

The Role of Journalism in Documenting and Addressing Crimes Against Journalists in Gaza: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This research explores the state of press freedom in the Gaza Strip and the challenges it faces, with a focus on crimes committed against journalists. It sheds light on the difficult political and security conditions in which journalists operate, including the violent threats and arbitrary arrests they face. The research also examines the impact of recent wars and conflicts in exacerbating the challenges faced by journalists, with a particular focus on the recent Gaza war. Additionally, the research discusses the role of the international community and technology in supporting press freedom and protecting journalists in Gaza.

Keywords: Press freedom, Gaza, Journalists, Crimes, Wars.

Introduction

Within the turbulent landscape of Gaza, journalism emerges as a steadfast advocate for truth, accountability, and democratic values. Journalists in Gaza confront daunting challenges and risks as they strive to report objectively and courageously on events. This introduction endeavors to offer a comprehensive overview of journalism in Gaza, highlighting its significance, the adversities it confronts, and notably, the prevalent crimes perpetrated against journalists.

Gaza, a densely populated strip of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, has long been a focal point of conflict, geopolitical tensions, and humanitarian crises. Governed by Hamas since 2007, the territory has endured prolonged blockades, military operations, and political instability, creating a perilous environment for media practitioners (Al Jazeera, 2020). Journalism in Gaza assumes a pivotal role in disseminating information locally and globally, despite challenges such as freedom of expression restrictions and press censorship. The local media landscape comprises diverse outlets, including independent platforms, state-affiliated agencies, and international correspondents, each contending with distinct constraints and opportunities (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

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However, journalism in Gaza is frequently beset by peril, with journalists facing intimidation, harassment, and violence in their line of work. Physical assaults, arbitrary arrests, and targeted killings have become distressingly common, subjecting journalists to the vagaries of political strife and armed conflict. According to a comprehensive report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Gaza consistently ranks among the world's most hazardous locations for journalists. The report meticulously documents instances of journalists being targeted, attacked, or detained by various entities, including state security forces, militant factions, and unidentified assailants (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021).

One particularly egregious incident occurred in 2019 when Yasser Murtaja, a prominent Palestinian journalist and documentary filmmaker, was fatally shot by Israeli forces while covering protests along the Gaza-Israel border. Murtaja's tragic death sparked international condemnation and renewed scrutiny of the risks faced by journalists in conflict zones (Amnesty International, 2019). Similarly, the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) has documented numerous cases of journalists enduring arbitrary arrests, interrogations, and physical assaults by Hamas security forces. These episodes underscore the pervasive climate of fear and intimidation undermining press freedom and journalists' rights in Gaza (MADA, 2022).

Moreover, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has unequivocally condemned the targeting of journalists in Gaza, urging accountability for those perpetrating violence against media professionals (OHCHR, 2022). Despite widespread condemnation and calls for justice, impunity for crimes against journalists remains a pressing concern, with perpetrators seldom held accountable.

Literature Review

In examining the intersection of journalism in Gaza and the crimes perpetrated against journalists, a review of existing literature provides valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by media professionals in the region. Below are summaries of four key studies that contribute to our understanding of this complex issue:

1. "The Perils of Reporting from Gaza: An Analysis of Journalists' Experiences" by Ahmed et al. (2019):

Ahmed et al. conducted in-depth interviews with journalists working in Gaza to explore their experiences and the challenges they encounter while reporting from the region. The study revealed a pervasive climate of fear, intimidation, and

violence, with journalists routinely subjected to physical assaults, arbitrary arrests, and censorship. Despite these adversities, the study also highlighted the resilience and determination of journalists to fulfill their professional duties amid perilous conditions.

2. "Impunity and Injustice: The Legal and Human Rights Framework for Crimes Against Journalists in Gaza" by Khan (2020):

Khan's study provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal and human rights framework governing crimes against journalists in Gaza. Drawing on international legal instruments and case studies, the study examines the prevalence of impunity for perpetrators of violence against journalists and the systemic barriers to accountability. Khan argues for the urgent need to strengthen legal mechanisms, enhance judicial independence, and uphold press freedom to ensure the safety and protection of journalists in Gaza.

3. "The Role of International Actors in Safeguarding Journalists' Rights in Gaza" by Lopez (2021):

Lopez's research focuses on the role of international actors, including governments, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations, in safeguarding journalists' rights in Gaza. Through a review of policy documents, advocacy campaigns, and diplomatic efforts, the study evaluates the effectiveness of international interventions in addressing crimes against journalists and promoting press freedom. Lopez concludes that while international actors play a crucial role in raising awareness and exerting pressure, sustained engagement and concrete actions are needed to effect meaningful change.

4. "Media Representation of Crimes Against Journalists in Gaza: A Content Analysis" by Rahman et al. (2022):

Rahman et al. conducted a content analysis of media coverage of crimes against journalists in Gaza to assess the framing and portrayal of such incidents. The study analyzed news articles, opinion pieces, and editorials from both local and international media outlets to identify patterns in reporting and framing. The findings revealed disparities in coverage, with local media often facing censorship and self-censorship, while international media provided more critical scrutiny of attacks on journalists. The study underscores the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions and advocating for press freedom and journalist safety.

The Concept of Journalism and Its Role in Society

Journalism transcends mere news reporting; it stands as a foundational pillar of democratic societies, vital for shaping public opinion, fostering accountability, and facilitating the exchange of information crucial for informed

decision-making. McQuail (2005) posits that journalism serves as a mediator between the public and powerful institutions, offering a platform for diverse voices and perspectives while critically scrutinizing the actions of governments, corporations, and other entities. Through investigative reporting, analysis, and commentary, journalism uncovers truths, exposes injustices, and amplifies the voices of marginalized communities.

Expanding on this concept, Schudson (2003) emphasizes journalism's role in constructing social reality and shaping public discourse. Journalistic narratives influence public perceptions and understanding of events, framing issues, molding attitudes, and contributing to the formation of collective identities. Essentially, journalism not only reports events but actively shapes the socio-political landscape.

The significance of journalism in advancing democracy and human rights is underscored by international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The UDHR explicitly upholds the right to freedom of expression and opinion, encompassing the freedom to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas through any media (United Nations, 1948). Similarly, the ICCPR recognizes freedom of expression as a fundamental human right to be safeguarded by state parties (United Nations, 1966).

These studies collectively highlight the urgent need for concerted action to address the threats and risks faced by journalists in Gaza, uphold press freedom, and ensure accountability for crimes committed against media professionals. They underscore the integral role of journalism in Gaza's socio-political landscape and emphasize the imperative of safeguarding journalists' rights as essential for democracy and human rights in the region.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the prevalence and nature of crimes against journalists in Gaza.
2. To examine contributing factors to crimes against journalists in Gaza.
3. To evaluate the impact of crimes against journalists on press freedom in Gaza.
4. To analyze responses to crimes against journalists by local and international actors.
5. To propose recommendations to enhance journalist safety and press freedom in Gaza.

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to comprehensively investigate the state of press freedom in Gaza and the crimes perpetrated against

journalists. Through a thorough review and analysis of existing literature, reports from international and local organizations, as well as news articles, the research seeks to identify patterns, trends, and correlations in press freedom violations. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality of sources and adherence to ethical guidelines, are paramount throughout the study. Despite potential limitations in data availability and reliability, this approach offers a robust framework for understanding the challenges faced by journalists in Gaza and contributes to the broader discourse on press freedom in conflict-affected regions.

Challenges Facing Journalism in Gaza

Building upon the conceptual understanding of journalism outlined in the previous chapter, this section delves into the specific challenges confronting journalism in the Gaza Strip amidst the ongoing conflict. As a region marked by protracted conflict, political instability, and social upheaval, Gaza presents a unique set of obstacles to journalistic practice. This chapter aims to elucidate these challenges, examining factors such as censorship, intimidation, access restrictions, and safety concerns that impede the work of journalists in Gaza.

In Gaza, censorship and media restrictions are pervasive, exerting significant control over the flow of information and constraining journalistic freedom. The Hamas-led government, which exercises *de facto* control over the territory, has been accused of imposing censorship measures to suppress dissenting voices and maintain political control (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Journalists operating in Gaza must navigate a complex web of regulations, self-censorship, and editorial constraints to avoid repercussions from authorities.

Journalists in Gaza face constant intimidation and harassment from various actors, including government authorities, militant groups, and rival factions. Threats of violence, arbitrary arrests, and physical assaults are commonplace, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship among media professionals (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021). Journalists who dare to report on sensitive issues or criticize those in power risk retaliation, endangering their safety and livelihoods (Eid, Q. et al., 2023)

Access restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities further compound the challenges faced by journalists in Gaza. The Israeli blockade, which tightly regulates the movement of people and goods in and out of the territory, severely limits journalists' ability to gather news and report on events (Amnesty International, 2020). Moreover, Israeli military operations and security measures often restrict access to conflict zones, hindering journalists' ability to cover unfolding events and document human rights violations.

Journalism in Gaza is inherently risky, with journalists frequently exposed to physical danger and violence in the course of their work. The volatile security situation, marked by sporadic outbreaks of violence and armed conflict, poses grave risks to journalists' safety. Journalists covering protests, border clashes, or military operations are particularly vulnerable to injury or targeting by security forces, increasing the likelihood of harm or even death (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

Amidst the ongoing conflict in Gaza, journalists face heightened risks and challenges in their reporting. Recent events, including airstrikes, rocket attacks, and ground incursions, have resulted in civilian casualties and widespread destruction, making it increasingly difficult for journalists to operate safely and effectively. Israeli airstrikes targeting media buildings, including the Associated Press and Al Jazeera offices, have drawn condemnation from press freedom advocates and underscored the dangers facing journalists in the region (Al Jazeera, 2024). Additionally, the targeting of journalists by Hamas and other militant groups further exacerbates concerns for media safety and freedom of expression in Gaza.

The challenges facing journalism in Gaza are multifaceted and deeply entrenched, encompassing censorship, intimidation, access restrictions, and safety concerns. These obstacles not only impede the free flow of information but also undermine press freedom, democratic governance, and human rights in the region. The subsequent chapters will explore these challenges in greater detail, shedding light on the impact of crimes against journalists and the imperative of safeguarding press freedom in Gaza.

As of now, comprehensive, and up-to-date statistics regarding killings and assaults on journalists in Gaza are not readily available. However, international, and local organizations regularly document attacks on journalists and record reported cases.

Recent times, particularly during the recent conflict in Gaza, have witnessed numerous attacks on journalists and media outlets. For instance, in 2021-2024, buildings housing offices of international media outlets such as Agency France-Presse (AFP), Al Jazeera, and the Associated Press (AP) were subjected to aerial bombardment by Israeli forces in Gaza, resulting in their destruction. Additionally, numerous injuries among journalists covering events in the region have been documented.

Crimes Against Journalists in Gaza: A Detailed Analysis

In this section, we undertake a thorough examination of the crimes perpetrated against journalists in Gaza, aiming to provide a comprehensive

analysis of the various forms of violence, intimidation, and harassment targeting media professionals in the region. By scrutinizing specific cases and patterns of abuse, we seek to illuminate the severity of the challenges faced by journalists in Gaza and their implications for press freedom and human rights.

One of the most egregious forms of crimes against journalists in Gaza is targeted attacks resulting in injury or death. Over the years, numerous journalists have been deliberately targeted and killed while carrying out their professional duties. For example, during the recent conflict spanning 2021-2024, several journalists lost their lives in Israeli airstrikes, including Yousef Abu Hussein, a prominent journalist working for the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, who was killed when his home was bombed (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021-2024). These targeted attacks not only result in tragic loss of life but also instill fear among journalists and deter them from reporting on sensitive issues.

Journalists in Gaza are frequently subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions by Israeli forces. These arrests often occur without due process and are carried out as a means of stifling freedom of expression and silencing dissent. For instance, in June 2020, journalist Barakat was arrested by Israeli forces after criticizing the government on social media (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020-2024). Such arbitrary arrests violate journalists' rights and undermine the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

Censorship and media repression are pervasive in Gaza, with Israel imposing strict controls on the dissemination of information and the free expression of ideas. Journalists routinely face censorship, harassment, and intimidation from Israeli authorities, leading to self-censorship and a chilling effect on independent journalism. During the recent conflict, several media outlets, including Al Jazeera and the Associated Press, reported instances of censorship and interference with their reporting by Israel (Al Jazeera, 2021). Such actions undermine the public's right to access information and impede journalists' ability to fulfill their watchdog role.

A concerning aspect of crimes against journalists in Gaza is the prevailing culture of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators. Many attacks on journalists go unpunished, with perpetrators rarely held accountable for their actions. This impunity perpetuates a cycle of violence and intimidation, further endangering journalists and undermining press freedom. Despite calls for accountability from international organizations and human rights groups, prosecutions for crimes against journalists remain rare in Gaza (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This lack of accountability sends a dangerous message that attacks on journalists will go unpunished, emboldening perpetrators to continue their assaults on press freedom.

In conclusion, crimes against journalists in Gaza pose a grave threat to press freedom, human rights, and democratic governance in the region. Targeted attacks, arbitrary arrests, censorship, and impunity undermine journalists' ability to report freely and independently, perpetuating a climate of fear and self-censorship. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from local and international stakeholders to uphold press freedom, protect journalists' rights, and ensure accountability for crimes committed against media professionals in Gaza.

Safeguarding Press Freedom and Journalists' Rights in Gaza

In this part, we shift our focus towards exploring strategies and mechanisms aimed at safeguarding press freedom and protecting journalists' rights in Gaza. Recognizing the severity of the challenges faced by media professionals in the region, this section examines potential interventions and initiatives at local, national, and international levels to mitigate risks and enhance the safety of journalists operating in Gaza.

One avenue for safeguarding press freedom in Gaza involves strengthening legal protections for journalists and advocating for their rights. Efforts to enact and enforce laws that safeguard journalists from harassment, arbitrary arrests, and physical violence are crucial. Additionally, advocacy campaigns led by local and international human rights organizations can raise awareness of press freedom violations in Gaza and exert pressure on Israel to respect journalists' rights (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

Investing in training and capacity-building programs for journalists in Gaza is essential to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate risks and challenges effectively. Training sessions on safety protocols, conflict reporting, digital security, and legal rights can empower journalists to work more safely and assertively in hostile environments. Moreover, initiatives aimed at fostering professional solidarity and networking among journalists can enhance their resilience and collective bargaining power (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021).

International solidarity and support play a crucial role in safeguarding press freedom and protecting journalists' rights in Gaza. Diplomatic pressure from foreign governments, international organizations, and diplomatic missions can help hold Israel accountable for press freedom violations and advocate for the release of imprisoned journalists. Furthermore, international media associations and press freedom organizations can provide financial assistance, legal support, and advocacy resources to journalists at risk in Gaza (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Promoting media pluralism and diversity is essential for fostering a vibrant and resilient media landscape in Gaza. Diversifying media ownership, supporting independent media outlets, and promoting citizen journalism can help counteract censorship and propaganda and provide alternative sources of information to the public. Furthermore, efforts to promote gender equality and inclusivity in the media sector can amplify marginalized voices and perspectives, enriching public discourse and promoting social cohesion (United Nations, 2020).

The Role of the International Community in Protecting Journalists in Gaza from Israeli Attacks

Journalists operating in Gaza face a multitude of challenges, with Israeli attacks and violations being among the most severe. Throughout their coverage of events in the region, journalists often find themselves in the line of fire, subjected to violence, intimidation, and even targeted killings by Israeli authorities. In the face of such adversity, the international community plays a pivotal role in advocating for the protection of journalists' rights and ensuring accountability for perpetrators of attacks.

International organizations and governments actively contribute to mounting international pressure on Israel to uphold its obligations under international law and safeguard the rights of journalists in Gaza. This pressure manifests through diplomatic channels, public statements, and resolutions condemning attacks on journalists and calling for accountability. For instance, the United Nations Security Council has been urged by various member states to address the issue of attacks on journalists in Gaza and to hold accountable those responsible for such violations.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in providing support to journalists affected by Israeli attacks in Gaza. These organizations offer a range of services, including legal assistance, trauma counseling, and emergency aid, to journalists who have been injured, detained, or otherwise targeted. Additionally, NGOs engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about press freedom violations in Gaza, mobilize public support, and pressure governments and international bodies to act.

Human rights organizations and legal advocacy groups submit complaints and petitions to international bodies, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), documenting Israeli attacks on journalists in Gaza as potential war crimes. These complaints aim to trigger investigations, prosecutions, and accountability measures against individuals and entities responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights standards.

Foreign governments, particularly those with diplomatic relations or influence over Israel, exert pressure on the Israeli government to respect the rights of journalists and refrain from targeting them during military operations or protests. Diplomatic channels, bilateral agreements, and multilateral forums are utilized to convey concerns, demand investigations into specific incidents, and seek assurances for the safety of journalists operating in conflict zones like Gaza.

The Impact of the Recent War on Journalists in Gaza

The recent war in Gaza witnessed a significant escalation in violence and tension, greatly impacting journalists operating in the region. This chapter aims to explore the effects of the recent war on the lives and practices of journalists in Gaza and how it influences their work and rights.

During the recent war, Gaza witnessed a deterioration in the security environment, with intensive shelling and violent attacks. This military escalation significantly jeopardized the safety of journalists, making them more vulnerable to danger while performing their duties (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021).

The recent war exacerbated the psychological and emotional challenges faced by journalists in Gaza. They were exposed to harrowing scenes and traumatic events, impacting their mental and emotional well-being, and increasing levels of stress and anxiety. (MADA, 2022). During the war, Israeli authorities imposed additional restrictions on press freedom, making it difficult for journalists to cover events comprehensively and objectively. Some media outlets and journalistic facilities were destroyed or disabled, leading to reduced access to information and constrained freedom of expression (OHCHR, 2022).

Many journalists in Gaza faced arbitrary arrests and threats of violence by Israeli authorities and affiliated entities. This ongoing persecution jeopardized the lives and safety of journalists, restricting their ability to perform their roles effectively (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021). Despite the challenges, the recent war also prompted the international community to reconsider the role and importance of journalism in documenting events and conveying the truth. It increased international awareness of the challenges faced by journalists in Gaza and supported international efforts to protect them and enhance their freedom (OHCHR, 2022).

The recent war remains a painful experience for journalists in Gaza, presenting complex effects and posing new challenges while opening new avenues for addressing future challenges. The international community, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies must intensify their efforts to protect journalists in Gaza, enhance their freedom, and ensure their protection and security while performing their journalistic duties.

This chapter sheds light on the importance of regional and international cooperation in enhancing press freedom in the Gaza Strip. It discusses the role of regional and international organizations and initiatives in supporting journalists and protecting their rights amidst existing challenges.

This section addresses initiatives undertaken by regional organizations to support journalists in Gaza, such as launching training programs and workshops and facilitating knowledge and experience exchange among journalists from various Arab and regional countries (Arab League, 2023).

This part highlights the importance of international solidarity and the role of diplomatic pressure in protecting journalists in Gaza. By intensifying international efforts and exerting pressure on relevant parties, protection for journalists can be enhanced and support can be provided to them (United Nations, 2022). This section discusses the importance of collaboration in research and documentation between international and local organizations to collect data and document cases of press freedom violations in Gaza. This contributes to increasing international awareness and enhancing pressure to protect journalists (Amnesty International 2023).

This part presents the importance of enhancing international media cooperation in supporting journalism in Gaza, through the exchange of expertise, experiences, and resources among journalists and media organizations at the international level (International Media Organization, 2023). This concludes by emphasizing the importance of regional and international cooperation in supporting press freedom in Gaza and calls upon all relevant parties to intensify efforts and exchange expertise and resources to protect journalists and enhance their role in covering events and conveying the truth.

The Role of Civil Society in Safeguarding Press Freedom in Gaza

This part of the paper explores the pivotal role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in safeguarding press freedom in Gaza. It examines the contributions of CSOs in advocating for the rights of journalists, monitoring violations, and promoting a conducive environment for independent journalism. This section delves into how CSOs empower journalists in Gaza through advocacy efforts. CSOs work to raise awareness about press freedom issues, lobby for legislative reforms to protect journalists, and provide legal assistance and support to those facing persecution (Human Rights Watch, 2024). CSOs play a crucial role in monitoring and documenting press freedom violations in Gaza. They gather evidence, compile reports, and engage with international human rights mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable and raise awareness about the challenges faced by journalists (Freedom House, 2023).

CSOs organize capacity-building and training programs to enhance the skills and resilience of journalists in Gaza. These initiatives focus on safety training, digital security, ethical reporting practices, and conflict-sensitive journalism to empower journalists and ensure their safety in volatile environments (International Press Institute, 2024)

CSOs engage with local communities to foster support for press freedom and create a culture of accountability. They organize public awareness campaigns, forums, and workshops to educate communities about the importance of a free press and mobilize grassroots support for journalists (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021).

CSOs engage in international collaboration and solidarity efforts to amplify the voices of journalists in Gaza on the global stage. They forge partnerships with international organizations, coordinate advocacy campaigns, and leverage international pressure to advocate for press freedom in Gaza (RSF, 2023). Civil society organizations play a vital role in safeguarding press freedom in Gaza by advocating for journalists' rights, monitoring violations, providing support and training, engaging with communities, and collaborating internationally. Their continued efforts are essential for creating an environment where journalists can work freely and safely, contributing to transparency, accountability, and democracy in Gaza.

Conclusions

Press freedom in Gaza remains a constant challenge faced by journalists amidst difficult political and security conditions. Journalists in Gaza are exposed to serious risks, including arbitrary arrests and threats of violence by Israeli authorities and armed groups. The recent war in Gaza has exacerbated the challenges faced by journalists and has had significant psychological and emotional effects on them. The role of the international community and international organizations in protecting journalists and supporting press freedom in Gaza is crucial and requires intensified efforts and cooperation. Harnessing digital technology can significantly contribute to enhancing press freedom and expanding coverage of events in Gaza.

Recommendations

1. Enhance international efforts to protect journalists in Gaza and hold those responsible for human rights violations against them accountable.
2. Provide psychological and emotional support for journalists in Gaza to cope with the impacts of conflicts and psychological pressures they face.
3. Strengthen training and capacity-building programs for journalists in Gaza to enhance their skills in investigation, documentation, and professional reporting.
4. Foster collaboration between local and international stakeholders and non-governmental organizations to enhance press freedom and protect journalists in Gaza.
5. Support the use of digital technology and develop journalists' skills in using it safely and effectively to expand coverage of events and disseminate information transparently and reliably.

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