

Response to Reviewers

Cover Letter

To the Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, “**Gender-Based Violence and Reproductive Harm in the Gaza Conflict (2023–2025): A Mixed-Methods Analysis of the UN Commission of Inquiry Report**”. We are grateful for the reviewers’ thoughtful and constructive feedback, which has been instrumental in strengthening the methodological rigor, analytical balance, and overall clarity of our work.

In response to the reviewers’ comments, we have undertaken substantial revisions to the manuscript. The key improvements include:

- **Methodological Strengthening and Transparency:** We have significantly expanded the methodology section (Section 4) to provide a more detailed and critical account of our data sources, verification protocols, and analytical procedures. This includes a new subsection on “Limitations and Robustness Checks,” explicit discussion of potential biases in UN data, and a commitment to data and code availability.
- **Analytical Balance and Terminology:** We have tempered our language throughout, replacing terms perceived as inflammatory with more neutral, academic terminology. We have qualified our conclusions to more precisely match the evidentiary support, framing our findings as documenting *systematic patterns* of violence with significant implications for international law, while avoiding definitive legal classification.
- **Addressing Reproducibility:** We have added a data availability statement and detailed our analytical procedures to enhance reproducibility. We now explicitly state that all data sources are publicly available UN reports and that analysis code will be provided upon request.
- **Incorporating Comparative Context:** We have integrated comparative analysis with documentation from other conflict zones (e.g., Syria, Yemen, DRC) throughout the results and discussion to better contextualize our findings and address concerns about specificity.

We believe these revisions have substantially addressed the reviewers’ concerns, resulting in a more robust, balanced, and transparent manuscript. Our detailed point-by-point responses follow.

Reviewer-by-Reviewer Detailed Responses

Reviewer 1

Comment 1: Major concern: The study relies entirely on secondary UN data without independent verification, creating potential institutional bias. No discussion of potential selection bias in testimony collection. **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this crucial point. We have substantially revised

the manuscript to critically engage with the limitations of our data sources. In the **Introduction (Section 1)**, we now explicitly state that the analysis “acknowledges inherent limitations in secondary data analysis” and that institutional documentation “operates within specific mandates and verification protocols that influence how evidence is gathered and presented.” We have added a detailed critique in the **Methodology section (Section 4, subsection “Participants and Sampling”)**, noting that “Sampling limitations include potential selection bias due to access constraints and security concerns that may affect which survivors come forward.” Furthermore, a new subsection, **“4.7 Limitations and Robustness Checks”**, systematically details these concerns, including “Reliance on institutional data sources introduces potential reporting biases, mitigated through methodological triangulation and transparency in verification protocols.” We also now mention the use of “comparative benchmarking” as a robustness check against selection bias.

Comment 2: Correlation analysis ($r=0.81$ between GBV and maternal mortality) is presented as evidence of systematic relationship without establishing causality or addressing confounding variables.

Response: We agree and have modified our language to appropriately frame the correlational findings. In the **Results (Section 5.5)**, we now state: “These strong correlations demonstrate how gender-based violence functions within a broader pattern of systematic violence... Robustness checks... confirm the stability of these correlations. However, appropriate methodological caveats are maintained regarding causal inference, and the analysis acknowledges potential confounding variables that may affect these relationships.” This caution is reiterated in the **Discussion (Section 6)**: “The discussion maintains appropriate caveats regarding causal inference while examining the systematic nature of documented patterns.”

Comment 3: Critical flaw: No data availability statement. Statistical code and analysis procedures not available. **Response:** This has been addressed. We have added a **data availability statement** at the end of the **Methodology section (Section 4)**: “All data used in this study are derived from publicly available United Nations reports cited in the references. The statistical code and analysis protocols used for quantitative analysis are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.” We have also significantly expanded the description of our analytical procedures in **Section 4.4 (Data Analysis)** to enhance reproducibility.

Comment 4: Terminology is sometimes inflammatory (“ritual of domination”) rather than analytical. The term “genocide” is used throughout without sufficient legal qualification. **Response:** We have revised the title and text to use more precise, academic language. The title is now **“Gender-Based Violence and Reproductive Harm in the Gaza Conflict (2023–2025)...”**. We have removed or reframed inflammatory phrases. The quote “ritual of domination” remains as a direct, anonymized testimony from a survivor, which we believe is a powerful and valid datum, but we have contextualized it within analytical framing. Regarding “genocide,” we have replaced it with terms like “systematic violence,” “patterns of violence with implications under international law,” and “potential elements of international crimes.” We emphasize the *systematic nature* of the documented patterns rather than making a definitive legal classification. This change is implemented throughout, especially in the **Abstract, Introduction, and Discussion**.

Comment 5: Add discussion of methodological limitations section. Include comparative analysis with other conflict zones to establish specificity. **Response:** We have added a dedicated subsection **“4.7 Limitations and Robustness Checks”** as requested. Furthermore, we have integrated comparative analysis throughout the manuscript. In the **Results (Sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5)**, we now include sentences comparing the scale and patterns of violations in Gaza to those documented in other conflicts (e.g., Syria, Yemen, DRC). For example, in Section 5.2: “Comparative analysis with health system documentation from other conflict zones... reveals that the scale of reproductive health infrastructure destruction in Gaza exceeds typical patterns observed in contemporary conflicts.”

Reviewer 2

Comment 1: Extreme political bias permeates the analysis. Terminology ("genocide") used as premise rather than conclusion. The presentation suggests advocacy rather than dispassionate scholarly analysis.

Response: We have undertaken a comprehensive revision to ensure the manuscript maintains a neutral, scholarly tone focused on methodological rigor and evidence-based analysis. As noted in response to Reviewer 1, we have changed the title to refer to the "Gaza Conflict" and have systematically replaced the term "genocide" with descriptive, evidence-based language focusing on "systematic patterns of violence," "reproductive harm," and their implications under international law. The **Abstract, Introduction, and Discussion** have been rewritten to frame the research questions and conclusions within academic and methodological discourse, not advocacy.

Comment 2: Methodological claims exceed actual implementation. No discussion of UN data collection limitations or potential biases. Hidden assumption: UN data represents objective ground truth.

Response: We have significantly expanded the **Methodology section (Section 4)** to provide a transparent and critical account of our methods. We now explicitly detail the "verification protocols" of the UN Commission of Inquiry and acknowledge their constraints. In **Section 4.1 (Research Design)**, we state the design "addresses the specific challenges of documenting gender-based violence... while acknowledging methodological constraints inherent in conflict zone documentation." In **Section 4.7 (Limitations)**, we list: "Reliance on institutional data sources introduces potential reporting biases." We no longer present UN data as unproblematic "ground truth" but as the best-available institutional documentation, subject to critical analysis.

Comment 3: Causal language applied to correlational findings. Claims of "systematic patterns" exceed evidentiary support. **Response:** We have carefully reviewed the manuscript to eliminate causal language. Findings are now described as correlations, associations, and patterns. The claim of "systematic patterns" is supported by the quantitative documentation of thousands of incidents across time and location types, their strong correlation with other indicators of system collapse, and the thematic consistency across qualitative testimonies. We have strengthened this argument by adding **comparative analysis** (showing these patterns are distinctive in scale) and discussing **robustness checks**. We believe the evidence, presented with appropriate caveats, robustly supports the conclusion of systematicity.

Comment 4: No consideration of alternative explanations for observed patterns. **Response:** We have incorporated this consideration into the revised **Discussion (Section 6)**. We now frame the interpretation of patterns within the context of scholarly debate and epistemic injustice. Furthermore, the new **Limitations subsection (4.7)** explicitly states that the "analysis cannot establish individual responsibility for documented violations, but rather identifies systematic patterns that suggest potential violations of international law." This acknowledges that our analysis documents *what* happened and its systematic nature, while leaving open the definitive assignment of intent or legal characterization to appropriate judicial bodies.

Comment 5: Complete absence of methodological critique of source data. **Response:** Added. Please see our response to Comment 2 above. The **Introduction (Section 1)** now states: "The analysis critically examines these institutional processes, acknowledging both their methodological strengths and potential limitations in capturing the full scope of violations." The **Methodology section** provides detailed discussion of sampling limitations, verification protocols, and potential biases.

Closing Note

We again express our sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their challenging and insightful critiques. Engaging with their feedback has been invaluable. We are confident that the extensive revisions detailed

above have significantly strengthened the manuscript's methodological rigor, analytical balance, and scholarly tone, making it a more robust and suitable contribution to the literature.

Respectfully submitted,

The Authors