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Invisible Harm in a Visible War:
A Thematic Analysis of Slow Violence and Engaged Vulnerability in the Denial of Children's Health Rights in Gaza

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the systematic denial of Palestinian children's right to health under Israel's prolonged blockade of the Gaza Strip, with a focus on how this crisis reflects structural violations of international human rights law and entrenched forms of violence. Grounded in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the study applies Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence and Don Kulick's concept of engaged vulnerability as analytical tools to examine how long-term policies produce lasting harm. The analysis is based on a thematic analysis of three humanitarian and legal reports published in 2024, which serve as the main empirical sources. The study identifies central patterns of violation, including the weaponisation of food access, the breakdown of mental health services, and the erosion of food sovereignty. These findings show that the vulnerability of Palestinian children is not a natural condition but one produced by political neglect, systemic deprivation, and deliberate state action. The thesis argues that it represents a breach of legal obligations and a moral failure. It demonstrates that the blockade amounts to slow violence, with effects that unfold gradually but severely, with consequences that are often hidden yet deeply damaging to children's lives and futures.

By interpreting these patterns through a rights-based framework, the thesis concludes that the blockade constitutes a breach of binding international obligations and represents a form of slow violence, its effects gradual, cumulative, and harmful to children's health and futures. The integration of engaged vulnerability also reveals how caregivers and affected communities resist invisibilisation by making children's suffering visible in demands for justice. These frameworks bring into focus forms of harm that dominant legal or humanitarian discourses often overlook, such as the erosion of rights, protections, and futures and expose how time, visibility, and accountability are manipulated to obscure responsibility. The study highlights the need for a recalibrated international response that centers children's rights and legal accountability. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on how legal and theoretical approaches can expose and challenge structural injustices in protracted conflict zones.

Keywords: Children's rights, Engaged vulnerability, Gaza blockade, ICESCR Article 12, Right to health, Slow violence, UNCRC Article 24

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List of Abbreviations

CESCR – Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

CIHL – International customary law

CRC Committee – Committee on the Rights of the Child

GCIV – Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War

GNC – Global Nutrition Cluster

HRC – Human Rights Council

HRW – Human Rights Watch

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IHL – International Humanitarian Law

OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem Formulation

One… two… three… four… five… six… seven… eight… nine… ten. In that time, a child somewhere in the world has died of hunger. One… two… three… four… five… six… seven… eight… nine… ten. Again, another child has lost their life. "A child dies from hunger every 10 seconds" [1]. Nearly half of all deaths among children under the age of five are caused by malnutrition, not due to rare or incurable diseases, but because their bodies are deprived of the essential nutrients needed to survive. Nowhere is this reality more visible than in the Gaza Strip**.** This thesis reframes these deaths not as unfortunate outcomes of poverty but as slow, structural violence, especially in protracted conflict zones like Gaza.

Gaza's children have lived under a blockade that for over a decade, has restricted access to food, clean water, medicine, and healthcare. Before the latest hostilities, 90% of preschoolers consumed less than 75% of their daily nutritional needs. Today, 31% of children under two in northern Gaza suffer from acute malnutrition, and 4.5% face severe wasting the deadliest form. Meanwhile, 80% of children report depression, grief and fear. These are not just humanitarian issues they raise serious legal and ethical concerns[2].

The right to health is protected under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). When these rights are systematically denied through policies like prolonged blockades, questions arise about international accountability and compliance with human rights law. Despite the severity of this crisis, much research has focused on visible violence bombings, casualties, and displacement while neglecting the slower, chronic harms that affect children's survival and development over time: hunger, trauma, and the collapse of essential services.

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[1] The world counts. "Around 9 million people die every year of hunger and hunger-related diseases. This is more than from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.". *The world counts.* Accessed 8th April, 2025. https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/people-and-poverty/hunger-and-obesity/how-many-people-die-from-hunger-each-year
World food program USA (WFP), "10 facts about child hunger in the world". *WFP.* Accessed 8th April 2025. https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/10-facts-child-hunger/

[2]Boukari et al "Gaza, Armed Conflict and Child Health." *BMJ Paediatrics Open* 8, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjpo-2023-002407.
Human Rights Watch (HRW), "They Destroyed What Was Inside Us" Children with Disabilities Amid Israel's Attacks on Gaza, *HRW, accessed 16 February , 2025, https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/09/30/they-destroyed-what-was-inside-us/children-disabilities-amid-israels-attacks-gaza?utm_sourc*
Human rights watch, "Big problems for children with disabilities in Gaza because of fighting", HRW, 2024. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/09/Children%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Gaza%20ETR.pdf

To understand these deeper impacts, this study draws on Don Kulick's concept of engaging vulnerability, which rejects the idea of vulnerability as a passive state. Instead, it is viewed as a relational and politically produced condition, shaped by power, law, and institutional neglect. In this light, Palestinian children's vulnerability is not inherent it is constructed and sustained by political decisions and international inaction[3].This framework shifts the focus from short-term humanitarian aid to long-term structural accountability. It asks if violations occur and how they are produced and maintained and who bears ethical and legal responsibility.

By combining this relational understanding of vulnerability with Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence that unfolds gradually and invisibly and over time. Therefore, this thesis frames Gaza's blockade as a deliberate mechanism of harm. These long-term deprivations are not side effects of war, but part of a broader political strategy with serious human rights implications. In the analysis, particular attention is paid to the physical and psychological consequences of the blockade, malnutrition, trauma, and denied healthcare and how these harms expose the failure to meet international legal obligations. This approach contributes to a broader understanding of how chronic crises and long-term deprivation challenge the human rights system and demand greater accountability[4].

1.1 The research aims and questions

This study explores violations of Palestinian children's rights in Gaza by applying a right based analytical framework grounded in the theoretical concepts engaging vulnerability and slow violence. By applying a right-based approach grounded in engaging vulnerability and slow violence, the study reinterprets this crisis as humanitarian and a legal and moral failure of international responsibility. In doing so, the study adopts a human rights-based perspective that assesses legal obligations and interrogates how structural conditions such as blockade, institutional neglect, and international inaction produce and sustain harm over time.

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[3] Engaging Vulnerability. "Engaging Vulnerability". *Engaging Vulnerability.* Accessed 25th February, 2025. https://www.engagingvulnerability.se/about-ev/about-engaging-vulnerability/

[4]Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Unlawful Gaza Blockade Deadly for Children. *HRW.* Accessed 16th February, 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/18/israel-unlawful-gaza-blockade-deadly-children

Human Rights Watch, "Gaza: Israels Imposed Starvation Deadly for Children". *HRW*. Accessed 16th February, 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/09/gaza-israels-imposed-starvation-deadly-children

Amnesty International, Investigation Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza.

Dannenbaum, Tom, *'Siege Starvation: War Crime of Societal Torture'* (2022) 22(2) *Chicago Journal of International Law.* 368–442.

This thesis, therefore, addresses a critical gap in human rights research by exploring how the Israeli blockade of Gaza constitutes a form of structural and invisible violence that systematically undermines children's rights to health and dignity.

- How does the Israeli blockade of Gaza constitute a form of slow violence that undermines children's rights to health, development, and life under Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR?

- How does the relational and power-structured nature of engaging vulnerability mediate the impact of Israel's blockade on the denial of Palestinian children's rights to health, nutrition, and psychological wellbeing in Gaza, considering Articles 24 (UNCRC) and 12 (ICESCR)?

1.2 Relevance to Human Rights

This study addresses a critical human rights issue about the systematic denial of children's right to health under Israel's prolonged blockade of the Gaza Strip. Situated within the framework of international human rights law, the thesis draws specifically on Article 24 of UNCRC and Article 12 of ICESCR. These provisions affirm every child's right to the highest attainable standard of health, encompassing access to adequate nutrition, medical services, and psychosocial support. In Gaza, the sustained obstruction of these rights has resulted in a deepening humanitarian crisis, raising urgent legal and ethical questions about state obligations and international accountability.

Reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories and organisations such as Human Rights Watch have documented the widespread deprivation, trauma, and structural harm that Palestinian children have faced. The use of starvation as a method through long term blockades of warfare has been identified as a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and may constitute a war crime. These conditions elevate the blockade beyond a political dispute, framing it as a legal and ethical emergency with transnational implications. By grounding the thesis in legally binding obligations under international human rights law, the study contributes to a growing body of research that not only highlights violations but also calls attention to the responsibilities of state and international actors to uphold children's rights during conflict. This focus underscores the urgent need to address prolonged blockade policies

not only as humanitarian crises but as failures of legal implementation and international protection[5].

1.3 Delimitation

Several key delimitations frame this study to ensure clarity and focus. Geographically, the research is confined to the Gaza Strip, where the blockade directly impacts many children, whose rights are at stake. While the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict is significant, the focus here is specifically on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, particularly its effects on children. The study does not aim to assess the overall statistical impact of the blockade on Gaza's entire population. Still, it will focus specifically on children aged 0 to 18, who are most vulnerable to its adverse effects[6]. Given the heightened risk to children's health, nutrition, and psychological well-being under these conditions, and their special protection under UNCRC, the research will focus exclusively on this group.

While the right to health is recognized in multiple international legal instruments such as Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) this study focuses specifically on Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 24 offers a comprehensive and child-specific framework for understanding health as a right. To address the dimension of mental health more fully, Article 12 of the ICESCR is also incorporated. Its explicit reference to "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health"[7] broadens the scope and complements the child-centred protections outlined in the UNCRC. Article 24 will serve as the primary legal reference for analysing children's health rights, while Article 12 enhances this perspective by situating it within the broader framework of international human rights law. This combined legal approach enables a more holistic analysis of health-related rights for children affected by prolonged humanitarian crises.

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[5]Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza". *HRW*. Accessed 16th February, 2025. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza
United Nations General Assembly, *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Geneva Convention IV)* (12 August 1949) https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/geneva-convention-relative-protection-civilian-persons-time-war accessed 12 March 2025.
[6] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 15... CRC/C/GC/15 (17 April 2013) https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/425041?v=pdf accessed 15 May 2025. p.3.
[7] ICESCR, art 12.

This study centres on developments from 2023 to 2024, a period marked by severe escalations in the humanitarian situation in Gaza, particularly concerning food insecurity and restricted access to humanitarian aid due to blockades. Data from early 2025 will be included to capture the continued impact of the blockade on children. While the wider political dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict including the role of military operations and external actors like the United States and the European Union remain important, they fall outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, the analysis is deliberately narrowed to examine the direct effects of the blockade on the rights, health, and psychological well-being of children. This focused approach enables a deeper investigation into how structural conditions shape the lived experiences of one of the most vulnerable groups in this context.

1.4 Disposition

This thesis is structured to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the physical and psychological impacts of Israel's blockade on children in Gaza. The structure follows a logical flow, beginning with the introduction of the research problem and moving through conceptual grounding, methodological design, empirical findings, and critical analysis, ultimately concluding with reflections and recommendations. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, outlines the study's objectives, research aims and questions, and explains the delimitations. It also highlights the human rights relevance of the topic and provides an overview of how the thesis is organised. Chapter 2 presents the necessary background information, defining key concepts such as gaza as a case study, blockade, right to health, and malnutrition. Chapter 3 reviews existing academic literature to identify gaps that this thesis seeks to fill.

Chapter 4 introduces the theoretical framework, drawing on Don Kulick's concept of engaging vulnerability and Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence. It explains how these critical theories are integrated with legal frameworks, specifically Article 24 of UNCRC and Article 12 of ICESCR[8]. Chapter 5 outlines the research methodology, beginning with the selection and review of empirical material, followed by a description of the qualitative approach and the thematic analysis process, including the coding structure. It also addresses reflexivity, ethical

[8] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,* 1st edn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). 45-128.

considerations, and the importance of reliability and validity. Chapter 6 presents the empirical findings of this thesis organized around three key themes: Starvation as Structural Violence, Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion, and Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement. These themes illustrate how the blockade produces cumulative and interconnected harm through mechanisms of slow violence and institutional neglect. Chapter 7 builds on the empirical findings by offering a critical discussion that connects the findings to the theoretical frameworks of slow violence and engaging vulnerability, highlighting how the blockade functions as a form of structural harm and what this reveal about international legal responsibilities. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarizing the main insights, reflecting on their broader significance for human rights and legal accountability, and suggesting directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1 Key Concepts and Definitions

This section outlines the key legal and analytical concepts that form the foundation of the study. Defining these terms is important for the analysis, particularly considering the thesis's interdisciplinary approach. The definitions also explain how core concepts such as the case of Gaza, the blockade, right to health and malnutrition are understood within the context of international human rights law and critical theory.

2.1.1 Gaza as a case study

Gaza constitutes an urgent and revealing case study in the examination of how prolonged conflict, occupation, and blockade policies violate children's rights under international human rights and humanitarian law. As part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Gaza has been subjected to a systematic blockade by Israel since 2007, severely restricting the movement of people, goods, and essential services by land, sea, and air[9]. The blockade has contributed to long-term shortages of food, clean water, fuel, and medical supplies, resulting in worsening living conditions and the erosion of essential services. International humanitarian organizations

[9] UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food 2024, UN General Assembly, 2024. https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/n2421230.pdf accessed 2025-03-31.

including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, WHO, and the United Nations to mention a few have repeatedly condemned the blockade, citing its disproportionate and harmful effects on the civilian population, particularly children[10].

By 2023, the humanitarian situation had deteriorated further due to intensified restrictions, especially following the October 2023 escalation in violence, after which Israel declared a total siege on Gaza. This included cutting off access to food, water, electricity, and medical aid, leaving humanitarian agencies unable to deliver lifesaving assistance. In northern Gaza, where access has been almost completely obstructed, 15.6% of children under two years old are now acutely malnourished, surpassing WHO's emergency threshold[11].

Simultaneously, the collapse of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure, lack of sanitation, and overcrowded shelters have contributed to the spread of preventable diseases and increased child mortality. These conditions not only reflect a public health emergency but also a systemic failure to uphold binding obligations under Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR, which guarantee children the right to health, nutrition, and protection. Beyond physical harm, the blockade has caused long-term psychological trauma. Children in Gaza are growing up in a context of constant exposure to violence, instability, and displacement, leading to widespread cases of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. These cumulative harms underscore what scholars refer to as structural vulnerability where institutional and political systems systematically expose populations, particularly children, to sustained and preventable suffering[12].

Despite clear legal obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, the blockade remains in place and continues to obstruct children's access to basic rights, raising serious ethical and legal concerns. According to Amnesty International's 2024 report, Israel's ongoing enforcement of the blockade, including the obstruction of humanitarian aid and denial of fuel, was carried out with full knowledge of its impact on civilians. This raises urgent legal

[10] United Nations General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (16 December 1966) https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights art. 12.
[11] UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food 2024, UN General Assembly, 2024. *https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/n2421230.pdf* (Accessed 2025-03-31).
Abuzerr et al, *The silent crisis: effect of malnutrition and dehydration on children in Gaza during the war,* Frontiers in nutrition, 2024, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/nutrition/articles/10.3389/fnut.2024.1395903/ful (Accessed 2025-02-16)
[12] Abduzerr et al, *The silent crisis: effect of malnutrion and dehydration on children in Gaza during the war.*

questions about the deliberate use of siege tactics in densely populated areas, particularly when such measures disproportionately affect children[13].

2.1.4 Blockade

A blockade refers to the isolation of a territory by restricting the movement of people, goods, or services, typically through military or political means. Under international humanitarian law, especially the GCIV and CIHL, blockading states must still permit the passage of essential humanitarian aid. Denying such aid can constitute a breach of these laws and, in some cases, a war crime[14].

While blockades may be presented as legitimate military strategies, their disproportionate impact on civilian populations especially children raise serious legal and ethical concerns. Scholars argue that when blockades are used not to target enemy combatants, but to pressure entire populations, they border on collective punishment and constitute a form of structural violence. As Roberto Regalado argues, they often function as "double-edged swords"[15], where the targeted population becomes a tool for political leverage" rather than a party to the conflict. In this way, blockades risk crossing the line from military tactics to pressure an opponent resulting of collective punishment and structural violence[16]. As *Britannica* explains, a blockade is a war measure that isolates an area to prevent the passage of supplies or people, but international law differentiates between lawful blockades and those that are disproportionate or indiscriminate in their impact on civilians[17].

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[13]Amnesty International, Investigation Concludes Israel is Committing Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza. p.26, 50.
[14] Geneva Convention IV. p.169-171, 177-178.
United Nations, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (17 July 1998) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf accessed 12 March 2025. p. 6, 9 26.
Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, *Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I: Rules*(Cambridge University Press 2005) https://www.cambridge.org/9780521005289 accessed 12 March 2025. p.189, 197.
[15] Roberto Regalado, *'The Blockade as a Double-Edged Sword'* (2022) 73(8) *Monthly Review*https://monthlyreviewarchives.org/index.php/mr/article/view/MR-073-08-2022-01_2 accessed 8 April 2025. pp. 22.
[16]Regalado, *'The Blockade as a Double-Edged Sword'*, pp. 12-13 and 22.
[17] Britannica. "Blockade". *Britannica*, accessed 8 April *2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/blockade-warfare.*

According to the Guide to *Humanitarian Law,* states are legally obliged to allow the passage of humanitarian relief including food, water, and medicine even during armed conflict and even if a territory is completely encircled. This means that military necessity does not justify blocking aid essential for civilian survival. Under international humanitarian law (IHL), attacks must be directed solely at military objectives. When relief supplies are intentionally obstructed, especially in the context of prolonged or total siege, such actions may violate not only IHL and CIHL, but also amount to war crimes. CIHL explicitly states that state practice shows that if a party imposes a siege, blockade, or embargo that leads to starvation among the civilian population, it has a legal duty to allow humanitarian aid to reach those in need (see commentary to Rule 53 in CIHL)[18]. Additionally, *The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* and Geneva convention explicitly prohibits attacks on humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel (Art. 8(2)(b)(iii)), as well as on medical facilities and transports marked with protective emblems (Art. 8(2)(b)(xxiv)). It also classifies the deliberate starvation of civilians by depriving them of essential resources such as food and aid as a punishable war crime (Art. 8(2)(b)(xxv))[19].

2.1.5 Right to health

The right to health is a foundational principle in international human rights law and serves as a critical lens for analyzing the conditions of children in conflict settings. This right is not confined to access to healthcare services, but includes a broad range of social, environmental, and psychological factors that shape physical and mental well-being. In this thesis, the right to health is examined primarily through Article 24 of UNCRC and Article 12 ICESCR. One of the more recent contributions to this field is the General Comment No. 14 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which clarified the scope of Article 12. Similarly, General Comment No. 15 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child offers a detailed interpretation of children's right to health under Article 24. Together, these texts provide a integrated framework to assess how health rights are realized or denied in prolonged crises such as Gaza[20].

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[18] Beck, *Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I: Rules*(Cambridge University Press 2005) https://www.cambridge.org/9780521005289 accessed 12 March 2025. p.187-189, 197.
[19] *Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*, "Blockade", (updated 2021) https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/blockade/ accessed 30 March 2025.
Rome Statue. Article 8(2)(b)(iii), Article 8(2)(b)(xxiv), Article 8(2)(b)(xxv). p.6-8.
[20] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 15 on the Right of the Child to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Article*

2.1.6 Article 24 UNCRC: Combating Disease and Malnutrition in Children

Article 24 of the UNCRC recognizes the child's right to the highest attainable standard of health and obligates state parties to take measures to ensure access to healthcare and to combat disease and malnutrition. Article *24(2)(c)* calls for states to take effective steps to provide adequate nutritious food and clean drinking water, to combat disease and undernutrition conditions that are exacerbated in contexts of war, occupation, and blockade[21]. This article is particularly relevant for children in Gaza, where the blockade and armed conflict have severely restricted access to food, water, and essential medical services. Numerous UN reports highlight that these constraints have resulted in widespread undernutrition, stunted growth, and preventable diseases, positioning Article 24 as a central legal tool for assessing children's health rights violations in Gaza. To further clarify the scope of this right, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued General Comment No. 15 (2013), which emphasizes the interdependence of children's health and the realization of other rights. States must address both direct healthcare needs and the broader structural determinants such as sanitation, housing, and safe environments that critically affect children's health and development[22].

> ***General Comment No. 15 (2013)***
>
> "States must combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water... The right to health extends beyond access to healthcare and encompasses underlying determinants such as safe drinking water, sanitation, and an adequate standard of living."

[23]

Thus, Article 24 UNCRC and General Comment No. 15 together form the normative foundation for assessing both state and international responsibilities in protecting children's health in conflict zones.

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24), CRC/C/GC/15 (17 April 2013) https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crc/2013/en/96127 accessed 30 march 2025, p. 2-3.

[21] United Nations General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (20 November 1989) UNTS vol 1577, art 24 https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child accessed 5 february 2025.

[22] UNCRC, art 24.
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 15*. p.3. 7-9, 11-12.

[23] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 15*.

2.1.7 Article 12 ICESCR: Health as a Holistic Right Including Mental Well Being

While Article 24 UNCRC is child specific, Article 12 of the ICESCR showcases a broader right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health for all individuals[24]. The inclusion of mental health is vital for understanding the impact of conflict related trauma on children a form of harm that is often less visible but equally devastating. General Comment No. 14 (2000) by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stresses that the right to health includes underlying determinants such as food, housing, and psychological well-being. This perspective is especially relevant in the Gaza context, where trauma, displacement, and insecurity have become chronic features of childhood. By integrating Article 12 ICESCR into this study's theoretical framework, the thesis underscores the holistic nature of health and positions mental health as a critical, though often overlooked, dimension of children's rights in armed conflict.

> ***General Comment No. 14 (2000)***
>
> "The right to health embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life... including the underlying determinants such as access to safe water, adequate sanitation, an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition, and housing, and healthy occupational and environmental conditions. It also embraces the availability of mental health treatment and care."

[25]

By including Article 12 ICESCR in this theoretical framework, this thesis emphasises that health must be understood holistically, as encompassing both the physical (e.g. disease, malnutrition) and the psychological (e.g.trauma, mental distress) dimensions. This is particularly relevant when analyzing the effects of armed conflict on children, whose mental health is deeply impacted by continuous exposure to violence, insecurity, and loss. Furthermore, both articles are supported by detailed General Comments that serve as

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[24] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Article 12 of the ICESCR)*, E/C.12/2000/4 (11 August 2000) https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Health/GC14.pdf accessed 5 february 2025. p. 1-2, 4.
United Nations General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (16 Decem ber 1966), art 12 https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights 12 march 2025.

[25] UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 14.*

authoritative interpretations and guide implementation and accountability. These texts help translate broad legal principles into concrete obligations, thereby strengthening the normative force of the right to health under international law.

The right to health, as enshrined in Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR, provides a crucial legal and normative foundation for understanding how protracted blockades, such as the one imposed on Gaza, systematically undermine the well-being of children. Drawing on the General Comments accompanying both articles, this framework emphasizes that physical and psychological health are inseparable dimensions of human dignity and children's rights. In the context of Gaza, where health systems are deliberately obstructed and access to adequate food and medical care is repeatedly restricted, the denial of these rights constitutes not only a humanitarian crisis but a grave breach of international law.

2.1. 8 Malnutrition

Malnutrition refers to a condition resulting from imbalances or deficiencies in a person's intake of energy and essential nutrients, leading to outcomes such as undernutrition (including wasting, stunting, and underweight), micronutrient deficiencies, and overnutrition (e.g., obesity). It is commonly categorized into three types: undernutrition, deficiencies in vitamins and minerals, and excesses that may lead to diet related noncommunicable diseases. The effects of malnutrition are particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries, where it contributes to high levels of child morbidity and mortality, impaired growth, and long-term developmental consequences[26].

In the Gaza Strip, malnutrition has reached emergency levels, particularly among children under five, as well as pregnant and breastfeeding women. According to recent assessments, over 90% of children aged 6–23 months and women in this group consume two or fewer food groups per day, indicating severe food poverty and poor dietary diversity. More than 15% of children in northern Gaza are now acutely malnourished, surpassing the global emergency threshold set by the World Health Organization. This escalating crisis is directly linked to continued restrictions on humanitarian access, the collapse of basic infrastructure, and

[26] Ashour et al. "The Impact of War on Gaza on Children's malnutrion Since 2023". Public Health Research 2025, 15(1): 1-9. DOI: 10.5923/j.phr.20251501.01. p.2.

widespread outbreaks of disease[27]. The systemic nature of this deprivation aligns with international legal definitions of rights violations. Article 24 of the UNCRC explicitly obliges states to combat malnutrition and disease, and Article 12 of the ICESCR demands the provision of the highest attainable standard of health. The failure to meet these obligations despite foreseeable risks reflects a prolonged breach of international legal standards.

Chapter 3: State of arts

Dannenbaum argues that siege-induced starvation should be reclassified as a distinct form of societal torture that erodes dignity and autonomy over time. He emphasizes that the cumulative nature of starvation, its gradual, prolonged infliction of harm, renders it a particularly cruel method of warfare. Dannenbaum links this harm to legal frameworks, particularly after the 2019 amendment to Article 8 of the Rome Statute, which explicitly recognizes starvation as a war crime even in non-international armed conflicts. Ultimetaly, he highlights how violence in the form of starvation can unfold gradually, often outside the scope of immediate visibility or media attention, yet with devastating long-term effects. His focus on starvation as a form of systemic cruelty provides a legal basis for understanding how the blockade in Gaza impacts children's rights to food, health, and survival[28].

Rhodes et al. contribute to the growing body of qualitative research that directly examines the lived experience of health deprivation in Gaza, based on in-depth interviews with families and children, illustrates how structural barriers such as import restrictions on medical equipment, denial of travel permits for treatment abroad, and collapse of mental health services create long-term and intensifying risks for children. Their research reveals that although healthcare systems nominally exist, access to them is undermined by layers of obstruction and insecurity, leading to avoidable suffering and developmental setbacks. The authors highlight that psychosocial stress is not simply a secondary effect, but a primary and ongoing form of harm that affects nearly every dimension of childhood in Gaza. They call for framing these

[27] Global Nutrition Cluster. *Nutrition Vulnerability and Situation Analysis, Gaza*. Global Nutrition Cluster, 2024. https://www.nutritioncluster.net/sites/nutritioncluster.com/files/2024-02/GAZA-Nutrition-vulnerability-and-SitAn-v7.pdf (Accessed 2025-03-30). pp. 1-5.
[28] Dannenbaum, "Siege Starvation: War Crime of Societal Torture", 405-406.

conditions not merely as humanitarian crises, but as rights-based violations demanding legal and ethical accountability [29].

Complementing this perspective, Saad, though not focused specifically on children or Gaza, offers important contextual insights into how Israeli settler-colonial strategies reshape ecological and political landscapes in the West Bank. Her ethnographic study maps how the systematic destruction of agricultural land, pollution, and forced displacement erode community health, autonomy, and future survival. Saad's analysis of environmental and infrastructural manipulation as tools of settler colonialism helps frame how similar strategies may function in Gaza particularly through the control of essential resources like water, food, and sanitation infrastructure. These forms of environmental degradation are critical for understanding how long-term exposure to deprivation becomes a normalized condition rather than an emergency[30].

Additional insights are offered by B'Tselem and Al Mezan who have jointly documented the direct impact of Israel's restrictions on the movement of goods and people in and out of Gaza. Their reports highlight how the denial of permits for medical travel, along with delays in diagnostic equipment and medical supplies, has contributed to preventable deaths and worsened chronic conditions among children[31]. Yet, while such documentation is crucial, it often lacks a legal framing that ties these consequences to violations of binding obligations under international law. Building on this, research by Quota , Punamäki, and El-Sarraj explores how ongoing conflict and siege contribute to emotional insecurity, poor academic performance, and increased aggression among youth. the psychological and developmental impact of military violence and siege on children in Gaza. Their studies, grounded in the work of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, reveal how repeated exposure to traumatic events, including night raids, home demolitions, and prolonged curfewsproduces high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and cognitive impairment among children. Their research also demonstrates that trauma is not experienced solely

[29] Rhodes, Tim, et al., "Structural Violence and Structural Vulnerability...", in O'Campo, Patricia and Dunn, James R. (eds), Rethinking Social Epidemiology: Towards a Science of Change (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 205–230. pp.206–208, 223–225.
Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor,* 2–4, 10–11.
[30] Saad, "The slow violence of Israeli settler-colonialism and the political ecology of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank". 512-532.
[31] B'Tselem and Al Mezan. "Unprotected: The Detention of Palestinian Teenagers by Israel," Joint Report (2017): pp.9-11, 24-29.

through direct violence but through chronic insecurity, loss of control, and humiliation, especially when family members are targeted. Importantly, their findings suggest that trauma disrupts not only immediate psychological stability but also longer-term developmental processes such as memory, symbolic play, problem-solving capacity, and peer relationships[32].

Complementing these psychological and health-focused perspectives, Shalhoub-Kevorkian offers a critical criminological lens through which to interpret the broader structural dynamics shaping children's lives in Palestine. Her work on the "criminalisation of childhood" and necropolitical governance provides a framework for understanding how Palestinian children are not only deprived of health services but also actively governed through fear and exposure to violence. Her empirical accounts of trauma, anxiety, and institutional abandonment further expose the hidden dimensions of rights violations in Gaza. Shalhoub-Kevorkian's research also foregrounds how the militarization of everyday life produces what she terms "spaces of death," where Palestinian children are socialised into fear and dispossession. In her ethnographic work, she highlights that childhood in occupied Palestine is not merely disrupted by conflict, it is fundamentally structured by it. Surveillance, unlawful arrest, and the constant presence of military forces transform schools, homes, and public streets into zones of political control. This reinforces a reality where children are not protected but targeted, their mobility restricted, and their bodies governed as security threats. In this way, Shalhoub-Kevorkian offers a critical departure from conventional human rights reporting, by showing how forms of necropolitical governance, that is, state power over life and death, are exercised not only through violence but also through bureaucratic practices of abandonment and forced exposure[33].

In addition to empirical research, legal scholarship has begun to critically examine the limitations of international legal enforcement in protecting children's rights in protracted conflicts. Burgis-Kasthala and Masetti Placci argue that current legal definitions of genocide are viewed by many scholars as too narrow to capture the full extent of Israel's destruction in Gaza. This has led to the development of so-called "genocide neologisms" such as domicide,

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[32] Qouta et al. "Child Development and Family Mental Health in War and Military Violence: The Palestinian Experience," *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2008): pp. 311–318.
[33] Shalhoub-Kevorkian. "Childhood: A Universalist Perspective for How Israel is Instrumentalising Children's Rights". *Current Sociology* 12, nr 3 (2015): pp. 223, 226-229.
Shalhoub-Kevorkian. *Militarisation and Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case Study* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

ecocide, and scholasticide to articulate the layered nature of state violence. These terms do not seek to replace the legal definition of genocide but aim to expand its analytical and normative scope to better reflect the complex realities on the ground[34].

Moreover, Shalhoub-Kevorkian critiques dominant legal and humanitarian narratives that often frame Palestinian children as passive victims rather than as political subjects. She argues for a decolonial reading of international law, one that accounts for how legal systems themselves can participate in the erasure of structural violence by limiting violations to moments of overt attack[35]. Her work calls for an expanded understanding of harm that includes psychological terror, forced immobility, and state produced fear as fundamental violations of the right to dignity, safety, and development. This broader framing is particularly important in the context of Gaza, where siege conditions produce slow, cumulative harm that may not always be visible but that deeply erodes children's health and agency over time.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian's work is important for understanding how Palestinian childhood is shaped not only by moments of crisis but by ongoing structures of colonial violence, institutional abandonment, and legal invisibility. Her analysis challenges conventional humanitarian narratives by showing how children's lives are governed through fear, surveillance, and the withdrawal of care, rather than protected through legal guarantees. In doing so, she calls for a right based approach that complements legal analysis and makes visible how rights violations are embedded in the everyday landscapes of occupation. However, there remains a clear gap in the existing research. Few studies examine the Gaza blockade through a comprehensive legal lens that connects the structural effects of long-term siege policy with specific rights violations under children's rights law, particularly Articles 24 of the UNCRC and 12 of the ICESCR. This thesis seeks to contribute to that gap by offering a focused legal and interdisciplinary analysis of how the blockade systematically undermines Palestinian children's rights to health, by integrating legal frameworks with critical concepts such as slow violence and engaged vulnerability[36].

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[34]European Journal of International Law (EJIL), "Lost for Words, yet Grasping for Neologisms: Gaza, Genocide and the Discursive Limits of International Law", *EJIL:Talk*, accesed 30 march, 2025, https://www.ejiltalk.org/lost-for-words-yet-grasping-for-neologisms-gaza-genocide-and-the-discursive-limits-of-international-law/

[35] Shalhoub-Kevorkian. "Childhood: A Universalist Perspective for How Israel is Instrumentalising Children's Rights". *Current Sociology* 12, nr 3 (2015): pp. 223, 226-229.
Shalhoub-Kevorkian. *Militarisation and Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: A Palestinian Case Study* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[36] Rhodes et al. "Structural Violence and Structural Vulnerability... ".206-208, 223-225.

Chapter 4: My theoretical framework: Engaging Vulnerability and Slow violence in the context of Children in Gaza

4.1 Theoretical foundations and Aims

This study aims to analyze how engaging vulnerability, and slow violence can serve as analytical lenses to deepen the understanding of the systematic denial of children's rights in the context of protracted blockades, concerning Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child UNCRC and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ICESCR. In doing so, the study adopts a human rights-based perspective that not only assesses legal obligations under international law but also interrogates how structural conditions such as prolonged siege and deprivation, result in institutionalized rights denial. Engaging vulnerability is used to highlight how children's exposure to harm is not inherent or accidental, but shaped through institutional, political, and legal mechanisms. Rather than treating malnutrition, trauma, and denial of healthcare as isolated humanitarian crises, this theoretical approach frames them as outcomes of structural violence and politically produced vulnerability. Slow violence offers a temporal lens through which to understand how harm unfolds gradually, often escaping visibility and legal accountability[37].

By using these frameworks allow the thesis to examine how protracted blockades produce harm that is both legally and ethically significant. This thesis contributes to existing human rights literature by focusing not only on violations themselves, but on the structural and representational mechanisms that obscure accountability. The framework is therefore applied throughout the empirical chapters to interrogate how the blockade of Gaza operates not merely as a policy of restriction, but as a sustained system of deprivation. While Section 4.2 develops the concept of engaging vulnerability in relation to legal neglect and institutional abandonment, and Section 4.3 elaborates on slow violence in the context of Gaza's blockade,

[37] Don Kulick, "Vulnerable Erotic Subjects", *Sexualities* 27 nr 1–2 (2019): 63, 64–67.

this introductory section outlines their joint function in framing the thesis's core research questions and analytical focus.

4.2 Engaging Vulnerability as a Relational and Ethically Charged Condition

Drawing on Don Kulick's concept of engaging vulnerability, this study treats vulnerability not as an inherent trait but as a condition produced through social, political, and legal relations. Engaging with vulnerability in this way allows the analysis to expose how Palestinian children's rights are systematically denied under the blockade not through momentary crises, but through sustained structures of power, neglect, and normalization of harm[38]. In the case of Gaza, this approach reveals how children's vulnerability is produced not only by immediate crises but by the sustained erosion of protective infrastructures. Vulnerability, in this sense, is not a passive condition but an active site of struggle, visibility, and legal recognition. By linking Kulick's framework to Rhodes et al. notion of "structural vulnerability," the thesis foregrounds how exposure to systemic harm such as siege, deprivation, and psychosocial trauma functions as a form of rights denial that international law must account for[39].

Drawing also on Martha Fineman's understanding of vulnerability as universal yet differentially distributed, this thesis reveals how political decisions determine access to fundamental rights like healthcare, food, and protection. In Gaza, children's vulnerability is not incidental it is politically manufactured through mechanisms of blockade, restricted aid, and institutional neglect. This theoretical framing not only informs the analysis but shapes the formulation of the research questions, which center on the mechanisms of denial, legal responsibility, and the systematic nature of vulnerability. As such, engaging vulnerability is not a supplementary framework; it is integral to the structure and argument of the entire thesis[40].

[38]Engaging vulnerability, "Engaging Vulnerbility", Engaging Vulnerbility, accessed 12 march , 2025, https://www.engagingvulnerability.se/about-ev/about-engaging-vulnerability/
Martha Albertsson Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," Yale Journal of Law and feminism. (2016): 20-22, 16-17.
[39] Rhodes et al. "Structural Violence and Structural Vulnerability…". 206-208, 223-225.
[40] Fineman. "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition". 16-17, 20-22.

These theoretical lenses do not function independently; rather, they are intertwined in a complementary manner throughout the thesis. Engaging vulnerability is introduced not as a static condition, but as a dynamic, relational structure shaped by policy, law, and institutional neglect. Fineman's concept of differential vulnerability reinforces this view by positioning institutional response as a key measure of justice and structural accountability. This theoretical approach allows the thesis to examine how Gaza's blockade creates layered exposure to harm, not only through direct violence but through the erosion of care systems and protective infrastructures over time. Furthermore, the relational and structural view of vulnerability is reinforced by the findings of Abu Mustafa et al., who does not explicitly use the term or theory engaging, document the mental health worsening or decline of Gazan youth in response to years of blockade and insecurity. Their research shows how trauma, anxiety, and despair are not random psychological outcomes, but direct effects of prolonged, invisible violence. This validates Kulick's claim that vulnerability is actively produced by institutional inaction and provides empirical weight to this thesis's focus on children's health as both a legal and moral concern.

4.3 Slow Violence and Structural Harm

Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence is used in this thesis to analyse the gradual, often invisible forms of harm that occur through environmental degradation, institutional neglect, and prolonged blockade. Unlike visible or immediate acts of violence, slow violence operates incrementally, unfolding over time and often evading public, legal, or media attention. When combined with a framework of vulnerability, it helps reveal how the denial of basic rights, such as access to food, healthcare, and psychosocial support, produces long-term harm that is deeply structural in nature. Slow violence shows that damage to health systems, the environment, and institutions is not random it is part of a larger architecture of control. Although Saad does not use the term explicitly, her analysis offers valuable insight into these dynamics by showing how Israeli settler strategies in Palestine extends beyond military operations to include the weaponization of space, the collapse of agricultural production, and the obstruction of movement all of which erode stability and diminish the life prospects of children[41]. These forms of harm are especially devastating because they are cumulative,

[41] Saad, "The slow violence of Israeli settler-colonialism and the political ecology of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank". 512-532.
Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. 45-128, 199-205.

normalized, and rarely represented in legal or media discourse. Integrating this understanding helps to expose the full scope of the blockade's consequences, particularly for children. It reinforces the need for a rights-based analytical framework that does not only recognize spectacular violence, but also addresses the prolonged, systemic conditions under which children's health, development, and dignity are undermined.

A similar perspective is found in the work of Michelle Pace and Haim Yacobi, who explore how Israeli policies in Gaza since the 2005 withdrawal constitute a form of settler colonialism without settlers. This conceptualization of slow violence as both systemic and obscured reinforces its relevance for legal analysis. While Pace and Yacobi do not explicitly use the theory slow violence, their analysis of settler colonial strategies in Gaza offers critical insight into how control is exercised without a direct settler presence. Instead, they show how domination is maintained through spatial restriction, bureaucratic obstruction, and the systematic denial of basic services, producing what they describe as "everyday non-life." These framing challenges conventional humanitarian narratives by revealing how life is weakned not through overt acts of violence but through sustained deprivation and structural neglect. Such a perspective is essential for understanding how Gaza's crisis is often framed as a humanitarian emergency, rather than as a legally accountable system of rights denial[42].

While Abu Mustafa and his colleagues do not frame their analysis in terms of slow violence, their findings offer valuable insight into how the blockade generates prolonged psychological harm. Based on field data and interviews with families and professionals, their report demonstrates how repeated exposure to trauma, material scarcity, and institutional abandonment has contributed to a sustained mental health crisis among children in Gaza. These effects are often overlooked in both humanitarian and legal discourse, yet they reflect deeply embedded violations of children's rights. Taken together, these studies provide a foundation for understanding the blockade not only as a humanitarian issue, but as a system of slow, structural violence. This thesis builds on that body of research by connecting these cumulative harms to international legal obligations, particularly under Articles 24 of the

[42] Pace, M., & Yacobi, H. "Settler Colonialism (Without Settlers) and Slow Violence in the Gaza Strip". *Partecipazione e Conflitto 14 nr* 3, 1221-1237. https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v14i3p1221. pp.1223-1224, 127.

UNCRC and 12 of the ICESCR. In doing so, it addresses a gap in the literature that frequently neglects the legal implications of long-term, policy-driven deprivation in Gaza[43].

4.4 Operationalisation and Integration of Theory

The theoretical framework in this thesis is not confined to a single section but is integrated throughout the empirical chapters to maintain conceptual consistency and analytical depth[44]. The ethical and relational dimensions of engaging vulnerability will be explicitly connected to children's testimonies, health indicators, and legal evaluations, ensuring that concepts are used actively and meaningfully rather than treated as abstract references. Engaging vulnerability will be used to interpret how children's exposure to systemic deprivation and institutional abandonment is produced by structural conditions, rather than attributed to individual misfortune. This allows the analysis to highlight how the erosion of healthcare, psychosocial well-being, and legal protection reflects deliberate policy design rather than coincidental hardship. In parallel, the temporal logic of slow violence will be linked to empirical patterns such as prolonged malnutrition, deteriorating health infrastructure, and invisible psychological trauma. This shows how harm build up through depleting mechanisms such as permit restrictions or the blocking of aid that rarely register as immediate violations but have profound long-term consequences.

In the analysis chapters, these frameworks will be operationalized by tracing how the blockade, infrastructure denial, and bureaucratic obstacles produce distinct but interrelated forms of harm and vulnerability[45]. These observations will then be assessed against the normative standards articulated in Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR, to evaluate the extent to which legal duties toward children's health are unfulfilled or obstructed. This conceptual framework also informed the construction of the research questions, guiding attention not only to the existence of rights violations but to the structural mechanisms that enable and perpetuate them. It prompts a shift in focus, from isolated events to systemic

[43] Abu Mustafa Jamal et al. "Making the Invisible Visible: Slow violence, Mental Health and Resilience in Gaza", Research Gate (2023): 2-5.
[44] Olle Tivenius. *Tematisk Analys*, 1 uppl. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2024), 89
[45] Tivenius, *Tematisk analys*, 89–90.

processes and from humanitarian concern to legal accountability. By integrating these theoretical perspectives into the structure of the thesis, the analysis moves beyond surface-level documentation of suffering. It interprets the blockade as a system of slow violence that normalizes prolonged deprivation, and views vulnerability not as a static condition but as something continuously produced by asymmetrical power relations embedded in occupation and blockade regimes.

This framework will guide the analysis in the following chapters, particularly in examining how the blockade operates as a form of slow violence that normalizes long-term deprivation, and how power asymmetries inherent in military occupation and blockade regimes produce and entrench children's vulnerability. By adopting a lens of engaged vulnerability, the analysis shifts away from viewing children's suffering as passive and instead interprets it as structurally and politically produced[46].

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Selection of Empirical Material

The empirical material for this study comprises three reports published in January, February, and September 2024, authored by the United Nations, Save the Children, and the Global Nutrition Cluster respectively. These documents were retrieved directly from the official websites of each organization to ensure authenticity, reliability, and traceability, while minimizing the risk of distortion from secondary sources. The selection of these documents was guided by their topical relevance, legal and humanitarian authority, and institutional credibility. All three organizations are internationally recognized actors in the fields of child protection, humanitarian assistance, and global health, which reinforces the material's validity and normative weight. Their recent publication dates were especially important given the evolving nature of the blockade and its escalating effects on the health and well-being of

[46] MR-Fonden, "Ekonomiska, sociala och kulturella rättigheter – rätten till hälsa", *MR fonden*, accessed 17 april, 2025, https://mrfonden.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/esk-skriftvhalsa.pdf. p. 21.
ICESCR, art.12.
Philip J Drew, "Can We Starve the Civilians? Exploring the Dichotomy between the Traditional Law of Maritime Blockade and Humanitarian Initiatives", *International Law Studies*, vol. 95 (2019): 302, 306, 311–313, 317.

children in Gaza. Using up to date reports enabled the study to engage with the most current conditions and avoid outdated data[47].

In line with the qualitative orientation of the study, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the selected material reflected a conceptually rich and analytically useful representation of the health-related consequences of the blockade. Documents were evaluated not for quantitative representativeness but for their capacity to illuminate the research problem through legally grounded and humanitarian lenses. Each report was reviewed iteratively, with key sections annotated to identify indicators of harm, legal obligations, and conceptual relevance in relation to the study's theoretical framework. Passages that did not contribute meaningfully to the research aim were excluded to maintain analytical clarity and thematic coherence. This process followed the logic of saturation sampling, as outlined by Tevenius (2021), whereby material collection was concluded once thematic saturation was reached that is, when further sources no longer introduced new themes or insights relevant to the research questions[48]. The careful reading of each report's structure and discursive framing also supported familiarity with the material's internal logic, facilitating a more precise and grounded thematic coding process. This ensured both depth and relevance in the final selection and interpretation of the empirical material.

5.2 Critical review of sources

A critical evaluation of sources was carried out to ensure the quality and credibility of the material used in this study. Particular attention was paid to criteria such as reliability, authority, objectivity, and timeliness[49]. Reliability was assessed by considering whether the reports had undergone internal review processes, while authority was evaluated through scrutiny of the organizations' reputations and the credentials of those responsible for the content[50]. Objectivity was addressed by analyzing the purpose of each report and distinguishing between empirical findings and normative interpretations. Timeliness, or time proximity, was treated as a key concern; priority was given to material published during or

[47] Tivenius. *Tematisk Analys.* 63–65, 88–90.
[48] Tivenius. *Tematisk Analys.* 63–65, 88–90.
[49]Esaiasson et al. *Metodpraktiken: konsten att studera samhälle individ och marknad.* 4 uupl. (Visby: Nordstedts juridik AB, 2012), 278–279.
[50] Uppsala University," Searching and Writing", Uppsala University, accessed 17 april, 2025, https://libguides.ub.uu.se/oxford-fotnoter/webbsida.

immediately following the humanitarian developments of 2023–2024, a period marked by intensified blockades, ceasefires, and structural deterioration in Gaza[51]. Eliasson et al. point out, source criticism is essential for assessing the credibility of different accounts, both in terms of (authority or reliability and timeliness), and in evaluating how the truthfulness of these accounts may have been influenced by the circumstances surrounding their objectivity[52].

The empirical material consists of three reports published by internationally recognized organizations with established expertise in humanitarian and children's rights monitoring. Each report was examined with attention to authorship, institutional framing, and the broader political context in which the information was produced. It was acknowledged that humanitarian organizations often pursue normative goals, which may influence how suffering is framed or quantified. To reduce potential bias, the reports were analysed in dialogue with legally binding instruments such as the UNCRC and ICESCR. These legal frameworks provided a structured, rights-based lens through which findings could be critically assessed. This was particularly important given a common challenge in social science research the failure to distinguish between the content of a narrative and its origin. Confusing the source with its provenance risks overlooking how a report's truth claims may be shaped by institutional, political, or situational conditions[53]. Further efforts to ensure analytical validity included triangulation across the three reports and, where applicable, cross-referencing with statements from other credible international bodies such as the WHO and UNICEF. This approach enhanced the reliability of the data and supported the validity of recurring claims. However, the limitations of working with secondary data in a rapidly evolving conflict zone must be acknowledged. Although all selected material is recent, the rapidly evolving and highly unstable situation in Gaza means that certain findings may already be outdated. These limitations have been accounted for in the analysis and balanced, where possible, through legal contextualization and triangulated verification[54].

[51] Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB), "Folkrätt i väpnad konflikt – en översikt" , MSB, accessed 30 march, 2025, https://rib.msb.se/filer/pdf/27968.pdf accessed 30 march 2025. pp.23-30.
[52] Esaiasson et al. *Metodpraktiken: konsten att studera samhälle individ och marknad. 280.*
[53]Esaiasson et al. *Metodpraktiken: konsten att studera samhälle individ och marknad*. 279–280.
[54] Esaiasson et al. *Metodpraktiken: konsten att studera samhälle individ och marknad.*280.
Maria Henricsson, red. *Vetenskaplig teori och metod: från idé till examination inom vård- och hälsovetenskap,* 3 uppl. (Lund: Studentlitteraturer AB, 2020), 130.

5.3 Qualitative analysis

This study adopts a qualitative research strategy as its methodological approach. The rationale for this choice lies in the study's emphasis on meaning, language, and interpretation rather than on numerical measurement or quantification. As Bryman explains, qualitative research is typically characterized by an inductive relationship between theory and research, where theoretical insights emerge from the data rather than being imposed upon it from the outset[55].

Given that qualitative research seeks to produce in-depth understanding of particular social phenomena by carefully engaging with specific contexts, actors, and meanings, this approach is particularly well suited to the aim of the present study[56]. The research investigates how Israel's blockade of Gaza constitutes a form of slow violence that undermines Palestinian children's rights to health, development, and life, as articulated in Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR. A qualitative design enables close engagement with the selected reports, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how protracted harm and vulnerability are represented and constructed through humanitarian and legal discourse.

5.4 Research Design: Thematic Analysis

This study applies Thematic Analysis (TA) as its analytical tool, following the approach developed by Braun and Clarke. TA provides a structured yet flexible method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data. Its theoretical openness makes it especially well-suited to interdisciplinary human rights research, where legal, ethical, and social dimensions intersect. This flexibility allows for the integration of both descriptive and critical analysis, particularly relevant when examining structural and long-term harms such as those produced by military blockades[57]. The choice of TA is grounded in its capacity to explore how the Israeli blockade of Gaza systematically undermines Palestinian children's rights to health, nutrition, and psychological well-being. It facilitates an in-depth analysis of how such harm is constructed and justified within humanitarian and legal discourse, as well as how it relates to broader frameworks of power

[55] Alan Bryman, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*. 4 uppl. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025), 55-56.
[56] Bryman. *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*. 426-427
[57] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis; A practical Guide.* Issue 1. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd 2021), 35-37.

and vulnerability. TA enables a close examination of how structural violence understood through the concept of slow violence and the production of engaged vulnerability shape the denial of rights under Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR.

TA was selected over other qualitative methods due to its compatibility with varied sources and its capacity to handle complex, layered materials. The study draws on three legal and humanitarian reports, each with distinct empirical and institutional perspectives. This diversity benefits from TA's adaptability, offering a legally grounded and context-sensitive understanding of children's rights under protracted siege. [58]. As Kjellström notes, thematic analysis offers a systematic yet adaptable process for identifying and interpreting themes across different materials, making it compatible with rights-based and ethically engaged research. This study follows Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analysis, which provides a clear and rigorous process for working with qualitative data. These phases familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report structure the entire analytical process[59].

The coding strategy combined both inductive and deductive approaches. In the early stages, an inductive method was used to allow patterns to emerge organically from the material. As the analysis progressed, coding was guided by the study's theoretical and legal frameworks particularly the concepts of slow violence and engaged vulnerability to capture structural and relational dimensions of harm and deepen the critical legal analysis. To systematise the analytical process, a coding table (see Table 1) was developed. It integrates legal references from Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR, along with theoretical insights from engaged vulnerability and slow violence, thereby providing a clear analytical lens for each category. The table includes six analytical categories related to children's health, nutrition, and psychological well-being under the blockade. Each category is supported by guiding questions, keywords, and legal sources, allowing the coding process to identify recurring patterns, link them to legal obligations, and evaluate their broader political and

[58] Braun and Clarke. *Thematic Analysis; A practical Guide.* 4-7.
[59] Braun and Clarke. *Thematic Analysis; A practical Guide.* 5–8.
Henricsson, red. *Vetenskaplig teori och metod: från idé till examination inom vård- och hälsovetenskap.* 313–316.

ethical implications. This ensures that the resulting themes are both empirically grounded and normatively significant[60].

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

Following Braun and Clarke's first phase of thematic analysis, the study began with repeated and attentive reading of the selected material. The empirical basis consists of three reports published in 2024 by the United Nations, Save the Children, and the Global Nutrition Cluster, comprising 21, 24, and 30 pages respectively. Each report was read multiple times to develop a thorough understanding of its structure, framing, and legal relevance. Particular attention was paid to how harm, vulnerability, and rights denial were presented. Extensive notes and annotations were made to mark significant passages and identify early patterns aligned with the study's aim and theoretical framework. This phase laid the groundwork for systematic coding by ensuring deep familiarity with the content and context of the material.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Coding was conducted manually and systematically across all three reports, with each segment reviewed for its substantive, relational, or structural relevance to the research aim. Codes captured both content-based categories (e.g. malnutrition, PTSD, aid obstruction) and deeper thematic dimensions such as powerlessness, institutional neglect, and prolonged deprivation. Each code was tied to a guiding analytical question reflecting a rights-based concern for example, "What are the psychosocial impacts of long-term blockade on children?" or "In what ways is access to health structurally obstructed?" This ensured that the coding remained aligned with the study's legal and conceptual focus. Codes were then clustered by types of slow violence and dimensions of engaged vulnerability, forming the basis for theme development in subsequent phases.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

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[60] Bryman, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder.* 377, 704.
Christen Erlingsson & Petra Brysiewicz "A Hands-on guide to doing content analysis", *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 7. (2017): 93, 97, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.afjem.2017.08.001.
[60] Braun and Clarke. *Thematic Analysis; A Practical Guide.* 34-36.

In phase three, coded segments were examined for conceptual relationships and grouped into five overarching themes: (1) Starvation as Structural Violence, (2) Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion, (3) Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement, (4) Rights Violations under the Blockade, and (5) Humanitarian Access and Obstruction. These themes were not selected by frequency but by relevance to the research questions (see Table 1), legal frameworks, and analytical depth. The themes reflect the intersection of legal violations, institutional mechanisms of neglect, and sustained structural harm.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

The initial themes were reviewed in relation to the coded data and full source documents to ensure coherence and depth. Redundant or overlapping categories were refined or merged where appropriate. Specific attention was paid to the framing of harm across reports particularly the distinction between humanitarian language and legal obligations. This iterative review process clarified that the themes captured not only recurring patterns of deprivation but also the mechanisms by which children's vulnerability is maintained and normalised under international inaction.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Themes were refined to reflect distinct and analytically grounded categories. For example, “Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion” was formulated to include both diagnosed mental health conditions and long-term emotional deterioration resulting from institutional breakdown. Each theme was clearly defined according to (1) its core indicators and codes, (2) guiding analytical question, (3) type of slow violence, and (4) how it reflects engaged vulnerability as a relational and ethically charged condition. Definitions were grounded in legal references from the UNCRC and ICESCR and aimed to connect empirical patterns with normative legal frameworks.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

The finalised themes were integrated into the empirical and analytical chapters. Each theme provided the structure for interpreting data through the dual frameworks of slow violence and engaged vulnerability, consistently referring to international legal standards. In line with Braun and Clarke’s principles of thematic analysis, the themes were kept grounded in the

data, drawing explicitly from the coded material and reflecting the relational and structural nature of the violations under study. The themes helped trace how protracted blockade conditions manifest as systemic legal failures and ethically unacceptable harm[61].

Table 1: Detailed Coding Structure

Main Themes	Representative Codes	Coding Question	Type of Slow Violence	Engaging Vulnerability Dimension	Legal Reference
Starvation as Structural Violence	Food insecurity, Malnutrition, hunger, wasting, disease	How is hunger used as a weapon or tool of deprivation?	Structural, Bureaucratic, Political	Dependency on external aid, erosion of care, invisibilized suffering	Article 24 UNCRC, Article 12 ICESCR
Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion	PTSD, anxiety, emotional distress, depression, suicidal thoughts, emotional distress	What are the psychosocial impacts of long-term blockade on children?	Psychological, Symbolic, Intergenerational	Silencing of trauma, long-term emotional breakdown, abandonment of mental health needs	Article 24 UNCRC
Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement	Displacement, land loss, destruction of agriculture and fishing sectors	How has the blockade impacted food systems and forced displacement?	Environmental, Political, Legal	Disempowerment, loss of autonomy, intergenerational dispossession	UNCRC, ICESCR
Rights Violations under the Blockade	Restrictions on movement, access, services, borders	Which rights are systematically denied or obstructed?	Legal-administrative, Political	Vulnerability shaped by legal exclusion and military policy	UNCRC, ICESCR
Humanitarian access, obstruction,	Obstruction of aid, delays, selective entry, control, restriction, manipulation	What barriers hinder humanitarian assistance and response?	Bureaucratic, control, restriction, or manipulation of space and movement	Institutional disregard, failure of those in power to protect	UNCRC

[61] Braun and Clarke. *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. 34-38.
Save the Children, *Trapped and Scarred: Children's Mental Health in Gaza report*. pp.4, 10–12.

5.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was applied throughout the study to critically engage with the researcher's background and positionality in relation to the material. This awareness was essential to avoid reinforcing existing power imbalances or presenting suffering in a way that feels distant, overly simplified, or emotionally detached. In qualitative research, reflexivity is understood as a process of examining how the researcher's own values, assumptions, and context influence every stage of the research. It encourages the researcher to question how their role and decisions shape what kind of knowledge is produced. As Longhurst argues, in a chapter cited by Bryman in Social Research Methods, this kind of continuous reflection makes the researcher more aware of how their methodological choices, ethical positioning, and interpretative decisions impact the study. From this perspective, knowledge is not neutral but always a reflection of the researcher's place in a particular time, culture, and social setting. The researcher is not merely reporting reality but takes part in constructing it through the questions they ask, the theories they use, and how they represent the people and issues involved[62].

In addition to reflecting on the researcher's background and position, this study also draws on a broader understanding of reflexivity as described by Alvesson and Sköldberg. They stress that reflexive research must pay close attention not only to the researcher's subjectivity but also to the processes through which knowledge is shaped. This includes how theory, language, politics, and context influence both what we study and how we interpret it. As Calás and Smircich describe it, reflexivity involves a constant examination of the relationship between "knowledge" and the ways of doing knowledge. In other words, empirical material is not something neutral that we simply observe it is constructed, interpreted, and presented through a series of choices[63]. This view underscores that research outcomes are shaped by the questions asked, the concepts applied, and the frameworks used. In this study, adopting a reflexive approach meant thinking critically at every stage about how these elements interact,

[62] Gillian Longhurst, '*Reflexivity'*, in Alan Bryman, Social Research Methods, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 448-449.
[63] Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, 1st edn (London: SAGE, 2018), 10-11.
Marta Calás and Linda Smircich, Postmodern management Theory: Voicing Seduction to Silence Leadership, Organization Studies, 13:4 (1992), 240.

and how they influence which aspects of children's experiences in Gaza are made visible, and which are not.

In a similar vein to Calás and Smircich, Braun and Clarke emphasize that reflexivity involves a critical reflection on both the knowledge we produce through research and the processes by which that knowledge is created. This includes the researcher's methodological choices, theoretical framework, and disciplinary positioning all which shape how research questions are framed, how data is interpreted, and how conclusions are drawn[64]. However, this understanding of reflexivity is not without critique. Some scholars argue that too much focus on the researcher's position may risk shifting attention away from the people or issues being studied. There is also concern that by emphasizing how knowledge is constructed, reflexivity may lead to relativism, where all interpretations seem equally valid potentially weakening the analytical or normative claims of the research[65]. In addition, there are few clear guidelines for how reflexivity should be practiced, making it difficult to assess its quality or depth across studies.

Despite these critiques, reflexivity remains essential in this study. It supports a more honest and transparent analysis of how legal, cultural, and ethical choices influence the interpretation of children's vulnerability and rights violations in Gaza. It also helps ensure that the researcher's role is examined critically, without overshadowing the lived realities of those represented. Special care was therefore taken to ensure that the portrayal of trauma and rights violations did not dehumanize or generalize the experiences of Palestinian children. The aim was to center their lived realities and examine how harm is structurally produced and maintained, rather than portraying children as passive recipients of suffering. Attention was also paid to how institutional and legal frameworks influence the framing of harm in the reports. The researcher's academic and cultural background inevitably shaped the interpretation of legal and humanitarian narratives, which required constant self-reflection to ensure that structural critique did not obscure the specific and personal dimensions of the experiences being analysed.

[64] Braun and Clarke. *Thematic Analysis; A Practical Guide.* 13–14.
[65] Bryman, *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder. 448-449.*

5.6 Ethical considerations

Following the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines, the research aimed for honesty, accuracy, and transparency in presenting findings, with critical reflection on potential biases in source selection and interpretation. Reflexivity and ethical reflection were used throughout the analysis and research process. This was important to avoid "voyeurism" in the presentation and portrayal of trauma, suffering and human rights violations from reinforcing power imbalances or encouraging a voyeuristic view of suffering[66]. As stated by the Swedish Research Council research integrity is a fundamental condition, nonetheless in this study, both for the quality of research and for its societal relevance. Because conducting research responsibly requires not only knowledge of ethical principles and the regulatory frameworks, but also the ability to apply them in practice, along with an ongoing and inclusive ethical dialoige among all actors involved in or affected by the research process[67].

The study also addressed ethical concerns by carefully considering how voices in the reports were represented, aiming to highlight the lived experiences of Palestinian children while holding states and institutions accountable without portraying the children as passive victims of humanitarian narratives[68]. As no human participants were interviewed or observed, informed consent was not required. However, the study took care to respect the dignity and vulnerability of the children portrayed in the reports. Special attention was given to the ethical implications of representing suffering and trauma The analysis was conducted with care to ensure that harm was not instrumentalized or reduced to mere data. Instead, the study sought to highlight legal and ethical responsibilities of state and international actors while preserving the dignity of those affected. Representations of suffering were approached with caution, and voices in the reports were given due weight to avoid reproducing simplified humanitarian narratives. All sources were fully cited, drawn from credible and transparent institutional channels, and handled in a way that protected the identity, dignity, and rights of individuals, even when anonymized or generalized in institutional language.

[66] Vetenskapsrådet (VR), *Godforskninged*, VR, 2024. https://libguides.ub.uu.se/oxford-fotnoter/rapport (Accessed 2025-04-17). pp. 24-27, 90-91.
[67] Vetenskapsrådet (VR), *Godforskninged*. p.4
[68] Vetenskapsrådet (VR), *Godforskninged*.

5.7 Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are addressed through the concept of trustworthiness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened by using a transparent and well-documented coding process, grounded in clearly defined legal and theoretical frameworks. Themes were not selected based on frequency alone but on analytical relevance to the research questions and normative standards[69].

From a constructivist perspective, the concept of validity becomes more complex. Some scholars argue that quality in research changes when social science concepts do not refer to fixed, objective realities but are instead shaped by interpretation. When studying issues such as power, oppression, or social injustice as in this thesis the researcher is not a neutral observer but becomes part of constructing the object of study. As Boreus and Bergström explain, the researcher's own understanding limits what kinds of answers can be found[70]. Therefore, it is not enough to assess the quality of research tools alone one must also consider the researchers own historically and socially shaped assumptions. Good validity alone does not guarantee a credible study precision in how the research is carried out and interpreted is equally important. This dimension is referred to as reliability.

Transferability was ensured by providing contextual detail about the reports, the legal frameworks applied, and the socio-political setting of Gaza, allowing readers to assess how findings might be relevant to other protracted humanitarian contexts. Dependability was supported through systematic application of Braun and Clarkes six-phase thematic analysis process and cross-checking between coding stages[71]. Confirmability was achieved through ongoing reflexive practice, minimizing researcher bias and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the empirical material rather than personal assumptions.

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[69]Bryman, Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder. 657–658.
Kristina Boreus och Göran Bergström, Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys, 4 uppl. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2018).40–41

[70] Bergström och Boreus, *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*. 40-41.

[71] Braun and Clarke. Thematic Analysis; A Practical Guide.143.

Chapter 6: Results and analysis

In conclusion, this six-phase thematic process enabled the identification and critical analysis of structural patterns of rights denial. It revealed how children's vulnerability is not incidental but produced through a combination of legal restriction, political neglect, and the erosion of protective systems making the harm not only visible, but legally and ethically actionable.

The findings presented in Chapter 6 demonstrate that the Israeli blockade of Gaza has structurally and chronically undermined Palestinian children's access to essential determinants of health, including clean water, nutritious food, and mental health services. Through a rigorous coding process, three interlinked themes emerged: (1) Starvation as Structural Violence, (2) Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion, and (3) Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement. Each theme reflects a distinct mechanism of harm, yet all expose how children's vulnerability is not incidental, but structurally produced through political design, institutional neglect, and international complicity. As part of this analysis, particular attention has also been paid to how different forms of slow violence converge and interact. The impacts on children vary depending on age, displacement status, and access to care, and these differences are considered throughout this chapter.

Table 2 showcases these refined themes and their representative codes, demonstrating how various forms of slow violence structural, bureaucratic, psychological, symbolic, and environmental manifest in children's everyday lives. The analysis moves beyond descriptive accounts of suffering by integrating Nixon's concept of slow violence with Kulick's and Fineman's framing of vulnerability as relational and ethically charged. Vulnerability is not treated as a static or individual condition, but as something politically shaped by sustained deprivation, eroded care systems, and ruptured social environments. This combined theoretical lens enables a rights-based reading of the blockade's effects, where the denial of health and well-being is understood not as a humanitarian shortfall, but as a systemic legal and moral failure. It offers a critical foundation for interpreting the ongoing violation of Palestinian children's rights in Gaza as both cumulative and deliberate.

Table 2: Summary of Refined Themes and Types of Slow Violence and Engaging vulnerbility

Theme	Types of Slow Violence	Representative Codes	Engaging Vulnerability Dimension
Starvation as Structural Violence	Structural, Bureaucratic, Political	Food insecurity, Malnutrition, hunger, wasting, disease	Dependency on external aid, erosion of care, invisibilized suffering
Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion	Psychological, Symbolic, Intergenerational	PTSD, anxiety, emotional distress, depression, suicidal thoughts, emotional distress	Silencing of trauma, long-term emotional breakdown, abandonment of mental health needs
Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement	Environmental, Political, Legal	Displacement, land loss, destruction of agriculture and fishing sectors	Disempowerment, loss of autonomy, intergenerational dispossession

6.1 Starvation as Structural Violence

This theme captures how the Israeli blockade functions as a deliberate mechanism of deprivation, systematically undermining children's access to food, water, and essential health resources. Rather than resulting from logistical failure or emergency, these shortages are the outcome of bureaucratic and policy-driven restrictions that form part of a broader strategy of control. Children in Gaza suffer from severe and chronic malnutrition, with 1 in 6 children aged 6–23 months in northern Gaza acutely malnourished and over 31% facing some form of undernutrition. These figures reflect not only caloric deprivation but also a collapse of dietary diversity, micronutrient intake, and developmental health. Blockade-imposed limitations on food imports, destruction of agricultural systems, and denial of humanitarian corridors all contribute to what has been described by the UN Special Rapporteur as the weaponization of hunger. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, “Never in post-war

history had a population been made to go hungry so quickly and so completely"[72]. The destruction of food systems, the denial of aid corridors, and administrative obstacles to food access amount to structural starvation.

Further, this theme aligns with the concept of slow violence, as these harms accumulate invisibly over time, escaping the spectacle of war while permanently damaging children's bodies and futures. It is further interpreted through the lens of engaged vulnerability, which reveals that children's suffering is not passive but actively produced through institutional neglect, policy design, and international inaction.

In the words of Father Maher in Gaza:

> A few days ago, one of my children told me, 'I want to eat healthy food. I really want to go to school and live my old, normal life. And I want to play. Their lives now are just deprivation, their childhoods have gone. They don't have food and they can't play[73].

Such testimonies reflect how deprivation is manufactured through access control, not scarcity. The systemic obstruction of food access and the destruction of Gaza's food systems, therefore, constitute not only humanitarian neglect but a prolonged breach of both legal and moral obligations. It directly relates to Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees children's right to adequate nutrition and access to health services. Additionally, it implicates Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which protects the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The systemic obstruction of food access and the destruction of Gaza's food systems therefore constitute not only humanitarian neglect but a prolonged breach of both legal and moral obligations.

By applying the concept of engaging vulnerability, it becomes clear that children's hunger in Gaza is not simply a matter of food scarcity but the result of policy choices that systematically erode access to nourishment and care. The coding showed how themes like obstruction of aid, hunger used as a weapon, and dependency reveal an environment where children's basic

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[72] United Nations, " The Questions of Palestine", UN, accessed 17 april, 2025, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/right-to-food-report-17jul24/.
UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, UN Doc A/79/171 (17 July 2023) 7.
[73] Save the Children, *Trapped and Scarred: Children's Mental Health in Gaza report*. 9.

survival is shaped by forces far beyond their control. Their vulnerability is not natural it is produced and sustained through political and institutional inaction. This makes visible the ethical and legal implications of allowing malnutrition to become normalized under prolonged blockade conditions.

6.2 Mental Harm and Psychosocial Erosion

Beyond physical deprivation, the blockade has devastating psychological consequences. Children report living in a constant state of fear, grief, and uncertainty. According to Save the Children, over 80% of children in Gaza experience signs of severe emotional distress, including nightmares, bedwetting, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation[3]. This theme examines how the prolonged denial of safety, protection, and routine systematically erodes children's psychological well-being. Homes and schools' spaces of stability are repeatedly destroyed. Mental health services are either absent or collapsed under pressure. Children are no longer just living through crisis; they are being raised in conditions of psychological collapse.

Samer, a father, shared how:

My son has stopped eating from fear and has become so thin now. All the time he asks me, 'Daddy, are we going to die? There is nothing I can do to help them as their father; I don't know what to say to them. They keep on asking this same question, but I have no answer for them[74].

This illustrates how the long-term denial of safety, protection, and care destroys emotional resilience. This theme examines how the prolonged denial of routine, safety, and psychosocial support systematically erodes children's mental well-being. Using Rob Nixon's framework, this represents psychological slow violence harm that festers without spectacle yet leaves profound intergenerational trauma. Engaging vulnerability sharpens this reading by exposing how mental harm is relational: children's distress is shaped by the breakdown of care structures, institutional silence, and a broader framework of abandonment. The coded material included subthemes such as emotional distress, psychological harm, and behavioral issues, which highlight how mental well-being is undermined over time. Using Rob Nixon's

[74] Save the Children, *Trapped and Scarred: Children's Mental Health in Gaza report*. 2.

framework, this represents psychological slow violence harm that festers without spectacle yet leaves profound intergenerational trauma. The framework of slow violence helps illuminate how children in Gaza are exposed to cumulative harm that is not spectacular but sustained and devastating. For example, the rise in malnutrition, the collapse of the local food system, and the inaccessibility of clean water illustrates how deprivation is embedded in long-term policy. Rather than being incidental, these harms unfold over time because of systematic blockade restrictions, revealing a pattern of structural and bureaucratic violence.

Engaging vulnerability sharpens this reading by exposing how mental harm is relational: children's distress is shaped by the breakdown of care structures, institutional silence, and a broader framework of abandonment. This theme directly implicates Article 24 of the UNCRC, which explicitly includes mental health as part of the child's right to health. It is also reinforced by Article 12 of the ICESCR, which guarantees the right to mental and emotional well-being. The denial of psychosocial care under blockade conditions reflects a failure to meet both the immediate and structural dimensions of these legal obligations.
The concept also helps unpack how children's psychological distress is shaped not only by repeated trauma, but by the breakdown of everyday protective systems. The coded material included subthemes such as "emotional distress," "psychological harm," and "behavioral issues," which together highlight how mental well-being is undermined over time. Children's exposure to fear and instability is not random it is linked to the absence of functioning support networks, parental coping collapse, and the silencing of their experiences. This shows that mental harm under the blockade is not just a medical issue it is a structurally produced condition that reveals deeper failures in legal and institutional responsibility.

6.3 Loss of Food Sovereignty and Forced Displacement

This theme explores how the blockade has stripped Palestinian families of their ability to grow, access, and manage food resources locally. Fishing zones have been severely restricted, 93% of the agriculture and fishing economy has been destroyed, and access to farmland is routinely denied[4]. Families are displaced repeatedly, often without notice or shelter, disrupting communal life and destroying the conditions for food sovereignty and self-reliance.

Maher, a displaced father noted:

> This war is very different. The violence of this war is different. Previously we didn't have to leave our homes, but now we have no place to go. We've been displaced six times. We went to a safe place and then they bombed it. This war has no safe place. This has affected our children. Even their games have become about war. [75]

These conditions exemplify environmental and legal slow violence where land, water, and livelihoods are systematically undermined not through visible force but through bureaucratic restrictions and policy design. The loss of food sovereignty is not only a nutritional issue but a form of cultural erasure and intergenerational harm. Engaged vulnerability shows that this erosion of land-based autonomy is not incidental; it is the result of targeted policies that fragment communities, collapse economies, and displace future possibilities. Children are deprived not only of nutrition but of rootedness, safety, and continuity.

These violations breach Article 27 of the UNCRC, which guarantees children's right to an adequate standard of living, and Article 16, which protects them against arbitrary interference with their home and family. They also constitute a broader infringement of Article 24 UNCRC and Article 12 ICESCR, as forced displacement under blockade conditions removes access to vital determinants of health such as food, shelter, and psychological stability. This theme also illustrates how children's vulnerability deepens when they are separated from land, food systems, and cultural continuity. The coding revealed how "displacement," "loss of autonomy," and "collapse of agriculture" represent not just material loss, but the disruption of intergenerational ties and collective identity.

Through the lens of engaging vulnerability, it becomes clear that this loss is not incidental it is a result of political structures that disconnect children from the resources and spaces that provide stability and meaning. Kulick's notion of engaging vulnerability rejects the idea that vulnerability is innate or passive. Instead, it is relational and ethically charged produced through political and institutional arrangements. The findings show that Palestinian children are made vulnerable through the collapse of protective systems: families are displaced, schools destroyed, and psychosocial services dismantled. This analysis moves beyond

[75] Save the Children, *Trapped and Scarred: Children's Mental Health in Gaza report*. 2.

describing hardship to show how vulnerability is actively shaped by policies that fragment life, community, and the future. Taken together, the themes and findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the health crisis facing Palestinian children in Gaza is neither incidental nor isolated. Rather, it is the product of sustained structural violence and policy-driven neglect, which manifest in both visible and invisible ways. The following chapter situates these findings within broader legal and theoretical debates, highlighting the relational and cumulative nature of harm and the responsibilities of international actors in addressing systemic rights violations.

6.4 Overlooked Dimensions of Vulnerability and Accountability

While each of the themes above targets specific mechanisms of harm, they are deeply interrelated. This analysis reveals how deprivation in one area such as nutrition intensifies mental distress among children, while forced displacement deepens both physical and psychological vulnerability. Children under blockade are not just affected by isolated violations, or example, a disrupted school term or a missed vaccination, children are exposed to a constant erosion of their physical, emotional, and social well-being through prolonged deprivation, repeated trauma, and institutional neglect because of not mainly the blockade but if anything, the war. This combination of harms is especially visible in the lives of displaced children and infants, who often lack access to basic needs such as food, clean water, and emotional support. Table 2 shows how key codes like "aid obstruction," "psychological harm," and "displacement" appear across several themes, highlighting how different forms of suffering reinforce one another. For example, malnutrition was not only identified as a health issue, but also as a cause of emotional breakdown and growing dependence on external humanitarian aid.

As noted by Save the Children, the psychological erosion of children is mirrored in the coping collapse of caregivers. Such testimonies illustrate the emotional inheritance of conflict, where trauma is transmitted through disrupted care structures, parental despair, and a fractured sense of future. The Nutrition Vulnerability Report (GNC, 2024) reinforces this picture. It highlights that 90% of children aged 6–23 months face food poverty, while 81% of households lack access to safe drinking water. These figures illustrate the conditions under which entire generations are raised with diminished bodily and emotional resilience. This

layered vulnerability confirms Kulick's notion that vulnerability is not inherent but produced relationally by fractured health systems, interrupted generational continuity, and policies that sever children from the resources and relationships that sustain life.

6.5 Legal failure

The patterns identified in this chapter point to more than humanitarian failure they reveal systemic violations of international legal obligations. Article 24 of the UNCRC guarantees children the right to the highest attainable standard of health, while Article 12 of the ICESCR reinforces this obligation for all individuals. However, the blockade's structural harm documented through malnutrition rates, mental health collapse, and the destruction of food systems shows a failure not only to fulfil these rights but to protect against foreseeable, sustained harm.

The destruction of agricultural zones, denial of aid corridors, and weaponization of access to food must also be viewed in relation to Article 6 of the UNCRC (right to life and development), Article 27 (adequate standard of living), and Article 39 (rehabilitation from trauma). Similarly, the ICESCR's provisions on food (Article 11) and health (Article 12) require not just passive observance but proactive measures. Under General Comment No. 14, states are obligated to refrain from interfering with access to health services, even extraterritorially. These obligations are clearly violated when children are deprived of life-sustaining resources by military policy, administrative restrictions, or the blockade's spatial design. As such, the situation in Gaza demands not only a humanitarian response but legal redress. The findings in this chapter support an interpretation of the blockade not merely as policy failure, but as a cumulative breach of international legal norms.

Taken together, the themes and findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that the health crisis facing Palestinian children in Gaza is neither incidental nor isolated. Rather, it is the product of sustained structural violence and policy-driven neglect, which manifest in both visible and invisible ways. By applying the frameworks of slow violence and engaged vulnerability, this chapter has shown that children's suffering is not natural, but politically orchestrated and legally consequential. The following chapter situates these findings within broader theoretical and legal debates, underscoring the need for a re-evaluation of

international obligations and accountability in the face of prolonged, rights-denying blockades.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Discussion

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the harms experienced by Palestinian children in Gaza malnutrition, displacement, psychological breakdown, and the denial of access to healthcare cannot be disentangled from one another. Rather, they represent a matrix of interconnected, cumulative violations, shaped and sustained by structural and political forces. These harms, while not always immediately visible, are persistent and systemic. This thesis has shown that interpreting such findings through the dual lenses of slow violence and engaged vulnerability allows for a deeper understanding of the blockade not as a temporary crisis, but as a long-standing mode of control that normalizes suffering and erodes human rights. This framing also reveals the limits of conventional humanitarian and legal responses that treat harm as short-term or event based. By focusing only on visible crises, such as military attacks, such frameworks often miss the prolonged and less visible policies that undermine children's well-being day after day. Without legal or media attention, these forms of harm persist unchallenged, creating a situation in which children are forced to adapt to deprivation as if it were normal.

In this context, Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence becomes indispensable. It captures how violence may occur not through explosions or direct attacks, but through the prolonged deterioration of essential systems water infrastructure, health services, agriculture, and food supply. These are not merely background conditions but deliberate outcomes of policy design and sustained inaction. By applying this framework, the thesis reframes the blockade as a form of invisible war one that plays out across timelines, sedimented in bureaucracies, and legitimized by international silence. In this space, children are disproportionately affected, their suffering compounded by a lack of legal recognition and humanitarian urgency. At the same time, Don Kulick's notion of engaged vulnerability brings into focus how vulnerability is not a passive or inherent trait but a politically produced condition. The analysis highlights how children's psychosocial breakdowns chronic anxiety, PTSD, emotional distress, and the

loss of hope are intimately tied to the collapse of familial, educational, and healthcare systems. Their psychological harm is not an unfortunate side effect, but a predictable result of prolonged exposure to insecurity and neglect. In this way, vulnerability is shaped not only by material deprivation but also by the emotional weight of being constantly overlooked.
This thesis insists that we ask: who produces vulnerability, who permits it, and how is it made durable through silence and neglect? These questions shift accountability from isolated acts of violence to the broader architecture of control. Through engaged vulnerability, the child is repositioned not as a helpless victim but as a subject whose agency is systematically eroded by structural forces. But how might we trace accountability in systems designed to obscure causality over time? What kinds of legal and ethical frameworks are needed to name and redress slow, cumulative harm? Can human rights law evolve to address violations that occur not through spectacle but through silence?

The repeated occurrence of crisis, in the absence of structural change, desensitizes both institutions and international actors. As the findings show, the malnourished child of today becomes the traumatized adult of tomorrow. Yet this continuum is often concealed in humanitarian discourse, which tends to focus on short-term needs. Legal frameworks, while normatively robust, often lack the tools to address long-term, dispersed, and institutionally embedded harm. This necessitates not only theoretical refinement but also a rethinking of how rights violations are conceptualized, monitored, and redressed in protracted contexts like Gaza.

7.2 Concluding summary

By applying Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, the study revealed how harm unfolds invisibly and accumulatively, bypassing the thresholds of media and legal urgency. Don Kulick's notion of engaged vulnerability contributed an ethically charged understanding of how children's suffering is shaped by relational and institutional breakdown, not simply exposure to conflict. Together, these concepts enabled a more nuanced and right-based interpretation of the blockade not as a temporary security measure but as a system of prolonged rights denial. This thesis has argued that the humanitarian crisis facing children in Gaza is not an accidental by-product of conflict but a deliberate outcome of sustained policies of deprivation and control. By employing the frameworks of slow violence and engaged

vulnerability, it has been possible to trace how harm is not only inflicted directly but orchestrated over time, often through the mundane instruments of policy, law, and neglect. Through these frameworks, the study has demonstrated how food systems, healthcare infrastructures, and mental well-being are simultaneously targeted and eroded under the blockade. These deprivations are not isolated events but cumulative, intersecting violations that reinforce one another and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. The analysis reveals how children's rights under Article 24 of the UNCRC and Article 12 of the ICESCR are persistently undermined not through absence of law but through its selective enforcement and abandonment.

The empirical findings show how these rights are not merely unmet but are systematically denied in a way that reflects broader patterns of state violence and international complicity. By linking theory to practice, the thesis has moved beyond descriptive accounts to offer a relational and structural analysis of how children's suffering in Gaza is rendered invisible, bureaucratized, and normalized in international discourse. This contribution is not only analytical but normative, demanding a reevaluation of both humanitarian response and legal accountability in contexts of slow violence.

7.3 Future Research and Final reflection

While this thesis has grounded its analysis in institutional and legal reports, future research could greatly benefit from fieldwork involving medical staff, mental health professionals, and humanitarian actors with direct experience in Gaza or similar conflict zones. Such voices could provide crucial insights into the relational and emotional dimensions of vulnerability and help validate or challenge the theoretical frameworks applied here. Interviews with professionals on the ground would also allow for a richer understanding of how slow violence manifests in everyday practices and how structural harm is internalized by affected populations.

Beyond fieldwork, future studies could further explore how international legal mechanisms such as human rights courts or treaty monitoring bodies might better respond to long-term, policy-driven rights violations. Comparative research on slow violence in other protracted crises, such as in Yemen or Sudan, could expand the applicability and relevance of the analytical framework. Interdisciplinary approaches that integrate environmental justice, digital mapping,

or children's participatory rights could also play a vital role in visualizing and amplifying the lived experiences of children affected by structural harm. Ultimately, future research must not only expand the academic field but also deepen its ethical commitments. The goal is not merely to document suffering, but to do so in a way that preserves dignity, centers lived realities and contributes to systemic redress. Research should hold power to account not by speaking for others, but by creating space for their experiences to be understood on their own terms.

Additionally, studies could build on this or further explore how legal accountability mechanisms such as international criminal and human rights courts might be adapted to address chronic and structural forms of violence against children. Comparative research into how slow violence manifests in other protracted crises such as Yemen or Sudan could also expand the applicability of the analytical framework used here. Furthermore, interdisciplinary methods combining environmental justice, digital mapping, or children's participatory rights offer promising pathways to visualise and amplify the lived realities of slow violence.

However, as noted above, researching such sensitive topics particularly involving children's trauma raises serious ethical and moral questions. Working with survivors of prolonged conflict requires more than rigorous methods; it demands an approach rooted in care, consent, and critical reflexivity. Researchers must ensure that dignity is prioritized over data, and that vulnerability is not mined for insight, but engaged with responsibly. Ultimately, future research must not only expand the academic field but deepen its ethical resolve to tell stories that matter without instrumentalising pain, and to hold power to account without reproducing its silence. In doing so, scholarship can move beyond documentation and become a force for structural redress, dignity, and long-term justice.

As Dr. Hanan Ashrawi reminds us, "We cannot rely upon the silenced to tell us they are suffering." [76]. This quote underscores the ethical imperative at the heart of future research to ensure that children affected by structural violence are not abstracted or depersonalized, but seen and heard as individuals with rights, dignity, and agency. It speaks directly to the challenge this thesis addresses the invisibility of slow and cumulative harm and reinforces the call for engaged justice-driven scholarship. In contexts where children are rendered voiceless by

[76] Build Palestine, "12 Palestinian Women Worth Talking About This Women's Day". *Build Palestine.* Accessed 8 May, 2025. https://buildpalestine.com/2020/04/22/12-palestinian-women-worth-talking-about-this-womens-day/ accessed 10 May 2025.

occupation, trauma, and institutional neglect, silence must not be mistaken for absence. This thesis is a step in those directions toward identifying not only the symptoms of injustice, but its systemic roots, and ensuring that the most vulnerable are no longer overlooked in law, policy, or scholarship.

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