Combating Human Trafficking: A Case on FDMN Rohingya at Cox's Bazar

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Abstract

Human trafficking remains one of the most egregious human rights violations, manifesting as modern slavery despite global advancements in human rights and civilization. The Rohingya crisis serves as an example of the grave consequences of human trafficking since the targeted ethnic minority in Myanmar is highly vulnerable as a result of their forced relocation and lack of safety in Bangladesh. The principal objective of this paper is to investigate the reason, consequence, and legal mechanisms of human trafficking of the Rohingya community within Bangladesh while offering insights and suggestions for more successful preventative and intervention tactics to preserve human dignity. This research has been conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods, which helped to analyze the core reasons for human trafficking among Rohingyas and formulate recommendations. This study finds that the influx of Rohingyas faced a lot of hardships in settling here. As a result, in search of a new life, they are attracted to migrate to other countries, which is the biggest reason for the voluntary human trafficking of Rohingyas. Bangladesh can implement comprehensive measures, which include legal reforms, enhanced enforcement, victim protection, intense international repatriation negotiations, and sustainable livelihood initiatives, which can help the government bring reforms to change this vulnerability into resilience.

Keywords: Rohingya, Repatriation, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sustainable Solutions, *etc*.

1. Introduction

Human trafficking of Forcedly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) involves the illicit trade of FDMN individuals through coercion, exploitation, and forced labor, exacerbating the dire circumstances faced by Rohingya refugees fleeing persecution in Myanmar and seeking sanctuary in Bangladesh (Khuda, 2020). The term "human trafficking" refers to a variety of human exploitation practices that include forced labor, sex trafficking, and the commercial harvesting of human organs. (Wooditch, 2024) Refugee trafficking exploits vulnerable

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populations globally fleeing conflict and persecution, such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh. Their displacement, coupled with limited legal protection and resources, heightens their risk of exploitation. Addressing this issue requires efforts to tackle the root causes of displacement, strengthen legal protections, and enhance international cooperation to combat trafficking networks. A multitude of factors, including poverty, security concerns, competition for aid, lack of basic facilities, educational needs, restricted movement, and inadequate healthcare, collectively drive Rohingya refugees to seek protection and opportunities in other transit countries (Ali, Rahman & Uddin, 2018). The divergent sociopolitical and socioeconomic contexts between Bangladeshi Nationals and Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar make it necessary to

take measures to prevent and protect against human trafficking, reflecting the unique vulnerabilities and challenges faced by each community (Barua, 2021). The main objective of this paper is to discover the reasons for human trafficking from its root and to suggest recommendations to address this transboundary crime, which can help the government bring reforms to overcome this crisis.

2. Background of the study

Human trafficking is recognized as one of the most terrible human rights offenses in the modern world (Hossain, 2024). This abhorrent practice manifesting modern slavery continues despite advancements in human rights and civilization across the globe (OHCHR,2009). Human trafficking is described as the use of coercion, deceit, or force to exploit human beings (International Labour Organization, 2019). It is an organized crime with serious consequences that is harder to stop. Human trafficking is a multifaceted issue with grave consequences, including physical, psychological, and socioeconomic hardships for victims (Chowdhury, 2020). Hence, it is a serious concern for law enforcement and human rights organizations worldwide (Broad and Turnbull, 2018). Moreover, it is perpetrated by networks of individuals who work together to exploit victims. This criminal activity also infringes on human dignity and severely threatens global security and stability (Albanese, Broad, & Gadd, 2022). The plight of the Rohingya people exemplifies the devastating impact of human trafficking. The Rohingya, an ethnic minority group from Myanmar, have faced severe persecution, leading to mass displacement and a humanitarian crisis. Fleeing violence and discrimination, many Rohingya seek refuge in neighboring countries (Islam, 2023). This desperate situation has rendered them highly vulnerable to human traffickers who exploit their lack of protection and resources. This criminal activity also infringes on human dignity and poses a severe threat to global security and stability. With the current upsurge in efforts to prevent human trafficking, international collaboration has become imperative

in addressing this issue. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies have banded together to pass stricter laws, raise awareness, and provide aid to victims. This study aims to delve deeper into the mechanisms of human trafficking, with a specific focus on the Rohingya crisis. Efforts to combat trafficking include international agreements like the Palermo Protocol, the ASEAN Convention, and regional initiatives. Still, challenges remain, including a lack of reliable data, enforcement gaps, corruption, and inadequate victim protection (Guild, Andrees & Van Der, 2005). By examining the socio-economic and legal frameworks that allow trafficking to persist among FDMN Rohingyas, the research seeks to contribute to the fight against their trafficking by Offering insights and recommendations for more effective prevention and intervention strategies. The ultimate objective of this article is to enhance global security and uphold human dignity by eradicating this scourge from society.

3. Statement of Problem

A substantial nontraditional security concern, human trafficking in Southeast Asia annually generates over $150 billion and impacts approximately 40 million individuals worldwide. Historical oppression of Rohingya, better called ‘ethnic cleansing,’ has compelled them to influx into Bangladesh, which happened thrice on a larger scale. As Bangladesh is a densely populated country, the influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh has created significant challenges for the government in providing food, shelter, and employment, which results in worsening the life of Rohingyas inside and outside the camp. With an aspiration for better standards of life, they want to migrate. Hence, organized trafficking networks are taking advantage of the refugees' vulnerable situation by targeting the Rohingya through forced labor, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse. The exploitation of Rohingya individuals not only violates their fundamental human rights but also highlights the broader security threats posed by human trafficking. Efforts to combat human trafficking among the Rohingya have intensified, with international cooperation playing a crucial role (Alam, E. and others, 2023).

4. Literature Review

The pre-colonial to post-colonial historical foundations of the persecution of the Rohingya people in Myanmar were explored by Chowdhury in his article. This paper illustrates how Rohingya identity was marginalized and made into the "enemy Other" by state processes supported by religious nationalism, and the Rohingya, who the state had marginalized, took a victim role to oppose it, which fostered a cycle of politicized identity and made the conflict worse as a result of Myanmar's democratic transition. The literature ignores a crucial part of the

Rohingya minority's situation by failing to examine the relationship between human trafficking and the persecution of this group in Myanmar (Chowdhury, 2020). After that, interventions were made by International Communities to stop the atrocities on the Rohingya people of Myanmar, which has been emphasized in Author *Faye's* article. The author here discussed the reasons for the influx of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, which started because of the Nagamin Census of 1977 and caused immense torture of the Myanmar Government on the Rohingya people based on religious and ethnical discrepancies. Though this article provides a clear indication of the desperation of Rohingyas to lead a better life, which makes them attracted to human trafficking, this article lacks in highlighting the effect of human trafficking and measures to prevent this transboundary crime (Faye, 2021). *Renzaho and others* addressed that, to avoid conflict and persecution, Rohingya refugees have been fleeing from Myanmar in large numbers to nearby countries, primarily Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Thailand. Bangladesh has been the preferred destination for Rohingya refugees due to its proximity and religion (Wali *et al.*, 2018). The influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh strained the government's capacity to provide essential resources, leading to harsh measures aimed at their removal due to demographic concerns. Despite efforts by the UNHCR to assist, inadequate shelter and crucial services in refugee camps worsened living conditions, making Rohingya susceptible to exploitation, including human trafficking, in pursuit of better prospects (Kamruzzaman, Siddiqi & Ahmed, 2024).

Kamruzzaman, Siddiqui, and Ahmed examined how host communities in Bangladesh perceive the Rohingya, attributing tensions to prolonged crisis, resource constraints, and Rohingya involvement in crime (Kamruzzaman, Siddiqui & Ahmed, 2024). Despite some positive impacts like increased productivity and local labor support, Rohingyas are primarily viewed as burdens. Similarly, Ansar and Khaled noted a shift from solidarity to resentment among host communities due to competition for government assistance and livelihood opportunities, fostering vulnerability among Rohingyas and increasing susceptibility to trafficking as they seek better prospects. *Parmar and others* investigated human trafficking and crimes in the Rohingya camps and tracked down the unemployment status as the prime reason behind trafficking in the COVID-19 pandemic era. Also, he observed children to be involved in narcotics trafficking (Parmar et al., 2019). Besides these reasons, Payakh Akhavan cited the driving factors, mentioning scarcity of money and income-generating activities that drive Rohingyas to find a better livelihood abroad. However, they face dangers when trying to flee. However, the author did not address the role of law enforcement bodies in stopping the trafficking (Akhavan, 2019). *Biswajit Ghosh* also analyses the causes and the nature, modes, and volume of human

trafficking in a nation. However, the study only focuses on structural factors with less recent practical data to combat social evil named Human Trafficking (Ghosh, 2009). On the other hand, *Robert F Barsky* describes the enticement process of human trafficking. Recruiters may involve their neighbors or friends in the recruitment process, as they understand the needs and sufferings of potential victims and may influence their families by sharing information. However, the author opted to cover all perspectives of human trafficking and only wrote a few about trafficking (Barskey, 2021). Therefore, awareness programs should try to make the Rohingyas through suggesting them to be aware of their neighbors and friends.

The consequence of this significant global issue of human trafficking is complex. It has long-lasting mental health consequences for survivors such as including the extensive needs of survivors, limited provider capacity, and a fragmented multi-sector response (Powell, C *et al.*, 2017).

Author Imamoglu, in his paper, also explains the weakness of governments in combating people trafficking in civil conflicts where disparities in strategies weaken efforts. This literature is deficient in its complete analysis of the multitude of factors that influence country attempts to combat human trafficking beyond civil conflict. As a result, the comprehension of effective global anti-trafficking methods is constrained (Imamoglu,2021). Fakhrul Islamprovides insights into anti-trafficking professionals in Bangladesh, emphasizing a pragmatic approach to understanding and combating human trafficking. This study aimed to explore the humanitarian dimensions of the law, mainly focusing on compensatory measures, rehabilitation, and the reintegration of victims of human trafficking. However, this study was confined to the Jessore district, and data collected from stakeholders regarding the legal implications of survivor women's socio-economic reintegration may differ from the actual experiences of victim women (Islam, F., 2023). Similarly, *Hossain* underscores the necessity for legal frameworks and international assistance, particularly amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, while also highlighting the ongoing difficulties in delivering comprehensive services due to governmental restrictions. Although this literature recognizes the vulnerability of Rohingya refugees in the context of the crisis, it does not thoroughly examine the individual cases, trends, and responses to human trafficking within this group (Hossain, A.N.M.Z., 2022).

Thus, some of the literature about the Rohingya minority mentioned above fails to examine the intersection of human trafficking and persecution adequately, to point out various influences that shape anti-trafficking initiatives, practical insights, and recent data on the role of law enforcement, and inadequate

examines trafficking within the Rohingya community. Our paper endeavors to address these gaps by investigating the correlation between Rohingya persecution and trafficking, expanding the range of determinants impacting anti-trafficking endeavors by integrating practical perspectives derived from in-depth interviews and emphasizing the responsibility of law enforcement.

5. Research Methodology

This research employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to examine the human trafficking crisis among the Rohingya. The qualitative aspect is theoretical and analytical, involving a thorough literature review of primary and secondary sources such as books, government and NGO reports, book chapters, and journal articles.

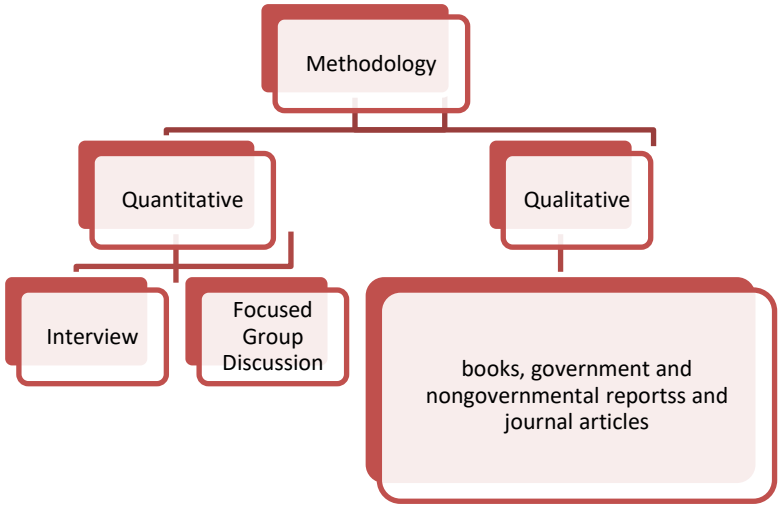


Figure no. 1- Types of Methodology

The researchers conducted field visits to Kutupalong refugee camps- Camp One and Camp 7 in Cox's Bazar, using observations, narrative inquiry (NI), and key informant interviews (KII) to gather insights. Quantitatively, the study uses a practical approach involving surveys, statistics, and interviews to show how law enforcement operates in society. Data were collected using random sampling, which can be categorized as simple random sampling. The study collected data only from Rohingyas in Camp 1 and Camp 7 and not from the entire population of Rohingyas across all camps. The selection process for individuals within those camps was random, and each had an equal chance of being chosen. The study targeted specific age groups—youth (16-24), young adults (25-45), and the elderly (46-60) to address the prevalence and risk factors of trafficking among

these demographics. Individuals below 16 were likely excluded due to legal and ethical considerations, while those above 60 are less commonly trafficked. The focus on these age ranges aligns with observed trafficking patterns and practical research considerations. Statistically, 72.3% of interviews were conducted in Camp 1 and 27.7% in Camp 7. Though Camp 7 has better facilities than Camp 1 due to a shortage of time, less data was collected from Camp 7. They also consulted diverse stakeholders and conducted interviews with FDMNs, Camp in Charges (CICs), government representatives, legal representatives, journalists, and NGO members in standardized and non-directive formats. To guarantee informed consent, every participant was given comprehensive information regarding the research's objectives, prospective advantages, and risks. The authors have worked with dedication to maintain the quality of the data, and the confidentiality level was highly addressed during data collection.

Data validation was performed twice to ensure accuracy. The research also included descriptive analysis and statistical tests to interpret the data, employing pie charts, bar graphs, XY scatter plots, and table charts for representation. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the human trafficking crisis among the Rohingya by analyzing patterns, trends, and correlations in the data while maintaining data quality and confidentiality.

6. Theoretical Framework

There are various theories regarding trafficking, such as General Systems Theory and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which help analyze anti-trafficking efforts by considering individuals' broader social and environmental contexts. **Conflict Theory** and **Structural Functional Theory** highlight how social inequalities and power imbalances contribute to trafficking, while **Migration Theory** explains how forced migration increases vulnerability to trafficking. **International Relations Theory** underscores the need for global cooperation to address trafficking; Labelling **Theory** emphasizes the importance of accurately identifying victims to ensure they receive appropriate support—Maslow's **Hierarchy of Needs** guides interventions by addressing victims' fundamental needs as a foundation for recovery.

Among these theories, **migration theory was used for this paper as it** focuses on the reasons and factors driving people to migrate, such as persecution, war, environmental crises, and economic disparities (C. Cindy Fan, 2020). This theory is particularly pertinent to the case of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar for several reasons:

Understanding Vulnerability: Migration theory helps to understand why Rohingya refugees are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Their forced

displacement due to violence and persecution creates conditions of extreme vulnerability, making them targets for traffickers who exploit their dire situation.

Identifying Push Factors: The theory highlights the push factors—such as the violence and persecution in Myanmar—that drive Rohingyas to flee. By understanding these factors, intervention strategies can be better tailored to address the root causes of their displacement and mitigate the risk of trafficking.

Designing Targeted Interventions: By applying migration theory, policymakers and social workers can design interventions that address the immediate needs of refugees and alleviate the underlying causes of their vulnerability. This includes providing safe and stable environments, addressing economic hardships, and improving legal protections.

Guiding International Cooperation: Migration theory also underscores the importance of international cooperation in addressing trafficking. Since trafficking often involves cross-border issues, a comprehensive approach that includes international support and coordination is crucial for effective prevention and response.

Migration Theory provides valuable insights into the reasons behind the displacement of Rohingya refugees and the conditions that make them susceptible to trafficking. This understanding was essential for developing effective strategies to combat trafficking and support the needs of these vulnerable populations. For these reasons, migration theory was chosen for this paper to uphold its standard.

7. Analyzing Data on Human Trafficking

This study examined the challenges faced by Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMNs) in combating human trafficking, focusing on their transition from vulnerability to resilience. Interviews with 150 Rohingya residents from Camps 1 and 7 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, three focused group discussions, six case studies, and collaboration with NGOs and government authorities provided data on trafficking prevalence and forms. Participants' experiences highlighted factors contributing to their susceptibility and resilience, aiming to inform more effective intervention strategies.

7.1. Data through Interview:

7.1.1. Camp of interviews and Gender whose interviews were taken

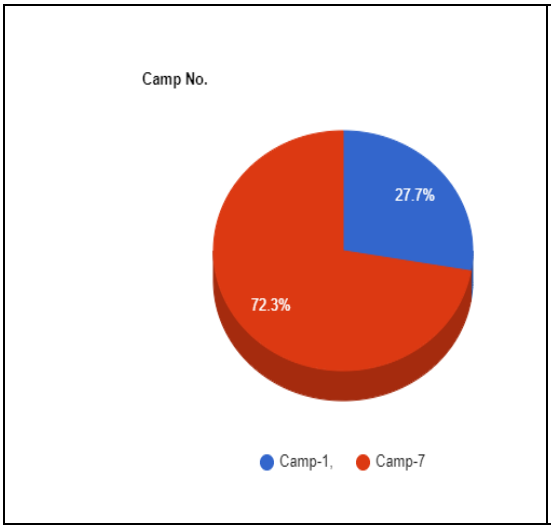


Figure 1. : Camp of interviews were taken

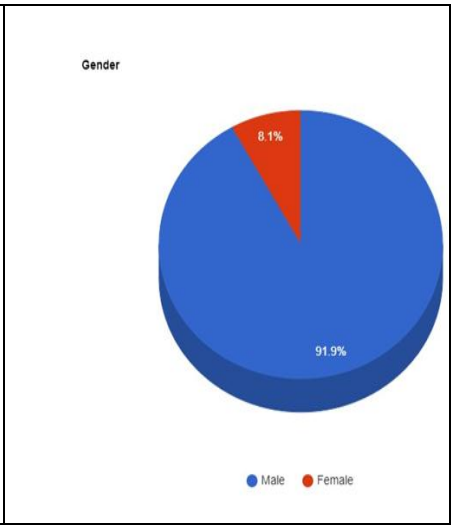


Figure 2. : Gender whose interviews

Interviews of FDMNs were taken from Camp No. 1 and Camp No. 7. Most of the responses came from Camp No. 7. Additionally, a new behavioral pattern was noticed: FDMNs from Camp 1 were introverted and conservative, whereas those in Camp 7 were welcoming and open, likely due to Camp-7's superior furnishings, equipment, security, and environmental friendliness compared to Camp-1(OHCHR, 2022). In **Figure 2,** The pie chart illustrates the proportion of interviewees in each segment, where it is shown that

- 91.9% was male interviewee.
- 8.1% were female interviewees, which, due to the unwillingness to answer, is negligible in amount.

Moreover, due to their religious practices, many Rohingya Muslim women preferred to stay inside their residences rather than participate in the study (Human Trafficking Search, 2022), with additional factors such as security concerns, fear for personal safety, and heavy household responsibilities further contributing to the skewed gender representation in the interviews.

7.1.2. Age:



Figure 3: Age of people whose interviews were taken

The pie chart illustrates age distribution: 6.7% aged 11-20, 40% aged 21-30, 33.3% aged 31-40, and 16.7% aged 41-50. This highlights that younger individual, especially those aged 21-30, are more educated about their rights and societal issues. Motivated by a desire for change, they actively advocate despite experiencing challenges.

7.1.3. Stakeholders:



Figure 4: Stakeholders

The pie chart illustrates the classification of stakeholders engaged throughout the survey. Significant amounts of engaged stakeholders are NGO Representatives, which is 32%. Government representatives comprise 16% of the total, and 30% and 22% are Rohingya. NGOs play a critical role in humanitarian crises, often

being the first to respond and provide essential services. Their substantial involvement in the survey reflects their significant presence and active participation in the field, working closely with the affected communities. Including a mix of stakeholders ensures a comprehensive understanding of the crisis.

7.1.4. Preferable Countries for Trafficking:

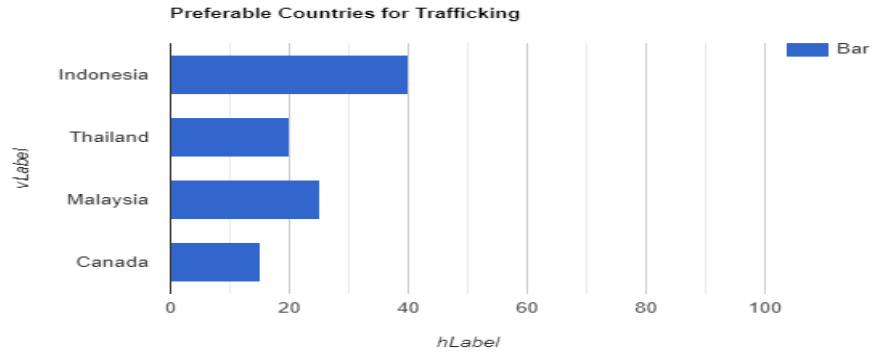


Figure 5.: Preferable Countries for Trafficking

The bar graph compares the average proportion of preferable countries among Rohingyas for trafficking. By the water route in the Bay of Bengal, people mainly have been exploited in Malaysia because it is so trouble-free for people in Cox's Bazar to go to Malaysia. Middleman came to them with various temptations (Letchamanana, 2013). In most cases, the employer showed the victim various temptations to move to these countries.

The trafficking data from Bangladesh reveals that Indonesia (40%) is the most preferred destination, primarily due to its high demand for low-wage labor, less stringent anti-trafficking laws, and relatively inexpensive and straightforward routes for traffickers. At 25%, Malaysia is also a major destination because of its economic opportunities, similarly weak regulatory controls, and accessible routes. Thailand, with 20%, benefits from its proximity and established trafficking routes, making it a viable option. Canada, at 18%, is less favored due to its stricter enforcement of anti-trafficking laws and higher costs and logistical challenges associated with trafficking. The preference for these destinations reflects economic factors, ease of access, and regulatory environment.

7.1.5. Reason behind Trafficking of Rohingya Girls:

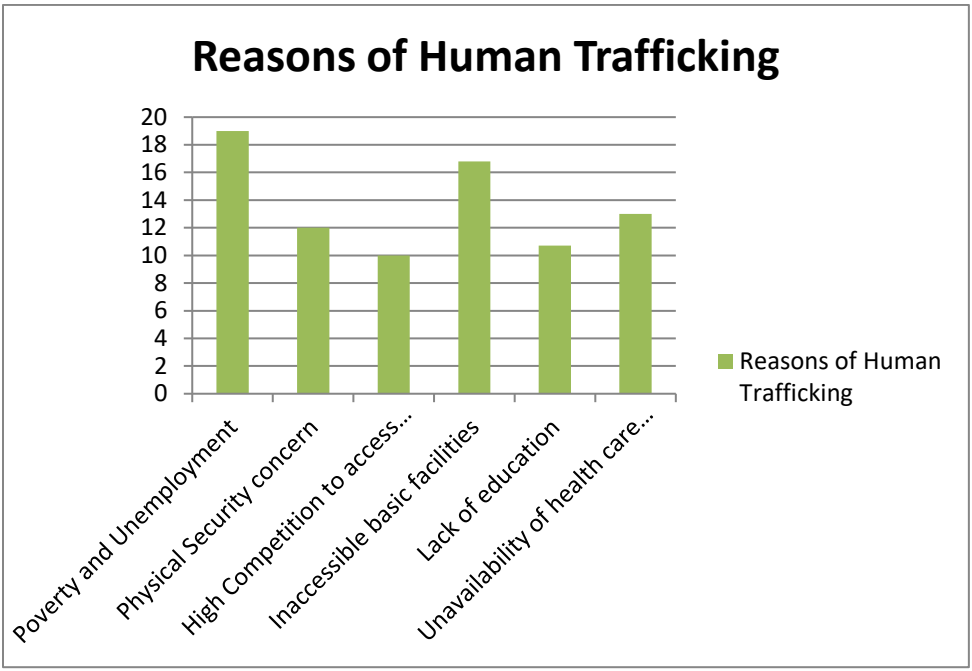


Figure 6.: Reason behind Trafficking of Rohingya Girls

When asked about their reasons for leaving Bangladesh, most Rohingyas cited multiple factors, illustrating the diverse and collective triggers behind their difficult decision to seek international protection in other transit countries.

About 19% of Rohingya respondents cited that *poverty and unemployment forced them to leave Bangladesh* in search of a decent employment opportunity in other transit countries, in particular Malaysia and Indonesia. A Rohingya community leader stressed that there were almost no job opportunities inside refugee camps, particularly in informal refugee camps and makeshift. Some Rohingya key informants shared that there were job opportunities outside their refugee camps. On the voice of an FDMN Named Md Hassan (aged 27, working as a volunteer) states, "We are often offered day labor, domestic chores as a maid*, though wages are cheap. But it is beneficial for us."*

About 12% of Rohingya respondents cited security concerns, including theft, intimidation, and sexual harassment, as the main reasons for leaving refugee camps in Bangladesh to seek protection elsewhere. One key informant also cited

that there had been several sexual harassment cases against women and girls in refugee camps.

About 10% of respondents cited intense competition for UNHCR protection and humanitarian aid due to overcrowding in Bangladesh's refugee camps as a reason for seeking asylum elsewhere, with some Rohingyas unregistered as refugees despite residing in the camps for over five years.

Next, About 16.7% of Rohingya respondents reported a lack of access to basic facilities like clean water, electricity, and proper housing in refugee camps in Bangladesh. A key informant, Suruza Jamal (FDMN No- 742-0000-2138), cited, "*Some women and children had to walk as far as two kilometers to fetch clean water with limited light at night."* She also noted that the temporary residence in many refugee camps in Bangladesh was worn out and inappropriate for human beings. *"During the rainy season, Rohingyas face chronic latrines as there are no proper piping systems installed around the housing area. Consequently, more and more Rohingyas, including women and children, are forced to find a way out, including seeking help from smugglers to bring them to other transit countries.*

According to 10.5% of Rohingya respondents, educational needs were a significant factor in moving to another transit country. Many key informants noted the lack of educational opportunities for children in both formal and informal refugee camps in Bangladesh (Focus group discussion with Rohingya.).

Slightly more than one-third of Rohingya respondents reported that the lack of freedom to move encouraged them to leave refugee camps in Bangladesh. Restrictions on movement outside the camps or to cities in Cox's Bazar hindered their ability to seek employment (Human Rights Watch, 2023). A Rohingya named Ataullah From camp-06 stressed that" *moving from one camp to another was an essential aspect of our life, especially to find and reunite with their family members that had been separated during the migration period from Myanmar to Bangladesh."*

Lastly, about 12.5% of Rohingya respondents cited the lack of access to healthcare facilities as a key reason for leaving Bangladesh. Many Rohingyas, having faced traumatic experiences, need more than regular health services; they require continuous mental health treatment and psychosocial support. In one conversation with Md Sabet (FDMN from Camp 07) uttered, "*We are provided with minimal medicine (by the govt.). And NGOs require us to pay for medicines. However, NGOs do not provide costly medicines."*

7.1.6. Types of Trafficking among Rohingyas:

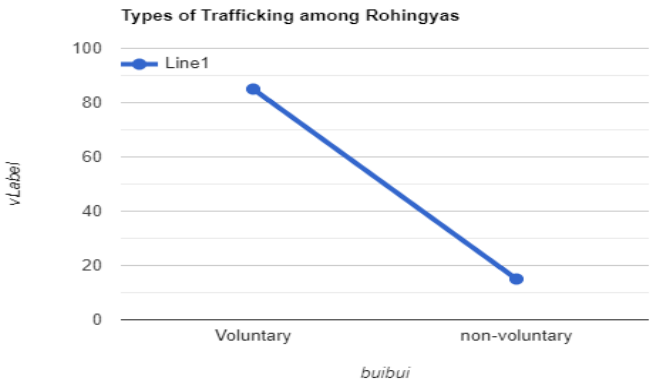


Figure 7.: Types of Trafficking among Rohingyas

The line graph compares information about the proportion of different types of trafficking among Rohingyas. The result of the ratio of voluntary purposes is much higher than that of non-voluntary purposes, which is nearly 85%. Traffickers primarily targeted male victims in casual, non-technical activities, while female victims engaged in commercial sexual and domestic activities. The remaining individuals were trafficked and exploited by relatives, recruiting agencies, NGO workers, and other individuals with consent or partial consent (Brysk, A., and Maskey, A., 2012).

7.1.7. Preferable Ways for Trafficking:

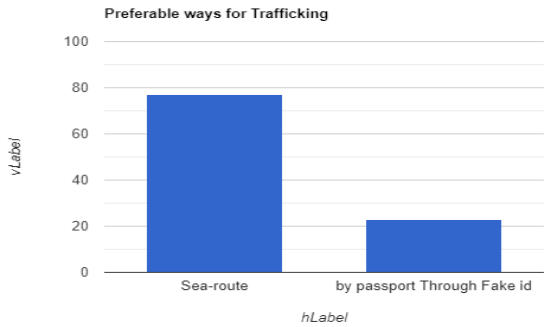


Figure 8.: Preferable Ways for Trafficking

The bar graph illustrates information about the percentage of preferable ways for trafficking. To do so, the way of the sea route is much higher and favored than that of the passport, which is almost 76.4%. On the other hand, the preferable way for human trafficking by using a passport was comparatively lower than that of a route, at nearly 23.6%. Victims often face exploitation in construction and domestic work, with the potential for lucrative jobs before moving abroad but being given risky jobs after. Hence, they risk their lives and choose an easy and less inquiring route, which is the route (Higginson, A. *et al.*, 2015).

7.1.8. Co-relation between Sex and Susceptibility to Trafficking:

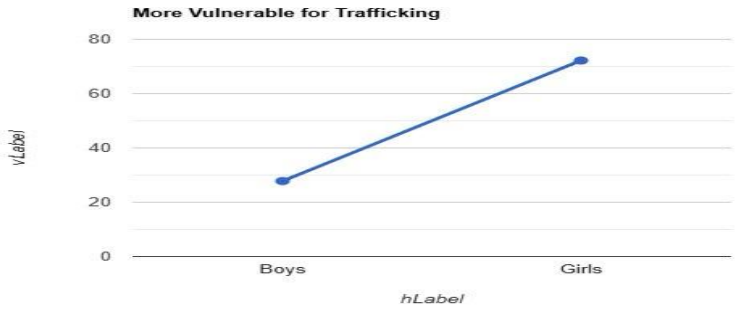


Figure 9.: More Vulnerable to Trafficking

The line graph compares information about the proportion of vulnerability of human trafficking. Overall, the ratio of girls is much higher than that of boys, approximately 72.2%. Women are often treated as domestic workers and forced into prostitution by employers. Both men and women perform different types of work abroad, with women frequently subjected to sexual abuse and forced prostitution (Bekker, L.G *et al.*, 2018). Meanwhile, the vulnerability rate of boys was comparatively lower than that of girls, which represented 27.8%.

7.2. Data through Focused Group Discussions

7.2.1. Focused Group Discussion took place among Journalists and the research team

Men in Cox's Bazar face trafficking primarily due to economic hardships, unemployment, poverty, and limited education. Brokers exploit these vulnerabilities, often with involvement from local stakeholders and police. The predominant form of trafficking is sexual exploitation, significantly affecting individuals aged 14 to 30. Trafficking routes through Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India favor sea routes for their weaker security, with increased rates during

winter. Post-rescue, government, and UN efforts focus on rehabilitation, addressing mental health, cultural needs, and rights protection. Despite funding challenges, journalists work to raise awareness about Rohingya and trafficking issues.

7.2.2. Focused Group Discussion with NGO Representative

Bangladeshi MPs, agencies, and brokers are accused of trafficking complicity, collaborating with foreign brokers via Dhaka agencies, and exploiting migrants (Suan, 2006). BRAC highlights trafficking vulnerability among teens and women, partnering with UNHCR and IOM for solutions. NGOs note gender disparities in victim support, with females freely leaving shelters and males lacking aid. In a central interview, NGO representative Jahed Alam said that Rohingyas are both victims and perpetrators of trafficking, frequently kidnapping Bangladeshis for exploitation. In 2023, many Bangladeshis, including vulnerable girls, were trafficked by Rohingyas to Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries, often extorting money from their families. Sexual trafficking is prevalent, affecting nearly 60% of Rohingyas with HIV and Hepatitis B. Rohingyas exploit lax camp security on Teknaf and Inani beaches to facilitate transnational crimes like human trafficking (Baird, T., 2013).

7.2.3. Focused Group Discussion with Government Authorities

Interacting sessions with the Deputy Secretary of the RRC Muhammad Talut and the Energy Policy Analyst Dr. Muhammad Talut explained the Bangladeshi government's efforts to combat human trafficking, particularly of women and children, include initiatives like Rohingya marking and exit cards (Ullah, A.A., 2011). Rohingyas escape camp conditions, seeking work and hope for return, with health issues and misused access passes causing overpopulation and increased vulnerability to traffic. CIC Shahed Iqbal emphasized the government's focus on repatriation, ignoring trafficking and bribery in law enforcement, preventing the creation of a unique court system for Rohingya cases.

The information assembled from the FGDs was in alignment with the practical scenario, which was gathered from the experience of Rohingyas through interviews in Camp 1 and Camp 7 regarding Rohingya trafficking in Cox's Bazar, which has strengthened the collected sample from the Rohingyas.

8. Barriers to Combatting Human Trafficking

As examined through this empirical study? Exacerbated by numerous structural and practical barriers, human trafficking remains a matter of concern for Bangladesh to combat. Additionally, these barriers impede effective measures

taken to combat trafficking and voluntary migration, thereby leaving victims in a vulnerable position. Key barriers include:

8.1. Legal and Policy Framework

Though Bangladesh has enacted the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 to address trafficking issues, gaps in the legal framework and inadequate implementation remain significant hurdles. Enforcement of this extensive law has been highly inconsistent with real life. Surprisingly, Jishu Barua noted that traffickers of Rohingya are rarely prosecuted under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012. Additionally, law enforcement's lack of specialization in trafficking laws leads to misinterpretation and mishandling of cases.

8.2. Irregularities within the Camp

Where there is a limited resource, there is a competition for "survival of the fittest." In resource-limited situations, competition arises, leading some to corrupt practices within camps. In a one-on-one conversation with Mohammad Farooque (A Bangladeshi Local), he often bribes to go outside the camp instead of taking access passes. He says, "*Though in the presence of CIC, we can't go inside the camp, we still can go inside to sell goods by finding an opportunity to give some bribes to the camp guard."*

8.3. Socio-economic factors

Lack of necessities and unemployment within the camp are the primary reasons for the voluntary migration of Rohingya. These factors are more of a "metaphysical" thing to solve. It is very over-aspirational for A third-world country Like Bangladesh, which is already dealing with overpopulation and unemployment problems, to solve these "metaphysical" issues.

8.4. Inadequate Victim Support and Rehabilitation

The victims of trafficking get traumatized severely. However, both registered and unregistered camps of Rohingya lack victim support centers to rehabilitate them into their everyday life. Vocational Training for reintegration into society is insufficient, thereby leaving victims vulnerable to re-trafficking. While having an FGD with RRRC, the Deputy Secretary of RRRC has affirmed the same.

8.5. Inadequate Cross-Border & Regional Co-Ordination

Human trafficking is a transnational organized crime that needs robust cross-border coordination (ILO,2019). However, regional cooperation amongst South Asian countries is often weak. The main reason can be attributed to the weak compliance of SAARC**.** This is where the lack of synchronized efforts between countries creates gaps that the traffickers exploit.

8.6. Lack of Reliable Data

Accurate and comprehensive data on human trafficking plays a crucial way in policy adoption. However, the lack of reliable data is another factor in combatting trafficking. For example, the Deputy Director of RRC says, "We prevent nine trafficking out of ten." That means the trafficking rate is very much in hand. The voice of an FDMN named Md Rifat (aged 16 years) states, "*A few days ago, an abduction took place on the edge of daggers and was taken hostage near BD-Myanmar Borders."*

8.7. Lack of Education and Awareness Regarding Migration Law

Mostly, those who migrate are unaware that they will never get citizenship legally in the migrated country. Still, they opt to choose this risky pathway. Unless this gets understood by the FDMN, the trafficking will never be combatted.

9. Legal Implication of Findings

Human trafficking involves exploiting people for forced labor, sexual exploitation, or involuntary servitude through fraud or coercion. Vulnerable people are lured for money or the expectation of a better life, just like FDMNs in Bangladesh. This research highlights that the Rohingya influx into Bangladesh was due to persecution by the Myanmar government. Overpopulation has strained Bangladesh's ability to provide for the Rohingyas, and international aid has been insufficient, worsening their living conditions. Consequently, Rohingyas are vulnerable to trafficking. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the history of Rohingya oppression and the dynamics of human trafficking. Interviews reveal that Rohingya women and girls are most vulnerable, often lured by promises of money, marriage, or love. Many risk their lives using sea routes or fake IDs for trafficking. Focus group discussions show that trafficking primarily affects those aged 14-30, driven by necessities and lack of non-state support. Corruption among police, locals, and officials facilitates trafficking, with misuse of access passes and bribery prevalent in camps. Organizations like UNHCR, YPSA, and IOM work to prevent trafficking, but government efforts focus on repatriation, limiting movement with exit cards, etc.

Lack of Specific Refugee Laws: Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and there is no specific domestic law for refugee protection. This limits legal recourse for refugees, including those vulnerable to trafficking.

Constitutional Protections for Refugees: Despite the absence of specific refugee laws, refugees in Bangladesh have constitutional protections. **Article 31**

guarantees the protection of law for all individuals; Article 32 ensures no person is deprived of life or personal liberty without due process. Article 33 provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention. Article 34 Prohibits forced labor, and Article 102 allows refugees to move to the High Court Division to enforce their rights. These provisions enable refugees to seek justice through national courts if their rights are infringed.

Access to Legal Aid: The Legal Aid Act 2000 provides free legal assistance to impoverished litigants, including refugees. This support is crucial in preventing trafficking, as access to legal aid reduces the likelihood of exploitation by trafficker

International Conventions and Domestic Legislation: Although Bangladesh is a dualist country, as per Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Laws of the treaties, no country is dualist in the true sense anymore. It requires the treaty obligations to be conformed irrespective of domestic incorporation. Despite Bangladesh not being a party to the Refugee Convention 1951, Bangladesh has ratified several international conventions addressing forced labor and human trafficking: **Forced Labour Convention, 1930** and **Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957:** Prohibit forced labor under coercion or discrimination. **Palermo Protocol, 2003:** Defines human trafficking and mandates criminalization of trafficking activities. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Asserts the right to life, liberty, and security and prohibits all forms of slavery; International **Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** Outlaws slavery, slave trade, and forced labor, **CEDAW:** Obliges states to take measures against trafficking and exploitation of women.

The Labour Act 2006: In compliance with these conventions, Bangladesh has enacted the Labour Act 2006 and the Prevention of Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012. These laws apply to all within Bangladesh, including stateless individuals such as Rohingyas. However, implementation challenges, including resource limitations and corruption, hinder effective enforcement.

10. Recommendations

To create a long-lasting community-based preventive mechanism, the government and other organizations should consistently spread awareness of counter-trafficking issues through various channels, such as community consultation meetings and media messaging in the host and Rohingya communities.

Firstly, the stakeholders must determine who is most vulnerable to human trafficking, place them under a different government social safety net program,

and assign them to a different non-governmental agency's development program. All levels of government, including central, district, sub-district, and union parishad, should establish more accountability for Counter Trafficking Committees (CTCs) by their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the Bangladeshi government's National Plan of Action (NPA) 2018–2024.

Secondly, establishing a Special Tribunal to prioritize the disposal of pending human trafficking cases, akin to Malaysia's successful approach, requires a comprehensive overhaul of Bangladesh's legal system, including the appointment of more special police officers, the formation of special courts, and anti-trafficking units.

Strict enforcement of Bangladesh's Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012, with harsher penalties for traffickers and improved victim protection mechanisms, alongside the full implementation of the Palermo Protocol, which supplements the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), is crucial. Additionally, monitoring private vessels and fishing boats in Cox's Bazar to track movement and hold owners accountable for any trafficking incidents is imperative.

Combating trafficking requires vigilance in spotting fraudulent documents and conducting regular legal searches to identify and penalize those unlawfully obtaining Bangladeshi national identity documents. Sustainable livelihood activities within Rohingya camps can alleviate financial instability and fear, while effective monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder inclusion, and psycho-social support are essential for program success.

Finally, strengthening repatriation efforts through bilateral agreements and support mechanisms for safe, voluntary, and dignified return is paramount to reducing vulnerability and combating trafficking. Continued pressure from international organizations is pivotal to accelerating repatriation efforts.

Conclusion

Human trafficking remains a severe human rights violation, with the Rohingya population exemplifying the acute vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers. Despite robust legal frameworks like the Palermo Protocol, enforcement gaps, corruption, and insufficient victim protection persist, impeding practical counter-trafficking efforts. This study highlights the need for strengthened legal measures, enhanced enforcement and accountability, sustainable livelihood programs within refugee camps, comprehensive victim support, and rigorous monitoring of trafficking routes. Additionally, international cooperation and pressure for the safe repatriation of the Rohingya are essential to address the root

causes of their vulnerability. By adopting these multifaceted strategies, the global community can make significant progress in eradicating human trafficking and safeguarding human dignity.

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