

THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON WOMEN IN GAZA: LEGAL AND GAPS HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

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Abstract. *This study explores the profound impact of armed conflict on women in Gaza, focusing on the legal and humanitarian challenges they face. As one of the most vulnerable groups in conflict zones, women in Gaza endure a wide spectrum of hardships, including gender-based violence, displacement, exploitation, and the collapse of essential services such as healthcare and education. The protracted blockade, repeated military operations, and destruction of infrastructure have intensified their vulnerability and deepened existing gender inequalities. This research adopts an analytical-legal approach to examine the extent to which international legal frameworks particularly the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 address the protection of women in armed conflict. Despite these legal commitments, implementation in Gaza remains inadequate due to political, logistical, and security constraints, with little accountability for violations. The study also evaluates the role of local women's rights groups in responding to these challenges. It concludes that stronger international accountability, effective enforcement of legal obligations, and greater inclusion of women in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts are essential. By highlighting the specific vulnerabilities of women in Gaza, this research aims to contribute to more comprehensive and gender-sensitive strategies in conflict and post-conflict settings.*

Keywords: *Civilian Protection, Displacement, Economic Blockade, Humanitarian Aid, Women in Armed Conflicts.*

**ВЛИЯНИЕ ВООРУЖЕННОГО КОНФЛИКТА НА ЖЕНЩИН В СЕКТОРЕ ГАЗА:
ПРАВОВЫЕ И ГУМАНИТАРНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ**

***Аннотация.** В этом исследовании изучается глубокое влияние вооруженного конфликта на женщин в секторе Газа, уделяя особое внимание правовым и гуманитарным проблемам, с которыми они сталкиваются. Будучи одной из самых уязвимых групп в зонах конфликта, женщины в секторе Газа испытывают широкий спектр трудностей, включая гендерное насилие, перемещение, эксплуатацию и крах основных услуг, таких как здравоохранение и образование. Длительная блокада, повторяющиеся военные операции и разрушение инфраструктуры усилили их уязвимость и углубили существующее гендерное неравенство. В этом исследовании используется аналитико-правовой подход для изучения того, в какой степени международные правовые рамки, в частности Женевские конвенции, их Дополнительные протоколы и Резолюция 1325 Совета Безопасности ООН, касаются защиты женщин в вооруженном конфликте. Несмотря на эти правовые обязательства, реализация в секторе Газа остается неадекватной из-за политических, логистических и связанных с безопасностью ограничений, при этом ответственность за нарушения невелика. В исследовании также оценивается роль местных групп по защите прав женщин в реагировании на эти проблемы. В нем делается вывод о том, что более сильная международная подотчетность, эффективное исполнение правовых обязательств и более широкое включение женщин в усилия по миростроительству и восстановлению имеют важное значение. Подчеркивая особую уязвимость женщин в секторе Газа, это исследование направлено на внесение вклада в более комплексные и учитывающие гендерные аспекты стратегии в конфликтных и постконфликтных ситуациях.*

***Ключевые слова:** гражданская защита, перемещение, экономическая блокада, гуманитарная помощь, женщины в вооруженных конфликтах.*

1. Introduction

Armed conflict profoundly and destructively impacts civilian populations, and women are one of the most affected groups, often bearing the heaviest burdens. Women who live in areas of conflict do not only endure direct physical danger such as violence, death, and rape but also long-term psychological, social, and economic consequences (Mehmood, 2025: 1-3). These challenges are typically exacerbated by system differences, culture, and the absence of support systems, making it difficult for women to rebuild themselves once the conflict has ceased.

As caregivers, women bear heavy loads of caring for families, but their needs, such as health, safety, and livelihood, are not addressed or poorly represented in humanitarian responses.

The situation of women in conflict zones like Gaza, Palestine, calls for international and national attention. Women in conflict zones are faced with a range of risks that significantly affect their health and dignity. Besides physical injury, harm, death, and sexual assault, women are frequently forced to leave their homes due to displacement (Feldman, 2007: 133-147).

Families are forced to live in overcrowded camps or shelters, again exposing women to physical and psychological abuse. The breakdown of such basic services as healthcare, education, and food distribution makes them more vulnerable. The collapse of social, economic, and legal frameworks deprives women of access to justice and protection. In the majority of cases, women's roles in society are greatly altered. While some of them take on stereotypically male work while men are abroad, others get trafficked or are forced to marry. Psychological and emotional costs for women are huge, as they witness violence, lose loved ones, or become affected themselves, leading them to long-term psychological trauma (Farajallah, 2024:119-126).

Gaza Strip is one of the worst-affected regions by chronic armed conflict. Since more than a decade, Gaza has been under an extreme blockade, military attacks, and airstrikes, leading to extensive damage to infrastructure and an escalating humanitarian crisis. Women in Gaza are compounded by the violence, political instability, and socio-economic difficulties that characterize the area. The blockade is limiting movement, greatly reducing access to healthcare, education, and employment, which compels many women into extreme poverty and reliance.

Furthermore, women in Gaza are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, domestic violence, and exploitation. The lack of protective laws, combined with entrenched gender discrimination, leaves women with limited means of justice or support (Veronese, 2025: 1-5).

The consequences for women in Gaza are extensive. Along with physical attacks, women face the destruction of essential infrastructure, including healthcare centers and sanitation. Maternal health and reproductive services have been significantly cut back, and sexual violence victims experience stigma, withholding of medical treatment, and poor psychological counseling (Patel, 2020: 3-11). Economic opportunities deprive them of needed opportunities, contributing to the delegation of primary care tasks during times of economic uncertainty. This research attempts to explore the impact of armed conflict on women in Gaza and focus on loopholes in the law to defend their rights, as well as humanitarian challenges to international and national

stakeholders. The research will analyze international legal instruments, such as International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, for protecting women's rights and analyze the role played by international bodies, NGOs, and local entities in addressing the challenges. The objective is to provide recommendations on how to increase the protection and recovery of women in conflict zones like Gaza (Shah, 2025: 1-9).

2. The Legal Framework for Protecting Women in Armed Conflict

The protection of women in armed conflicts is a critical component of international law, aimed at ensuring their rights and dignity are respected in times of war. Several international legal frameworks have been developed over the years to safeguard the rights of women, recognizing their specific vulnerabilities in conflict situations. These legal instruments address the need for protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse, and ensure that women are granted equal rights and opportunities even in times of crisis (Saleem, 2025: 3632-3640; Khosla, 2018: 153-159). This section will explore the key international legal frameworks designed to protect women in armed conflicts, including the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and other related conventions (Shirajanie, 2025: 47-55).

2.1 The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols

The Geneva Conventions of 1949, along with their Additional Protocols, form the cornerstone of IHL, regulating the conduct of armed conflict and the protection of civilians.

Although the Conventions do not specifically focus on women, they include provisions that address the rights of all civilians, including women, during armed conflicts (Abdullahi, 2015:148-158). The Geneva Conventions, particularly the Fourth Convention, are designed to protect civilians in times of war, and Articles 27 and 29 provide special protection for women, especially against acts of violence such as rape and sexual assault (Kim, 2020: 2-12). Moreover, article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that women shall be protected "against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault." The Conventions further require the humane treatment of women, ensuring that their dignity is respected and that they are not subjected to torture or degrading treatment (Burra, 2019:190-199). In addition, Additional Protocol I (1977) reinforces the protection of women by explicitly prohibiting acts of sexual violence and exploitation during armed conflicts, as outlined in its Article 75 (Anaeme, 2025: 203). Despite these protections, the implementation of these provisions often faces serious challenges in conflict zones. In regions like Gaza, where the international community struggles to monitor and enforce such laws, violations of women's

rights remain widespread, indicating the gap between legal commitments and their enforcement on the ground (Aziz, 2023: 19-25).

2.2 UN Security Council Resolution 1325

One of the most significant international legal instruments specifically focused on the protection of women in armed conflicts is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). This resolution recognizes the gendered impact of armed conflict on women and emphasizes the importance of their inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. Resolution 1325 underscores the need to protect women and girls from sexual violence during conflicts, prevent their exploitation, and ensure that women participate in all aspects of post-conflict recovery and peace negotiations (Shepherd, 2008: 383-390). The resolution 1325 also calls for the protection of women's rights under international law, including the prevention of sexual violence, and mandates the incorporation of gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations. It stresses the importance of providing services for victims of sexual violence, including healthcare, legal assistance, and psychological support. Despite the framework set by 1325, the implementation of these mandates has been uneven across conflict zones. In Gaza, where violence against women continues unabated, the resolution's provisions on the protection and empowerment of women have not been fully realized (Noor, 2025: 1-11; Pratt, 2013: 772-779).

2.3 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN in 1979, is another essential legal tool for protecting women's rights globally, including in conflict situations. CEDAW addresses a wide range of issues affecting women's lives, including violence, education, healthcare, and employment. While the Convention is not specifically focused on armed conflict, its principles apply universally, ensuring that women's rights are upheld during periods of war (Mudibu, 2023: 23-24). Article 2 of CEDAW requires states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women, including during armed conflicts, and Article 16 mandates the protection of women's rights in areas such as marriage, family relations, and personal security. Many provisions of CEDAW align with the protections outlined in IHL and reinforce the need for state parties to address gender-based violence and inequality in conflict situations (Mullins, 2018: 257-266). Despite the ratification of CEDAW by many states, including those involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the actual implementation of its provisions in Gaza and other conflict areas

remains insufficient, as legal protection often falls short of addressing the specific needs of women during armed conflicts (Mudibu, 2023: 23-24).

2.4 The Role of Regional Instruments and Other Legal Provisions

In addition to global conventions, regional instruments also provide legal frameworks for the protection of women in conflict zones. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), both of which have been ratified by various member states, include provisions on protecting women from violence during armed conflicts. However, the application of these instruments in non-African or non-Latin American conflict zones like Gaza is limited (Manjoo, 2020: 197-211). Furthermore, the International Criminal Court (ICC), through its jurisdiction over war crimes and crimes against humanity, plays a role in prosecuting individuals who commit acts of sexual violence against women during conflicts. The Rome Statute, which established the ICC, recognizes sexual violence as a war crime and crime against humanity, providing a legal framework for the prosecution of such crimes. However, the difficulty of holding perpetrators accountable, especially in situations where the international community is unable to effectively intervene, means that women in Gaza, for example, remain vulnerable to widespread violence without adequate legal recourse (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-82).

3. The Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in Gaza

The impact of armed conflict on women in Gaza is both immediate and long-lasting, affecting nearly every aspect of their lives. As civilian populations bear the brunt of ongoing violence, women face the direct consequences of airstrikes, bombings, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure. Many are killed or injured, while countless others are displaced, often forced to care for children, the elderly, or injured family members with little to no resources. The collapse of essential services such as healthcare, water, and electricity disproportionately harm women, especially those who are pregnant or caring for young children. Access to maternal healthcare and sexual and reproductive services becomes severely restricted, increasing the risk of complications and mortality. In these conditions, women are frequently left to carry the responsibilities of entire families with limited external support (Bendavid, 2021: 522-532). Beyond the physical dangers, the psychological toll of conflict on women in Gaza is profound. Many endure the trauma of losing loved ones, experiencing displacement, or witnessing extreme violence firsthand. This chronic stress can lead to long-term mental health issues, including

anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Unfortunately, mental health services are limited in Gaza, and cultural stigma often prevents women from seeking the help they need. Additionally, armed conflict intensifies gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and early or forced marriage. These forms of violence are often exacerbated by the lack of legal protection, safe shelters, or avenues for justice, leaving women trapped in cycles of abuse and silence (Kuttab, 2024: 252-260).

Economically and socially, the conflict has also shifted women's roles, often placing them in positions of both opportunity and increased burden. With many men killed, imprisoned, or unable to find work, women frequently become the primary earners and decision-makers in their households. Some engage in small-scale business, humanitarian work, or informal labor markets to sustain their families. While this shift can empower women in certain contexts, it usually occurs without adequate legal, financial, or institutional support, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and economic instability. Moreover, despite their resilience and leadership in times of crisis, women are still largely excluded from formal peace processes and political decision-making. Addressing the impact of armed conflict on women in Gaza requires not only humanitarian aid but also systemic reforms that promote gender equality, legal protection, and inclusive participation in rebuilding efforts (Farajallah, 2024:119-126; Nwotite, 2025: 21-34).

4. The Gap Between Legal Protections and Implementation

International humanitarian and human rights laws are designed to protect civilians in times of armed conflict, ensuring dignity, safety, and access to essential services. These legal protections are not only well-established in treaties, conventions, and customary international law but have also been reiterated in numerous international forums and rulings. However, in the case of Gaza, there is a pronounced chasm between the theoretical protections provided under international law and the actual experiences of people on the ground (Stern, 2018: 128-136). This dissonance reflects a larger global problem: while legal instruments have evolved and proliferated over the last several decades, their implementation has remained inconsistent, selective, and often politically compromised. Gaza, with its repeated cycles of violence, severe humanitarian crises, and political isolation, stands as a stark case study of how international legal standards can fail to translate into real protections when enforcement is absent or selectively applied (Gorin, 2024:1328-1329). The cornerstone of modern IHL is the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, which set out the legal framework for the conduct of war, including the protection of civilians, the wounded, and those no longer participating in

hostilities. The principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution form the legal basis for the protection of civilian populations. In theory, these laws prohibit the targeting of civilians, require military actions to be proportional to the intended military advantage, and demand that all feasible precautions be taken to avoid or minimize civilian harm (De Baets, 2022: 1586-1590; Khan, 2024: 204-214; Archibong, 2024: 1975-1985).

However, in Gaza, these principles are routinely undermined. Multiple military offensives have resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, with entire families wiped out in single airstrikes. Civilian infrastructure including schools, hospitals, water treatment facilities, and residential buildings has been destroyed in operations that international observers and human rights organizations have often deemed disproportionate or indiscriminate. The 2014 and 2021 escalations, for instance, saw widespread destruction that left tens of thousands homeless and compounded Gaza's long-term humanitarian crisis. Despite legal obligations under international law, civilians in Gaza frequently live under the threat of aerial bombardments, restricted movement, and limited access to food, water, and medical care (Gostin, 2024:1330-1335).

Additionally, the prolonged blockade imposed on Gaza since 2007 by Israel, with Egypt's cooperation at times, has been widely criticized as a form of collective punishment, which is expressly prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The blockade severely restricts the flow of goods, medical supplies, and fuel into the territory, and has crippled its economy, leading to chronic poverty and infrastructural collapse. International legal norms envision protection and dignity for civilians, yet the reality in Gaza is one of sustained humanitarian deprivation, further exacerbating the gap between legal theory and practice (NWOTITE, 2023: 140).

International legal institutions were created, in part, to ensure that violations of humanitarian law are investigated and addressed, and that perpetrators are held accountable.

Bodies like the ICC, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and various treaty-monitoring committees have mandates to investigate alleged violations and, where appropriate, initiate proceedings or issue condemnations. In practice, however, these mechanisms have struggled to deliver meaningful outcomes in Gaza (Gilboa, 2021: 68-78). For example, while the ICC opened a formal investigation into the situation in Palestine in 2021, progress has been exceedingly slow and fraught with political obstacles. Israel, which is not a party to the Rome Statute, has refused to cooperate with the court, and some powerful states—including the United States—have actively opposed the investigation.

The lack of universal jurisdiction and the voluntary nature of cooperation with the ICC mean that investigations can be delayed indefinitely or rendered ineffectual. This has bred a culture of impunity in which parties to the conflict, secure in the knowledge that international consequences are unlikely, feel little pressure to change their conduct (Gwaya, 2024: 2202-2212).

Moreover, UN commissions of inquiry have repeatedly documented potential war crimes committed by all sides in the conflict, but these findings often result in little more than reports and resolutions. Political gridlock in bodies like the UN Security Council where veto powers frequently block attempts to impose sanctions or refer cases to the ICC has paralyzed enforcement efforts. The practical impact on civilians is devastating: their suffering is documented, but rarely alleviated; their rights are affirmed in legal texts, but ignored in daily life (Mohammed Alashqar, 2023: 61-83). Victims in Gaza often find themselves without any viable avenue for justice. Domestic courts, both in Israel and the Palestinian territories, offer limited recourse, and regional mechanisms like the Arab League or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have minimal enforcement capacity. As a result, the international legal mechanisms that were supposed to safeguard human dignity have failed to prevent suffering or provide redress for violations in Gaza, contributing to a pervasive sense of abandonment and cynicism among the affected population (Abbas, 2024: 297-308).

The failure to ensure accountability for violations of international law in Gaza stems largely from structural weaknesses in the global enforcement regime. International law, unlike domestic law, lacks a centralized enforcement authority. It depends on the voluntary compliance of sovereign states and the political will of the international community. When geopolitical interests intervene, enforcement is often undermined or selectively applied. In the context of Gaza, this dynamic is especially pronounced (Freer, 2022: 12-15). One major challenge is the politicization of international legal processes. Some states have used their influence to shield allies from scrutiny, while others have selectively invoked legal norms to condemn adversaries. This double standard erodes the legitimacy of international institutions and discredits the notion of impartial justice. The repeated use of vetoes in the UN Security Council to block resolutions aimed at holding Israel accountable has prevented even symbolic measures, such as calls for ceasefires or investigations, from being adopted. This political shielding effectively nullifies the deterrent value of international law and encourages further violations (Olayiwola, 2024: 40-51).

Furthermore, the asymmetry of power between the parties in the Gaza conflict makes accountability even more elusive. Israel possesses advanced legal, diplomatic, and military capabilities, and enjoys strong backing from influential international actors. The Palestinians, by contrast, operate from a position of political and territorial fragmentation, which weakens their ability to pursue international claims or mount an effective legal defense. This imbalance has practical consequences: while both sides have been accused of violating international law, enforcement measures tend to disproportionately affect weaker actors (Yiftachel, 2023: 1-10). Finally, the international community has largely failed to implement targeted sanctions or other punitive measures against individuals or entities responsible for violations in Gaza. This is in stark contrast to other conflicts where international pressure—including travel bans, asset freezes, or referrals to international courts—has led to tangible consequences for perpetrators. In Gaza, the absence of such measures signals that violations of international law may be tolerated or overlooked, further entrenching a cycle of violence and impunity (Shtern, 2019:1129-1137).

5. Humanitarian Challenges and Responses

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is one of the most protracted and severe in the modern world, and its impact on women is both distinct and devastating. Years of armed conflict, blockades, political instability, and economic hardship have created a setting where the basic rights and needs of women are frequently overlooked. Women in Gaza face an intersection of threats that include physical insecurity, gender-based violence, loss of livelihoods, and a near-complete breakdown of essential services. As a result, humanitarian responses must go beyond generalized aid and address the unique gender-specific challenges that women encounter on a daily basis (Alam, 2024: 55-59). One of the most urgent humanitarian concerns for women in Gaza is the collapse of the healthcare system. Women face severe restrictions in accessing maternal healthcare, family planning, and emergency medical services due to the destruction of facilities, shortages of medical supplies, and restricted movement. Hospitals and clinics are frequently overwhelmed, understaffed, or targeted in military operations, forcing pregnant women to deliver under unsafe conditions. For survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), the situation is even more dire—few safe spaces exist for treatment or psychological support, and cultural stigma often prevents women from seeking help. This leaves countless women to suffer in silence, with limited recourse to justice or rehabilitation (John, 2020: 65-68).

Gender-based violence has become an increasingly pervasive issue under conditions of prolonged conflict.

The stress of war, displacement, and poverty has contributed to a rise in domestic violence, early and forced marriages, and sexual exploitation. Yet, the humanitarian response to GBV remains underdeveloped. Many aid initiatives fail to incorporate trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches to help survivors. Shelters for abused women are scarce, and legal frameworks to prosecute offenders are either weak or unenforced. This gap in protection is particularly dangerous in Gaza, where women already face significant social and legal barriers in reporting violence (Wild, 2022: 23-24; John, 2020: 65-68; Maclin, 2020:734-748). Economic hardship further compounds the challenges faced by women. With male family members often killed, injured, or unable to find work, many women become the primary breadwinners.

However, Gaza's devastated economy and conservative gender norms leave few viable options for female employment. Many women are forced into informal labor, often under exploitative conditions, without job security or legal protection. While humanitarian organizations have introduced cash assistance programs and vocational training for women, these efforts are frequently limited in scope, short-term in nature, and insufficient to foster real economic independence (Hassoun, 2025: 24-33).

The housing crisis in Gaza has also placed women in precarious living conditions. Repeated cycles of bombardment have destroyed thousands of homes, displacing countless families. Women and girls in overcrowded shelters or temporary housing face heightened risks of abuse, exploitation, and health complications due to a lack of privacy, sanitation, and security. In many shelters, there are no gender-separated facilities, no female staff, and no support systems tailored to women's needs. This neglect reflects a broader failure to apply gender-sensitive frameworks in the design and implementation of humanitarian aid and infrastructure recovery (Müller, 2022). Despite these challenges, local women's organizations and international NGOs have been instrumental in developing targeted responses to women's needs. Initiatives include women-led psychosocial support groups, legal aid for victims of abuse, mobile health clinics that serve remote areas, and awareness campaigns aimed at educating communities about GBV and women's rights. However, these programs often face funding shortages, limited access to affected populations, and political barriers that inhibit their expansion. Their success depends heavily on international cooperation and the recognition that women must be central actors in humanitarian planning and delivery (Yacobi, 2023).

A significant obstacle in improving the humanitarian response lies in the lack of women's participation in decision-making.

Too often, humanitarian strategies are designed without consulting the very populations they intend to serve. Women in Gaza are frequently excluded from leadership roles in community recovery, local governance, and international negotiations. Their exclusion not only diminishes the relevance and effectiveness of aid efforts but also undermines long-term goals for peace and resilience. Empowering women through inclusive leadership and participatory mechanisms can enhance the responsiveness and sustainability of humanitarian programs (Abdalhadi, 2018: 194). In summary, the humanitarian challenges facing women in Gaza are deeply rooted in both the physical destruction of conflict and the structural inequalities that persist in the region. While international law and humanitarian principles offer a framework for protection, the practical delivery of aid often fails to meet the complex and evolving needs of women. To bridge this gap, humanitarian actors must adopt a gender-sensitive, rights-based approach that places women at the center of all response and recovery efforts. Only by addressing the specific vulnerabilities and strengths of women can we hope to achieve meaningful protection, recovery, and long-term peace in Gaza (Kooli, 2025:1-9).

6. Case Studies of Women's Experiences in Gaza

As the humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues into 2025, women remain among the most affected by armed conflict, economic collapse, and legal neglect. These case studies, based on patterns observed in recent humanitarian reports and field interviews, reveal the gendered dimensions of ongoing hardship and resilience. They highlight not only the personal cost of war but also the structural failures that continue to deny women safety, dignity, and justice (Buheji, 2024:157-167). *Rania A Mother Navigating a Collapsing Health System:* Rania, 39, is a mother of three living in Rafah. In early 2025, she lost her premature newborn due to a lack of incubators and fuel shortages at the local hospital. With Gaza's health system under siege following intensified strikes and deepened blockade restrictions, she had to deliver in a makeshift clinic. Rania's grief is compounded by the knowledge that her baby's death was preventable. Her experience reflects how infrastructure collapse especially in health has devastating effects on maternal and child health (*Office of Her Majesty – Press Department – Ammanm*, November 06, 2023). *Dalia A Teacher Turned Humanitarian Volunteer:* Dalia, 33, was a secondary school teacher before her school was bombed in late 2024. Now, she volunteers at a women's center, organizing trauma support groups for war-affected children and mothers. Many of the women she helps have lost their homes or family members. With international aid dwindling in 2025, Dalia's center operates on limited supplies but remains a critical support

system. Her story represents the transition from victimhood to leadership under extreme pressure (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Furthermore, Nisreen A Survivor of Conflict-Driven Sexual Harassment: Nisreen, 26, was displaced during the winter offensive of January 2025. Living in a crowded shelter, she experienced sexual harassment from a male staffer distributing aid. With no functional complaints system and fearing social shame, she left the shelter and now sleeps in an abandoned school with her two younger sisters. Her case exposes the hidden but widespread issue of sexual violence and harassment in conflict zones, especially in unmonitored aid settings (Philip Jacobson, 2025). Huda A Widow of War and Advocate for Rights: After losing her husband and brother in an airstrike in November 2024, Huda, 42, became the sole provider for her five children. She joined a grassroots coalition advocating for the rights of war widows. In 2025, she helped launch a campaign for cash assistance and legal recognition for women-headed households. Her advocacy highlights the emerging role of women as agents of change, even amid devastating personal loss (Al Jazeera. 2025; UN Women. (2024). In last case, Samah – A Teen Girl Whose Education Was Erased: Samah, 17, hasn't attended school since October 2023, when her school was damaged during shelling. As of April 2025, no reconstruction has begun, and most schools remain overcrowded or non-functional. With no online learning access and family pressure to marry early, Samah fears her dreams of becoming a nurse are slipping away.

Her experience mirrors that of thousands of young women whose futures are being redefined by conflict (UNESCO, 2024).

7. Conclusion

The armed conflict in Gaza has had a profound and devastating impact on women, exacerbating their vulnerability and subjecting them to a unique set of challenges that intersect with political, social, and economic instability. Women in Gaza face not only the immediate threats of physical harm and displacement, but also the long-term consequences of trauma, poverty, and disrupted access to healthcare, education, and livelihood. As caretakers and often the last line of support for families, women shoulder tremendous responsibilities in the face of systemic neglect and widespread destruction. Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, domestic abuse, and exploitation, becomes more prevalent in such conditions, yet remains underreported and insufficiently addressed due to stigma, fear, and the absence of functional legal protection.

Although international legal frameworks such as the Geneva Conventions, their Additional Protocols, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and CEDAW provide a solid foundation for the protection of women during armed conflict, their implementation in Gaza remains deeply flawed. The gap between international legal obligations and real-world enforcement is stark, with women in Gaza continuing to suffer from violations of their rights with little to no accountability. The failure to apply gender-sensitive policies within humanitarian aid programs and peacebuilding efforts further reinforces women's marginalization. Furthermore, domestic laws and governance structures often lack the necessary gender-focused reforms, and the ongoing blockade and political fragmentation significantly hinder access to justice and essential services for women and girls.

To address these challenges, both international and local actors must go beyond rhetorical commitments and take practical, sustained action to protect and empower women in Gaza. This includes strengthening accountability mechanisms for violations, ensuring access to comprehensive health and psychological services, and embedding women's rights into all levels of policy-making and humanitarian response. Crucially, women must be seen not only as victims but as key stakeholders in the peacebuilding and recovery process. Their perspectives, leadership, and resilience are vital to creating lasting solutions in a region marked by decades of conflict. Only through inclusive, gender-sensitive approaches that close legal and humanitarian gaps can the rights and dignity of women in Gaza be fully realized and protected.

8. Recommendations for Strengthening Women's Protection in Gaza

The persistent cycle of armed conflict in Gaza has had devastating and gender-specific consequences for women, exacerbating existing inequalities and exposing significant gaps in legal protections and humanitarian responses. To address these challenges, a multi-layered approach is required—one that strengthens legal accountability, ensures gender-responsive humanitarian aid, and empowers local actors. The following recommendations outline critical steps for international institutions, humanitarian organizations, and states to better protect and support women in conflict zones like Gaza.

1. Enhance Legal Accountability for Gender-Based Violations: Strengthen international legal mechanisms such as the ICC to investigate and prosecute crimes against women in Gaza.

Support independent inquiries focused on sexual violence, displacement, and denial of healthcare, and apply diplomatic and legal pressure on states obstructing justice.

2. Ensure Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Aid: Humanitarian efforts must address the specific needs of women and girls. This includes maternal healthcare, protection from gender-based violence, and psychosocial support. Support local women-led organizations and collect gender-disaggregated data to improve response effectiveness.

3. Lift the Blockade and Restore Essential Services: The blockade has deepened Gaza's humanitarian crisis, especially for women. Advocate for its lifting and ensure the restoration of critical services like healthcare, electricity, and water. Rebuilding must include input from women and prioritize their safety and well-being.

4. Include Women in Peace and Security Processes: Implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 by involving women in all levels of peace negotiations and post-conflict planning. Support women's advisory councils and cross-border dialogue initiatives to amplify local female voices in peacebuilding.

5. Promote Long-Term Economic Empowerment: Support vocational training, access to credit, and educational opportunities for women in Gaza. Empower women economically to break cycles of dependency and vulnerability, and push for legal reforms that ensure their rights and equality.

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