

WAR CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN: THE CRISIS IN GAZA – PALESTINE

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Abstract. *The ongoing war in Gaza has subjected women to grave violations, including sexual violence, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, and denial of essential services. These acts breach core principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). This study employs a doctrinal and interdisciplinary methodology to examine war crimes committed against women in Gaza through a gender-based lens, grounded in international legal and human rights frameworks. Despite existing legal protections for civilians, women in Gaza continue to suffer disproportionately, enduring physical harm, psychological trauma, and heightened economic vulnerability. This research explores documented violations, the erosion of international accountability, and the urgent need for effective global intervention. It also investigates humanitarian consequences such as the destruction of health infrastructure and disruption of social support systems, which compound women's suffering. Drawing on reports from judicial authorities and human rights organizations, the study highlights the failure to prosecute perpetrators and the inadequacy of current protection mechanisms. These gaps demand stronger legal enforcement, increased humanitarian support, and greater international advocacy. Urgent action is essential to prevent further abuses, ensure justice for victims, and reinforce protection for women in armed conflict zones like Gaza.*

Keywords: *Gaza Conflict, Gender-Based Violence, International Humanitarian Law, War Crimes, Women's Rights.*

ВОЕННЫЕ ПРЕСТУПЛЕНИЯ ПРОТИВ ЖЕНЩИН: КРИЗИС В СЕКТОРЕ ГАЗА – ПАЛЕСТИНА

***Аннотация.** Продолжающаяся война в секторе Газа подвергла женщин серьезным нарушениям, включая сексуальное насилие, принудительное перемещение, неизбежные нападения и отказ в предоставлении основных услуг. Эти акты нарушают основные принципы международного гуманитарного права (МГП), включая Женевские конвенции, Дополнительные протоколы и Римский статут Международного уголовного суда (МУС). В этом исследовании используется доктринальная и междисциплинарная методология для изучения военных преступлений, совершенных против женщин в секторе Газа, через призму гендера, основанную на международных правовых и правозащитных рамках. Несмотря на существующую правовую защиту гражданских лиц, женщины в секторе Газа продолжают несоразмерно страдать, испытывая физический вред, психологические травмы и повышенную экономическую уязвимость. В этом исследовании изучаются задокументированные нарушения, эрозия международной ответственности и настоятельная необходимость эффективного глобального вмешательства. В нем также изучаются гуманитарные последствия, такие как разрушение инфраструктуры здравоохранения и нарушение систем социальной поддержки, которые усугубляют страдания женщин. Опираясь на отчеты судебных органов и организаций по правам человека, исследование подчеркивает неспособность привлечь виновных к ответственности и неадекватность существующих механизмов защиты. Эти пробелы требуют более строгого соблюдения закона, увеличения гуманитарной поддержки и более активной международной пропаганды. Необходимы срочные действия для предотвращения дальнейших злоупотреблений, обеспечения справедливости для жертв и усиления защиты женщин в зонах вооруженных конфликтов, таких как Газа.А*

***Ключевые слова:** Конфликт в Газе, Гендерное насилие, Международное гуманитарное право, Военные преступления, Права женщин.*

1- Introduction

Armed conflicts have historically inflicted disproportionate suffering on women, subjecting them to violence, displacement, and deprivation. In Gaza, the ongoing conflict has exacerbated this reality, exposing women to systematic war crimes, including sexual violence, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, and the denial of essential humanitarian aid. Despite the presence of IHL, such as the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols and the ICC, which explicitly prohibit these

acts, women in Gaza continue to endure severe violations of their fundamental rights (Balachandran, 2015:179-183; Saleem, 2025: 3632-3636). The conflict has not only led to direct violence against women but has also eroded social structures, disrupted healthcare services, and deepened economic instability, leaving them vulnerable to long-term humanitarian and psychological consequences. Moreover, this research employs a qualitative and analytical approach to examine war crimes committed against women in Gaza and the effectiveness of international legal frameworks in addressing these violations (Kuttab, 2024: 252-260).

Furthermore, the gendered impact of war is particularly evident in Gaza, where women often become the sole providers for their families after the loss of male relatives. Forced evictions, home demolitions, and indiscriminate bombings have left many women homeless and without access to essential resources, increasing their risk of exploitation and abuse. Moreover, blockades and restrictions on movement have severely limited their ability to seek medical care, food, and shelter, with pregnant women and mothers facing particularly dire conditions (Souza, 2024: 349-351). Reports from human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have consistently documented these violations, highlighting the failure of the international community to intervene effectively and hold perpetrators accountable. While international legal frameworks theoretically provide protections for women in conflict zones, weak enforcement mechanisms and political obstacles have rendered these protections largely ineffective. Perpetrators often evade prosecution, leading to a culture of impunity that allows war crimes against women to persist (Saleem, 2025: 3632-3640). The ICC has recognized sexual violence, forced displacement, and indiscriminate attacks against civilians as war crimes, yet justice remains elusive for women in Gaza due to political resistance, lack of international cooperation, and challenges in evidence collection (Kuttab, 2024: 252-260).

This paper aims to examine the extent of war crimes committed against women in Gaza, analyze the failures of international accountability mechanisms, and propose policy recommendations to enhance protection, ensure justice, and prevent future violations. By shedding light on documented atrocities and legal shortcomings, this research underscores the urgent need for global intervention to safeguard women's rights and dignity in conflict zones. Without immediate and decisive action, the cycle of violence, displacement, and suffering will continue to devastate the lives of women in Gaza and beyond (Saleem, 2025: 3632-3641).

This research seeks to explore several critical questions concerning war crimes committed against women in Gaza.

It examines the nature and extent of these crimes, including sexual violence, forced displacement, and other forms of gender-based violence during the ongoing conflict. It further investigates how such acts constitute violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, particularly under the Geneva Conventions and the ICC. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of current international and regional mechanisms such as the ICC, United Nations bodies, and human rights organizations in documenting, investigating, and prosecuting these crimes. In addition, the research addresses the psychological, social, and economic consequences of these violations on women survivors, and how such impacts hinder their access to justice and long-term recovery. Finally, the study seeks to identify and recommend policy measures and legal reforms that can enhance protection, promote accountability, and provide sustained support for women affected by armed conflict in Gaza and other similar settings.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the nature and extent of war crimes committed against women in Gaza, including acts of sexual violence, forced displacement, and other forms of gender-based violence amid the ongoing conflict. It aims to analyze the relevant international legal frameworks particularly the Geneva Conventions and the ICC that prohibit such crimes and are designed to protect women in armed conflict. The study also seeks to assess the effectiveness of international and regional mechanisms, such as the ICC, United Nations bodies, and human rights organizations, in documenting, investigating, and prosecuting these violations.

Additionally, it explores the short- and long-term social, psychological, and economic impacts on women survivors in Gaza. Ultimately, the research aims to provide informed policy recommendations and propose legal reforms that enhance protection, ensure accountability, and offer sustained support to women affected by armed conflict in Gaza and other similarly affected regions.

Importance of the Research: The significance of this research lies in its urgent focus on one of the most underreported and devastating aspects of modern armed conflict: war crimes committed against women. In the context of Gaza, where ongoing violence and instability have created a protracted humanitarian crisis, women are disproportionately affected—not only as casualties of war but as direct targets of gender-based violence, exploitation, and systematic abuse. This research aims to shed light on these violations by providing a comprehensive legal and human rights analysis. It contributes to the growing body of academic and legal work that seeks to document atrocities, promote accountability, and support justice for victims. Given the limited access to formal justice mechanisms for Palestinian women, this study emphasizes the

need for stronger international intervention and effective legal redress. Furthermore, the research serves as a critical resource for policymakers, legal practitioners, human rights organizations, and scholars. By highlighting both the failures and potential of existing international frameworks, it encourages meaningful action to protect women in conflict zones, ensure accountability for perpetrators, and offer long-term support and empowerment for survivors. In sum, this study is not only timely and relevant it is a moral and legal imperative in the pursuit of justice and human dignity for women in Gaza and other conflict-affected regions.

Research Methodology: This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology, focusing primarily on the analysis of legal texts, international treaties, conventions, case law, and scholarly literature relevant to war crimes and the protection of women in armed conflict. The doctrinal approach allows for a systematic examination of the applicable legal frameworks, including IHL and the ICC. Primary sources such as the Geneva Conventions, United Nations reports, resolutions, and judicial decisions from international tribunals will be critically analyzed to determine the scope and application of legal protections afforded to women in conflict zones. Secondary sources, including academic articles, and legal commentaries, will support the interpretation and evaluation of these laws in the context of the Gaza crisis. This method is particularly suitable for exploring the legal consequences, enforcement mechanisms, and gaps in current international responses to war crimes against women. While the study is mainly doctrinal, it may also incorporate limited qualitative content analysis of documented cases, victim testimonies (where available), and human rights reports to contextualize legal findings within real-world impacts.

2- War Crimes Against Women: Definitions and Legal Frameworks

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 form the foundation of IHL, and these treaties expressly protect women in armed conflict. In recognition of women's specific needs, the treaties legally protect women against violence, abuse, and discrimination in international and non-international armed conflicts (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-83; Crawford, 2024: 221-228). The Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols provide essential legal protections for women in armed conflicts, addressing sexual violence, forced displacement, and access to humanitarian aid (Jamkhandi, 2022: 1-10). Article 27 explicitly prohibits rape, forced prostitution, and indecent assault, ensuring protection from gender-based violence. Recognizing the vulnerabilities of pregnant women and mothers (Goonsekere, 2017: 23-34), Article 14 prioritizes their access to medical care, food, and a

sanitary environment, while Article 76 of Additional Protocol I demands privileged treatment for detained pregnant women and mothers with children, discouraging their execution. Additionally, Article 49 prohibits the forced displacement or deportation of civilian communities, including women, safeguarding their right to remain in their homes. To further ensure survival in conflict zones, Article 55 mandates humanitarian relief, food, and medical attention for women in occupied territories. Despite these legal protections, women in conflict zones—such as Gaza—continue to be victims of sexual violence, forced displacement, and denial of humanitarian aid (Imtihani, 2024: 763-773). The lack of robust enforcement mechanisms and political obstacles enable perpetrators to act with impunity. For protection for women in conflict zones to be guaranteed, compliance with the Geneva Conventions must be strengthened. By prosecuting violators of the laws and enforcing the laws, the international community can foster greater protection, justice, and assistance for women in conflict zones (Zafar Abbas, 2024: 923-928).

The 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions extend further protection to civilians, including women, in international (Protocol I) and non-international (Protocol II) armed conflicts. The protocols recognize the disproportionate impact of war on women and enhance protection from violence, abuse, and denial of essential needs (Plachta, 2024). Key provisions for the protection of women in the other protocols, Protection from Sexual Violence and Inhumane Treatment, Article 76 of Additional Protocol I: Directly protects women against rape, forced prostitution, and indecent assault during armed conflict. Emphasizes the need for special respect and protection for women, particularly pregnant women and mothers of young children. Additionally, article 4(2)(e) of Additional Protocol II: prohibits outrages on personal dignity in terms of humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, and forced prostitution, particularly where such conflict involves non-state parties. Also, Protection of Pregnant Women and Mothers, Article 76(2) of Additional Protocol I: Advocates that pregnant women and mothers who have dependent children must be given priority in receiving medical care, aid, and protection. Article 6(4) of Additional Protocol II: Prohibits the killing of pregnant women and mothers of little children even if they are presumed to have committed a crime (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-73).

Protection from Forced Displacement, Article 17 of Additional Protocol II: Prohibits the forced displacement of civilians, particularly vulnerable individuals such as women and children, unless absolutely necessary to safeguard them. Access to Humanitarian Aid and Medical Care Article 70 of Additional Protocol I: Entitles women in conflict areas to humanitarian aid, food,

and medical supplies provided to them without discrimination. Article 7 of Additional Protocol II: Protects the right of women to appropriate health care, in particular maternal and reproductive health care (Fleck, 2021). Despite the strong legal measures taken under the Additional Protocols, weak implementation and political challenges leave women living in areas experiencing war continuing to face war crimes and human rights violations. Even in conflicts such as the ones in Gaza, women endure sexual violence, displacement, and denied access to health care despite these legal protections being in place. Lack of accountability and political obstacles further augment their vulnerability (Crowe, 2013: 320-334).

The 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions were designed to extend the protection of civilians, particularly women, in international (Protocol I) and non-international (Protocol II) armed conflicts. The protocols acknowledge the disproportionate impact of war on women and try to safeguard them against sexual violence, inhuman treatment, forced displacement, and denial of basic needs. Articles 76 of Additional Protocol I and 4(2)(e) of Additional Protocol II explicitly ban rape, prostitution, and humiliating treatment, and Articles 76(2) and 6(4) first prioritize pregnant women and mothers in receiving medical aid and protection. Furthermore, Article 17 of Additional Protocol II bans forced displacement, and Articles 70 and 7 guarantee women humanitarian assistance and maternal health care. However, despite such strong legal protections, poor implementation and political obstacles impede effective enforcement, rendering women in conflict areas like Gaza susceptible to repeated war crimes and human rights violations. Women remain exposed to sexual violence, displacement, and restricted access to health care, and political obstacles and impunity perpetuate their exposure. Strengthening the enforcement mechanisms and holding individuals accountable are still necessary to bridge the gap between legal frameworks and protection realities (Melzer, 2017: 184-188). Also, The ICC, adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2002, is a landmark international treaty that explicitly recognizes war crimes against women. It establishes legal accountability for those who commit gender-based violence in armed conflict, ensuring that such crimes are prosecuted as serious violations of international law (Ahmed, 2024: 60-69.).

The ICC defines war crimes in Article 8, including serious violations of the laws and customs of war and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. It criminalizes sexual and gender-based violence as separate war crimes when committed during international or non-international armed conflicts. 1. Sexual Violence as a War Crime, Article 8(2)(b)(xxii) and Article 8(2)(e)(vi) explicitly recognize sexual and gender-based violence as war crimes, including: Rape,

Sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, Enforced sterilization. Any other act of sexual violence of similar gravity, such crimes violate the Geneva Conventions and are grave breaches of IHL. 2. Attacks Against Civilian Women, Indiscriminate or targeted attacks against civilian women (Article 8(2)(b)(i) and 8(2)(e)(i)) are prohibited, especially those which cause forced displacement, homes demolished, and deprivation of basic necessities. In most conflict zones, for example, Gaza, women bear the brunt disproportionately of deliberate military strategy or indiscriminate bombing. 3. Forcible Transfers and Exploitation of Women, Article 8(2)(a)(vii) and Article 8(2)(e)(viii) criminalize the forcible deportation or transfer of civilians, with a disproportionate effect on women, leaving them to greater risks of sexual violence, human trafficking, and economic exploitation. 4. Denial of Humanitarian Aid to Women, Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) criminalizes the use of starvation as a method of war, including blocking access to humanitarian aid—a tactic that disproportionately affects pregnant women, mothers, and female-headed households in conflict zones (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-73; Alamuddin, 2010: 1219-1233; Knoops, 2018: 178-186).

Challenges in Implementing the ICC for War Crimes Against Women, Despite the ICC's strong legal framework, women in conflict zones continue to be subjected to systematic violence due to: Limited ICC jurisdiction, with some states refusing to accept the jurisdiction of the court. Political challenges and lack of cooperation by states and military forces. Challenges in getting evidence, particularly for sexual violence cases due to stigma and trauma. Failure to prosecute commanders and state officials, thereby permitting pervasive impunity. The Need for More Forceful Implementation, for enhanced accountability and justice for female victims of war crimes, the international community must: Strengthen the ICC role to investigate and prosecute gender-based war crimes. Pressure states to implement ICC judgments and facilitate the arrest of perpetrators. Ensure protection and support to victims, such as psychosocial support and access to legal aid. Raise international awareness of the ICC's role in preventing war crimes against women. By enactment of these legal steps, the ICC can play a significant role in the prevention of war crimes, protection of women in situations of armed conflict, and justice for survivors (Knoops, 2018: 178-196).

The ICC in Article 8 establishes war crimes, categorizing grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and serious international law violations as prosecutable offenses. Of them, sexual and gender-based violence is explicitly made a war crime under Articles 8(2)(b)(xxii) and 8(2)(e)(vi), criminalizing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and other

forms of sexual violence as criminal offenses (Hathaway, 2019: 44, 53). Moreover, attacks against civilian women (Articles 8(2)(b)(i) and 8(2)(e)(i))—including indiscriminate shelling, forced displacement, and deprivations of their homes—are strictly prohibited. The forced transfer and exploitation of women (Articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(e)(viii)) are most representative of the disproportionate impact on women, who are subject to human trafficking and economic exploitation even further (Lawrence, 2007: 20, 61). Moreover, the denial of humanitarian aid (Article 8(2)(b)(xxv)) is also a war crime since it aggravates hunger, medical abandonment, and suffering, and impacts disproportionately pregnant women, mothers, and woman-headed families in such devastated territories as Gaza (Arnold, 2020: 271-284). Apart from these legislative protections, the exercise of the ICC jurisdiction continues to be problematic due to state recalcitrance, political obstacles, challenges in presenting evidence, and immunity of high-ranking officials. Strengthening the mandate of the ICC requires greater investigative powers, international pressure on states to implement ICC rulings, enhanced protection and legal aid for victims, and greater awareness of the role of the ICC in preventing gender-based war crimes. Filling these gaps will enable the ICC to be a valuable instrument in ensuring accountability, preventing atrocities, and securing justice for women victims of war crimes (Arifuddin, 2022: 480-488).

3- Documented War Crimes Against Women in Gaza

The Gaza Strip, an area that has been beset for decades by ongoing cycles of violence and war, is one where women, especially, are subjected to a disproportionate and cruel effect. They have been subjected to all manner of violence, exploitation, and oppression, much of which constitutes war crimes under international law. They are the sexual violence, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, and the deprivation of life's necessities. The following describes the war crimes committed on women in Gaza under these headings, providing a glimpse into the bleak reality they endure in this land of conflict (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-73). Sexual violence has emerged as one of the most widespread and severe forms of abuse against women in Gaza, particularly during periods of intense military conflict. Though the reporting of sexual violence is often difficult due to social stigma, fear of retribution, and limited access to support services, numerous reports by organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the UN have highlighted the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence during conflicts in Gaza. In times of war, women are often deliberately targeted for sexual violence as a weapon of war (Naqvi, 2003: 583-606).

This has included cases of rape, sexual assault, and other forms of gender-based violence, often occurring in contexts where the law and order have broken down, and impunity reigns. The chaos and instability during military operations create an environment in which perpetrators can act with relative freedom, exploiting women in vulnerable situations (Almuhana, 2024:191-198).

Sexual violence in Gaza is not limited to direct assault; women also face widespread sexual exploitation and trafficking, particularly during periods of displacement when families are forced into refugee camps or makeshift shelters. Women, particularly young girls and the elderly, are at risk of being trafficked or coerced into prostitution. Human rights organizations have documented cases where women and girls in Gaza are subjected to sexual violence by both combatants and civilians in positions of power. Moreover, the trauma caused by sexual violence often leaves long-term psychological scars (Madar, 2023: 72-88). Many women suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Unfortunately, due to the lack of adequate mental health services in Gaza, particularly in conflict zones, many women do not receive the necessary support to heal from these traumatic experiences. The international community has largely failed to hold perpetrators accountable, further perpetuating the cycle of violence and abuse (Ribeiro, 2025: 616-623).

The displacement of civilians, particularly women and children, during military operations is another widespread war crime in Gaza. Forced displacement occurs when entire families are uprooted from their homes as a result of military strikes, air raids, or ground operations. In many cases, entire neighborhoods and villages are bombed or demolished, leaving women and their families without shelter and forcing them to seek refuge in overcrowded, unsafe areas (Mousavi, 2025: 420-434). The mass demolitions of homes, often as part of military strategies, particularly during Israeli military operations such as Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009) and Operation Protective Edge (2014), have left women in Gaza with no place to live. These demolitions have devastating consequences on the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of women, who are often the primary caregivers for children and elderly family members. Forced displacement places immense strain on women's ability to provide for their families and to access basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water (Procter, 2024: 2359-2383). Women who are displaced often live in makeshift shelters or refugee camps, where they are subjected to overcrowded conditions, poor sanitation, and increased risks of violence. These conditions create an environment where women are vulnerable to further abuse, including sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking (Ezzedine, 2019: 12-25). Furthermore,

the destruction of homes and community infrastructure exacerbates women's economic instability, as they lose their property, livelihoods, and access to resources. Displacement also leaves women without access to legal protections, as they are unable to rebuild their homes or reclaim lost property, and often face legal and bureaucratic hurdles in securing new housing. The stress of displacement can lead to severe mental health issues for women, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD, which are compounded by the constant uncertainty they face in the aftermath of losing their homes (Ari, 2023: 445-455).

Indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations are a core feature of many military operations in Gaza, and women are among the primary victims of these attacks. Under IHL, it is prohibited to target civilians or civilian infrastructure, yet women in Gaza continue to face deadly consequences from airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and other military actions that do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants. Women are often caught in the crossfire of military operations (Bidali, 2016). During periods of escalation, such as the Gaza Wars of 2008-2009, 2014, and 2021, entire neighborhoods were bombarded, resulting in the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, and marketplaces. These indiscriminate attacks have led to a high number of civilian casualties, with women making up a disproportionate percentage of the casualties. During these airstrikes and shelling, many women are killed or severely injured, with injuries ranging from broken bones to burns, amputations, and traumatic brain injuries. For the survivors, the consequences of these indiscriminate attacks are long-lasting. In addition to the physical injuries they endure, women are often left with significant psychological trauma. The constant threat of violence creates a pervasive sense of fear and insecurity, and women who survive such attacks are often left to rebuild their lives with limited resources, inadequate healthcare, and no access to justice for the violence they have experienced. Women, particularly those with young children or elderly family members, also bear a disproportionate burden of the aftermath of these attacks (Vecellio Segate, 2024:388-901). They are often the ones who must care for the injured, search for shelter, and tend to the needs of their families while dealing with their own grief, trauma, and injuries. The breakdown of social support systems and the destruction of healthcare infrastructure further exacerbates their vulnerability (Abdullahi, 2024: 447-456).

The blockade imposed on Gaza has resulted in widespread shortages of essential goods, including food, medicine, and medical supplies, which has severely impacted the ability of women to access basic services.

Healthcare, in particular, has been among the hardest-hit sectors, with hospitals and clinics overwhelmed or destroyed during military operations. The blockade restricts the flow of essential medications, and medical professionals struggle to provide adequate care due to shortages of both supplies and staff (Smith, 2024: 22-34). Women in Gaza, particularly pregnant women, are among the most vulnerable populations, as they often require specialized medical care, including maternal health services, which are frequently unavailable or inaccessible.

Maternal mortality rates in Gaza are significantly higher than in other regions due to the lack of healthcare infrastructure, restricted access to hospitals, and the inability to afford or access necessary treatments. Beyond healthcare, women in Gaza face acute shortages of food and clean water. The World Food Programme (WFP) has documented the widespread food insecurity in Gaza, with over half of the population, including many women, unable to meet their nutritional needs. This is exacerbated by the destruction of local agricultural infrastructure, which has been targeted in military operations. As a result, women and children are often left malnourished, which not only undermines their health but also affects their ability to recover from the psychological and physical trauma of war (Fliss-Isakov, 2025: 13-27; Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-83).

Shelter is another critical issue. The destruction of homes during airstrikes, combined with the difficulties of accessing building materials due to the blockade, leaves many women and their families homeless. In the absence of adequate shelter, women face heightened risks of exposure to the elements, sexual violence, and other forms of abuse (Abdullahi, 2024: 447-456). The loss of homes and livelihoods also has a profound impact on women's social standing and their ability to maintain their dignity in a society already suffering from economic instability and political conflict. The documented war crimes against women in Gaza reflect a deeply troubling and systematic pattern of violence, abuse, and neglect. Women in Gaza continue to endure the horrors of sexual violence, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, and deprivation of basic necessities, all of which are war crimes under international law (Awadallah, 2024). Despite the widespread documentation of these abuses, accountability remains elusive, and the international community has largely failed to act with the urgency and commitment needed to prevent further violations. The suffering of women in Gaza must be acknowledged and addressed as a matter of international human rights and humanitarian concern. Immediate action is required to provide protection, justice, and support to the women of Gaza, and to hold those responsible for these atrocities accountable (Mosleh, 2018:1-9; Deif, 2006).

4- The Humanitarian and Psychological Impact

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has caused profound humanitarian and psychological consequences for women. These impacts span physical, mental, and emotional health challenges, affecting not only the victims of direct violence but also those who suffer from the systemic collapse of infrastructure and support systems. Women in Gaza face unique challenges due to the intersection of gendered violence and the broader impacts of the war, resulting in long-lasting and often devastating consequences (Farajallah, 2024: 119-136). Furthermore, the physical health consequences for women in Gaza are severe and multifaceted. The indiscriminate violence during military operations, including airstrikes, shelling, and ground incursions, has led to widespread injury and death among women and girls. These injuries range from burns and broken bones to life-threatening conditions like traumatic brain injuries, internal bleeding, and amputations. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable, with many facing complications due to lack of access to necessary medical care. The destruction of medical infrastructure has resulted in high maternal mortality rates, as women are unable to access timely and appropriate obstetric and gynecological services (Niaz, 2014: 1-15).

The psychological impact on women in Gaza is equally catastrophic. Women who survive the direct violence of war often face a lifetime of trauma. PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders are prevalent among women who have witnessed or experienced violence. The constant threat of violence, displacement, and the loss of family members or homes leaves women in a state of perpetual fear and uncertainty. The lack of access to mental health services compounds these issues, as many women are unable to receive the care they need to heal (Abudayya, 2023: 1-10). This is particularly significant in a region where mental health awareness and services are underdeveloped and the stigma surrounding mental illness is high.

Moreover, the constant exposure to violence can lead to the normalization of trauma, where women may feel disconnected from their emotions, experience severe mood swings, or have difficulty forming or maintaining relationships. These mental health challenges are further exacerbated by the lack of social support and a highly stressful living environment where women are forced to care for their families in a state of perpetual crisis. The cumulative toll of these psychological wounds is profound and often untreated, leading to generational cycles of trauma that severely impact women's well-being and quality of life (Saleem, 2025: 3632-3644).

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has also led to the destruction of critical healthcare and social support systems, leaving women without access to essential services that are necessary for

their physical and mental well-being. Healthcare facilities have been targeted during military strikes, leading to the destruction of hospitals, clinics, and medical infrastructure that once provided vital services to the civilian population. Women, especially pregnant women, are disproportionately affected by the collapse of healthcare systems, as they rely heavily on access to maternal care, emergency medical services, and reproductive health services (Gostin, 2024:191-192). The destruction of hospitals has resulted in an overwhelming shortage of medical supplies, such as medicines, surgical equipment, and vaccines, further limiting women's access to healthcare. The breakdown of essential healthcare systems has led to a rise in preventable deaths, particularly among mothers and infants. Moreover, many women who sustain injuries in the conflict are unable to receive proper treatment or rehabilitation, leaving them with long-term physical disabilities that further compromise their quality of life (Irfan, 2024: 190-200).

Social support systems, which typically provide care for vulnerable individuals, have also been destroyed or severely weakened. The collapse of family structures and the destruction of community networks leave women isolated and without the support they need to cope with the emotional and psychological burden of war. Women in Gaza often serve as the primary caregivers for their families, and when social support systems break down, they face an additional burden of responsibility (Disabil, 2017: 555-565). This lack of social safety nets has forced many women to navigate the crisis alone, exacerbating feelings of isolation and vulnerability. The breakdown of education and community centers further isolates women and children, diminishing their opportunities for social engagement and support. Additionally, the blockade on Gaza restricts the flow of essential humanitarian aid, including food, clean water, and medical supplies, creating an environment where women struggle to meet even the most basic needs of their families. The inability to access necessary resources exacerbates the stress and trauma women face daily and limits their capacity to function in a meaningful way in both their personal lives and in society (Buheji, 2024: 157-172).

The socioeconomic impact of the ongoing conflict in Gaza is another critical consequence that disproportionately affects women. The destruction of infrastructure, including homes, schools, businesses, and essential public services, has led to widespread economic instability. Women, who are often the primary caregivers and providers for their families, face immense challenges in securing an income. Many women have lost their homes and livelihoods due to military operations, and the economic collapse in Gaza has left them with few opportunities for employment. This exacerbates the already dire financial situation that many women in Gaza face (Hammad, 2020:

1791-1810). As a result, many women are forced into poverty and financial dependency. Women who were once able to earn a living or run small businesses now face severe limitations in their ability to provide for themselves and their families. With the destruction of the local economy and the lack of access to education or vocational training, women are often relegated to subsistence living, with little hope of financial independence or mobility. This socioeconomic instability further entrenches the vulnerability of women, making them more susceptible to exploitation, including human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse (Hassoun, 2025: 124-143).

Furthermore, the economic instability has profound consequences for women's children. The inability to afford food, healthcare, and education has placed a significant strain on families, and children, particularly girls, are often the first to suffer. Girls are more likely to drop out of school due to financial constraints, leaving them without an education that could help them break the cycle of poverty and violence (Buheji, 2024: 157-172). The lack of educational opportunities not only limits their future prospects but also reinforces traditional gender roles that often keep women in domestic and caregiving roles, limiting their empowerment. Moreover, the stress and trauma caused by economic hardship also have long-term effects on family dynamics. Women in Gaza are frequently forced to take on the responsibility of caring for injured or traumatized family members, including husbands, children, and elderly relatives (Abudayya, 2023: 1-15).

This caregiving burden, combined with the constant stress of economic insecurity and physical danger, has led to widespread mental health issues within families. This can also result in disrupted family relationships, with many women reporting feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and isolation. The cumulative impact of these socioeconomic challenges leads to long-term instability for women and their families, further entrenching the cycle of poverty and violence in Gaza abuse (Hassoun, 2025: 124-143). Thus, the humanitarian and psychological impact of the conflict in Gaza on women is both profound and far-reaching. The physical and mental health consequences, the destruction of healthcare and social support systems, and the long-term socioeconomic effects have left women in Gaza in a state of crisis. These women face a daily struggle to survive amidst violence, deprivation, and trauma, with little access to the resources and support they need to rebuild their lives. Without a concerted effort by the international community to address these issues, the situation for women in Gaza will continue to deteriorate, perpetuating cycles of suffering for future generations (Disabil, 2017: 555-615).

5- Challenges of the War Crimes Against Women in Gaza, Palestine

The crisis in Gaza, marked by ongoing conflict and violence, presents significant challenges in terms of addressing and preventing war crimes against women. The myriads of complexities surrounding the situation not only exacerbates the suffering of women but also hinders efforts to protect them and ensure justice. Below are some of the key challenges that contribute to the escalation of war crimes against women in Gaza. Moreover, one of the primary challenges in addressing war crimes against women in Gaza is the lack of robust legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms (Sharifi Kia, 2023: 93-119). While IHL such as the Geneva Conventions and the ICC exist to protect civilians in conflict zones, these laws are often violated with impunity in Gaza. The lack of political will, coupled with the international community's limited ability to enforce these laws, leaves women without adequate legal protection. Furthermore, the ongoing political and military standoff between Israel and Palestine complicates the application of international law, as various actors involved in the conflict may not recognize or adhere to these legal standards (Balachandran, 2015:176-183). The judicial systems in Gaza itself are severely weakened due to the ongoing conflict and blockade, and legal resources are strained, preventing women from seeking justice. Even when war crimes are documented, perpetrators often evade accountability due to the failure of international institutions to intervene meaningfully. International bodies such as the ICC and the UN have limited influence on the ground, often hindered by geopolitical interests and lack of enforcement capacity. This creates a culture of impunity where perpetrators of gender-based violence, including sexual assault, trafficking, and forced displacement, are not held accountable (Ribeiro, 2025: 616-634).

The socio-economic devastation in Gaza is another challenge that intensifies the vulnerability of women to war crimes. Gaza has faced years of economic blockade, severely limiting access to basic goods, services, and humanitarian aid. The resulting poverty, lack of education, and diminished social infrastructure make it increasingly difficult for women to escape abusive situations or access support services (Hassoun, 2025: 124-143). The economic instability also forces many women to take on multiple burdens, including caring for displaced or injured family members, all while lacking the resources to provide for their families. This poverty often leads to increased rates of domestic violence, trafficking, and exploitation, as women are more likely to be coerced into harmful situations when they lack economic independence (Mihai, 2015: 855-860). The lack of proper healthcare services exacerbates the challenges for women who suffer from physical injuries or psychological trauma as a result of

the war. With hospitals overwhelmed, medical resources in short supply, and healthcare infrastructure frequently destroyed or damaged in the conflict, the healthcare needs of women, particularly those who are pregnant or have children, remain unmet (Farajallah, 2024: 119-136).

The violence inflicted upon women in Gaza is not only physical but also deeply gendered. Women are often targeted with sexual violence and other forms of gender-based atrocities, which are used as weapons of war. Rape, sexual assault, and sexual exploitation are prevalent forms of violence inflicted on women during conflict. Yet, these acts are often underreported due to the stigma surrounding sexual violence in the region. The cultural and societal norms in Gaza place significant pressure on women to remain silent, as rape and sexual abuse are often seen as bringing shame to families (Segate, 2024: 387-398). This stigma silences victims and prevents them from coming forward to seek justice or access the support they need.

In addition to sexual violence, women face a host of other gender-specific threats, such as forced marriage, displacement, and coercion. The breakdown of social order during the conflict increases the likelihood of women being forced into such circumstances. They are often viewed as property and as caregivers, expected to endure hardships for the sake of family survival. These gendered expectations complicate efforts to protect women from violence and limit their ability to act autonomously or seek refuge from abusers (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-93).

The destruction of Gaza's healthcare and social support systems presents another formidable challenge in addressing the war crimes against women. Since the onset of the conflict, healthcare facilities have been targeted, leaving women with little access to critical medical services, including maternal care, psychological support, and emergency medical treatments (Farajallah, 2024: 119-136). With hospitals destroyed or damaged in airstrikes and shelling, women cannot access the care they need, which leads to unnecessary deaths and long-term health complications. This destruction also severely limits women's ability to seek mental health services to cope with the trauma of violence. In conflict zones like Gaza, women are exposed to extreme stress, loss of family members, displacement, and physical violence. Without the means to access mental health care, women often suffer in silence, with long-term consequences for their emotional and psychological well-being (Mihai, 2015: 855-860). The ongoing trauma, combined with a lack of counseling and therapeutic support, leads to the perpetuation of mental health crises among women. In addition to healthcare, the social support systems that are typically in place to protect vulnerable populations, such as shelters, legal aid, and counseling services, have also been decimated in Gaza.

This leaves women with few safe spaces to seek refuge from violence, and the loss of community networks compounds the feeling of isolation and helplessness. The lack of resources and infrastructure makes it difficult to address the many dimensions of violence against women, including sexual violence, displacement, and domestic abuse, thus increasing their vulnerability to further harm (Irfan, 2024: 190-205).

A significant challenge in addressing war crimes against women in Gaza is the global apathy and inaction from the international community. Despite numerous reports by human rights organizations documenting atrocities committed against women, there is a lack of significant intervention from global powers and international institutions (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-93). Political considerations, strategic alliances, and the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often hinder decisive action from the UN and other global actors. For example, the failure of international bodies like the UN Security Council (UNSC) to take concrete action to hold perpetrators accountable for war crimes in Gaza has been a longstanding issue (Bukhari, 2025, 611-617; Sharifi Kia, 2023: 93-119). The geopolitical stakes and the involvement of powerful state actors with competing interests in the region often lead to inaction or weak responses to the suffering of civilians, particularly women. Additionally, the ongoing blockade and restrictions on Gaza limit the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide aid and assistance to those most in need. This international indifference allows the cycle of violence to continue unchecked and further perpetuates the vulnerability of women in Gaza. Without international pressure, stronger legal frameworks, or humanitarian intervention, the protection of women's rights remains insufficient, and impunity for war crimes continues to be the norm (Sharifi Kia, 2023: 93-119).

Women in Gaza are also significantly impacted by displacement as a result of the war.

The widespread destruction of homes, schools, and infrastructure has led to massive displacement, leaving women and children in overcrowded refugee camps or makeshift shelters, where they are vulnerable to further violence, including sexual assault, exploitation, and trafficking (Farajallah, 2024: 119-136). The lack of safety and privacy in these temporary shelters makes women especially susceptible to gender-based violence. Additionally, the ongoing displacement disrupts access to essential services, such as education and healthcare, further compounding the challenges faced by women and girls. In these refugee settings, women often face extreme difficulties in accessing basic necessities such as food, water, and sanitation, leading to increased vulnerability to diseases, malnutrition, and mental health crises.

The challenges of living in precarious conditions, coupled with the absence of legal protections and the ongoing instability, leave women in a continuous state of physical, psychological, and emotional distress. The challenges facing women in Gaza amidst the ongoing conflict are manifold and deeply entrenched. From legal and institutional barriers to the destruction of social infrastructure, the situation for women in Gaza is dire (Kuttab, 2024: 252-260). Despite the existence of international laws and frameworks designed to protect civilians, weak enforcement, political inaction, and the widespread prevalence of gender-based violence continue to exacerbate the suffering of women. The international community must urgently address these challenges by strengthening legal accountability, enhancing humanitarian aid, and creating safer spaces for women in conflict zones. Without such efforts, the cycle of violence and impunity will continue, and the rights and dignity of women in Gaza will remain at risk (Müller, 2022).

6- Conclusion

The war crimes committed against women in Gaza underscore a severe humanitarian and legal crisis, reflecting the persistent failure of international mechanisms to uphold justice and protect vulnerable populations in conflict zones. Women in Gaza continue to endure severe violations, including sexual violence, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, and deprivation of essential needs, despite the presence of IHL such as the Geneva Conventions and the ICC. These crimes not only constitute blatant breaches of human rights but also highlight the widespread impunity that allows perpetrators to escape accountability. The ongoing hostilities, military operations, and economic blockade have further deepened the vulnerabilities of women, limiting their access to healthcare, shelter, legal assistance, and social support systems. This research has critically examined the extent of war crimes committed against women in Gaza, identifying specific violations and analyzing their impact on the physical, psychological, and socio-economic well-being of victims. The study has also highlighted the failure of existing legal frameworks and international accountability mechanisms in prosecuting those responsible for these crimes. Reports from human rights organizations have consistently documented the suffering of women, yet global responses have remained insufficient, often hindered by political complexities, geopolitical interests, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. As a result, women in Gaza continue to suffer in an environment where justice is often delayed or entirely denied.

Beyond the immediate physical harm, war crimes against women in Gaza have long-term humanitarian consequences.

The destruction of healthcare infrastructure has deprived women of access to maternal care, emergency medical aid, and psychological support services, leaving them to cope with trauma without adequate assistance. Forced displacement has not only uprooted families but has also left women struggling to secure basic needs such as food, clean water, and safe shelter.

Furthermore, the breakdown of law and order has increased the risk of exploitation, gender-based violence, and economic hardship, pushing many women into cycles of poverty and instability. These challenges highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to protect and support women affected by war. The international community has a moral and legal obligation to address these war crimes and take decisive action to prevent further violations. Strengthening the enforcement of international legal frameworks, improving accountability mechanisms, and ensuring the prosecution of perpetrators are crucial steps toward justice. Additionally, increasing humanitarian aid, supporting local and international organizations working in Gaza, and advocating for policy reforms that prioritize the protection of women in conflict zones are essential to mitigating the impact of war. International courts, human rights bodies, and global leaders must work collaboratively to implement measures that safeguard the rights and dignity of women in Gaza. In conclusion, the suffering of women in Gaza due to war crimes must not be ignored. Immediate intervention is necessary to halt further atrocities, provide justice for victims, and establish stronger protective mechanisms for women in conflict-affected areas. Without meaningful action, the cycle of violence, impunity, and injustice will continue to devastate countless lives. This research emphasizes the urgent need for international accountability, policy reforms, and humanitarian initiatives that prioritize the rights and well-being of women in war zones. By fostering global awareness and collective responsibility, the world can take a crucial step toward ensuring that war crimes against women are addressed and prevented in the future.

7- Suggestions

1- Establish Independent International Investigations: To address the grave violations of women's rights during the Gaza conflict, it is imperative to form an independent international commission dedicated to investigating and documenting war crimes committed against women.

This commission should include gender experts, trauma-informed professionals, and legal specialists to ensure a comprehensive, empathetic, and accurate assessment of the crimes. A thorough investigation will provide credible documentation, necessary for holding perpetrators accountable and for future legal proceedings.

2- Strengthen Enforcement of IHL: The enforcement mechanisms of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute, need to be enhanced to prioritize violations against women in conflict zones. These legal frameworks offer crucial protections for civilians, especially women, during armed conflicts. Strengthening enforcement would ensure that gender-based crimes are addressed more effectively, and perpetrators are held accountable under international law. It is essential to create mechanisms that enable swift and coordinated action to prevent and respond to such violations.

3- Support Access to Justice for Victims: Access to justice is a fundamental right for survivors of war crimes. Palestinian women must be provided with legal aid, translation services, and secure, confidential reporting mechanisms to seek justice through international and regional courts, such as the ICC. Offering these services will allow victims to navigate the legal system and pursue accountability for the atrocities they have suffered. Establishing safe channels for reporting and seeking justice will empower women and help dismantle the barriers preventing them from receiving legal redress.

4- Ensure Gender-Sensitive Humanitarian Aid: Humanitarian aid efforts in Gaza must be tailored to address the specific needs of women and girls. Gender-sensitive aid programs should include reproductive health services, menstrual hygiene products, safe shelters, and protection from sexual violence, particularly in displaced communities. By ensuring that aid initiatives are designed with the distinct needs of women in mind, relief efforts can better mitigate the impact of the conflict on their health, security, and overall well-being. Gender-sensitive aid is crucial to ensuring that women have the resources and support they need to survive and recover.

5- Rebuild and Protect Women's Healthcare Infrastructure: The destruction of healthcare facilities in Gaza has disproportionately impacted women, who face heightened risks during conflict. Prioritizing the reconstruction of bombed healthcare infrastructure is essential to ensure women's access to maternal care, emergency services, and mental health support. These facilities must be protected under international law, guaranteeing that healthcare services remain available and accessible, especially for women. Restoring these services is critical to mitigating the long-term physical and psychological effects of war on women in Gaza.

These five suggestions provide a comprehensive framework to address the violations and suffering women endure in Gaza. They aim to ensure accountability, enhance justice mechanisms, and prioritize the protection and well-being of women both during and after conflict.

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