

Israeli women have testified to being sexually assaulted on October 7 was debunked from top to bottom)


Israel refused to participate in an independent UN investigation on the sexual assault on Oct 7, and refused to interview any survivors. The UN investigation found Israel's allegations.

Israel is now so desperate for rape pro
prisoners into confessing to sexual a
committed thegrayzone.com/2024

Roger Waters told the truth
brigades are melting down

This Post is from an

 MARIA ZAKHAROVA:

 **MARIA ZAKHAROVA:**
"Imagine what will happen when everyone finally realizes what has long been clear to us—that Bucha was a horrific staged event, orchestrated by Zelensky at the instigation of the West?"
[Show more](#)

it's obvious to everybody that it's Hasbara.
she found out she was raped few m

she was raped few months after being released 😭😭😭😭

the evidence is not 'overwhelming', it's extremely
said right after Oct 7 revealed to have been mad

Khilafah Market شلافة مارکت 421 عضو

!! Slave for sell 12 yrs old not virg
very beautiful in raqqa...13.000\$
letzter preis !!

!! للبيع سببية ثيب عمرها 12 سنة
جميل جدا في الرقة السعر 13 الف دولار من
اخيسير !!
10:18 م

testimony either
or time after month

For example, when Amit Soussana first spoke to i24 News two months ago, he cited a single instance of sexual violence or assault

violence report
renounces st
says reporter
manipulated

ON LAND AND ONLINE:

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA BATTLEFIELD

ON LAND AND ONLINE:

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE
SOCIAL MEDIA BATTLEFIELD

BY MERYL FRANK

JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

1701 Rhode Island Ave NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.857.1300 | www.jwi.org

First edition | April 2025
© Jewish Women International

Meryl Frank is the former US Ambassador to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. She is President of Makeda Global, an international consulting firm specializing in women's empowerment, leadership and political participation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
PREFACE.....	6
OVERVIEW.....	8
HISTORY OF CRSV	10
CRSV AND SOCIAL MEDIA.....	11
ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS	11
THE DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA.....	12
EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA.....	12
BOTS, TROLL FARMS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS	13
THE IMPACT OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE	14
THE IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL	16
CASE STUDIES	18
UKRAINE.....	19
MYANMAR*: THE ROHINGYA.....	22
SUDAN.....	25
IRAQ: ISIS AND THE YAZĪDĪS	28
ISRAEL.....	32
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.....	37
CONCLUSION.....	40
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	41
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	44
TERMS AND DEFINITIONS.....	45
REFERENCES	47

** The terms Myanmar and Burma refer to the same country in Southeast Asia. Myanmar is used in this report as it is the term used by the United Nations and most countries around the world in diplomatic contexts.*

INTRODUCTION

BY MEREDITH JACOBS, CEO OF JEWISH WOMEN INTERNATIONAL (JWI)

As the author of this report writes, rape as a weapon of war is as old as war itself. Campaigns of denial and distortion have gone hand-in-hand with the violence. All of this was one thing when the disinformation campaigns were relegated to the limited reaches of print newspapers or local media. But what happens when communication vehicles allow for global reach with the mere click of a button?

How is global public opinion shaped when false narratives are so easily disseminated? And, how do online campaigns of disinformation, distortion, and denial become the blueprint by which perpetrators not only further spread terror and trauma, but avoid accountability? How have social media platforms become the battleground for information warfare that silences survivors and generates support and sympathy for terrorists?

As the leading Jewish organization working to end violence against women and girls, Jewish Women International has worked to lift the voices and truth of victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

We have seen how narrative is weaponized against survivors and in support of the abuser. The October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel by Hamas and other terrorist organizations, the use of sexual violence, and the concurrent weaponization of disinformation on social media platforms was our wake-up call to what has been happening in conflict zones across the globe. It was our call to speak out — not only for Israeli women, but for all women. We have now joined the unfortunate sisterhood of communities affected by conflict-related sexual violence, and it is our hope that this report raises awareness of the lethal online battleground littered with women's bodies and voices.

On Land and Online is but a first step, naming the global challenges and dangers of virtual campaigns of denial, distortion, and disinformation. It is our hope that it serves as a catalyst for further research, scholarship, and advocacy.

In sisterhood,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meredith Jacobs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Meredith" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Jacobs".

Meredith Jacobs
CEO, Jewish Women International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has long been used as a weapon of war. Today, it continues beyond the battlefield, distorted through denial and disinformation on social media.

The October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, which included brutal acts of sexual violence, sparked an unprecedented flood of denial and antisemitic conspiracy theories online. Survivor accounts were dismissed, evidence distorted, and the truth attacked.

Recognizing this disturbing new front in the fight against sexual violence, Jewish Women International (JWI) commissioned *On Land and Online*, the first comprehensive report to examine how digital platforms are being weaponized to manipulate public perception of CRSV, retraumatize survivors, and block accountability.

Drawing on case studies from Israel, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, and Iraq, the report shows how social media has become a battleground where testimony is discredited and disinformation spreads through bots, troll farms, and algorithmic amplification. It also reveals the psychological toll of online abuse and the silence of institutions as platforms enable and glorify CRSV denial.

The report calls for urgent action: adoption of the Berkeley Protocol for ethical use of digital evidence; stronger platform accountability; improved tools to report abuse; increased digital literacy; and support for communities countering disinformation.

Sexual violence in conflict is no longer confined to physical space. It is echoed and intensified. Confronting it requires defending truth and dignity, on land and online.



Image: Meredith Jacobs, JWJ CEO, center, speaking at the UN on CRSV, September 2024.

PREFACE

The term conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) represents deliberate acts of war aimed at terrorizing an entire society. It is an act of domination, meant to inflict fear, to degrade, and to fracture the social bonds that hold a people together. It is also meant to define some of the most horrific crimes committed in war and allows policymakers, human rights organizations, and governments to discuss and combat rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and sexual torture of women, men, girls and boys. It is a necessary and precise term.

But this term is also insufficient because it does not, and cannot, capture the depth of human suffering that CRSV inflicts. It is sterile, detached, clinical. CRSV is a category but it is also the girl in Myanmar, raped so violently that she will never walk without pain again. It is the Yazidi woman who was sold from man to man, raped until her body stopped resisting. It is the women in Ukraine, raped in front of their families in occupied villages, their pain meant to break not just them, but also the people who love them. It is the Sudanese women attacked in displacement camps, raped when they leave in search of food and water, knowing that their choice is to risk violation or let their children starve. CRSV is the young woman dancing at a music festival in Israel, suddenly hunted, captured and brutalized, her body crushed under the force of the assault, her pelvis shattered before she was murdered and abandoned as a final humiliation.

It is the men raped with objects, their bodies mutilated beyond repair, left to suffer in silence because speaking about what was done to them would mean losing everything. And it is also the witnesses who will be forced to live with nightmares, the children whose last memory of their mothers is one of screams and blood, the husbands held at gunpoint as their wives were violated. Their suffering will never be classified as CRSV, but it will mark them forever.

Despite the brutality, the scale, and the intentionality of these crimes, CRSV remains one of the most under-prosecuted war crimes, domestically and internationally. When survivors come forward, they are too often met with disbelief, shame, or silence within their own communities and international bodies. Perpetrators act with impunity, knowing that war and disbelief shield them from justice. Even when governments acknowledge these crimes, legal systems have been too slow, too weak and too late to provide support for the victims.

Today, in our digital age, survivors and witnesses face a new kind of torment. Thousands of people who will never know these victims, who will never know what it means to have their bodies used as a battlefield, sit behind screens and deny that this horror ever happened. State-sponsored bots flood the internet, drowning out truth with propaganda, rewriting reality in real time.

They call the survivors liars. They say that the scars are fake, that the trauma to the community is an exaggeration. Social media turns justice into a spectacle, survival into a contest, and suffering into an arena where people who have lost nothing feel entitled to pontificate in service of their own political agendas.

And then there is the silence, not just from strangers, but from those most trusted for support, from the institutions that claim to protect the vulnerable yet choose neutrality, silence, and inaction over recognition and justice.

In this report, the term CRSV is used because it defines the broad range of acts of sexual violence in war. However, the use of the term is not meant in any way to reduce these crimes to mere abstraction. CRSV is not just a category of violence. It is a calculated act of cruelty that leaves permanent scars on individuals, families, and societies. The suffering it inflicts does not fade when a war ends. It lives on in the communities fractured and in the bodies violated.

There is no undoing what has been done. But there can be recognition. There can be justice. And attention to social media is a crucial component of recognition and justice.

OVERVIEW

This report, the first of its kind, explores the pervasive denial and disinformation regarding CRSV that is promoted on social media. It provides an analysis of the manner in which these narratives are constructed, and details their impact on survivors, advocacy efforts, and global justice systems. Drawing on examples from Ukraine, Iraq, Sudan, Myanmar, and Israel, the report sheds light on the evolving role of social media in shaping CRSV discourse and proposes tangible steps for addressing these challenges. In doing so, it underscores the urgent need to confront not only the violence itself, but also the digital ecosystems that enable its erasure and denial.

Social media has been used to spread lies about what happened to us. It retraumatizes survivors and makes it harder for the world to understand the truth.

- Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

To fully grasp the gravity of these digital dynamics, it is essential to first understand the scope and severity of CRSV as recognized by the international community. Conflict-Related Sexual Violence was formally acknowledged by the United Nations in 2008, when UN Security Council Resolution 1820 recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war (UNSC, 2008). It is among the gravest of human rights violations, wielded not just against individuals but as a deliberate weapon in conflicts to instill fear, dominate populations, and destabilize societies. At this time, CRSV is a global crisis, with documented cases across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

The 2024 UN Report on CRSV, published by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, detailed a 50% increase in verified cases of sexual violence linked to conflicts in 2023 (SRSG-SVC, 2024).

The Special Representative verified 3,622 cases, with women and girls constituting over 95% of the victims, including 1,186 children, 98% of whom were girls. Sudan alone has experienced a 288% increase in CRSV survivors seeking assistance, with over 200 children, four of whom were as young as one year old, raped as a tactic of war between January and March 2024 (UNICEF, 2025). These numbers are alarming, yet the true incidence of CRSV remains vastly underreported due to stigma, trauma, and the spread of disinformation on social media.

In today's digital age, social media connects approximately 5.24 billion people worldwide, representing 63.9% of the global population (Statista, 2024). Among social media platforms, Facebook leads with 3.07 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube (2.5 billion), WhatsApp (2 billion), Instagram (2 billion), and TikTok (1.58 billion). All of these platforms have become essential spaces for documentation of human rights violations, amplification of survivor voices, and mobilization of international responses (Backlinko, 2025).

However, these same platforms have also become battlegrounds for denial, distortion, and disinformation—spaces where perpetrators and their supporters manipulate narratives to obscure truth. As survivors and activists share evidence in real time, counter-narratives emerge, seeking to undermine testimonies, shield abusers, and deepen the trauma of those affected.

This weaponization of social media is not limited to any one region. From attempts to discredit Yazīdī survivors of ISIS in Iraq to the dismissal of testimonies from Rohingya women in Myanmar, and from downplaying systemic violence in Sudan to coordinated denial campaigns targeting Ukrainian victims, disinformation has become a tool of war in its own right. Following Hamas's October 7 attacks, for example, a surge of coordinated denialism erupted online in response to initial documentation of CRSV against Israeli women. Survivors were vilified, journalists were harassed, and evidence was aggressively dismissed, revealing how swiftly digital platforms can be used against victims.

This report, *On Land and Online*, argues that combating CRSV in the digital age requires a new paradigm—one that integrates online harm into global responses to sexual violence in conflict. It calls for investment in digital literacy and survivor-centered fact-checking, stronger accountability mechanisms for tech companies, and support for civil society organizations tracking disinformation in real time. Additionally, it urges international bodies to treat online denialism not merely as misinformation, but as an extension of the violence itself.

Survivors deserve more than silence. They deserve to be heard, believed, and protected, in both physical spaces and digital ones. Addressing CRSV today means confronting not only the atrocities committed on the ground but also the second wave of violence that unfolds online. The international community must act decisively to ensure that truth prevails and that justice is not derailed by a tide of digital distortion.

THE HISTORY OF CRSV

Sexual violence has long been a weapon of war, used for conquest, subjugation, and terror. Ancient texts as diverse as the Hebrew Bible and *The Iliad* document CRSV, while medieval codes attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to curb it. In later centuries, colonial expansion was rife with sexual violence, particularly against indigenous and enslaved women, and wielded as a tool to enforce racial and social hierarchies. During the 19th and 20th centuries, CRSV became a feature of pogroms, colonial expansion, and both World Wars.

For centuries, wartime rape was largely ignored in legal frameworks. This changed in the late 20th century, when the 1994 Rwanda Tribunal became the first formal effort to classify rape as genocide, thus setting a legal precedent. The 1998 *Rome Statute* further defined sexual violence as a war crime, a crime against humanity, and an act of genocide when used as part of a systematic campaign. As noted above, the UN reinforced these laws with *Resolution 1820* (in 2008) and then again with *Resolution 2467* (in 2019), both of which recognize sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of war and call for stronger accountability, survivor support, and prevention measures.

Throughout the world, enforcement is poor at best and perpetrators continue to act with impunity.

Yet, despite this legal progress, throughout the world, enforcement is poor at best and perpetrators continue to act with impunity. Survivors, in turn, often face stigma, trauma, and significant barriers to justice.

CRSV AND SOCIAL MEDIA

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS

Social media has fundamentally transformed how CRSV is documented, discussed, and addressed. It has empowered survivors, activists, and journalists with unprecedented tools to expose atrocities, challenge impunity, and demand justice in real time. With its vast global reach and immediacy, social media can become a critical force in mobilizing international awareness and catalyzing action.

Campaigns such as #EndRapeInWar, spearheaded by organizations such as the Global Survivors Fund, have strategically used platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram to amplify survivor testimonies, circulate verified evidence, disseminate educational resources, and call for urgent international intervention. These efforts have attempted to not only build global solidarity but also to exert pressure on governments and multilateral institutions to recognize and respond to CRSV as a serious violation of international law. Similarly, campaigns such as #StopRapeInSudan and #IBelieveIsraeliWomen have attempted to counter denialist narratives, and create virtual spaces of solidarity, dignity, and truth for survivors.



Image: Social media screenshot of campaign to counter the denial and disinformation in virtual spaces.

THE DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can thus be a powerful tool for activists to spread knowledge about CRSV and for survivors to share their stories and mobilize support. However, it has also become a formidable instrument for disseminating disinformation, amplifying denialism, and spreading propaganda. This capacity for manipulation of narratives in real time has allowed state and non-state actors to distort facts, undermine survivor testimonies, and perpetuate harmful ideologies.

A recent example of the dangers of social media disinformation emerged following the October 7th attacks on Israel. Reports of sexual violence, documented by first responders and witnesses, were swiftly met with an online campaign to discredit and dismiss their testimonies. Coordinated efforts, including bot networks and influential social media figures and influencers, falsely claimed that reports of rape and sexual violence were fabricated for political purposes (Baruchin, 2023).

Conspiracy theories that alleged that the evidence had been staged began to circulate, and alternative media sources amplified these narratives, creating an echo chamber of denial.

This pattern of denial and disinformation is not new. Victims of rape, whether in conflict settings or not, often face campaigns designed to cast doubt on their testimony, retraumatizing them and making them question their decision to come forward. The difference, however, is scale. While individual cases may be subject to targeted disinformation online, conflict-related

sexual violence is often met with mass, state-sponsored efforts to distort the truth and shield perpetrators from justice.

EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA

ISIS was among the first terrorist organizations to exploit social media to spread terror through broadcasting beheadings and inciting violence (Callimachi, 2015). Ideological posts served both as tools for terror and recruitment advertisements, drawing in new members through displays of brutality.

ISIS further weaponized social media to facilitate human trafficking of Yazīdī women and girls by creating digital slave markets, complete with descriptions of their victims, their ages and prices (Warrick, 2016).



Image: Social media screenshot of campaign to counter the denial and disinformation in virtual spaces.



Image: Social media screenshot of ISIS digital slave market.

Indeed, encrypted digital platforms with little oversight, such as Telegram, are increasingly used to document and disseminate violent acts as a form of psychological warfare (ProPublica, 2025).

Other extremist groups and individuals quickly followed suit of ISIS, including an Australian white supremacist, who live streamed from his GoPro bodycamera as he shot and killed 51 worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on March 15, 2019.

Hamas terrorists clearly took their cue directly from the ISIS playbook on October 7, as they recorded their attacks using GoPro cameras and smartphones and sending evidence of their murderous actions to the victim's facebook page for their families to witness.

BOTS, TROLL FARMS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS

Disinformation related to CRSV is increasingly spread through a coordinated system of bots, troll farms, and social media algorithms. These tools function in tandem to distort public understanding, delegitimize survivors, and undermine efforts toward justice and accountability.

Bots are automated accounts programmed to disseminate large volumes of content, and troll farms, organized groups often linked to political or state actors, play a central role in shaping online narratives. In the context of CRSV, these actors promote false claims suggesting that reports of sexual violence are fabricated, exaggerated, or politically motivated (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2024).

Such campaigns frequently involve targeted harassment. Survivors, human rights defenders, and journalists may be subjected to coordinated threats, defamation, or doxxing, the public release of private personal information, such as home addresses or phone numbers. These are intended to intimidate or silence individuals (SEON, n.d.). In addition, hashtags and keywords related to CRSV are regularly hijacked, flooding social media platforms with misleading or



Image: Social media screenshot of Israeli woman Mor Bayder.

unrelated content. This tactic obstructs access to credible information and limits the visibility of survivor-led advocacy (DiResta et al., 2018).

Beyond these direct actions, social media algorithms significantly amplify disinformation. These algorithms analyze patterns of user engagement, such as likes, shares, comments, and watch time and prioritize content that is likely to maintain user attention. Because emotionally charged, sensational, or polarizing material tends to generate high engagement, algorithms often promote such content regardless of its accuracy or credibility (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

Disinformation campaigns are designed to exploit this system. Bot networks rapidly interact with false or misleading content, artificially inflating its visibility. This activity signals to the platform that the content is popular or trending, prompting further algorithmic amplification and enabling disinformation to reach broader and more diverse audiences.

Algorithmic recommendation systems can also create false equivalency, presenting conspiratorial or denialist narratives alongside verified reports. This can produce the misleading impression that credible evidence of CRSV is contested or uncertain (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Together, bots, troll farms, and social media algorithms form a powerful and self-reinforcing system that not only spreads disinformation but also obstructs justice by silencing survivors, weakening institutions, and distorting public discourse.

Addressing these challenges is possible. It requires coordinated action among social media platforms, civil society, researchers, and policymakers to safeguard the integrity of information and the safety of those affected by CRSV.

THE IMPACT OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE

Social media has become so central to communication that the lack of engagement or silence on the part of well-known organizations, governments, or influential individuals sends a powerful signal. This silence can be traced to numerous factors, reflecting a complex web of political, social, and institutional considerations.

The *Spiral of Silence* theory, developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, suggests that individuals are less likely to express opinions they perceive as unpopular due to fear of social isolation or backlash (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). On social media, this effect is intensified by algorithmic bias, online harassment, and political pressures, discouraging both individuals and organizations from speaking out on contentious issues such as CRSV. When those with influence remain silent, it creates a chilling effect,



Image: Graphic created by JWI in 2024 as part of a campaign to condemn CRSV.

reinforcing the perception that certain topics are too sensitive or dangerous to address (Hampton et al., 2014). This hesitation has real-world consequences, as seen in cases where organizations fail to condemn CRSV consistently.

One example is the silence on the CRSV committed against Israeli women on October 7th, 2023. Unlike other cases, where international agencies, women's organizations, and leading feminists moved quickly to condemn sexual violence in conflict, many remained silent. Others ignored these crimes, delayed their response, or outright denied that sexual violence occurred on October 7th, unable to divorce their positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from their commitment to support women victims, unequivocally (Prince-Gibson, 2024). This drew widespread criticism for selective advocacy and bias, and for allowing disinformation, denial, and revisionism to spread unchecked. Ignoring or delaying a response, or denial altogether, not only deepened survivors' suffering but also reinforced the perception that condemnation of credible cases of CRSV is influenced by political considerations rather than universal human rights principles (Lipstadt & Taylor, 2024).

Another example of selective silence is Sudan, widely regarded as “the world’s worst humanitarian disaster.” The nation is experiencing the greatest mass displacement in the world, the deadliest famine in 40 years, widespread killings, and thousands of cases of brutal sexual violence (Borger, 2024). Yet, given the scale of human suffering, the crisis remains largely overlooked on social media and tragically ignored by the global community. There are no mass demonstrations, no viral hashtags, and little global outcry. As Jonathan Freedland of *The Guardian* writes, “The war in Sudan is out of sight and out of mind” (Freedland, 2024).

The absence of media coverage and global attention raises a critical question: Why do some humanitarian crises, especially those involving CRSV, elicit international outrage and trigger social media algorithms, while others, like Sudan, remain suffering in silence?

In some cases, silence is a calculated decision, a deliberate choice to avoid stepping into a minefield of political sensitivities. In conflicts involving powerful states or influential actors, organizations may tread carefully, fearing backlash or the loss of critical funding. Neutrality, or at least the appearance of it, becomes a shield against accusations of bias.

Silence might also be a strategy, a way to create space for solutions without the noise of public scrutiny. Behind closed doors, diplomacy may be at work. Negotiations, fact-finding missions, and quiet mediation often unfold away from the public eye. Humanitarian organizations, for instance, may remain silent to preserve their ability to operate in conflict zones. Public criticism of one party could mean losing access to vulnerable populations, leaving them without aid or protection. In these cases, silence is a trade-off made in the name of pragmatism.

In the face of overwhelming crises, organizations may focus on broader issues—ceasefires,

humanitarian aid, or peace negotiations, believing that addressing the immediate needs of the many outweighs highlighting the suffering of the few. This pragmatism can feel like indifference to those directly affected.

At times, silence stems from the absence of verified information. In the chaos of conflict, facts are often elusive, and international organizations, bound by their need to remain credible, may hesitate to speak without concrete evidence. This approach can leave victims feeling abandoned, their suffering unacknowledged.

But silence is not always born of caution or necessity. Sometimes, it reveals deeper flaws, bias, double standards, or even complicity. Incidents may be ignored because they do not align with popular opinion or geopolitical interests. In these moments, silence reflects the inequalities and prejudices embedded in the international system and that silence can be deadly.

Silence is never neutral, regardless of the justification. It carries profound consequences. For victims and for the communities affected, it may feel like betrayal, a denial of their suffering and humanity and often a denial of the aid necessary to meet the needs of the population. For perpetrators, it can instill the belief that they can continue their violence with impunity.

THE IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL

The consequences of CRSV denial and disinformation is far-reaching, affecting survivors, witnesses, justice systems, public opinion, and global responses. One of the most devastating effects is the silencing of survivors. Victims and witnesses of CRSV often face immense fear of online abuse and harassment, which discourages them from coming forward to share their stories or seek justice. The threat of being disbelieved, ridiculed, or attacked online creates an environment of intimidation, leaving many isolated and voiceless. Popular opinion often exacerbates this issue, as many people are quick to dismiss these accounts, influenced by the disinformation they encounter online. This widespread skepticism further discourages survivors and witnesses from speaking out. Public opinion often coalesces around the most viral version of events, further complicating the pursuit of justice. Witnesses who might otherwise provide critical testimony may withdraw due to fear of retaliation or disbelief.

Disinformation fuels public opinion warfare. By shaping how people perceive war crimes, it manipulates narratives to favor perpetrators or downplay the severity of atrocities. This distortion of truth not only polarizes public discourse but also diminishes the urgency of addressing CRSV as a global issue. Popular opinion, swayed by manipulated narratives, often becomes divided, with some groups denying the existence of atrocities with others demanding action. This division weakens collective efforts to address the issue. Witnesses, who might have been instrumental in swaying public opinion toward justice, are often drowned out by the louder voices of denial and disinformation.

The ripple effects thus extend to international responses. Ensuing disinformation circulating online confuses policymakers, journalists, and international organizations, delaying coordinated action. When facts are obscured by falsehoods, the global community struggles to respond effectively to crises, leaving survivors and witnesses without the support they desperately need. Public opinion, influenced by disinformation, can pressure governments and organizations to either act prematurely on false information or hesitate in the face of uncertainty, further delaying meaningful action.

By shaping how people perceive war crimes, [disinformation] manipulates narratives to favor perpetrators or downplay the severity of atrocities.

Perhaps most alarming is the manner in which the prevalence of online denial has emboldened perpetrators. When disinformation and denial dominate the narrative, it signals to those committing CRSV that they can act with impunity. The lack of accountability and the normalization of denial create a dangerous cycle, perpetuating violence and silencing justice. Popular opinion, when shaped by denial, often shifts blame away from perpetrators, creating an environment where such crimes are not only tolerated but, in some cases, justified. Witnesses, who might otherwise serve as a deterrent to such crimes by exposing the truth, are silenced or discredited, further enabling perpetrators.

Thus, social media disinformation and denial not only harm individual survivors and witnesses, but also undermine the broader fight against CRSV, eroding trust, delaying justice, and enabling further atrocities. Popular opinion, heavily influenced by these false narratives, plays a critical role in either perpetuating the problem or, if informed and mobilized, becoming part of the solution.

CRSV CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented span diverse regions, populations, and circumstances and involve diverse perpetrators with distinct methods and objectives. While each case must be viewed in its own particular historical and political context, a common pattern emerges, illustrating what we have shown above: the extreme brutality of CRSV and its use as a tool of war. And while the specific tactics may vary by context, ranging from state-sponsored propaganda to grassroots misinformation campaigns. The overarching strategy remains consistent: to discredit survivors, spread false narratives, manipulate public perception and shield perpetrators through outright denial, victim-blaming, disinformation campaigns, and the coordinated use of digital platforms to sow doubt and suppress the truth.

Together, survivors form an “Unfortunate Sisterhood,” sharing the physical and psychological scars and the enduring trauma of CRSV.

The impact on victims, survivors, and their communities is similarly consistent across cases. Together, survivors form an “Unfortunate Sisterhood,” sharing the physical and psychological scars and the enduring trauma of CRSV. Thus, analysis of these cases reveals both recurring themes and the unique challenges of each setting. Examining CRSV in Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Iraq, and Israel provides a deeper understanding of these patterns and their implications for justice and accountability.



Image: Ukrainian refugees, November 2015. (Sviatlana Lazarenka, iStock)

UKRAINE

OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

The war in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, has led to widespread destruction, mass displacement and severe human rights violations. Russian forces have committed numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence (Gender Security Project, n.d.). The war has devastated cities, left thousands dead, and displaced millions. It has also become a fierce battleground for information warfare, with Russian disinformation campaigns seeking to distort the reality of the atrocities committed.

Ukrainian civilians have used X, Facebook, and Telegram to report Russian military movements, war crimes, and survivor testimonies, helping to document atrocities in real time (GIJTR, 2024).

SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CRSV

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine has extensively documented CRSV as a systematic weapon used against civilians (OHCHR, 2024). These crimes, described as widespread and deliberate, have targeted women, men, and children, and have occurred in occupied territories and detention centers. CRSV has been used not only to inflict

physical and psychological suffering but also to terrorize communities, break resistance, and exert control over occupied regions.

The COI on Ukraine findings reveal numerous violations of international humanitarian law, including the systematic use of sexual violence. Survivors of CRSV, including women, men, and children, have provided testimonies of rape, sexual torture, and forced nudity, often accompanied by physical torture, threats, and coercion (OHCHR, 2024).

Russian soldiers have raped women and girls, often in their own homes and in front of family members. In Kyiv for example, one documented case was reported of soldiers raping a woman multiple times at gunpoint, while in Kharkiv and Kherson, there were reports of gang rapes. These incidents indicate systematic abuse rather than isolated crimes.

Perhaps most disturbingly, children as young as four years old have been victims of CRSV. In Bucha, Russian soldiers raped a mother while her child was present, later sexually assaulting the child as well. Reports from occupied Luhansk indicate that teenage girls were abducted and repeatedly raped at Russian military bases before being released (OHCHR, 2024). These crimes leave survivors with severe physical and psychological trauma, highlighting the need for urgent intervention.

Russian state-controlled media and government officials have used social media to spread false narratives, attempting to dismiss reports of rape and sexual violence as Western propaganda.

DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL OF CRSV

Russia uses its sophisticated social media apparatus to disseminate disinformation both within Russia and globally, influencing public opinion and undermining opposition. Utilizing state-controlled media, troll farms, and automated bots, Russia propagates misleading content in order to distract from or justify its actions, and destabilize adversaries (Alieva et al., 2024).

Russian state-controlled media and government officials have used social media to spread false narratives, attempting to dismiss reports of rape and sexual violence as Western propaganda. State-controlled media outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* are key tools of disinformation, disseminating misleading information across platforms like Telegram, X and YouTube (Treyger et al., 2022). The Kremlin also fabricates news stories and manipulates images and videos, creating confusion about well-documented war crimes and casting doubt on verified evidence. Another effective tactic involves flooding comment sections and forums with pro-Kremlin narratives,

artificially inflating the appearance of support for Russia's position while drowning out opposing views (Demeuse, 2023).

Similarly, on Telegram, pro-Kremlin channels have falsely claimed that Ukrainian forces staged sexual violence in order to manipulate public opinion. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov dismissed reports of mass rape in Bucha as “another fake attack” (Whalen et al., 2022).

Automated bots and trolls to amplify pro-Russian narratives while targeting dissenting voices, making fabricated content appear widespread and organic. Reports of Russian-perpetrated CRSV surfaced on social media within hours of the invasion in February 2022 (Alieva et al., 2024). Telegram, X, and Facebook became primary platforms for sharing survivor testimonies and investigative reports. Disinformation spread rapidly, driven by Russian state media, bots, and Telegram channels.

Since many of these propaganda efforts are primarily aimed at Russian and Ukrainian audiences, Russian outlets framed allegations as “Western lies” and deployed deepfakes to discredit survivors, while pro-Russian influencers used fake accounts to question evidence and suggest that Ukrainian forces were fabricating reports.

UN Women and the International Criminal Court recognized CRSV almost immediately. By March 2022, war crimes investigations had begun, backed by global media coverage. The UN COI on Ukraine urged swift international action to hold perpetrators accountable and called for increased monitoring of social media disinformation designed to silence victims. (OHCHR, 2024).

Yet despite this, the effects of this abuse of social media have spread globally. As the *Georgetown Journal of Public Affairs* points out, “As compassion fatigue sets in, Russian disinformation against Ukraine can permeate social media spaces more effectively” (Karalis, 2024). One of Russia's most successful information tactics on has been to deploy malinformation—truths selectively framed to distract, mislead, or undermine solidarity. This strategy exploits Western audiences' skepticism, turning attention toward NATO or U.S. foreign policy to erode sympathy for Ukrainian victims.

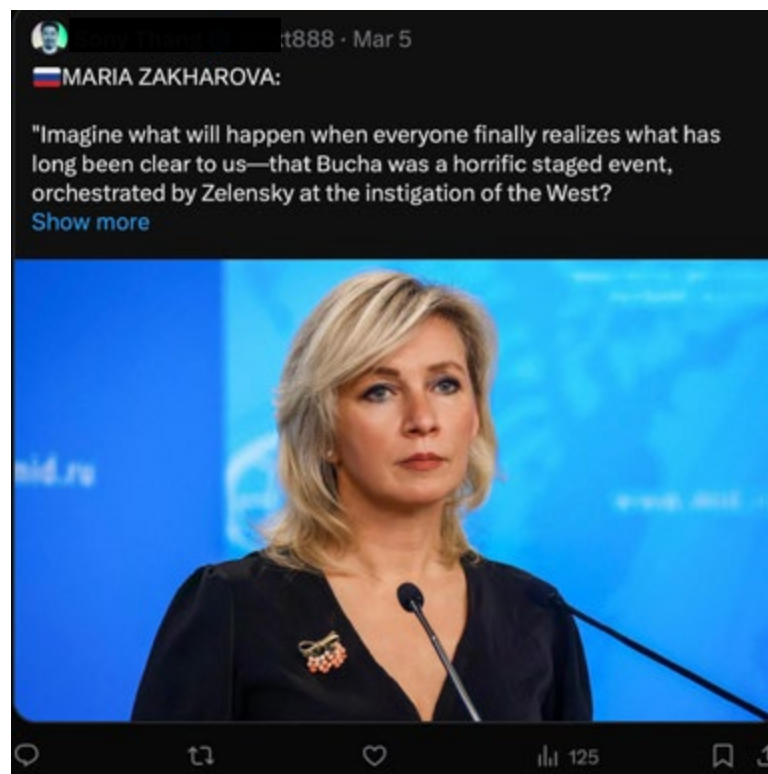


Image Social media image of Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, who made several false claims about the war in Ukraine.



Image: Rohingya women and children receive medical check-ups at a refugee camp, October 2017. (Joel Carillet, iStock)

MYANMAR: THE ROHINGYA

OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

Myanmar, a Buddhist-majority country, has long been marked by ethnic and religious tension. Nationalist rhetoric often frames the Rohingya population as outsiders, despite their centuries-long presence in the region. The Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority, have faced decades of discrimination and violence. In 2017, the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown on the Rohingya people in Rakhine State, forcing more than 700,000 to flee to neighboring Bangladesh. Reports of mass killings, sexual violence, and village burnings drew international condemnation (Albert & Maizland, 2020).

SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CRSV

Sexual violence was a key component of the military's campaign against the Rohingya. Since August 2017, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided support to 3,500 survivors of sexual assault. However, estimates suggest that over 58,700 women and girls have experienced sexual violence. Even more alarming than the scale of these assaults is that only 6% to 7% of survivors seek medical care following their experiences (Stoken, 2020). Human rights organizations documented cases of women being raped in front of their families, sometimes after being tied to trees; pregnant women were targeted to prevent future

generations of Rohingya from being born (OHCHR, 2018). Testimonies also detailed how young girls were taken from their homes, assaulted, and either left to die or killed afterward. A United Nations fact-finding mission reported that the Myanmar military systematically used rape as a tool of war to instill fear and break community cohesion.

DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL OF CRSV

The key players in Myanmar's digital misinformation war include the military government, the Information Ministry, state-run media, and nationalist groups (Mozur, 2018). The military used state-controlled platforms and social media to suppress narratives that accused them of crimes against humanity. The Information Ministry and government-backed media outlets amplified these denial tactics, portraying allegations of atrocities as insurgent propaganda. Nationalist groups further fueled hostility toward the Rohingya, actively disseminating anti-Rohingya content and undermining international efforts to seek justice. In fact, reports of sexual violence against Rohingya women by the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) surfaced only after many months, due to the military censorship and controlled media.

Social media also played a critical role in shaping narratives about the Rohingya crisis. Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube emerged as powerful instruments for spreading mis- and disinformation. It has been estimated that 50% of the population of Myanmar were active on Facebook, which was the primary battleground, used both by activists documenting CRSV and the military, which spread hate speech and denied the atrocities. In fact, the Myanmar military systematically employed fake Facebook accounts to spread false counter-narratives, aiming to discredit allegations of human rights abuses. A 2018 Facebook report acknowledged the platform's role in exacerbating the crisis, leading to the removal of accounts and pages linked to military-controlled networks (Warofka, 2018).

TikTok also became a breeding ground for nationalist propaganda. In an attempt to deceive the world, videos on the platform portrayed Rohingya survivors as "actors" (Mozur, 2018). The app's algorithm, which favors engagement-driven content, further fueled the spread of anti-Rohingya rhetoric. Similarly, government-friendly media outlets utilized YouTube to dismiss CRSV reports as "fake news." These videos often framed allegations as part of a Western conspiracy designed to undermine Myanmar's sovereignty.

In response to its role in Myanmar's crisis, Facebook (now Meta) conducted an internal evaluation and admitted that its platform had been used to incite violence.



Image: Banner on the Facebook page of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Myanmar's State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi.

On social media, numerous denialist narratives circulated. A now-deleted Facebook post from a military-aligned page stated, “The so-called ‘victims’ are lying. No real evidence of rape or abuse has been provided, only stories designed to discredit our nation” (Warofka, 2018).

Nobel Peace Prize winner and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi’s Facebook page dismissed the documented sexual assault claims as “fake rape,” a statement that sparked global outrage and further undermined her credibility as a human rights defender (Beech, 2021).

According to a UN Report, “Facebook has been a useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate” (OHCHR, 2018). In response to its role in Myanmar’s crisis, Facebook (now Meta) conducted an internal evaluation and admitted that its platform had been used to incite violence (Warofka, 2018). As a result, Meta implemented stricter policies, including the banning of military accounts, increased investment in content moderation, and enhanced transparency in political advertising. However, critics argue that these measures came too late and were insufficient to prevent further harm.

Despite these initial changes, Meta has since scaled back some of its content moderation policies, citing a shift in priorities and an emphasis on “free expression” (Chow, 2025).



Image: Sudanese survivors of CRSV gathered in Juba, February 2025. (Rights for Peace)

SUDAN

OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

The Sudanese Civil War, which began in April 2023, stems from a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) following the collapse of Sudan's transition to civilian rule. The conflict, which has been described as “the world's worst humanitarian disaster,” has resulted in thousands of deaths, mass displacement, and widespread atrocities, including the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

As of March 2025, more than 14 million people have been forcibly displaced, making it the largest displacement crisis in the world. Civilians continue to face indiscriminate bombings, targeted massacres, and ethnic violence, particularly in Darfur, where reports indicate acts of genocide committed by RSF-affiliated militias (UNHCR, 2025).

Despite the unprecedented scale of human suffering, humanitarian aid efforts remain critically underfunded, with only 16% of the required aid being met (OCHA, 2024). This shortfall has left millions without access to food, water, shelter, and medical assistance, deepening the famine crisis and causing a surge in preventable deaths. The situation is further exacerbated by attacks on aid workers, restrictions on humanitarian access, and deliberate starvation tactics used as a weapon of war.

SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CRSV

The conflict in Sudan has led to a sharp increase in CRSV, with women and girls subjected to rape, abduction, sexual slavery, and forced marriage. Armed groups use these atrocities to terrorize communities, displace populations, and inflict lasting trauma. Survivors and witnesses have reported that perpetrators, particularly the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias, engage in systematic sexual violence with impunity (UNSC, 2024).

Entire villages have been raided, with men executed and women taken as sexual slaves. Non-Arab women have reported being told, “If you are Black, you are finished” before being assaulted (Salih, 2025). Armed groups use rape to spread terror, ensuring that communities flee permanently. Forced pregnancies create children who, according to the ideology of the militias, would be considered of Arab descent.

The scale of these crimes is difficult to determine, as many cases go unreported due to stigma, fear, and limited access to medical care. However, reports indicate that thousands of women and children have been assaulted since the conflict began. In July 2023, Sudanese authorities reported 88 cases of sexual assault, but NGOs estimated the real number to be as high as 4,400 (OHCHR, 2024). A UN Fact-Finding Mission in October 2024 described the prevalence of mass rape and sexual slavery as “staggering” (OHCHR, 2025). UNICEF reported in March 2025 that infants as young as one year old had been raped, with 221 documented child rapes in early 2024, though actual numbers are likely much higher (UNICEF, 2025).

Women and girls remain especially vulnerable, with survivors facing severe psychological and physical trauma, societal rejection, and limited access to post-rape care. Medical facilities are overwhelmed, and many victims lack access to emergency contraception, safe abortions, or psychosocial support.

DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL OF CRSV

Reports of mass rapes by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) emerged only weeks after the conflict began, largely due to internet shutdowns and local repression. Sudanese authorities shut down



Image: Social graphic referencing the CRSV victims of Sudan and the extreme rise of cases from 2023 to 2024.

internet access, severely limiting real-time documentation of CRSV. WhatsApp and Facebook groups controlled by Sudanese factions spread misinformation, blaming rival militias or denying CRSV altogether. International media coverage was limited, keeping Sudan's CRSV crisis from reaching the same level of global awareness as other cases.

RSF-affiliated social media accounts claim that reports of sexual violence are exaggerated or fabricated, despite extensive documentation from UN bodies and human rights organizations (Nihar, 2024).

These accounts often use manipulated images, edited videos, and fabricated survivor testimonies to mislead the public and discredit international reports. RSF and SAF-affiliated accounts have also spread false claims, such as blaming attacks on rival factions or attributing incidents to foreign actors (SMEX, 2024). Investigations have identified coordinated bot networks amplifying these narratives, making it difficult to distinguish authentic reports from propaganda.

RSF and SAF disinformation campaigns are primarily spread through X, Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp, where official and affiliated accounts push propaganda and discredit reports of CRSV. X has been used to amplify official RSF statements, while Facebook is often used by SAF-aligned pages spreading denial messages. Telegram and WhatsApp have been critical for circulating misleading reports within Sudan and diaspora communities, making it difficult for factual reporting to counteract false narratives (SMEX, 2024).

Despite the severity of the crisis, global disinterest on social media has contributed to the continued neglect of Sudan's atrocities. While conflicts in geopolitically prominent regions often spark viral activism and widespread digital solidarity, Sudanese activists struggle to gain traction online. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content from conflicts that dominate Western political discussions, leaving Sudanese voices marginalized. Posts about Sudanese atrocities receive limited engagement compared to similar reports from other crises, and hashtags related to Sudan rarely trend. The lack of sustained global awareness not only silences survivors but also allows perpetrators to act with impunity.

In October 2024, an RSF spokesperson stated on X: "Reports of sexual violence are Western propaganda meant to defame our forces. Our soldiers are disciplined and follow strict military codes" (Nihar, 2024).

Meanwhile, Sudanese activists continue to fight against online suppression, calling for greater international attention and accountability.



Image: Yazidis gathered at the Genocide Memorial in Sinjar waiting for the remains of 32 victims to be returned, February 2025. (Nadia's Initiative)

IRAQ: ISIS AND THE YAZĪDĪS

OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

The war in Iraq, and most particularly the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014, marked one of the most devastating periods in the country's modern history. Among the many communities affected, the Yazīdīs, a religious and ethnic minority with ancient roots in northern Iraq, suffered disproportionately as ISIS targeted the Yazīdīs in a systematic campaign of genocide, aiming to annihilate their culture, religion and people.

ISIS is estimated to have massacred an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 Yazīdī men and elderly (IICISAR, 2016). Thousands were rounded up, forced to dig their own graves, and executed in mass shootings. Others were publicly beheaded, burned alive in locked buildings, or thrown from rooftops. Some were buried alive after being wounded, while the elderly who could not flee perished from starvation and dehydration on Mount Sinjar. Those who refused to convert to Islam were immediately executed, shot or beheaded, while women who resisted conversion faced sexual violence and enslavement.

SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CRSV

An estimated 6,800 Yazīdī women and girls as young as nine years old were abducted, subjected to sexual violence, and forcibly married to ISIS fighters (Callimachi, 2015). Some Yazīdī women

and girls were sold to individual fighters directly from the holding sites as well as in slave markets in Syria.

The genocide has left deep scars on the Yazīdī community, with over 200,000 Yazīdīs remaining displaced, thousands still missing, and survivors struggling with severe psychological, physical, and social trauma (Sayki, 2024). It is estimated that as many as 2,700 Yazīdī women and children remain missing, believed to be either in captivity, forcibly integrated into families in Syria, Iraq, or Turkey, or unaccounted for due to human trafficking networks (Sampson, 2024).

Efforts to locate and rescue them continue, led by Yazīdī activists, including Nadia's Initiative and The Yazīdī Survivors Network. Some have been found in refugee camps in Syria, while others have been located in Turkey and other regions. In a remarkable recent case, one Yazīdī woman was rescued from Gaza by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in early 2024 (Fatima, 2024).

Survivors who are rescued often struggle with legal identity issues, reintegration, and long-term psychological trauma. Ongoing efforts also focus on documenting the genocide, securing justice, and providing reparations and rehabilitation programs for survivors (UNSC, 2021).

DISINFORMATION, DENIAL, AND OTHER ONLINE ABUSE

Despite the overwhelming evidence of the genocide against the Yazīdī nation, denial and disinformation campaigns have sought to distort the truth, undermine survivors' testimonies, and diminish the international community's response. These efforts have been driven by a range of actors, including ISIS propagandists, sympathizers, and political groups with interests in downplaying the atrocities. Social media platforms, such as Telegraph, have served as the primary vehicle for these campaigns, amplifying false narratives and retraumatizing survivors.

ISIS itself was the primary source of disinformation about CRSV against the Yazīdīs. The group used its extensive propaganda network to justify its actions and dismiss international condemnation. ISIS publications, such as its online magazine *Dabiq*, openly admitted to enslaving Yazīdī women, but framed it as a religious obligation. In one issue, ISIS claimed: "Enslaving the families of the *kuffar* [non-believers] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of *Shariah* [Islamic law]." On social media, ISIS sympathizers furthered these narratives by spreading propaganda that denied the genocide and portrayed Yazīdīs as "infidels" deserving of their fate (Abdelaziz, 2014).

Encrypted messaging apps like Telegram became crucial tools for ISIS fighters to spread propaganda, including the content that justified the enslavement of Yazīdī women. ISIS supporters used private Telegram channels to share recruitment materials, indoctrination videos, and religious justifications for sexual slavery. Reports by counterterrorism researchers indicate that ISIS affiliated Telegram groups circulated messages reinforcing the notion that enslaving Yazīdī women was "lawful" under their extremist interpretation of Islamic teachings (Hinnant et al., 2016).



Image: Social media screenshots of ISIS video depicting the justification and support of the slave market.

These groups also provide support for human trafficking, including online slave auctions which circulate photos of captured Yazīdī women and girls, including details of their age, marital status and price (OHCHR, 2016).

In addition to their online glorification of their actions and slave markets, denial has also been found on social media. A United Nations report, *They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazīdīs* (IICISAR, 2016) states that “denial of the genocide has been perpetrated through online platforms, where coordinated campaigns seek to undermine the credibility of survivors and distort the facts of the atrocities.”

Murad highlighted the impact of these campaigns, stating “Social media has been used to spread lies about what happened to us. It retraumatizes survivors and makes it harder for the world to understand the truth” (Murad, 2018).

The circulation of harmful content, including images of Yazīdī women in captivity, has further compounded the trauma experienced by survivors and their communities. Murad has spoken extensively about the role of social media in spreading denial and disinformation. In her 2018 memoir, she wrote, “Even after escaping captivity, I could not escape the images and videos of Yazīdī women being shared online. It was as if our suffering was being used as entertainment.” (Murad, 2018).

“Even after escaping captivity, I could not escape the images and videos of Yazīdī women being shared online. It was as if our suffering was being used as entertainment.”

- Nadia Murad in her 2018 memoir

In 2022, Yazīdī activists called on governments to investigate major tech companies for their platforms' role in facilitating ISIS crimes. Their 120-page report details how ISIS used Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube to traffic Yazīdī women and girls, spread propaganda, and incite violence (Gebeily, 2022).

The report cites cases such as a Yazīdī woman sold via a WhatsApp group, where her family paid \$80,000 for her release. Other examples include ISIS members negotiating the sale of women on Facebook and discussing their "value" in YouTube videos. Activists argue that the platforms failed to act swiftly or consistently, thereby contributing to the atrocities.

A recent wave of hate speech against the Yazīdīs is spreading across social media, fueling fears of renewed violence against the persecuted minority. The backlash began after Yazīdīs voiced concerns about the return of suspected ISIS affiliated families to Sinjar. False claims then circulated online, alleging that Yazīdīs had attacked a mosque, allegations that security officials have debunked. Instead of stopping the spread of misinformation, social media users amplified it, posting statements such as, "ISIS was right about what they did to Yazīdīs," and "They should all be killed before they grow stronger" (FYF, 2023). This rhetoric mirrors the propaganda used by ISIS to justify the 2014 genocide. For the Yazīdīs still struggling with trauma, displacement and destruction, the renewed hostility poses a direct threat to their safety.



Image: Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and UNODC Goodwill Ambassador, and a leading advocate for survivors of genocide and sexual violence, in particular, the Yazidis. (Nadia's Initiative)



Image: A photo taken at the Nova Festival Victims Memorial, October 2024. (Alexey Protasov, iStock)

ISRAEL

OVERVIEW OF CONFLICT

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, infiltrating multiple communities near the Gaza border. The assault resulted in more than 1,200 fatalities, including civilians, soldiers, and foreign nationals, and led to the abduction of 251 hostages. The attackers engaged in mass shootings, home invasions, executions, and acts of extreme brutality, including widespread sexual violence. Victims were subjected to rape, gang rape, and mutilation before they were murdered.

SCALE AND SEVERITY OF CRSV

The Hamas-led assault on October 7, 2023, was unprecedented in the history of the State of Israel. Unlike other cases of conflict-related sexual violence examined, most victims of the massacre are presumed to have been killed. These atrocities were not part of a prolonged conflict but occurred suddenly, in a single, large-scale, coordinated attack, leaving no opportunity for warning, intervention, or escape.

Documenting these crimes has been particularly challenging due to the absence of survivor testimony. Further complicating evidence collection was the condition of many victims' bodies, which were mutilated or burned, and the requirement under Jewish religious law for immediate burial, limiting forensic examination. Despite these obstacles, testimonies from witnesses, first responders, forensic specialists, and photographic and video evidence provide compelling documentation of systematic sexual violence. Reports indicate that victims were found bound, stripped, and brutalized, and bloodied with evidence of rape, sexualized torture, and genital mutilations strongly suggesting sexual abuse. International organizations have acknowledged the credibility of these findings. UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, reported to the Security Council that there are "reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, occurred across multiple locations of Israel on 7 October 2023" (SRSG-SVC, 2024).

Additionally, there are accounts of CRSV perpetrated against hostages. UN Special Representative Patten reported evidence that hostages taken into Gaza were subject to "various forms of conflict-related sexual violence including rape and sexualized torture and sexualized cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment." Amit Soussana, held for 55 days in Gaza, came forth to provide evidence in her testimony of being sexually abused at gunpoint by her Hamas captor (Kingsley & Bergman, 2024).

Survivor and witness testimony is always, in every context, hampered by trauma, following CRSV. However, in this case, the relentless online harassment faced by those who choose to speak out has been global and particularly intense, with fierce accusations of lies and fabrications laced with blatant antisemitic tropes. This has further deterred survivors and witnesses from telling their stories, fearing retaliation and the risk of further harm.

DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL OF CRSV

Hamas had social media in mind before they entered Israeli space. They came equipped with cell phones and GoPro body cameras to record footage of their attacks, using social media, sometimes on accounts belonging to their victims, to broadcast their atrocities in real-time, spreading fear, propaganda, and terror. A Hamas official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, stated that the group sought to shape its own narratives and garner support from allies through social media. This official, formerly responsible for creating Hamas-related content, emphasized the organization's strategic use of social media to influence public perception and engagement (Frenkel & Myers, 2023).

The speed and global scale disinformation was unprecedented. Within hours of the attack, coordinated denial campaigns flooded social media. Government officials and independent researchers described the deluge of online propaganda as one of the largest disinformation campaigns in modern history (Myers & Frenkel, 2023).

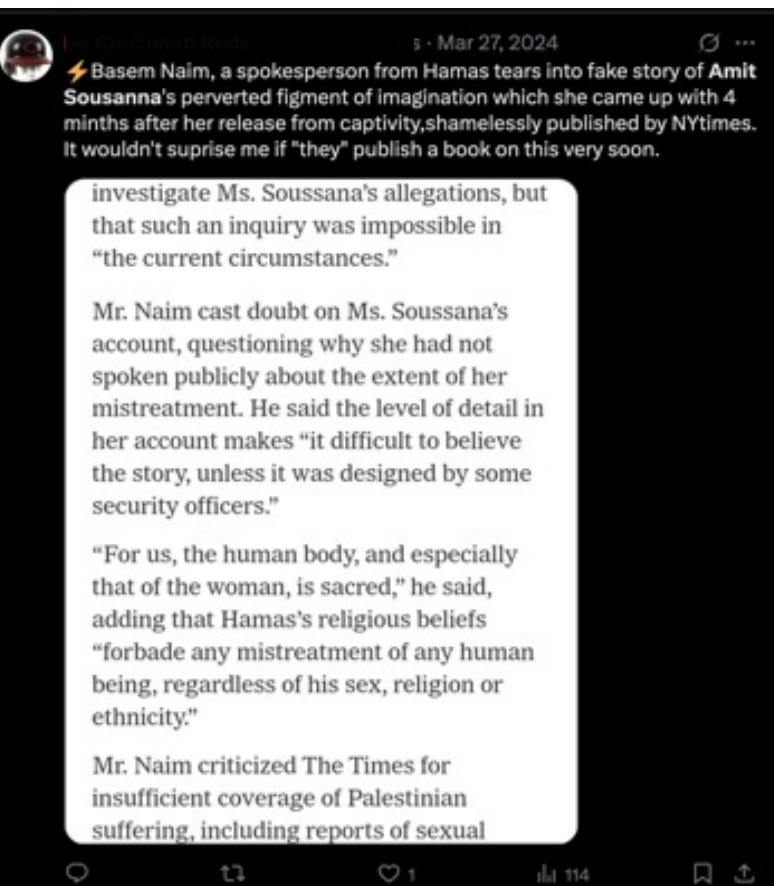


Image: A social media screenshot dismissing the claims of sexual violence shared by Amit Soussana following her release from Hamas captivity.

Analysts identified that nearly 30% of early denial messages in the period immediately following the attack originated from bot accounts, later amplified by Iran, Russia and China, and conspiracy theorists. Social media algorithms exacerbated the issue (Baruchin, 2023). Hashtags such as #FalseFlag trended within hours, fueled by bot networks, troll farms and the ideologically driven accounts of politically motivated influencers with huge follower bases. Reports of sexual violence committed during the Hamas attack were met with immediate denial and accusations of fabrication. Disinformation campaigns rapidly gained traction on social media platforms such as X and TikTok. Viral posts falsely claimed that allegations of sexual violence were designed to manipulate global opinion. For instance, a widely shared post on X claimed, “The Zionists are lying about rape to justify genocide in Gaza,” amassing more than 50,000 shares within hours (ADL, 2024).

Charges of fabrication on social media were bolstered by a particularly popular claim among Hamas leadership that Muslims don’t rape (Cyberwell, 2024). Senior Hamas leader Basem Naim dismissed accusations of sexual violence in a statement published online, “Our fighters are freedom fighters and dignified, and cannot commit such shameful acts. Our Islamic religion, national values, and societal culture do not accept such disgraceful acts,” adding that the accusations were “Zionist propaganda to spread lies and demonise Palestinian struggle to justify war crimes” (ummid, 2024).

In addition to denial by Hamas, celebrities, public figures, and academics contributed to the spread of misinformation. US Congressman Jamaal Bowman described the the sexual violence on October 7th as “propaganda” in a speech posted on TikTok (Lippman, 2024). In January 2025, The University of California, Berkeley’s Gender and Women’s Studies Department promoted a panel discussion of feminist scholars describing the accusations as “debunked” (Stutman, 2025). Political commentators, such as Max Blumenthal, who has more than 10 million followers on X, has repeatedly claimed that Israel was “inventing stories of mass rape on October 7” (Pollitt, 2023).

News outlets such as *Electronic Intifada*, *Intercept*, *The Grayzone*, *Mondeweiss* and *Al Jazeera*

have published articles framing reports of sexual violence as unverified and politically motivated, further fueling skepticism (ADL, 2024). Russian state-controlled media outlets, such as *RT* and *Sputnik*, along with bot networks on Telegram and X, disseminated narratives suggesting that the allegations were part of a broader effort to justify Israel's military response (Baruchin, 2023).

Similarly, Iranian cyber influence operations were linked to bot networks spreading hashtags dismissing the reports as “Zionist lies” (ADL, 2024). Three months post October 7, of all denial spread online about that day, rape denial was the leading narrative, amounting to 39% of all posts (Cyberwell, 2024)

In addition to the disinformation campaigns, the silence or delayed reaction of international agencies and humanitarian organizations, resulted in an information vacuum which allowed falsehoods to spread unchecked, quickly reaching politically motivated actors who dismissed survivor testimonies as propaganda aimed at justifying war.

As the UN mission report noted, “Trust in national governmental institutions or international organizations, such as the United Nations, are at an all-time low amongst many witnesses and/or survivors of the 7 October attacks making them reluctant to come forward, in addition to the high media scrutiny of those who do opt to share their accounts publicly” (SRSG-SVC, 2024).

Survivors and witnesses faced brutal online harassment, leading many to reconsider whether they should expose themselves to the intense abuse. Survivors and witnesses reported experiencing severe psychological distress that has been compounded by the global denial of their experiences. Many were retraumatized by encountering disinformation that dismissed their experiences as fake. Witnesses who spoke publicly about the atrocities faced threats and intimidation, further discouraging others from coming forward. Legal experts and advocacy groups highlighted how these coordinated disinformation efforts created additional barriers to accountability and justice for victims. The lack of clear, unequivocal condemnation from trusted organizations, and individuals added fuel to the claims of CRSV was fabricated, further deepening the distress of those, who felt betrayed, and abandoned by the international community.



Image: A social graphic created by JWI in 2024 featuring Agam Goldstein-Almog, a former hostage of Hamas, who shared some of what she endured during her 51 days in captivity.

Survivors and witnesses reported experiencing severe psychological distress that has been compounded by the global denial of their experiences.

This weaponization of social media addressing the October 7th attacks has manifested in various forms, including Holocaust inversion, where online posts compare Israel's actions to Nazi war crimes while dismissing CRSV allegations as propaganda.

The disinformation campaigns surrounding CRSV in Israel have also drawn heavily on long-standing antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories, stereotyping Jews as controlling global institutions, such as the media, governments, or international organizations. Posts often claim that Israel is using allegations of sexual violence as propaganda to justify military actions in Gaza or to distract from alleged war crimes. Another recurring trope claims that international media outlets are complicit in spreading propaganda.

The spread of CRSV disinformation has contributed to the dramatic 340 percent increase in antisemitic incidents worldwide from 2022-2024 (Stub, 2025). Thousands of Jewish individuals and institutions around the world have been targeted since October 7, 2023. Seventy percent of American Jews feel less safe, with nearly half avoiding “wearing or displaying things that might identify them as a Jew” for fear of harassment or violence (AJC, 2025).

Jewish schools, community centers, and synagogues ramped up security measures in response to the rising hostility, with many institutions hiring private security or increasing police presence. In online spaces, those advocating against disinformation were frequently met with coordinated online harassment campaigns aimed at silencing them. Protests in various countries frequently included antisemitic chants, and social media platforms saw an escalation in hate speech targeting Jewish communities as a whole (Andre'ev & Portnoy, 2024).

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

As demonstrated below, there are clear commonalities across the five case studies. At the same time, each of these conflicts reveals a unique form of social media use. Understanding both the distinctions and the commonalities is crucial in order to validate their experiences of sexual violence to ensure accountability in digital spaces and to seek the justice they deserve.

COMMON ELEMENTS

Across the different conflicts, the perpetrators of CRSV demonstrated a remarkable consistency in the cruelty of their methods. In all cases presented, instances of gang rape, mutilation and torture, as well as sexual assault followed by murder were recorded. Sexual violence was employed not just to attack the individual, but to terrorize, degrade, and destroy communities. Regardless of where these crimes took place, survivors and witnesses endured not only physical and psychological trauma but also intimidation, societal stigma, and, in many cases, outright threats to their safety if they were to come forward.

Furthermore, in all cases, social media attention contributed to both survivors and witnesses reluctance or outright refusal to come forward and testify. Coordinated social media campaigns, implemented by governments, militant groups and even global institutions, retraumatize them, deepen their suffering and shield perpetrators from accountability.

DIFFERENCES - FIVE UNIQUE CASES

While the effects of CRSV are similar across conflicts, the ways in which perpetrators deny, distort, or obscure these crimes depend on political control, technology, and strategic goals. Some governments and groups spread state-sponsored disinformation, flooding social media with false stories to discredit survivors and witnesses and undermine their accounts. Others exploit social media algorithms, amplifying disinformation and hate speech to manipulate

public perception. In some cases, information is simply suppressed, with internet blackouts, censorship, and threats preventing survivors and witnesses from speaking out. Some denial efforts extend beyond the conflict itself, using globally coordinated disinformation campaigns to shape international opinion, deflect scrutiny, and shield perpetrators from accountability.

In all cases, social media attention contributed to both survivors and witnesses reluctance or outright refusal to come forward and testify.

UKRAINE – STATE-CONTROLLED DISINFORMATION, DEEPPAKES, AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Russia's use of social media in the Ukraine conflict is heavily state-controlled and organized, involving government-backed media outlets, bot networks, and troll farms. Russian propaganda seeks to discredit reports of CRSV by flooding social media with fabricated counter-narratives, often portraying Ukrainians as perpetrators instead of victims. Unique to this case is the use of deepfakes and AI-generated content to distort evidence and manipulate survivor testimonies. Russia also amplifies disinformation through bot-generated mass engagement, making false narratives appear widely accepted.

MYANMAR (BURMA) – STATE-SANCTIONED HATE SPEECH, FACEBOOK WEAPONIZATION, AND SUPPRESSION OF TESTIMONIES

Myanmar's military leveraged Facebook as a primary tool for propaganda and genocide denial, a tactic distinct from other cases where multiple platforms played a role. The military-controlled state media and nationalist groups flooded Facebook with anti-Rohingya hate speech, portraying them as terrorists while suppressing reports of CRSV. The government also deployed fake Facebook accounts to fabricate counter-narratives, actively preventing accurate documentation of crimes. Myanmar's social media war was largely domestic, targeting its own population to justify ethnic cleansing.

SUDAN – INTERNET BLACKOUTS, WHATSAPP-FUELED PROPAGANDA, AND BLAME-SHIFTING

Sudan's disinformation tactics stand out due to the strategic use of internet shutdowns to prevent real-time reporting, allowing RSF and SAF factions to manipulate the CRSV narrative before survivors could speak out. Sudanese factions relied on WhatsApp and Telegram group networks to spread misinformation, often blaming rival factions for sexual violence. AI-enhanced manipulated survivor testimonies were also used to discredit real accounts. The war's chaotic nature made misinformation difficult to counter, as both sides spread contradictory narratives, leading to confusion and mistrust.

IRAQ (ISIS AND THE YAZĪDĪS) – TERRORIST-DRIVEN JUSTIFICATION AND ONLINE SLAVE MARKETS

Unlike all other cases examined, the Yazīdīs experienced an exception to the pattern of using social media to deny their crimes. Instead, ISIS proudly publicized sexual slavery as part of its ideology and weaponized the trafficking and enslavement and sale of Yazīdī women by posting advertisements in real-time. ISIS also engaged in active recruitment through its online magazine *Dabiq*. Denial narratives emerged on X (formerly Twitter), falsely claiming Yazīdī survivors were actors or fabricating their suffering, a tactic later mirrored in the Israel-Hamas conflict. In addition, the government of Iraq downplayed the extent of CRSV attacks on the Yazīdīs.

ISRAEL – REAL-TIME TERROR BROADCASTING, FOREIGN-STATE AMPLIFICATION, AND GLOBAL REACTION

The Hamas-led attack on Israel was notable for its use of real-time digital terror tactics. Terrorists livestreamed their crimes on social media, eventually deleting some of the most incriminating. Hamas launched immediate denial campaigns, supported by both networks and foreign state actors like Russia and Iran, amplifying the false narrative that no sexual violence occurred.

Unlike all other incidents of sexual violence in conflict, this case was not met with the usual online condemnation from international agencies and humanitarian organizations. The resulting information vacuum allowed falsehoods to spread unchecked, quickly reaching Western academic circles, feminists, and influencers who dismissed survivor testimonies as propaganda aimed at justifying war.

TikTok's algorithm-driven promotion of conspiracy theories accelerated the spread of denialism globally at an unprecedented pace. This contributed to existing antisemitic narratives, including Holocaust inversion which gained traction, further fueling a significant increase in hate crimes against Jewish communities worldwide.

The resulting information vacuum allowed falsehoods to spread unchecked, quickly reaching Western academic circles, feminists, and influencers who dismissed survivor testimonies as propaganda aimed at justifying war.

CONCLUSION

The fight against CRSV disinformation is a fight to reclaim digital space as part of the struggle for justice and human dignity—where CRSV is no longer tolerated, on land or online.

Sexual violence in conflict is not only a physical atrocity—it is also a battleground for truth. In today's digital landscape, social media plays a double-edged role: it can amplify the voices of survivors and mobilize action, but it is also exploited to deny and distort these crimes. Disinformation campaigns are deliberately crafted to discredit victims, obstruct justice, and shield perpetrators from accountability. Across conflicts in Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan, Iraq, and Israel, although each has a unique set of circumstances, a disturbingly consistent pattern emerges—survivors are dismissed as liars, evidence is manipulated, and platforms are used to spread impunity. Even more disturbing is the way in which social media is sometimes used to glorify acts of sexual violence or facilitate systems of sexual slavery—transforming digital spaces into tools that not only deny abuse but actively sustain it.

Confronting CRSV disinformation requires more than passive awareness—it demands coordinated and sustained action. Governments, technology platforms, international institutions, and civil society must work together to expose digital falsehoods, elevate and amplify the truth, and prevent online spaces from becoming tools of further harm. The narratives that dominate social media shape public awareness, policy decisions, and the pursuit of accountability. In this struggle, silence enables denial. Responsible engagement can shift the balance toward truth and protection.

Ultimately, the fight against CRSV disinformation is a fight to reclaim digital space as part of the struggle for justice and human dignity—where CRSV is no longer tolerated, on land or online.



RECOMMENDATIONS

TO ADDRESS CRSV DISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

As an organization committed to survivor-centered approaches, JWI's recommendations are, first and foremost, aimed at achieving justice and safety for survivors as well as accountability for the perpetrators of CRSV. We have identified actions to be taken at the International, national, organizational and individual levels to move toward addressing the issue of CRSV disinformation and denial on social media.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

ADOPTION OF THE BERKELEY PROTOCOL

In an era where conflicts and human rights abuses are increasingly documented online, the [Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations](#) (more commonly known as the Berkeley Protocol) provides investigators, legal professionals, journalists, and organizations with an internationally recognized set of guidelines to ensure that publicly available digital content—such as social media posts, videos, images, and satellite data—are reliable, ethically sourced, and admissible in legal proceedings. The Protocol is used to document human rights violations, war crimes, and other forms of injustice.

The protocol serves several key functions:

- **Enhancing the Credibility of Digital Evidence** – It provides a rigorous process for verifying the authenticity of images, videos, and other digital content to prevent the spread of misinformation and ensure accuracy.
- **Guiding Ethical and Secure Investigations** – The guidelines emphasize responsible data collection practices to protect the safety and privacy of victims, witnesses, and investigators.
- **Facilitating Legal Accountability** – By outlining proper methods for preserving and handling digital evidence, the protocol ensures that such material can be used effectively in courts and human rights tribunals.
- **Standardizing Investigative Practices** – The framework helps organizations conduct investigations in a consistent and legally sound manner, strengthening their impact in advocacy and legal settings.
- **Combating Misinformation and Disinformation** – In an era of deepfakes, propaganda, and digital manipulation, verifying the authenticity of online content is critical. The protocol equips investigators, journalists, and researchers with fact-checking methodologies to distinguish real evidence from misleading content. Standardized verification processes increase public trust in investigative findings.

SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS, TECH PLATFORMS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND INDIVIDUALS

Addressing the urgent issue of social media disinformation about CRSV requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral response. This includes strengthening platform policies, expanding public education, engaging communities, protecting survivors, fostering research collaboration, and enforcing relevant legal frameworks. Each of these elements is essential to countering harmful narratives, promoting accountability, and upholding the dignity of those affected.

The following action recommendations are directed at governments, tech platforms, advocacy organizations, and individual users. Together, these actors have the power to combat CRSV disinformation and help build a digital environment where truth is amplified, survivors are believed, and justice is within reach.

1. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY

- Define and enforce policies against CRSV-related misinformation, harassment, and denial on social media platforms;
- Adapt user reporting systems in order to facilitate efficient and prompt reports of harmful content, with priority channels for survivor advocates;
- Utilize AI and human oversight in order to quickly detect and remove CRSV misinformation more effectively;
- Demonetize disinformation by preventing accounts and platforms that spread false CRSV narratives from profiting;
- Increase visibility of truthful content by promoting verified survivor and witness stories and adjust algorithms to add value to supportive engagement on CRSV.

2. ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS & DIGITAL LITERACY

- Prioritize and elevate content that shares verified survivor and witness testimonies in order to amplify truth, foster public empathy, and counter stigmatization;
- Implement prebunking strategies to educate people about false narratives before they encounter them;
- Expand media literacy programs in schools, newsrooms, and online platforms to help people recognize and reject misinformation;
- Develop multilingual fact-checking resources to ensure accurate information reaches diverse communities.

3. SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

- Strengthen survivor-led networks to challenge misinformation and amplify authentic experiences;
- Partner with grassroots movements, activists, and trusted community voices to spread accurate information;
- Encourage peer-driven efforts where individuals actively help correct misinformation in their own networks.

4. PREVENTING ONLINE HARASSMENT & PROTECTING SURVIVORS

- Increase protections for vulnerable individuals, including survivors, refugees, and marginalized groups, to prevent online exploitation;
- Strengthen digital privacy measures to ensure survivors can share their experiences safely without fear of retaliation;
- Enforce stricter policies against image-based sexual abuse, including non-consensual sharing of explicit content.
- Label, downgrade, limit visibility, or take down content which is abusive, non-consensual, or designed to intimidate, discredit, or retraumatize survivors.

5. ADVANCING RESEARCH, ALGORITHMIC ACCOUNTABILITY & DATA TRANSPARENCY

- Facilitate collaboration between researchers, policymakers, tech companies and the public to analyze trends in CRSV-related misinformation and its spread across digital platforms;
- Establish early warning systems to track and counter emerging disinformation campaigns related to CRSV;
- Urge social media platforms to disclose how they handle CRSV-related content, including moderation policies, algorithmic promotion or suppression of material, and escalation procedures;
- Promote transparency around algorithmic recommendation systems, including how they may contribute to the amplification of disinformation or victim-blaming narratives;
- Support independent audits of platform algorithms to evaluate their impact on CRSV discourse and identify harmful amplification patterns;

6. STRENGTHENING LEGAL & INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

- Recognize CRSV disinformation as a form of obstruction of justice in war crime investigations;
- Strengthen cybercrime laws to combat doxxing, deepfake abuse, and targeted online harassment;
- Develop secure digital platforms where survivors and witnesses can share their stories without fear of intimidation;
- Fully implement UNSC Resolution 1325.

7. ADOPTION OF THE BERKELEY PROTOCOL

- Encourage global adoption of the Berkeley Protocol on digital open-source investigations to standardize the collection, verification, and use of online evidence related to CRSV.*

These recommendations aim to create a safer, more transparent, and just digital environment for survivors of CRSV and those advocating for truth and accountability.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my deepest gratitude to Evan Segal for his insight, dedication, and unwavering commitment to justice for women. His keen ability to connect the right people at the right time has been invaluable to this project. I also sincerely thank the Segal Family Foundation for their generous support, which made this report possible.

To my JWI partners, I am profoundly grateful for your contributions. Meredith Jacobs, CEO, whose original idea and leadership in the field of sexual violence provided the foundation for this report. Laura Adkins, for bringing an editor's eye and fresh perspectives that strengthened this report. Alexis Ewald, whose dedication brought this report to life. Stephanie Africk of I Believe Israeli Women, for her insightful contributions to the key concepts explored within these pages.

I also wish to recognize our colleagues at The Dinah Project, whose international expertise on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and invaluable guidance shaped this work. I extend my appreciation to Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, Sharon Zagagi-Pinchas, Nava Ben-Or, and Eetta Prince-Gibson for their wisdom and counsel.

My sincere thanks to Cristen Broecker of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights for her guidance on international affairs and Yfat Barak-Cheney of the Technology and Human Rights Institute of World Jewish Congress for her expert guidance. Additionally, I am grateful to Kristina Wilfore of #ShePersisted for providing her insight and expertise on social media, and Abid Shamdeen of Nadia's Initiative, Yuryna Voloshyn of JurFem Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association, and Naw Hser Hser of the Women's League of Burma for their dedication and expertise in advancing our understanding of the CRSV on the ground.

A special thank you to Sharon Kregel, a trusted editor whose thoughtful feedback strengthened this report. Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to Steven Gabel for his unwavering support throughout.

To all who contributed their time, knowledge, and passion to this project—thank you. Your commitment to justice and human rights continues to inspire and drive meaningful change.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

- **CRSV** stands for conflict-related sexual violence and refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. Under international law, CRSV is a war crime, crime against humanity, crime of torture and can be a constitutive act of genocide.
- **Rape** is the act of non-consensual sexual intercourse, typically involving physical force, coercion, or manipulation. It is a severe violation of a person's bodily autonomy and is considered a crime in most legal systems.:
 - Genocidal Rape: Rape used as a tool of genocide to destroy a specific ethnic, religious, or national group through forced impregnation or mass sexual violence.
 - Systematic Rape: Rape used systematically by armed forces or groups to terrorize communities, destroy social cohesion, or force displacement.
 - Opportunistic Rape: Rape committed by soldiers, rebels, or other armed actors due to the breakdown of law and order in conflict zones.
 - Reprisal Rape: Rape committed as revenge against specific communities, families, or groups associated with opposing forces.
 - Sexual Enslavement: The abduction and repeated sexual assault of individuals in conflict settings, often as part of forced labor or trafficking networks.
 - Public or Humiliating Rape: Rape conducted in public settings to shame and degrade victims and their communities.
- **Social / Digital Media** refers to online platforms where users create, share, and interact with content. Examples include social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), video-sharing platforms (YouTube, TikTok), and messaging services (WhatsApp, Telegram).
- **Disinformation** is deliberately false or misleading information spread with the intent to deceive or manipulate public opinion.
- **Misinformation** refers to false or misleading information shared without malicious intent.
- **Propaganda** is biased or misleading information used to promote a particular political cause, ideology, or perspective.

Continued on next page

- **Deepfake** refers to synthetic media—typically videos, images, or audio—that use artificial intelligence to manipulate or replace a person’s likeness or voice, often making it appear as though they are saying or doing something they never did.
- **Bots** are automated software programs that perform repetitive tasks online, often without direct human intervention. While some bots are used maliciously to spread disinformation, manipulate social media trends, or engage in cyberattacks.
- **Doxxing** (or doxing) is the act of publicly sharing private or personally identifiable information about an individual without their consent, often with malicious intent.
- **Algorithm** is a set of rules or instructions used by computers to solve problems, process data, and automate decision-making. While they can enhance efficiency, they can also contribute to bias, misinformation, and the spread of disinformation by prioritizing certain content over others based on engagement patterns.
- **Encrypted** is widely used in messaging apps, online transactions, and data storage to protect privacy and prevent unauthorized access. While encryption enhances security, it can also be exploited by malicious actors to conceal illegal activities.
- **Troll farms** are organized groups, often funded or coordinated by a state or political actor, that use fake online identities and accounts to spread disinformation, manipulate public opinion, sow division, or influence political outcomes. These operations typically operate on social media platforms and may post inflammatory content, amplify conspiracy theories, or harass individuals and groups.

REFERENCES

OVERVIEW

- UN Security Council, UNSC. (2008, June 19). *Resolution 1820*. UN. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1820\(2008\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1820(2008))
- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, SRSG-SVC. (2024, April 4). *Conflict-related sexual violence (S/2024/292)*. UN. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/report/report-of-the-secretary-general-on-conflict-related-sexual-violence/202404-SG-annual-report-on-CRSV-EN.pdf>
- United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF. (2024). *Sudan's child rape and sexual violence crisis*. Unicef. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/media/15671/file/UNI754893.pdf>
- Statista. (2024, May 17). *Number of worldwide social network users 2028*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>
- Backlinko. (2025, February 10). *Social media usage & growth statistics*. Backlinko. <https://backlinko.com/social-media-users>

CRSV AND SOCIAL MEDIA

THE DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Baruchin, R. (2023, October 11). *1 in 4 profiles are pro-Hamas fake accounts: The Online Battlefield*. Cyabra. <https://cyabra.com/blog/1-of-4-pro-hamas-profiles-are-fake-the-online-battlefront/>

EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA

- Callimachi, R. (2015, August 13). *Isis enshrines a theology of rape*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>
- Warrick, J. (2016, May 28). *Isis fighters appear to be trying to sell their sex slaves on the internet*. Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/isis-fighters-appear-to-be-trying-to-sell-their-sex-slaves-on-the-internet/2016/05/28/b3d1e4ea-24fe-11e6-9e7f-57890b612299_story.html
- Thompson, A.C. and Bandler, J. (2025, March 15). *The rise and fall of terrorgram: inside a global online hate network*. ProPublica. https://www.propublica.org/article/rise-and-fall-terrorgram-inside-global-online-hate-network-frontline-telegram?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dailynewsletter&utm_content=river

BOTS, TROLL FARMS, AND SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS

- Wardle, C. and Derakhshan, H. (2017, September 27). *Information disorder: toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>
- SEON. (n.d.). *Doxxing & Digital Risk*. SEON. <https://seon.io/resources/dictionary/doxxing/>
- DiResta, R. et al. (2018). *The tactics and tropes of the internet research agency*. New Knowledge. <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/533-read-report-internet-research-agency/7871ea6d5b7bedafbf19/optimized/full.pdf>
- Marwick, A. and Lewis, R. (2017). *Media manipulation and disinformation online*. Data & Society. https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_MediaManipulationAndDisinformationOnline.pdf
- Cinelli, M. et al. (2021, February 23). *The echo chamber effect on social media*. PNAS. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>

THE IMPACT OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE

- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). *The spiral of silence: a theory of public opinion*. Journal of Communication. https://vnecas.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/spiral_of_silence.pdf
- Hampton, K. et al. (2014, August 26). *Social media and the 'Spiral of Silence.'* Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/>
- Prince-Gibson, E. (2024, May 1). *Why won't more feminists speak up for Israeli victims of sexual violence?* Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/01/israel-hamas-rape-un-women-feminists-sexual-violence/>
- Lipstadt, D. and Taylor, M. (2024, January 11). *Israeli women and girls have suffered horrific sexual violence from Hamas. Where is the outrage?* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/11/israeli-women-and-girls-have-suffered-horrific-sexual-violence-from-hamas-where-is-the-outrage>
- Borger, J. (2024, June 17). *'We need the world to wake up': Sudan facing world's deadliest famine in 40 years*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/17/we-need-the-world-to-wake-up-sudan-facing-worlds-deadliest-famine-in-40-years>
- Freedland, J. (2024, October 11). *Sudan is the world's gravest humanitarian disaster - but almost nobody cares*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/oct/11/world-humanitarian-disaster-sudan?utm_source=chatgpt.com

CRSV CASE STUDIES

UKRAINE

- Gender Security Project. (n.d.). *CRSV: Russia's invasion of Ukraine*. Gender Security Project. <https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/crsv-observatory-cases/crsv-russian-invasion-ukraine>

UKRAINE, CONTINUED

- Global Initiative for Justice, Truth & Reconciliation, GIJTR. (2024). *Ensuring accountability for CRSV in Ukraine*. GIJTR. <https://gijtr.org/our-work/ensuring-accountability-for-crsv-in-ukraine/>
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, OHCHR. (2024, March 5). *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (A/HRC/55/66)*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/report-independent-international-commission-inquiry-ukraine-ahrc5566-advance-unedited-version-enruuk>
- Alieva, I. et al. (2024, June 12). *Analyzing Russia's propaganda tactics on Twitter using mixed methods network analysis and natural language processing: a case study of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine*. EPJ Data Science. <https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds/s13688-024-00479-w#citeas>
- Treyger, E. et al. (2022). *Russian Disinformation Efforts on Social Media*. Rand. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR4300/RR4373z2/RAND_RR4373z2.pdf
- Demeuse, R. (2023, October 8). *The Russian war on truth: Defending allied and partner democracies against the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2023-10/014%20CDS%2023%20E%20rev.%20%20fin%20-%20RUSSIA%20DISINFORMATION%20-%20DEMEUSE%20REPORT.pdf>
- Whalen, J. et al. (2022, April 4). *Russia denies and deflects in reaction to Bucha atrocities*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/04/russia-bucha-atrocities-war-crimes/>
- Karalis, M. (2024, February 2). *The information war: Russia-Ukraine conflict through the eyes of social media*. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/02/02/russia-ukraine-through-the-eyes-of-social-media/>

MYANMAR

- Albert, E. and Maizland, L. (2020, January 23). *The Rohingya crisis*. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis>
- Stoken, J. (2020, December 19). *Suffering in silence: Sexual and gender-based violence against the Rohingya community and the importance of a global health response*. National Library of Medicine. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7750012/#R3>
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, OHCHR (2018, September 12). *Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar**. OHCHR. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf
- Mozur, P. (2018, October 15). *A genocide incited on Facebook, with posts from Myanmar's military*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html>
- Warofka, A. (2018, November 5). *An independent assessment of the human rights impact of Facebook in Myanmar*. Meta. <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/11/myanmar-hria/>

MYANMAR, CONTINUED

- Beech, H. (2021, February 1). *How a human rights angel lost her halo*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/14/world/asia/myanmar-aung-san-su-kyi-election.html>
- Chow, A. (2025, January 7). *Why Meta's fact-checking change could lead to more misinformation on Facebook and Instagram*. Time. https://time.com/7205332/meta-fact-checking-community-notes/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

SUDAN

- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR. (2025). *Sudan Situation*. UNHCR. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/sudan-situation>
- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. (2024, April 15). *Sudan: One year of conflict - Key facts and figures*. OCHA. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-one-year-conflict-key-facts-and-figures-15-april-2024>
- The UN Security Council, UNSC. (2024, December 19). *Senior UN official tells Security Council that 'unbearable' numbers of civilians killed, injured in Sudan, urging end to violence, funding for aid*. United Nations. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15947.doc.htm>
- Salih, Z. (2025, January 10). *'If you are black, you are finished': the ethnically targeted violence raging in Sudan*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/jan/10/ethnically-targeted-violence-raging-sudan-darfur>
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, OHCHR. (2024, February 2024). *Sudan: Horrific violations and abuses as fighting spreads - report*. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/sudan-horrific-violations-and-abuses-fighting-spreads-report>
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, OHCHR. (2025, March 7). *Accelerating action for Sudanese women amid conflict - statement by the UN Independent International Fact-Finding mission for the Sudan*. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2025/03/accelerating-action-sudanese-women-amid-conflict-statement-un>
- United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF. (2025, March 4). *Sudan's child rape and sexual violence crisis [EN/AR]*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudans-child-rape-and-sexual-violence-crisis-enar>
- Nihar, S. (2024). *Sexual violence in Sudan: From denial to recognition*. Chr. Michelsen Institute. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/9136-sexual-violence-in-sudan-from-denial-to-recognition>
- SMEX. (2023, May 19). *How disinformation campaigns endanger lives in Sudan*. SMEX. <https://smex.org/how-disinformation-campaigns-endanger-lives-in-sudan/>

IRAQ

- Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, IICISAR. (2016, June 15). *"They came to destroy": ISIS crimes against the Yazidis*. United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/843515?ln=en>

IRAQ, CONTINUED

- Callimachi, R. (2015, August 13). *ISIS enshrines a theology of rape*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>
- Sayki, I. (2024, March 13). *Where are the Yazīdīs today, almost a decade after ISIS' genocidal campaign?*. Frontline. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/Yazīdīs-decade-after-isis-genocidal-campaign/>
- Sampson, E. (2024, September 5). *Racing the clock to document ISIS genocide of Iraq's Yazīdīs*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/05/world/middleeast/Yazīdī-genocide-mass-graves.html>
- Fatima, Z. (2024, October 3). *Yazīdī woman rescued from Gaza after decade in captivity*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpw5v077nyjo>
- The UN Security Council, UNSC. (2021, May 10). *ISIL/Da'esh committed genocide of Yazīdī, war crimes against unarmed cadets, military personnel in Iraq, investigative team head tells Security Council*. United Nations. <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14514.doc.htm>
- Abdelaziz, S. (2014, October 13). *ISIS states its justification for the enslavement of women*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/10/12/world/meast/isis-justification-slavery/>
- Hinnant, L. et al. (2016, July 6). *Islamic State tightens grip on captives held as sex slaves*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/general-news-7685e20b2883496abc3d0911de6c67ab>
- Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, OHCHR (2016, June 15). *"They came to destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazīdīs**. OHCHR. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf
- Gebeily, M. (2022, February 17). *FEATURE-Iraq's Yazīdīs want Big Tech held to account over Islamic State crimes*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/media-telecom/feature-iraqs-Yazīdīs-want-big-tech-held-to-account-over-islamic-state-crimes-idUSL8N2UC1U8/>
- Free Yezidi Foundation, FYF. (2023, May 4). *Condemnation of Anti-Yezidi Rhetoric*. Free Yezidi Foundation. <https://freeyezidi.org/news-updates/fyf-statements/condemnation-of-anti-yezidi-rhetoric/>

ISRAEL

- Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, SRSG-SVC. (2024, March 4). *Mission report: Official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/report/mission-report-official-visit-of-the-office-of-the-srsg-svc-to-israel-and-the-occupied-west-bank-29-january-14-february-2024/20240304-Israel-oWB-CRSV-report.pdf>
- Kingsley, P. and Bergman, R. (2024, March 26). *Israeli hostage says she was sexually assaulted and tortured in Gaza*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/26/world/middleeast/hamas-hostage-sexual-assault.html>

ISRAEL, CONTINUED

- Frenkel, S. and Myers, S. (2023, October 10). *Hamas seeds violent videos on sites with little moderation*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/technology/hamas-violent-videos-online.html>
- Myers, S. and Frenkel, S. (2023, November 3). *In a worldwide war of words, Russia, China, and Iran back Hamas*. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/03/technology/israel-hamas-information-war.html>
- Anti-Defamation League, ADL. (2024, June 28). *Denial and distortion of the Hamas-led October 7 attack: An overview of false narratives*. ADL. <https://www.adl.org/resources/article/denial-and-distortion-hamas-led-october-7-attack-overview-false-narratives>
- Cyberwell. (2024). [Various Cyberwell reports]. Cyberwell. <https://cyberwell.org/reports/>
- Ummid. (2024, January 1). *'We don't rape': Hamas rejects New York Times report about sexual violence*. Ummid. <https://ummid.com/news/2024/january/01-01-2024/we-dont-rape-hamas-rejects-new-york-times-report-about-sexual-violence.html>
- Lippman, D. (2024, March 26). *Bowman reverses after calling reports of Oct. 7 sexual assaults in Israel 'propaganda'*. Politico. <https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2024/03/26/congress/bowman-house-israel-october-7-sexual-assault-hamas-00148426>
- Stutman, G. (2025, January 24). *UC Berkeley removes event description denying Oct. 7 rapes*. Jewish News of Northern California. <https://jweekly.com/2025/01/24/uc-berkeley-removes-event-description-denying-oct-7-rapes/>
- Pollitt, K. (2023, December 15). *Why have feminists been so slow to condemn the Hamas rapes?*. The Nation. <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/feminists-hamas-rapes/bowman-house-israel-october-7-sexual-assault-hamas-00148426>
- Stub, Z. (2025, January 22). *Global antisemitism surged 340% in two years, report finds*. The Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/global-antisemitism-surged-340-in-two-years-report-finds/>
- American Jewish Committee, AJC. (2025, February). *Findings from the American Jewish Committee 2024 Survey of Antisemitism in America*. AJC. https://www.ajc.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2025-02/2024_AJC-Survey-of-American-Jewish-Attitudes-about-Antisemitism-2.14.2025.pdf
- Andre'ev, V. and Portnoy, L. (2024, November 4). *Arabic and English antisemitism on social media platforms post-October 7: Analysis on discourse and prevention*. The Institute for National Security Studies. <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/antisemitism-on-social-media/>



JWI is the leading Jewish organization championing women and girls by working to end gender-based violence, building pathways to long-term economic security, and advancing women's leadership.

We envision a world free of violence and inequity where all women and girls thrive.

Funding for this report was generously provided by:



Segal Family Foundation