

Research Study:

Analysing Disinformation, Misinformation, and Malinformation on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Digital Media in Jordan and Tunisia

Final Report

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List of Abbreviations

ATL MST SIDA: Tunisian Association to Combat Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS
ATSR: Tunisian Association for Reproductive Health
CMN: Community Media Network
CSE: Comprehensive sexuality education
FGDs: Focus group discussions
KIs: Key informant interviews
LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, and other identities
MD: Misinformation and disinformation
ONFP: National Office for Family and Population
SRH: Sexual and reproductive health
SRHR : Sexual and reproductive health and rights
STDs: Sexually transmitted diseases
UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

1. Executive Summary

Overview

Commissioned by RNW Media, an international digital media organisation committed to fostering social change through youth-centred digital media solutions, this research study delves into the dynamics of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and misinformation in digital spaces in Tunisia and Jordan, and to look into how these dynamics impact young people in the two countries. In collaboration with RNW Media's country partner organisations — the Community Media Network in Jordan and Al-Qatiba in Tunisia — and using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, we aim to investigate the misinformation landscape and offer evidence-based solutions to effectively counteract this phenomenon.

Objectives

This research seeks to shed light on the prevalence, origins, impact, and drivers of online SRHR misinformation and disinformation in Jordan and Tunisia, with a focus on young individuals aged 18-35. It encompasses a thorough analysis of SRHR-related information disorder and its consequences for the youth in these countries. The study's primary goal is to provide evidence-based recommendations to counteract the negative effects of misinformation. Key areas of focus include:

- Availability and accessibility of SRHR information
- Types, forms, and impact of SRHR misinformation
- Influential actors in SRHR misinformation
- Factors influencing misinformation spread
- Recommendations for mitigation

This study adopts the "Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation (MDM) Framework" proposed by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan in 2017 as a foundational tool to comprehend the intricacies of the misinformation ecosystem, and delineate the spectrum of mis/disinformation categories prevalent in the digital sphere, as well as gain a deeper understanding of their implications for SRHR in the context of Jordan and Tunisia. The categories explored in this study encompass a range of misinformation types, including satire, false connections, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content, and fabricated content.

Data Collection and Methodology

This study primarily adopted a qualitative research approach, complemented by quantitative statistical data from online surveys, to comprehensively address the key objectives. We conducted a series of focus group discussions and key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, which enabled us to capture rich narratives and diverse perspectives from our participants. To strengthen our research, we also distributed a targeted survey, specifically designed for the young population in each country, through social media channels. The findings provided us with quantitative data that supported and enriched our qualitative findings.

This approach allowed us to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between digital media, SRHR information, and the vibrant youth populations in Tunisia and Jordan.

Findings

The findings provide insights into the intricate landscape of accessing and disseminating SRHR information online in both Tunisia and Jordan, as well as the mis/disinformation ecosystem. While both countries face common challenges related to SRHR misinformation, they also exhibit unique distinctions in how societal norms, cultural factors, and digital preferences shape the spread and forms of misinformation, as well as the availability of accurate information. For example, in Jordan, cultural factors like stigma, taboos, religious influences, the "culture of shame," pressures on married women, lack of formal sexual education, and reluctance to discuss sex within families significantly contribute to the spread of SRHR misinformation. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, a combination of cultural, societal norms, and religious factors heavily influences the spread of SRHR misinformation; and misinformation is often spread for political gain or due to ignorance, with individual actors and influencers playing key roles.

Our findings also unveil distinct types, sources, and motives of misinformation in each country context. In Tunisia, a range of misinformation, including satire, misleading content, and fabricated stories, are propagated by various actors such as political figures, media outlets, influencers, and individuals. These actors are often motivated by political agendas, personal and financial gain, or simply ignorance. Meanwhile, in Jordan, the digital misinformation ecosystem encompasses a broad spectrum of forms, sources, and influencing factors. Misinformation types vary from satire and parody to misleading content, imposter content, fabricated content, false connections, false context, and manipulated content, disseminated by social media influencers, journalists, politicians, and religious figures. Cultural, political, and economic factors play a substantial role in influencing the spread of misinformation, which in turn affects young people's beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes towards SRHR topics.

A summary and narrative of the full findings from each country are available in Section 5 of this report.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of our research, we offer a range of policy, programmatic, and general recommendations, including those that span both countries and those that are specific to each country.

For example, in Jordan, one of our key programmatic recommendations relates to the need for strategic messaging aligned with the local context. Simple messages, often which are aligned with religious beliefs, can effectively convey the idea that discussing SRHR topics is acceptable even within religious frameworks.

In Tunisia, one of our key policy recommendations relates to the need to effectively integrate and implement comprehensive sexuality education in school curricula from kindergarten to secondary school in order to ingrain healthy beliefs and practices within the new generation.

Our full list of recommendations can be found in Section 6.

Conclusion and Future Research

Our study concludes with a discussion of the critical importance of this research in identifying the challenges and complexities surrounding SRHR information and misinformation in Jordan and Tunisia, from which we are able to offer evidence-based recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges.

We also offer recommendations around future research into related topics to further enhance our collective understanding of the impacts of SRHR-related misinformation, such as a study to investigate its long-term impacts and performing a gender-based analysis examining how misinformation affects different genders and the role of gender norms in misinformation dissemination and beliefs.

2. Introduction

In today's rapid digital era, marked by an overwhelming abundance of unregulated information, ensuring access to accurate sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)¹ information is crucial, especially for youth. As the digital landscape increasingly becomes a key source of SRHR information, it is simultaneously plagued with false and misleading information, posing significant challenges to young people. Whether accurate or wrongful, this online information significantly shapes their perceptions and behaviours concerning SRHR and extends to broader areas of their lives. Thus, understanding the complex dynamics of SRHR-related information disorder and its impact on young individuals is of paramount importance.

Our study delves into the dynamics of SRHR information and misinformation² in digital spaces in Tunisia and Jordan. We explore how young people interact with online SRHR content, how misinformation influences them, the forms and types of misinformation propagated online, and the roles of various contributors in propagating misinformation. Our objective is to thoroughly investigate the misinformation landscape and offer evidence-based solutions to effectively counteract this phenomenon. Utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methods, we aim for a comprehensive understanding of how digital media, SRHR information, and youth intersect in Tunisia and Jordan.

¹ The encompassing definition of SRHR presented by the Guttmacher–Lancet Commission includes sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health, and reproductive rights. Moreover, it tackles crucial issues such as violence, stigma, and the significance of upholding bodily autonomy, which deeply impact the mental, emotional, and social well-being of individuals. Furthermore, it specifically focuses on addressing the SRHR needs of marginalised groups like adolescent girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, and those with disabilities (Sundewall, J., & Kaiser, H. (2019, Nov 8). Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Essential Element of Universal Health Coverage. Background document for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 - Accelerating the promise. United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unfpa.org/featured-publication/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-essential-element-universal-health>)

² In our research, we adopt Wang et al.'s (2019) definition of 'misinformation' as a comprehensive term encompassing all forms of false information, except when there's clear intent to deceive. By doing so, we aim to cast a wide net, allowing us to explore the diverse range of misleading information circulating in the digital sphere of SRHR in these countries. Although distinguishing between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation is crucial, extensively parsing these differences may introduce subjectivity into our analysis. Thus, while we acknowledge the importance of these distinctions, our research prioritises the exploration of the breadth of misleading information rather than delving deeply into subjective assessments of intent, aligning with our study's objective of understanding the broader scope of SRHR-related misinformation in digital spaces.

SRHR encompasses a broad spectrum of topics, each carrying unique cultural sensitivities and specific misinformation trends. Recognising this diversity, our study narrows its focus to particular SRHR issues relevant to each country, as determined through initial focus group discussions (FGDs). In Jordan, our research centres on family planning and contraceptives, postpartum depression, and societal beauty standards. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, we shift our attention to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), the rights and health of the LGBTQIA+ community, and the intersection of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) with migrant populations.

This paper aims to unpack the layers of misinformation affecting these select SRHR topics in Jordan and Tunisia. By dissecting misinformation nuances in these areas, we hope to enrich the broader SRHR discourse, shedding light on how digital media can both impede and advance progress in these critical health and human rights sectors.

2.1 Background and Significance/Rationale of the Study

RNW Media, an international digital media organisation, stands as a beacon for fostering social change through youth-centred digital media solutions. These solutions, co-created with young individuals aged 18-35, form the core of its "Digital Rights Agenda (DRA) 2023." At its heart, the DRA strives to safeguard the digital rights of young people, ensuring their respect, protection, and fulfillment. Of particular concern within the DRA's framework is the gendered impact of mis/disinformation, which recognises the disproportionate harassment and targeted campaigns faced by women, gender non-conforming individuals, and marginalised groups. Guided by the DRA, RNW Media has embarked on multifaceted initiatives — spanning content creation, research, and education, all executed through diverse consortia and programs — that are designed to address these challenges holistically and specifically combat disinformation-related issues.

Within RNW Media's "Masarouna" Project, an SRHR programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an overarching objective is to provide young individuals with accurate, inclusive, and secure information about SRHR. This initiative seeks to empower youth to advocate for their rights and drive meaningful change. However, the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation poses a threat, fostering negative attitudes towards SRHR and perpetuating stigmatisation and discrimination. The amplification of such falsehoods through social media and digital platforms underscores the urgency of understanding dis-, mis-, and mal-information ecosystems.

To that end, this research study embarks on a collaborative journey with RNW Media's country partner organisations — the Community Media Network in Jordan and Al-Qatiba in Tunisia — to unravel the complex web of SRHR-related information disorder in the digital spaces of the two countries. With a dual focus on comprehending the shaping of misinformation and disinformation and identifying patterns of information disorder, the study aims to generate evidence-based insights. These insights will not only illuminate the landscape but also contribute to shaping collaborative initiatives that counter SRHR-related misinformation and disinformation effectively.

2.2 Purpose and Scope of the Research

This research seeks to shed light on the prevalence, origins, impact, and drivers of online SRHR misinformation and disinformation in Jordan and Tunisia, with a focus on young individuals aged 18-35. It encompasses a thorough analysis of SRHR-related information disorder and its consequences for the youth in these countries. The study's primary goal is to provide evidence-based recommendations to counteract the negative effects of misinformation. Key areas of focus include:

- **Availability and accessibility of SRHR information:** Investigating the availability of accurate online SRHR information and assessing the ease of access for young people. The study explores motivations for interacting with SRHR information and factors influencing their preferences.
- **Forms, types and impact of SRHR misinformation:** Delving into the various forms and types of SRHR misinformation present in digital media and analysing its impact on young individuals' understanding, beliefs, behaviours, and awareness.

- **Influential actors in SRHR misinformation:** Identifying key actors responsible for spreading SRHR misinformation and examining their intentions.
- **Factors influencing misinformation spread:** Investigating social, political, and economic factors contributing to the spread of misinformation, including cultural norms, political contexts, and economic disparities.
- **Recommendations for mitigation:** Offering evidence-based recommendations to mitigate the adverse effects of misinformation, aiming to ensure young individuals in Jordan and Tunisia have access to accurate SRHR information.

In summary, this research provides a detailed exploration of SRHR-related misinformation and disinformation in Jordan and Tunisia, with a goal to protect young people's rights and improve access to reliable SRHR information.

2.3 Research Questions

The research seeks to explore the dynamics of SRHR information and misinformation in Tunisia and Jordan through a series of key questions:

- **Availability, accessibility, and interaction with online SRHR information:** What is the level of availability of and accessibility to accurate online SRHR information in Tunisia and Jordan, and how do young individuals engage with this information? What drives their interaction with it?
- **Kinds, types, and impacts of SRHR misinformation:** What are the various kinds and types of SRHR misinformation prevalent on digital media in these countries, and what impact does this misinformation have on the understanding, beliefs, and behaviours of young individuals?
- **Key actors in SRHR misinformation:** Who are the primary propagators of SRHR-related misinformation in Tunisia and Jordan, and what strategies do they use in the dissemination process?
- **Contributing factors to misinformation spread:** What are the social, political, and economic factors that contribute to the spread of SRHR-related misinformation in the digital spaces of both countries?
- **Mitigation solutions:** What strategies can be effectively implemented to address and mitigate the adverse impacts of misinformation on young people; and to facilitate their access to accurate SRHR information?

These guiding questions aim to thoroughly analyse the issue and develop recommendations for enhancing the digital SRHR landscape in Tunisia and Jordan.

3. Theoretical Foundations and Contextual Analysis

3.1 Digital Dynamics of SRHR Information: Analysing Opportunities and Challenges

The internet and social technology have fundamentally altered the landscape of information creation, communication, and dissemination (Wardle, 2017), making the spread and impact of misinformation more significant than ever before. The easy access to advanced editing and publishing tools has democratised content creation, allowing almost anyone to share information widely with almost zero regulation. Social media platforms have transformed how we consume information, turning private consumption into a public act of sharing and enabling rapid dissemination to large audiences. Additionally, the constant news cycle and prevalent use of mobile devices have accelerated the spread of information, often without thorough scrutiny, making it less likely that misinformation will be challenged.

In the context of SRHR, the influential role of digital media is particularly pronounced. While digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for knowledge-sharing and awareness-raising, they also present a complex landscape where incorrect and malicious content can proliferate rapidly. On the one hand, technological advancements offer a promising avenue to enhance the availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services (United Nations Development Programme, 2021), particularly for individuals residing in societies where such

subjects remain stigmatised, such as Jordan and Tunisia. On the other hand, the very nature of the internet that enables these new possibilities also introduces novel risks to the SRHR of young people (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). As aptly articulated by Tina D. Purnat, health informatician and infodemic manager at the World Health Organization (WHO), the internet can be likened to the "Wild West" concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights-related information, allowing individuals to freely create, modify, and disseminate content without stringent regulation (Purnat, 2023). This dual nature of the digital landscape presents both opportunities and challenges: while it can facilitate access to valuable information and services, it also allows the rapid spread of misinformation, significantly influencing perceptions and decisions in the digital age.

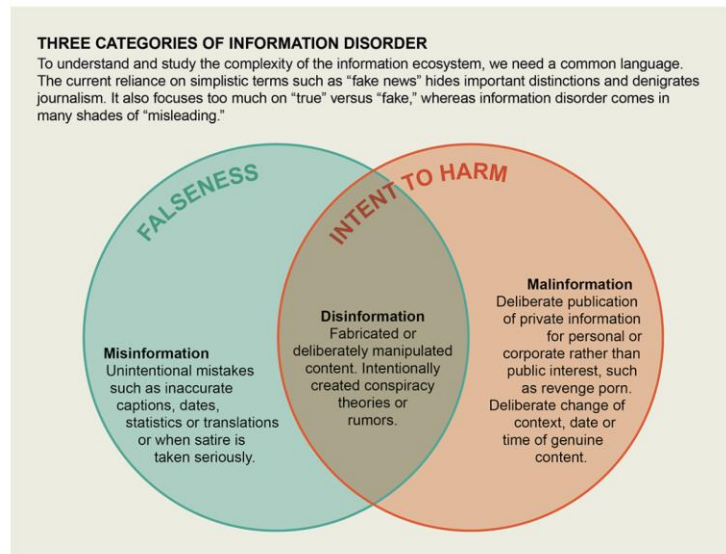
3.2 Unpacking Digital Information Disorder: Conceptual Framework

The rapid and rampant spread of SRHR information and misinformation in the digital landscape, which acts as a double-edged sword, is part of a larger and increasingly recognised issue: digital information disorder. This issue gained significant attention following the spread of false and manipulated information online during the U.S. elections in 2016, which led to the widespread use of the term "fake news." However, as Bianco et al. (2021) note, this term is now seen as insufficient to fully capture the complexities of the digital information disorder phenomenon. The landscape of digital information disorder extends beyond merely "fake" information to include a range of other forms: genuine information taken out of context, rumours, memes, manipulated videos, hyper-targeted "dark ads," the repurposing of old photos as new, etc. These various elements contribute to a deceptive information environment that goes far beyond the simple concept of "fake news."

As a result, researchers and experts have abandoned the use of the term "fake news" in favour of more accurate descriptors such as disinformation, misinformation, or malinformation, collectively referred to as information disorder (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). This shift in terminology reflects a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges posed by misleading information on digital platforms. Along these lines, one of the theoretical frameworks commonly used to analyse the information disorder is the **"Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation (MDM) Framework"** developed by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017). The MDM Framework, which was further elaborated and built upon by Wardle in 2020, classifies three different types of false information as follows:

- **Disinformation** involves intentionally false content that is deliberately created and disseminated with the aim of causing harm. The individuals or entities responsible for spreading disinformation do so with a clear intention to deceive and manipulate public opinion or perception.
- **Misinformation** is shared by individuals who may not be aware that the information they are spreading is false or misleading. These individuals genuinely believe the information to be true and share it with their networks, thinking they are providing helpful or accurate information.
- **Malinformation** refers to genuine information that is shared with the intent to cause harm. In this case, the information itself is factual and not false, but it is shared with a malicious purpose, such as exposing someone's private information or spreading harmful rumours.

Figure 1: Three Categories of Information Disorder



Credit: Jen Christiansen; Source: *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*, by Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan. Council of Europe, October 2017

In practice, distinguishing between these categories can still be challenging due to the difficulty of determining the intent behind the dissemination of information. It may not always be straightforward to discern whether content is intentionally false (disinformation) or genuinely believed to be true (misinformation). Therefore, **for the purpose of this research, we adopt the approach taken by Wang et al. (2019), which treats "misinformation" as an umbrella term encompassing all types of false information, unless there is evident intention to deceive.** This comprehensive perspective acknowledges the intricacies and nuances within the misinformation landscape, enabling a better understanding of the scope of misleading information on SRHR in the digital landscape of Jordan and Tunisia.

Under this umbrella of misinformation comes a wide spectrum of sub-categories outlined by Wardle (2017, 2019, 2021), showcasing the intricacies and diversity within the ecosystem of misleading content. **Table 1** defines each of these categories, based on a desk review of literature work that has built on and developed Wardle's initial categorisation, seeking to provide a comprehensive idea of each subtype of mis/disinformation:

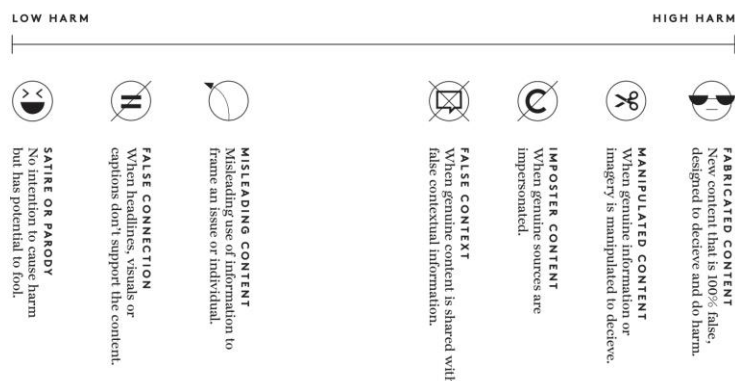
Table 1

Subtypes of mis/disinformation	
Satire	Satire is a form of writing that employs literary techniques like ridicule and irony to critique various aspects of society. However, satire can inadvertently turn into misinformation when audiences mistakenly interpret it as factual information. There is a concerning trend where disinformation agents label content as satire deliberately to avoid being detected by fact-checkers (Wardle, 2018).
False connection	False connection occurs when headlines, visuals, or captions misalign with the actual content, leading to deception. Clickbait headlines are a common example, enticing clicks but often failing to deliver on promises, leaving readers feeling misled. Misleading visuals and captions, especially on platforms like Facebook, can also create deceptive impressions unsupported by the accompanying text. As people often scroll through social feeds without clicking on articles, reliance on visuals and captions can contribute to misinformation (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

Misleading content	Misleading content involves using information selectively to portray issues or individuals in specific ways, often achieved through cropping photos or selectively choosing quotes and statistics. Visuals are especially effective in disseminating misleading information, as our brains are less likely to be critical of visuals. Additionally, "native" or paid advertising that resembles editorial content falls into this category when it is inadequately identified as sponsored (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).
False context	False context refers to sharing genuine content with false or misleading contextual information. A typical example is resharing a picture to fit a new narrative, a potent form of information disorder. In this case, the content itself is authentic and cannot be refuted, but it is manipulated and presented in a dangerous manner to support a specific viewpoint (HiveMind, NA).
Imposter content	Imposter content involves impersonating genuine sources, taking advantage of the trust people have in specific organisations, individuals, or brands. This form of disinformation often appears in phishing and smishing attempts, where the logo or name of a well-known brand is used to create the impression of receiving legitimate content. Victims may fall prey to such manipulation if they are distracted or in a hurry, making it essential to stay vigilant and cautious while navigating digital platforms (HiveMind, NA).
Manipulated content	Manipulated content involves the alteration of genuine information or imagery to deceive audiences. This often pertains to photos and videos that are manipulated in a way that makes them appear realistic, but their overall meaning differs from the original intent (HiveMind, NA).
Fabricated content	Fabricated content refers to completely false information purposely designed to deceive and cause harm. In this type of content, there are no constraints, and creators have full liberty to fabricate any information. Differentiating between real and fabricated content is challenging for the unaided eye. For instance, "deepfakes" fall under the category of fabricated content, demonstrating the profound impact such content has on undermining trust in the messages we encounter (HiveMind, NA).

This study follows **Wardle's spectrum of mis/disinformation categories** to understand the various types of misinformation in the digital landscape and gain a deeper understanding of its implications for SRHR in the context of Jordan and Tunisia. It is also worth noting that the spectrum categorises types of misinformation from the least to the most harmful (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2 (Wardle, 2017)



3.3 Sociocultural and Digital Contexts of SRHR: Insights from Jordan and Tunisia

3.3.1 Jordan

In Jordan, the context of SRHR reveals a complex picture of progress and challenges. The country has demonstrated a commitment to advancing SRHR through its participation in global initiatives, such as the endorsement of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+25) (MannionDaniels, 2020). Domestically, Jordan has also taken significant strides in addressing these issues. It has formulated and published its own National Reproductive Health/ Family Planning Strategy, covering the period from 2013 to 2017. Moreover, in 2022, Jordan launched its strategy on sexual and reproductive health. The strategy focuses on maternal health and vaguely mentions access to sexual and reproductive health services and information to all individuals (UN platform, 2022). Nevertheless, within Jordan and the broader Middle Eastern context, SRHR still stands as a sensitive topic shrouded in secrecy and cultural taboos. These deeply ingrained societal norms, spanning across educated and uneducated communities alike, render SRHR discussions as confidential matters, rarely ventured into openly (MannionDaniels, 2020).

As illustrated in a comprehensive research project by the Dutch Research Council (2020), despite the existence of widely accessible public primary health care services in Jordan, certain segments of the population, particularly unmarried individuals, encounter multifaceted societal barriers that hinder their access to crucial SRH information and care. These challenges are amplified by limitations in the scope of services available to these groups. For instance, unmarried young women and men, as well as adult women and men who have not married or are no longer married (widow(er)s/ divorcees), face notable hurdles in accessing appropriate SRH services.

Further complicating the SRHR landscape in Jordan is the significant youth demographic, which confronts considerable challenges in addressing SRH needs (MannionDaniels, 2020). Acknowledging the critical importance of catering to the SRH needs of the youth, the Government of Jordan has recognised the need for youth-friendly SRH services. Yet, the actual provision of such services remains at a nascent stage, struggling to overcome barriers that hinder accessibility and utilisation. Startling statistics from Jordan's Ministry of Health (MOH) highlight that a mere 1% of adolescents access primary health care services, underscoring the glaring gap in effectively addressing the SRH needs of this demographic (Gausman, et al, 2019). In sum, the prevailing inflexible societal expectations and deeply ingrained gender norms in Jordan exert a substantial influence on the SRH outcomes experienced by

young individuals. These socio-cultural dynamics have implications for the well-being and SRH outcomes of adolescents and youth within the country (MannionDaniels, 2020).

The digital landscape in Jordan plays a crucial role in the dissemination and accessibility of SRHR information, presenting both opportunities and challenges. With the country's high internet penetration and extensive use of social media, especially among youth, digital platforms have become key channels for SRHR education (Smith, 2021). However, the spread of misinformation on these platforms, intensified by cultural norms and taboos, poses a barrier to accessing accurate and reliable SRHR information, particularly for young women (Hunger, 2022). Social media and online forums, while offering important spaces for SRHR discussions with some degree of anonymity and privacy, also present challenges due to the variable reliability of the information shared, necessitating careful evaluation by users (Ahmed et al., 2020). The recent implementation of Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023 in Jordan, which places strict controls on online speech and prohibits the use of VPN technology, further complicates this landscape. This law has sparked concerns about its potential effects on freedom of expression and the ability of young people to access SRHR information in digital spaces (Al Jazeera, 2023; Dentons, 2023).

Given the evolving nature of research in this field, this study aims to delve into the complexities at the intersection of SRHR and the digital landscape in Jordan. It seeks to examine the nature and extent of available information and misinformation, identify key actors involved, and explore the various factors influencing this digital SRHR environment. This comprehensive approach is intended to provide a more nuanced understanding of how digital platforms impact the accessibility and quality of SRHR information in Jordan, contributing to a broader discussion on effective strategies for education and communication in the field of SRHR.

3.3.2 Tunisia

Tunisia has a long history of progressive policies on women's rights and SRHR dating back to the Code of Personal Status in 1956 (Amroussia et al., 2016). Notably, it has achieved significant milestones by legalising contraception and abortion, making these services accessible to all women and girls for free and with complete anonymity since 1973, and positioning Tunisia as one of the pioneering countries in this regard. The strategic use of state feminism was a driving force until the revolutionary events from 17 December 2010 to 14 January 2011 brought about a transformative shift. Independent feminist organisations, especially since 1989, have amplified advocacy for sexual and bodily rights, shaping the discourse. Moreover, Tunisia has earned the distinction of being the first Arab state to withdraw all reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2014, further solidifying its commitment to gender equality and SRHR (UNFPA, 2014).

Despite these commendable accomplishments, the years following 2011 have witnessed a gradual erosion of hard-fought gains, leading to a contemporary crisis. Several factors have contributed to this regression, including the evolving landscape that reveals disparities between the Personal Status Code and modern realities, shifting societal attitudes under the influence of religious conservatism, economic challenges compounded by a strained public health system, and recurring shortages of contraceptives and Plan B pills due to prioritisation issues within the government (Affes & Maffi, 2017; BBC news Afrique, 2017). Harmful practices are further reinforced by a deeply entrenched patriarchal and gendered perspective on sexual interactions between individuals of different genders, particularly concerning concepts of virginity. Of paramount concern is Tunisia's broader decline in democracy, human rights, and women's rights following the constitutional coup led by President Kais Saied on 25 July 2021. All of these challenges were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, with several offices of the National Office for Family and Population (ONFP) shutting down and preventing a large number of citizens from accessing free services and information on how to address their SRHR issues during the pandemic.

In this current landscape, Tunisia is witnessing an acute decline in the accessibility of SRH services, data, and information within the public sector (Khenitech, 2022). According to preliminary observations from the visit to Tunisia by the Independent Expert on Protection against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in 2021, much of the available information is managed by civil society, while the state maintains secrecy around this issue due to societal and religious taboos. (OHCHR, 2021) Another study conducted by Lamia

Ben Hassine reveals that the primary source of information on SRHR in Tunisia has been the National Offices for Family and Population (ONFP) (Ben Hassine, 2020). However, as the effectiveness of these offices declines, young Tunisians are left without other reliable sources of information.

Amidst this landscape of information disorder and scarcity, misinformation about SRHR is proliferating, significantly contributing to confusion and misguided decision-making. There have been several initiatives by Tunisian authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in recognition of the importance of addressing misinformation on SRHR. Their efforts include educational campaigns, community outreach, and initiatives to enhance sex education in schools. However, challenges persist, and there are even concerns that the regime itself may be leading a misinformation campaign to manipulate public opinion into endorsing repressive and dictatorial measures. Notably, similar to Jordan, the Tunisian president issued Decree 54 of 2022 on cybercrimes. This decree includes a list of repressive measures against what is perceived by the establishment as misinformation, with potential penalties reaching up to 30 years in prison (Tounsi, 2023). However, it has been criticised for its vague use of the term "misinformation", which is used in a way that can encompass anything that does not align with the regime's agenda, posing a significant threat to freedom of speech.

In summary, misinformation regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights in Tunisia reflects a complex interplay of cultural, religious, and socio-political factors. This study aims to delve deeper into this complexity and explore ongoing efforts and mitigation measures to address these critical issues.

4. Methods

4.1 Research Approach

This study primarily adopted a qualitative research approach, complemented by quantitative statistical data from online surveys, to comprehensively address the key objectives. We conducted a series of focus group discussions and key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant stakeholders, meticulously exploring the intricacies of SRHR information and misinformation within the digital contexts of Jordan and Tunisia. These qualitative methods enabled us to capture rich narratives and diverse perspectives from our participants. To strengthen our research, we also distributed a targeted survey (designed specifically for the younger population in each country) through social media channels, providing us with quantitative data that supported and enriched our qualitative findings. By integrating the depth of qualitative research with the breadth of quantitative analysis, we achieved a methodological synergy. This approach allowed us to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between digital media, SRHR information, and the vibrant youth populations in Tunisia and Jordan.

4.2 Data Collection Methodology

Our data collection methodology was carefully structured to gather comprehensive insights into the digital landscape of SRHR information and misinformation in Tunisia and Jordan. It encompassed four distinct approaches.

- **Focus group discussions:** We conducted two FGDs as the initial step in our research. The first FGD engaged the Community Media Network (CMN) team and its affiliates, while the second involved participants from Al-Qatiba. These in-depth discussions, each lasting from one and a half to two hours, were skillfully facilitated by Arabic-speaking qualitative researchers. Recordings and transcripts of these discussions were meticulously preserved and later utilised in our data analysis process.

These discussions played a crucial role in identifying key themes that were subsequently explored as SRHR-specific topics for each country. Based on these consultations, in Jordan, the focus of the study was directed towards family planning and contraceptives, postpartum depression, and societal beauty standards. In Tunisia, the emphasis shifted towards comprehensive sexuality education, LGBTQIA+ issues,

and STDs in the context of migrants, particularly sub-Saharan migrants. These topics were selected due to their recognised significance by partner organisations, reflecting the areas where misinformation is most prevalent and could have the most tangible and detrimental effects. This approach aimed to ensure that the study was firmly grounded in the actual needs and priorities of local communities and stakeholders.

- **Key informant interviews:** Building upon the insights gleaned from the FGDs, we conducted a total of 10 KIIs with Jordanian stakeholders and nine KIIs with Tunisian stakeholders, including programme team members; young people aged 25-35 years; and external stakeholders. These interviews were structured to align with specific stakeholder categories, with each interviewee representing a unique perspective within the SRHR discourse. Each KII spanned approximately 45 minutes to one hour, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of key themes and issues. Prior to the interviews, participants provided their consent for audio recording, enabling us to capture their insights accurately. The transcripts of these KIIs served as invaluable data sources for our research analysis.
- **Surveys:** In tandem with our qualitative data collection methods, we implemented a survey mechanism to bolster our research with quantitative data. This survey was strategically distributed through targeted social media channels, with the objective of securing 50 responses per country. By harnessing this quantitative approach, we enriched our understanding of SRHR perceptions, behaviours, and experiences within the digital landscape. The survey yielded a total of 102 responses (51 responses per country), which provided valuable quantitative data that complemented and enhanced the qualitative insights gathered from the FGDs and KIIs.

In summary, our data collection methodology embraced a holistic approach, combining the depth of qualitative research through FGDs and KIIs with the breadth of quantitative data obtained through surveys.

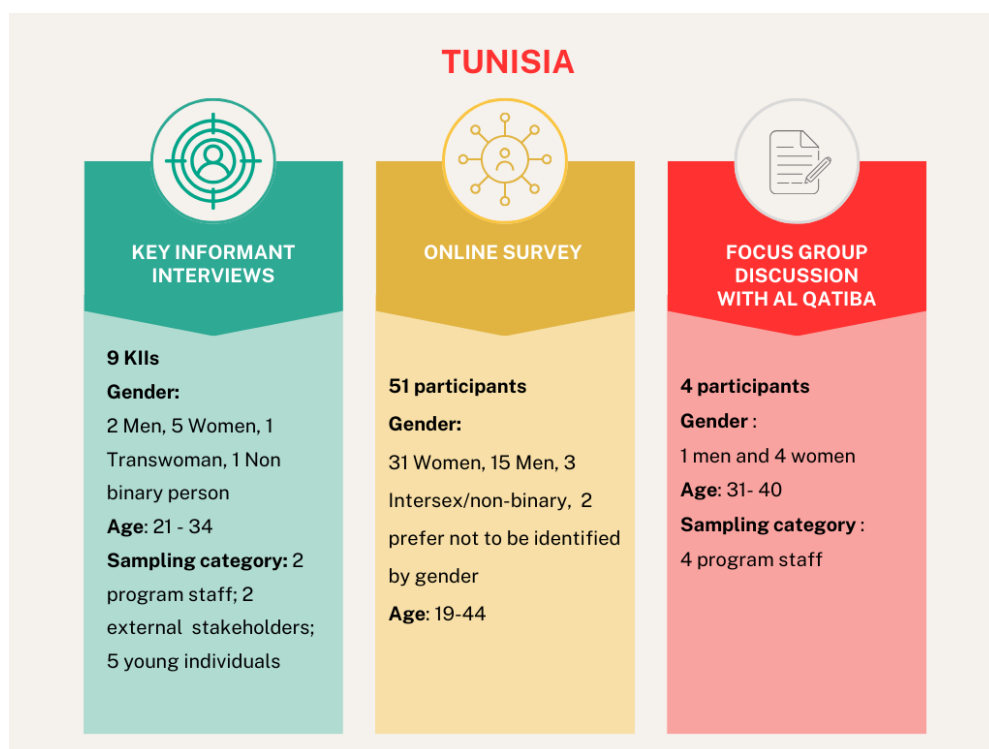


Figure 3. Key demographics information for data collection in Tunisia

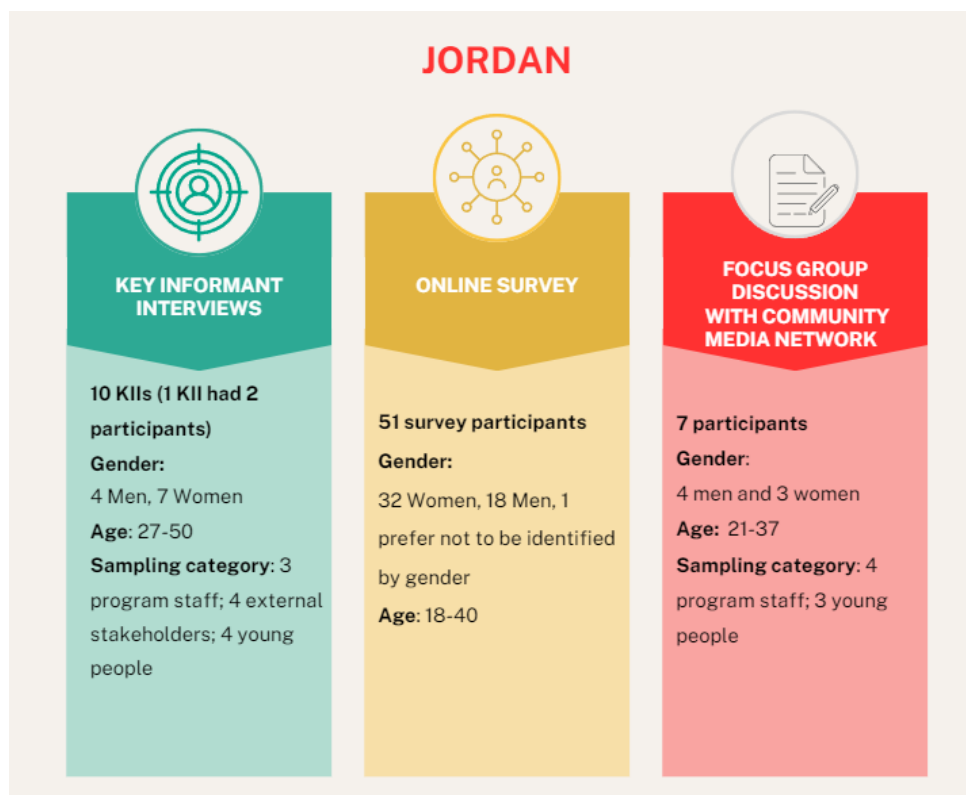


Figure 4. Key demographics for data collection in Jordan

4.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data obtained from the FGDs and KIIs underwent a rigorous thematic analysis process, systematically identifying, categorising, and examining key themes related to SRHR misinformation and digital interactions in Tunisia and Jordan. Additionally, we conducted a quantitative statistical analysis of survey data to enhance and support the findings derived from our qualitative research. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings allowed us to triangulate our results, reinforcing the validity and reliability of our conclusions and providing a comprehensive understanding of the SRHR landscape in Tunisia and Jordan.

In summary, the combination of qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative statistical analysis enabled us to delve deeply into the nuances of SRHR misinformation and digital interactions, offering quantitative evidence to support and enrich our qualitative insights and highlight any inconsistencies.

4.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Management

Ethical considerations were a paramount concern in our research. We obtained informed consent from all participants in the surveys³, KIIs, and FGDs, and participants were informed of their right to opt out at any point during the interview. Moreover, we meticulously adhered to confidentiality and data protection measures. All research data were securely stored and managed in strict compliance with ethical standards and regulations, and

³ The surveys included a specific question on consent: "Do you consent to participating in this survey, and do you confirm that you are older than 18 years old?" In Tunisia 100% of the 51 survey participants responded positively. In Jordan, 49 survey participants gave their consent, and two participants opted out.

our data collection procedures were carried out with the utmost respect for the confidentiality and safety of both participants and researchers.

4.5 Limitations

The study encountered a number of limitations that should be considered:

Firstly, the choice of focus themes was influenced by partner organisations, potentially introducing bias when predetermining the study's direction. We attempted to mitigate this limitation by incorporating additional input from KIIs centred around key topics relevant to each country's context. This approach expanded the scope of our study and enriched our findings and recommendations. It is important to note that this limitation was more pronounced in the Tunisia part of the study, where certain topics, such as STDs among sub-Saharan migrants, were challenging to substantiate in the KIIs or with online evidence. Instead, broader issues of racism, violence, and discrimination against people in sub-Saharan Africa were more frequently discussed.

Secondly, the complexity of the topic and concepts, particularly the categorisation of misinformation types, posed a challenge in data collection. Understanding and categorising misinformation require a certain level of familiarity with the subject, and the interviewees' limited exposure to these concepts may have affected their ability to recognise and differentiate between the various types of misinformation. However, it's worth noting that several interviewees expressed curiosity and interest in the theory of misinformation types, highlighting its relatability. Additionally, in terms of complexity, some interviewees encountered difficulties in distinguishing between accurate sources of information and misinformation, resulting in examples that were occasionally off-topic or unrelated to the digital space.

Thirdly, technical limitations related to the dynamic nature of social media posed a challenge in our study. Many examples of misinformation provided by KIIs existed within closed Facebook groups or were deleted by the individuals responsible for spreading the misinformation, making it challenging to access and analyse such content.

Fourthly, it is crucial to recognise the inherent limitations within the survey methodology. As our focus was on a particular youth stratum, the survey employed a snowball sampling approach instead of utilising probability sampling or random selection. Consequently, the relatively fewer responses obtained from this specific group may present limitations, potentially introducing biases linked to snowball sampling and restricting the broader generalisability of the findings.

Fifthly, while we prioritised the safety of participants by engaging individuals who shared similar core ideas and values, this approach limited our ability to gather insights from those actively involved in the production and dissemination of misinformation, which could have added another layer of depth to the study.

Lastly, the conservative nature of the Tunisian and Jordanian societies presented some additional challenges in discussing SRHR topics. For instance, many Tunisian participants in our study resorted to using replacement terms to describe sexual concepts due to the prevailing taboo surrounding sexuality. Such conservative environment prevented us from achieving the depth and openness of discussions on SRHR-related issues that we had hoped for in the interviews, potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of our findings. Similar challenges were observed in Jordan. Discussions about unrealistic beauty standards, particularly regarding genital body parts, were met with hesitation — Only one out of 11 key informants was open to discussing these topics directly, specifically regarding female genital anatomy and its impact on youth. This hesitation reflects the broader challenge of openly researching and discussing sensitive topics in conservative societies.

In the context of Tunisia, our study encountered some specific limitations. First, linguistic differences between French — the predominant and second official language in Tunisia — and English introduced challenges in data collection and interpretation. Conducting interviews and surveys in French, followed by interpreting the results and performing the analysis in English, raised concerns about potential variations in the interpretation of concepts

related to misinformation due to nuances in language and terminology. Additionally, a unique challenge emerged when it transpired that Facebook's algorithm struggles to process the Tunisian dialect, making it difficult to locate and analyse relevant groups and pages that discuss SRHR in the local Tunisian dialect. Many of these pages also had names that were not directly associated with SRHR, further complicating our efforts to establish clear connections between the content and its subject matter. Another limitation specific to Tunisia was the lack of availability of the ONFP for interviews. ONFP is the only public institution dedicated to SRHR in Tunisia, and its absence from our interviews leaves a noted gap in our exploration of this theme.

While acknowledging these limitations, we also contend that the study has broken new ground in a relatively unexplored field. By facing its limitations head-on, we have creatively navigated the challenges of cultural sensitivities and the fluid nature of digital misinformation. Venturing into this emerging area, particularly within conservative contexts, led us to adapt and innovatively tailor our methodologies. This approach effectively addressed cultural nuances and responded to the evolving dynamics of the digital landscape.

5. Findings

5.1 Regional Findings

The regional findings provide insights into the intricate landscape of accessing and disseminating SRHR information online in Tunisia and Jordan, as well as the complex misinformation ecosystem. While both countries face common challenges related to SRHR misinformation, they also exhibit unique distinctions in how societal norms, cultural factors, and digital preferences shape the spread and forms of misinformation, as well as the availability of accurate information.

Access and availability of accurate information

In Jordan, access to SRHR information is multifaceted, with varying awareness of reliable digital resources and a growing preference for online platforms among youth, influenced by societal norms, stigma, and marital status. Challenges include balancing scientific content with misinformation, and public discourse often lacks depth. Civil society plays a key role in disseminating information, with initiatives like the Mawwada platform being significant. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, while there is a preference for online sources, access to SRHR information faces challenges such as societal taboos, language barriers, and the lack of a clear distinction between reliable and unreliable sources. Young Tunisians are motivated to seek information online due to shame, fear, and curiosity but encounter barriers like societal stigmas, the absence of accessible comprehensive sexual education that targets the wider youth demographic and not only the “usual suspects”, and communication challenges. Popular platforms include Google, Wikipedia, and social media, but misinformation and limited accessibility persist. Initiatives like the Salema platform and efforts to integrate CSE into curricula are noteworthy mitigation strategies.

Forms and types of misinformation

In Tunisia, misinformation in SRHR revolves around topics such as CSE, LGBTQIA+ rights, and STDs linked to migrants, specifically migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. False beliefs about CSE include misconceptions that it promotes sexual activity and/or promiscuity and/or homosexuality among youth, while LGBTQIA+ rights are often seen as a Western agenda that corrupts morals. STDs are wrongly associated with Sub-Saharan migrants who are thought to have brought HIV with them. Various misinformation types, including satire, misleading content, and fabricated stories, are disseminated by diverse actors, including political figures, media outlets, influencers, and individuals, often motivated by political agendas, personal and financial gain, or ignorance. This complex misinformation landscape significantly impacts public perception and understanding of SRHR topics.

In Jordan, the digital misinformation ecosystem surrounding SRHR information encompasses various forms, sources, and influencing factors. Misinformation prevalent in Jordan includes beliefs about family planning, postpartum depression, and beauty standards. Types of misinformation range from satire and parody to misleading content, imposter content, fabricated content, false connections, false context, and manipulated content. Sources and intentions span social media influencers, journalists, politicians, and religious figures. Cultural, political, and economic factors significantly influence the spread of misinformation, affecting young people's beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes toward SRHR topics.

Intentional vs. unintentional spread of misinformation

In Tunisia, misinformation in SRHR is disseminated by various actors with differing intentions. Political figures, such as the president, and nationalistic political parties intentionally spread misinformation for political agendas, while mainstream media and social media influencers often do so for profit or societal approval. Conversely, some actors unintentionally spread misinformation due to ignorance or lack of awareness. In Jordan, the intentional spread of SRHR misinformation is less clear but involves a range of actors, including influencers, journalists, and politicians, driven by factors like cultural beliefs, political agendas, and economic gains.

Factors contributing to misinformation

In Jordan, cultural factors like stigma, taboos, religious influences, the "culture of shame," pressures on married women, lack of formal sexual education, and reluctance to discuss sex within families significantly contribute to the spread of SRHR misinformation. The patriarchal attitude towards self-education in SRH topics and perceptions of family planning as a Western concept further compound these issues. Politically, decision-makers influence public discourse on SRHR topics, often employing conservative arguments to align with societal norms or advance political agendas. The enactment of the Jordanian cybercrime law has led to increased self-censorship online, further impacting the spread of information. Economic factors, like access to private health care and enrollment in different types of schools, indirectly affect SRHR knowledge.

Meanwhile, in Tunisia, a combination of cultural, societal norms, and religious factors heavily influences the spread of SRHR misinformation. Cultural taboos and shame, especially surrounding unmarried women's sexual health and LGBTQIA+ rights, hinder open discussions and access to accurate information. Economic factors create disparities in accessing health services and information. Misinformation is often spread for political gain or due to ignorance, with individual actors and influencers playing key roles. Political figures and nationalistic pages contribute to xenophobic and racist discourse, while mainstream media and cultural productions also influence public perceptions of SRHR issues, echoing misinformation stemming from social media and vice versa.

Impact of SRHR misinformation

The general impact of SRHR misinformation in Tunisia includes physical and mental health issues, strengthening of hate speech and conservatism, and impacts on CSE acceptance. Misinformation about CSE, particularly virginity and sexual orientation, reinforces gender stereotypes and attacks individuals or groups working in this field. In Tunisia, misinformation about LGBTQIA+ impacts health and societal attitudes. Hormone therapy misinformation endangers trans individuals' health, while homophobic myths fuel violence and social exclusion. The spread of misinformation about migrants reinforces xenophobia and limits migrants' access to essential services, including SRH care.

In Jordan, SRHR misinformation affects young people's health decisions, gender socialisation, and mental well-being. It leads to uninformed choices, reinforcing traditional gender roles and impacting relationship dynamics. Media portrayals of gender and family roles further shape societal norms. Misinformation about beauty standards creates unrealistic body image expectations, influencing mental health, relationships, and economic choices, and leading to a rise in cosmetic procedures among youth.

Mitigation Initiatives

In Jordan, successful mitigation initiatives for SRHR misinformation include interactive online applications, podcasts, TV shows, and educational games tailored to engage youth. CMN's initiatives, Royal Health Awareness Society's educational campaigns, and the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA's) TV shows and podcasts effectively address SRHR topics. In Tunisia, ATSR's platform Salema offers extensive SRHR information and direct consultations with professionals. Other measures include introducing CSE into school curricula, using educational games for engagement, outreach in public spaces, and campaigns like Pink October for breast cancer awareness. These initiatives demonstrate innovative approaches to counter SRHR misinformation and promote informed understanding among Tunisian youth.

In conclusion, both countries grapple with common challenges related to SRHR misinformation such as the heavy influence of conservatism, patriarchy and religious beliefs, and the massive use of satire and parody to spread misinformation, yet their unique cultural, societal, and digital contexts contribute to distinct patterns of misinformation and access to accurate information. It is evident that misinformation significantly impacts public perception and understanding of SRHR topics, affecting health decisions, societal attitudes, and even political discourse across both countries. However, proactive mitigation initiatives, such as educational campaigns, online platforms, and innovative content dissemination strategies, are making strides in countering misinformation and promoting informed understanding among young people in these regions.

5.2 Jordan

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Overall landscape:** There is a diverse landscape of online SRHR information in Jordan, marked by both gaps and recent initiatives aimed at improving access and quality.
- **Factors influencing search and access:** Young Jordanians' engagement with online SRHR information is influenced by societal norms, stigma, marital status, fears of online repercussions, lack of comprehensive sexual education, and lack of knowledge about which reliable sources exist.
- **Preference for online sources:** A significant majority (81.6%) of survey respondents, predominantly young adults, prefer obtaining SRHR information from online sources.
- **Quality and accessibility issues:** The available online SRHR content faces challenges in quality, accessibility, and public discourse, often overshadowed by misinformation and cultural stigmas.
- **Diverse views on information dissemination:** Opinions vary on whether government, private sector, civil society, or international organisations are the primary disseminators of accurate SRHR information, with civil society organisations playing a significant bridging role.
- **Misinformation ecosystem:**
 - In Jordan, prevalent SRHR misinformation includes beliefs that family planning is a Western conspiracy, misconceptions about postpartum depression being a sign of luxury or lack of religious devotion, and unrealistic beauty standards influenced by social media, which often

equate thinness or specific physical traits with attractiveness.

- Types of SRHR misinformation in Jordan include satire and parody (often used humorously by influencers), misleading content (selectively presenting information), imposter content (false representation of authoritative sources), fabricated content (creation of false information), false connections (sensationalised headlines not reflecting true content), false context (misrepresentation of information), and manipulated content (alteration of original information).
- **Sources and intentionality of misinformation:** Social media influencers, anonymous voices, politicians, social media users, official pages, religious figures, and journalists contribute to misinformation, with varying degrees of intentionality.
- **Cultural impact on misinformation:** Cultural factors like stigma, religious beliefs, societal narratives, marital status, gender roles, and conspiracy theories significantly influence misinformation spread.
- **Political and legal influences:** Political discourse and legal factors, such as cybercrime laws, impact the dissemination and nature of SRHR information online.
- **Economic factors and SRHR knowledge:** Economic status affects access to health care and educational resources, influencing knowledge and decisions regarding SRHR.
- **Consequences of misinformation:** SRHR misinformation profoundly affects young people's decision-making, gender socialisation, and mental health, impacting areas like family planning, postpartum depression, and beauty standards.
- **Effective mitigation strategies:** Recent initiatives focusing on relatable and accessible content have shown promising effectiveness in combating SRHR misinformation, utilising various media formats for engagement.

5.2.1 Evaluating the Availability of and Access to Online SRHR Information

The findings on the availability and access to accurate online SRHR information in Jordan present a multifaceted landscape. While some stakeholders admit to a lack of knowledge about any reliable digital resources, others are aware of and acknowledge recent initiatives aimed at bridging these gaps. However, more critical issues highlighted by the qualitative and quantitative data are not just the availability of information but its accessibility, appeal, comprehensiveness, and the complex dynamics that impact young people's willingness to engage with it.

5.2.1.1 Factors Influencing Young Jordanians' Search for and Access to Online SRHR Information

The KIs uncovered a divergence in Jordanian youth's tendency to seek online SRHR information. Some interviewees noted that youth are hesitant to do so due to societal norms and stigma, especially related to their marital status and parental supervision. One perspective expressed was, "Youth may avoid searching for accurate SRHR information online because they are unmarried and fear stigma if they do so in front of their parents." Conversely, findings expressed an emerging trend where youth are increasingly turning to online platforms, particularly social media, for SRHR information, as they are drawn to the engaging and relatable content available on these platforms. This inclination is explained, in part, by discomfort in openly discussing sensitive topics, as well as the fact that online platforms offer accessibility and anonymity, making them attractive alternatives. Survey results further support this trend, with 81.6% of the 51 respondents (average age = 23.11) indicating that they primarily obtain SRHR information online⁴. This suggests a growing preference for online sources among young Jordanians.

⁴ See section 5.2.1.3 for a mapping of the platforms used by youth as per the survey.

A deeper dive into the factors influencing young people's access to online SRHR information further unpacks this complex landscape shaped by cultural and societal dynamics. Findings from KIIs showcase that curiosity and the intrinsic need for accurate information emerge as primary drivers motivating youth to seek SRHR information online. However, their access to reliable information faces significant hurdles, including:

- **Societal stigmas and taboos:** Issues related to gender and LGBTQIA+ topics are often shrouded in societal stigmas and taboos. One interviewee underlined that the mere mention of "gender" often leads to misconceptions, which could be due to lack of awareness of gender-related terminology and concepts.
- **Marital status:** Marital status plays a pivotal role, with unmarried youth facing more stigma and restrictions. This can result in uncertainty about where to find information or reluctance to inquire about SRHR topics.
- **Fears and hesitations:** Young people are concerned about potential repercussions of their online activities, leading to hesitations in engaging with certain websites or online discussions. Apprehensions are amplified by fears of parental repercussions and skepticism about the motives of organisations providing SRHR information.
- **Lack of comprehensive sexual education:** There is a notable lack of comprehensive sexual education and internet literacy among the youth. This gap can lead to misdirected searches and a general mistrust in the credibility of online resources.
- **Online security and privacy concerns:** Concerns about online security and privacy breaches further dissuade young people from engaging with online SRHR platforms. Limited internet access in rural and refugee areas, coupled with concerns about privacy and a lack of mobile device access among adolescent girls, exacerbates these challenges.
- **Government censorship:** Censorship by the Jordanian government also affects how young people access accurate information, with legislative measures and online control impacting the availability and quality of SRHR information.⁵
- **Societal narratives:** The narrative around SRHR topics being "haram" (forbidden) can deter individuals from seeking information, further impeding access.

In summary, while there might be an increasing tendency among young people in Jordan to turn to online sources for SRHR information, their access to and utilisation of this information are profoundly affected by a range of societal, cultural, legal, and personal factors.

5.2.1.2 The Availability, Quality, and Accessibility of Online SRHR Information

The content, quality, and accessibility of available SRHR information pose their own challenges. One key issue that was underlined is the contrast between the abundance of rigorous scientific content and the prevalence of

⁵Jordan's government has the authority to block websites, including those related to political dissent, LGBT issues, and pornography. They also monitor online activities, resulting in arrests for critical online speech against the government or religious figures (Hunt, 2023). Recently, the introduction of Cybercrime Law No. 17 of 2023 has criminalised various online activities, including the spread of "fake news" or content undermining national unity or religious values. This law imposes penalties of imprisonment for three months to three years and fines from 5,000 to 20,000 Jordanian dinars (approximately US\$7,000 to \$28,000). However, this law has also raised concerns as it holds website and social media managers accountable for illegal content, potentially promoting self-censorship. (Dentons, 2023; Migiro, 2023).

Cybercrime law in Jordan. Dentons. (2023, October 16).

<https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/alerts/2023/october/16/cybercrime-law-in-jordan>

Hunt, G. (2023, November 23). *Best VPN for Jordan [Bypass Censorship - 2023 guide]*. VPNRanks.

<https://www.vpnranks.com/countries/jordan/>

Migiro, K. (2023, August 15). *New Jordanian cybercrime law criminalizes "fake news" online*. Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/2023/08/new-jordanian-cybercrime-law-criminalizes-fake-news-online/>

misinformation, including personal anecdotes. One interviewee explained that, “despite the availability of content, there is a challenge in attracting young readers, especially to more medically oriented topics, compared to those with more sensational or attention-grabbing themes.” It is believed that the complexity of scientific information often does not resonate with youth, leading them to engage with more accessible but frequently inaccurate narratives influenced by diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This “great deal of confusion and mixing of information” reflects the difficulties young people face in finding reliable information online.

Moreover, interviewees' responses shed light on the selective openness of public discourse on SRHR, which is reflected in the online content available. For instance, they shared that civil society organisations are more willing to engage in discussions on certain topics like antenatal care, while others, especially STDs, are stifled by cultural stigma and receive less attention. This selectiveness underscores a broader societal hesitancy to address the full spectrum of SRHR topics. Within our chosen themes, findings suggest that discussions on subjects such as contraception, family planning, postpartum depression, and beauty standards tend to be tentative and superficial, often lacking the necessary depth to be truly impactful. While influencers and occasional medical professionals address these topics, their conversations often lack robust expert input. Furthermore, conversations about family planning methods are typically confined to married couples, avoiding the endorsement of premarital sexual activity and highlighting the sensitivity surrounding these topics.

Jordan's stringent legal censorship on SRHR-related resources and activities further narrows the scope of available content, as shared by the research participants. This censorship poses particular challenges for NGOs, restricting their ability to discuss SRHR topics on digital platforms due to the sensitive nature of these issues in Jordan. Interviewees noted that ministries rigorously review projects and programmes, with the authority to veto topics they deem inappropriate. One interviewee mentioned that initiatives like Masaruna and earlier UNFPA and WHO efforts predominantly focus on pregnancy, birth, and family planning, lacking information on sexual rights and sex education. We were told that only specific aspects of SRHR are deemed permissible for discussion, such as puberty and personal hygiene, while other essential details are often omitted, hindering a comprehensive understanding of SRH topics. Interestingly, a young participant highlighted that this monitoring might aim to ensure the provision of reliable content and potentially build trust among beneficiaries. However, they emphasised the importance of the individuals overseeing this monitoring possessing a thorough understanding of SRHR and its components to ensure accurate and inclusive information dissemination.

5.2.1.3 Mapping of Online SRHR Platforms⁶

Findings showcase a clear divide in views on whether the private sector, civil society, government, or international organisations play the largest role in disseminating “accurate” SRHR information within the Jordanian digital landscape. A notable divide exists between those who believe the government and traditional health centres are sufficient providers of SRHR information, and those who argue these sources are inadequate, particularly in addressing the specific needs of young people. On another note, civil society organisations were also acknowledged for playing a significant role in bridging the SRHR information gap. However, they face notable challenges, including resource constraints, restrictions imposed by government regulations, and self-censorship due to societal norms and cultural taboos. These



⁶ Image Source: Daramzin Human Development / Public Facebook Page [Text Translation: Women who choose family planning enjoy better health and face less risks. What are the benefits of family planning? And what are the ways used? This podcast is specialised in raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence.

obstacles limit their capacity to operate freely and deliver comprehensive SRHR information.

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While there was a near consensus among interviewees that the currently available online SRHR information falls short of meeting the needs, stakeholders, particularly the younger generation, highlighted the emergence of various initiatives and platforms aimed at providing accurate and scientifically sound SRHR information. These efforts span both government-led initiatives and those within civil society. Among the government-led initiatives are those associated with the Ministry of Health and the maternity and childhood department, as well as the National High Population Council (HPC) in Jordan, which reportedly has recently been proactive in developing a new interactive online platform that targets young men and women, with early consultations involving religious leaders to tactfully address the cultural sensitivities.

One interviewee specifically noted that in Jordan, online SRHR information is primarily disseminated by institutions, referring to the HPC's '[Darbi](#)' platform, supported by UNFPA. The findings also refer to prominent figures (such as "Dr. Samkari" and "[Montasser](#)", whose content is specifically considered contextual and sensitive to the dynamics in Jordan), and international and national platforms (including UNFPA, IOM, Oxfam, [I-DARE](#), [Sawaed Al Taghyir Center](#), [Darabzeen](#), [Liwan space](#), [Ard organization](#), [Mawadda](#), and [YPEER Jordan](#)), which were recognised for their contributions to disseminating online SRHR information. The [Institute for Family Health \(IFH\)](#), was also specifically noted for providing electronic papers and booklets, with special consideration for persons with disabilities.



In line with the qualitative findings, survey respondents also identified a range of similar and other platforms and resources. The Mawadda platform and Y-Peer were mentioned most frequently (three times), followed by the "WHO website" (two times). A variety of other sources were also identified, such as the same "[Darbi](#)" platform by the HPC, [WebTeb](#), [Jeem](#), [Khateera](#), [Feminist Movement Jo](#), the [Moj](#) Instagram page, doctors specialising in reproductive and sexual health, different private groups, as well as governmental and health organisation sources like the Hussein Cancer Foundation and the Jordanian Ministry of Health⁸. It is also worth noting that a few respondents expressed a reluctance to seek Jordanian sources due to perceived bias and misinformation.



The platform that was mentioned most frequently during the KIIs and in the survey for playing a significant role in addressing the SRHR information gap is Mawadda, operated by the Hikaya Foundation. Mawadda is a platform that addresses taboo and stigmatised topics, offering articles that claim to be reliable and reviewed for quality. Mawadda was lauded for taking a progressive approach, enabling young individuals to ask questions without censorship (contrasted against other platforms like Darbi). The

Hikaya Foundation operates within the framework of the Masaruna project and is a partner of RNW Media. What is noteworthy about Mawadda, as revealed in the qualitative data, is that it addresses a wide range of highly sensitive issues that many people might find challenging to discuss openly. What sets it apart is its inclusion of

⁷ Image Source: MontaserTheVictor / Public Instagram Page

⁸ It is worth noting that two other entities' names came up during the revision of the report by our Jordanian Young Research Advisor. These are: Wayber Network and Sawa'id Foundation, which are reportedly considered among the pioneer Jordanian organisations spreading awareness about SRH in recent years.

medical professionals, psychiatrists, and sexual health specialists who provide trusted answers to concerns in the field of SRHR.

Focusing on social media more specifically, insights gathered from KIIs and survey responses provide a comprehensive understanding of the landscape of different platforms for SRHR information dissemination in Jordan and the preferences of individuals seeking such information:

In the KIIs, Instagram and TikTok emerged as popular platforms for SRHR content, with a noted inclination toward entertainment over scientific accuracy. Instagram influencers who have millions of followers (including celebrities, religious leaders, some influencers focusing on SRHR, comedians, etc.) and medical professionals were identified as key players in discussing SRHR topics on these platforms, contributing to information dissemination. However, the quality and depth of information varied depending on the content creators and their adherence to scientific standards. One significant challenge highlighted in the interviews is the difficulty of addressing SRHR topics directly on Facebook. This challenge arises from the demographic characteristics of Facebook users in Jordan, who tend to be older (40 years and above) and more conservative. This demographic composition poses a potential barrier to open discussions about SRHR topics on the platform, as users may not be as receptive or open to such conversations due to conservative views. Findings also point to a lack of content variation across different social media platforms, with a tendency to recycle content.

Conversely, survey results reflected a different range of preferences among respondents when choosing online platforms for SRHR information searches. Youtube was the top choice for 49% of respondents, followed closely by Instagram (42.9%); Facebook was mentioned by 22.4% of participants; and there was a smaller but notable user base on platforms like Google, Twitter, Whatsapp, and TikTok. Some respondents also referred to official websites, Google Scholar, and university library resources for SRHR information.

The divergence in findings suggest a potential variation in platform preferences, possibly influenced by the age demographics of the users, which warrants more in-depth research. Interestingly, when compared to data sourced from DataReportal – Global Digital Insights (2023), it is noteworthy that Facebook stands as the most popular social media platform in Jordan with 6.5 million active users while WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app in the country, boasting 6.4 million active users. Meanwhile, Instagram secures the second spot as the most popular social media platform in Jordan, amassing 4.2 million active users.

An accompanying mapping conducted as part of this research further identified several platforms dedicated to addressing one or more SRHR issues in the Jordanian digital landscape. These range from SRHR-focused platforms and feminist collectives to NGOs and CSOs that address SRHR topics among other issues, national entities, and international entities. The mapping table (see Annex 1) provides a snapshot of these entities and their digital media presence, underscoring the diverse landscape of SRHR information sources in Jordan. Yet, as clearly illustrated from the above insights, the availability of these platforms does not necessarily mean that the content is accessible, nor guarantees a comprehensive coverage of relevant SRHR topics.

5.2.2 Unpacking the Digital Misinformation Ecosystem in Jordan: Forms, Types, Sources, and Influencing Factors

5.2.2.1 Prevalent SRHR Misinformation about Family Planning, Postpartum Depression, and Beauty Standards

The interviews and survey findings provide valuable insights into the most common and deeply ingrained SRHR misinformation prevailing within Jordanian society — which are reflected in the digital landscape — with a particular focus on family planning, postpartum depression, and beauty standards:

- The findings reveal a concerning prevalence of misinformation regarding family planning within Jordanian society, which is also reflected on digital platforms. One prevailing misconception suggests that family planning is part of a larger conspiracy, with some individuals erroneously linking religious verses to incorrect concepts that portray family planning as forbidden and reflective of Western conspiracies targeting Arab and Muslim populations. As one interviewee remarked, "There are those who view family planning as a Western plot to weaken our families and traditions." Another common misinformation theme pertains to the economic implications of family planning, with many Jordanians holding the belief that every newborn is a source of livelihood for the family, leading to the misconception that family planning (specifically pregnancy prevention) may result in economic hardship. The debate over the religious permissibility of family planning also continues to be a contentious issue. While some religious leaders have issued fatwas (religious rulings) differentiating between family planning and birth control, interpretations vary. As one interviewee highlighted, "The ongoing debate over whether family planning is considered Haram persists, with differing religious views on the topic." Misinformation surrounding contraception also includes doubts about the safety and efficacy of methods, such as intrauterine devices (IUDs), and there is also a misconception that contraceptives can lead to infertility. Additionally, there is a common belief that contraceptive responsibility falls solely on women, which can have implications for family planning choices. One survey respondent noted, "There is no mention on Arab platforms of the possibility of contraception through males, and when I came across one female doctor talking about it, all the comments were rejecting any procedure that males undergo in their reproductive organs, even if it is reversible, and there is not enough awareness about the side effects or harm of contraceptives for females." A key informant interviewee also echoed this, noting that "there's that thought that you won't enjoy sexual interaction at all if you put on a condom, that it could even affect the erection."⁹ Some individuals also wrongly believe that breastfeeding can prevent pregnancy. These are just a few examples, illustrating the prevalence of misinformation surrounding family planning in Jordan, particularly on digital platforms.
- Misinformation surrounding postpartum depression is also suggested to be prevalent in Jordan, even though the topic is rarely brought up or acknowledged. Interviewees observed that it is frequently misattributed to women being "spoiled" or living luxurious lifestyles, or ascribed to a lack of religious devotion and superstition. There are also false claims that postpartum depression is a fabricated excuse for mothers to avoid responsibility. Particularly noteworthy is the normalisation of postpartum depression, especially in women's discussions, where some trivialise it or even deny its existence. One respondent remarked, "Surprisingly, some discussions even suggest that some individuals don't believe in postpartum depression at all, and it's often women who are more vocal in defending this idea."

⁹ Vasectomy reversal, which is what is referred to here by the survey respondent, only came up once in our data collection. The data collection vastly pointed out that contraception is perceived as first and foremost the responsibility of Jordanian women. Male condoms were referred to as decreasing pleasure and that when used, could affect male erection.

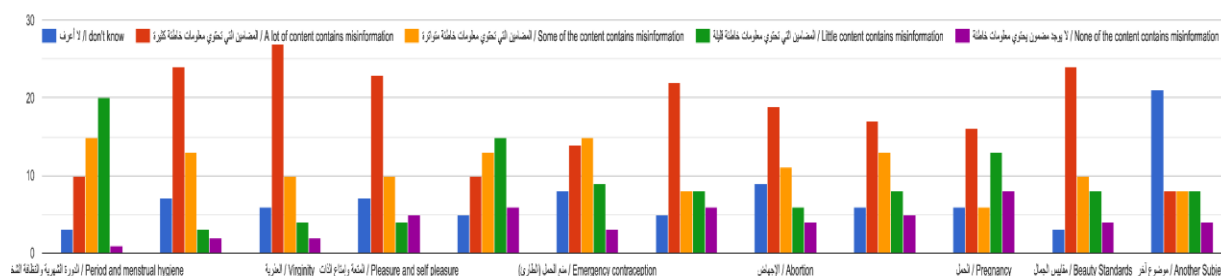
- The findings suggest that misinformation surrounding beauty standards in Jordan is primarily rooted in societal attitudes, with societal pressures exerting a more significant influence than accurate knowledge. As one interviewee pointed out, "It's more about the models of success that young people see on platforms like TikTok, which is very popular. They pursue these as their examples; and at this young age, they don't differentiate between right and wrong." This societal influence is further exemplified by a survey respondent who highlighted an example of a Facebook post perpetuating the idea that a woman with a darker complexion is of lower value compared to one with a lighter complexion. Another prevalent and concerning misconception, repeatedly mentioned by interviewees based on their personal observations and experiences, is the false belief that being underweight equates to beauty. Beauty standards propagated on social media lead some individuals to mistakenly correlate thinness with attractiveness, which can result in harmful behaviours such as extreme dieting and unhealthy weight loss practices. One interviewee shed light on this issue, stating, "They try to induce vomiting, which is very common among teens, because they think that they should be thinner or lighter in weight."

"One of the most extensively discussed topics among young people online is beauty standards. While it may not be directly discussed in relation to reproductive and sexual health, it is a prevalent topic concerning overall body image. For instance, saying that factors like weight, skin colour, nose shape, or eye colour can impact attraction, and some individuals set specific standards like, 'I prefer someone to look a certain way.'" — Key Informant, Jordan (young stakeholder)

- Beyond the specific topics of family planning, postpartum depression, and beauty standards, both qualitative and quantitative findings strongly indicate that SRHR misinformation is pervasive in Jordan, encompassing a wide range of topics. These misconceptions extend to various aspects of SRHR, including but not limited to puberty, masturbation, the measles vaccine, diet and nutrition, breastfeeding, STDs, menstrual hygiene, abortion, sexual pleasure, virginity, and more. The prevalence of misinformation is suggested to be particularly challenging to navigate when topics involve religious considerations and emphasise negative health impacts.

Figure 4. Survey results: SRHR topics that are most subject to online misinformation in Jordan

10/ أي من الموضوعات التالية عن الصحة الجنسية والإنجابية هي أكثر عرضة للأدوار المعلومات الخاطئة عبر الإنترنت من خلال تجربتك وملاحظاتك؟ / Which of the following SRHR topics are most impacted by misinformation online, from your experience and observations?



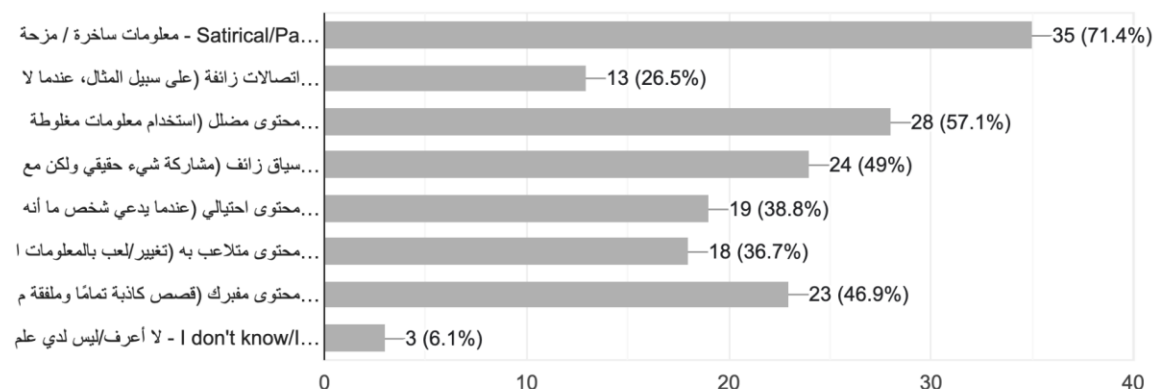
5.2.2.2 Key Types of Digital SRHR Misinformation

5.2.2.2.1 Overview

The findings from interviews and survey responses provide valuable insights into the prevalent types of misinformation surrounding SRHR in the digital media landscape in Jordan. Key trends include the use of satire and parody, commonly employed by influencers to address SRHR topics with humour and sarcasm, with a goal to achieve more shares. Memes, particularly those related to beauty standards, are also suggested to play a substantial role in spreading misinformation, often belittling women and perpetuating stereotypes through humour and jokes. Imposter and misleading content are underlined as significant issues, illustrated through the impersonation of genuine sources and religious leaders emphasising practices like polygamy to manipulate beliefs. False connections are observed, especially concerning incidents like harassment and rape, which are sometimes sensationalised through clickbait headlines, leading to misconceptions about their severity. False context occasionally arises from individuals attributing blame to specific tools or practices without considering pre-existing health issues. Lastly, manipulated content is believed to be relatively rare in Jordan due to strict cybercrimes laws. According to the survey responses, 71.4% of respondents chose satire/parody as the most widespread type of SRHR misinformation, followed by misleading content (57.1%), false context (49%), fabricated content (46.9%), imposter content (38.8%), manipulated content (36.7%), and false connections (26.5%).

Figure 5. Survey results: Most prominent misinformation types in Jordan's digital landscape

ما هي الطرق المختلفة التي تنتشر بها الأخبار الزائفة أو المعلومات المضللة حول الصحة والحقوق الجنسية والإنجابية عبر وسائل 13/
الإعلام الرقمية في الأردن؟ What are the different ways... digital media in Jordan? (Please select all that apply)
49 responses



While this research did not investigate the level of harm caused by each type of misinformation, it is worth noting that based on Wardle's (2017) types spectrum, satire — which appears to be the most prevalent type in Jordan according to the survey responses — is theoretically considered the least harmful type of misinformation. Conversely, the two least prevalent types, namely manipulated and fabricated content, are theoretically considered the most harmful (see Figures 2 and 4). Further investigation is warranted to confirm this hypothesis and to determine whether the widespread misinformation in Jordan, often in the form of memes, is indeed not significantly harmful.

5.2.2.2.2 Satire and Parody

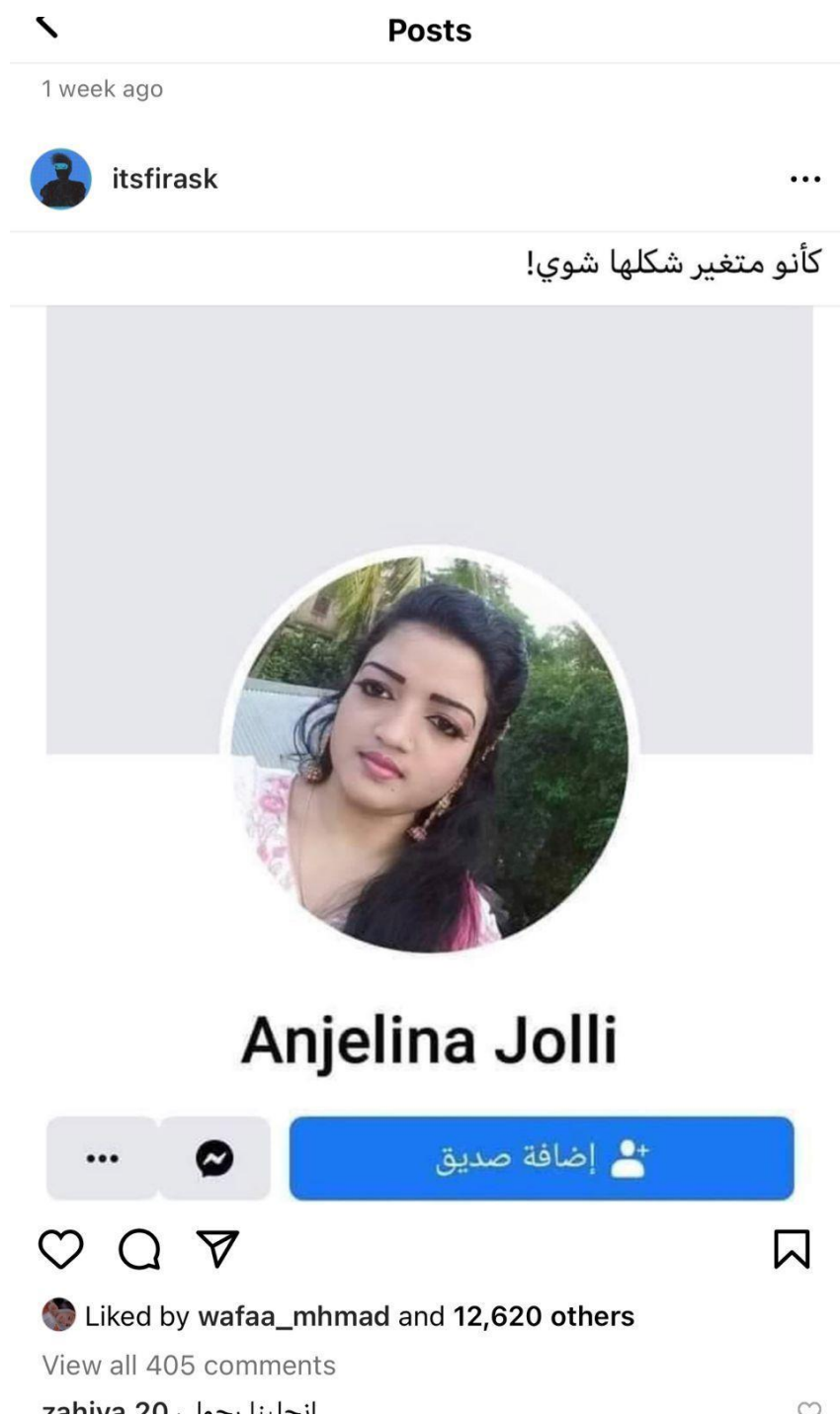
The perception of humour, memes, and stand-up comedy as forms of misinformation in the digital media landscape in Jordan varied among interviewees. Some emphasised that these elements play a significant role in disseminating misinformation related to SRHR. Memes, in particular, were repeatedly noted for their substantial influence in spreading misinformation, often touching on beauty standards and family planning topics, as well as belittling women and perpetuating gender stereotypes through humour and jokes. Additionally, certain influencers are seen as actively promoting satire and parody, especially concerning feminist discussions and SRHR issues. These forms of content are often used to attract a larger audience due to their perceived humour, resulting in increased engagement. Meanwhile, fewer participants suggested that humour, satire, and parody are not as applicable to Jordan, because SRHR topics are generally considered taboo and would not be tackled in that way or another. Another interviewee also noted that Jordanians are sometimes perceived as serious individuals, which could limit the popularity of such content in the country. Interestingly, 71.4% of survey respondents chose satire/parody as the most widespread type of online SRHR misinformation in Jordan, which is more in line with the first set of KIIs. This finding suggests that among younger demographics, satire is particularly prevalent and influential, especially when addressing sensitive topics like SRHR.



In sum, one could conclude that satire and parody exist, possibly widely, in the Jordanian landscape when addressing SRHR, either by influencers or regular users. Nonetheless, perceptions and experiences of SRHR misinformation may differ among various age groups and segments of the population.

5.2.2.2.3 Misleading Content

Misleading content emerged as a prevalent and concerning form of misinformation within the digital media landscape in Jordan, characterised by the selective presentation of information to shape narratives around SRHR issues. This finding aligns with the survey results, where misleading content was identified as the second most prominent type of misinformation. KII interviewees emphasised that this type of misinformation is both common and impactful. For instance, misleading content can take the form of professionally produced videos that present postpartum depression as “either a fact or a fabricated notion.” This is noted to be particularly concerning as it distorts the understanding of well-established medical conditions, such as postpartum depression, which is a recognised and legitimate mental health concern. Another manifestation of misleading content involves religious leaders emphasising the importance of polygamy and framing it as a positive practice. The misleading aspect of such content lies in the disparity between the message's true intent and the content being shared. In these cases, the primary goal is to encourage men to marry multiple times, but the content may not accurately represent the complexities and implications of polygamous relationships. In some instances, misleading content may even take the form of word-of-mouth sharing, where personal stories are twisted and used to give unsolicited medical advice. These personal narratives, when taken out of context, can perpetuate false beliefs and contribute to the spread of SRHR misinformation, as one interviewee explained.



5.2.2.2.4 Imposter Content

Imposter content, while not as widespread as some other forms of misinformation, emerged as a noteworthy concern within Jordan's digital media landscape. Interviewees shared various instances of imposter content, highlighting the diverse nature of this type of misinformation. One example involved a self-proclaimed religious figure named Eyad Qunaibi, who has falsely invoked the name of the UNFPA to lend credibility to his discourse while expressing opposition to UNFPA's work in the realm of SRHR. This deceptive use of an organisation's name illustrates how imposter content can be employed to manipulate and distort the perception of legitimate authorities in the field.

Another example of imposter content pertained to a scenario where a purported research centre is falsely quoted as conducting studies on certain SRHR topics, despite the fact that no such research centre exists. Such instances can mislead individuals into believing that the research findings are genuine, even though they may lack credibility or validity. Furthermore, interviewees noted cases where well-known publications have been falsely referenced in the context of SRHR topics. One interviewee shared, "There are cases where the *Washington Post* references postpartum depression in its latest research, but the information spread by the publication does not align with the actual findings. This kind of source manipulation and misinformation dissemination exists."

An important observation made by one interviewee was that imposter content within the field of SRHR may not always stem from malicious intent but from the fact that concepts within SRHR are continually evolving and adapting to societal changes, reflecting shifts in understanding and recognition of the importance of a participatory relationship between men and women. This natural progression of ideas and understanding over time can result in adjustments in terminology and conceptual frameworks, rather than deliberate misrepresentation, the interviewee noted.

5.2.2.2.5 Fabricated Content

The findings shed light on the presence and impact of fabricated content within Jordan's digital media landscape, particularly its ties to cultural beliefs, distorted personal experiences, and the involvement of pharmaceutical companies. While fabrication may not be as common as other forms of misinformation, it is recognised as a potential concern. One interviewee highlighted this by noting that "Fabricated content is less common, especially in sensitive scientific topics where creating false information from scratch is challenging. However, it's essential to note that fabricating false information can potentially happen in any scientific topic." The pharmaceutical industry is identified as one source of fabricated content, especially in the context of SRHR. Competitive pharmaceutical companies are suggested to engage in disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining their rivals, often spreading false claims about the safety and efficacy of competing drugs, as one interviewee explained.

"As a pharmacist, I know that pharmaceutical companies sometimes work against each other, saying this drug might cause infertility or that one has side effects you don't know about, with the aim of just fighting each other. And I spread this information, and people start to relay it and stop using the drug." — Key Informant, Jordan

Additionally, individuals themselves may unintentionally contribute to the spread of fabricated content based on personal experiences, often linking unrelated issues to specific drugs or treatments. Interviewees noted these personal accounts can become sources of misinformation, further complicating the landscape of SRHR-related information.

In essence, fabricated content, whether originating from pharmaceutical companies or stemming from cultural beliefs and personal anecdotes, poses a significant challenge in the realm of SRHR-related information, both online and offline. One poignant case shared by one interviewee highlighted the dire consequences of fabricated content,

where rumours about a new birth control method causing cancer spread in refugee camps. These rumours, initiated by an outsider's false claim, led to widespread fear and mistrust, resulting in many individuals seeking the removal of the implant, despite it being offered for free and proven to be safe.

5.2.2.2.6 False Connection

While false connections were identified as the least prevalent type of misinformation in the survey results, qualitative interviews provided valuable insights into false connections as another prevalent and concerning form of misinformation within Jordan's digital media landscape. Interviewees revealed that this form of misinformation often relies on tactics such as using enticing headlines to attract users, only to lead them to content that is less informative and more commercially driven. As one interviewee described, sensationalised headlines that may not directly relate to the actual content are a common trend, and are particularly effective in conservative communities where cultural, social, and religious taboos are prevalent. For example, people are frequently drawn to content or headlines related to sexual arousal, even if they are misleading or sensationalised.

It was further noted that false connection is done with the aim of attracting views and likes on social media, and is not only limited to Jordan or targeting Jordanians but is rather a trend across the Middle East. Examples of false connections provided by interviewees included stories related to harassment and rape incidents involving girls in Jordan. As one interviewee clarified, these incidents are sometimes sensationalised, leading to misconceptions about their severity. Hence, individuals engage with such stories, only to discover that the headline and image do not accurately represent the actual event. Another interviewee noted that this trend is increasing, particularly in relation to beauty standards and sensationalised content.

The discrepancy between the survey results and interviews regarding the prevalence of false connections may be attributed to the need for further clarification on what false connections entail, as expressed by some interviewees. Additionally, there was some uncertainty among interviewees about the distinction between false connections and completely fabricated content. Nonetheless, the examples shared by interviewees indicate that false connections are indeed present and have a notable impact on Jordan's digital media landscape.

5.2.2.2.7 False Context

While not as prevalent as some other types of misinformation, false context emerged as another noteworthy issue within Jordan's digital media landscape, as highlighted by interviewees. One interviewee highlighted that occurrences of false context are rare in mainstream media in Jordan but may be more prevalent on social media platforms. Another participant pointed out examples of false context on digital media beyond SRHR, such as the use of photographs from abroad or foreign websites, or the misrepresentation of specific individuals in specific places. These pictures are often repurposed and discussed out of their original context, leading to potential misunderstandings.

In the context of SRHR, findings revealed several examples specific to Jordan. These include instances of misinformation arising from individuals who attribute pain or suffering to specific tools or experiences when, in reality, the root cause might be pre-existing health issues. One interviewee explained, "It will be from individuals who have gone through a certain experience, suffered through it, and then start to confuse things and blame the tools they were using, whereas the real issue might be a pre-existing health problem." Misconceptions resulting from framing information inaccurately were also discussed, with an example given of the perception that all homosexuals have AIDS.

It is important to note that false context was generally not believed to be associated with deliberate actions or organisations but rather stemming from individual perspectives, confusion, lack of awareness, or misunderstandings. In some cases, false context may also be a result of individuals failing to conduct thorough research before sharing information, as one interviewee noted.

5.2.2.2.8 Manipulated Content

Manipulated content was found to be relatively uncommon within Jordan's digital media landscape, consistent with its ranking as the second least common type of misinformation in the survey results. In interviews, several participants noted that instances of manipulated content, particularly in the form of misinformation disseminated through manipulated reels or videos, are not frequently observed.

Interviewees provided various insights into why manipulated content might be relatively rare. Some pointed out that individuals often attempt to divert discussions or present misleading information to make themselves appear righteous, rather than engaging in direct manipulation of content. In the specific context of SRHR, it was also suggested that the conservative nature of Jordanian society, where discussions on SRHR are limited, may contribute to the absence of such manipulation. Moreover, it has been suggested that the technical sophistication required for content manipulation might not be widespread in Jordan.

Furthermore, the presence of cybercrime laws in Jordan was mentioned as a significant deterrent against engaging in manipulative activities. These laws are believed to create a fear of legal consequences among the majority, contributing to the low prevalence of manipulated content in the digital media landscape. Another interviewee also referred to the strong intervention of the cybercrimes unit in cases where individuals impersonate someone in a video or engage in similar manipulative activities, highlighting the control measures in place to address manipulated content and that even if it did exist, it would be removed quickly.

5.2.2.3 Sources and Intentionality of Online SRHR Misinformation

The findings offer a nuanced insight into the diverse sources of misinformation within Jordan's digital landscape. They depict an intricate misinformation ecosystem in Jordan, where individual actors hold significant sway in disseminating misinformation across digital and social platforms, rather than organised entities or institutions. Moreover, while certain instances indicate deliberate dissemination, especially in political, economic, or religious contexts, a significant portion appears to stem from unintentional causes, such as a lack of awareness or inadvertent belief in the misinformation. This section sums up the key sources and motivations behind SRHR online misinformation in Jordan, as revealed in the findings.

Findings indicate that misinformation predominantly stems from individual actions and decisions, involving a spectrum of actors such as social media influencers, political figures, self-proclaimed religious advocates, and journalists:

- **Social media influencers and content creators** are highlighted as significant contributors to misinformation. Among the examples mentioned were celebrities, religious leaders, influencers focusing on SRHR, beauty influencers, and comedians. Interviewees noted that these individuals often share information based on their personal experiences and perspectives, which tend to align with mainstream narratives. This approach can lead to a prioritisation of gaining views over ensuring accuracy. A notable issue is the dissemination of incorrect health information by influencers, such as misleading claims about contraceptives, due to their extensive reach and influence.
- Misinformation is noted to be spread through **anonymous sources**, particularly via voice recordings. An interviewee pointed out the challenges with this method, stating that in rural areas, "a single piece of incorrect information shared in a village's WhatsApp group can reach all of the community." This highlights the difficulty in countering misinformation from unidentifiable sources.
- The role of **politicians and parliament members**, especially those lacking scientific knowledge, in inadvertently spreading misinformation is noted to be significant. An interviewee explained how political discussions can mislead the public: "To someone without background knowledge, it might appear as

though a parliament member is conducting research and posing critical questions to the minister." This demonstrates how political discourse can inadvertently become a vector for misinformation.

- Most prominently, the impact of **individual social media users and online groups like "Mamsters" and "Dadsters"** in spreading misinformation was emphasised, noting that misinformation proliferates within specific social media pages or groups, where individuals may openly or anonymously share their problems or concerns. An interviewee highlighted this issue, stating, "A lot of women share personal and intimate stories and information on social media and they can sometimes receive thousands of comments that contain a lot of misinformation." This observation underscores how personal narratives shared online can become breeding grounds for misinformation. The role of unqualified responses in these online communities further exacerbates the spread of false or misleading information. As one interviewee noted, "It is not those who post; but individuals who respond to posts or discussions with personal advice, regardless of their qualifications, often contributing to misinformation or malinformation." Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, emphasising the prevalence of misinformation in discussions among women: "I see something that is spread among girls; a lot of women share a lot of personal and intimate stories and information on social media, leading to sometimes thousands of comments that can contain a lot of misinformation." These insights point to the significant role of unqualified advice in the spread of misinformation.
- **Official pages** are also reported to face widespread misconceptions, as seen in comments on the Ministry of Health's social media pages and platforms like Y-Peer. "Even when reliable and medically accurate information is presented, many people doubt or outright reject it, clinging to their misconceptions," one interviewee noted. However, it was also mentioned that the new cybercrime law in Jordan has impacted online discussions, and "reduced the tendency for people to comment on each other's posts due to concerns about potential accusations and bullying."
- **Self-proclaimed religious figures** are also noted as sources of misinformation. They discuss sensitive topics, including sexual and reproductive health, blending personal beliefs with misinformation. An interviewee highlighted this issue, saying, "These are the ones I talked about the preachers, they could be sheikhs — not necessarily sheikhs of mosques, but they consider themselves religious figures."
- **Journalists and news agencies** are thought to contribute to the misinformation landscape due to a lack of technical capacity or know-how in reporting health-related content. Examples mentioned include Jo24 (Khabar Jo) and Amoon.



Group by MoMsters - NewsFeed

MoMsters @ ممسترز >

Private group · 150.1K members

When examining the intentionality behind the spread of online SRHR misinformation in Jordan, the findings displayed a broad spectrum of motivations and circumstances. There are instances where misinformation appears to be deliberately disseminated as part of targeted campaigns. This intentional spread is often tied to political and economic struggles, as highlighted by one interviewee: "The rampant spread of misinformation often falls under the guise of a campaign...some of these campaigns are targeted." This observation suggests a strategic use of misinformation in specific scenarios, such as corporate battles or political disputes. The sensitive topic of LGBTQI+ is particularly cited as an area where misinformation might be spread more deliberately, possibly due to the controversial nature of the subject.

Religious figures, especially during sermons, are also mentioned as potentially engaging in the intentional spread of misinformation. An interviewee noted, "The religious men propagating misinformation during Friday sermons probably don't have good intentions." Commercial motivations and the desire for increased social media engagement are identified as additional drivers behind the spread of misinformation. Content creators may opt for sensational or controversial topics to attract a larger audience, as an interviewee explained. On the other hand, a significant portion of misinformation seems to emerge unintentionally, primarily from a lack of knowledge or awareness. An interviewee pointed out the role of ignorance in this spread: "The root cause often lies in a lack of

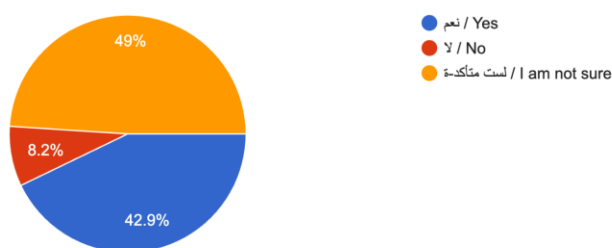
awareness, as individuals may not have sufficient knowledge and may inadvertently link SRHR issues with religious beliefs." Furthermore, many individuals who spread misinformation are believed to genuinely trust the validity of the information they share. As one interviewee noted, "For the most part, it seems that those spreading misinformation genuinely believe in what they are saying," suggesting that misinformation is often propagated out of belief, not malice.

It is also worth noting that the spread of misinformation was often characterised as random and unorganised, spreading more like a rumour or word-of-mouth, rather than through coordinated efforts. As one interviewee remarked, "I don't think that it's on purpose, or something systemised. If there's something out there, it's because someone released information and people passed it on."

In sum, the intentionality behind the spread of misinformation in Jordan varies widely. This also echoes with the survey results, where 49% respondents reported that they are not sure whether misinformation about SRHR in Jordan is intentional or not. This lack of consensus on intentionality and competing opinions supports the initial approach adopted in the research — to adopt an umbrella term of misinformation — as it is not possible to judge intentionality beyond the doubt.

Figure 6. Survey results: Unpacking the intentionality of online SRHR misinformation

15/ هل تعتقد/ين أن بعض المعلومات المغلوطة عن الصحة الجنسية والإنجابية عبر الإنترنت مقصود/يتم عن قصد؟ Do you think some of the online SRHR misinformation is intentional?
49 responses



5.2.2.4 Factors Impacting the Spread of Digital SRHR Misinformation

5.2.2.4.1 Cultural Factors

The findings unveil a complex and interwoven tapestry of cultural and social factors that profoundly influence the presence and dissemination of online misinformation SRHR in Jordan. These factors encompass stigma and taboos, religious influences, cultural norms, the prevailing "culture of shame," the disproportionate pressures faced by married women, a deficit of formal sexual education, hesitance to engage in open conversations about sex within families, suspicions related to conspiracy theories and the notion of the West imposing its agenda, as well as a macho attitude towards self-education on SRH topics:

- **Stigma and taboos:** Nearly all interviewees highlighted the pervasive stigma and taboos surrounding topics related to SRHR in Jordan's conservative society. This prevailing culture of silence contributes to the widespread dissemination of misinformation in real life, which is subsequently perpetuated and amplified in the online sphere. We learned that cultural norms dictate that subjects like sexuality and bodily functions should remain veiled in secrecy. Young individuals, especially those who are unmarried, are discouraged from asking questions or seeking information about these topics. In fact, instances of parents reprimanding their children for exploring their bodies without providing adequate explanations were cited,

fostering a sense of shame from an early age. Furthermore, relationships outside of marriage are deemed taboo, and premarital intercourse is forbidden in both dominant religions, Islam and Christianity. Consequently, Jordanian youth engaged in such relationships tend to seek information in secret due to societal rejection. In sum, the prevailing societal norm discourages open discussion even within family settings, perpetuating feelings of fear and shame surrounding these topics, and facilitating the spread of misinformation.

"In our society, discussing SRHR regarding unmarried couples is a taboo, although relationships and such activities are common among youth in schools and universities. It's a prevalent issue, but in a conservative community like Jordan, it's not acceptable to discuss these topics if you're not married. These are societal factors and religious factors. It is a whole culture." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **Religion:** Religion, particularly Islam, is suggested to exert a significant influence on the attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health in Jordan, contributing to the spread and persistence of misinformation on these topics. This religious influence is deeply interwoven with long-standing cultural norms, reinforcing feelings of shame and the classification of certain behaviours as "haram," meaning sinful or forbidden, in relation to various aspects of SRHR. The impact of religion on these matters begins early in life, shaping how young individuals perceive and engage with SRHR discussions, as noted by interviewees. For example, the belief that bearing children is a divine gift from Allah (God) and that using contraception is sinful is a widespread form of misinformation rooted in religious convictions. This belief, which is deeply ingrained in the upbringing of Jordanians, contributes to the hesitancy surrounding family planning and the use of contraceptive methods. Additionally, misinformation originating from religious beliefs, such as the unfounded idea that self-pleasure can lead to medical issues, can persist within communities, often going unchallenged due to its religious origin. These intricate interactions between religion, culture, and SRHR create a complex web of factors that contribute to the dissemination of misinformation and the perpetuation of taboos surrounding these topics in Jordan. Importantly, these factors can also lead to resistance against correcting misinformation, as observed in comments on posts that attempt to debunk some of these falsely associated religious claims.
- **Culture of "shame":** A prevailing culture of shame is deeply ingrained in Jordan, as emphasised by interviewees. This culture of shame is particularly pronounced when it comes to young unmarried girls seeking knowledge about their own bodies and SRH. Mothers, who are traditionally expected to serve as the primary source of information for their daughters, may sometimes lack accurate information themselves. This knowledge gap can lead to the transmission of misconceptions from one generation to the next. As one informant pointed out, there is also a strong societal expectation that unmarried girls should not actively seek information or become educated about their bodies and SRH topics. This cultural norm can result in individuals feeling ashamed when attempting to access certain information, as if they are engaging in something they shouldn't be. The culture of shame thus contributes to the perpetuation of misinformation and hinders open and informed discussions about SRH among young women in Jordan.
- **Pressure exerted on married women:** Misinformation about reproductive health in Jordan is closely intertwined with the significant burden placed on married women in matters related to reproduction. This unequal reproductive responsibility is imposed on married Jordanian women by various parties, including their spouses, families, in-laws, and even medical practitioners. A brief study has shown that decisions regarding contraception are often influenced by the mother-in-law, who frequently advises against its use. Consequently, while wives may acquire contraceptives from health centres, they may refrain from using them due to societal pressure to conceive and prevailing misconceptions surrounding contraceptive methods, as noted by one of the interviewees.
- **Reluctance to talk about sex within families:** The reluctance of parents to openly discuss sex with their children, coupled with the lack of comprehensive sexuality education, emerged as a pivotal social factor

contributing to the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation in Jordan. Interviewees shared that conversations about sexual health are deemed highly sensitive and uncommon within families. While parents should ideally serve as the primary trusted source of information for their children, discussing sexual and reproductive health topics in a scientific, transparent, and direct manner is a significant challenge in Jordan. Even with modern-day parents who may be more open-minded, there remains a notable gap in open communication with children regarding sensitive subjects. Consequently, many Jordanian youth feel uncomfortable discussing these topics openly, leading them to rely on the internet, primarily platforms like Google or Facebook, for information without necessarily verifying the credibility of their sources. This reliance on potentially non-credible references contributes to the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

"Yesterday, my wife was talking to a friend; the latter's son is 12 years old. The children were sharing photos on WhatsApp, and these photos had sexual connotations. This was a problem, and the parents of the children intervened. The woman was surprised, saying that she has a 16-year-old son, but she has never talked to him about these issues. So, it starts with the family. Even in the new generations, and despite the fact that the parent generation now is more open-minded, there is still not this kind of open communication with the children. This plays a big role." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **Macho attitude towards self-education on SRH topics:** Several informants pointed out the prevailing belief that young Jordanian men are expected to possess inherent knowledge about SRH, leading to a macho attitude when it comes to educating themselves on these topics. This attitude often results in an over-reliance on peer-to-peer knowledge. As one informant explained, "The common notion that a young man should already have comprehensive knowledge can deter him from seeking information through reading or asking questions. When this idea is reinforced among young people themselves, they may think, 'Why am I reading this? I shouldn't be reading this information. I should just ask my friend, and he'll provide the right information.'"
- **Conspiracy theory and perception of the West imposing a specific agenda:** Several informants raised the belief that family planning is a concept imported from the West and not aligned with Jordanian culture. It is viewed as an external imposition. As one informant explained in relation to family planning, "It exists, but not everyone accepts it, you see what I mean? It's present as a term or a topic, but as I mentioned earlier, one of the issues is that some people may argue, 'No, you brought it from outside, we don't have family planning.'"

Notably, findings also reveal that these cultural elements are further exacerbated by a pervasive skepticism towards scientific information available online. Instead of embracing scientific knowledge, there exists a prevailing reluctance to relinquish traditional beliefs, particularly in the digital realm. Efforts to rectify misinformation often encounter skepticism, particularly when they challenge deeply ingrained societal and religious convictions. A preliminary discovery from this study underscores a pervasive sense of mistrust in scientific information, with a preference for adhering to traditional Jordanian societal norms.

5.2.2.4.2 Political and Legal Factors

Political factors were found to have a substantial impact on the online dissemination of information and misinformation in Jordan, particularly when addressing sensitive subjects.

The findings underscore the significant role of politics in determining all subjects of public discourse and their framing. One interviewee elucidated that decision-makers hold ultimate authority in deciding whether certain topics, even those conflicting with social or religious taboos, can be openly discussed or suppressed. In essence, if

there is political consent to address any issue, it can permeate various channels, including media, social platforms, and public debates. For instance, politics exerts its influence on shaping the discourse surrounding family planning, birth control, and gender-related matters.

"The political factor holds significant sway, as any topic in Jordan can be subject to political influence. Decision-makers ultimately determine whether a particular subject can be openly discussed or not. Even if a topic goes against social or religious taboos, if there is political consent to address it or share it in some manner, it will find its way into the media, social platforms, and public debates." — Key Informant, Jordan

Furthermore, while political discourse often aligns with the conservative nature of Jordanian society, it can also manipulate religious, cultural, and social systems to advance specific political agendas. For example, conservative and occasionally inaccurate arguments against contraception, birth control, and family planning may be strategically employed during elections to showcase conservative ideologies and secure electoral support.

Likewise, the rejection of certain topics by politicians, such as feminism and LGBTQI+ rights, is believed to have a substantial impact on public discourse and contribute to the dissemination of misinformation. Conversations regarding LGBTQI+ issues frequently encounter strong resistance and negative sentiments, including suggestions that LGBTQI+ individuals should be expelled from the country. Notably, the government's conservative stance on these matters, driven by concerns of community backlash, often fosters misconceptions that addressing these issues aligns with foreign agendas or undermines traditional values.

"I often mention this comparison: criticising the regime or the King, for example, is easier than talking about LGBTQI+ issues or sex education. Even the government itself adopts a conservative stance on these topics. If they were to open up and be willing to address these issues, they would face backlash from the communities." — Key Informant, Jordan

The ripple effect of political discourse is widespread, especially as parliamentary sessions are publicly broadcasted. One interviewee mentioned an example of promoting early marriage: "The parliament sessions are always published on Jordanian television. So, the opinions, such as those related to early marriage, were broadcasted on national television. It had some influence on the local communities, leading to discussions like, 'Why don't we let girls at the age of 15 or 16 get married?'"

In addition to the aforementioned direct impact on information dissemination, the findings also highlight an indirect political influence. One interviewee shared that decision-makers' often conservative positions can act as barriers to support for organisations dedicated to SRHR. These organisations face serious limitations and risks in openly discussing SRHR topics. Additionally, political hurdles exist in securing project approvals and funding from international agencies, especially in institutions like the Ministry of Health where administrative processes can be slow, leading to funding delays. This significantly affects the realisation of SRHR projects, including those working on combating misinformation or raising awareness.

"The decision-makers are in a conservative position. They do not support, for instance, many organisations concerned with sexual and reproductive health. Organisations do not have the freedom to speak. Sometimes, and this is also political, if you want to apply for a project or get funding from an international agency, you have to secure approval from the Prime Minister's office, specifically from the institution or ministry involved. In our case, for example, the Ministry of Health sometimes delays the process of approving projects related to SRHR, so the funding is lost, because it is a matter that takes a lot of time for the donor to wait. So this has a significant effect on whether the project materialises or not." Key informant, Jordan

The interplay between political and legal factors is also worth noting. Some interviewees shared that the enactment of the new Jordanian cybercrime law has resulted in tighter online control, provoking a shift towards more cautious

online commentary. This shift has led to a significant decrease in the number of critical comments, with website owners or page administrators either removing critical comments or individuals refraining from posting them. Interviewees shared that the new cybercrime law has instilled fear of prosecution and self-censorship among internet users. Users have become hesitant to share information, even if it is accurate, due to the fear of legal consequences, particularly for content deemed offensive to women or in violation of gender-based violence norms. Interestingly, the fear of legal repercussions and restrictions due to the new legislation has encouraged people to post comments that align more closely with prevailing social norms, potentially stifling open discussion and diverse perspectives, and propagating information which may be based on cultural misconceptions and culturally ingrained misinformation.

"Nowadays, a comment could lead to the court, like if religious or social groups see that I'm promoting something, like homosexuality, for instance. If a friend, or someone I don't know, comments and says, 'Oh, she's right,' to explain in more detail, if the comment agrees, it could lead to legal action. If I don't remove the comment, it's my responsibility to remove harmful comments from the page. It's my responsibility because even a 'like' can lead to trouble. The law is vague and has many details, so it came as a shock to people, and they suddenly backed off, even on news websites, they removed the comments feature." — Key informant, Jordan

One interviewee explained that the fear of prosecution and criticism may restrict the flow of information, but it may not necessarily prevent the spread of misinformation. Instead, it discourages sharing about specific topics and leads to a more cautious approach to sharing content. Accordingly, the new legislation indirectly affects access to information and its availability online. It discourages individuals from engaging with websites, leaving comments, or asking questions out of fear. As a result, the available information may be insufficient or inaccurate, or it may simply not exist. This is a significant concern, especially considering that the law is relatively recent in Jordan, and its full impact may not yet be fully visible.

5.2.2.4.3 Economic Factors

The influence of economic factors on SRHR information and misinformation in Jordan, particularly regarding family planning and postpartum depression, appears to be indirect and less pronounced compared to other factors such as political, social, and religious elements. And more generally, while economic factors play a more evident role in shaping beauty standards due to their connection with an individual's financial capacity to engage with these standards, their impact on other SRHR issues is less direct. Nevertheless, findings still highlight a couple of notable indirect connections between one's economic status and access to information that are worth mentioning:

Access to private health care services: Economic factors strongly impact the accessibility of SRHR-related information and services, namely those within the private health care sector. For example, the costs associated with psychological treatment for postpartum depression may not be widely covered by the Ministry of Health, making it expensive in Jordan. This financial barrier could affect an individual's recognition of the condition and their willingness to seek psychological follow-up. Similarly, individuals with better economic resources may have easier access to specialised information about reproductive health from private medical practices. Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that public health centres in Jordan often focus primarily on maternal and child health and are tailored to married women, potentially leading to challenges for unmarried individuals seeking information.

Enrollment in public vs. private schools: Another interesting finding relates to the economic situation of a family and whether children are enrolled in private or public schools, which was said to directly influence the type of sexual education they receive and the information they have access to. The socioeconomic class one belongs to is suggested to have a direct impact on access to the SRH knowledge and information one receives, whether from their families or school systems. As one key informant explained, "We have the students in schools, especially in private schools, who are studying sexual education but in a conservative way. And we have the majority of the students in public middle schools and high schools, where the Ministry of Education has no intention to offer

anything related to sexual education to teenagers. Therefore, the economic situation sometimes controls what families would transfer to their children from this perspective."

Socio-economic status is suggested to be a determining factor in the number of children a couple chooses to have in Jordan. Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds may have more children at an earlier age compared to those with access to educational opportunities. However, recent economic challenges in Jordan, driven by factors like the economic crisis, are expected to encourage a shift in family planning practices. One interviewee noted, "In the past, people might not have viewed contraception as crucial, but the current situation, particularly the economic challenges in Jordan, has shifted the focus. It's not like it used to be; similar to the rest of the world, Jordan has been affected by the economic crisis and its consequences. Regarding family planning, for example, in the past, people were not very concerned about it, but now they are paying more attention." This suggests that economic difficulties may incentivise households to have fewer children, promoting the adoption of family planning and contraception.

5.2.3 Underlining the Impact of SRHR Misinformation on Young People's Beliefs, Behaviours, and/or Attitudes

SRHR misinformation has serious and multifaceted impacts on young people's beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes. Our findings underscore the serious consequences this misinformation has on Jordanian youth, particularly in shaping their decisions, gender socialisation, and mental health.

5.2.3.1 General Impact of Online SRHR Misinformation

- **The spread of online SRHR-related misinformation can lead Jordanian youth to make uninformed decisions about their bodies and health**, especially in the absence of awareness or comprehensive education, which empowers young people to make the right choices or informed choices. As illustrated below, such uninformed decisions include unsafe and unplanned pregnancies, unhealthy diets that can cause anemia and other health problems, and using hormones and supplements prematurely and excessively, which can lead to serious health problems.
- **Misinformation significantly influences the social construction of gender and gender socialisation among Jordanian youth, shaping their self-perceptions and interactions, and often reinforcing traditional gender roles that place burdens on both genders.** This leads to unrealistic expectations, impacting the well-being of young men and women alike, and it can also have significant social effects on the relationships between young people. For instance, in many societies, including Jordan, social norms continue to uphold the notion that men must consistently embody strength. Despite changing contexts, these entrenched expectations persist, contributing to mental and emotional strain among men in society. Moreover, misinformation can foster patriarchal attitudes, leading them to adopt a certain mold of being the authoritative and decisive male figure. As one key informant explained, "Due to misinformation, men might adopt a certain mold of 'being the male, the authority, the strong one, the one who decides and acts'." Similarly, young girls might feel pressured to behave in certain ways to be viewed as "desirable" by the opposite sex, often without adequate understanding of their own bodies and emotions. An interviewee noted, "We often hear stories about, let's say, girls using their bodies to please another party at a young age without being aware of the nature of the relationship or what they are doing, without even a basic understanding of their bodies and emotions."
- Specific Jordanian soap operas have been identified for playing a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of women's roles. One interviewee mentioned that the Syrian "Bab El Har" series, for instance, has been a staple in many Jordanian Muslim households during Ramadan for over a decade. They noted that this show has been instrumental in reinforcing traditional gender roles and limitations, shaping how women are perceived in society. Other TV soap operas, such as "Gafar El Omda" **normalised the concept**

of polygamy and violence against women. Such portrayals by successful actors have the potential to influence the audience and perpetuate regressive attitudes rather than promoting progressive ones.

"The series 'Gafar El Omda' with his four wives was particularly influential. (...) It normalised the concept of a man having multiple wives and being violent if he has power and money. Such portrayals, especially by successful actors and those who make us laugh, influence the audience who keep following them, often perpetuating regressive attitudes instead of progressive ones. What we see in the media is recreated in real life. For instance, I am sure that all the gender-based violence we see in our homes is not just a product of domestic issues but the media certainly has a role." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **Misinformation perpetuated through various media channels can have a profound impact on domestic violence, affecting both men and women.** Interviewees shared that one prevalent misconception fueled by media narratives is the expectation that men should always be emotionally resilient and readily available, in contrast to women. This stereotype contributes to domestic violence, which can manifest as both physical and verbal abuse. It also influences the education and guidance children receive within the family, often perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and harmful behaviours. The issues of intimate partner violence and marital rape were also prominent in KIIs. Moreover, research conducted by the Institute for Family Health (IFH) on the impact of gender-based violence on sexual and reproductive health identified a direct link between early marriage, lack of adequate SRH information, and violence perpetrated by husbands. In cases where young women lack sufficient knowledge and awareness about sexuality, they may be hesitant or avoidant towards sexual intercourse. This lack of understanding and communication can lead to frustration and violence in relationships. An informant explained, "She thinks that is wrong, so he feels very angry and then according to that, he becomes a violent husband."

5.2.3.2 Impact of Misinformation Related to Family Planning/Contraception

- **Misinformation surrounding family planning and contraception significantly affects young people's ability to make informed choices, with repercussions at the personal, economic, and social levels.** Misguided beliefs can lead to unplanned pregnancies and families having more children than they can financially support, exacerbating family tensions, poverty, and unemployment. A young survey respondent highlighted, "This is shown in the statistics which confirm the rates of abandonment of family planning, leading to repeated births without considering the mother's health or providing adequate care for the newborn, or using inappropriate family planning methods."
- **Misinformation poses serious health risks.** It often leads to inadequate protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and diseases (STDs). A case in point is a reported instance in 2023 of syphilis resulting directly from misinformation about contraception shared online, as one interviewee shared with us.

"In my line of work as a doctor, I have dealt with individuals who are vulnerable to HIV and syphilis. This is a particular story of someone who came to us with a syphilis infection. The individual mentioned to me that the reason behind this was this misinformation. They didn't disclose the influencer's name or the specific source of information, but it was certain that the misinformation came from an online source." — Key Informant, Jordan

- Due to widespread misinformation and entrenched cultural norms, **the burden of contraception is disproportionately placed on women**, fostering a reliance on females for birth control and disregarding the negative effects on their physical and mental health. A young respondent noted, "You build a

generation dependent on the female to take contraceptive measures, as if the issue does not concern two parties.” Misinformation also strongly impacts unmarried women, who, without access to reliable family planning services and post-abortion care, may resort to unsafe abortions, especially in contexts where abortion is illegal.

There is “a lack of appreciation and understanding of women, their body, and how to deal with them during difficult times (pregnancy, childbirth, and multiples), while making them bear the full responsibility for family planning alone and focusing only on the shape of their body, so he (the man) takes them as his possessions to fulfill his sexual and reproductive desires only.” — Key Informant, Jordan

- Popular TV series and soap operas have a considerable influence on shaping societal norms and perceptions. One interviewee specifically mentioned shows featuring renowned actors like Adel Emam that often depict large families in a comedic setting. Such portrayals, while entertaining, may inadvertently **encourage viewers to idealise large family structures without fully considering the serious sexual and reproductive health implications associated with them.** This can lead to a lack of awareness or misjudgment regarding family planning and its consequences.

5.2.3.3 Impact of Misinformation Related to Post-Partum Depression

- **Misunderstandings about postpartum depression and the lack of awareness and acknowledgment poses significant risks to the health and well-being of both mothers and their infants.** When a woman's struggles during the postpartum period are trivialised as mere “spoiling”, the outcomes can be grave, potentially leading to suicide or harm to the newborn. A survey respondent illustrated this, noting, “Postpartum depression is often mislabeled as 'pampering' or explained away by other excuses, such as being upset over having a daughter. This is partly because newborn girls often receive considerable attention, and a large part of our society either does not recognise or is unaware of postpartum depression.”
- Beyond the family, misinformation about postpartum depression has significant and concerning effects. One major issue is the underestimation of its importance by key decision-makers, including those in the Ministry of Health. **This lack of awareness at higher levels of government and health care administration can lead to insufficient policy measures to address the condition.** It is of crucial importance to emphasise that postpartum depression can have a prolonged duration and poses risks to both mothers' and infants' well-being.

5.2.3.4 Impact of Misinformation Related to Beauty Standards

- A notable finding from the research is how unrealistic beauty standards negatively impact young men and women in distinct yet equally harmful ways. Young women often become fixated on achieving a “skinny” appearance, leading them to skip healthy meals and lose weight excessively. This behaviour increases the risk of health issues like anemia. On the other hand, young men are driven by the desire to appear “manly.” This leads to practices such as starting weightlifting as early as 15 years old and using hormones and supplements to attain a muscular physique prematurely, potentially resulting in serious health problems like kidney failure, as highlighted by one of our key informants. Overall, Jordanian youth, regardless of gender, are influenced by the desire to emulate the looks of influencers and celebrities, striving to meet unrealistic standards of beauty.

"They refuse home-cooked meals, they always want to diet and want to be skinny, even though they are young and growing, which could lead to long-term results in issues like stunted growth or eating disorders because they are not eating healthy food that they need at this age. They could also suffer from anemia very easily, because the period can come more than once a month at this age. As for boys, it is the opposite. They are not required to be skinny, they are pressured to be muscular and sometimes resort to unhealthy practices like using hormones and supplements to get the 'male' shape. In the long run, this could potentially lead to serious health issues because they are not consuming the right food. Also, in Jordan, there has been more than one case where someone goes to the gym and consumes supplements, and then suffers from kidney failure or something." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **Young individuals who consume a significant amount of pornography may carry these misconceptions into their sexual lives, expecting unrealistic performance and body standards.** This can lead to dissatisfaction, anxiety, and other issues related to their sexual well-being. Unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by pornography can also affect mental health and satisfaction in relationships. Youth may struggle with body image issues and self-esteem, which can have broader implications for their overall well-being and the quality of their relationships. When reality doesn't meet these expectations, it can result in relationship breakdowns. The taboo surrounding the discussion of these issues further exacerbates the problem, potentially causing marital dissatisfaction, loss of confidence, objectification of women, and even divorce. Additionally, these misconceptions can lead to a general reluctance to enter into marriage due to the fear of unmet expectations and resulting disappointment.

"They (the youth) think that they would learn from pornography. Then they realize that sex is not like this; bodies are not like this; and the duration of the performance is not like this. This also affects their mental health, their satisfaction in relationships, and many other aspects." Key Informant, Jordan

"There are many girls who, before the wedding night, lose confidence in themselves because they can't reach the beauty standards. Men also think that their wife does not look like the things they have seen in porn. So, men are shocked and women are offended and lose confidence. They don't know the real motivations behind such images and standards. Young men and women, when they access married life, they have expectations based on the images circulated in the media, they don't know that married life involves more than this, such as responsibility, etc. This explains the high divorce rate in Jordan, as well as the objectification of women and men in the society. These beliefs are sown in people since their teenage years and remain with them." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **The growing popularity of the beauty industry in Jordan has a significant impact on the psychological well-being and self-esteem of young women in particular, leading to questions about self-worth and social acceptance from a young age.** Unrealistic beauty standards can be a limiting factor and hold the potential to ostracise individuals who do not meet these standards, and can lead to bullying. As a young woman about to enter into marriage, one's self-perception and the suitability of a partner can greatly impact various aspects of a relationship.

"A notable story illustrates the impact of misinformation on societal attitudes. I recall a person whose mother and sister, while searching for a bride for him, rejected a potential match simply because she had a birthmark, treating the process more like selecting a model than a life partner. This reflects deeply ingrained and misguided beliefs about physical appearance in marital selection." — Key Informant, Jordan

"Misinformation is not just online. When we discuss topics like body standards or beauty standards for instance, it can significantly influence how both males and females approach their relationships and who they want to be with, regardless of the type of partner they seek. They would have specific standards, and these standards can sometimes limit individuals or confine them to a certain mold, so they become outcast and no one wants to be with them." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **False information about beauty standards can have serious health and economic implications for young people and their families.** In Jordan, there has been a notable increase in plastic surgeries, particularly rhinoplasty, which has been directly linked to the influence of unrealistic beauty standards portrayed on social media. The pressure to conform to these standards has led to a rise in various cosmetic procedures, including Botox injections, dermal fillers, and laser hair removal. Additionally, there have been reports of alterations being made to the genital area. These trends not only reflect the deep impact of social media on personal body image perceptions but also highlight the financial and health risks associated with pursuing such cosmetic procedures.

"Lately, we have also seen the spread of fillers for the outer genital area, I mean, the outer pelvic area. They (young women) are doing fillers, and this thing is going on in clinics, because it is claimed to be the highest beauty standard. So there is a push by society as a whole, and by the girls themselves, (...) it's pressure from all sides." — Key Informant, Jordan

- **Globally, beauty standards exert pressure on individuals, but in Jordan, these standards can have particularly negative effects on women, especially post-childbirth.** Jordanian women often face societal pressure regarding their body image, including expectations to quickly lose weight gained during pregnancy. In some cases, extreme and potentially harmful measures, such as consuming vinegar to accelerate weight loss, are suggested. These practices can pose health risks not only to the mothers but also to their newborns. This intolerance towards women's natural postpartum bodies can also lead to significant mental health issues and self-esteem concerns.

5.2.4 Mitigation Initiatives and Successful Models

Findings indicate that recent mitigation measures addressing SRHR misinformation in Jordan have been promising. A key factor contributing to the success of these initiatives is their design, which focuses on accessibility and relatability for young people. The content and presentation of these initiatives are tailored to resonate with young people, ensuring that the information is not only engaging but also easily comprehensible. Moreover, the formats chosen for these initiatives are critical; they aim to provide information quickly and concisely while maintaining an interactive approach. By utilising modern and popular platforms such as social media, podcasts, TV shows, and plays as educational tools, these initiatives seek to facilitate direct engagement and interaction with young audiences.¹⁰

CMN, supported by RNW Media, has implemented innovative approaches to educate and inform young people about SRHR. One such initiative is an online application featuring a question-and-answer game, specifically designed to engage youth in learning about SRHR. Additionally, CMN has developed the podcast series "[Keif we leish](#)" — [How and Why](#). Participants are encouraged to create their own podcasts or short videos that address SRHR



¹⁰ Source: Royal Health Awareness Society Public Facebook page

Text Translation: There is a viewpoint that is important to see and hear #See_With_Their_Eyes

issues, particularly focusing on tackling misinformation prevalent on social media or within their communities. Another "23 Episodes" program by CMN addresses a variety of SRHR topics, inviting decision-makers to participate. This initiative aims to rectify misconceptions and enhance the correct understanding of SRHR among youth, thereby fostering a more informed and aware community.

[The Royal Health Awareness Society](#) has pioneered various innovative initiatives to enhance SRHR education. These include an educational board game modeled on Monopoly to engage youth in SRHR topics, and a smaller version designed for use in youth centres to address misconceptions. Their "10,000 Questions" campaign, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, established anonymous question boxes in youth centres to gather inquiries for targeted interventions. Additionally, they developed a CSE policy brief with nine mini-guides, involving 23 organisations and ministries to form a committee for CSE, aimed at combating SRHR misinformation. The "See it through their eyes" campaign was created to help parents understand their children's views on puberty and SRHR. Furthermore, the "Infodemic" campaign trained 50 journalists in countering misinformation, enabling them to present credible information on SRHR and other health topics. These varied approaches demonstrate a comprehensive effort to address SRHR education and misinformation effectively.

Interviewees highlighted several innovative approaches led by the UNFPA to address SRHR. These include the TV show "[Mesh Taboo - Not a taboo](#)," launched in 2019 with a specialised gynecologist as the host, targeting married couples and discussing various SRHR topics. Another groundbreaking TV show, "[Fee al mamar](#)," is the first of its kind in Jordan to specifically address young people, covering topics like the menstrual cycle and pornography. Educational materials from this show are also used in youth training sessions. Additionally, the UNFPA has produced a web series featuring [short videos](#) that convey SRHR messages in a comedic and light-hearted manner. These videos star the well-known Jordanian comedy actress Rania El kurdi, utilising characters from her original comedy show to engage the audience effectively. The organisation has also launched two podcasts: "Eib" (shame) and "Sawt" (voice), consisting of six sessions each, and another podcast titled "Kebro" ("they've grown up") specifically designed for parents. These podcasts aim to provide a deeper understanding and open discussions around SRHR topics. The online platform "Darbi" ("my path") — mentioned earlier — was also identified for being dedicated to raising awareness about SRHR, providing accessible and reliable information to the public.

Interviewees also highlighted a range of other diverse innovative initiatives contributing to the discourse and education on SRHR in Jordan. Nana Pads, through their collaboration with influencers, were considered instrumental in raising awareness about menstruation, a subject often considered taboo. Influencer Salam Qatanani was recognised for her research-based approach to sensitive topics. By incorporating diverse guests into her discussions, she enriches the dialogue, adding both depth and diversity. The "Mawadda" online platform was once again mentioned for being effective in spreading SRHR information using culturally sensitive language. One interviewee noted that its focus on delivering pertinent messages and addressing crucial SRHR aspects, like pleasure, has resonated well with its primary audience of married couples, amassing one million users in its first year. The King Hussein Foundation's Institute for Family Health was identified for engaging in global awareness initiatives, such as celebrating World Menstrual Hygiene Day, where they developed a menstrual bracelet to educate people about menstrual cycles and menstruation. The Rafiq Foundation's initiative for Persons with Disabilities was noted for utilising theatre as a medium to challenge and change the negative stereotypes associated with disabilities, offering an empathetic and engaging educational tool. Lastly, the Institute of Women's Solidarity has developed digital solutions to address gender-based violence. This programme reached out to 500 individuals, introducing them to new concepts and encouraging them to reconsider and reshape their understanding of such critical issues. These initiatives collectively represent a significant effort in advancing SRHR education and awareness, demonstrating innovative and impactful approaches in Jordan.

5.3 Tunisia

KEY FINDINGS:

- **Overall landscape:** Google serves as the predominant repository of information on SRHR for young people in Tunisia. This easy-to-access search engine/platform offers a diverse range of resources, including social media content, various online platforms, websites, and informative videos. However, a noteworthy challenge persists, as many young individuals may struggle to discern between reliable and unreliable sources when accessing information on SRHR on Google. It underscores the importance of fostering media literacy and critical thinking skills among young people to enable them to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive well-being.
- **Preference for online sources:** An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (92.2%) expressed a distinct preference for acquiring SRHR information through online channels. Notably, platforms such as Google and Wikipedia emerged as the preferred sources. This preference is also reflected in the interviews, highlighting the widespread reliance on online platforms for SRHR knowledge thanks to its accessibility.
- **Quality and accessibility issues:** Online sources pertaining to SRHR in Tunisia face challenges, as they are either unavailable or inaccessible. Even when available, these sources may still prove to be inaccessible for young people in Tunisia for different reasons, including young people being ignorant of the existence of this information, the language barrier, or the technical-heavy language used. The dual barriers of lack of availability and limited accessibility significantly influence the quality of information and shape the way young people interact with it.
- **Factors influencing search and access:** Gender and societal norms, deeply ingrained cultural and conservative environments, religious beliefs, and a pervasive misunderstanding of CSE as being against good morals collectively act as significant barriers to the search and access of information related to SRHR in Tunisia. Furthermore, the lack of awareness and insufficient educational mechanisms pertaining to SRHR exacerbate these challenges, highlighting the critical need for targeted initiatives that address these multifaceted factors.

Economic factors have also been identified as both a cause and a consequence of misinformation in the context of SRHR. Economic disparities create significant barriers to accessing quality sexual and reproductive health services and information, as it is considered a topic that is freely spoken about in certain privileged circles; SRH services and information require a certain financial comfort and abilities unavailable to most Tunisians, among others. This not only increases their vulnerability to misinformation but also contributes to inequalities in accessing health services.

- **Diverse views on information dissemination:** Civil society and non-governmental organisations play a pivotal role as the primary conduits for disseminating accurate information about SRHR in Tunisia. They accomplish this through various means, such as utilising their social media platforms and introducing innovative solutions. However, most interviewees mentioned that this information is not accessible to the vast majority of young people. Civil society remains quite an elitist circle, pointing to a need for new approaches that meet the information needs of young people.
- **Misinformation ecosystem:**
 - In Tunisia, prevalent SRHR misinformation includes CSE, issues related to the LGBTQIA+ community, and STDs in relation to migrants, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - Types of SRHR misinformation in Tunisia: The spectrum of SRHR misinformation in Tunisia encompasses various forms, as highlighted in the survey, focus groups, and interviews. The initial type identified is satire and parody, which are often used humorously by influencers. Subsequently, there is misleading content (selectively presenting information), manipulated

content (alteration of original information), false connections (sensationalised headlines not reflecting true content), fabricated content (creation of false information), false context (misrepresentation of information), and imposter content (false representation of authoritative sources).

- **Sources and intentionality of misinformation:** Political figures, parties, nationalistic pages, mainstream media, digital platforms, cultural productions, TV series, social media influencers, lone wolves, satirical groups, and pornographic websites were mentioned as the main disseminators of misinformation. Most people classified political figures and nationalistic pages and parties as relatively intentional sources of information whereas the rest were considered as either unintentional sources of information or benefit-driven.
- **Impact of misinformation:** Pulling out from the digital space, physical and mental health issues, along with hate speech, real-life violence, and cyber violence, are the primary impacts of misinformation on young people. The LGBTQIA+ community and women are the primary victims of these effects, given the nature of Tunisia's predominantly patriarchal society.
- **Effective mitigation strategies:** Numerous initiatives centered on CSE have been launched by both the government and civil service organisations and were mentioned by interviewees as successful initiatives. A noteworthy effort in progress is the incorporation of CSE into the school curriculum. Additionally, the creation of innovative solutions, such as mobile applications and dedicated platforms for SRHR such as platform "[Salema](#)" and "[Sexo santé](#)", can play a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information.

5.3.1 Evaluating the Availability of and Access to Online SRHR Information

The findings highlight the challenges surrounding the availability and accessibility of SRHR information for Tunisian youth. KIIs largely concurred that SRHR information is either unavailable or inaccessible, or available but still not accessible to young people in Tunisia. This issue is closely linked to the fact that discussions about sex are still considered taboo in the Tunisian context, influenced by various factors including religious beliefs and cultural heritage. Furthermore, it was noted that young people in Tunisia predominantly obtain and share SRHR information among their peers. This peer-to-peer exchange, while valuable, raises concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the information being circulated. Interviewed informants identified a range of sources that Tunisian youth frequently turn to for SRHR information. However, most KIIs did not distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources, indicating a potential gap in the dissemination of trustworthy and fact-based SRHR information.

5.3.1.1 Factors Influencing Young Tunisians' Search for and Access to Online SRHR Information

The findings highlight several key motives and challenges that Tunisian youth face in accessing reliable SRHR information online. The primary drivers pushing young people to seek information are **shame** and **fear** related to their sexual activity, concerns about sexually transmitted diseases, and general curiosity.

However, **societal challenges** significantly impede access to reliable information. Stigmas and **taboos**, especially regarding gender and LGBTQIA+ topics, are prevalent, often leading to misconceptions. For instance, the mere mention of "gender" can trigger misunderstandings. There is also a notable **lack of comprehensive sexual education**, partly due to societal resistance and misinformation, which was particularly evident when attempts were made to integrate CSE into school curricula. This resistance was fueled by media and social media narratives. Moreover, societal narratives of "Eib" (shame) and "**haram**" (forbidden) commonly arise in contexts related to sex. The promotion of reliable, comprehensive sexual education and SRHR information is also limited to certain organisations and associations, often those working specifically on CSE and LGBTQIA+ rights.

In terms of **communication challenges**, the format of reliable information presents a barrier. Such information is often perceived as boring or dull by young people, who may have shorter attention spans and find the complex technical language or long-form content like articles and documentaries unengaging. One interviewee noted the reluctance of young people to consult institutional websites, which are not always user-friendly.

"Unfortunately, young people nowadays do not have the patience to consult institutional websites such as the UNFPA, Salema platform or Tawhida Ben Cheikh or others and they are right. These websites are not always very easy to access."— Key informant, Tunisia (young person)

Additionally, it was noted that engagement with SRHR topics among young people is often met with **violence** and **discriminatory** comments online, deterring many from expressing and exchanging information. This is attributed to a tendency towards violence and hate, especially in the anonymity of online platforms.

"I feel as a Tunisian society we are more attracted to violence and hate and 'do not' especially when you're behind a screen. It's easier to express hatred, violence, and release frustration. This feeling of being covered and safe helps young people express themselves in that way."— Key informant, Tunisia (young person)

In sum, as interest and effort to access reliable SRHR information grows among Tunisian youth, the younger generation tends to seek such information online. However, their access is still very limited, primarily due to societal and religious factors and the format in which the content is presented.

5.3.1.2 The Availability, Quality, and Accessibility of Online SRHR Information

The findings shed valuable light on the availability and accessibility of information related to SRHR for Tunisian youth. The consensus among the KIIs is that information in this domain falls into two broad categories: either it is insufficiently available and inaccessible, or it is available but still largely inaccessible. One key informant expressed, "There's some information, but it's not enough. The available information is quite inaccessible." This sentiment is echoed in discussions regarding CSE and LGBTQIA+ rights. While some information is available, it is often challenging to access, specifically due to the inappropriate or unengaging format and language. Additionally, there is a recognition of the need for improvement, particularly in making this information more widely available and easily accessible to all.

Notably, the KIIs revealed that many respondents did not distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of SRHR information. Instead, they highlighted the commonly used online platforms preferred by youth for accessing SRHR information. Google, Wikipedia, and various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, emerged as popular choices for seeking information on various SRHR-related topics, including gender concepts, HIV testing, abortion services, non-prescribed pills, hormone therapy, menstrual cycles, and consent.

"There are a lot of sub-topics such as how the sexual relationship should be, the importance of consent, what are the things that you can accept mentally and those things that you can't. Also, the topic related to LGBTQIA+, people look for the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. People look for what can happen if you have unprotected sex."— Key informant, Tunisia (young person)

These platforms are favoured for their user-friendly interfaces and the abundance of articles and content they offer. One informant shared, "Personally, at first, I used to Google things and choose the most captivating and clear information, such as Wikipedia and other platforms."

Surprisingly, pornography websites were identified as significant sources of information for young people. Views on these websites were mixed, with some interviewees considering them negative sources, while others found them helpful. Pornographic content was noted for its reliance on fiction and editing, creating idealised depictions of various aspects of sexuality. On the flip side, some respondents believed that these sites aided young individuals in exploring their bodies, especially in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education within families. One informant emphasised the complexity of this issue, stating, "I don't want to say that porn is a negative or positive source of information, but there is a grey zone for young people for sure. But we can't say that porn is a reliable source of SRHR information."

"Most young people mention porn and porn websites as their main source of information about sexual practices, length of the intercourse, etc." – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

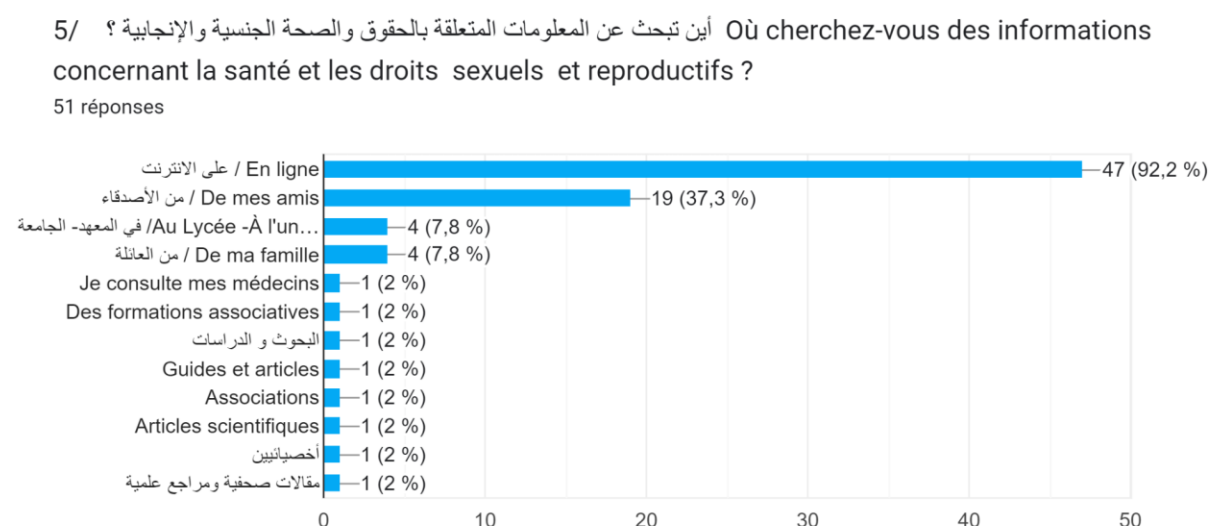
Additionally, NGO platforms were recognised as sources of information. However, these platforms are not exclusively dedicated to SRHR, despite the presence of specialised NGOs in the field. The challenges related to accessing information from these platforms were more associated with accessibility rather than availability.

"I typically follow NGOs like ONUFEMME... and organisations related to human rights, although not specifically focused on sexual and reproductive health (SRH)." – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Beyond online sources, the KIIs indicated that Tunisian youth also rely on offline sources, such as peers, health professionals, and experts. These sources serve both to gather information and to verify existing information. One informant highlighted this dual approach, stating, "Honestly, when I want to know something, I often turn to the internet. However, if someone asks me, I prefer to reach out to a knowledgeable person who can provide me with accurate information."

It's worth noting that the KII findings diverged somewhat from the survey results, which identified online sources as the primary means of accessing SRHR information (at 92.2%). This disparity can be attributed to the unique perspective of the KIIs, who are closely associated with SRHR circles in Tunisia. In contrast, the survey reached a larger and more diverse sample, resulting in differing viewpoints and preferences among respondents.

Figure 7. Survey results: Sources of SRHR information for young people in Tunisia



The research findings also reveal a notable disparity in the distribution of available information, particularly concerning the key focus topics of the study. CSE emerged as a more prominent subject within the landscape of available information compared to LGBTQIA+ rights. Accurate and reliable information regarding CSE is readily accessible on numerous websites operated by organisations and associations dedicated to the topic. These include prominent entities like ATSR, UNFPA, ONFP, ATL-MST-SIDA, among others. However, despite its availability, there remains a significant challenge in ensuring that this information is accessible to young people, as previously discussed.

Furthermore, the research indicates that certain specific components of CSE, such as maternal health and rights, heterosexual sexual relationships, contraception, and broader relationship issues, enjoy active and open discussions within both public and private Facebook groups. These online communities provide platforms for individuals to engage in conversations and seek information on these topics. However, it is noteworthy that other aspects of CSE, such as the prevention and treatment of STDs, do not receive as much attention in these discussions. In situations where individuals encounter real or perceived symptoms related to STDs, they often resort to conducting independent online research. Platforms like Google and Wikipedia become valuable resources for individuals seeking information and guidance in such cases.

We were unable to find information sources focusing on the third focus topic of this study, which pertains to STDs in relation to migrants, particularly Sub-Saharan migrants. However, it is worth noting that some KIIs echoed the concerns discussed in the FGD with Al-Qatiba regarding the spread of misinformation that accuses Sub-Saharan migrants of spreading HIV in Tunisia.

Throughout the process of data collection, a significant disparity between the availability and accessibility of quality information regarding SRHR became increasingly evident. One of the key informants aptly stated, "It is not a question of where young people find information, but rather a question of the information finding young people." This statement underscores the challenge of ensuring that vital information reaches youth effectively.

Another notable observation is that many organisations, associations, and institutions providing SRHR content do not exert sufficient effort to present this information in an engaging and attractive manner for young people. In contrast, Google stands out for its user-friendliness and efficiency in information retrieval. It provides a diverse array of responses closely aligned with users' queries. However, this convenience sometimes necessitates multiple query adjustments to obtain a definitive and valuable answer tailored to individual needs.

"We cannot address people born in 2005 with a classical and archaic discourse. Some content creators also promote a discourse believing that SRHR is only for married women for example and is only restricted to information about monitoring pregnancy or preventing it. The available discourse, its architecture, and its content are not responding to the needs and curiosity of young people. No one consults young people before creating their content." — Key Informant, Tunisia

"The information should be designed and adapted in a way that is attractive to young people. It should not be books or complex research. The information should be squeezed into a photo or short videos with attractive slogans." — Key Informant, Tunisia

5.3.1.3 Mapping of Available Platforms

When asked about their preferred platforms for researching SRHR-related information, KIIs indicated that young people tend to opt for the easiest options, such as Google and Wikipedia. Some also mentioned specialised health

websites, particularly those in French. Language, in addition to accessibility, appears to be a significant factor influencing platform choice.

Similar to the Jordanian context, KIs in Tunisia shared that Tiktok, Instagram, and Facebook are the primary social media platforms where young people are exposed to SRHR-related content. These platforms are favoured for their user-friendly formats, the fact that content creators are typically young individuals, and their ability to facilitate immediate interaction.

There was a near consensus among research participants that the Tunisian government has made commendable efforts over the decades to raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health. Despite some reductions in these efforts over the past decade, a robust infrastructure for SRHR information remains, including youth-friendly spaces, family planning clinics, and the ONFP. However, the ONFP's attempt to launch the "Sexo santé" app targeting young people has not achieved significant success, as shared by interviewees. A representative of an institution supporting the app mentioned that the app's utilisation by young people experiences fluctuations, depending on the context and current events in the country. One KI also explained that an app format may not be as successful as initially planned.



"There is also the app 'Sexo santé' launched by the ONFP. I don't really find it successful. I don't think that any young person will download a health app, or a sexual health app in Tunisia. I think young people are more attracted by short formats of videos on Facebook or TikTok of 1 minute or shorter. Young people do not have the patience to look for information on websites and fact-check. I can see it even with myself." —Key Informant, Tunisia

There was also a consensus that many civil society associations provide high-quality information and content on all aspects of CSE and LGBTQIA+ rights and health. However, these platforms are deemed underutilised due to inadequate promotion, a lack of youth-friendly formats, self-censorship influenced by societal norms and cultural taboos, and heritage factors. This limited accessibility confines the information to a specific segment of young people who are already aware of SRHR matters. The general CSE platforms mentioned are: platform [Salema](#), developed by the Tunisian Association for Reproductive Health; the website [ATSR](#); the [Tawhida ben Cheikh group website](#); and the government-led National Office for Family and Population [Facebook page](#). Interestingly, none of the KIs mentioned a particular influencer as an accurate source for information besides one interviewee who is an influencer themselves. Other platforms mentioned in the survey include [Moom](#), [The sex talk](#), [Cosmopolitan.fr](#), [Web Teb](#), [Ena Zeda](#), [World Health Organization](#), [Orgasme et moi](#) (Orgasm and Me), [Period, Wicul](#) (Instagram content creator), [Ceci est ton corps](#) (This is your body), [Jeem](#), [Raseef 22](#), and ChatGPT.



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¹¹ Screenshot of Salema platform

¹² Screenshot of Jeem platform / Headlines Translation: Menstruation transit: the day Hello Kitty Turned Red - How to know that you are a woman?: Saudi women express through body and country - From Isis to the Virgin Mary and Sayyidah Zainab: Sacred Feminine Figures in Societies that Marginalize Their Women



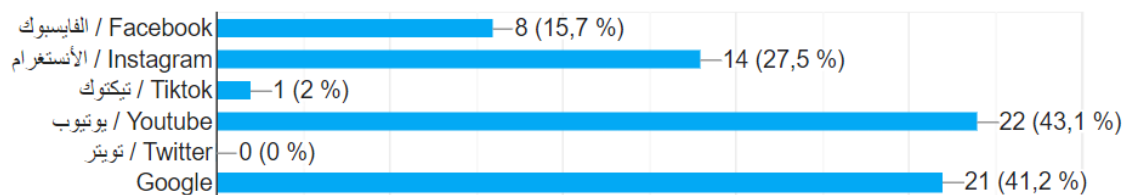
Despite being mentioned by all KIIs as a reliable and successful platform, a KII from ASTR mentioned that they are carrying out an audit to understand the reasons behind the platform not reaching as many young people as expected despite containing all necessary information and having a chat room allowing young people to ask their questions to professionals in a discreet and safe way.

Interviewees also shared that the dissemination and interaction with SRHR content significantly depend on the audience, which varies across different platforms. For instance, when considering the integration of CSE in schools, the reactions on Facebook differed from those on Instagram. As one key informant pointed out:

"Facebook is full of older people who have received a different education and tend to share a similar mentality. In contrast, Instagram predominantly attracts a younger audience, who are more receptive to CSE. (...) You find more people accepting of CSE on Instagram because they're mostly young." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Survey results presented a more nuanced picture of platform usage for SRHR information. According to the survey, YouTube emerges as the primary source for SRHR information, used by 43% of respondents. Google follows closely at 41%, with Instagram ranking third at 27.5%. Notably, TikTok, despite its popularity, is rarely used for seeking SRHR information, with only 2% of respondents using it for this purpose. This finding contradicts the observations from KIIs, where TikTok was mentioned as a main source of SRHR information, which might be explained by the demographic differences between the survey respondents and KII interviewees. Further elaborating on these platform preferences, another interviewee emphasised the importance of the content's format and delivery method, especially among young people. They noted, "Young people usually find information on social media. The form of the information is important. It has to be attractive, provided by influencers on Instagram and TikTok in a smooth way. They also listen to podcasts. There's a certainty that young people don't want to read. The best illustration of this is Twitter, which has a character limit per tweet." This comment underscores the evolving nature of content consumption among youth, highlighting a preference for engaging, influencer-driven content on visually oriented platforms like Instagram and TikTok, as well as auditory media like podcasts, over more traditional text-based platforms like Twitter.

Figure 11. Survey results: Digital media used to find SRHR information by young people in Tunisia



"I think Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook, all three platforms have a lot of control on young people's minds, especially Tiktok nowadays." – Key informant, Tunisia (Young Person)

Podcasts also emerged as significant sources of SRHR-related information. Notable options include "[Missaha](#)", a regional podcast that focuses on feminism and involves Haifa Dhouib, a Tunisian activist available on Spotify. Additionally, the Jordanian platform "[Khateera](#)" on Instagram was highlighted as a noteworthy source of information and enjoys substantial popularity in Tunisia, as mentioned by multiple key informants. One interviewee mentioned the [podcast "Hkeyet matehketech" \("untold stories"\)](#) by Al-Qatiba as a source of information about SRHR. Netflix was identified as an unexpected yet valuable source of SRHR-related information. Kils noted that Netflix features content that discusses important topics like consent, making it a platform where young people can learn about these subjects. One particularly unique response was the mention of "ChatGPT" This underscores the growing demand among young people for quick and convenient access to SRHR-related information. Young individuals seek accessibility and prompt responses when seeking information in this domain.

As part of this research, an accompanying mapping exercise identified various platforms dedicated to addressing one or more SRHR issues within the Tunisian digital landscape. These platforms can be categorised as follows: 1) Institutional and NGO websites, 2) Social media platforms of institutions and NGOs, 3) Mobile applications and platforms, 4) Social media content of influencers

Additionally, offline sources of SRHR information can be classified into two categories: 1) Family and friends, 2) Experts

For a comprehensive list of these platforms, please refer to Annex 2 for the full mapping table.

5.3.2 Unpacking the Misinformation Ecosystem: Forms, Types, Sources, and Influencing Factors

5.3.2.1 Prevalent SRHR Misinformation: Comprehensive Sexuality Education, LGBTQIA+ Rights, and STDs In Relation to (Sub-Saharan) Migrants

The findings allowed us to identify the most common misconceptions prevailing within Tunisian society, with a particular focus on CSE, LGBTQIA+ rights, and STDs in relation to (Sub-Saharan) migrants, and how they are reflected in the digital landscape:

- **Misconceptions surrounding CSE** are mostly based on a general ignorance of the meaning of CSE and its components. These components extend beyond relationships covering concepts such as respect, consent, anatomy, sexually transmitted infections, sexual and reproductive health, gender and social norms, and so on.

Many Tunisians do not distinguish between comprehensive sexuality education, relationships, and sexual activity. These three concepts are frequently perceived as synonymous and used interchangeably, often referred to collectively as "sexual relationships" or "sex" which is, in itself, a driver of controversy and resistance.

In this context, when there were initiatives to integrate CSE into school curricula in 2019, the media and social media, especially Facebook, hosted heated discussions around CSE. The hype on traditional and/or social media has worked against the initiative, exacerbating the spread of misinformation about CSE which aims, in reality, to protect and prevent sexual abuse and diseases.

Several articles, reports, and Facebook posts have been widely circulated with a bold headline: "Tunisia Integrates Sexual Education into Primary Schools". Some falsely claimed that its goal is to teach young people sexual practices, allow young people, and even children, to be abused, and encourage them to be homosexuals, among other misconceptions. Many religious preachers have disseminated videos denouncing the initiative, urging parents to vocalise their opposition and reject the initiative. On the other hand, certain TV shows have counterproductively spotlighted this initiative by featuring sketches that not only associate it with implicit violence but also include hate speech.

From 2020 until the present, the discourse around the initiative has significantly decreased. At one point, one interviewee believed that the project had been abandoned because of the counter-campaign and misinformation, despite the ongoing implementation of the initiative.

"In 2019, we witnessed a counter-campaign against CSE, where some people took the name (CSE) and added below it a wrong definition. So, the name was right, but the definition was wrong, pretending that CSE is about teaching young people homosexuality and low morals. The smear campaign does not stop there but also discredits the organisations working on CSE. So, there's a distortion of the information and a smear campaign against people working on CSE. This could be worse if we start working on CSE again in the current political and social situation in Tunisia." – Key Informant, Tunisia

- ***The LGBTQIA+ community and their rights are perceived by some as a Western conspiracy aiming to destroy Tunisian societal values and young people's morals.***

Many Tunisians do not understand the meaning of each letter in the LGBTQIA+ acronym and they frequently limit it to just homosexuality and lesbianism. Indeed, homosexuality is often viewed as one of the gravest religious sins, and some people refer to the story of the people of Lot mentioned in the Quran. According to one of the KIs, a homosexual relationship between two men is more harshly judged by society than a lesbian relationship between two women.

This judgment is rooted in gender roles that allocate the responsibility of "leading human capital" to men, relegating women to the passive role of "babysitters". For these reasons, lesbianism is more socially accepted as it is perceived not to directly impact the process of reproduction. Also, women are widely acknowledged for their ability to express emotions, leading to a situation where their lesbian relationships may be less visibly recognised.

Additionally, transgender individuals are often ignored and violated, sometimes based on rumours. The anti-transgender attitude and violence comes, obviously, from a certain fixed and inflexible vision of sex (male/female) and gender roles (societal norms and expectations around masculinity and femininity) but is also fueled by debates happening outside of Tunisia, for example in the United States. One of the KIs mentioned that a lot of young people in Tunisia are influenced by the discourse of the conservative American political commentator Ben Shapiro and his followers.

Furthermore, many Tunisians wrongly believe that the LGBTQIA+ community, especially homosexual individuals, is responsible for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV and AIDS.

In addition, one of the KIIs mentioned the example of Monkeypox misinformation being widely spread in 2022, particularly targeting homosexual and bisexual men as being responsible for this infectious disease through anal sex. This misunderstanding is exacerbated by a lack of accurate information, hate speech, and the media, as well as the legislative framework in Tunisia, which criminalises LGBTQIA+ individuals.

"Regarding the LGBTQIA+, no one takes the time to explain what it is and present an accurate definition except for the organisations already working on the issue. When someone says LGBTQIA+, there's hate speech straight away based on assumptions and rumours. I feel that the LGBTQIA+ word is used to create buzz. Everyone links it to anything in order to make the issue negative, for example when talking about sexual and reproductive rights. Going even to say that sexual and reproductive rights mean allowing same-sex people to get married (knowing that the Tunisian law criminalises homosexuality)." – Key Informant, Tunisia

- **Misconceptions about STDs in relation to migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa** were mentioned during the FGD with Al-Qatiba and by a couple of KIIs. These misconceptions are linked to the broader issues of racism, xenophobia, and several paranormal beliefs. One of these beliefs is the idea that Black women have mystical abilities that can cleanse the body of the effects of cannabis.

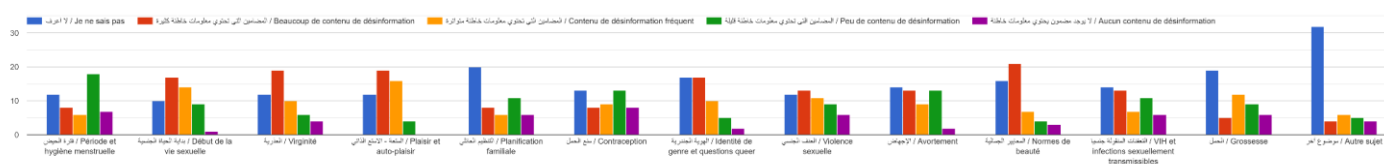
"Misinformation in regards to SRHR starts from our own heritage. We have a wrong information saying that if you want to clean your body from cannabis, you need to have sex with a Black woman from Sub-Saharan Africa." – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

In addition, many Tunisian people make simple connections between the spread of HIV in the continent and Sub-Saharan migrants spreading the disease in Tunisia. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that "Migration is not per se a primary risk factor for disease or for propagation of HIV. Instead, it is the conditions of migration and the lack of appropriate policy responses that exacerbate health risks and increase vulnerability in places of origin, transit and destination."

Beyond the specific topics of CSE, LGBTQIA+ rights, and STDs in relation to migrants, it was evident that SRHR misinformation is prevalent in Tunisia. Findings indicate that this misinformation extends to various other subjects, including beauty standards influenced by the porn industry, misconceptions about virginity, the false belief that masturbation leads to the loss of virginity, confusion between gender identity and sexual orientation, baseless ideas such as women getting pregnant from sitting in public transportation, and misconceptions about abortion involving the use of a hot bath. The survey also sheds light on additional significant topics, including sexual debut, virginity, pleasure and self-pleasure, gender identity, queer questions, beauty standards, and sexual violence. Notably, despite beauty standards not being a primary focus, it emerged as a significant concern in the survey findings.

Figure 12. Survey results: SRHR topics that are most subject to online misinformation in Tunisia

10/ Quels types de désinformation liée à la santé sexuelle et reproductive avez-vous rencontrés lors de vos recherches en ligne ? / 10/ Quels types de désinformation liée à la santé sexuelle et reproductive avez-vous rencontrés lors de vos recherches en ligne ?

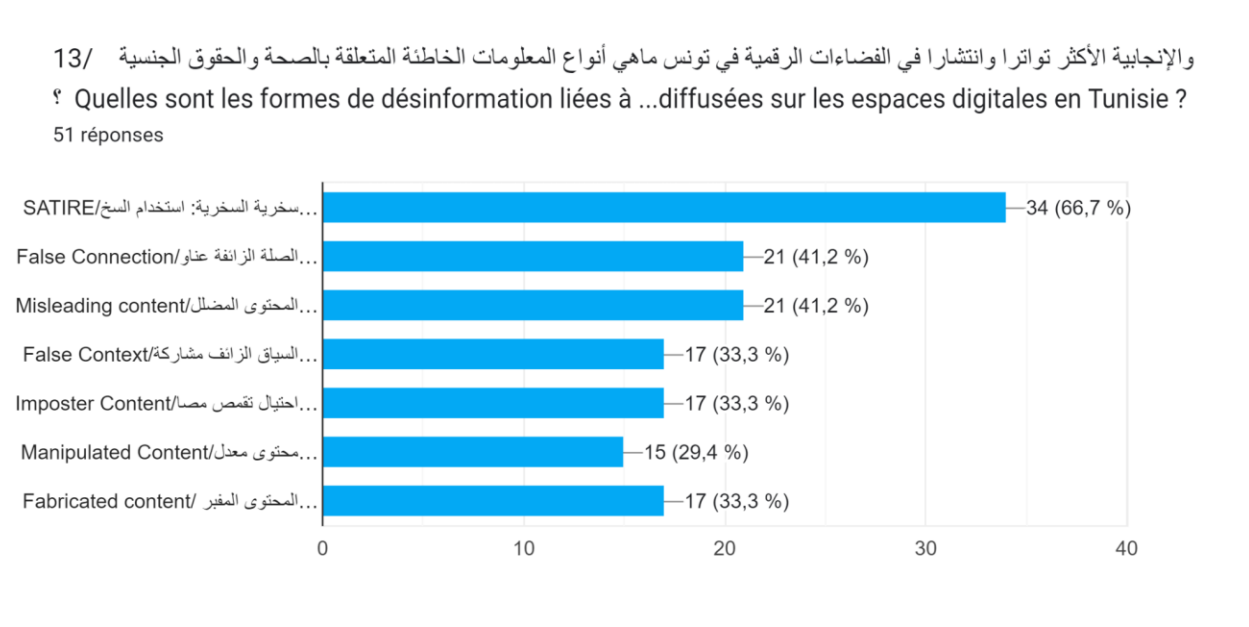


5.3.2.2 Key Types of Digital SRHR Misinformation

5.3.2.2.1 Overview

The findings from interviews and survey responses provide valuable insights into the prevalent types of misinformation surrounding SRHR in the digital media landscape in Tunisia. Satire and parody were the most frequently mentioned types in the KIIs and the survey. In Tunisia, satire is often associated with bullying but is also a widely used form of communication in everyday life. SRHR topics are not exempt from satire, as it is believed to allow individuals to maintain a certain distance from the subject matter and express opinions in a passive-aggressive manner. According to KIIs, the other main types of identified misinformation are misleading content, manipulated content, and fabricated content, in that order. In the survey, following satire (66.7%), the types of misinformation identified are as follows: misleading content (41.2%), false connection (41.2%), false context (33.3%), imposter content (33.3%), fabricated content (33.3%), and manipulated content (29.4%).

Figure 13. Survey results: Types of misinformation in Tunisia



5.3.2.2.2 Satire and Parody

The findings strongly support the role of satire in shaping public opinion in Tunisia. This observation was explained by different interviewees by the unique temperament of Tunisians, notably characterised by their distinctive sense of humour and tendency to avoid talking about intimate issues and feelings, instead covering their feelings with sarcasm..

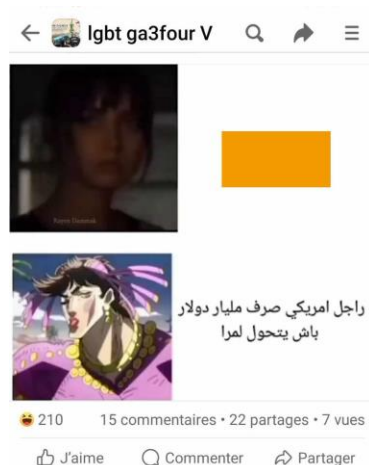
Commonly called “tanbir”, satire and sarcasm were identified as a double-edged sword. On one hand, they allow messages to be conveyed in a simple, funny, and effective way. One interviewee explained that satire is very common because it is part of the “Tunisian personality,” which is fond of making fun of things and people. On the other hand, it was also noted that satire in Tunisia often takes a harmful turn, either by being passive aggressive or by being violent, condescending, and belittling. The LGBTQIA+ community, especially transgender women and the broader LGBTQIA+ community, were identified the most frequent targets. Satire directed towards the LGBTQIA+

community is perceived as normal and, at times, is even encouraged in order to “educate” or “tame” LGBTQIA+ individuals. Content using derogatory images of LGBTQIA+ is rapidly shared and generates massive interaction on social media. Moreover, everyone is encouraged to take part in it since there is no penalty when it comes to mocking the LGBTQIA+ community. Mocking LGBTQIA+ individuals often revolves around associating them with feminine attributes, positioning femininity as an opposite to virility — a deeply ingrained and often preached model among men. In this narrative, gay men are unfairly portrayed as “feminine” and “weak,” perpetuating harmful stereotypes and serving as an extension of misogyny. The misuse of satire also extends beyond LGBTQIA+ individuals to include cisgender women, further perpetuating a culture of ridicule and fueling hate and fear of difference.

“In general, memes are the most widespread way of [spreading] misinformation in Tunisia, used for the sake of bullying the LGBTQIA+ community. In general, they even make fun of their names such as “damj”, “takatoa”, meem, 3ayn....etc. For example, they publish a photo of a political actor or an artist, who is wearing something non-conventional and they start making fun of him being part of these organisations, meaning, being part of the LGBTQIA+ community. It’s mostly bullying.” – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Furthermore, social media platforms, notably Facebook, were identified by the research participants as breeding grounds for derogatory content, memes, and slurs directed at these communities. Social media figures like “Malek Khedhri” have gained popularity by exploiting satire to mock individuals, even going as far as creating a Telegram group to share people’s personal information along with their photos. The prevalence of satire, especially among the younger generation, is also evident in the creation of groups like “LGBTQ Gaafour and Tanamor (تتمر - bullying)” where memes featuring real faces are shared with comments that are often rude and targeting real individuals. This misuse of satire also involves the unauthorised use of people’s photos to create humour without considering the emotional, psychological, and safety impacts on the individuals involved.

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In sum, satire in Tunisia was identified as a vehicle for misinformation that goes hand in hand with bullying, intimidation, harassment, and the erosion of personal integrity. The most alarming aspect is the prevalence of intimidation, as individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community are bombarded with insulting content that can lead to feelings of shame and a desire to conceal their identities. This form of satire, or rather “mean” satire, emerges as a potent and damaging type of misinformation.

14 “ wedding night among Spiosexual “

15 “An American man who spends billions of dollars to become a woman”

5.3.2.2.3 Misleading Content

Misleading content was identified as another prevalent type of misinformation. One prominent example of misleading content involves the association between Sub-Saharan migrants and the spread of HIV in Tunisia. Exploiting the awareness of HIV prevalence among young people in Sub-Saharan Africa, some misleading content draws a direct connection between migrants and the perceived threat of HIV transmission in Tunisia. This manipulation of information helps perpetuate stereotypes and fosters unfounded fears.

CSE was also highlighted as another example of misleading content. Many articles and traditional media sources often use the term "sex education" instead of the more precise "sexual and reproductive health." According to interviewees, such inaccurate terminology has spread through social media, reducing sexuality to merely sex, which contributes to the misperception of education as promoting sexual intercourse among young people. This misleading content fails to consider important aspects of sexuality such as relationships, gender equality, and open dialogue.

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"People think that CSE encourages young people to have sex. It's true that CSE teaches about genitals, contraception, and other topics, but with the aim of protecting young people from hazards. It aims to teach them how to have a healthy sexual relationship, how to protect their own bodies from harassment, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and where to go for help if any of these issues happen. The misconception that CSE promotes sexual activity is a result of false information and misunderstanding." – Key informant, Tunisia

As another example of selective and misleading information, one interviewee mentioned Article 230 related to homosexuality. They explained that people often misinterpret the article, wrongly accusing advocacy groups of endorsing harmful actions and supporting gay marriage and pedophilia. This misinterpretation disregards the article's actual content, which specifically addresses consensual activities between adults in private spaces, thus encouraging misinformation about its essence and objectives.

¹⁶ Screenshot from Only Tunisia - Translation: For the first time in the Arab World, Tunisia will teach sex education in school curricula starting from the age of five

¹⁷ Screenshot from Sbeh Ennes By Mosaïque FM (Radio show) - Translation: Exclusive and for the first time in the Arab World: Tunisia will teach sex education starting from the age of five, starting December 2019.

"For example, when an association posts something about removing Article 230, people jump directly to say that the association wants children to be raped. They disregard the fact that Article 230 concerns a relationship between two consenting adults in a private place." – Key Informant, Tunisia

5.3.2.2.4 Manipulated Content

Although not commonly addressed in the KII or the FGD, manipulated content emerged consistently in the online survey, with 15 respondents identifying it as a prominent type of misinformation in the Tunisian digital landscape.

Influencers and cosmetic pages were identified as notable culprits in disseminating manipulated content, often featuring photoshopped before-and-after images, especially in the context of products claiming to lighten genitalia. For instance, a key informant mentioned, "Recently, Bella Emylie was promoting a cream that makes breasts larger. We, specialists, know this is wrong information and that there are no creams that can magically enlarge breasts. It is 100% wrong. She was saying that she used it and it worked."

The prevalence of manipulated content also appears to extend to issues surrounding trans individuals, where false narratives are crafted to undermine their identities. This often serves the purpose of spreading inaccurate information, as well as promoting gender stereotypes and the objectification of women.

5.3.2.2.5 False Connections

Similar to misleading content, false connections stood out as a prevalent type of misinformation in Tunisia, as indicated by the online survey, accounting for 41.2%, as well as in the KIIs

An illustrative example was provided by [Nourshene Chegueni](#), a midwife and content creator specialising in SRH in Tunisia. She highlighted a case where another influencer shared information from an article they found online and presented it as a verified fact. The mentioned article purportedly asserted that consuming chicken could lead to infertility.

"There's once an influencer who used a CSE topic just to hook people and attract them, but eventually, she was talking about something else. She knows that people usually watch the first 10 seconds and this can mislead them. The misinformation was about eating chicken leading to infertility for men. The worst is that she is not a health professional. She is a foodie and makes content about food and she used an article that she found on Google. The problem is that she has a lot of influence since she has a lot of followers. I was scared for her and from the reaction of people." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Notably, several tactics are used to establish false connections, such as incorporating links and/or photos that lead to entirely different articles or subjects with misleading titles, as well as strategically selecting the timing for the dissemination of the content.

5.3.2.2.6 Fabricated Content

A significant observation from our study is the strong correlation between fabricated content and other types of misinformation like satire, false connections, and misleading content, a distinction often overlooked in KIIs. Notably, using a combination of different techniques and misconceptions, along with creating intentionally post-produced content, leads to the construction of fabricated content.

Interviewees shared that fabricated content goes beyond mere statements to the creation of elaborate false narratives. Instances arise where individuals craft entire paragraphs, complete with links to seem more credible, yet the content they provide is entirely fabricated.



Among the fabricated content mentioned by interviewees and commonly spread on websites and social media is misinformation about gay marriage. For example, an article falsely claiming 'Tunisia becomes the first Arab country to recognize same-sex marriage,' accompanied by a photo, was entirely fabricated.

This deliberate manipulation aims to misinform and shape public opinion, underscoring the potential harm caused by the intentional spread of misinformation. Furthermore, it generates hate speech exacerbating the negative impact of intentional misinformation on societal discourse.

5.3.2.2.7 False Context

The research participants emphasized the immense significance of context and timing in communications regarding SRHR topics, particularly Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), LGBTQIA+ rights, and issues concerning Sub-Saharan migrants. These elements crucially shape young people's engagement with the information, influencing both the effectiveness of the message and its reception among the target audience.

A notable instance of this is the theory of the "Great Replacement," frequently mentioned in the discourse of the Tunisian president, which has contributed to shaping public perception of migrants as threats and invaders in Tunisia. This conspiracy theory suggests that Sub-Saharan migrants intend to "colonize" Tunisia and alter its demographic composition. Such narratives are not exclusive to Tunisia; similar theories are often utilized in various societies to justify racism. In this context, certain posts on gender-based violence against Sub-Saharan individuals, a component of CSE, are misperceived as being recent developments, coinciding with the president's statements. In reality, such incidents have been occurring for years both before and after the president's discourse. However, the circulation of old videos with the intent of fueling hatred and inciting more violence against Sub-Saharan women demonstrates the dangers of miscommunication and false context information.

5.3.2.2.8 Imposter Content

Imposter content was not frequently mentioned in either the KIIs or the online survey. The only notable instance relates to content falsely presented as originating from a 'British study.' One Key Informant from Tunisia, a young person, noted, 'Fabricated content often involves the use of nonsensical false percentages and statistics, commonly prefaced with phrases like "according to a British study."' This observation points to a subtle form of imposter

content where the credibility of information is artificially enhanced by associating it with a reputed foreign source, albeit without direct impersonation.

5.3.2.3 Sources and Intentionality of Online SRHR Misinformation

The research findings provide valuable insight into the complex origins of misinformation within Tunisia's digital landscape. They reveal a misinformation environment characterised by the significant role of individual actors who sporadically disseminate deceptive content across various digital and social media platforms, as opposed to coordinated efforts by organised entities or institutions. Notably, while specific instances suggest intentional dissemination, particularly in political, economic, or religious contexts, a substantial portion of misinformation appears to arise from unintentional factors, such as a lack of awareness or inadvertent belief in false information, particularly during periods of upheaval or in response to specific events or controversies. This section delineates the primary sources and motivations behind online misinformation concerning SRHR in Tunisia, as revealed by the research findings.

- **Political figures, particularly the president of Tunisia,** play a significant role in spreading misinformation about a wide range of issues, including SRHR, often using derogatory language like "queer" with a negative connotation. The president has expressed intentions to combat the LGBTQIA+ agenda, framing it as a foreign-funded conspiracy. This has led some to refer to the president as a "disinformant-in-chief." In fact, the president has been showcasing generally conservative tendencies, policies, and practices that are alarming to many human rights, women's rights, and queer advocates. In addition, it seems that he is determined to abolish queer and LGBTQIA+ associations, as he promised before the elections of 2019 that led him to the presidency of the Republic. There are calls from civil society and activists for state institutions and political authorities to use more careful language to avoid harmful stereotypes and derogatory terms and to avoid confusion when dealing with LGBTQIA+ people or migrants as the main targets of the institutional smear campaigns.

"I think that the Tunisian administration, state institutions, and the political authorities in Tunisia need to be more careful of their choice of words in their communications. The language used by these actors is full of stereotypes and rejection of difference. When the president of the Republic makes a declaration calling people 'showeth' (queer in a negative way), why is he using this language to describe a minority? This language has a certain connotation that can be harmful." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Political entities, including the national party (Al Hezb Al Watani),** are involved in spreading xenophobic and racist discourse. Pages aligned with the government and Islamist groups also contribute to misinformation. Findings reveal that this is a common issue among most political parties that aim at pleasing the wider public. Even the most progressive political forces would avoid talking about CSE or the LGBTQIA+ community to avoid any altercation with the conservative public and secure sympathy and, eventually, voters.
- **Mainstream media and social media:** There is a notable connection between mainstream media and social media. Some KIs mentioned that mainstream media has extended its influence to social media platforms. This is achieved by resharing content on social media and adapting it to the digital space. Techniques employed include using misleading titles and manipulating images or videos, which inevitably generates misinformation. This observation was made by various interviewees who highlighted how mainstream media content, when shared on social media, contributes to the spread of misinformation. The opposite is also true, as some talk shows and popular TV shows look for information/misinformation on social media that can be transformed into sensational material. The social media content then becomes a headline in primetime shows, drawing a bigger audience and generating more profit.

- **Cultural productions and TV series:** Tunisian TV series were recognised for promoting violence, including sexual violence, through narratives of sexual assault, rape, and non-consensual sexual relationships that result in childbirth. Interviewees noted that these series profoundly influence young people, especially when amplified on social media, shaping attitudes towards violence, illegal migration, and harassment. Young viewers often memorise and joke about these troubling scenarios, contributing to the normalisation of violence and sexual violence. These shows are also suggested to influence societal perceptions of masculinity and femininity, with masculinity often associated with physical strength, control over women, and sexual dominance, as depicted in series like "Awled Moufida." Additionally, media outlets play a role in sensationalising these themes to attract viewers. One interviewee highlighted the negative impact of harmful language and media representations, drawing examples from series such as "Al Hajjema" and "Choufli Hall." These comedy series, rife with violence, misconceptions, and bullying, trivialise serious issues like mental health and LGBTQIA+ rights, further normalising inappropriate behaviours.

"Choufli Hall is a series that is full of stereotypes and social norms. For example, the gay character played by Lotfi Abdelli shows the social stereotypes about gay men. Society thinks that gay men need to be effeminate, extravagant, look and behave like Lotfi Abdelli's character, which is not true in reality. So, this reinforces the stereotype. Choufli Hall has been playing for years on repeat on YouTube. There are a lot of satiric memes that came out of the gay characters." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

"I think Tunisian TV series are part of these platforms promoting acts of violence, including sexual violence. When the series is broadcasted on social media, it results in much more impact on young people than when it is broadcasted in classic media." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Social media influencers:** Social media influencers, especially on platforms like TikTok, are contributing to the spread of misinformation. Their focus often lies in creating sensational content aimed at generating a "buzz," rather than prioritising accuracy or sensitivity to societal issues. Some media personalities, including Malek Khedhri, Bella Emylie, El zoug, Lapa, and Lady Samara, were identified for spreading content that is homophobic, violent, and stereotypical. They position themselves as credible figures, offering advice on relationships and sexual matters, and command significant followings. Notably, Lady Samara and Bella Emylie are viewed as successful, attractive role models who have risen from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to achieve a comfortable lifestyle. Lady Samara's influence was highlighted when a fan paid tribute to her on a reality show. As a result, followers of such influencers often regard the information they share as reliable and accurate. However, the content from these influencers frequently reflects patriarchal views, emphasising male dominance over women, and is often driven by profit motives. For example, we were told that Bella Emylie promoted a product that led to hospital visits for several women who experienced varying degrees of burns after following her recommendation.

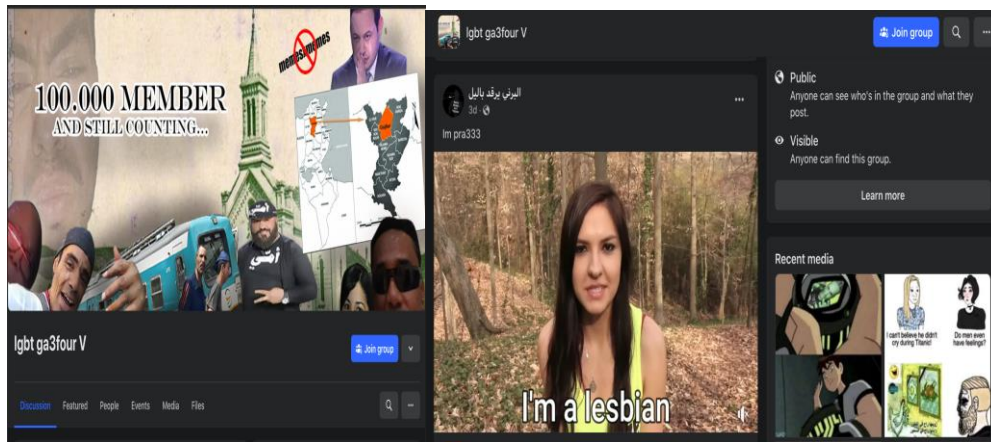
"Lady Samara remains an example of disinformation and misinformation and how harmful its impact can be. She once said, addressing men, that if a woman is not going along with their flirtation, they should beat her up. She also says to girls and women, if you are wearing something revealing, people have the right to abuse you." —Key informant, Tunisia (young person)

"El Madame", an anonymous individual running a satirical YouTube channel and social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook, is also known for circulating misogynistic and homophobic content. This platform primarily uses satire to target influencers, often grounded in patriarchal values. The primary motivation behind these attacks seems to be to provoke reactions and comments, thereby generating income.

In addition to Tunisian influencers, Tunisians also follow international figures like Ben Shapiro, a conservative influencer known for giving more legitimacy to homophobic, misogynistic, and transphobic discourses.

"It's not only in the U.S., [but] in Tunisia as well, you have a lot of young people who follow Ben Shapiro and other people who are promoting a very conservative discourse and a conservative social model. These influencers mostly target uneducated and not very aware people." – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Lone wolves and satirical groups:** Some KIs identified individuals and groups acting independently (also known as "lone wolves") to spread misinformation, particularly in the context of misogyny and homophobia. Groups like "LGBT Gaafour," for instance, engage in satire about various topics, including LGBTQIA+ issues, thereby contributing to the landscape of misinformation. Their content is primarily composed of memes curated by page administrators, which often mock or trivialise LGBTQIA+ people.



- **Pornographic websites:** It was frequently noted that young people often turn to pornography websites for information about sex. KIs have emphasised the potential harm of such platforms, including inducing body image issues, creating unrealistic expectations about oneself and partners, and contributing to confusion among young individuals. However, it was also acknowledged that, despite its unreliability as a source of comprehensive SRHR information, pornography can act as a form of sex education in the absence of better alternatives. One informant pointed out that pornography can help young people learn about their own anatomy and that of potential partners. They also noted the benefit of pornography in exposing its audience to a wide and diverse range of body types and shapes. This perspective highlights the complex role of pornography in sexual education, especially in contexts where more formal and reliable sources of information are lacking or inaccessible.

In examining the motivations behind the spread of misinformation and whether it is done intentionally, several categories of actors with differing intentions have been identified. First, there are individuals who deliberately spread SRHR misinformation. Their motivations vary, including political agendas, a desire for societal approval, or seeking sympathy. These actors are often aware of the impact of their misinformation and use it to further specific goals or viewpoints.

Conversely, there is a group that inadvertently contributes to misinformation due to a lack of knowledge or awareness. This is particularly evident among some social media influencers who may not fully understand the implications or accuracy of the SRHR information they share. Their misinformation stems more from ignorance

than from a deliberate attempt to deceive. A third category, identified as "benefit-driven" in the KIIs, includes those who strategically use SRHR misinformation for personal gain, particularly financial. This group is characterised by their use of misinformation to promote products or services, capitalising on the high level of interest in SRHR topics to attract attention and generate income.

This multifaceted nature of motivations behind SRHR misinformation underscores the complexity of addressing this issue, as it involves tackling a range of motivations and understanding the diverse reasons why different actors might spread false or misleading information in this sensitive area.

5.3.2.4 Factors Impacting the Spread of Digital SRHR Misinformation

The factors detailed below are prominently featured in both FGDs and KIIs. Primary among them are cultural norms, societal norms, and religious factors. The second significant category encompasses economic and commercial factors, while the third crucial factor is the political dimension.

5.3.2.4.1 Social, Cultural, and Religious Factors

In Tunisia, the spread of digital misinformation regarding SRHR is significantly influenced by a combination of social, cultural, and religious factors, and to a certain extent, economic and political factors.

One of the predominant challenges brought up in the findings is the cultural notion of **taboo and shame** (عيب). In the relatively culturally conservative context of Tunisia, conversations about sexual and reproductive health are delicate and often avoided or spoken about in vague terms and in secret. This reluctance is further exacerbated by entrenched gender stereotypes, misogyny, and toxic masculinity, which collectively create barriers to effectively addressing vital aspects like consent, violence, safety, and societal gender norms, especially when it comes to unmarried women's sexual health and rights or LGBTQIA+ people. In fact, there is usually an assumption that unmarried people in general, and unmarried women in particular, do not have sex and therefore, do not have the right to talk about sex or sexuality. Otherwise, this can affect their reputation and thus, social acceptance into society.

Within this context, sexual matters need to remain secret. Therefore, in the absence of reliable sources of information and reliable and safe service providers, most young people will either look for information online or rely on advice from peers that might not be accurate or helpful. Consequently, many young individuals find themselves with inadequate information about their own bodies and their SRHR. The judgmental nature of the environment often deters them from seeking guidance from their immediate and supposedly safe environment. For instance, talking to parents is almost never an option in Tunisian society due to the culture of secrecy surrounding SRHR. As a result, young people often turn to the internet in search of information, only to encounter more misinformation than accurate, evidence based knowledge.

"These searches are common, especially among younger individuals who may not feel comfortable discussing such matters with adults or older individuals. I also refrain from sharing SRH-related content because my social circle falls into two categories: those who are open-minded, informed about SRHR, and accepting of it, and those who consider it taboo and might find it uncomfortable to discuss. As a result, I'm more comfortable leaving comments on such content, but I tend to avoid sharing it on my own timeline. In Tunisia, there is a lack of a secure and welcoming environment for young people to inquire about or advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights." – Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Religion serves as another significant barrier preventing young people in Tunisia from seeking and openly discussing topics related to SRHR. The social and religious values entrenched in the lives of Tunisian youth deeply influence their attitudes and behaviours across various aspects of life, including in the digital realm, especially when it comes to SRHR. Discussions around LGBTQIA+ issues often ignite religious controversy, particularly when framed

within the context of the Qu'ran's story of People of Lut (قوم لوط) about a community living in the cities of Sodom and Ghommorrah and who used to practice homosexuality. Their sexual practices supposedly triggered great punishment from God who destroyed their cities. This story contributes to the perpetuation of homophobia, transphobia, hate speech, and gender-based violence since it is thought that these practices bring God's damnation and are warning of imminent destruction of the community.

The story of Loth has different religious interpretations and is consistently used to justify violence and even killing of homosexuals. Women are also the target of religious narratives that limit their role to bearing and rearing children and depriving them of pleasure or from accessing contraception, since some religious views see contraception as against Islam. Transwomen are frequently the target of hate campaigns since they are "letting go" of their masculine privileges, resulting in other men and society judging them even more harshly and excluding them not only from society but from the whole system. In fact, trans-people are usually denied health care, jobs, or basic services such as opening a bank account.

Additionally, discussions about sex are often shrouded in religious language, labeling such matters as forbidden ("haram") without necessarily providing clear or comprehensive explanations. This approach not only inhibits open and healthy conversations about sexuality but also reinforces misconceptions and misinformation, further complicating the efforts to educate and empower young people regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This complexity is encapsulated by an interviewee's observation that "there are still many complexities and a tricky relationship between Arab-Muslim societies and their bodies."

The lack of awareness and educational mechanisms regarding SRHR were also identified as factors that significantly increase the risk of misinformation. In Tunisian society, parents and schools, as primary agents of socialisation, hold substantial responsibility for providing accurate information on these topics. However, as noted by a key informant in Tunisia, there is a notable deficiency in SRHR education within high schools, where teenagers spend a considerable amount of their time. This gap in information at a critical stage of adolescence contributes to the persistence of misconceptions and lack of knowledge among young people about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

5.3.2.4.2 Economic and Commercial Factors

Economic factors: Economic factors have been identified as both a cause and a consequence of misinformation in the context of SRHR. Interviewees highlighted that economic disparities create significant barriers to accessing quality sexual and reproductive health services and information, a divide that is particularly stark across different social classes. High costs for medical consultations, medications, and procedures such as abortion drive individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds to seek free information online. This not only increases their vulnerability to misinformation but also contributes to inequalities in accessing health services, leading to increased exposure to health hazards like unsafe abortions.

Furthermore, the content on SRHR provided by alternative or associative media platforms is suggested to be influenced by the agendas and requirements of donors. The issues they cover may not necessarily address the needs of young people, instead aligning with the programmatic, financial, and grant-related priorities of these donor organisations. An interviewee noted a sense of skepticism when encountering such content, feeling that it often prioritises donors' agendas over genuine sexual health concerns. They expressed that if the creators were truly committed to their message, the impact and reach of this content would likely be more substantial.

Commercial factors: In addition, content creators, including influencers, are frequently motivated by personal gains. They often aim to create a buzz to gain fame and attract more engagement in the form of likes and comments. The controversial nature of SRHR topics makes them particularly suitable for boosting social media engagement, especially during periods of low activity. Influencers like Bella Emylie, for instance, may engage in current debates or discuss provocative and sensational topics, such as bleaching intimate areas, with the intent of promoting products rather than educating on SRHR. In doing so, they contribute to the spread of misinformation

and the potential promotion of harmful products. Content creators, including influencers, may also be **driven by the benefits**. Thus, they provoke buzz in order to gain fame, and attract more likes and comments. Given the controversial nature of SRHR topics, addressing them can boost social media accounts, especially during low periods.

"A lot of influencers are primarily focused on generating buzz, accumulating likes, views, and comments. There are accounts that typically cover news or other unrelated topics but resort to using SRHR misinformation to capture attention, often employing religious, social, and pseudo-scientific evidence. Their ultimate aim is to elicit as many reactions as possible, as this translates into greater monetary gain. Similarly, other digital media outlets exploit LGBTQIA+ and SRHR topics to create catchy titles, drawing attention to their content even at the cost of spreading misinformation." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

5.3.2.4.3 Political Factors

SRHR misinformation has been identified as **a distractive strategy used by decision-makers** to divert attention from socio-economic issues, crises, and failures, including government corruption and inflation. By focusing on unconscious and irrational identity issues, decision-makers avoid directly confronting socio-economic challenges, instead keeping people preoccupied with discussing their various opinions on SRHR matters. Additionally, interviewees shared that controversies surrounding SRHR and migrants are politically exploited to shift blame away from the government for rising unemployment rates, which are over 35% among higher education diploma and degree holders. In these instances, decision-makers may legitimize hate speech against migrants by linking them to job scarcity, reflecting a discourse similar to that used in northern Mediterranean countries.

"This is a well-known strategy. So, in order to make people forget about corruption and other socio-economic issues and failures. It's very useful to talk about the LGBTQIA+ or sexual education or Sub-Saharan migrants because then, you are not addressing the conscience of people or their rational selves but rather their unconscious and irrational sense of identity and belonging." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

5.3.3 Underlining the Impact of SRHR Misinformation on Young People's Beliefs, Behaviours, and/or Attitudes

5.3.3.1 General Impact of SRHR Misinformation

- **Pulling out from the digital space:** Social media not only perpetuates the dissemination of misinformation but also serves as an expansive platform for open discussions. Unfortunately, this open space often becomes a breeding ground for discriminatory, stigmatising, and often violent rhetoric, particularly targeting women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and Sub-Saharan migrants. These inherent characteristics significantly impact the reliability of information concerning SRHR, transforming social media from a space of constructive exchange into one marred by violence. This violence leads some people to pull out from the digital space and, as a result, pushed into isolation, as one of the key informants testified. For instance, one of the key informants, who is a trans woman, stopped using Facebook because of the digital violence based on misinformation such as satire.
- **Health issues:** The spread of misinformation about sexual and reproductive health significantly impacts young people, influencing their choices and overall well-being. Both physical and mental health issues were commonly discussed in all KIs. Women and transwomen are particularly susceptible to these problems. Physical health issues include, among others, unverified products leading to allergies and the impacts of alternative prescriptions, such as contraceptives with incorrect dosages, offered by non-

medical platforms. The effect can be more dangerous with trans-people making their own hormones mix, for example, or some women using unsafe and unhealthy methods for abortion that can be fatal.

Mental health issues include feelings of isolation, self-image and body issues, and unhealthy comparison with peers, to mention a few. For instance, pornography exposes young people to references that may not align with personal experiences and differences, influencing their perception of their bodies and leading to self-image issues, guilt, and shame in relation to sex.

- **Strengthening hate speech, cyberviolence, moral judgment, and conservatism.** Satire mostly makes the digital space unsafe and leaves a big margin for uncontrolled hate speech and cyberviolence, including psychological violence and verbal abuse, especially against persons who do not fit into societal molds and do not conform to social expectations. This constant harassment could lead to people repressing parts of themselves, propagating false and conservative ideas to fit into their social group, and/or answering violence with violence. Unfortunately, this violence is not limited to the digital space but can also lead to physical violence in real life as well as widespread smear campaigns, such as in the case of Malek Khedhri. LGBTQIA+ individuals and young women are usually the main victims of such violence and repression.

5.3.3.2 Impact of Misinformation Related to CSE

- **Health problems:** Unverified content on the use of approved hygiene products leads young people, mostly women, to use inappropriate products for intimate hygiene, leading to allergies and irritation. Furthermore, ads provided by social media influencers promote an image of “bleached and good smelling vaginas,” affecting perceptions about anatomy.

“Lady Samara is providing a completely wrong and biased sexual education for young women. These pieces of advice are harmful and it happened that several girls went to the hospital for burns due to applying Lady Samara’s advice about lightening, tightening, and bleaching the private parts with pomegranate and alum that can be harmful and can cause burns.” —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

Watching pornographic movies can also lead to health issues, including deception, sexual trauma, and vaginismus.

“Also, when people watch porn, they will be brainwashed by commercial beauty and performance standards. As a psychologist, I can confidently say that there is a lot of sexual trauma coming from these standards and the deception of not meeting them in real life.” —Key Informant, Tunisia

Furthermore, misinformation surrounding abortion services and the legal framework places young women at risk of resorting to domestic abortion or experiencing delays due to financial constraints. While abortion services are free and available at family planning clinics and OB-GYN departments in hospitals, there is a prevalent idea that abortion should be performed at private OB-GYN clinics.

These misconceptions primarily originate from social media and are frequently encountered in comments on anonymous posts on platforms like Facebook, women-focused groups, and public pages exclusively sharing inbox messages. Notably, these platforms lack robust comment filtering mechanisms, permitting anyone to contribute without ensuring accuracy or providing credible references.

- **Strengthening gender stereotypes:** Influencers play a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes related to beauty standards, thereby exerting a considerable impact on individuals' self-esteem.

Gender dynamics portraying women as “seductive” and needing to land men who are “providers” are quite common in content from Lady Samara and Bella Emylie, preaching the use of certain cosmetics and clothing, as well as seduction tips, in order to attract men.

Virginity as a cultural norm is surrounded by misinformation like sustaining the idea that masturbation, tampon usage, or riding a bicycle leads to loss of virginity.

"In general, people talk about masturbation for men and not women. People think that when women masturbate, they can lose the ability to have babies, or lose their virginity and things of that sort. People think that men masturbate because they need to discover themselves. Women do not have the right to discover their bodies and their pleasure. Women should not have experience. These are some of the misinformation that I see." —Key Informant, Tunisia

For women, virginity is coveted and perpetuated as a norm. Women are encouraged to avoid masturbation, certain activities, and even specific hygiene products in order to maintain their virginity — recommendations that are misinformation with no scientific basis.

- **Attacking or criticising individuals or groups working on CSE:** The term "comprehensive sexuality education" may not be clear, often causing confusion as people conflate it with the more straightforward concept of sex education. Despite this terminology distinction, it is crucial to recognise that CSE aims to foster a healthy understanding of adolescents and young people's sexuality.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education officially incorporated CSE into curricula. However, during this period, a fabricated document outlining purported objectives of CSE circulated on Facebook pages. This misinformation triggered a strong reaction from parents who deemed the content inappropriate. Consequently, the ATSR Facebook page faced threats, with accusations of attempting to undermine Tunisian society. This incident underscores the challenges in conveying the true essence of comprehensive sexuality education and the impact of misinformation on public perception.

5.3.3.3 Impact of Misinformation Related to the LGBTQA+ Community

- **Health issues:** The dissemination of misinformation surrounding hormone therapy, a medical intervention not permitted in Tunisia for trans individuals, poses a serious threat to their health and well-being. In a climate where access to accurate information about gender-affirming care is restricted, doctors do not provide platforms on gender affirming care or medical consultation and persons identifying as trans are forced to resort to unregulated and unsupervised hormone therapy practices. As a result, they are sharing dosages and other information with no medical reference in private social media groups.

Without professional guidance, individuals may struggle to determine the correct dosage, leading to under- or over-medication and endocrine system disruption. The side effects of unauthorised or self-prescribed hormone therapy may include cardiovascular issues, blood clots, and inconsistent hormone levels, potentially affecting the effectiveness of the treatment and leading to undesired physical and emotional effects as well as increased risk of liver damage. Self-medication can also contribute to mood swings, anxiety, and depression.

"From what I've heard, many transgender individuals are experiencing challenges with their mental health. Some friends have shared that they often feel angry, down, and their mental well-being is deteriorating. Physically, they don't feel well, experiencing changes they didn't anticipate, their sexual desire has decreased, and some start hormone treatment but discontinue it within the first week due to its negative impact on their mental health." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

In addition to the health struggles faced by trans people, the general population is increasingly at risk of HIV infection. In fact, according to a KII working at an SRH association, staff members conducting STD testing noticed a sharp rise in the number of HIV infections (from two to three per month to two to three per day). They have also noticed that infected people come from different economic, social, and educational backgrounds, including doctors. The interviewee thinks that this increasing infection rate is due to a lack of comprehensive sexual education, more particularly, awareness raising about sexually transmitted diseases and/or the lack of seriousness in dealing with CSE.

- **Attacking or criticising individuals or groups working on LGBTQIA+ issues:** Engaging with content related to LGBTQIA+ rights and the exploration of gender identity is seen as promoting a specific culture. Efforts to increase awareness and understanding of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are seen as threats.

There is a persistent misconception that initiatives advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights, including discussions on sexual and reproductive rights, pose a threat. Addressing these topics is not about promoting a singular culture but rather acknowledging the rich tapestry of human experiences and identities. It's an opportunity to create environments that respect and celebrate diversity, dismantling harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

"If, as ATSR, we show openly that we stand with the LGBTQIA+ community, people will attack us even more and won't believe us because of all the widespread misinformation in Tunisia."
—Key informant, Tunisia

- **Violence and social exclusion:** Misunderstandings about LGBTQIA+ individuals lead to harmful stereotypes. People wrongly see it as a culture invading society, threatening norms and religious beliefs. This has fueled unfounded fears, prejudices, and homophobia, resulting in social exclusion for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Associating the community with pedophilia is a baseless stereotype, contributing to stigmatisation and discrimination. These misconceptions have far-reaching consequences, denying basic human rights, causing violence, and impacting mental health due to the associated stigma.

"It reinforces the rejection and the homophobic discourse. On the individual level, we have families rejecting their children and kicking them out of their houses. Some of them are even sequestered (girls). Boys are usually kicked out of the family house. At the end of the day, we find that this disinformation eventually leads young people to school drop-out, loss of employment, etc., leading to a situation of precarity." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

The consequences of this prevalent satire extend to digital media, where it becomes counterproductive, diluting the very causes it purports to represent. Even those defending the LGBTQIA+ community sometimes inadvertently contribute to the issue by engaging in satire that, instead of fostering understanding, further harms the cause. In the Tunisian cultural context, where satire is deeply ingrained in the national personality, finding a balance between humour and respect becomes crucial to maintaining the consistency and credibility of causes.

5.3.3.4 Impact of Misinformation Related to Migrants

Referring to unfounded theories like "the big replacement" (i.e. the demographic replacement of Tunisians by Sub-Saharan migrants, leading to Tunisians becoming darker and of Christian faith) sustains the feeling of being threatened and at risk of assault by migrants. Migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa are seen as not worthy of sharing the same rights as Tunisians, and they should not have access to services because Tunisians should be prioritised and are more deserving. They are also accused of stealing Tunisians' jobs, making them competitors and enemies.

The spread of misinformation not only increases fear among migrants but also imposes constraints on their fundamental rights, hindering their ability to move freely from their residences to essential services such as hospitals, schools, and in particular, SRH centres or associations, as highlighted by one of the KIIs. As a consequence, migrant women are more at risk of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and unsafe childbirth, and migrants in general are at higher risk of STDs and lack of access to medication. In addition, it has been frequently reported that migrant women are often raped or sexually assaulted but these incidents are under-reported because of fear and all the aforementioned reasons.

5.3.4 Mitigation Initiatives and Successful Models

Several mitigation measures to counter SRHR misinformation, as shared by interviewees, have been effectively implemented by the association ATSR. These include:

- **The Salema platform:** This platform not only contains all information about SRHR but also has a feature to engage with a professional in real time to ask questions and express concerns. Many KIIs reported using Salema for activism, work, or personal curiosity.
- **CSE Integration Initiative in Tataouine:** ATSR spearheaded the integration of comprehensive sexual education into the school curriculum in Tataouine, a conservative city in southern Tunisia. The rationale behind this choice was that if the initiative succeeded in one of the most conservative areas of the country, it would have potential to succeed elsewhere. The initiative involved the headmaster and the local teaching staff who were very encouraging and quickly adopted the CSE curriculum. The initiative was a success and is being transferred to other areas of Tunisia.
- **Educational Games and Quizzes:** ATSR also launched a series of innovative educational initiatives such as promoting the use of educational games, including Monopoly-style games and quizzes targeting young people in primary schools, leveraging the power of fun activities in message dissemination. **Collaboration with Social Media Influencers:** ATSR has engaged with social media influencers. The association invited a pool of social media influencers and spent a few hours with them to talk about the best ways to channel accurate SRHR information.
- **Outreach in Youth Spaces:** ATSR reaches out to young people where they are usually present, such as bars, festivals, and clubs. For instance, the association set a stall for the distribution of free condoms and for answering people's questions. This initiative was a relative success.

Other than ATSR, **Pink October**, or Breast Cancer awareness month, is now an established tradition in Tunisia. Many people look for it in order to use free testing and diagnosis and to ask questions to specialists and professionals. This initiative helped destigmatise cancers affecting women and represents a successful CSE measure.

Moreover, **"Sexo santé"** is a mobile app launched by ONFP in 2021. It provides young people with basic information related to SRHR, such as anatomy, sexual violence, consent, puberty, relationships, and sexually transmitted infections. This app has been mentioned by several KIIs. Despite being youth friendly, the app witnesses seasonal rise in use. Its effectiveness is yet to be proved.

On a general note, one of the KIIs, who is a content creator for SRHR, shared that repeating information across various platforms in different formats helps in building trust and reinforcing messages among the audience.

6. Recommendations

Addressing SRHR misinformation is crucial for promoting accurate information and ensuring the well-being of individuals, especially young people. Below is a comprehensive set of recommendations encompassing policy, programmatic, and general strategies to combat SRHR misinformation, with specific insights tailored to the unique contexts of Jordan and Tunisia.

6.1. General Recommendations

The following recommendations are applicable to the two countries featured in this study, as well as other countries worldwide.

Policy recommendations:

Government involvement: Encourage the government to establish institutionalised information centres, online security, and secure online access for minors.

Legislation: Consider laws addressing misinformation while respecting freedom of expression.

Prioritise SRHR: Advocate for SRHR inclusion in the state agenda, budget, and activities.

CSE in schools: Implement CSE in school curricula.

Regulate cosmetic procedures: Enforce stricter regulations for cosmetic procedures.

Programmatic recommendations:

Tailored messaging: Create culturally resonant SRHR messages.

Youth engagement: Involve youth, use youth-friendly language, and engage with them actively in content planning, production, and dissemination.

Enhanced outreach: Intensify outreach efforts, combining online and offline interventions.

Expert input: Promote expert involvement on social media in an engaging and accessible format.

Age-appropriate information: Provide age-tailored SRHR information.

Correction of misinformation: Organise online sessions to debunk misinformation.

Audio and visual communication: Use visuals, podcasts, and videos for accessibility.

Humour and influencers: Utilise satire, humour, and influencers to create and disseminate engaging and youth-attracting content.

Financial support: Allocate funds to SRHR campaigns and content creators.

General recommendations:

Collaboration: Foster collaboration among stakeholders to avoid duplication and allow for information exchange.

Media literacy: Build capacity for identifying, debunking, and countering misinformation.

Inclusive communication: Implement inclusive communication practices.

Innovative outreach: Explore innovative methods for reaching young people.

Platform-specific strategies: Develop tailored strategies for each social media platform.

6.2. Country-Specific Recommendations

6.2.1 Jordan

Programmatic recommendations:

- **The need for strategic messaging aligned with the local context:** Clear definitions, a clear strategy, and more contextualisation efforts for sexual and reproductive health topics are needed in Jordan. It is crucial to craft messages that resonate with the local context without being too confrontational. Simple messages, often which are aligned with religious beliefs, can effectively convey the idea that discussing SRH topics is acceptable even within religious frameworks. This approach has proven to be successful in

the past. Several informants highlighted the importance of improving terminologies used to reflect local context and reality.

"Regarding concepts and terminologies, I think that if we use better and more precise terminologies, our work would be much easier. I noticed that the language used by us is different from the language used by the common people, even if we are trying to say the same thing. I think it's important to reconcile the two languages and to get closer to people in that sense." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Importance of coordination and cooperation between civil society organisations:** Collaboration between various institutions, such as the consortium model employed by Masarouna, is vital. Sharing experiences and expertise ensures that efforts are not duplicated but instead, are built upon established foundations. The SRHR national strategy in Jordan, which includes members from Masarouna and other partners, exemplifies this collaborative approach. It provides a platform for stakeholders, including the Jordanian government, to develop strategies that enhance SRHR at the national level. Joining forces in such consortia can lead to more significant involvement in national strategies and broader impact.
- **Involve youth in SRHR programmes early on:** Young people and youth educators need to be involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of SRHR initiatives as early as possible so that programmes correspond to their needs. It is only by involving youth that organisations can understand which topics are most subjected to cultural myths and misinformation and successfully address them in SRHR interventions. The importance of using youth-friendly language was also highlighted, providing the information on the platforms they are already using, and being proactive with reaching out to youth (instead of the opposite).

"When we talk with young people, we don't need to be this medically oriented. We should use youth friendly language, use the language they speak, and go to the platforms they are interested in. You are the one who should go to the youth. Don't expect that the youth will come to you." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Enhance outreach efforts:** The need to increase the intensity of outreach efforts to reach a more diverse and extensive audience, bridging the gap between existing NGO initiatives and broader community access, was highlighted. Online platforms¹⁸ working on SRHR topics should be widely disseminated and actively work on improving their reach. They should be supported to work jointly/collaboratively with organisations that deliver training to youth on the ground, to amplify their mutual efforts. **Online interventions need to go hand in hand with offline interventions**, as youth will have follow-up questions which need to be addressed.
- **Encourage expert input on social media:** It is recommended to involve doctors, experts, or professionals in discussions on social media regarding these important SRHR topics. Currently, much of the content is relayed or reposted without expert input, which can lead to misinformation. Reliable platforms like "share.net" are important. Podcasts are increasingly influential since many people listen to them. It is important that those providing advice on these platforms are qualified.
- **Tailor SRHR information for different age groups:** It is important to recognise the need to provide accurate information tailored to different age groups. What an 18-year-old needs to know may differ significantly from what a 14-year-old should be exposed to. Additionally, certain topics, like menopause, may not directly concern adolescents but can be vital for other family members. Unfortunately, these topics are rarely discussed.
- **Correcting misinformation through digital platforms:** Online live sessions with SRHR specialists need to take place on popular platforms for youth (such as Instagram), with a specific focus on demystifying and

¹⁸ Civil society institutions are pivotal in spreading accurate information. They can utilize influencers and radio stations for effective communication. For instance, the Community Media Network's commitment to providing accurate information exemplifies how such channels are essential in countering misinformation.

debunking false information on SRHR. **Specialists need to be more involved in actively addressing SRHR misinformation.** Just as some platforms spread misinformation, there are also those dedicated to correcting it. These platforms play a crucial role in addressing and debunking misinformation, thereby shifting public perspectives and fostering more open discussions. For instance, the Community Media Network's commitment to providing accurate information exemplifies how such channels are essential in countering misinformation.

- **Integrate education for caregivers and religious leaders in programming:** Working on providing SRHR education to caregivers, whether they are parents or grandparents, and how they convey information, is important. Similarly, religious leaders have an important role to play in spreading awareness and should be provided with a SRH curriculum to use within their local communities.

"I think more awareness raising should be done so more people (especially families and parents) can access this information. We need to convince families and parents that their children should better know themselves and access reliable information about SRHR in order to protect themselves. Many parents are against SRHR education, especially when it comes to their daughters. We need to explain in a positive way the importance of accessing SRHR information." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Utilise visuals and audio for effective communication:** Photographs, podcasts, and TikTok videos featuring professionals can make information more accessible than scientific articles. Infographics and other visuals, especially when discussing complex issues like depression, can simplify and clarify information, emphasising its impact on the entire family.

"One strategy could be to use cartoons, infographics, or visuals to discuss depression. We can say it's not just about the woman; it affects the husband, the parents, and the care of a daughter who may be suffering from postpartum depression. It targets the entire family foundation. Visuals can simplify and clarify information for people." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Messages need to be delivered in a format that appeals to young people and in a straightforward manner:** Using comedy is a good way to deliver the messages in a light manner. One approach could be to call on stand-up comedians who have a medical background, such as Dr. Abadi, to use their own platforms to share informative SRHR messages. The right influencers (with the right background) can help the spread of correct/accurate information.

"We worked with people who had a base among youth followers. We're not inventing a new platform. And an important point is that we don't create a new platform to put the content, instead we try to mainstream the content within existing platforms." —Key Informant, Jordan

Policy recommendations:

- **Government involvement:** The Jordanian government's role in correcting misinformation is essential. Institutionalised information centres and initiatives providing accurate information are essential. More online security, monitoring content, and ensuring accountability efforts led by the Jordanian Ministry of Information, including providing secure online access to children under the age of 16, were also highlighted.
- **Create a tailored campaign or website specifically for youth, led by the Ministry of Health:** Creating a centralised and trusted source of information which encompasses SRHR content, that everyone in Jordan can refer to, was brought up several times. This source could serve as a reference point for influencers, civil society organisations, and others alike, enabling them to ground their information while maintaining flexibility in their methods of explanation and presentation.

"If the Ministry of Health were to take ownership, they could publish FAQs. And if people see that the Ministry is the owner and the information is clearly reviewed and the terminology is clear — for instance, for us we can't use sexual and reproductive health due to cultural sensitivities — it could be more acceptable. We also can't openly discuss providing condoms or family planning methods to unmarried individuals at the health centres. ... Since as an international organisation or one with international funding, we are limited in the topics we can address, a Ministry of Health platform with culturally appropriate information could be highly acceptable and effective." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Integrate sex education in school curricula:** Several informants stressed the fact that implementing comprehensive sexuality education in schools (together with having a youth educator or a nurse present in every school) is the primary step towards fighting misinformation around SRHR in Jordan. Efforts are needed by the Ministry of Education to provide contextually sensitive information to students, jointly with the Ministry of Health and the Royal Association for Health Awareness, as they are the most credible and trusted sources in Jordan when it comes to SRHR.

"I believe having comprehensive sexuality education in schools is the main step to fight all of this, so I would go for offline (interventions); with the government; in schools as a kind of intervention." —Key Informant, Jordan

- **Expand SRHR education beyond NGOs and work through multifaceted approaches:** Addressing taboos surrounding SRHR topics, from multiple approaches, including scientific, religious, and social perspectives, can help overcome political constraints. For instance, in Jordan, reproductive health is endorsed by policies emphasising its broader impact on family health. Despite societal resistance, efforts to convey this message are gradually diminishing opposition. It is important to broaden the scope of SRHR discussions to encompass schools, universities, and mosques whereby influential religious figures can contribute positively. This will ensure that wider audiences will receive essential information.
- **Financial support:** Awareness campaigns, products, and podcasts related to SRH should receive financial support. Qualified influencers, especially those with a medical background, should be supported to discuss well-researched SRHR topics.
- **Regulations for cosmetic procedures:** There should be stricter regulations and oversight of cosmetic procedures in Jordan, especially in non-medical settings like salons and pharmacies. Instances of under-qualified individuals, such as dentists, offering cosmetic services have become common. This issue needs addressing to prevent serious incidents from occurring.

Other recommendations:

- **Accessibility of health services:** SRH services need to be accessible, including for people with disabilities. The Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is working on this front, however more needs to be done in order to make services and facilities inclusive and equipped for various needs.
- **Leverage key entry points such as universities:** The RHA is involved with Jordanian universities and developing curricula in health promotion and reproductive health. These are currently available in 13 universities across Jordan and are highly sought after by students, showcasing a strong need to learn more.
- **More awareness raising before marriage to both genders:**

"I also noticed a lack of platforms providing advice before marriage or during pregnancy and all the changes that happen during these events (psychological). I feel there should be more awareness raising, including medical awareness raising to women but also to their husbands." —Key Informant, Jordan

6.2.2 Tunisia

Programmatic recommendations:

- **Address the language barrier:** Generally, posts are published in a single language (Arabic or French and increasingly English). This can limit the accessibility of sources and resources as many people do not understand these languages, especially if many technical words are used. Therefore, the language used has to be accessible and understandable and reflect the language needs of the target population(s), taking into account key considerations such as dialect.

"Classical Arabic is not the language we use in our everyday life in Tunisia to talk about sex. Young people do not relate to such content and there are no current alternatives" —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Use unified concepts at the regional level** to facilitate the dissemination of accurate information related to SRHR and ensure appropriate control of the production and spread of misinformation.
- **Use accessible and understandable language:** Avoid jargon or technical concepts that cannot be easily understood by a non-specialist audience. Indeed, simplifying concepts facilitates the promotion and internalisation of accurate information related to SRHR.
- **Develop appropriate content for the youth audience** and use innovative formats such as podcasts, reels, and games. NGOs and public institutions should opt for a participatory approach with young people through the assessment of their needs and through upgrading and adapting the ways used to communicate with them by creating structured content to effectively control the quality of information.

"Videos and podcasts are a good practice to implement and are more attractive to young people. Many young people listen to podcasts while doing something else. They also like a series of videos with different themes about SRHR. Podcasts and videos are very successful on a global level." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Encourage knowledgeable people to create content on social media:** Create a digital "ambassadors pool" that utilises digital platforms and employs the same communication techniques used by spreaders of misinformation in a positive manner, with the aim of combating misinformation and countering the fake, wrong, and misleading narratives. In addition, **encouraging social media content creators and mass media professionals** to produce accurate content by launching competitions and awards can be beneficial on the long run.
- **Adopt a mixed communication approach** by launching, for example, awareness campaigns at the university rather than digital campaigns. Face-to-face contact allows young people to ask questions and receive immediate answers by specialists. Medical staff should also provide more ample information about SRHR by default when dealing with young people. This practice should be adopted across all medical practices.

"I believe the university should be a primary focus, as young individuals there can play a pivotal role in facilitating awareness campaigns and making information more accessible to various demographics." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Adopt an approach of inclusive communication** that takes into consideration the needs and experiences of marginalised people such as people with disabilities. It is extremely important to apply accessibility

standards such as colour choices, typography, braille letters, and so on to ensure communications are as accessible and inclusive as possible.

- **Use mass media** to disseminate accurate information and reach a wider audience. Recruit and train journalists and TV and radio hosts and anchors on how to present and treat SRHR-related information as well as how to debunk misinformation that usually comes from social media. Collaborate with existing authorities such as the High Independent Authority for Audiovisual Communication ([HAICA](#)) in order to enforce such measures.
- **Engage in capacity building** for both institutional and NGO key actors, as well as young people, on how to identify, debunk, and counter misinformation. Such capacity-building will help raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health, encourage young people and stakeholders to adopt healthy habits when dealing with information and contribute to disseminating more accurate information. This can be done through digital media literacy initiatives that build a culture of information verification and social responsibility for all actors, including disseminators and audiences.

"The need for training sessions specifically tailored for trans individuals on this topic. Unfortunately, the challenge is compounded by the lack of qualified endocrinologists, and even some doctors would benefit from training sessions in this area." —Key Informant, Tunisia

Policy recommendations:

- **Setting up collaborations and partnerships** is essential to implement the necessary measures to limit misinformation. The first step is to identify stakeholders for design projects. We need to map the stakeholders working on CSE, SRHR, and other key areas. These stakeholders need to establish a common roadmap and action plan in order to avoid repetition, duplication, and overlap and to make better use of already shrinking resources.

"We need to map the stakeholders working on CSE, SRHR, etc. These stakeholders need to establish a common roadmap and action plan." —Key Informant, Tunisia

- **Propose a law that criminalises misinformation** to promote autoregulation and optimise the production of accurate and verified information related to SRHR. This recommendation, although mentioned by several KIs, is quite controversial. Criminalising misinformation can breach freedom of expression when instrumentalised. In addition, decree 54 constitutes a legal framework against misinformation and has been instrumentalised to criminalise perceived opponents to the current regime in Tunisia.

"I'm aware that probably there has been a law introduced that defines misinformation as a criminal offense." —Key Informant, Tunisia (young person)

- **Prioritise sexual and reproductive health in the official state agenda, budget, and activity**, especially with the skyrocketing number of STDs among all backgrounds. Present the SRHR issue as a national health hazard that should be taken more seriously.
- Effectively **integrate and implement CSE** in school curricula from kindergarten to secondary school in order to ingrain healthy beliefs and practices within the new generation. This information, when provided to young people at an early stage, can help prevent the spread and the consumption of misinformation later on and protect young people from the harmful effects of SRHR misinformation.

Other recommendations:

- SRHR actors should **seek innovative methods** to reach young people where they usually are such as festivals, clubs, and other social events in order to enhance the possibility of disseminating accurate information related to SRHR and communicate directly with a diverse and large public of young people.
- **Conduct research** related to SRHR specific to each social media platform.
- Focus on **eliminating stigma around LGBTQIA+ rights** through **effective advocacy**.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, our comprehensive study has illuminated the intricate landscape of SRHR information and misinformation in the digital realms of Tunisia and Jordan. In an era defined by the rapid proliferation of digital information, the imperative of ensuring young people's access to accurate SRHR information cannot be overstated. Our research has unveiled the dual nature of online platforms, serving as vital sources of SRHR information while also harbouring a diverse range of misinformation that significantly influences young individuals' perceptions and behaviours pertaining to SRHR, extending its impact into various facets of their lives.

Key findings from our study reveal significant challenges and complexities surrounding SRHR information and misinformation in both countries, touching upon issues such as cultural and social norms, accessibility, and the myriad impacts of misinformation.

Consequently, we have provided a set of evidence-based recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges. These recommendations are intended to guide stakeholders, policymakers, and SRHR organisations in adopting effective strategies to enhance the digital SRHR landscape in Tunisia and Jordan. Our recommendations span a wide spectrum of actions, from education initiatives and digital platform development to engagement with civil society, responsible social media use, public awareness campaigns, and support for marginalised groups. By implementing these recommendations, we take substantial strides toward countering SRHR misinformation, amplifying the presence of accurate information, and safeguarding the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young individuals in Tunisia and Jordan. Collaboration among all stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, educational institutions, and tech companies, is paramount in the realisation of these goals.

This study stands as an innovative approach, addressing the intersection between misinformation and disinformation with SRHR in culturally sensitive contexts. It opens the door for further in-depth exploration, suggesting potential areas for future research and expansion of the quantitative aspect to offer a more comprehensive understanding of SRHR information dynamics. In Jordan, additional topics influenced by SRHR-related misinformation have emerged, such as period poverty, menopause, the "wedding night," SGBV, early marriage among Syrian refugees, LGBTQI+ issues, female genital mutilation, and the SRHR of people with disabilities, all warranting further investigation in subsequent studies. Furthermore, the observed correlation between cyberviolence and misinformation in Tunisia, especially through Klls, highlights the need for comprehensive research on the relationship between these two phenomena and their impact on young people. Additionally, the role of traditional media in disseminating misinformation online underscores the necessity of examining media practices related to SRHR in the digital age. Lastly, the unique characteristics and audiences of different social media platforms call for specific studies tailored to each platform.

Furthermore, we propose the exploration of the following research areas:

- **Long-term effects of SRHR misinformation:** Delve more deeply and comprehensively into the long-term consequences of SRHR misinformation on individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making regarding topics like family planning, reproductive health, and relationships.
- **Gender-based analysis:** Investigate the gendered impacts of SRHR misinformation, examining how misinformation affects different genders and the role of gender norms in misinformation dissemination and beliefs.

- **Online behaviour and SRHR:** Explore how online behaviour, such as the sharing of SRHR information and engagement with SRHR-related content, correlates with individuals' real-world SRHR decision-making and outcomes.
- **Digital literacy interventions:** Evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions and educational programmes aimed at improving young people's ability to critically assess and navigate SRHR information online.
- **Qualitative analysis of misinformation ecosystems:** Conduct in-depth qualitative studies to understand the motivations, beliefs, and intentions of individuals and groups responsible for propagating SRHR misinformation.
- **Legal and regulatory frameworks:** Analyse the legal and regulatory frameworks governing SRHR information and misinformation online and assess their effectiveness in protecting individuals' rights and promoting accurate information.

By addressing these areas and continuously refining our research methodologies, we can deepen our understanding of SRHR-related issues in the digital age, develop targeted interventions, and contribute to the enhancement of SRHR information and access on a global scale.

This comprehensive study offers RNW Media and its partner organisations in Jordan and Tunisia, the Community Media Network and Al-Qatiba, a multitude of benefits. Firstly, it equips RNW Media with a deep understanding of the intricate landscape of SRHR information and misinformation in these countries' digital domains. This knowledge enables RNW Media to make informed decisions and design tailored interventions that directly address the challenges identified in the study, aligning with its core mission of co-creating digital solutions with young individuals aged 18-35. By actively addressing SRHR-related misinformation and safeguarding digital rights, RNW Media strengthens its commitment to the Digital Rights Agenda (DRA) 2023, particularly in addressing the gendered impact of disinformation.

Furthermore, the evidence-based insights gained from this research provide a solid foundation for advocacy efforts and policy changes, enhancing RNW Media's role as a credible advocate for positive change in the digital landscape. Additionally, the study's global relevance allows RNW Media to gain insights that can be leveraged in other regions where it operates, contributing to a more holistic approach to SRHR and digital rights globally.

As for the partners, we hope that through this study, they will be able to invest this knowledge to improve their efforts to combat SRHR misinformation as part of their overall objectives.

Annex 1. Mapping Table (Jordan)

Platform type	Platform name	Platform description as per official website/platform	Digital media presence
Dedicated	LGBTQ Jordan	LGBT JORDANA is a platform that focuses on body, gender, and sexual	Twitter

pages/platforms/solutions that focus on one or more SRHR issues		diversity in Jordan. Highlighting the online queer Arabic language content.	Instagram
	Khateera	Khateera is an electronic magazine that focuses on women and their diverse experiences and issues.	Website YouTube Instagram
Individual influencers that address one or more SRHR related topics	Sanad Nowar	Passionate about democracy and human rights in Jordan, Sanad often refers to women's rights and SRHR on his account of over 6k followers.	Instagram
NGOS and CSOs that address the topic specifically or among Others	Darabzeen for Human Development	A non-profit organisation that aims to develop communities by addressing diverse topics including SRHR.	Facebook
	Naya	The Naya Community Network aims to contribute to achieving positive change in Jordan peaceful and creative ways.	Facebook
	الفينيق /Phenix Center	The Phenix Center works to spearhead a development model in Jordan that embraces democracy and human rights principles.	Website
	طمي /Tammey	Tammey is a social business and a house of expertise in the field of youth and community development.	Website Facebook Twitter
	Ahel/ أهل	Ahel is institution that empowers those seeking change in organising their strength and leadership to achieve justice in their cases, by accompanying them on their field trips and collective work, and by introducing them and training them on the community organization approach and participatory leadership practices.	Website Facebook Instagram Linkedin Twitter

	جمعية أنا إنسان - لنوي الإعاقة / Ana Insan Organisation For Persons with Disability	"I AM HUMAN" Society for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (I AM HUMAN) is a disabled persons' organisation (DPO) that is non-governmental, non-profit, and volunteer-based. It now has almost four thousand members all over Jordan. Women with disabilities (WwDs) constitute the majority of its members. It aims to provide WwDs with equal access to all spheres of community life, including realisation of all social, economic, political, cultural, health, and legal rights under Jordan's Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.	Facebook
	Takatoaat	Takatoat is a non-governmental, independent feminist collective based in Jordan. It is led by a group of feminist activists working together to spread feminist knowledge, establish safe spaces for women and girls, support their solidarity and struggle against the dominating patriarchal culture, practices, policies, and norms, enhance their effective participation in all sectors and ensure their enjoyment of rights, protection from all forms of gender-based violence, and access to freedom, justice, and equality.	Website Facebook Youtube Twitter Instagram
	تمكين / Tamkeen Center Jordan	Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights is an independent Jordanian non-governmental civil society organisation established in 2007 specialized in labour, migration, and combating human trafficking.	Website Instagram Twitter Facebook
National entities	جمعية معهد تضامن النساء الأردني SIGI	SIGI embodies a symbol of empowerment and equal participation in the journey towards achieving comprehensive and sustainable development in Jordan. The organisation embraces the principle of parity, aiming to engage women and girls in all fields while enhancing their human rights. By fostering a democratic society built upon the values of dignity, freedom, social justice, and respecting diversity, "Empowered Women and Girls" work to promote equal opportunities and respect for diversity in Jordan as a state of citizenship, where everyone enjoys their rights and freedoms.	Website Facebook Instagram YouTube Twitter
	الجمعية الملكية - للتوعية الصحية Royal Health Awareness Society	According to the official website, RHAS develops and implements public health and safety awareness programs in Jordan in partnership with the public and private sectors as well as civil society organisations.	Website Facebook Twitter Instagram YouTube

	المجلس الأعلى للسكان /Higher Population Council (HPC)	According to the official website, the HPC works as a reference for all demographic issues and information related to development in Jordan; facilitates setting policies strategies and action plans with best practices, monitors and evaluates their implementation, advocates, and raises awareness of them and enhances national capabilities in these areas.	Website Facebook Twitter LinkedIn YouTube
International entities	UNFPA Jordan	Active in the country since 1976, UNFPA currently supports the government on issues related to maternal and newborn health, reproductive health, gender equality, and population dynamics. It has also been on the frontlines of the response to the Syrian crisis, providing reproductive health support and life-saving services to Syrian women, girls, and youth in Jordan.	Website Facebook YouTube Twitter
	Oxfam Jordan	Oxfam has been in Jordan since the 1990s, working with local partners for a future where everyone can reach their full potential, especially women and young people, while promoting longer-term sustainable solutions to challenges facing Jordan.	Website Facebook

Annex 2. Mapping Table (Tunisia)

Platform type	Platform name	Platform description as per official website/platform	Digital media presence
Dedicated pages/platforms/solutions / website that focus on one or more SRHR issues	Salema	"Salema website is a national digital platform dedicated to Human Rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV. It is the first website of its kind in Tunisia dedicated to information, education and psychological assistance for people living with HIV, the LGBTQ++ community and young people. It is a permanent space for exchanges and collaboration between Tunisian NGOs committed to sexual and reproductive rights at the national level".	Salema Platform
	Wirelessnik	A Tunisian platform providing simplified content in dialectal Tunisian about sexual response, and sexuality.	Instagram

	Boobli	A youth-led digital media platform.	Facebook Instagram YouTube Example
	Sexo Santé	Sexo Santé is a free mobile app developed by the National Office for Family and Population and UNFPA to raise awareness among young people and adolescents about sexual and reproductive health.	Sexo Santé
	ShababiT	A digital solution for youth-friendly services that captures and meets young people's knowledge, information, educational, and health needs.	ShababiT
	Moom	A platform that focuses on pregnancy and maternity issues.	moom.family.officiel
	راحة المرأة والطفل	Facebook page dedicated to SRH.	Facebook
	Ceci est mon corps	Platform dedicated to sexuality.	Ceci est mon corps
Individual influencers that address one or more SRHR related topics	Karim Mechri	Content creator on health including SRHR.	doctor.karim.mechri
	Nourchene Chgueni	SRHR content creator midwife.	Instagram
	Othello present	Content creator.	Instagram
	Raja Jomni	Content creator on health including SRHR.	Instagram Example 1 Example 2
	Khormologia	Content creator.	Twitch YouTube Examples 1 Example 2
NGOs and CSOs that address the topic specifically or among others	ATSR	Tunisian Association for Reproductive Health.	ATSR Website
	ATL-MST-SIDA	Tunisian Association to Combat Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS.	ATL SIDA Website

	Tawhida Ben Cheikh Group		Tawhida Ben Cheikh Website Facebook
	ADLI	The Tunisian Association for the Defense of Individual Liberties (ADLI).	ADLI Facebook Instagram
	Mawjoudine	NGO promoting LGBTQI and equal rights for all in Tunisia.	Facebook Instagram Mawjoudine LinkedIn
	Damej	Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality working to promote inclusion and advocate for minorities and marginalised groups.	Facebook
	Shams	Shams is a Tunisian association advocating for LGBT rights.	Facebook
	Ypeer	Peer Educator Network for the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Youth.	Facebook
	Aswat Nissa/Ena Zeda	A social movement against sexual harassment and sexual violence.	Facebook Instagram Facebook
National entities	National Office for Family and Population - ONFP	Public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Health and charged with the implementation of the government's policy on population and reproductive health.	Facebook Instagram
	الصحة الجنسية والإنجابية منكم وإليكم	Private Facebook Group created by the Regional Delegation of the National Family and Population Office – Bizerte.	Facebook

International entities	UNFPA Tunisia	United Nations Fund for Population operating in Tunisia since 1974	UNFPA Facebook Instagram X
	IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation	IPPF Tunisia

Annex 3. Successful Mitigation Initiatives in Jordan

Successful Mitigation Initiatives in Jordan			
Innovative approaches led by Community Media Network (supported by RNW Media)	Innovative approaches led by the Royal Health Awareness Society	Innovative approaches led by the UNFPA	Other initiatives mentioned:
Online application, question-and-answer game designed to educate and inform young people about SRHR.	Educational board games , consisting of a large board game similar to Monopoly, but focused on SRHR topics. This game featured elements like chance and community chest, serving as an informative map for players. Players could engage with this game in live sessions to learn more about SRHR. Additionally, they designed a smaller board game tailored for youth, both boys and girls, to play in youth centers and groups, aiming to correct misconceptions related to SRHR.	A TV show called "Not a taboo" which began in 2019 with a specialized gynecologist as the TV host, targeting married couples	Nana Pads' collaboration with influencers has significantly contributed to raising awareness about menstruation, a topic often considered taboo in Jordan. This initiative has sparked discussions and is gradually leading to more acceptance. Their efforts in addressing period poverty highlight a shift towards a broader societal acceptance of these issues.
The Podcast series "Keif we leish" — How and Why,	"10'000 Questions" campaign , conducted in collaboration with	A TV show called "Fi al mamar" , the first TV of	Salam Qatanani (influencer) stands out for

providing youth with training on using digital media, followed by SRHR awareness sessions. Youth are encouraged to create podcasts or short videos addressing SRHR issues they have identified, particularly those related to misinformation, whether on social media or within the community.	the Ministry of Youth in 2010, aimed to provide a platform for individuals to anonymously submit their SRHR-related questions. Question boxes were placed in various youth centers, allowing anyone to ask questions anonymously. Based on the questions received, targeted interventions were designed.	its kind to target young people in Jordan addressing a variety of topics (including menstrual cycle and porn movies). Materials from the TV show have been used by youth educators in trainings.	her method of addressing sensitive topics in a way that clearly shows her reliance on research. By bringing in various guests for discussions, she adds depth and diversity to the conversations.
"23 Episodes" program delves into various SRHR subjects. CMN invites decision-makers with the aim of rectifying misconceptions and broadening correct SRHR understanding.	Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) policy brief , consisting of nine mini-policy guides, in collaboration with youth, local, and regional institutions in its development. Subsequently, engagement was fostered with 23 official organizations, ministries & youth groups to establish a committee for CSE to collectively address SRHR misinformation among youths and facilitate access to accurate information.	A web series of short videos which deliver SRHR messages in a comedy/ light manner , with a well known Jordanian comedy actress (Rania Elkordy), using the same characters appearing in her original comedy show	"Mawada" online platform spreading SRHR information in a culturally sensitive language, demonstrating a good approach and presentation, delivering the "right messages" and focusing on the needed aspects of SRHR (topics such as pleasure). Their primary target audience are married couples. The platform reached one million users in its first year.
	"See it through their eyes" campaign which aimed at helping parents understand their children's perspectives better, providing insights into how boys and girls perceive their parents when discussing topics like puberty and SRHR.	Two podcasts: "Eib" (shame) and "Sawt" (voice) , six sessions. Another podcast specifically targeting parents called "Kebro" (they've grown up)	King Hussein Foundation's Institute for Family Health on initiatives celebrate international days, like World Menstrual Hygiene Day , where a menstrual bracelet was created to educate people on menstrual cycles and menstruation.
	"Infodemic" campaign providing training to 50 journalists, on verifying and countering misinformation and disinformation, enabling health journalists to present credible information on various topics, including SRHR.	An online platform called "Darbi" (my path) raising SRHR awareness, supported jointly by UNFPA and the Jordanian Population Council	Rafiq Foundation's initiative for Persons with Disabilities using theater to address the negative stereotypes people living with disabilities are affected by.
			The Institute of Women's Solidarity's digital solutions for gender-based violence, targeted

			500 individuals, explaining new concepts to them and encouraging them to find solutions and rebuild and relearn wrong ideas and concepts.
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Annex 4. Successful Mitigation Initiatives in Tunisia

Successful Mitigation Initiatives in Tunisia			
Innovative approaches led by Media: Al-Qatiba and Essaida FM	Innovative approaches led by the ATSR	Innovative approaches led by the ONFP	Other initiatives mentioned:
<p>Al-Qatiba: Podcast "hkeyat ma tehkatech #حكايات_ما_تحكاشش (untold stories). The podcast is part of the 'Masarouna' project. It focuses on SRHR topics such as sexual education, breast cancer awareness, pre-marital screening, contraception, vaginismus, STDs, sexual violence, gender-transition ...etc.</p> <p>Essaida FM: "نحكيو حقوق جنسية وإنجابية" (We are talking about sexual and reproductive rights) is a web-radio show produced by Arab Institute for Human Rights in partnership with UNFPA. It focuses on SRHR topics including CSE and LGBTQA+ community rights.</p>	<p>Educational games: Two interactive games were initiated in 2022 and launched in 2023. The games are designed to be played in groups and consist of questions and answers on Sexual and Reproductive Health.</p>	<p>"Sexo santé" It is a mobile app launched by ONFP in 2021. It provides young people with basic information related to SRHR, such as anatomy, sexual violence, consent, puberty, relationships, and sexually transmitted infections</p>	<p>Integration of CSC in schools: Tunisia has been working to implement Sexuality Education in schools since 2017. To implement this initiative, multiple efforts have been exerted by various parties, including the Ministry of Education, UNFPA, ONFP, ATSR, and the Arab Institute for Human Rights, such as multisectoral reflection workshops on communication around CSE, comprehensive Sexuality Education TOT of inspectors and teachers of primary and secondary schools and developing CSE pedagogic tools ... It aims to equip educators with necessary knowledge about the various components of sexuality and empower children and adolescents to realize their health and well-being, which certainly contributes to limiting misinformation The initiative is still in the process of implementation</p>
	<p>Joining festival: ATSR awarded a prize on 'Sexual and Reproductive</p>	<p>Youth friendly spaces: These spaces, led by ONFP and found throughout the 24</p>	<p>Instagram groups: Many Instagram groups are distinguished by their originality in terms of content,</p>

	Health' during the 4th edition of the International Health Awareness Film Festival to the best film focusing on this theme.	governorates, offer various services, including orientation, information, and communication in addition to medical and psychological support.	subjects, and format. Boobli is one of them. By using dialect and language that speaks with young people, especially Gen Z, vibrant colors, and illustrations, Boobli has succeeded in appealing to more than 129k followers. Wirelessnik is also another instagram account that has more than 176K followers and has succeeded in promoting sexual education beyond taboos using Tunisian dialect and attracting visuals that speaks to young people.
	Collaborating with social media content creators Talking to social media influencers , ATSR invited a pool of social media influencers and spent a few hours with them to talk about the best ways to channel accurate SRHR information.	Integration of CSC out of schools: ONFP in partnership with UNFPA has organised training sessions on Comprehensive Sexuality Education for supervisors of youth-friendly spaces. A Reference Guide for 'Youth-Friendly Spaces' in Sexual and Reproductive Health was published in 2022 to promote these spaces among young people	
	Cultural activities: *Organising festive events in spaces massively frequented by youth. *Conducting dance therapy workshops to raise awareness among Sub-Saharan migrants on breast cancer and screening techniques.		
	Youth platform: As mentioned on the platform's homepage: " Salema is a national digital platform focused on human rights and sexual and reproductive health/HIV. It aims to promote engagement and provide access to services and information for populations at risk of HIV in Tunisia, including key populations".		.

Annex 5. Researcher Guide and Toolkit

This resource has been shared separately due to length. Includes interview guides; survey tools; consent form; and more.

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