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GBV in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Practitioner Reflections and Lived Experiences

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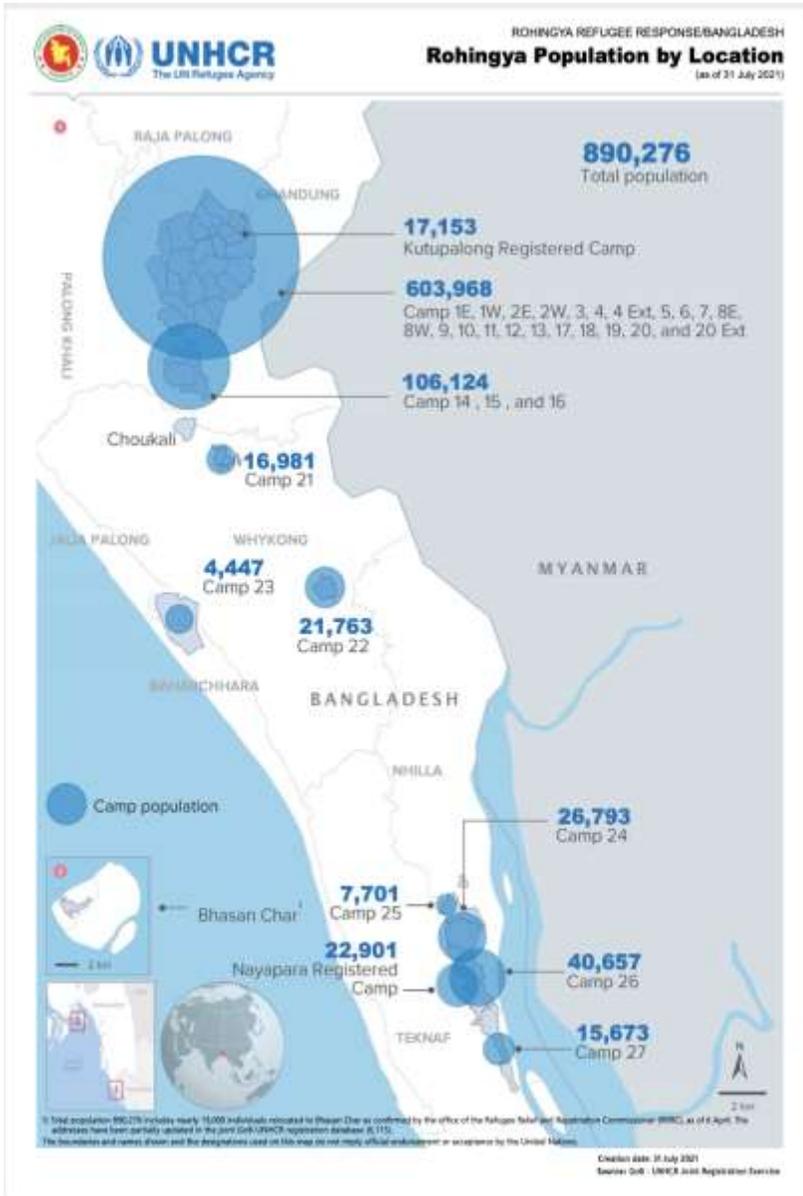- Rohingya Women´s Leader and Student
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Hello, my name is Lucky,
I'm a Rohingya advocate working for women rights

Rohingya Population by Location (as of 31 July 2022)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The majority of the Rohingya population experienced or were witness to conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar

- Complex security environment in camps, congested living conditions and protection risks. No access to livelihood and educational opportunities, wholly reliant on international humanitarian aid

- Insecurity caused by displacement; camp settings carry many GBV-related risks (which are constantly evolving alongside gender norms)

- Mobility restrictions of women and adolescent girls and new restrictions in socio-cultural and gendered social norms (new changes in displacement). Increase in early marriage and intimate partner violence.

- Single-headed female households, widows, new family composition and demographic changes. 52 per cent of the Rohingya population is female.

- Conditions which heighten protection risks of many forms of GBV

L3 Emergency 2017 → L2 2018 → 2019 → 2020 → 2021 → 2022

CAMP CONDITIONS AND GBV RISKS

- Social norms perceptions of women's and men's **honour ("izzot")** and practices of **"purdah"**

- No electricity, poor or no lighting, congestion, lack of safe water and sanitation facilities - Lack of privacy, **lack of spaces appropriate for social norms**

- Social conflict, crime, violence, and **pre-existing protection risks** (including armed groups)

- **Natural disasters:** cyclones, monsoon-related risks (landslides, flooding), fires, other rapid-onset emergencies and disasters

- **COVID-19 lockdown restrictions:** shrinking of protection space due to government restrictions (not seen as life-saving and essential) which impacted on GBV programming

- In 2022, **intimate partner violence** is the main GBV case typology, physical assault, sexual assault, forced marriage, denial of resources and risks of human trafficking (labour and sexual)

SHIFTING GENDER NORMS, BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Gender and GBV

- Purdah and perceptions of honour restrict women from access to services/information

- Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment.

- Economic insecurity contributing to risks of transactional sex, human trafficking, early marriage, polygamy, etc.

Women´s Leadership

- Rohingya women play an important role as volunteers.

- Elected and self-mobilised community leaders and have formed their own groups to advocate for their rights

- New engagement in income-generating activities (can create risks for women)

Women´s Committee Meeting in Rohingya Refugee Camp, Teknaf,, Cox´s Bazar, Bangladesh (IOM 2019)

A SITUATION OF COMPOUNDING RISK: COVID-19

Impact of COVID-19

- Social stigma, blaming and community policing

- Increase in domestic violence, child marriage, and transphobic violence due to fear, anxiety, economic insecurity

- Reduced access to GBV services and protection presence

Security Risks

- Presence of armed gangs, non-state armed groups

- Targeting women through kidnapping, smuggling, human trafficking, killing, adductions, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment and threats

- Escalation of security threats, violence, extortion, etc.

IOM´s GBV Team in the Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhiya, Cox´s Bazar, Bangladesh (IOM 2018)

CHANGES SINCE DISPLACEMENT

- Research with Rohingya in Bangladesh indicates that men experience frustration stemming from a change in traditional gender roles and associated shame linked to their loss of status as breadwinners.

- Financial challenges are increasingly leading women to engage in "unacceptable" work that threatens their honour.

- Women are engaged in humanitarian activities in ways that can compromise their honour and which can result in further policing, harassment and shaming by men and women

E.g.: requiring women to stand in distribution lines alongside men or participating in cash-for-work programmes that require them to perform non-traditional or masculine forms of work in the public sphere with men.

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES: IZZOT (HONOUR)

Izzot was identified among the Rohingya as a system of social reputations whose basis was **"derived from three sources: religious piety and observation of religious practices, financial wealth, and educational achievements"** – all gendered, e.g., through purdah and marriage

For men honour is something produced, whereas for women, honour is something that can only be lost – like her chastity – symbolized and evaluated through her actions and practices.

Nexus between power and gender is evident in the established value system through which men and women's actions are deemed **"honourable"** or **"dishonourable"** - through which social reputations and actions are assessed, governed and punished for non-compliance.

A woman's honour is something that is carefully policed, assessed and evaluated through **complex trade-offs** that a woman makes between **upholding traditional values, Rohingya identity** and her engagement in **"less acceptable"** non-normative activities.

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES: PURDAH

- The tradition of **purdah** begins with menstruation and is the predominant practice of **regulating honour.**

- Understanding of the practice is varied and **can permit or inhibit access to spaces and opportunities** outside of a woman's home.

- The **interpretation of purdah** governs how a woman behaves and where she can go **(potential site for transformation of gender norms)**

- **Rohingya women and men police practices of purdah as a way to affirm Rohingya collective identity.** Many Rohingya believe returning to traditional religious values, social norms and practices is important after the attempted genocide

Painting made by a Rohingya woman in IOM´s Women and Girls Safe Space (IOM 2020)

NORMS TRANSFORMATION

- The conflict and feeling of having their ethnicity attacked, as well as the gendered nature of the violence that occurred during displacement, has meant that **women's bodies and behaviours are increasingly scrutinized and associated with "Rohingya identity."**

- feeling of **"losing control of women"** is related to experiences of **"losing control"** over Rohingya identity.

- **Interpretation of religious texts by women and men have a tremendous impact on what women are allowed to do and how they are treated**. Women and men rely heavily on the hadith and religious institutional norms to determine the acceptability of women's actions and their impact on honour.

- **Women's participation in these religious discussions** has resulted in better outcomes for their access to public spheres. However, women and men both participate in enforcing these norms, and the broader consequences of women's engagement in religious spaces are unclear

- Negotiation of new ways of maintaining *izzot* **(honour)** and what it means to be a **"good woman"**

INFORMING STRATEGIES OF PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

- **Ensuring evidence-based and culturally sensitive curriculum and approaches.** Development should be in collaboration with Rohingya communities themselves with women and girls in the driver´s seat of development

- **Create spaces for meaningful participation with women and girls**, including women's CBOs/CSOs, in ways that they perceive as culturally appropriate

- **Community-led models and approaches** to be utilised through working with women and men community representatives and groups to identify risks and solutions, and to have effective, safe and inclusive systems for feedback, two-way communication and regular monitoring and feedback

- **Static (facility-based) and community level activities should be complementary** and driven by each other (GBV response and prevention activities mutually reinforce each other, women and girls safe spaces, male engagement, etc.)

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

- **Social norms are heavily influenced by individual attitudes, institutional practices**, including religious rules and governing institutions, material incentives, and humanitarian programmes.

- It is important to understand where social norms are inter-related to these various dynamics and what impact they have on different groups and their access to services. **Such intersections are important spaces through which to transform norms, but also points of contention.**

- Humanitarians need to be **aware of social norms, attitudes and practices** to ensure response efforts do not contribute to GBV.

- Important to address structural **underlying causes and contributing factors of GBV** including access to livelihoods and education, camp governance systems and GBV risk mitigation in site planning.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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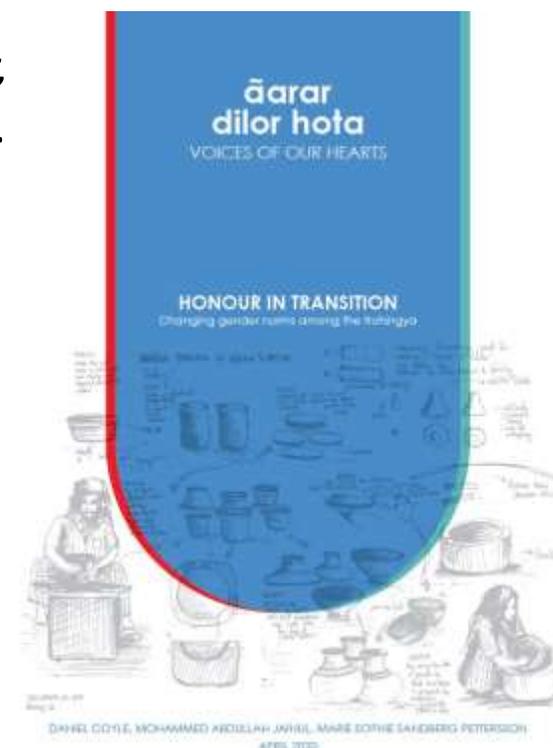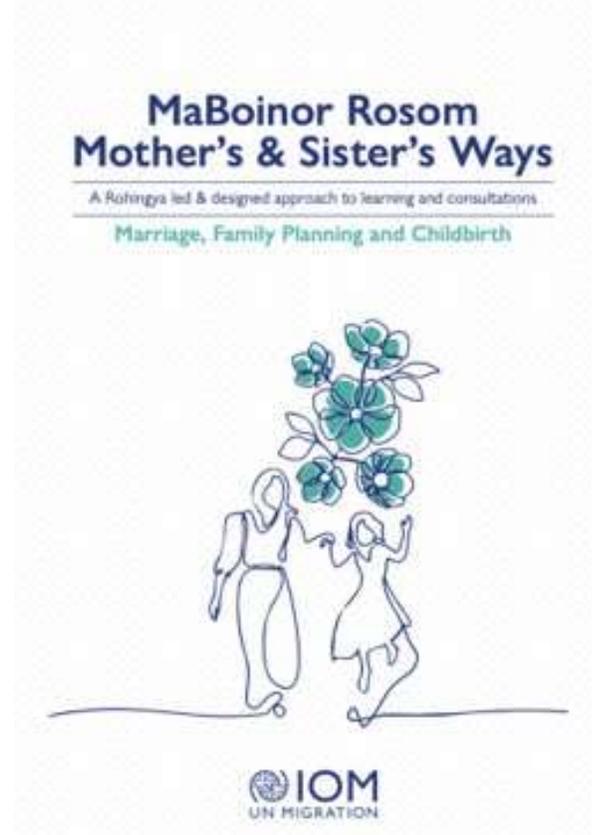
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MA BOINOR ROSOM – A ROHINGYA-DESIGNED APPROACH

- MaBoinor Rosom (MBR) Edition 1 Summary Report: Menstrual Hygiene Management: https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/maboinor-rosom-mother-s-sister-s-ways-summary-report-menstrual-hygiene-management

- MBR Edition 2 Summary Report: Marriage: https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/maboinor-rosom-mother-s-sister-s-ways-marriage-summary-report-february-2022

- MBR Edition 2 Summary Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health: https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/maboinor-rosom-mother-s-sister-s-ways-sexual-and-reproductive-health-srh-summary

MaBoinor Rosom
Mother's & Sister's Ways
A Rohingya led & designed approach to learning and consultations
Marriage, Family Planning and Childbirth

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