

Situation Report

Overview

Gender-based violence (GBV) occurs in all cultures and societies, however, it is exacerbated and proliferates in refugee camps.

This report examines the role of the refugee camp environment itself in influencing GBV, and the role that the status of being a “refugee” or “asylum seeker” plays in the Rohingya refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Methodology

Qualitative document analysis of reports, site assessments, needs analyses, and situation updates on the Rohingya camps produced in Cox's Bazar from late 2017 until July 2021.

Documents were located and collected using the “snowballing” strategy, pursuing references of references to obtain quality sources on a specific subject matter.(1)

Thematic analysis was conducted using both deductive and inductive methods, underpinned by the theoretical frameworks of the socio-ecological model (SEM) and intersectional feminism.

Limitations

The documents analysed were produced not by the population being studied, but external observers. To mitigate against potential bias/perspectives that lean heavily on Western notions/norms, data originating from first-hand field accounts were prioritised and accorded more weight.

Thematic Analysis Themes

- Gender Roles in Rohingya Society
- Camp Layout and Infrastructure
- Risks of Cox's Bazar
- Justice-Seeking Mechanisms
- Limitations in the Humanitarian Response

Key Findings

1

The experience, or direct threat, of GBV, is unavoidable and inescapable for all Rohingya women and girls residing in the Rohingya camps.

2

Every manifestation of GBV experienced in the camps is directly influenced in shape and form by the refugee camp setting, and the vulnerabilities that come with being displaced.

3

The camp context is incompatible with the socio-cultural norms of Rohingya culture, increasing instances and prevalence of GBV.

Gender roles in Rohingya society

'Purdah' and preserving honour

- 'Purdah' is "the Islamic practice requiring women to be veiled from 'public' gazes or remain within private' spaces controlled by the family". (2)
- This practice is highly important to Rohingya society and cultural identity, and is strongly linked to personal and familial honour. (2, 3)
- This norm necessitates women remain in the private sphere after menarche, relying on male partners or relatives and not talking to male strangers. (4, 2)
- In Rakhine State, it was easier to maintain purdah whilst completing household duties and daily tasks. (5)
- Purdah requires women most commonly to be covered by hijab or headscarf when outside the home, covering the entire body, "usually with a blouse, thami, a burka, socks, gloves and umbrella". (2)

'Men repeatedly emphasised women's breaking of purdah as more problematic than a Rohingya man who did not pray the required five times a day.' (2)

Domestic tensions & challenges to traditional male roles

- Gender norms in Rohingya society position men as the primary providers of the family, chief conflict resolvers, and final decision makers. (6)
- Displacement has disrupted the ability of traditional gender norms to be enacted. (6)
- The enactment of traditionally accepted female and male role and functions are highly important to the sense of identity in the Rohingya community. (3)
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) is to an extent normalised in the Rohingya community, however, the stressors associated with the disruption to family dynamics may be a contributor to high rates of IPV and DV. (7, 8, 9)

Normalisation of violence against women

- In the Rohingya community, IPV rates are high and it is often seen as an acceptable part of marriage which does not require external intervention or mediation. (7, 8, 9)
- Child marriage is not unusual, with reports of children as young as 13 being married, Child marriage has increased since displacement. (7, 10, 11)

- The Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies have measures to prevent child marriage, however, these measures are being circumvented by the community. (2, 12, 13)
- Sexual harassment, particularly "eve teasing", causes fear and anxiety for young girls and women particularly when leaving the household to access facilities and services. (7, 9, 14)
- "Eve teasing" refers to "shouts, insults, threats... harassment of a sexual nature by men toward women and girls". (28)

Socio-cultural restrictions on women working and studying

- There is stigmatisation of women working in the Rohingya community. Women who work may face harassment from their community. (2, 15, 16)
- There are mixed sentiments in the Rohingya camps surrounding the education of adolescent girls. (17)
- Traditionally, the education of girls after the onset of puberty was seen in the Rohingya community as inappropriate and unnecessary. (18)
- There is evidence these attitudes are changing. (17)
- Parents who support adolescent girls' education stress the importance of culturally-sensitive classes, allowing maintenance of purdah. (17)

- Such classes must be female-led and be exclusively for female students. Such classes are extremely limited in camp. (17)

Extra-vulnerable demographics

- Female heads of household, and those residing in them, face extra vulnerability to GBV and barriers to accessing camp aid and services. (13, 14, 18)
- Unmarried adolescent girls and unmarried young women are highly vulnerably to GBV and face the most restrictions in the camps (i.e., compared to married women, older women, or younger girls). (19, 20)

Tensions between gender norms and camp realities

- Camp layout, congestion, and means of aid and service distribution, purdah must be “broken” for most Rohingya girls and women to access washrooms, health facilities, water points, distribution points, humanitarian provider assistance or camp authority assistance. (5, 7, 15, 21)
- Contrasting to life in Myanmar, in the camps women and girls must regularly interact with people not familiar to them, and engage in tasks and activities that were traditionally not acceptable for women to do in Rakhine. (2)

- This situation causes great stress for Rohingya women and girls, who must make daily trade-offs between conducting daily activities, and maintaining purdah and honour. (2, 7)

Camp layout & infrastructure

Toilets and bathing points

- Public toilet and shower blocks in the camps are where Rohingya women report feeling the most unsafe. (13, 20)
- Distance of toilet and bathing facilities from shelters is a key safety issue. (20)
- There is a lack of security around the toilets at night and poor (or no) door-locks. (7, 22, 23)
- There are approx. 100 - 150 people per toilet, compared to the standard set by the Sphere Handbook. (Sphere states that 1 toilet per 20 people is appropriate for medium and long-term humanitarian contexts). (20, 24)

- Many facilities are located next to tube wells, which is unsafe as it decreases privacy. (20)
- Many facilities are at the bottom of a hill, which is unsafe due to a lack of nearby housing and lighting. (20)
- Lack of gender-segregated facilities is a key concern.
- Women and girls experience intimidation, fear, and shame when having to go to a toilet or washroom during the day, when they can be seen by men who may be in line to access the facilities, or gathering nearby. (25)
- Being seen by men can risk their dignity and reputation. Trade-off assessments are made concerning whether to use facilities at night, where there is higher risk of facing assault or rape, or injury due to limited lighting, to avoid the risks of using such facilities in the day. (25)
- In Myanmar, women did not typically have to walk in front of men to access shower facilities, as there was normally an area for bathing within the boundaries of one’s home. (11)

“We face challenges going to the toilets because we can’t use them during the day. Even if we urgently want to go... we need to wait until it is night. If we go to the toilets during the day, men stare at us and scandalise us. They allege that we talk to boys and that we are bad-mannered. They humiliate us and blemish our dignity. Therefore, we can’t use the latrines during the day.” (25)

- Negative coping mechanisms are resorted to due to this issue.
- Some women and girls report delaying going to the bathroom and skipping showers, resorting to defecating in the open, and/or deliberately not eating or drinking at certain times to avoid requiring the bathroom often. (11, 20, 25)

Lack of adequate lighting

- The poor lighting situation is consistently reported as key contributor to the insecurity of the camp, particularly for women and girls. (18, 22, 23)
- Sexual assault against women and girls occurs in the night more often than during the day in the camps. (3, 22)
- There have been attempts at the installation of new lampposts in some sections of the camps, however, reports of newly installed lampposts being stolen or broken after installation are common. (25)

Water collection points

- Nearly all girls feel unsafe as well as when collecting water from water points, and feel uncomfortable being in the presence of men when undertaking this task. (7, 20)

- Some girls have experienced instances of adults who have prevented them from filling-up their pitchers with water and attempted to extort money. (7)
- Some women and girls choose to collect water after dusk to avoid crowds, when there are additional safety risks. (25)
- Some water points do not run for all hours of the day, which results in overcrowding at the tube well and may force women and girls to collect water after dusk when it is less safe. (25)
- Households without adolescent or older male relatives face additional burdens, as the accompaniment of males on this daily chore decreases protection risks. (13)

"We face many problems with water because we have to fetch water from very far away. There is no protection for us on the way to the water point, so we feel unsafe and insecure." (25)

Overcrowding and lack of privacy

- While best practice in humanitarian situations states a minimum standard of 45 square metres per person, those residing in the camps have only 8 to 10 square meters per person, for between six to eight people. (16)

- People living in the camps consistently report overcrowding as a top housing concern. (26, 27)
- To avoid public interaction and view, women in the camps spend most of the time within their shelters, which are generally found to be "insufferably small and hot spaces". (5)
- There is a sense of distress permeating the lives of Rohingya women due to the cramped living situation. True enactment of the cultural norm of purdah is often difficult in this space, begetting feelings of humiliation, shame and loss of dignity. (16)
- The lack of locks on doors and privacy partitions within shelters serves to aggravate the risks of GBV. (18)
- Shelter break-ins have been reported and are a constant fear of more vulnerable households, i.e. households with no older boys or men. (14)
- Many people in female headed households report they are constantly targeted with sexual assault and rape, as their shelters can easily be broken into after dark. (14)
- The lack of unoccupied land in the Rohingya camps increases the risks of GBV, as it limits the ability for actors to construct new structures for protection services. (7)

Risks of Cox's Bazar area

Prostitution hotspot

- Cox's Bazar is a popular tourist destination with a long-established sex trade. (9)
- Many Rohingya girls have been kidnapped or tricked into the sex trade in Cox's Bazar, with the refugee influx since 2017 fuelling prostitution in the area. (28)
- Many girls are also being given away or sold into the sex trade by relatives who have limited capacity to feed all their dependants. (28)
- Young women and girls remain trapped in such a situation, feeling that they have no other option but to continue working to provide income to their family, earning \$1 to \$3 per customer. (28)
- It is believed that kidnapping and trafficking into Cox's Bazar city's sex trade of Rohingya young women and girls is underreported. (7)

Human trafficking zone

- Human trafficking networks have taken advantage of the arrival of over 750,000 vulnerable people into Cox's Bazar since they fled Myanmar in 2017 and have expanded long-established operations as a result. (9)
- Anecdotal reports of children and adolescents attempting to be kidnapped are common in the camps and there is a general fear of having one's child kidnapped, amongst the other protection issues. (20)
- Girls and young women are most likely to be kidnapped and trafficked into forced sex work, while the kidnapping of men and adolescent boys is generally for ransom, forced labour, or debt bondage. (29)
- Trafficking is generally internal within Bangladesh, with Rohingya girls often being trafficked into the sex trade in Dhaka and Chittagong. (29)
- Trafficking across national borders also occurs, with sex trafficking to Kolkata and Kathmandu reported. (29)

- There have also been cases of girls being sent by family to Malaysia for marriage proposals and then experiencing GBV upon arrival. (29)
- Females between the ages 15 and 22 are at most risk of abduction and human trafficking into the sex trade. (20, 30)
- The traffickers are both Bangladeshi and Rohingya, often posing as recruiters who deceive Rohingya individuals living in the camps into pursuing the job opportunities they are offering. (31)

Drug trafficking zone

- The drug trade in the Cox's Bazar area has expanded as networks have taken advantage of the refugee influx since 2017. (9)
- Participation in the drug trade is common within the camps and surrounding host community, particularly with adolescent boys and men. (9, 20)
- Reports show that adolescent girls are being recruited by drug traffickers, as they are less likely to be physically searched by army or police. (9)
- Residents of the Rohingya camps report that drugs are easily available and that drug addiction is a concern, driving conflict within the community and within households. (9)

“We target girls who only have a single parent, girls with only a father or mother. We also target poor girls who are good-looking ... We treat them to tea and snacks and eventually we tell them that we can get them a job to support their family... They come because they don't have another option.” (28)

- Women in the camps have reported that marital rape is more likely to be perpetrated by men who are addicted to 'yaba' - an amphetamine that is widespread in Cox's Bazar. (9)
- There is general sentiment among women that the drug trade is a contributor to an increase in violence within the camps. (9)

Host community villages

- The Rohingya in Southeast Cox's Bazar constitutes more than a third of the population. (32, 33)
- The influx has resulted in higher competition for jobs and decreasing wages due to the participation of many Rohingya in the informal wage market, resulting in economic instability. (32)
- Prices for essential goods and transport have surged, due to the influx of workers from Bangladesh and abroad to work in the humanitarian effort. (32, 34)
- A perception can be found among some in the host community that humanitarian aid and resources are not equally distributed in the economically challenged region, and that humanitarians are acting to support the Rohingya whilst neglecting the plight of their community. (34)
- This situation has resulted in a degree of tensions between the two communities, escalating at various times.

- For women and girls, these tensions result in additional protection risks. There have been reports of incidents occurring when collecting water or aid, or doing informal work outside of the camps in the host community. This includes the risk of harassment, attack, and GBV. (9)

Marriage for safety

- The various dangers posed by camp and surrounds incentivise parents to marry their daughters at a young age as a protective measure.
- Child marriage is also a coping mechanism to decrease the economic burden on families and ensure young women have a livelihood, and for cultural reasons to ensure individual and family honour is maintained.
- Limited opportunity for education for adolescent girls has also resulted in marriage as an "alternative milestone". (21)
- Young women and adolescents are getting married younger than parents would normally arrange for due to the dangers of the camps and not being able to provide for them. (8, 9)
- There are less severe deterrents to child marriage than were in place in Myanmar, where marriage before 18 was punishable by a jail sentence. (14)

- In the refugee camps in Bangladesh, it is illegal to marry before 21, however, there are no legal ramifications for being caught marrying early. (7)
- Early pregnancy usually occurs within the first year of marriage, which carries health risks both psychologically and physically. (14)
- Sexual assault and domestic violence are other forms of GBV that often accompany child marriage. (14)

“In Burma if we got caught marrying children under 18, we were punished with jail time. In Bangladesh if we get caught we just get scolded, so we try more for early marriages here.” (14)

Justice-seeking mechanisms

Limited access to the formal justice system

- The Rohingya population of the camps are under the care of Bangladesh as host country, yet outside of the Bangladeshi legal system. (9)
- To engage with the formal justice system, the permission of the Camp in Charge (CiC), the authority placed in charge of an individual camp by the Government of Bangladesh, is required. Without their permission, Rohingya may not involve police or access the courts in any matters. (9)
- The formal justice system can be accessed for more “serious” crimes, such as murder, and occasionally rape. For other crimes, the Rohingya population is expected to deal with such incidents inside the confines of the camps’ informal justice systems. (9)
- If a matter that has not been resolved to satisfaction through the various informal and local camp justice mechanisms, they may request the CiC to file a formal complaint and involved the local police or the army. However, escalation to the army or the police rarely eventuates. (9)

- Even though under Bangladeshi law and penal code domestic violence is a compoundable crime, in the camps it is not treated in this way, and is only ever addressed through informal justice avenues. (9, 11)
- Rohingya women and girls are deprived of a context of accountability and reside in an environment where there are little to no consequences for sexual and gender violence and abuse against women and girls.

Inadequate informal justice systems

- When an incident or crime occurs, the block mahji is contacted for support, who will then arrange for community leaders to gather and hear both sides; if the verdict is not satisfactory, the case may pass through several steps. (9)
- Cases may pass from block mahji to Masjid Committee, head mahji, and even the camp CiC. NGOs may play a mediation role. (9)
- This model works for some disputes, however, many cases remain unresolved or bribes are required for a case to progress. This often leaves complainants to feel disheartened about the system and give up trying to achieve justice. (9, 25)

- There is frustration about the lack of clarity on how to raise issues or make complaints, on who is responsible for follow-ups and confusion about how much power humanitarian actors can wield in this informal injustice system. (25)
- Regarding GBV: Mediation sessions, comprised of local male decision-makers, often shame and blame the survivor and attribute responsibility for the violence to the survivor. If a negative verdict is delivered to the perpetrator, it is generally a “warning”. (16, 20)
- If a warning is delivered, then there is the risk to the survivor of revenge violence taking place at the hands of either the perpetrator or relatives of the perpetrator. (16)
- This environment of general impunity, and male-dominated camp governance structures in a socio-cultural context that restricts women and pubescent girls to the private domain, leaves this group vulnerable to GBV and results in under-reporting of incidents.
- In this setting, impunity is fostered, as the camps effectively operate outside of the rule of law and doctrines of accountability and justice.

Women have less access to every form of justice

- Women and girls have less awareness of where to seek assistance for troubles facing them and most choose to not report problems to anyone in camp. (20, 25, 38)
- The patriarchal structure of Rohingya society means that men are the head of the household and are thus responsible for engaging with figures outside of the camps. (9)
- Women, particularly women with no adult males in their household, have difficulties obtaining assistance or are discouraged from doing so due to social and structural reasons. (25)
- Women are aware that the informal justice system does not lean in favour of victims of domestic violence and often works to intensify the problem, further discouraging them from choosing to seek help from any authorities for such violence. (7)
- The governance and community structures in the camps are dominated by Rohingya and Bangladeshi males. As Rohingya women are generally restricted in the public domain due to socio-cultural norms, seeking assistance from any authority in a culturally appropriate way is near impossible. (9)

“In our society, the women do not step outside their respective homes... distressed women do not go to the Majhi for justice because they can’t share all the things with him. Women seeking justice is also seen negatively in our society” (9)

Corruption and misconduct in the mahji system

- Mahjis are (generally) unelected officials in charge of a camp block. They hold a large amount of influence and informal power, due to their access to Bangladeshi authorities and their delegation as unofficial focal points of camp CiCs. (15, 35)
- For any issue, all Rohingya residing in the camps know they can go to their block mahji for assistance. (9)
- This system is rife with corruption and misconduct, impeding chances at attaining assistance without bribes or exploitation, especially for women. (35)
- Reports found key failings to include: reliability issues, lack of impartiality, lack of transparency, and gender inequality. (36)

- Being close to a mahji is favourable, as it puts households in a better position to receive preferable treatment. (14)
- Abuse of power and exploitation is common, with the most significant reports being of sexual exploitation and abuse, deterring women from engaging altogether. (3, 35, 37)
- Mahjis have provided help to households in exchange for sex and this may be requested by the mahji for any kind of assistance. (7)
- Female mahjis report that when women reach out to them about GBV faced, they involve the male mahji in the incident and then are generally excluded from the mediation process. (37)

Justice systems reinforcing harmful gender dynamics

- Women are pressured to not report incidents or escalate disputes due to concerns about familial reputation and status. (20)
- Survivors of GBV are often blamed and shamed for the violence they experienced. (20)
- The social belief that men are “natural” leaders largely excludes women from holding positions of power and authority within the camps. (5)

- When cases of GBV escalate, the result often perpetuates harmful power dynamics and is not gender responsive.
- Some GBV survivors are forced to marry their perpetrator in cases of rape or other sexual violence, with the intention of avoiding attaching shame and stigma to the survivor. (22)
- Mediation favours wives staying with their husbands in the interest of maintaining stability and favouring patriarchal ideals of men having control over their wife. This is prioritised over the individual interests and safety of a woman reporting GBV, placing her at further risk of violence. (25)
- The mediation process does not operate to protect potential GBV victims, bringing disputing parties into close proximity to have their cases discussed by a typically all-male forum, risking further trauma and social stigma. (37)

“If the fight is huge and there is harm or hurt, [the] CiC... tries to convince them to live together... he tells the Mahji that if they continue to fight, he’ll make sure that they don’t get rations anymore... [the couple] become scared and tried not to fight anymore.” (25)

Limitations in the Humanitarian Response

Limited awareness of GBV programming

- Knowledge about services related to human rights and protection among Rohingya women is generally low. (7, 14, 20)
- Many Rohingya households cannot identify points of service for GBV support. Very few Rohingya women know where to make a complaint if they face abuse by humanitarian aid workers. (3, 7, 11)
- Some women and girls have more access to information about camp services, such as households with a working male or close to a mahji. (14)
- Low levels of literacy, particularly among women, is an issue. Information written about GBV support, or signs signalling women’s shelters and services, are not able to be understood by the majority of women in the camp. (14)
- Women rely on other women in their household or female relatives for knowledge about protection services, limiting the number of women who benefit from them. (8)

Limitations of existing GBV programming

- There is insufficient coverage of GBV case management services that are required for GBV prevention, response and life-saving support. (20, 26)
- There is a need for additional entry points to services, referral services, GBV mental health support, and legal aid, as current caseworkers are overburdened and unable to provide the support necessary. (26)
- Overcrowding means that humanitarian actors are limited in their ability to construct the amount of safe spaces necessary for women and girls necessary across the camps. (7)
- Only 43% of minimum coverage of GBV has been achieved for urgent cases requiring psychosocial support and case management. 56% of camps lack sufficient GBV services. (20)
- There are coordination limitations within the humanitarian response which complicate referral pathways for GBV survivors (e.g. for legal support, medical care, psychosocial support, and law enforcement). (20)

- Mandated camp hours necessitate humanitarian actors close services (apart from emergency health facilities) between 5pm and 9am, creating another gap in protection, as it cannot be provided at all hours despite the fact that violence can occur at any time.
- GBV protection efforts and gender-sensitivity has not been sufficiently mainstreamed across the activities of all sectors and organisations within the camps. (15, 26)
- A recent ACAPS study identified Bangladesh as a state with “very high” humanitarian access constraints across the core areas of: security and physical constraints; access of humanitarian actors to the affected population; and access of people in need to humanitarian services and aid. This impacts all aid providers. (13)

“Humanitarian agencies are working in a challenging operational context in a deteriorating environment...

Restrictive government policies and practices undermine their ability to operate and deliver programmes efficiently and effectively.” (15)

Issues with collection of aid distribution

- Women who receive aid at distribution site are often targets of harassment and assault. (7, 11)
- Participating in distribution collection puts women in a position where their honour is compromised and societal backlash from women who in engage in “unacceptable” tasks occurs, often resulting in shaming and harassment. (2)
- Women and girls in female headed households, or in households that do not have an able-bodied adolescent boy or man in the family, are additionally disadvantaged. They have no option other than to attend distribution points, despite the known risks these sites pose. (22)
- There is a strong desire in the camps for more gender-segregated means of engaging with the camps’ services, including for distributions. (2)

Lack of sensitivity to gender norms across response

- The predominance of men in service provider and authority positions (due to norms and education levels) effectively cuts women off from seeking support or information in a culturally acceptable way. (5)

- Rohingya men generally hold positions such as medics, teachers and other service providers in the camps, limiting the engagement of women in camp services. (5)
- Rohingya women and adolescent girls must cover themselves in a culturally appropriate way to move through the public domain and access services. This typically involves wearing a a burqa, veil, gloves, socks and holding an umbrella. Some households do not have all of these items of clothing, restricting when they can go outside and access aid and services, as they have to borrow these items from neighbours. (25)
- Some facilities and services have gender segregation enforced in queuing. However, interviews with the community reveal that often such segregation is still not culturally appropriate, as men and women can still view each other in line, the entrance is usually shared, and men gather near facilities. (25)

Challenges of living in camp & an overburdened humanitarian response

- Bangladesh accepted and assisted the fleeing of 90 per cent of the Rohingya population in 2017 into Bangladesh from Myanmar. The nation provided a temporary settlement for them to live in, for their safety from persecution. (40)

- The nation is hosting over 900,000 refugees in one of the poorer regions of its country, outnumbering the host community. (41)
- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has stated that: "The protracted stay of Rohingyas in Bangladesh poses enormous challenges to our development aspirations. The hosting of 1.2 million Rohingya has flared into various fronts. We have to spend around \$1.22 billion every year for the Rohingyas." (42)
- In this overburdened and underfunded context, there are many basic needs that the Rohingya population live without, increasing resorts to negative coping mechanisms.
- Rohingya do not have the right to work in Bangladesh and therefore are reliant entirely on humanitarian aid. (15)
- This especially affects households with vulnerable family members, such as elderly, pregnant women, or a family member with a disability, and households without working age and able-bodied boys and men. This is as working age and able-bodied boys are more able to engage in "volunteer" stipend-based or illegal (outside of camp) work. (26, 38, 30)
- Not having sufficient access to livelihood activities is significant, as levels of food assistance distributed in the camps are consistently reported to not meet the needs of households. (13, 30, 39)
- The majority of households do not have enough money to access medical support when needed, nor to buy materials to repair shelters and purchase other essential non-food items as situations arise. (25)
- When Rohingya do access healthcare in the camps, it is common for there to be inadequate supplies of medicine at clinics, and an inadequate variety of services and types of medicine. (14)
- The struggles for survival that the majority of households face drive child marriage, child labour, survival sex work, inter- and intra-community conflict, and risk a dangerous onward journey by sea. (15)
- Restrictions on freedom of movement and income-generating opportunities increase the risk of anti-social behaviour in the camps, particularly for males, who may engage in petty crime, drug abuse, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. (20)
- Such a context of aid-dependency and severe restriction contributes to the high risk of GBV that all women and girls face.

Summary of Findings

The refugee camp setting places women and girls in a high-risk position where they are extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse.

This is due to intersecting factors, including:

- Infrastructure and a layout that is not gender nor culturally sensitive.
- Ineffective patriarchal justice systems.
- Exposure to the criminal networks operating in Cox's Bazar.
- Increasingly hostile relations with the host community.
- Inadequate provision of aid and services to meet basic needs.

The gender norms accepted in Rohingya culture are at odds with the requirements of survival in the Rohingya camps, creating a considerable amount of tension within the displaced community.

Rohingya women and girls face a daily internal struggle, as they attempt to minimise contravening accepted gender norms, and undertaking activities or movements that break these norms and could thus place them in harm's way.

The structure of the refugee camp is contradictory to the needs of women and girls, with male dominated governance structures and a context of impunity coinciding with a cultural necessity for women to rely on male figures to access the "outside world".

Poor justice-seeking mechanisms, limited security and protection for the refugee population, and opportunistic criminal networks add to the immense danger faced.

Trapped in this situation, Rohingya women and girls resort to negative coping mechanisms and are highly vulnerable to child marriage for their "protection".

It must be stated that the dangers of the district are a risk to all residing in Cox's Bazar, to varying extents.

However, Rohingya refugees live in an unstable camp environment with limited security and protection, have restrictions placed on them limiting movement and access to paid work, and have limited access to police or other authorities for assistance.

It is the confluence of these dynamics that makes this population especially exposed to the risks of the local region, despite not being able to legally leave the confines of the camps.

Hence, Rohingya women and girls are vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence, due largely to factors that were (typically) not present in their home villages in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

This research determines that the camps are inherently unsafe and dangerous for women and girls, and in this setting, the possibility of facing GBV is unavoidable.

Some Rohingya women and girls and more vulnerable than others to GBV, however, all are affected.



Situation report produced by the Maiya Research Hub in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, September 2022.

Any questions or comments can be directed to research@maiyaschool.org

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