






THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN AND WOMEN FROM THE HOUTHI INSURGENCY



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Abstract

The ongoing Houthi insurgency in Yemen has led to severe humanitarian impacts, particularly affecting women and children as the most vulnerable groups. This research aims to examine the protection of human rights for women and children amidst continuous violations committed by the Houthi armed movement. Using a qualitative field research approach, the study is based on direct interviews with humanitarian workers, legal experts, and victims, supported by the analysis of human rights reports and international legal instruments. The findings reveal that despite the existence of frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW, protection remains ineffective due to political instability, the dominance of non – state actors, and limited access for humanitarian organizations. Key violations include child soldier recruitment, sexual violence, forced displacement, and denial of access to education and healthcare. The study concludes that stronger international monitoring mechanisms, targeted sanctions, and the integration of gender – and child – sensitive frameworks into Yemen's peacebuilding agenda are urgently needed. This study contributes a field – based legal analysis of the systemic failures in protecting the rights of women and children in armed conflict, and emphasizes the importance of a more effective international legal response in the context of the dominance of non – state armed actors.

Abstrak

Pemberontakan Houthi yang masih berlangsung di Yaman telah menyebabkan dampak kemanusiaan yang sangat serius, terutama terhadap perempuan dan anak-anak sebagai kelompok paling rentan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perlindungan hak asasi manusia bagi perempuan dan anak-anak di tengah berbagai pelanggaran yang dilakukan oleh kelompok bersenjata Houthi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian lapangan, yang didasarkan pada wawancara langsung dengan pekerja kemanusiaan, pakar hukum, dan korban, serta didukung oleh analisis laporan hak asasi manusia dan instrumen hukum internasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun telah ada kerangka hukum internasional seperti Konvensi Hak Anak dan CEDAW, perlindungan tetap tidak efektif akibat ketidakstabilan politik, dominasi aktor non-negara, dan terbatasnya akses lembaga kemanusiaan. Pelanggaran yang ditemukan meliputi perekrutan tentara anak, kekerasan seksual, pengungsian paksa, dan penolakan akses terhadap pendidikan dan layanan kesehatan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa diperlukan penguatan mekanisme pemantauan internasional, sanksi yang tepat sasaran, dan integrasi kerangka kerja yang sensitif terhadap gender dan anak dalam agenda perdamaian di Yaman. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi berupa analisis hukum berbasis lapangan atas kegagalan sistemik dalam melindungi hak perempuan dan anak dalam konflik bersenjata, serta menekankan pentingnya respons hukum internasional yang lebih efektif dalam konteks dominasi aktor bersenjata non-negara.

INTRDUCTION

The armed conflict that has been ongoing in Yemen since 2015, largely involving the Houthi group and the Saudi –led coalition, has created an extraordinarily severe humanitarian crisis, especially for vulnerable groups such as children (Levy et al., 2022). Thousands of children have lost their lives in airstrikes, shootings, and armed clashes, while many others have suffered serious injuries that permanently alter their lives. According to reports from UNICEF and human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Save the Children, children are not only direct victims of physical violence but also suffer due to the collapse of vital infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and clean water systems. Tens of thousands of children have lost the opportunity to receive education because schools have been destroyed or turned into military barracks, while healthcare systems are unable to cope with malnutrition, infectious diseases, and the psychological trauma these children endure. This situation is exacerbated by economic blockades and limited access to humanitarian aid, leaving children's basic needs unmet (Laing et al., 2020). Although international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as international humanitarian law, exist, their implementation and enforcement have proven weak amidst the complexity of the conflict and the lack of effective state authority in conflict zones. As a result, the fundamental rights of children—rights that should be protected under all circumstances—are neglected, and violence against children continues in an unending cycle (Ćerimović, 2023).

In the context of prolonged conflict such as that in Yemen, children are not only passive victims who bear the consequences of violence, but are also systematically exploited by armed groups as part of their military strategy. The Houthi group, for instance, has openly recruited and trained young boys to become soldiers, scouts, or even suicide attackers, often under ideological pretexts or false promises of dignity and honor. This recruitment process occurs through intense propaganda in schools or training camps, significantly disrupting children's psychological development and robbing them of their childhood. Moreover, girls also suffer from sexual violence, forced marriages, and exploitation through child labor in unsafe environments (Ecker et al., 2024). Although the international community has expressed concern, responses have tended to be reactive, fragmented, and inconsistent, often prioritizing geopolitical interests over child protection. The absence of effective legal mechanisms to hold perpetrators of child rights violations accountable and to prevent further recruitment has allowed these abuses to continue with impunity. This situation creates collective wounds and long –term psychosocial trauma within communities, giving rise to a generation raised under the shadow of violence, distrust, and poverty—ultimately posing a threat to social stability and long –term peace in the region (Heibach & Transfeld, 2018).

Despite the abundance of reports and documentation from international institutions regarding violations against children in the context of the armed conflict in Yemen, particularly those implicating both state and non – state actors, there remains a significant gap in academic research that critically and systematically analyzes the legal protection mechanisms available for children within the Houthi conflict. Most existing literature tends to focus on humanitarian consequences in general or broader violations of international law, without delving into the nuanced intersection between Yemen's national legal framework, international humanitarian law (IHL), and international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This lack of integrated legal analysis has resulted in the absence of a clear roadmap for the effective

implementation of child protection policies during armed conflict. Moreover, the limited number of scholarly contributions that attempt to address this issue often do so from a purely descriptive or advocacy–based perspective, rather than offering normative and analytical frameworks grounded in comparative legal methodologies or empirical data from the field. The complexity of the Yemeni legal and political landscape, combined with ongoing instability and limited access for international monitoring bodies, has further hindered the development of robust academic inquiry that could inform national policy reforms or international responses (Nasr et al., 2024). Consequently, the academic silence on this matter has contributed to a stagnation in the evolution of protection standards for children caught in protracted armed conflicts like that in Yemen, where legal ambiguity often allows perpetrators to act with impunity and without fear of judicial accountability.

This study aims to address that research gap by pursuing four interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to identify the various forms of child rights violations perpetrated by both state and non–state actors in the context of the Yemeni armed conflict, including but not limited to recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence, denial of education and healthcare, and forced displacement. Second, the research critically examines the effectiveness of existing legal protection systems, both domestically within Yemen's national law and internationally through legal instruments such as the CRC, the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Laron & Kauli, 2016). This involves assessing not only the normative content of these legal regimes but also the actual implementation, enforcement challenges, and gaps in accountability mechanisms. Third, based on these findings, the research aims to offer practical legal and policy recommendations grounded in human rights principles and international humanitarian law to enhance the protection of children in conflict zones, with particular attention to Yemen's unique legal and sociopolitical context. Finally, this study aspires to contribute to the broader academic and global discourse on child protection in armed conflict, providing a model of interdisciplinary legal research that could be applied to similar conflict–affected regions such as Syria, South Sudan, or the Democratic Republic of Congo. By bridging theory and practice, and grounding the analysis in both legal doctrine and the lived realities of conflict–affected children, this research seeks to become a meaningful scholarly contribution that supports long–term peacebuilding and the realization of children's rights in international law.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative field research design to examine the protection of human rights for children and women affected by the Houthi insurgency in Yemen. The research was conducted over a four–month period from January to April 2024 in regions most impacted by the conflict, including Sana'a, Saada, and Hajjah. Given the ongoing security risks in these areas, field data were collected by trained local research assistants who adhered to strict ethical protocols to ensure participant safety and data integrity. The study focused on internally displaced persons (IDPs), survivors of gender–based violence, parents of children recruited by armed groups, humanitarian workers, and local legal experts. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify individuals with firsthand or professional experience of the issues under investigation. A total of 30 participants—18 women and 12 men—from both urban and rural backgrounds were selected to ensure a gender–balanced and regionally diverse perspective. Ethical clearance for the research was obtained through a collaborating university in Yemen, and all participants gave informed consent before the interviews took place.

Data collection methods included semi–structured interviews, direct observation in IDP camps and community centers, and review of field documents such as case reports, NGO logs, and local legal files. Interview questions were open–ended and aimed at exploring participants' lived experiences, access to justice, interactions with humanitarian organizations, and awareness of their rights as protected by international conventions. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, transcribed, and then translated into English for analysis. Observational field notes documented patterns of aid distribution, the presence or absence of protective services, and visible signs of systemic neglect. Data triangulation was employed to increase the credibility of findings by cross–checking information from interviews, observations, and documents. Using NVivo software, thematic coding was applied to identify recurring issues, challenges, and institutional gaps. Analysis was conducted through an inductive process that allowed themes to emerge organically from the data while being interpreted in the context of international human rights principles, including references to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW. When quantitative data from humanitarian reports—such as the number of child soldiers or incidents of sexual violence—were referenced, they were used only to support the qualitative narrative. This integrated field–based approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the real–world limitations faced in protecting vulnerable populations in conflict zones and provides insights for developing more effective, context–sensitive protection mechanisms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The Rule of Law in the Protection of Children in the Yemen Conflict

Although Yemen has, in normative terms, established various national legal instruments that regulate the protection of children's rights—including in situations of armed conflict—the implementation of these provisions at the practical level faces extremely serious obstacles (Sun et al., 2025). The conflict that erupted in 2015 has crippled nearly all institutional structures of the state, including law enforcement bodies that should serve as the primary protectors of vulnerable groups such as children. Yemen's Child Rights Law No. 45 of 2002 formally recognizes children's rights to life, growth, and development, as well as protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. However, in the context of a prolonged and uncertain war, these legal norms have become little more than administrative documents stripped of operational power. The fragile and fragmented governance structure has rendered the state absent as a protector, and the law has lost both its regulatory and repressive functions. As a result, children have become the most affected group—not only as direct victims of physical violence but also through the loss of access to education, healthcare, and social protection (Costello et al., 2015).

The situation has become even more severe in areas under the control of the Houthi armed group. In these regions, national laws enacted by the central government in Sana'a or recognized by the international community hold no legitimacy and are often regarded as irrelevant. De facto authorities such as the Houthis enforce their own legal systems, which are not necessarily aligned with the principles of child protection as outlined in either national or international law. Child protection is not a priority in the political agenda of this armed group; on the contrary, children are frequently mobilized to support military objectives through recruitment as child soldiers, ideological indoctrination, and emotional exploitation masked in religious narratives (Al–Zumair et al., 2025). Under such conditions, the supremacy of national law is not only weakened but effectively

replaced by informal power structures that operate without accountability. This creates a highly dangerous legal vacuum in which violations against children occur systematically and on a massive scale, with no legal protection or accountability mechanisms in place.

The absence of an independent and effective monitoring mechanism has further exacerbated the situation. Institutions such as Yemen's National Human Rights Commission have been unable to perform their oversight and investigative functions optimally due to limited access, insufficient resources, and pressure from various armed actors. Not only have state institutions been affected, but civil society organizations that previously played an active role in advocating for children's rights have also been forced to shut down or operate covertly. Meanwhile, international organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children face significant barriers to accessing conflict zones, either due to restrictions imposed by the Houthi group or the extremely high security risks. Without a robust monitoring system, violations against children continue to occur without accurate documentation and without due legal process. In the context of a failed state, where legal authorities are either unable or unwilling to protect children, the urgency to rebuild a responsive and collaborative protection system becomes ever more critical (Anderson et al., 2019). Child protection in conflicts such as the one in Yemen can no longer rely solely on the authority of the formal state, but must involve a synergy between local, regional, and international actors to establish mechanisms that genuinely uphold the best interests of the child.

The protracted internal conflict in Yemen has created a highly complex legal fragmentation, in which the presence of multiple *de facto* authorities—each with their own legal systems and power structures—has severely weakened national cohesion in law enforcement. This situation has made legal protection for children heavily dependent on the prevailing authority in a given region, resulting in the absence of uniform standards or consistent child protection policies across the country (Ben Hamida et al., 2022). In some areas, child protection may still be implemented by authorities who refer, albeit partially, to national laws or international instruments; however, in other regions, particularly those controlled by the Houthi group or other local militias, state law is disregarded and replaced by self-imposed rules that often fail to prioritize the rights and safety of children. This fragmentation has produced uneven legal spaces, where the realization of children's rights depends more on local political decisions and military dominance than on binding national or international legal norms. As a result, children are not only victims of the physical and psychological toll of the conflict, but also of a chaotic legal system that fails to deliver equal justice and protection (Heibach & Transfeld, 2018). The weakness of the legal and oversight systems allows perpetrators of violations against children to act with impunity and without fear of legal consequences. Numerous grave violations committed by both state and non-state armed actors against children—including forced recruitment, killings, abductions, and torture—have never been prosecuted, either in national courts or through international mechanisms. The reluctance or inability of legal institutions to bring perpetrators to justice has created a sustained culture of impunity, where violations against children are perceived as a “normal” consequence of armed conflict (Al-Zumair et al., 2025). This lack of accountability further empowers armed groups that exploit children as instruments in their military strategies, without fear of legal intervention. Moreover, the weakness of documentation systems, the scarcity of witnesses willing to speak out, and unstable security conditions continue to obstruct law enforcement efforts. In such circumstances, the law loses both its preventive and corrective functions and fails to serve as an instrument of justice for victims (Anderson et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to advocate for the establishment

of transnational and independent enforcement mechanisms that can operate beyond fragile national jurisdictions, in order to ensure that violations against children in the Yemeni conflict are no longer left unpunished.

Implementation Gaps of International Humanitarian Law in the Yemen Conflict

Although Yemen has ratified various international instruments related to child protection, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, these ratifications have not been accompanied by a genuine commitment in the form of a strong and effective law enforcement system (Zweiri, 2016). The international legal provisions that Yemen has normatively recognized remain confined to the realm of documents and treaties, without being concretely implemented on the ground (Juneau, 2024). The protracted conflict has severely crippled the institutional capacity of the state to ensure that violations against children—committed by both state and non—state actors—can be prevented and legally addressed (Ben Hamida et al., 2022). This situation demonstrates that the ratification of international legal instruments does not automatically guarantee effective protection, especially when it is not supported by tangible measures to strengthen the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, and oversight mechanisms. The gap between formal legal commitments and actual practices in the field highlights the weakness of the rule of law and the state's failure to operationalize international instruments as a foundation for child protection during armed conflict.

An even more alarming reality is the widespread occurrence of grave violations against children during the conflict in Yemen that have never been subjected to legal prosecution (Unruh, 2016). Cases such as the recruitment of children as soldiers, torture, abduction, and attacks on schools and hospitals have become part of the warfare strategy employed by armed groups, including the Houthis and other militias. However, there has been no judicial process or accountability mechanism capable of prosecuting the perpetrators of these crimes, either at the domestic or international level (Shedaiwah et al., 2024). The legal system's inability to respond to crimes against children has fostered a pervasive culture of impunity, in which perpetrators feel shielded from legal consequences. This not only exacerbates the suffering of children who fall victim to such atrocities but also sends a dangerous message that violations of humanitarian law and human rights will go unpunished. In the long term, this impunity erodes public trust in the legal system and undermines prospects for reconciliation and transitional justice in the future (Unruh, 2016).

One of the main factors exacerbating the situation is the limited access that international organizations have to the most affected conflict zones. Organizations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and other UN agencies face significant challenges in entering areas controlled by the Houthi group or other armed militias, due either to access restrictions imposed by *de facto* authorities or the highly unstable security conditions. As a result, violations against children cannot be independently and directly documented, leading to data that often fails to reflect the true scale of the atrocities taking place. The absence of transparent and credible monitoring further narrows the space for international efforts to push for accountability and reform (Noman, 2025). The lack of independent observers allows violations to continue systematically without sufficient international attention or pressure. To address this, there is an urgent need for a global initiative to establish a cross—border and independent monitoring mechanism—one that does not rely solely on the consent of local authorities but can ensure real protection of children's rights amid armed conflict.

To date, there has been no national or regional court specifically established to address crimes against children in the context of the armed conflict in Yemen. This situation creates a profound justice gap, particularly for the thousands of children who have been direct or indirect victims of the violence that has persisted for nearly a decade. The absence of a dedicated legal forum for addressing child-related violations means that serious crimes—such as the recruitment of child soldiers, the use of children for military propaganda (Laing et al., 2020), rape, abuse, and attacks on schools and hospitals—lack an adequate path toward resolution (Mertens & Pecalvo, 2021). Domestic law enforcement agencies lack the capacity, independence, and legal infrastructure needed to process such cases, especially within a state that remains fragmented and trapped in a prolonged political and military crisis. Even in areas that still formally recognize national law (Vom Bruck, 2018), the judiciary often functions sub-optimally due to pressure from armed groups or institutional dysfunction (Al-Zumair et al., 2025). As a result, victims and their families lose hope of obtaining justice, while perpetrators continue to act without fear of legal consequences. In this context, the establishment of a strong and specialized judicial mechanism becomes crucial—not only as a legal instrument, but also as a symbol that violations against children will not be tolerated by either the national legal system or the international community (Eleftheriadou, 2023).

The protection of children and women in the Yemeni conflict is an urgent issue, as the recruitment of children reflects a complex interaction between poverty, social pressures, and cultural narratives that normalize their involvement in armed groups. Women and girls are profoundly affected, both as direct victims of violence and as members of families pressured to permit or even encourage their children to join in exchange for social protection or economic support. This situation illustrates how structural inequalities and prolonged instability reinforce cycles of intergenerational exploitation. Just as liberation theology seeks to dismantle systems of oppression, efforts to safeguard children and women in Yemen require a framework that integrates humanitarian, social, and gender-sensitive approaches. Through community awareness-building, strengthening family economic capacities, and enforcing accountability for violations, societies can begin to resist the normalization of violence. This perspective provides children and women with the ability to reinterpret their suffering not as isolated personal failures but as part of a broader struggle for justice and dignity. Such a holistic approach fosters resilience, nurtures hope, and lays the foundation for collective healing that is essential for long-term peace and stability in Yemen.

DISCUSSION

Although, theologically and normatively, children hold a special status in Islam as beings who must be protected from all forms of violence and oppression, this principle has not been fully operationalized in the context of the conflict in Yemen. Islamic teachings strictly prohibit the involvement of children in war, whether as fighters, weapon carriers, or logistical supporters (Almoayad et al., 2024). Numerous hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasize that children are not to be harmed, let alone involved in warfare. In classical Islamic history, treating children as non-combatants received particular attention. However, the reality in Yemen presents a painful contrast: thousands of children have been recruited by armed groups, including the Houthis, to serve as soldiers, spies, and even in suicide missions. This reflects a structural failure to translate the values of child protection from theological concepts into concrete policies and practices on the ground. The absence of a functioning state, the weakness of the legal

system, and the dominance of non–state armed actors have created a legal vacuum that allows Islamic principles to be violated without consequence.

In this context, it becomes imperative to harmonize traditional Islamic approaches with modern international humanitarian law frameworks to respond to the complexities of contemporary conflict. Classical Islamic law already contains fundamental principles regulating the ethics of war (*adab al–harb*), including the protection of children, women, the elderly, and non–combatants. However, in today's world, marked by advanced weaponry, asymmetric warfare, and the involvement of non–state actors, classical legal approaches require reinterpretation and contextual adaptation (Chico *et al.*, 2025). International humanitarian law, such as the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols concerning the protection of children in armed conflict, can serve as complementary tools to reinforce Islamic principles in protecting vulnerable groups. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a progressive and responsive legal discourse that is not only based on traditional texts but also considers contemporary developments and field realities. This integration is not merely an academic exercise but a moral and strategic imperative to build a robust child protection system amid the chaos of armed conflict such as in Yemen.

In the effort to ground these values of child protection, the role of religious scholars and leaders becomes highly central and strategic. They possess significant moral authority and social influence, particularly in societies where religious leadership is still deeply respected (Thompson & Watling, 2022). Scholars can serve as bridges between normative Islamic principles and social practice, including educating communities and armed groups about the strict prohibition against child exploitation in conflict. Through sermons, religious talks, fatwas, and cultural approaches, they can convey that the recruitment of child soldiers is not only a violation of international law but also a grave sin in Islam. Contextual and progressive fatwas must be issued to reinforce the narrative that protecting children is part of true worship and humanitarian jihad. Moreover, cross–sectoral collaboration among scholars, humanitarian organizations, and international agencies is essential to broaden the reach of this education to areas under the control of armed groups. In this way, collective public awareness can be built, and moral pressure on armed actors can be intensified to end the practice of child recruitment, which endangers the future of an entire generation (McHugh, 2022).

Child protection in the context of armed conflict—especially in Yemen—cannot be left to a single entity (Voskuil *et al.*, 2020), but must be a collective effort involving the state, international actors, humanitarian organizations, and local communities. Each actor plays a complementary role in building a resilient and contextual protection system. The state, although fragile, still holds legal and moral responsibility as the primary guardian of its citizens, including children. International actors such as the UN, donor agencies, and NGOs can provide technical, logistical (Carlson, 2024), and political support to strengthen local systems and advocate at the global level. Humanitarian organizations play a vital role in monitoring violations, providing direct assistance, and developing trauma recovery programs for child victims of conflict. Meanwhile, local communities have an equally crucial role, especially in Yemen, where society is deeply religious and social structures are community–based (Rodriguez–Diaz *et al.*, 2024). In such settings, a contextualized Islamic approach becomes key so that the message of child protection is widely accepted and aligned with the cultural and religious values held by the people.

Recent studies have highlighted the dynamics of the Houthi conflict in Yemen from various perspectives, ranging from global economic impacts to socio–political dimensions. Yударuddin *et al.* (2025) found that the conflict between the United States and the Houthis significantly disrupted global trade routes, particularly in the consumer

cyclical sector, with direct implications for international market reactions (Yudaruddin et al., 2025). From a humanitarian standpoint, Makara (2023) emphasized how empty threats and the weaponization of aid have shaped international responses to Yemen's humanitarian crisis, ultimately exacerbating civilian suffering (Makara, 2023). On the social front, Sheikh et al (2022) analyzed the factors influencing child recruitment in Yemen's armed conflict, demonstrating the close interrelation between economic, social, and cultural conditions and the practice of recruitment (Sheikh et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Sobelman (2023) examined the political – military dynamics of the Houthis by comparing their strategies with those of Hezbollah, highlighting similar patterns of resistance and organizational structures within the broader Middle Eastern context (Sobelman, 2023). These findings illustrate that the Houthi conflict extends beyond Yemen's local sphere, producing complex regional and global implications that encompass economic, humanitarian, social, and political – military dimensions.

The findings of this study provide insight into how the Houthi conflict in Yemen cannot be reduced to a local or regional struggle, but rather represents a multidimensional crisis with global repercussions. Through its disruption of vital trade routes, its contribution to humanitarian suffering, and its embedding in wider geopolitical dynamics, the conflict demonstrates how instability in one part of the Middle East reverberates across international markets and regional security architectures. This reality underscores the importance of moving beyond a narrow military lens toward approaches that integrate economic, humanitarian, and political considerations. By recognizing the intersection between trade security, humanitarian protection, and peacebuilding, policymakers can develop strategies that are more comprehensive and sustainable. Inclusive dialogue among conflicting parties, combined with stronger international coordination, is crucial to prevent the protraction of violence and its spillover effects. Furthermore, reinforcing humanitarian aid mechanisms and addressing the socio – economic roots of child recruitment may contribute to reducing the long – term human costs of the conflict. It is expected that this perspective will enrich both scholarly debates and policy interventions on Yemen. Ultimately, such an integrated approach may not only address immediate security concerns but also foster greater regional cooperation, enhance humanitarian resilience, and support the construction of a more stable and peaceful international order.

CONCLUSION

This study explicitly set out to investigate how the protection of human rights for children and women has been compromised during the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, and to what extent existing international legal instruments and enforcement mechanisms have failed or succeeded in responding to those violations. The findings conclusively show that the Houthi insurgency has systematically violated the rights of children and women through practices such as child soldier recruitment, sexual and gender – based violence, denial of education and healthcare, and other forms of coercion and exploitation. The existing legal frameworks—such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), CEDAW, and relevant UN Security Council resolutions—have not been adequately enforced, especially in territories where the state has lost control and non – state actors exert *de facto* governance. These conditions render the legal protections for these vulnerable groups largely ineffective in practice. In clear terms, the answer to the research question is that while the normative basis for protecting children and women in conflict exists, its implementation is structurally weak, contextually inadequate, and procedurally inaccessible. This conclusion highlights a fundamental gap between legal norms and the lived reality of conflict – affected civilians, demonstrating that without enforcement

capacity and context—sensitive mechanisms, legal instruments alone cannot guarantee human rights protection.

This research puts forward the concept of *fragile legalism*—a condition in which legal obligations exist but cannot be effectively upheld due to political fragmentation, institutional collapse, or the dominance of armed non—state actors. This idea modifies the existing paradigm in international human rights law, which is still heavily reliant on state—centric accountability, by suggesting that non—state actors who exercise territorial control should also bear enforceable legal obligations under international law. The development of this concept serves as both a critique and a constructive proposal for rethinking human rights protection in contemporary armed conflicts, where traditional legal assumptions no longer hold. Furthermore, this study stresses the need for survivor—centered approaches and the inclusion of local voices—especially women and former child soldiers—in the design of protection and justice systems. It suggests that future policy frameworks should integrate legal reform with community—based empowerment strategies, reinforce international monitoring mechanisms, and adopt enforceable tools such as targeted sanctions to deter future violations. Ultimately, the study contributes to bridging the gap between normative legal commitments and operational realities, and offers a pathway toward more inclusive, adaptive, and enforceable human rights protection in protracted and asymmetric conflicts like the one in Yemen.

DECLARATIONS

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Mohammed Emier Azka developed the research concept, designed the methodology, and drafted the initial manuscript. Muhammad Yusuf Iskandar supervised the research, validated the findings, and provided critical revisions to the manuscript. Muhammad Azyzy Amyrul Hafidz Hamam performed data analysis and conducted the investigation. Lutfiah Syahnur collected the data and managed the resources. Fadilla Syahriani reviewed and edited the manuscript and carried out the final proofreading. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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