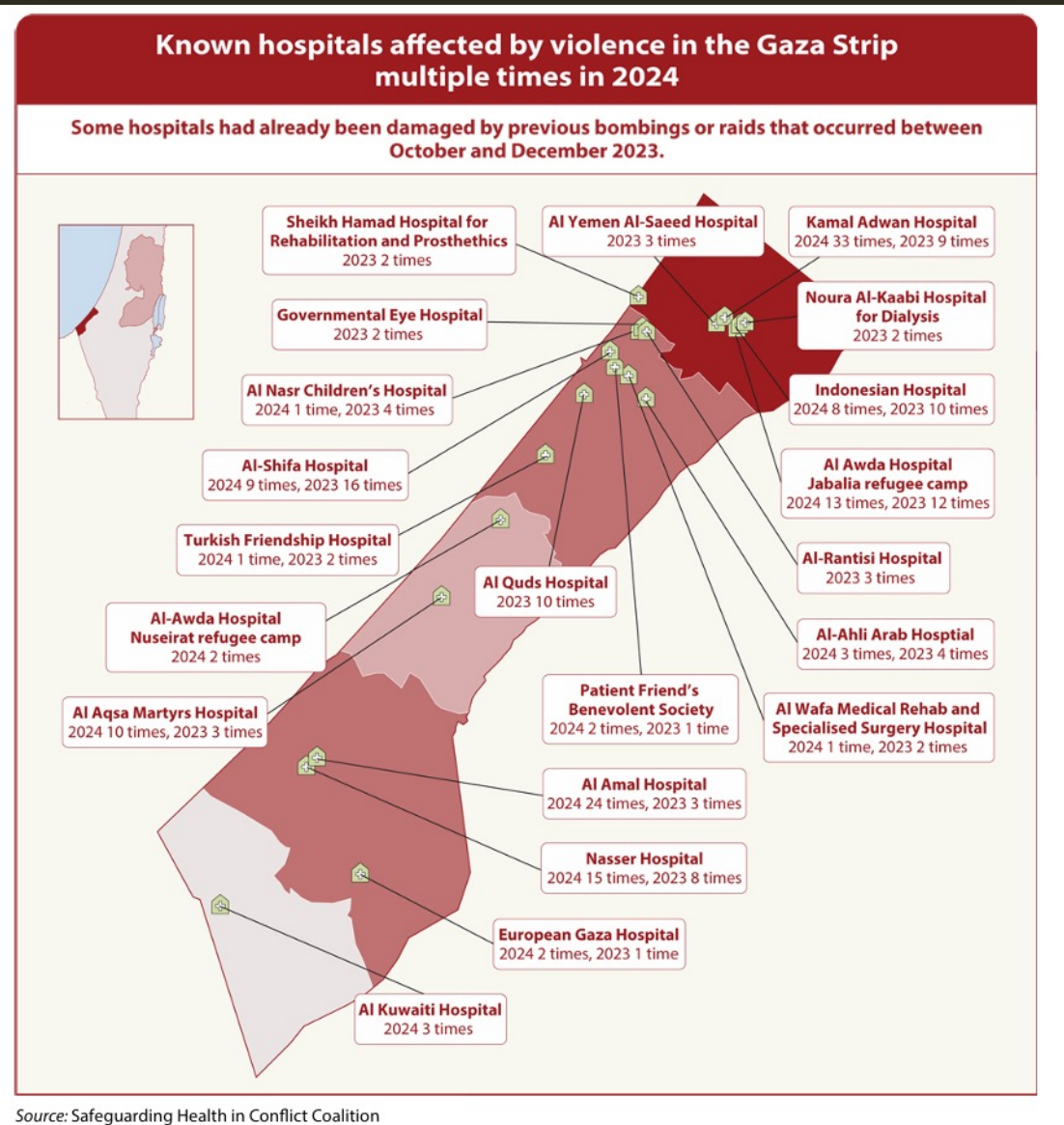
Reported incidents of violence against or obstruction of health, 2016 and 2024

Since 2022, incidents have increasingly been attributed to state actors, coinciding with escalating conflicts where health care almost immediately comes under attack.

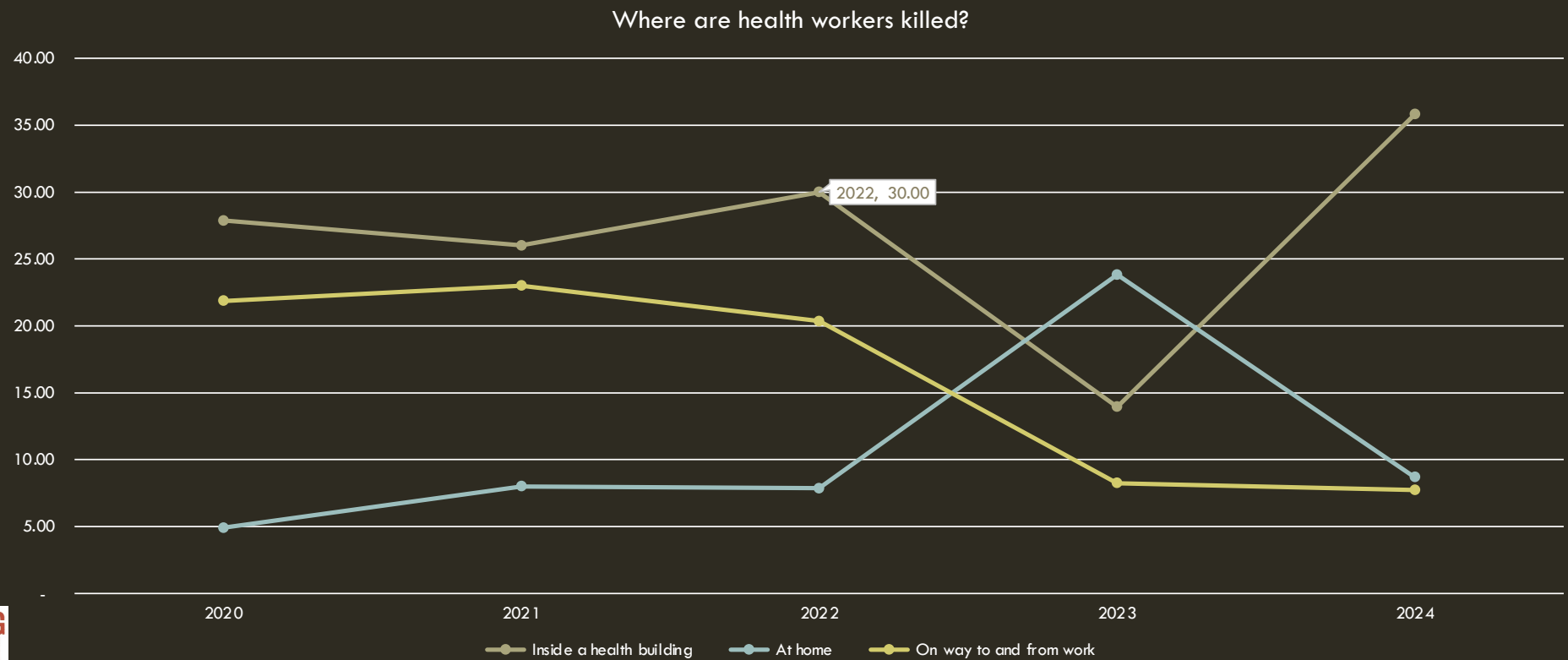


Source: Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition

MULTIPLE ATTACKS



CHANGES IN LOCATION OF HEALTH WORKER DEATHS



THANK YOU!

<https://riah.manchester.ac.uk/>