

## **Violence Against Rohingya Refugee Women in the Nayapara Camp in Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh has been a hub of Rohingya refugee for many years. The Rohingya is the most vulnerable group of the world's refugee communities. This study aims to shed light on violence against women in documented Rohingya refugees living in the Nayapara camp located in the Cox's Bazar district under Teknaf Upazila of Bangladesh. However, the living status of Rohingya refugee is very poor and they are not legally allowed to find employment in Bangladesh. At the same time, state support is minimal and the mobility of refugee is highly restricted by violence and intimidation. Women are more vulnerable both inside and outside the camp. The study has applied case study method for collecting primary data. It has also applied interviews and informal discussion methods for collecting primary data. The study found that women of Rohingya refugee suffer multiple forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution, coerced suicide, murder and other psychological and physical torture in the camp and also outside the camp. Most of the domestic violence happens for frustration and minimal support of living. On the other side, rape, other sexual and physical harassment, trafficking also occurred in the camp by local villagers and refugee community. Accommodation, sanitation, limited work opportunities, moving restriction, arrest etc. are the main causes of violence in the camp. The study recommends that the government of Bangladesh should enhance bilateral ties with Myanmar in order to push back Rohingya refugees to their home countries and also to ensure living conditions for protecting human rights.

**Keywords:** Violence against Women; Rohingya Refugee; Bangladesh

### **1.1 Introduction**

Bangladesh is an impoverished country of over 160 million people. In its short history as an independent nation, Bangladesh has fought war for independence, faced massive internal displacement, famines and frequent natural disasters. In addition, Bangladesh is hosting over 200,000 Rohingya refugees from Burma in the eastern region (Ahsan, 2011, p.139). The Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma are trapped between severe repression in their homeland and abuse in neighboring countries. Bangladesh has hosted thousands of Rohingya fleeing persecution for more than three decades, but at least 200,000 Rohingya refugees have no legal rights there (Samima & Kayoko, 2014, p. 225). They live in squalor, receive very limited aid and are subject to arrest, extortion and detention. Refugee women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical attacks. In the registered refugee camp their movement is highly restricted; they have no permission to go outside from the camp. In the camp they live in small shed which is allotted for 7

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members (Abrar, 2015). There is no electricity and have no recreational activities. They have no work in the camp. So they become very frustrated and it directly affects women through violence. For the purpose, the study aims to shed light on violence against women in Rohingya camp. It intends to analyze the root causes of violence against refugee women and investigate who is the perpetrator of violence.

The Rohingya ethnic minority of Burma is one of the most persecuted groups in the world. The area of eastern Rakhine (Arakan) was home to the Rohingya for about a thousand years (Ahmed, 2010, p. 13). In the Union Treaty of 1947 Rohingyas were granted no rights within the Union of Burma. After then they continued to be oppressed under Burmese Government especially under the military regime of General Ne Win (Ahmed, 2010, p. 14). The Dragon Operation, conducted in 1978, forced 3, 00,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh, causing tremendous political and economic problems there. After an agreement between Burma and Bangladesh in 1979, most of the Rohingya returned to their homeland and they fled to what is today northern Arakan. Thus the story of two Arakan races began. After then again Rohingyas were stripped of their citizenship by the Burmese government in 1982 by Citizenship Law of 1982 and forced to flee through violent military campaigns and sustained persecution (Zaiez, 2009, p. 48). Later on, between 1991 and 1992, almost 250,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) with the support of United Nations stood by their side despite its own socio-economic problems. The GOB had originally built twenty camps for the Rohingya refugees in 1992. At present there are two camps for the Rohingya refugees. Documented Rohingya refugees are living in those ‘Kutupalong’ and ‘Nayapara’ camps in Ukhia and Teknaf Upazila respectively (Shamima and Kyoko, 2014, P. 226). The most recent incident took place in June 2012, when a large number of Rohingyas tried to enter Bangladesh after riots pitted Buddhists against Muslims in Myanmar’s state of Rakhine. At present only approximately 28,000 are recognized as refugees by the Government of Bangladesh and live in Kutupalong (approximately 12,000 refugees) and Nayapara camps (approx. 16,000 refugees) both of which are administered by UNHCR. Registered refugees receive basic health services, primary education and food rations, but about 5,000 of the camp residents were not properly registered and are barred from receiving food rations (Abrar, 2015, p.8). In addition, a total of 15,000 refugees reside in Leda refugee camp in Teknaf and a total of 55,000 refugees live in an unregistered camp near Kutupalong. Presently a total of about 450,000 unregistered refugees lives in different places of Cox’s Bazaar and Bandarban district (Ahmed, 2010, p. 13). However, the actual number of undocumented Rohingyas is unknown and it is estimated that it can be around 2,00,000 to 5,00,000. Everyday 5 to 10 families are trying to cross the border of Bangladesh. Though Myanmar is the closest neighbor country of Bangladesh, the unsolved Rohingya crisis is impeding the bilateral relationship between the countries. Actually, the huge number of Rohingya refugees is a matter of serious security concern for the host country because the refugees are also involved in serious crimes, including terrorism, drug and human trafficking, smuggling, robbery and other organized crimes.

The study analyzes different types of violence against women of Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. The study also recommends how the government of Bangladesh

can ensure the human rights of women of Rohingya refugees and can create international pressures on the Myanmar government to take back their people to their home countries.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The study is primarily based on both the primary and secondary data. In order to collect primary data, the study was conducted at the Nayapara camp in Cox's Bazar District under Teknaf Upazila in Bangladesh among documented Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The data was collected in June 2014. At first in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 households inside the camp. The respondents comprised of 37 women and girls. The households were selected through snowball sampling. In addition, an informal group discussion was conducted within the camp for those who willing to come and talk. Finally, 16 women took part in this research and shared their experiences regarding violence and, raised some pertinent issues regarding sexual harassment and violence. While the in-depth interviews included only adult women and girls, however, young girls and boys also participated in the informal group discussion.

In –depth interviews were also conducted with NGO officials who had been working with refugees as well as with the Government of Bangladesh Refugee and Relief Commissioner, the camp in-charge and the Local Chairman (an elected representative of the local government body). The interviews included the local villagers, a tea-stall owner selling goods just outside the registered camp. Moreover, secondary data were drawn from the existing literature like official documents, different books, articles, research paper, research seminar, document paper, newspaper and related website concerning the issues. The findings of the research are as follows:

## **1.3 Findings**

### **1.3.1 Violence Against Women in Rohingya Camp**

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN General Assembly, 2006). However, violence against women might be included in the following:

1. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
2. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution (UN General Assembly, 2006).

Violence against women is a very common occurrence in Rohingya camp. Rohingya refugee women suffer multiple forms of violence, including domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution, coerced suicide, murder and other psychological and physical torture inside the camp and also outside the camp. They face violence in the camp by their husband, community people, camp ansar and camp police. On other side, they also face violence in the outside of the camp, by villagers and local Police. There are many socio-economic factors contributing to the occurrence of sexual and gender based violence in the camp. Cultural traditions, insufficient humanitarian assistance, limited income generating possibilities as well as the frustrations arising from inactivity and lack of future prospects all contribute to a high level of violence and exploitation experienced by women refugees. Moreover, the absence of effective prevention and response mechanisms contributes to the general level of impunity that prevails, as does the fact that the perpetrators are often those who are responsible for ensuring the security of the camp residents, including the Mahjees, other camp personnel and the local police.

The worse living status of Rohingya refugee women in the camp is the root causes of violence. Virtually the place where Rohingya refugees live is densely packed and overcrowded; there have no privacy and no personal space. They allotted 7 people in one shed include father, mother, son, daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and other. So sexual relationship is open here and as a result, rape, extra marital relationship, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is very common here. Their accommodation and living standard picture have been given below:

**Table-1.3.1: The Accommodation and Living Standard of Rohingya Camp**

With five family members live in a hut	Over five family members live in a hut	Less than five family members live in a hut	Total
17	25	11	53

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

On the other side the sanitation system is not also secure; it is visible and they take bath in an open place. This causes sexual violence. In Nayapara camp the ratio of latrines is 1 to 25 refugees. At present the bathing cubicles are not adequately equipped for women. Male and female cubicles are adjacent to one another, and the female ones have a poorly maintained because of these women tend to use them at night, these places them at risk of harassment and/or violence because cubicles are not in well-lit areas. This further endangers the refugee women as the location is not well lit, leading leaving them vulnerable to harassment and violence (Burnett, 2001, p. 544).

Insufficient level of humanitarian assistance to refugees, particularly of food coupled with the absence of legal income generating potential, has driven many refugee women to engage in survival sex. Coercion by Mahjees, camp personnel, and local police (who financially profit from sexual labour) are involved with these types of violence. Although the registered refugee receives regular WFPO supplied food rations, but it is not sufficient for them. The food rations given to them by the camp authorities are too meagre for survival. The refugees also need cash to buy other necessities such as fuel,



soap and clothes. Hence, they are forced to earn cash income, either by selling a part of their meagre food rations or by seeking work and when they go to outside from camp for seeking work, then they face various kinds of violence like rape, sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse etc.

In the other hand, the highly restriction of movement of the refugee is also another cause of violence. The movement of Rohingya refugee is highly restricted by the Bangladeshi government. Registered refugees who stay in camps are prohibited from leaving the camp without a valid permit. They are not allowed to hold jobs or integrate with Bangladeshi society (Ahmed, 2010, p. 14). But they need to go outside every day for survival activities. They go outside for income and shopping their necessary needs. So they use illegal way and go outside the camp and face violence by the local police and villagers. Many people take opportunity from the refugee for their illegal movement; especially women are more vulnerable in this case. In fact the restriction on movement has led to a series of persistent and grave protection problems both within and outside the camps. Inactivity contributes to illegal activity, corruption, abuse and domestic violence. Thus the inability to engage in legal economic activity leads to exploitation, including in regard to wages, conditions of work, and exposes refugees to the risks of arrest and detention. A further consequence of the limitation on the freedom of movement is that it renders women, particularly female heads of household, vulnerable as they are less able to engage clandestinely in income generating activities. In some instances, this has led to survival sex by refugee women (Shamima and Kyoko, 2014, P. 227).

The absence of effective prevention and response mechanisms also contributes the violence against women in the camp. In reality, the perpetrators are often those who are responsible for ensuring the security of camp residents including the Mahjee, other camp personnel and the local police. In the refugee camps, the Mahjee (the formal title of male Rohingya community leaders) are very influential. Nothing is done without their approval, and even the camp management is not able to access the people directly. The Mahjee support the traditional gender roles and values and, instead of assisting the impoverished women refugees, many of the Mahjee take advantage of a woman's need to be accepted by the community (El-Bushra, 2000, p. 70). Refugees must get the Mahjee's permission to engage in income- generating activities, which makes the leader extremely powerful in the community. Some women are asked to offer sexual services to these leaders in negotiations to get permission for their businesses.

The major trends of violence against refugee women have been given below:

#### **1.3.1.1 Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence incidences are fairly common and widespread across all over the camp. Domestic violence includes maltreatment, beaten and abuse by husbands, in-laws, and other family members. Most of the refugee women reported that men's frustrations and experiences of violence directly affect women through domestic violence.

Such men's frustration gets exacerbated because of the gendered norms that are embedded strongly in Rohingya culture in which men are expected to be breadwinners and women housekeepers. Therefore, when women start to work outside the home, it

becomes difficult for men to accept their wives' independence, and relations become strained. Men feel frustrated since their mobility is restricted due to fear of police arrest outside the camp. On the other hand, women's jobs, such as domestic work, keep them indoors, so it is safer for women to work, even though they earn less than the men (Jack, 2003, p. 17). Even as women face increased tensions at home, they also experience more violence outside the home and in the workplace. The negative experiences within the home and outside directly affect their family and create domestic violence. The data on domestic violence have given below:

**Table-1.3.1.1: Domestic Violence in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrators	Number of cases of Domestic violence	Did not face domestic violence	Total
Husband	48	5	53

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.1 demonstrates that 48 (90.57%) respondent faced domestic violence in their family and only 5 (9.43%) did not face domestic violence. That means a vast number of Rohingya refugees face domestic violence in the camp.

### **1.3.1.2 Rape/Attempted Rape**

Rape is a very common incident both, within and outside the camp. Refugee men, including Majhee, local villagers are known as perpetrator. The women who collected firewood in the area surrounding camps, female heads of household or young girls whose father/husband are in detention are particularly risk of rape. Inside the camp refugee women are attacked by their neighbor when they stay alone at home. Besides the camp security guards also visit their shed at night and force to make sex with them otherwise they caught by them and send to jail. They are also raped by other refugee at night when they go to latrine because cubicles are not in well-lit areas (Moser, 2001, p.19). In the other side refugee women are also raped by their employers outside the camp. Furthermore, there is evidence that men do not only rape to women, but also physically torture and murder the victims as well. In the last year, gang rape has become the prevalent form of rape in the outside of the camp. It is found that several men kidnap a woman when she went to collect firewood, then they took her to an isolated place, and did rape.

According to Nur Fatema (817/2, C), CMC member Abdur Rahman tried to rape her when she was alone at her home. Nur fatema is a married woman and she has two children. Her husband went to Kutupalong for three days and her children were also not at the home. When she was alone at her home suddenly Abdur Rahman entered into her room and tried to rape her. Then she was shouting for help and hearing her shouting her brother Md. Zakir came to rescue her.

In another case, according to Somira Begum (1121/4, P) she was raped by Kefayetullah (another refugee) at night while she was going to latrine besides her shed.

**Table-1.3.1.2: Rape/Attempt Rape in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrators	Number of cases of Rape/ Attempt rape
Other refugee of the camp	6
Villager	4
Relatives	3
Total	13

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.2 demonstrates that a total of 13 (24.53%) respondent of refugee women had faced rape in the camp. The study found that 46.15% were raped by other refugees of the camp, 30.77% were raped by villagers and 23.07% by relatives.

### 1.3.1.3 Sexual Abuse and Harassment

Sexual abuse and harassment is widespread both inside and outside the camp for refugee women. Rohingya men, villager, local people, camp security, local police all try to get an advantage from Rohingya women. When Rohingya women or girl go to collect firewood and to get any job, then they face sexual abuse and harassment. Sometime camp security forces (for example, police and ansar) try to use them and harass them sexually. The community power structure at camp is also liable of sexual harassment in the camp. The women are also harassed by Majhee in the camp.

Hamida Begum (1012/4, B) shared that her husband was caught by police on robber case and it was a false allegation. Then she went to local police to seek help the police officer punched her sex organ with a stick. They did not offer any help. Samira (1135/5, P) opined that perpetrator Tuka (a pseudonym name of a local villager) has made a fake pornography of her and spread it in the whole community. He collected Samira's photo and added her face with a nude body. Noor Kaida (refugee), Nosima (refugee) and Belal (refugee) helped Tuka to make the pornography and spread it out.

**Table-1.3.1.3: Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrators	Number of cases of sexual harassment
Camp Police	1
Employer	4
Other refugee of the camp	5
Villager	7
Total	17

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.3 demonstrates that a total of 17 (32.08%) respondent of refugee women had faced sexual abuse and harassment. It is found that 5.88% were abused and harassed by

police, 23.53% were abused by local employer, 29.41% were harassed by other refugees, 41.18% by villagers.

#### **1.3.1.4 Forced Prostitution**

Forced prostitution is another sexual abuse issue in the camp. Many women are forced in prostitution inside the camp and also outside the camp. Many women are even forced by their husband for prostitution and many are forced by their father and other family member for money, because the life of the camp is very difficult and the source of income is also limited. So the women are also forced in prostitution for bearing their lives. On the other hand the women are also forced in prostitution by the other Rohingya men and outsider. Many times they are tempted by other men, they are often sold as sex worker and are forced in prostitution in order to receive money.

**Table-1.3.1.4: Forced prostitution in Rohingya camp**

Perpetrators	Number of cases of forced prostitution
Family members	2
Other refugee of the camp	3
Total	5

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.4 demonstrates that a total of 5 (9.43%) respondent of refugee women had faced forced in prostitution. The study found that 40% were forced by the family members and 60% were forced by other refugees.

#### **1.3.1.5 Exploitation**

Sexual exploitation is another common issue in the Rohingya camp. The teenagers and adolescents are more prone to victim of sexual exploitation. At first teenager girls are tempted to make a relationship like affair, then miscreants promise adolescents girls to marry and finally make sexual relationship. One day miscreants left girls alone or in pregnant. When victims want justice from BMC (Block Management Committee) and CMC (Camp Management Committee) members they are eventually exploited by BMC and CMC members, giving false promise. Many Rohingya women are also exploited by Rohingya men, CMC and BMC members. Besides the villagers and local police also exploit them to give some gift, advantage of ration, money and promise to marry. Minara Begum (Shed-724/8, Block-D) expressed that she had an affair with BMC secretary Mohammad Khalil. One-day perpetrator (Mohammad Khalil) came to her shed at night and invited her at his shed. He promised Minara again and again that he will marry her tomorrow morning. Then he made a physical relation with her forcibly. Finally Khalil took her back at her shed and then he did not communicate with her later. When Minara tried to communicate with him, she failed.

**Table-1.3.1.5: Exploitation in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrator	Number of cases of exploitation
Villager	3
CMC-BMC members	7
Other refugee of the camp	11
Total	21

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.5 demonstrates that a total of 21 (39.62%) respondent of refugee women had faced exploitation in the camp. The study found that 14.29% were exploited by villagers, 33.33% were exploited by CMC-BMC members and 52.38% were exploited by other refugees.

### **1.3.1.6 Trafficking**

Trafficking of women and children is a significant problem in the camp. Teenage girls are the main target of traffickers in the camp. In the absence of social protection, economic security and legal support, an alarming number of women and children from the camp become easy victims of trafficking (Syeda, 2005, p. 154). Refugee women and children are trafficked both within the country and internationally. The organized gangs of traffickers often lure young women with false promises of better jobs or false proposals of love and marriage. Victims of trafficking are generally trafficked for forced prostitution, but sometimes also for other purposes such as organ transplants and slave labor (Syeda, 2005, p. 154). A refugee women, Sawkat Ara, said that her neighbor Noor Jahan (1212/02, H) took her daughter for giving a job. Noor Jahan did not keep her words. She took her daughter to Chittagong as a maid servant. She could not communicate with her daughter for a long time and her daughter did not get any salary from them. Her daughter passed miserable life while she was working as a maid servant.

**Table-1.3.1.6: Trafficking in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrators	Number of cases of Trafficking
Villager	2
Other Refugee of the camp	5
Total	7

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.6 demonstrates that a total of 7 (13.21%) respondent of refugee women had trafficked in Nayapara camp. It is found that 28.57% were trafficked by villagers and 71.43% were by other refugees.

### **1.3.1.7 Abuse/Humiliation**

The Rohingya women face abuse and humiliation often every day. They are abused by their own family members, neighbors, community members, co-workers, and security member etc. When they go outside from the camp everybody treats them as a refugee abuses and humiliates them. Joynob Bibi (shed-1204/5, Block-H) opined that she went to her cousin's house in "B" block wearing 'borkha'. When she was returning home alone, then police members and ansar stopped her and saw her face forcibly. She tried to forbid them, but they became angry and abused her. They caught her hand and they dragged her in the ground and toured her mask and scarf. They also snatched her mobile phone and money.

**Table-1.3.1.7: Abuse/Humiliation in Rohingya Camp**

Perpetrator	Number of cases of Abuse/Humiliation
Other refugee of the camp	7
Villager	8
Camp security members	3
Total	18

Source: Field Survey of Nayapara Camp, 2014

Table-1.3.1.7 demonstrates that a total of 18 (33.96%) respondent are abused and humiliated. The study found that 38.89% were abused and humiliated by other refugees, 44.44% were by villagers, 16.67% by camp security members. Furthermore, early marriage, forced marriage, polygamy, extra marital relationship, physical assault are also available in the camp. These types of violence also effect on Bangladeshi culture. In addition, the Rohingya community, both male and female is also involved with drug smuggling, robbing and terrorism, which is a big threat to security of Bangladesh.

### **1.4 Conclusion**

The study focuses on the violence against women of Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh and it is found that both women and men, refugees suffer violence in the camp from the local Bangladeshi communities, the police, their employers and the camp authorities. The refugee's illegal status makes them more vulnerable and nullifies their rights when dealing with the injustices meted out to them. It is evident that the solution to the problem is complex as well. Only a larger change in the status of the Rohingya, especially living status, an end to the Mahjee's power in refugee camps and an end to violence against the community, can change the women's position of acute vulnerability. The study found that the Rohingya refugees are involved with a number of illegal activities such as drug smuggling, robbing, terrorism, illegal arms trade and other organized crimes which are the biggest threat for security dilemma for the host Country-Bangladesh. If the Rohingya crisis is not addressed quickly emphasizing on justice and rights, it will tarnish security and stability of the country. Actually the primary problem and the solution lies with Myanmar, the representation of various developed countries, including the USA and EU should continue to exert pressure on Myanmar's government to consider the community

as their nationals. The Rohingya deserve to be accepted in the integration, social reconciliation and economic development process of Myanmar. Therefore, it is important to resolve Rohingya refugee problem and to develop a peaceful bilateral relation between Bangladesh and Myanmar. To reduce the violence in the camp and resolve the Rohingya refugee problem Bangladesh should take the following steps soon:

- To involve Rohingya refugee with income generating activities in the camp and take more significant steps to improve the protection of Rohingya refugee women both inside and outside the camp.
- UNHCR has to take steps to resettle them to their home country; and
- Bangladesh government has to take steps to get support from UNO and other developed countries like USA, UK, Russia, China and Japan to convince Myanmar government to take back Rohingya refugee from Bangladesh.

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