Media Disinformation and Violations Against Children in Yemen

Between Evasion of Responsibility and the Right of Victims to Truth

This study was prepared by the **Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV)** — a member of the *Justice for Yemen Pact* — as part of the outputs of the project **"Strengthening Awareness and Facilitating Enforcement of Children's Rights During the Conflict in Yemen – Phase II (SAFE II),"** implemented in partnership with the **DT Institute**.

Publications of the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV)

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DT Institute

DT Institute is a nonprofit organization committed to *"doing development differently."* DT Institute implements complex global development programs in conflict-affected, fragile, and closed environments. We also fund thoughtful leadership initiatives that stimulate innovation and improve people's lives through evidence-based programming. DT Institute works with communities and leaders to help build and sustain societies that are more resilient, equitable, inclusive, and democratic.

The Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV) – Rasd Coalition

YCMHRV is a Yemeni civil society organization established in January 2015 under license No. (1240). The Coalition monitors and documents all human rights violations in Yemen through its field teams, issues specialized qualitative reports on these violations, and submits them to relevant local and international bodies to support accountability, justice, and the principle of non-impunity. It also conducts training, advocacy, and awareness raising of human rights principles at both local and international levels.

Supporting Awareness, Facilitating Enforcement of Children's Rights During the Conflict - SAFE II

The SAFE II program, implemented by the YCMHRV in partnership with the DT Institute, aims to unify efforts to protect Yemeni children from grave human rights violations during armed conflict by strengthening local and international recognition of these violations and facilitating accountability for perpetrators.

SAFE II seeks to achieve this through:

- Civic education campaigns targeting communities and victims to enable safe reporting of grave violations
- Documentation and investigation of violations to support justice and accountability dialogues with international stakeholders using reliable evidence
- Launching dialogue among Yemeni justice actors on protecting children during and after conflict

Contents

Executive Summary

This study — the first of its kind in Yemen — examines the growing role of media disinformation in the context of the Yemeni conflict since 2014 and its impact on uncovering grave violations against children and on victims' right to truth.

Amid a multi-party war and the collapse of protection systems and essential services, children in Yemen have suffered a wide range of violations, including killing, maiming, forced recruitment, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian assistance. UN reports have documented more than **11,500 children killed or injured** during the years of conflict.

Within this context, media disinformation emerges as a **multiplier of violations and an extension of them**. Conflict actors seek to deny crimes, distort facts, shift blame, or smear victims — all of which obstruct human-rights monitoring, weaken accountability, and violate children's and families' right to truth.

This study is part of the outputs of the SAFE II project implemented by YCMHRV in partnership with DT Institute. It adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology combining qualitative content analysis of **18 cases of media disinformation** related to the six grave violations against children, and a field survey targeting **62 journalists, researchers, and child-rights activists**.

YCMHRV's field team conducted extensive monitoring and documentation using open-source intelligence and multi-tool digital verification. The research team also distributed and followed up on the survey to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Key Findings

- **80%** of respondents believe media disinformation has a *"very significant impact"* on uncovering the truth and documenting violations against children. By obstructing the course of justice and concealing crimes, the suffering of victims is deepened, and accountability efforts are undermined.
- **63%** believe *all* conflict parties engage in disinformation, with **Houthi-aligned media** identified as the most frequent source, followed by anonymous/unverified sources and partisan media outlets.
- Four main patterns of disinformation were identified:
    1. Shifting responsibility and exchanging accusations
    2. Smearing victims and protecting perpetrators
    3. Reframing and distorting violations
    4. Concealment and information blackout

The findings of the study revealed that disinformation has deep impacts on victims by intensifying psychological and social trauma, denying suffering,

obscuring perpetrators' identities, and undermining documentation and public trust.

Journalists and human-rights workers face threats and pressure that limit their ability to verify information, creating an opaque information environment and weakening the production of reliable reports — despite their high awareness of the dangers of disinformation.

Drivers of Disinformation

- **Weak media independence**: 69% of participants indicated that reliance on conflict-linked funding exposes media outlets to political influence.
- **Low public media literacy**: Lack of verification skills increases susceptibility to misleading content.

Capacity Gaps

Civil society and independent media have a limited ability to counter disinformation due to:

- Scarce specialized resources
- Weak professional partnerships
- Dominance of political narratives

The study also stressed the need to strengthen independent media, develop journalists' fact-checking skills, activate legislation and regulatory frameworks, promote media literacy among the public, expand partnerships with human rights organizations, and empower and enhance the independence of local fact-checking platforms.

Media disinformation has become part of the **system of violations** committed against children in Yemen. Combating it is essential to:

- Uphold the right to truth
- Strengthen transitional justice
- Protect children
- Build a transparent information environment
- End impunity
- Support future peace efforts

Introduction

Since the escalation of the Yemeni conflict in 2014 between Ansar Allah (the Houthis) and the internationally recognized government — and its transformation

into a multi-party war following the intervention of the Arab Coalition in March 2015 — children have been subjected to widespread grave violations affecting their lives, safety, and fundamental rights.

UN reports document thousands of violations, including killing, maiming, forced recruitment, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. The collapse of infrastructure and deterioration of health and education services have further exacerbated children's vulnerability.

Parallel to these violations, **media disinformation** has emerged as a major factor complicating the landscape. Media — both conventional and digital — have shifted from being a neutral conveyor of information to becoming an active player in shaping the conflict, influencing public opinion, and constructing narratives that serve political and military agendas.

Conflict actors use their media platforms to reframe events, deny violations, or shift blame, undermining monitoring efforts and reinforcing impunity.

Disinformation also harms victims and families by denying their suffering and depriving them of their right to truth — a core principle of transitional justice and reparations.

From this perspective, examining media disinformation in the context of grave violations against children is especially significant. It is part of the very structure of the conflict and serves as a tool that perpetuates these violations. This makes the precise uncovering of facts and the challenge to denial narratives—driven by media manipulation—fundamental pillars for fostering a more just and peaceful environment.

Structure of the Study

The study consists of five main chapters:

1. **Chapter One**: Methodological framework
2. **Chapter Two**: Media disinformation in armed conflict and violations against children
3. **Chapter Three**: Patterns, mechanisms, actors, and objectives of disinformation
4. **Chapter Four**: Impact on victims, society, and justice
5. **Chapter Five**: Community responses and proposed solutions

Chapter One — Methodological Framework of the Study

Section 1 — Problem Statement

With the growing use of misleading information by parties to the conflict in Yemen when covering violations committed against children, the central problem emerges in understanding how media disinformation is being employed as a tool to obscure facts, deny responsibility, and cast doubt on evidence related to violations of children's rights. This disinformation contributes to entrenching impunity, obstructing protection and accountability efforts, and weakening public trust in the media and justice institutions.

Accordingly, the study revolves around the following core question: How is media disinformation used in the Yemeni conflict to conceal violations against children, and what impact does this have on justice, accountability, and the protection of victims?

Section 2 — Importance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from several key considerations, the most prominent of which are:

1. **Clarifying the pivotal role of combating disinformation** in protecting the rights of child victims and reinforcing the principles of transitional justice and the prevention of impunity.
2. **Highlighting the psychological and social impacts of media disinformation** on victims and their families, and how these impacts shape opportunities for protection and support.
3. **Linking efforts to counter disinformation with peacebuilding**, by promoting transparency, accountability, and ensuring that victims are meaningfully included in future political settlement processes.
4. **Providing a substantive and original contribution** to the field of media studies and transitional justice in the context of the Yemeni conflict, an area that remains under-researched despite its growing relevance.
5. **Drawing the attention of decision-makers, human rights actors, and civil society** to the dangers posed by media disinformation and its direct impact on monitoring, documentation, and the ability of institutions to protect children and hold perpetrators accountable.

Section 3 — Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

This study aims to analyze how media disinformation is used within the Yemeni conflict to conceal violations committed against children, and to assess its impact on justice, accountability, and the protection of victims. To achieve this, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

A. Analytical Research Questions

1. **What are the main patterns of media disinformation** used in covering violations of children's rights in Yemen?
2. **What mechanisms do parties to the conflict employ** to produce misleading content?
3. **What rhetorical and visual techniques** are used in misleading materials to justify or deny violations?
4. **Which actors are most involved** in practicing media disinformation in the context of child-related violations?
5. **How are child victims portrayed** in misleading media content?

B. Field Research Questions

1. What are the most prominent forms of media disinformation in covering child-rights violations in Yemen, as perceived by journalists and child-rights researchers?
2. What factors contribute to the spread of media disinformation?
3. What motives and objectives drive the production of misleading media content?
4. How does media disinformation affect the work of journalists and human-rights researchers?
5. What are its impacts on victims, public awareness, and public trust in the media?
6. What role do civil-society organizations and independent media play in exposing and countering disinformation?
7. What are the key strategies proposed to reduce media disinformation and strengthen truth-seeking?

Section 4 — Methodology of the Study

1. Study Design and Approach

The study adopted a **descriptive–analytical methodology**, combining qualitative analysis with field-based tools to develop an in-depth understanding of media disinformation related to violations of children's rights in Yemen. This approach made it possible to integrate qualitative and quantitative data within a unified

analytical framework, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the findings.

The study consisted of two main components:

1. **Content analysis** of media materials
2. **A field study** conducted through a structured questionnaire

In addition, the study relied on the database of the **Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV)** as a primary source of documentation and statistical data related to child-rights violations and cases of media disinformation. This enabled the research team to merge qualitative and quantitative insights with verified statistics, allowing for a clearer identification of patterns and trends.

2. **Data Collection Tools**

The study employed two primary tools for data collection:

2.1. Content Analysis of Media Materials

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on **18 documented cases of media disinformation** related to the coverage of violations against children in Yemen. These cases were documented by the YCMHRV team, with each case treated as an independent unit of analysis.

The analyzed materials included:

- Written texts
- Official statements
- Reports
- Video clips
- Social-media posts

The aim was to examine the content, uncover implicit meanings, and identify the patterns and techniques used by parties to the conflict when covering child-rights violations.

These media materials were published between **January 2024 and August 2025**, reflecting diverse approaches to reporting on child-related violations and enabling a more nuanced understanding of differences in media discourse across actors.

The materials were categorized into four main groups based on the publishing entity:

- **Media outlets affiliated with or loyal to Ansar Allah (the Houthis):** 17 media items from Al-Masirah TV, Yemen Today (Sana'a edition), Ansar Allah website, Saba News Agency (Sana'a edition), and 26 September (Sana'a edition).
- **Media outlets aligned with the internationally recognized Yemeni government:** 3 media items published by Yemen Daily and Al-Sahel Net (affiliated with the Joint Forces and National Resistance).
- **Media outlets affiliated with political parties:** 1 media item published by Suhail Net (close to the Islah Party).
- **Social-media platforms:** 23 posts from X and Facebook, including official and unofficial accounts linked to conflict actors, as well as posts by activists aligned with these actors.

2.2. Field Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed and administered to **62 participants**, including journalists, researchers, and activists working in media, human rights, and child-rights monitoring in Yemen. The questionnaire aimed to measure participants' awareness and experiences with media disinformation, its methods, its use in covering violations, and its impact on public perception.

The questionnaire covered key themes such as:

- The perceived impact of media disinformation on children's rights
- Participants' assessments of the effectiveness of different media outlets
- The role of civil-society organizations in countering disinformation
- Proposed strategies for confronting misleading narratives

The questionnaire included both **closed-ended questions** (for quantitative analysis) and **open-ended questions** (to capture deeper qualitative insights), enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The YCMHRV team distributed the questionnaire electronically through its network of journalists and human-rights researchers, ensuring accessibility across different Yemeni governorates while maintaining geographic and institutional diversity.

Participants were selected based on:

- Professional experience
- Engagement in human-rights or media work
- Direct involvement in child-rights monitoring

The sample included participants from:

- Taiz
- Aden
- Sana'a
- Hodiedah
- Mukalla
- Ibb
- Al-Mahwit
- As well as Yemeni professionals residing abroad (Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, Austria)

This diversity enriched the study with a wide range of perspectives shaped by varying local contexts and conflict dynamics.

3. Characteristics of the Field Sample

A total of **62 individuals** participated in the questionnaire:

- **69% male**
- **31% female**

Chart (1)
Gender

Male Femal

31%

69%
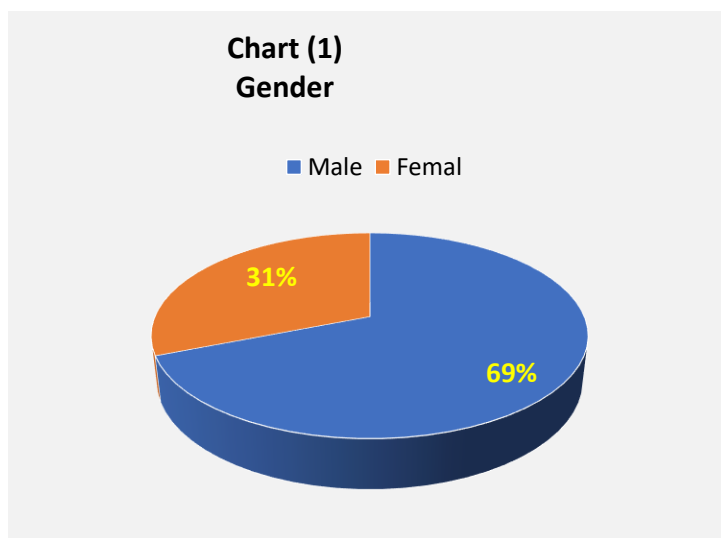
Although men constituted the majority, the level of female participation is considered significant, given the limited representation of women in media and human rights work in Yemen, especially in conflict-related fields. Their participation adds valuable social and human perspectives to the findings, enhancing the diversity of viewpoints.

Among age groups, participants aged 30–39 years formed the largest segment of the sample at 35.5%, reflecting that they belong to an age cohort with professional experience capable of analyzing media and human rights phenomena. Meanwhile, the presence of about 25.8% of participants under the age of 30 enhances the sample's age diversity and allows for integrating the perspectives of younger generations, who are more engaged in digital media and social networking platforms.

Chart 2
Age Group

Age Group	Percentage
>50	17.7%
40– 49	21%
30– 39	35.5%
< 30	25.8%
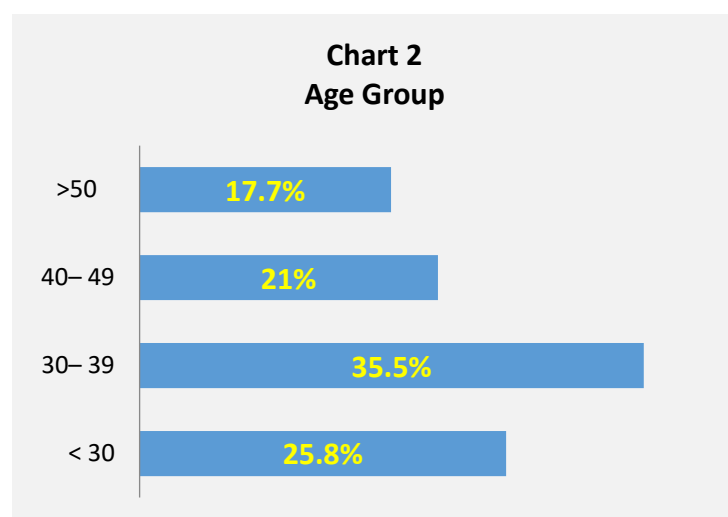
Geographically, respondents to the questionnaire were concentrated in the city of Taiz at 55%, followed by Aden at 21%, reflecting the high level of media and human rights activity in these two governorates. This concentration may be partly linked to the displacement of several journalists from areas controlled by Ansar Allah (the Houthis) to territories under the internationally recognized government since 2015, due to the relatively wider space for media work, although this displacement began to decline starting in 2020.[1]

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[1] Ashraf Al-Rifi, Secretary of the Freedoms Committee in the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate, information via social media, January 2, 2026.

Chart 3
Place of Residence
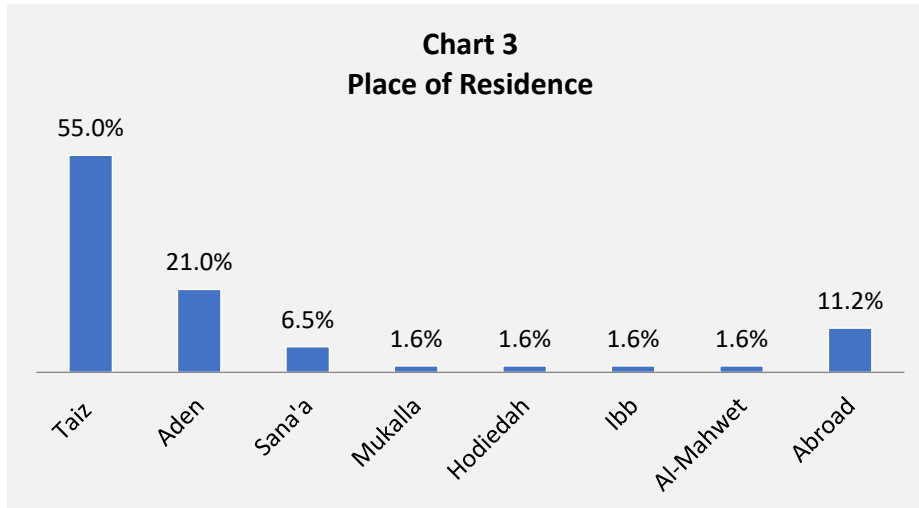
In contrast, Sana'a shows limited representation at 6.5%, which likely reflects the difficulties of participation from areas under the control of Ansar Allah (the Houthis), possibly due to security concerns. The sample also included participants from outside Yemen (Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, and Austria), representing approximately 11.2%, which added a comparative dimension and broader perspectives to the study.

In terms of profession, journalists constituted the largest segment of the sample at 50%, followed by human rights activists at 30.6%, followed by researchers at 14.5%, and 4.8% were distributed among other professions such as health education and pharmacy. This distribution gives the study a distinctly professional character, as the sample combines practical media experience with an analytical human rights perspective.

Chart (4)
Professions
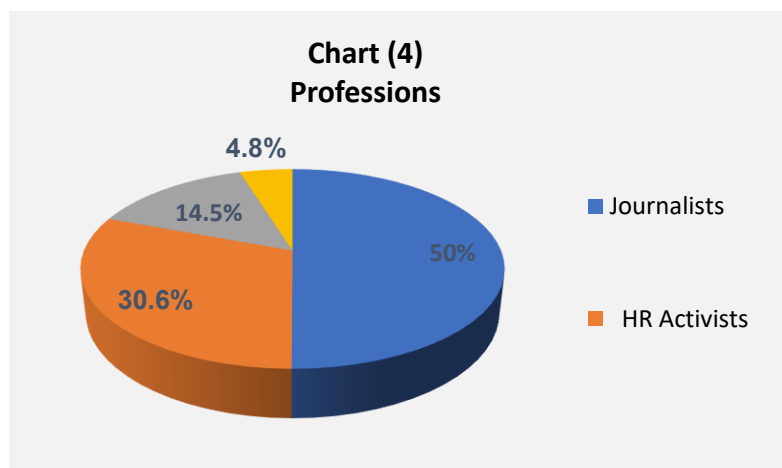
Regarding years of experience, most respondents possess extensive experience in their respective fields, which enhances the credibility of their responses and indicates a mature understanding of media and human rights issues. 32% of participants had more than ten years of experience, followed by 29% with 6-10 years, 24% with 3-5 years, and finally, 15% with less than three years.

**Chart (5)
Experience**

32%   29%   24%   15%

>10 years   6-10 years   3-5 years   <3 years
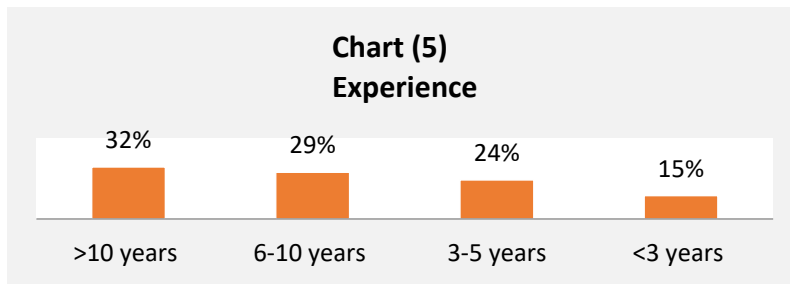
In terms of employment, the percentage of those working in independent or private media outlets was equal to that of those working in civil society organizations, at 40% each. State media accounted for only 5%, while the remaining 15% were distributed among other sectors such as research centers, the education sector, fact-checking platforms, and the health sector. This distribution indicates a clear bias towards independent and human rights-based movements, reflecting a high level of engagement with issues related to childhood and human rights violations.

**Chart (6)
Employment**

40%   40%   5%   15%

Independent/Privat...   CSOs   State-owned Media   Other entities...
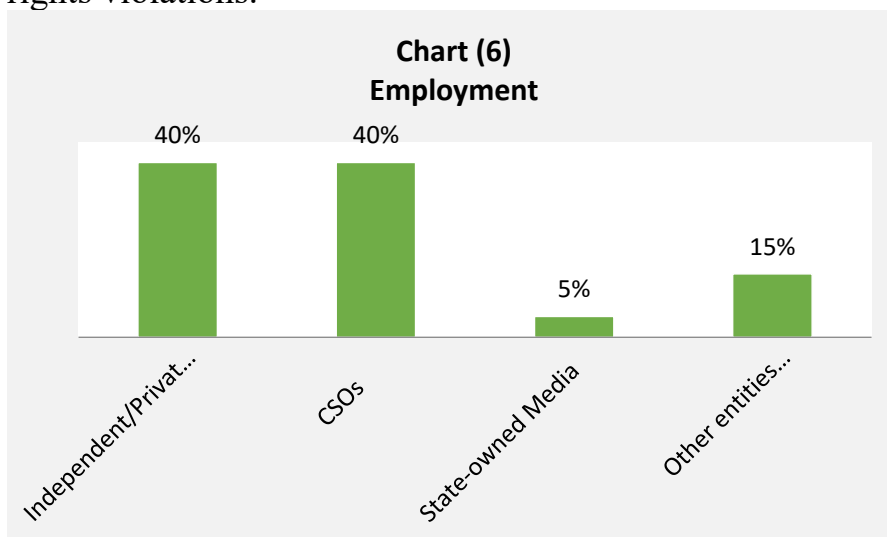
4. Data Analysis Tools

The study relied on Microsoft Excel to analyze the questionnaire data, extracting basic statistical indicators and conducting quantitative analysis. Thematic Analysis was also used to analyze participants' responses to the open-ended questions, to explore and interpret in-depth attitudes and perceptions related to the issue of media disinformation. In addition, Qualitative Content Analysis was employed to examine media materials, enabling the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings and supporting a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Chapter Two: Media Disinformation and Violations Against Children in Armed Conflicts

Armed conflicts contribute to the creation of highly fragile environments in which children lose the most essential elements of protection, leaving them exposed to serious violations that undermine their rights to life, safety, and development. The collapse of state institutions, the weakening of protection systems, and the absence of oversight and accountability exacerbate these risks, making children the most affected group in contexts of violence and armed conflict.

First Section: Violations Against Children in Armed Conflicts

A report by the UN Secretary-General indicated that the past year, **2024**, was the most devastating for children worldwide in nearly two decades, with grave violations increasing by approximately **25%** compared to 2023. According to the report, the published figures represent only a small fraction of the reality, due to the difficulty monitoring teams face in accessing many conflict-affected areas—meaning the actual scale of violations may be significantly higher.[2]

In Yemen, "Rasd Coalition" documented **845 grave violations** against children between 2023 and August 2025. **Recruitment** was the most common violation, with **636 cases**, followed by **47 cases of arbitrary detention**, **64 injuries**, **33 killings**, **13 cases of sexual violence**, **48 attacks on schools**, and **five cases of denial of humanitarian assistance**.

The data indicates that **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)** bear the largest share of these violations, with **763 cases** recorded. In comparison, the **internationally recognized government and its affiliated forces** were responsible for **61 cases**, in addition to **16 other cases** linked to security breakdowns or shared responsibility. The Coalition also documented approximately **7,490 cases of child recruitment** in Yemen between 2015 and 2025, reflecting the expansion of this practice over the past years.

Against this dire backdrop, the importance of returning to **international conventions and treaties** becomes evident, as they constitute the legal and ethical framework for protecting children in armed conflicts and ensuring their rights to life, safety, and protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. The **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** laid this foundation by obligating states to take all possible measures to protect children affected by

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[2] Human Rights Watch, "Violations Soar Against Children in Armed Conflict," June 20, 2025, accessed December15 , 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/06/20/violations-soar-against-children-in-armed-conflict

conflicts and to prevent the recruitment of children under the age of fifteen or their direct participation in hostilities.

The **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)** further strengthened this protection by expanding obligations to include **non-state armed groups**, requiring them to adhere to a minimum age of **18 years** for recruitment or use in hostilities. This framework is complemented by the rules of **international humanitarian law**, which prohibit targeting children or using them in combat operations.

These principles were reaffirmed by the **1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions**, while the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998)** establishes clear foundations for international accountability, classifying the recruitment of children under 15 as a **war crime**. It also covers other crimes such as killing, torture, rape, and forced displacement, which may constitute **crimes against humanity** when committed on a widespread or systematic basis.

Despite Yemen's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and its accession to several related international instruments, the implementation of these obligations has remained limited — particularly since the outbreak of the conflict in 2014, which significantly weakened the legal protection available to children.[3]

A. The Six Grave Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict

Despite the adoption of an extensive system of international conventions and agreements to protect children in armed conflicts, field realities reveal that they remain among the groups most exposed to the gravest forms of violations. The international community has identified **six primary categories of grave violations**[4] considered the most dangerous to children's lives and safety, forming the legal basis for international monitoring and accountability mechanisms. These include: **killing and maiming of children; recruitment or use of children in military operations; attacks on schools and hospitals; sexual violence; abduction; and denial of humanitarian assistance**.

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[3] Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Yemen's Children Between War and Delayed Justice," October 15, 2025, accessed December 15, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/activities/news/yemens-children-between/.

[4] Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "The Six Grave Violations," United Nations, accessed December 15, 2025, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/ar/six-grave-violations/

The severity of these violations increases when they occur within a media environment saturated with propaganda and disinformation. Media outlets may be exploited to distort facts, deny crimes, or reframe events in ways that serve the interests of warring parties. This goes beyond merely obscuring the truth—it extends to **discrediting victims, undermining the credibility of testimonies and human rights documentation**, and complicating monitoring and investigative efforts, thereby weakening prospects for accountability. In this sense, **media disinformation becomes a multiplier of violations against children**, an additional barrier to truth and justice, and a contributor to entrenching a culture of impunity.

B. Media Disinformation as a Tool for Sustaining Grave Violations

Violence against children in armed conflicts intersects closely with the media environment. The impact of these violations is not limited to the direct physical harm inflicted; it also extends to how events are portrayed in the media. When a child victim is represented in the media as a combatant or a legitimate target, **disinformation becomes an extension of the violation itself**, serving as a tool to conceal the crime and divert the course of accountability.

According to the **Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**, the acts listed in **Article 7[5]** constitute *crimes against humanity* when committed as part of a "widespread or systematic attack" directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. Within this framework, the use of media disinformation may fall under the crime of **persecution** when it is deliberately and systematically employed to target specific civilian groups and deprives them of their fundamental rights based on political, social, or other internationally prohibited grounds —particularly when combined with other acts within the Court's jurisdiction.

In the context of armed conflicts, the use of media disinformation may also constitute a **war crime** if it is employed to justify or facilitate acts prohibited under the Rome Statute — especially **directing attacks against civilian populations, obstructing humanitarian assistance, or exposing civilians to direct harm** in violation of international humanitarian law.[6]

The findings of the field study show that **80% of respondents believe that media disinformation has a "very significant" impact** on uncovering the truth and

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[5] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, accessed December 14, 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/rome-statute-international-criminal-court

[6] Katz, Eian, *"Liar's War: Protecting Civilians from Disinformation during Armed Conflict,"* International Review of the Red Cross , **no. 914** (December 2021): 679–680, https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/protecting-civilians-from-disinformation-during-armed-conflict-914

documenting violations against children in Yemen. This reflects a broad awareness of its role in disrupting the path to justice and concealing crimes through distorting narratives, obscuring the identity of perpetrators, and promoting contradictory storylines that undermine the credibility of evidence. Such dynamics complicate the documentation of violations and hinder the pursuit of justice. Media disinformation also weakens the efforts of human rights actors, intimidates victims' families, and discourages them from reporting or pursuing legal action, thereby reinforcing impunity and undermining accountability.

Second Section: Media Disinformation and Transitional Justice

The **right to truth** is one of the core pillars of transitional justice in post-conflict societies, as it ensures that victims and communities have access to accurate and comprehensive information about the circumstances of violations, the identity of perpetrators, and the outcomes of investigations. This right forms the basis for accountability, preventing impunity, restoring victims' dignity, and ensuring non-recurrence.[7]

However, media disinformation poses a direct threat to this right by obscuring facts, discrediting witnesses and victims, and weakening the credibility of documentation—particularly with the widespread manipulation of images and videos. This makes victims' testimonies vulnerable to doubt and obstructs the trajectory of transitional justice.[8]

The impact of disinformation extends beyond individuals to institutions. It undermines the credibility of transitional justice bodies — such as truth-seeking commissions or special tribunals—by spreading rumors or accusations that they are biased or politically influenced. It also reproduces the social and political divisions that transitional justice seeks to address, thereby weakening public trust in the entire process and reducing the legitimacy of its outcomes. Ultimately, media disinformation creates an environment of mistrust that discourages victims' participation in justice mechanisms, undermines the credibility of investigative institutions, distorts collective memory, and obstructs the construction of an objective, fact-based historical narrative.[9]

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[7] International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), *Truth Seeking: Elements of Creating an Effective Truth Commission*, ICTJ, March 18, 2013, 7, https://www.ictj.org/publication/truth-seeking-elements-creating-effective-truth-commission

[8] Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression (Irene Khan), "Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression during Armed Conflicts", U.N. General Assembly, A/77/288, August 12, 2022, accessed December 14, 2025, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3987899?v=pdf.

[9] Yemeni Archive, "A War of Narratives: How Mis- and Disinformation Endangers Lives, Distorts Memory, and Delays Justice in Yemen," August 5, 2025, accessed December 14, 2025, https://yemeniarchive.org/en/blog/a-war-of-narratives-how-mis-and-disinformation-endangers-lives-distorts-memory-and-delays-justice-in-yemen/

Third Section: The Conceptual Framework of Media Disinformation

Media disinformation has become one of the defining features of coverage of the Yemeni conflict. The military confrontation on the ground has been accompanied by a parallel information war that has reshaped the media landscape in ways that serve the interests of the warring parties.

A. The Yemeni Media Ecosystem in the Context of Conflict

Media — both conventional and digital — has shifted from being a mere conduit of information to becoming a central actor in managing the conflict, shaping public opinion, and constructing narratives that serve the political and military objectives of each party.

In this context, Yemen's media landscape has witnessed deep fragmentation along political and military lines. Media ecosystems aligned with the internationally recognized government emerged alongside outlets affiliated with **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)**, as well as media linked to the **Southern Transitional Council**, in addition to partisan outlets associated with the **Islah Party** and the **General People's Congress**. This fragmentation has produced a highly polarized media environment in which information is reproduced, and events are interpreted according to the logic of the conflict and the interests of the dominant actors on the ground.[10]

The field study findings align with this reality: around **63% of respondents** stated that all parties to the conflict engage in media disinformation "to a very great extent" when addressing issues related to children. This reflects a professional consensus that disinformation has become a **strategic tool** systematically embedded within the media discourse of the warring parties.

The analytical findings also reveal variations in disinformation tactics among actors. **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)** employ multiple patterns, most notably portraying victims as perpetrators or security threats, in addition to blackout strategies, silence, and reframing violations to conceal their real causes. Meanwhile, social media pages and accounts contribute to producing parallel narratives that cast doubt on incidents and downplay their significance. For its part, the media aligned with the internationally recognized government relies

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[10] Abdullah Qaid, "Funding Journalism in Yemen," *Media and Journalism Research Center*, August 20, 2024, accessed December 14, 2025, https://journalismresearch.org/2024/08/funding-journalism-in-yemen/

heavily on exchanging accusations with other parties, further clouding the media landscape and weakening society's ability to distinguish facts.

B. The Concept of Media Disinformation

Media disinformation is defined as the deliberate and planned production or dissemination of false or distorted information, with full awareness of its inaccuracy, while presenting it to the public as factual, to influence attitudes, beliefs, or public behavior.

Disinformation is widely employed during wars and conflicts to achieve specific political or ideological objectives by distorting reality or reframing it in ways that alter public perception of events and facts, thereby serving the interests and propaganda narratives of the warring parties.[11] This organized and systematic manipulation of information is practiced through both traditional and digital media.[12] However, the evolution of digital platforms has made social media—such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube — a fertile environment for the spread of disinformation.

This is due to several factors, most notably:

- algorithms that favor emotionally charged content,
- weak verification mechanisms,
- and the ease of creating fake accounts or "bot" networks to amplify misleading content on a large scale.[13]

Media disinformation does not necessarily involve entirely fabricated content; it may also consist of a mixture of manipulated information blended with facts, or the reframing of events and altering their contexts through conflicting propaganda narratives that serve the agendas of conflict actors. Such content may take multiple forms, including automated accounts, edited videos, visual memes, or coordinated online propaganda campaigns.[14]

There are three main elements upon which **media disinformation** is founded:

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[11] Philip N. Howard, Lisa-Maria Neudert, Nayana Prakash, and Steven Vosloo, Digital Misinformation / Disinformation and Children, UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, August 2021, accessed December 14, 2025, 2-3 https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/digital-misinformation-disinformation-and-children

[12] UNESCO, "Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation," UNESCO, accessed December 14, 2025, via Web Archive, https://webarchive.unesco.org/web/20230926213448/https:/en.unesco.org/fightfakenews.

[13] Ibid., 15

[14] European Commission, "A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation: Report of the Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation", Publications Office of the European Union, 2018, accessed December 14, 2025, 10-11, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ef4df8b-4cea-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1.

- **Deliberate intent** in producing or disseminating information.
- **Distortion or reframing of facts** to alter the public's perception.
- **An influence-driven objective** that serves political, military, or ideological interests.

Confusion often arises between **disinformation** and related concepts such as **misinformation**. The essential difference lies in **intent**: disinformation involves a conscious, premeditated effort to deceive the public and shape its perception through deliberate planning, whereas misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of inaccurate information due to weak verification or lack of knowledge, without any deliberate intent to mislead.

Propaganda, on the other hand, refers to organized, politically driven communication aimed at influencing attitudes, shaping beliefs, and mobilizing the public. It is a deliberate and systematic act intended to gain support or justify political or military positions. In the context of armed conflicts, disinformation often becomes part of the propaganda machinery used by different parties to justify their actions or undermine the credibility of their opponents.[15]

Despite the theoretical distinctions between these concepts, they overlap in practice within conflict environments. Disinformation is often produced within organized propaganda frameworks, then later circulated as misinformation by the public or journalists without verification.

This overlap has produced what is known as **information disorder**, a term describing an environment in which facts and falsehoods intermingle, and accurate information becomes entangled with manipulated content. This complicates fact-finding and documentation of violations and weakens public trust in the media and institutions.[16]

Media disinformation is practiced by both state and non-state actors and has direct implications for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to access information, freedom of opinion and expression, and the public's right to know the truth. Such practices can undermine accountability and advocacy efforts, and fuel social and political tensions — especially during crises and armed conflicts.[17]

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[15] C. W. Anderson, "Propaganda, Misinformation, and Histories of Media Techniques," Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review" 2, no. 2 (April 15, 2021), https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/propaganda-misinformation-and-histories-of-media-techniques/

[16] Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, "Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making", Council of Europe, October 2017, accessed December 14, 2025, 5, https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html

[17] Khan, "Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression during Armed Conflicts", 4–5.

C. Causes of the Spread of Media Disinformation

The survey results show that the respondents have identified several key reasons behind the spread of media disinformation in the coverage of childhood-related issues in Yemen.

At the top of these reasons is **the lack of media independence**, with around **69%** of participants indicating that media outlets' reliance on funding linked to conflict parties makes them vulnerable to political influence and limits their ability to provide objective coverage.

Chart (7)
Reasons for the Spread of Disinformation
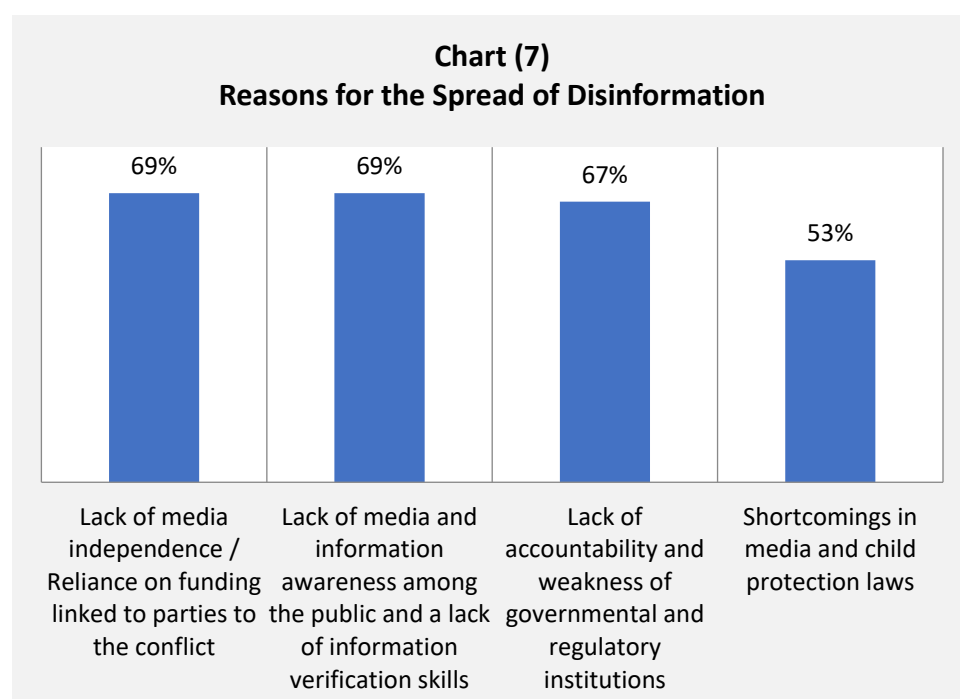
Equally significant is **the low level of media and information literacy among the public**, as participants noted that the absence of verification skills greatly contributes to the spread of disinformation and makes society more susceptible to consuming misleading content without scrutiny.

Additionally, **67%** of participants pointed to the absence of accountability and the weakness of governmental and oversight institutions as a structural and organizational deficiency that exacerbates the phenomenon.

 In addition, **53% of respondents** considered the shortcomings of laws related to media and child protection to be an additional factor contributing to the spread of media disinformation. They described the current legislation as either insufficient or poorly enforced, leaving a gap that is exploited to produce and disseminate misleading content without any effective deterrent.

These findings indicate that the spread of media disinformation is the result of an interplay of institutional, social, and legal factors. This underscores the need to strengthen media independence, reinforce oversight institutions, and enhance the public's media and information literacy to ensure their ability to distinguish between factual content and misleading information.

Chapter Three: Patterns and Objectives of Media Disinformation in Covering Childhood Issues in Yemen

The patterns identified by the study reveal an integrated system of disinformation used to conceal violations committed against children and reframe them in ways that serve official narratives. This system operates within a fragile environment that enables propaganda to spread and grants actors greater control over public narratives.

First Section: Patterns and Mechanisms of Media Disinformation in Covering Childhood Issues

The study revealed an intensive and systematic disinformation discourse that reshapes facts related to violations against children in ways that obscure real responsibility and reproduce the political and military narratives of the warring parties. Analysis of media materials covering the eighteen documented cases showed that media disinformation takes **four main forms**, as follows:

1. Shifting Responsibility and Exchanging Accusations

This is the most common pattern. Media outlets affiliated with parties to the conflict frequently reframe incidents, deny their direct responsibility for violations, and attribute them to the opposing side — regardless of field evidence.

This is evident in the heavy use of terminology that redirects responsibility, such as *"remnants of aggression"* or *"sniper fire from the coalition militias"* in media aligned with **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)**, versus *"remnants of the Houthi war"* or *"Houthi militia explosives"* in media aligned with the **internationally recognized government**.

Chart (8) Patterns of Media Disinformation in Covering Children's Issues
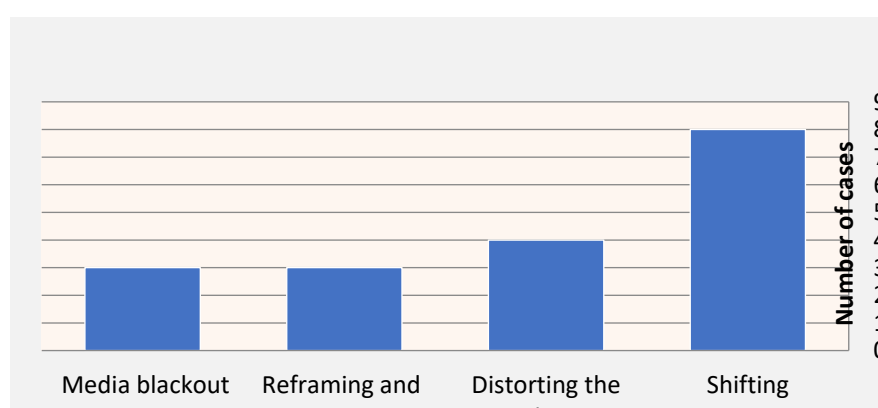
This pattern was documented in **eight cases**, particularly in coverage of landmine and unexploded ordnance incidents, such as:

- the killing of two girls by a landmine in Al-Bayda,[18]
- the killing of a child by an explosive projectile in Razih,[19]
- the injury of 34 children due to an explosion inside a school in Sana'a,[20]
- and a child injured by sniper fire in Taiz.[21]

In these incidents, rival media outlets reframed the violations as *"remnants of aggression*," *"results of Saudi aggression*," or *"Houthi landmines*," in attempts to absolve local actors of responsibility.

Furthermore, **64% of field study respondents** confirmed that shifting responsibility to the opposing party is one of the most widespread disinformation tactics. This reframing creates confusion among the public, obstructs the identification of the actual perpetrator due to competing narratives, and transforms the violation from a documentable and prosecutable incident into a murky event in which the truth is buried under dense propaganda.

2. Distorting the Image of the Victim and Protecting the Perpetrator

[18] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "A Stolen Future in Al-Baidha: Houthi Landmine Kills Two Girls and Lies Deepen Their Families' Grief," May 15, 2025, accessed December 13, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/a-stolen-future-in-al-baidha-houthi-landmine-kills-two-girls-and-lies-deepen-their-families-grief

[19] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "The Razih Child Whose Name and Suffering Were Distorted by the Houthis' Landmine," March 5, 2024, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/the-razih.

[20] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Houthi Disinformation Seeks to Evade Responsibility for an Explosion that Injured 34 Children at a School Turned into a Military Camp," August 25, 2024, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/houthi-disinformation/.

[21] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "A Lion in Lamb's Clothing: How Houthi Media Amplifies False Narratives and Obscures Violations," October 9, 2024, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/lion-in-lambs-clothing.

Analysis of the eighteen documented cases revealed this pattern of media disinformation, particularly in the discourse of media outlets and digital accounts affiliated with or supportive of **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)**. This tactic involves re-presenting the child victim as a security threat or as part of a "hostile network," which creates social acceptance for the use of violence against them and weakens public empathy and demands for accountability.

This pattern was recorded in **four cases**, and its use is evident in several incidents, including the detention of the child **Amjad**[22] for celebrating the anniversary of 26 September. The detention was framed as an effort to "prevent chaos," while those arrested with him were labeled "foreign agents" and "sleeper cells." The same pattern appeared in the coverage of the arrest of children from the **Hantous family**[23], who were described as "belonging to a terrorist cell."

These narratives rely on redefining the violation as a "legitimate measure to restore security and order." In the case of the **raid on Aal Bathhan family home**[24], the raid and the assault on children were portrayed as a "security operation," using a "security framing" to justify the violations by presenting them as lawful operations or counter-terrorism measures. This conceals the true nature of the abuse, transforms victims into culpable actors or security threats, and makes violence against them appear acceptable and justified.

Approximately **48% of field study respondents** indicated that exploiting children's images as political or security symbols is a widespread practice. These findings show that distorting the image of the victim not only influences public opinion but also undermines children's legal protection by stripping them of their victim status and embedding them within a security narrative that legitimizes violations and redefines them outside the framework of child rights. It also reduces public empathy and exacerbates the psychological trauma experienced by victims and their families due to the denial of truth and reputational harm.

3. Reframing and Distorting the Violation

This pattern appears in the representation of violations in distorted forms that conceal their real causes. It was most common in media outlets and digital

[22] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Detention of the Child Amjad: How the Houthis Use Media Misinformation to Justify Their Systematic Repression," September 19, 2024, accessed December 13, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/amjad-17357.
[23] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Children of the Hantous Family: Victims of Abduction and Deception," July 1, 2025, accessed December 13, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/hantous-children.
[24] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Children of the Aal Baṭḥān Family in Al-Jouf: Victims of Houthi Violence and Defamation," July 28, 2025, accessed December 13, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/children-of-the-aal-bathān-family-in-al-jouf-victims-of-houthi-violence-and-defamation

accounts affiliated with or supportive of **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)** and was documented in **three main cases**, most notably:

- The killing of the child soldier **Raddad** by his supervisor.[25] Houthi-affiliated media reframed the incident by portraying the victim as a "martyr of the Quranic march," relying on a heroic-religious narrative that transforms children into "young fighters" and justifies their recruitment under nationalistic or religious slogans. This mobilizing frame conceals the reality of recruiting a child below the legal age and his subsequent killing.
- The same approach appeared in the coverage of **summer centers**[26] in government schools in Houthi-controlled areas, which included military training and ideological indoctrination sessions for children. These activities were presented in the media as "educational and recreational programs" within a developmental and pedagogical framework that conceals their military and indoctrinating nature.

This type of distortion helps conceal violations and minimize their severity in the eyes of the public. Serious practices — such as child recruitment or ideological indoctrination — are re-presented in positive or simplified ways that do not reflect their true nature, thereby obscuring the exploitation involved and hindering accountability.

In some cases, multiple disinformation techniques are used simultaneously. For example, in the killing of the child soldier **Badr**[27] in a projectile explosion in Sa'da, the victim was reframed as the perpetrator by promoting the narrative that he was "playing with a weapon irresponsibly" and caused his colleague's injury. In another instance, the incident was described as an "accident" or "misstep." This was accompanied by irrelevant documents and images taken out of context to justify the violation, reinforce the media narrative, and reduce the perpetrator's legal responsibility.

Approximately **60% of field study participants** reported that visual manipulation, including the use of outdated or contextually misaligned images to

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[25] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Children of the Aal Baṭḥān Family in Al-Jouf: Victims of Houthi Violence and Defamation," July 28, 2025, accessed December 13, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/children-of-the-aal-baṭḥān-family-in-al-jouf-victims-of-houthi-violence-and-defamation

[26] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Summer Centers: How the Houthis Turn Children's Pens into Rifles," May 12, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/summer-centers-how-the-houthi-turns-childrens-pens-into-rifles.

[27] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Badr: A Child Killed by the Bullet and the Lie," July 12, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/badr-a-child-killed-by-the-bullet-and-the-lie

support misleading narratives, is a frequent and widespread practice across all forms of media disinformation.

4. Media Blackout and Silence

This form of media disinformation is characterized by the absence of information, where media outlets issue no statements or comments and do not explain the violation. Its danger lies in preventing society from knowing the truth and in fully removing the violation from the public sphere.

This pattern was clearly evident in media outlets and digital accounts affiliated with or supportive of Ansar Allah (the Houthis). It appeared in three cases, including the killing of **Bayan,**[28] as well as the killing of three children in Hodiedah by a Houthi-operated drone strike,[29] where no trusted media coverage of either incident was provided.

In some cases, the blackout is accompanied by contradictory or multiple narratives, aimed at casting doubt on the incident, downplaying its severity, or distorting it. An example is the arrest of a child in Al-Mokha[30] by individuals affiliated with the local security administration, where the child was used as leverage in a financial dispute with his father. No official body issued clarifications regarding the incident, and the narrative was distorted in media outlets affiliated with Ansar Allah (the Houthis), which exploited the violation and attributed it to another party as part of a political instrumentalization of the event.

A similar pattern appeared in the drone attack carried out by a Houthi drone on the Al-Bawmiyya market in Taiz,[31] which resulted in 16 victims, including the child, Iyad. Digital accounts affiliated with the Houthis were observed attempting to cast doubt on the incident by minimizing its significance, responding aggressively to anyone trying to share the truth, and smearing opponents and independent sources.

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[28] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Bayan Al-Humayqani: A Victim of the Houthi Double Killing Machinery: A Bullet and Disinformation," May 9, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/bayan-al-humayqani.

[29] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Death Falls from the Sky: From a Moment of Play to a Massacre: How Did the Houthis Turn Yemeni Homes into Killing Grounds?", April 10, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/death-falls-from-the-sky.

[30] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Disinformation Compounds Violation Against a Child in Mocha," May 31, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/disinformation-compounds-violation.

[31] Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV), "Al-Bumiyah Market Massacre: Houthi Drone Attacks in Reality, and the Media Kills Twice," December 1, 2024, accessed December 11, 2025, https://ycmhrv.org/publications/researches/al-bumiyah-market-massacre-houthi-drone-attacks-in-reality-and-the-media-kills-twice

Thus, the blackout becomes a dual strategy: concealing the original event while disrupting any alternative narrative. This obstructs the public's access to truth and prevents accountability. Around 38% of participants in the field study indicated that smear campaigns targeting independent sources — those attempting to reveal information being suppressed — constitute a form of media disinformation that weakens the media environment and undermines accountability mechanisms.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the four patterns of media disinformation — shifting responsibility, victim-blaming, reframing violations, and media blackout — are clearly manifested in media outlets affiliated with or loyal to Ansar Allah (the Houthis). This concentration of disinformation is directly linked to the group's control over most of the media space in its areas of influence, which has weakened independent platforms and limited their ability to access accurate and reliable information. This dominance has deepened since the group's takeover of the capital, Sana'a, in 2014,[32] enabling it to monopolize narratives, shape public opinion, and reproduce political and military accounts that reduce accountability for violations — thereby amplifying the impact of disinformation on society and increasing the vulnerability of child protection.

Second: Actors Involved in Practicing Media Disinformation

Table (1) Actors Involved in Practicing Media Disinformation

Parties	arithmetic mean	Order
Media outlets affiliated with the Ansar Allah (Houthi) group	1.66	1
Anonymous/unverified sources	3.27	2
Partisan Media outlets (Islah Party or the General People's Congress)	3.35	3
Media outlet affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council	3.41	4
Biased local organizations	3.62	5

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[32] Yemen Policy Center, "حرب الحوثيين الناعمة على دعاية العدو ," December 2021, https://www.yemenpolicy.org/ar/ حرب-الحوثيين-الناعمة-على-دعاية-العدو/.

Social media activists	3.72	6
Media outlets affiliated with internationally recognized government	3.91	7

As shown in Table 1, the survey results indicate that participants view media disinformation as a practice shared by all parties to the conflict, though with clear variation in its impact and severity. Media outlets affiliated with Ansar Allah (the Houthis) ranked first, with an average score of 1.66, identifying them as the most active producers of disinformation. This reflects the centralized and organized nature of their media apparatus, which employs ideological and mobilizing language and uses religious and national frames to shape and politically repackage events related to children.

Anonymous sources and unverified pages ranked second, with an average of 3.27, suggesting that disinformation is no longer confined to traditional media institutions. Instead, it has become a growing phenomenon in the digital sphere, where individuals and anonymous accounts exploit weak digital oversight and the rapid spread of content.

Media outlets affiliated with political parties came in third, with an average of 3.35, followed by the Southern Transitional Council's media outlets with an average of 3.41. This reflects participants' perception of systematic disinformation linked to political loyalties, whether through justifying violations or reproducing one-sided narratives that serve the interests of conflict actors.

Biased local organizations ranked fifth, with an average score of 3.62, a significant indicator from a public trust perspective. It reveals that some institutions expected to be human rights or humanitarian actors are perceived by the public as part of the polarization, either due to conditional funding or weak professionalism in their reporting.

Social media activists ranked sixth, with an average of 3.72. Despite their wide presence and the fact that many are linked to conflict parties, their influence is perceived as less organized than institutional disinformation. Their role relies more on resharing inaccurate or exaggerated narratives than on producing complex storylines. The growing public awareness of digital content appears to have reduced trust in this category.

Finally, media outlets affiliated with the internationally recognized government ranked last, with an average of 3.91. While this ranking may suggest a degree of

relative trust and indicate that their disinformation practices are less intense compared to other actors, it does not imply the complete absence of such practices.
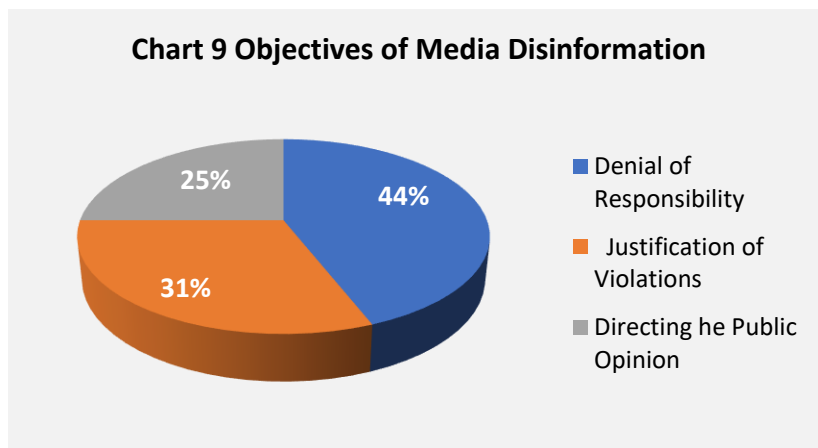
A review of the arithmetic means shows that the crisis of trust is broad and pervasive; no actor received a low score indicating freedom from disinformation. This confirms that Yemen's media environment during the war suffers from both a credibility crisis and institutionalized disinformation.

These findings align with the analytical review of the media materials examined in the study. The analysis showed that the actors most involved in producing disinformation — by a clear margin — are media outlets affiliated with or loyal to Ansar Allah (the Houthis), along with their associated digital account networks, which appeared in all analyzed materials. They were followed by accounts on social media platforms loyal to various parties, and to a lesser extent, some media outlets affiliated with the government or other actors. The latter appeared in only five cases, mostly within exchanges of accusations with media outlets affiliated with Ansar Allah (the Houthis), reflecting the adversarial nature of the media conflict between the two sides rather than independent narrative production.

Third: Objectives of Media Disinformation in Covering Child-Related Issues

The study's field and analytical findings reveal that media disinformation in covering violations against children is a deliberate process serving three central objectives directly linked to narrative management in armed conflict. The first objective is the denial of responsibility, which is the most common, according to 44% of participants. Parties resort to denying involvement in violations by concealing evidence, distorting facts, sometimes shifting blame to another actor, and at other times casting doubt on whether the violations occurred at all. This approach disrupts accountability, confuses the public, and weakens human rights pressure.

The qualitative analysis of media materials showed this objective clearly in most cases. Media outlets — particularly those affiliated with Ansar Allah (the Houthis) — reframed events and attributed them to an "external conspiracy," or presented them in a vague manner that obscures the real perpetrator and conceals their legal responsibility.

Chart 9 Objectives of Media Disinformation

- 44% Denial of Responsibility
- 31% Justification of Violations
- 25% Directing he Public Opinion

The second objective is the justification of violations, as indicated by 31% of participants. This is achieved by reframing violations within a security or ideological discourse that presents detention, recruitment, or assault as "necessary" or "legitimate." This manifests in transforming the child from a victim into a "potential offender," or from a forcibly recruited minor into a "heroic fighter and martyr," and in describing assaults as "legitimate security operations." The analytical component of the study confirmed this pattern through several incidents in which childhood was stripped away, the victim was criminalized, and the violation was presented as an act falling under the "duty to protect security" or as a "pedagogical project."

The third objective is influencing public opinion, expressed by 25% of participants. This objective is achieved by using the child as an emotional symbol capable of generating significant public impact — turning the child into a tool for political mobilization, a means to amplify hate speech against the opponent, or material for attracting local and international sympathy. The analysis of the examined media materials showed that these practices range from crafting heroic stories about recruited children to disseminating emotional narratives used to reshape power dynamics and gain political legitimacy.

A cross-reading of both analyses reveals a fourth overarching objective that forms the broader framework of the previous three: controlling public consciousness. This objective aims to prevent the formation of an independent understanding of events. It is achieved through smear campaigns targeting independent organizations, intimidation of families, and the production of counter-narratives that obstruct access to the truth. This process leads to the monopolization of the information space and its transformation into a tool wielded by conflict actors through an intertwined propaganda discourse.

Chapter Four: The Impact of Media Disinformation on Society, Victims, and Justice Efforts

Media disinformation reshapes societal awareness of child-related issues by distorting perception, weakening empathy, and undermining the ability to verify and hold perpetrators accountable. It has also affected journalistic and human rights work by creating an environment of informational fog that erodes the independence and credibility of such work. As a result, children's issues have been transformed into instruments of political conflict at the expense of victims' rights and the pursuit of truth.

First Section: The Impact of Media Disinformation on Public Awareness and Behavior Toward Child-Related Issues

The field study revealed that 74% of participants believe media disinformation directly affects society's awareness and behavior regarding childhood issues, compared to 26% who denied such an impact. This near-consensus reflects a broad recognition of disinformation's ability to reshape collective consciousness and influence social attitudes toward victims and perpetrators.

Chart 10 Does Media Disinformation Impacts Society's Awareness

26%

74%

■ Yes
■ No
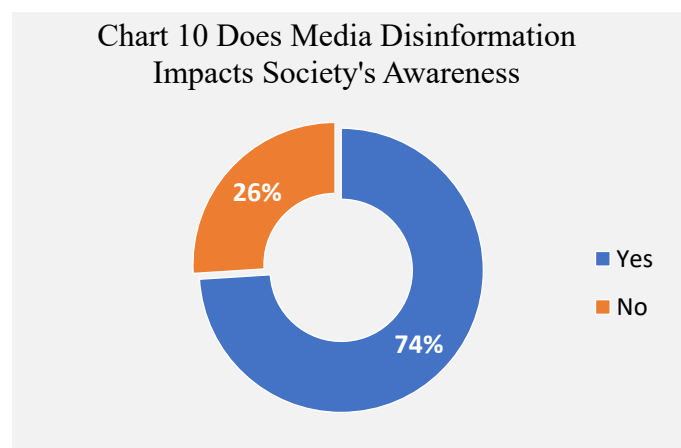
According to the respondents, the impact of disinformation goes beyond distorting facts to reshaping public perception itself. Divergent and inflammatory narratives have produced false understandings of the nature of violations and perpetrators. They have led some individuals to doubt whether violations occurred in the first place, or to adopt interpretations that justify violence or blame the victim. In this sense, disinformation becomes a tool that alters society's relationship with justice—from empathy with the victim to justification of the perpetrator, and from moral condemnation to indifference. One participant expressed this by saying that "when information reaches the public in a form that contradicts reality, it produces a false perception and leads to a decline in empathy and community support."

In other cases, disinformation contributed to normalizing the official narratives of conflict parties. One participant noted that "society, due to media disinformation, has begun to accept the narrative promoted by the Houthis in

cases of assault, particularly abduction, which has resulted in declining solidarity and public pressure, especially on social media."

Participants also indicated that media disinformation has significantly reduced moral sensitivity toward violations committed against children. One participant stated that "societal sensitivity—especially in areas under Houthi control—has declined regarding child recruitment and militarization." Child recruitment has increasingly come to be viewed as normal, driven by media discourse that promotes these practices and frames them as heroic. In this context, another participant explained that "dozens of videos, programs, and websites affiliated with the Houthis have glorified child recruitment and portrayed it as a heroic act, reinforcing a culture of militarization in the minds of children and families, and pushing many of them to the frontlines instead of schools."

Conversely, participants pointed to a parallel dynamic in which disinformation generates excessive fear and anxiety within families due to the circulation of misleading or unverified stories about child abductions or targeting. One participant noted that disinformation may "push parents to adopt exaggerated protective measures, such as isolating children from social activities, out of fear of risks amplified by the media." Thus, media disinformation creates two parallel trajectories within society: excessive indifference on one side and excessive fear on the other — both reflecting the fragility of public awareness when shaped by misleading information.

Participants also emphasized that media disinformation has undermined trust in the media and human rights organizations. Conflicting narratives and politicized coverage have created a general impression that some human rights actors may themselves be part of the disinformation landscape. One participant noted that "publishing biased or inaccurate information, or concealing essential facts, has reduced public trust even in organizations that follow strict methodologies," adding that "some organizations deliberately downplay violations committed by certain parties or exaggerate humanitarian needs, which harms human rights and humanitarian work and undermines the principles of neutrality and impartiality."

At the level of public discourse, media disinformation has deepened polarization and social division, turning children's issues from universally shared humanitarian concerns into subjects of political contention. One participant explained that "public opinion regarding the targeting of the Al-Arsoum children, for example, was divided between those who justified the crime, those who downplayed its severity, and those who used it to accuse their opponents," limiting society's ability to form a unified, pressure-driven public stance demanding justice.

In sum, media disinformation does not merely reproduce inaccurate information; it reshapes collective awareness and behavior, weakens societal empathy toward children, and makes violence against them more socially acceptable. This reduces society's ability to exert the necessary pressure to protect children and uphold their rights.

Second Section: The Impact of Media Disinformation on the Work of Journalists and Human Rights Activists

The survey results show that media disinformation affects the professional work of journalists and human rights practitioners to varying degrees. A total of 39% reported that they had been directly affected by it—an unusually high percentage given the sensitivity of child-related issues—while 61% said the impact was indirect. This disparity reflects the composition of the sample: journalists made up half of the participants and are typically the most exposed to direct influence due to their daily engagement with conflicting news. In contrast, researchers, human rights workers, and other professionals — who constitute the other half of the sample — tend to be indirectly affected because they rely more on data from international and more reliable sources, reducing their likelihood of being influenced by misleading information.

Chart 11 Did Media Disinformation Impact Journaliksts ad HR Activists Work

39%

61%

■ Yes
■ No
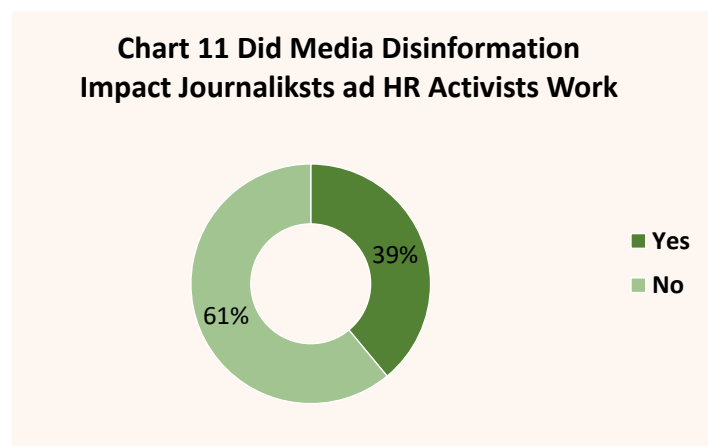
An analysis of responses from participants who encountered disinformation in the field revealed that several cases involving child-related violations began with widely circulated images or reports that were later found to be inaccurate or taken out of context. This highlights the fragility of verification tools in an environment where freedom of movement is restricted, and access to incident sites is difficult. As a result, journalists sometimes rely on ready-made narratives that are susceptible to politicization. One participant noted that "information is often circulated from open sources or activists, but upon analysis it becomes clear that it originates from a single source and is then replicated across platforms and news websites, and shared by activists without scrutiny," pointing to the presence of

"media and human rights arms affiliated with conflict parties that promote biased and inaccurate information."

Regarding the coverage of child-related violations by Ansar Allah (the Houthis), participants emphasized that "this pattern does not reflect ignorance of the nature of the violations, but rather a clear expression of disregard for human rights standards and principles," through minimizing responsibility or shifting blame to other parties.

The impact of disinformation extends beyond professional confusion to personal safety risks for journalists. Several participants reported facing direct pressure and threats from de facto authorities (the Houthis), which led some to refrain from correcting misinformation or to publish unverified narratives out of fear of repercussions. This reinforces self-censorship and undermines the independence of journalistic work. One journalist explained that "the de facto authorities' monopoly over information and their prevention of access to incident sources placed us under threat, pushing us at times to publish material that had not been fully verified."

Another participant confirmed that "at times, while preparing reports on child rights violations, certain actors issue direct threats against the journalist or their family, which may force them to stop working altogether."

Responses also indicated that media disinformation undermines professional credibility—both with the public and with supporting institutions. Republishing misleading information, even unintentionally, weakens the credibility of journalists and media outlets in an environment already characterized by distrust and polarization. One participant stated that disinformation "caused a loss of trust from employers and from readers concerned with children's issues, especially those who have the awareness and ability to distinguish between accurate and misleading news."

Respondents further noted that disinformation creates a state of "informational fog," characterized by multiple narratives, conflicting figures, fabricated images, and recycled content circulating within "media echo chambers," which "wastes journalists' and human rights workers' time and effort on verification instead of focusing on documentation and analysis."

The impact extends to human rights work as well. The absence of accurate data and the difficulty of verifying facts lead to the production of reports or humanitarian decisions based on unreliable information. Respondents documented cases where images from other conflicts were used and attributed to violations in Yemen, reflecting weak visual verification and the rapid spread of misleading content. One participant admitted that he "published photos of victims

from Gaza as if they were crimes committed by the Houthis, influenced by social media activity and partisan media," illustrating the dangers of cascading disinformation.

These findings reveal that media disinformation in Yemen constitutes a systematic structure linked to the nature of the conflict—one built on distortion, obscurity, and politicization. It disrupts journalistic and human rights work despite high professional awareness of its risks. This underscores the need to strengthen the capacities of journalists and documenters in digital verification, visual verification, and political context analysis to safeguard the credibility of media and human rights work in a complex conflict environment.

Third Section: The Impact of Media Disinformation on Victims and Justice and

Accountability Efforts

Table No. (2): The Impact of Media Disinformation on Victims and

Justice and Accountability Efforts

No.	Phrases	Relative Weight	Agreement	Ranking
1	Media misinformation exacerbates the psychological and social harm suffered by children and their families	92.2	Very high	1
2	Media misinformation contributes to depriving child victims of knowing the truth and achieving justice	91.6	Very high	2
3	Media misinformation contributes to concealing the identity of perpetrators and diluting responsibility for violations	90.6	Very high	3
4	Media disinformation contributes to intimidating victims' families and damaging their reputation in society	90.3	Very high	4

5	Media disinformation hinders efforts to document violations and reach victims	90	Very high	5
6	Media disinformation leads to the denial of the suffering of child victims of abuse	89	Very high	6
7	The suffering of children is exploited for political and propaganda purposes, thus losing its humanitarian dimension.	89	Very high	7
8	Conflicting media coverage leads to confusion in public awareness about child abuse	88	Very high	8
9	Media misinformation weakens public trust in local media outlets	88	Very high	9
10	Media disinformation weakens local and international pressure aimed at achieving justice, accountability, and protecting children's rights	86.7	Very high	10
11	Media misinformation contributes to the normalization of violence	86.4	Very high	11

against children and creates indifference towards their suffering			

As shown in Table 2, the study results revealed an almost complete consensus among participants regarding the profound effects of media disinformation on child victims and on the course of justice. These findings indicate that the most evident impacts relate to the human dimension. Respondents believe that disinformation exacerbates the psychological and social harm experienced by children and their families by distorting their image, denying their suffering, and altering the context of the violation in ways that intensify psychological pain and turn it into a form of ongoing emotional abuse. This distortion leads to a decline in community empathy and places part of the blame on some families, thereby reinforcing isolation and social stigma.

The results also confirm that media disinformation is one of the central factors obstructing justice. It deprives victims of their right to know the truth and contributes to concealing the identity of perpetrators and diluting legal responsibility through conflicting narratives that diminish the value of evidence and disrupt the documentation process. This situation weakens local and international pressure for accountability, as the credibility of information declines and human rights issues become material for political conflict rather than a foundation for achieving justice.

The role of disinformation in hindering access to victims and documentation efforts is also evident. Participants emphasized that disinformation complicates the work of human rights actors by concealing essential information, presenting fabricated narratives, or exaggerating certain details to divert attention from the core of the crime, thereby reshaping an environment in which many violations become unprovable.

Respondents also revealed a direct social impact of media disinformation, manifested in the intimidation and stigmatization of victims' families. Misleading narratives are used to spread fear, silence witnesses, and prevent families from reporting or pursuing justice. This pattern reproduces silence, protects perpetrators, and reinforces a climate of impunity.

At the level of public awareness, the findings show that disinformation distorts collective perception of the reality of violations and weakens trust in local media due to repeated conflicting coverage and the spread of unverified information.

This creates confusion and a tendency toward skepticism or apathy. Among the serious consequences highlighted in the responses is that disinformation may contribute to normalizing violence against children. With the repeated circulation of distorted narratives, society gradually loses its sensitivity to violations, and violence against children becomes part of the "ordinary scene."

Chapter Five: Community Response and Solutions to Counter Media Disinformation in Coverage of Child Rights Violations

Civil society and independent media efforts to counter disinformation related to violations against children remain limited and inconsistent, amid declining public trust in local media and increasing reliance on alternative sources for verification. This underscores the need for comprehensive solutions that include strengthening independent media, developing journalists' skills, activating legal frameworks, promoting media literacy, and building partnerships between human rights and media institutions to effectively confront disinformation and protect children.

First Section: The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Countering Media Disinformation

The survey results revealed that respondents' assessment of the role of civil society organizations in countering media disinformation related to violations against children was relatively low. The data shows that 82.2% of respondents believe that the performance of these organizations ranges between weak and moderate, while only 17.7% considered them "effective" or "highly effective." This indicates that civil society efforts remain limited, inconsistent, and insufficiently institutionalized.

Chart 12, Role of NGOs in Countrring Media Disinformaton
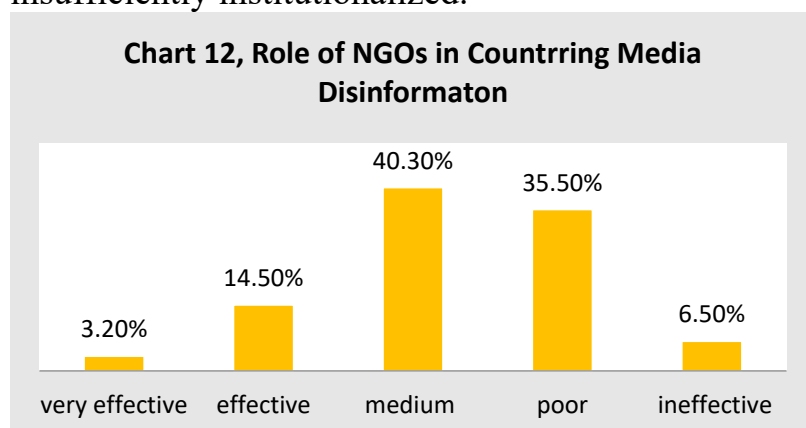
According to participants, this weak performance is attributed to several factors, including the lack of specialized resources for information verification, reluctance to confront media outlets affiliated with powerful actors, and reliance on general or second-hand data without professional scrutiny. As a result, organizations often respond to the consequences of disinformation after it occurs,
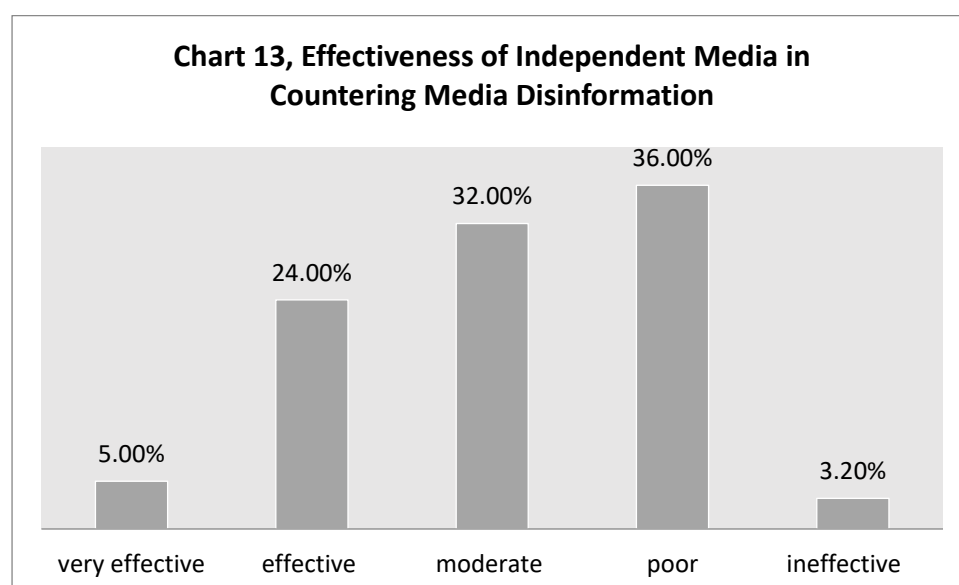
rather than addressing it proactively through monitoring, analysis, and awareness-raising.

The findings also reveal a clear gap between the expected role of civil society organizations and their actual ability to redirect public discourse toward factual information. Partisan narratives and political media remain more influential than independent human rights messaging. Although a few "effective" examples exist, they are typically individual or limited initiatives rather than part of a coordinated effort between human rights and media institutions.

Second Section: The Effectiveness of Independent Media in Countering Media Disinformation

The study indicates that respondents' assessment of the role of independent media in countering disinformation related to child rights violations ranged from moderate to weak. This reflects significant variation in individual experiences depending on the type of media outlet, its geographic location, and the political context in which it operates.

A total of 36% of participants described the performance of independent media as weak, arguing that it lacks the capacity for in-depth analysis or for debunking misleading information. This assessment is linked to several factors, most notably: limited resources and specialized staff, political and security pressures that restrict the freedom to cover violations, and weak verification mechanisms and coordination with independent documentation organizations. Meanwhile, 32% rated independent media performance as moderate, indicating a limited ability to counter disinformation without achieving broad impact.

Chart 13, Effectiveness of Independent Media in Countering Media Disinformation

very effective: 5.00%
effective: 24.00%
moderate: 32.00%
poor: 36.00%
ineffective: 3.20%

Conversely, around 27% of participants pointed to positive efforts, noting that independent media is effective or highly effective in certain cases. This percentage reflects the presence of individual initiatives that professionally monitor humanitarian violations without political bias. However, these efforts are not institutionalized, which limits their influence on public opinion.

Overall, the analysis of responses shows that independent media possesses the awareness and willingness to confront disinformation but lacks the institutional structure and organizational capacity needed to build public trust. This makes it less capable of correcting misleading narratives about children's issues or shaping a public consciousness resistant to disinformation. Therefore, its effectiveness can be described as moderate and constrained, relying on scattered professional efforts that face structural and political obstacles limiting their ability to counter media disinformation comprehensively.

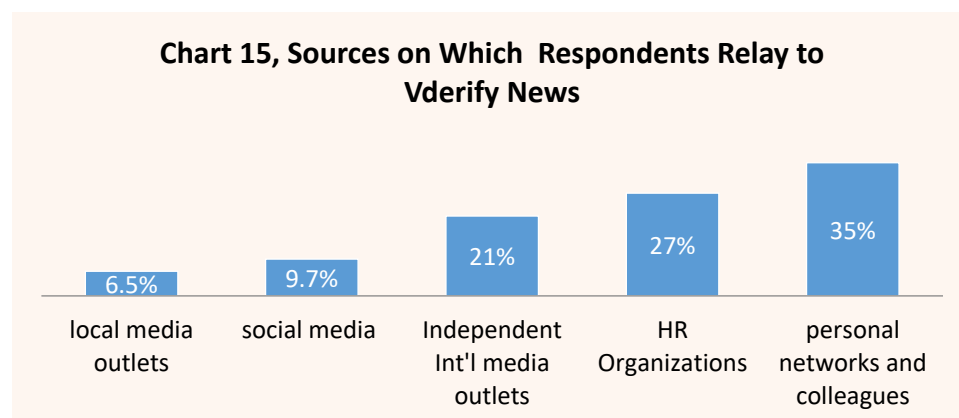**Third Section: Public Trust in Local Media**

The survey results revealed a noticeable decline in public trust in local media when covering child-related issues. Most evaluations fell within the categories of moderate trust (46.8%) and low trust (40.3%), while 3.2% expressed a complete lack of trust. Although a small percentage (9.7%) reported high trust, this overall pattern indicates a prevailing perception that local media is no longer a stable or reliable source when addressing children's rights issues.

Chart 14, Public Trust in loca Media

very high	high	moderate	poor	no trust
0.00%	9.70%	46.80%	40.30%	3.20%
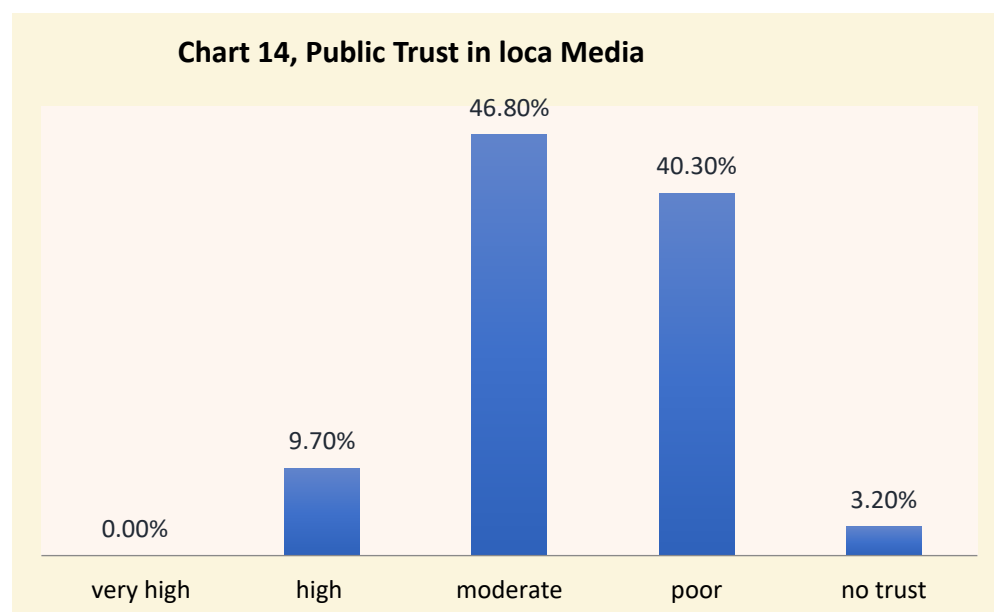
This decline in trust has directly influenced verification practices. When respondents were asked about the sources they rely on to verify news related to violations against children, the results showed a clear shift toward alternative and non-institutional sources. A total of 35% of participants stated that they rely

primarily on personal networks and colleagues to verify information. This high dependence on personal relationships reflects a shift in verification from an institutional professional framework to an informal social one, revealing a deep gap in public confidence in the local media system.
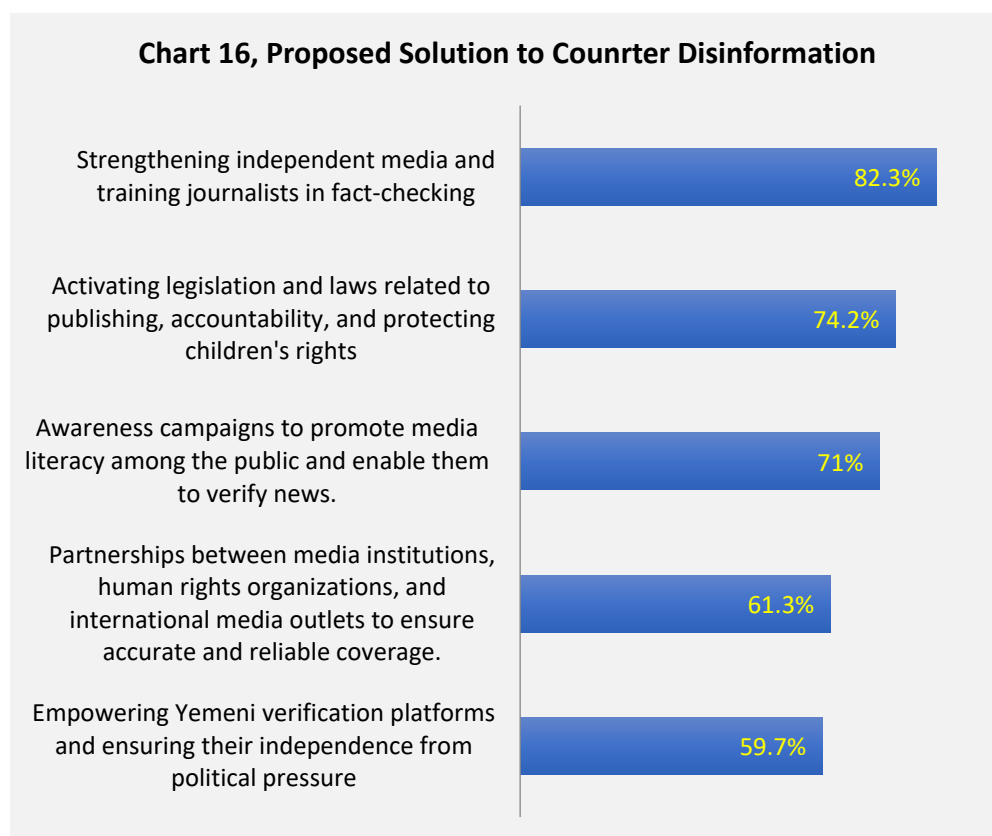
Human rights organizations ranked second among the sources respondents rely on, at 27%, as they are perceived to have greater capacity for independent documentation and field access. However, this trust remains limited and insufficient to serve as a definitive source of information. Additionally, 21% of participants reported turning to independent international media outlets in search of more professional and less politicized coverage.

Chart 15, Sources on Which Respondents Relay to Vderify News

local media outlets	social media	Independent Int'l media outlets	HR Organizations	personal networks and colleagues
6.5%	9.7%	21%	27%	35%

In contrast, trust in social media as a verification source was significantly lower, at 9.7%, and trust in local media was even lower, at 6.5%, reflecting their perceived lack of reliability. These findings highlight a structural crisis within local media and underscore the urgent need for professional, independent journalism that can restore public trust and fulfill its role more effectively.

Fourth Section: Proposed Solutions and Strategies to Reduce Media Disinformation in Coverage of Child Rights Violations

The respondents proposed a comprehensive, multilayered approach that combines professional, legislative, and societal reforms to counter media disinformation in coverage of child-related violations. The top recommendation, by 82.3% of respondents, was to strengthen independent media and train journalists in information-verification skills. This reflects a shared belief that the core of the problem lies in weak professionalism and the susceptibility of some media outlets to political or financial influence. Participants emphasized that developing journalists' capacities and supporting independent platforms represent a sustainable solution with greater impact than relying solely on legal interventions.

Chart 16, Proposed Solution to Counrter Disinformation

Proposed Solution	Percentage
Strengthening independent media and training journalists in fact-checking	82.3%
Activating legislation and laws related to publishing, accountability, and protecting children's rights	74.2%
Awareness campaigns to promote media literacy among the public and enable them to verify news.	71%
Partnerships between media institutions, human rights organizations, and international media outlets to ensure accurate and reliable coverage.	61.3%
Empowering Yemeni verification platforms and ensuring their independence from political pressure	59.7%

In second place came the activation of legislation and regulations related to publishing and accountability, at **74.2%**, indicating a growing recognition of the need for a strict legal framework that limits the spread of misinformation, especially in sensitive issues affecting children. This result confirms that media freedom must be accompanied by legal responsibility that protects the most vulnerable groups from media exploitation.

Additionally, **71%** of participants highlighted the importance of promoting media literacy and strengthening the public's ability to verify information. This reflects an interest in the preventive measures, as an informed audience contributes to reducing the spread of disinformation. Developing critical content-evaluation skills is also one of the key factors in improving the overall media environment.

Furthermore, **61.3%** of respondents proposed building partnerships between media institutions, human rights organizations, and international media outlets, given the role these partnerships play in exchanging expertise and data, enhancing verification standards, and strengthening professional protection for journalists working in conflict environments. On a related approach, **59.7%** emphasized the need to empower independent Yemeni fact-checking platforms free from political and financial pressures. Being an essential tool for exposing misinformation. Analysis of participants' responses revealed a clear call for specialized child-focused journalism that provides coverage that adheres to child-rights standards and relies on specialized professional knowledge.

Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate that media disinformation in Yemen has become a central instrument in the dynamics of the conflict. Parties to the conflict employ disinformation to justify or deny grave violations committed against children and to reshape the narratives surrounding victims and perpetrators in ways that advance their respective interests. Such practices have deprived victims of their right to truth, weakened efforts related to documentation and accountability, and contributed to an environment in which impunity persists.

The study further indicates that media disinformation has evolved into an extension of the violations themselves, amplifying their psychological and social consequences and eroding public trust in the media and state and non-state institutions. Given the fragility of independent media and the limited capacity of civil society, there is an urgent need to establish a knowledge-protection ecosystem grounded in verification, professional standards, and community awareness.

Addressing disinformation related to childhood issues requires comprehensive and coordinated reforms encompassing the media sector, the legal and regulatory framework, and civil society. These efforts must be complemented by effective partnerships with human rights organizations and international media actors. Upholding the right to truth remains a foundational step toward safeguarding children, ensuring justice for victims, and laying the groundwork for transitional justice and sustainable peace.

Recommendations

A. To Yemeni policymakers and legislators

1. Strengthen legal protections and adopt legislative frameworks that criminalize media disinformation and the exploitation of children.

2. Facilitate safe and unhindered access to information for journalists and human rights researchers, ensure their legal protection, and develop mechanisms for preserving digital evidence and safeguarding victims and witnesses.
3. Support local fact-checking platforms, guarantee their independence, and establish an autonomous national mechanism to monitor child-related content.
4. Integrate media and information literacy into school curricula to enhance individuals' capacity to assess and verify information.

B. To the parties to the conflict in Yemen

5. Cease the use of children in propaganda activities and refrain from misrepresenting victims in media communications; adopt language and practices that respect child rights.
6. Grant independent monitoring teams unrestricted and safe access to all areas.

C. To local media outlets

7. Strengthen professional verification processes before publication and provide training for journalists on digital verification and the identification of misleading content.
8. Establish dedicated units within media institutions to monitor child-related content and issue periodic analytical reports.
9. Adhere to ethical standards prohibiting the use of children for political or propaganda purposes and promote the development of specialized journalism on childhood issues and misinformation.

D. To local civil society organizations

10. Build institutional capacity to monitor and analyze disinformation related to children and produce accurate, evidence-based reports.
11. Establish a joint civil society network to collaborate with independent media in monitoring and countering disinformation concerning childhood issues.
12. Support fact-checking initiatives and develop robust documentation mechanisms and databases on violations against children.
13. Conduct awareness campaigns on the risks of media disinformation and its impact on children and society.

E. To international organizations and donors

14. Provide financial and technical support to local fact-checking platforms, ensure their independence, and facilitate joint training for media and civil society on digital verification and child-sensitive reporting.
15. Support and implement training programmes aimed at enhancing public media and information literacy, enabling communities to critically assess media content and counter disinformation.
16. Support field level documentation of violations and the preservation of evidence to prevent tampering, and issue periodic reports on disinformation trends and their implications for children's rights.
17. Incorporate analyses of disinformation related to child rights violations into international human rights reporting and recognize it as part of the broader pattern of violations affecting children.