

OVERVIEW

The Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar has been heavily assessed over the past four years, often with a large number of uncoordinated assessments that significantly overlap in terms of the factors being measured or evaluated (ACAPS 04/04/2019; ACAPS 28/11/2021). Despite this overflow, the gender lens remains largely overlooked.

The progress in gender analysis has been steady but inconsistent. Since 2017, there has been an improvement in exploring and including gender in research and analysis in the Rohingya refugee response. This progress includes an increase in the number of stand-alone gender assessments and the inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting theme in assessments and responses. These analyses provide a specific understanding of gendered needs and explore how these needs intersect with other dimensions, such as age, disability, social status, education, income, legal status, and religion. But despite the developments, several gaps in understanding shifts in gender norms and practices in the Rohingya community and their impact on specific populations (such as male groups, people with diverse gender identities, people with disabilities, and host communities) still exist.

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About this report

Aim: this report critically reviews how gender assessments in the Rohingya refugee response have adapted to changing gender norms over time. It also highlights information gaps that have emerged throughout time. This report was first drafted in July 2021 then reviewed and updated in January–February 2022. The main objective was to inform and shape the Comprehensive Gender Analysis (CGA) study led by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group. ACAPS contributed to the study with the Needs and Population Monitoring team (NPM) of IOM, and it was funded by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). This report was used in the inception phase and informed the methodology and tools development of the CGA. At the time of writing (February 2022), the CGA is in its finalisation phase and is set to be published in March 2022.

Methodology: in 2019, ACAPS created a meta-database compiling and categorising all reports published in the response since 2017. This meta-database has been updated periodically since. This report uses that meta-database and builds on ACAPS' 2019 report about strengthening gender analysis in the Rohingya refugee response. It also uses the 30 unique results produced by a PubMed database search using various combinations of the terms 'Rohingya', 'gender', 'Bangladesh', and 'host community'. Lastly, this review has identified and included 49 relevant documents published between 2019–2022. Of these documents, 17 are secondary data reviews, 10 are quantitative studies, 13 are qualitative studies, and nine are mixed-method studies.

Limitations: this report primarily focuses on the Rohingya refugees, with a limited focus on the host community given the lack of available information on them.

This report relies on publicly available information and analyses. As such, data quality cannot be ensured and errors and biases that exist in the included reports and studies are also present in this review. While conclusions can be drawn from the report, further primary research may be necessary to validate the findings.

SHIFTING GENDER NORMS AND THE NEED FOR REGULAR GENDER ASSESSMENTS

Gender norms are defined as social principles that govern the behaviour of girls, boys, women, and men in society and restrict their gender identity into what is considered appropriate (Save the Children accessed 22/02/2022). In the Rohingya community, gender norms are integral to understanding dignity or izzot – a normative honour system that shapes women’s status and roles within their families and communities, including their freedom, rights, agency, and mobility (ISCG 07/05/2020). Dignity is also understood and defined differently based on the individual (HPG 23/08/2019). According to traditional Rohingya gender norms, a woman’s honour or dignity depends on a man’s control of her behaviour, including her mobility and interaction with other people, and both their honours depend on the views of the community. In other words, men are expected to police women’s behaviour, and women are expected to be policed (IOM 11/05/2020).

Since the displacement of the Rohingya to Bangladesh, both men and women had to adapt their practices to the new situation. To address the need for essential resources such as food, clothing, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), Rohingya men and women have had to expand and modify what they considered honourable. The same women who used to spend 21–24 hours a day inside their homes in Myanmar have been forced to stand many hours in resource distribution lines, fetch water, and engage in income-generating activities in Bangladesh (IOM 11/05/2020). Also, according to a survey, out of all the households in which women reported going outside their homes, 85 percent reported women going out more than they did in Myanmar. (The Asia Foundation 09/09/2020).

Gender norms and practices in the Rohingya and host communities are constantly changing and shifting as the humanitarian crisis protracts, with added layers of external influences, gendered barriers, and coping strategies (IOM 11/05/2020). These shifts and changes possibly lead to new and emerging impacts on the lives of the Rohingya population. Robust and periodical gender assessments are necessary to track and understand these changes and incorporate them into gender and other humanitarian programmes and services (ActionAid 15/09/2020).

Given these cultural characteristics, it is imperative that a stronger understanding of the gender dynamics in the Rohingya refugee response is developed. To increase the acceptability of all humanitarian services and ensure the broader wellbeing of refugee and host community populations, adequate funding and expertise for gender assessments, gender and intersectionality analysis, and social norms research, as well as the dissemination of research findings and their uptake into transformational gender programmes, should be secured.

PROGRESS IN EXISTING GENDER ANALYSIS

In November 2019, ACAPS identified challenges in the existing analysis of gender issues within the Rohingya refugee response and published a list of recommendations in strengthening gender analysis (ACAPS 12/11/2019). Three years later, there has been progress regarding many of the challenges and recommendations identified in the original report, while others remain the same.

In 2019, ACAPS found that there were few stand-alone gender assessments in the Rohingya refugee response in Cox’s Bazar (ACAPS 12/11/2019). In 2020, there was a marked improvement in the number of stand-alone assessments with gender as the main theme: six assessments published in 2020 compared to eight in 2017, 2018, and 2019 combined. The first stand-alone gender assessment conducted in October 2017 identified early recommendations on gendered needs shortly after the refugee influx (CARE 18/10/2017). Two gender analyses published in August 2018 and March 2019 built on this assessment (ACF 01/08/2018; ISCG 31/03/2019). All three studies identified similar gendered needs, adopted a multisectoral approach, and provided a list of key recommendations. In 2020, an intersectional gender study was published (ActionAid 15/09/2020), followed by a study on the impact of the pandemic from a gendered perspective (ACAPS 14/10/2020). These studies adopted a cross-sectoral approach, again identifying the same needs highlighted in the early years of the response. The number of assessments that provided a more in-depth understanding of gendered needs also increased in 2020. These studies included assessments on bathing facilities (IOM 17/09/2020), reports on women’s leadership (Oxfam 03/02/2020), and trends in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (IRC 22/01/2021).

While the number of gender-focused assessments and research did increase since 2017, several contextual and methodological factors still render them insufficient.

METHODOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER RESEARCH

A lack of balance between qualitative and quantitative methods

Qualitative and quantitative data often complement each other, filling in gaps. In 2019, many assessments across the Rohingya response relied heavily on quantitative data (ACAPS 12/11/2019). While there are reports that used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, humanitarians tended to rely more on quantitative studies to shape their programmes (ACAPS 28/11/2021). Qualitative data is crucial to gender research, as experiences of gender and gender norms are deeply personal and subjective experiences. In 2019, an ACAPS report also emphasised the lack of qualitative gender research and its importance in describing gender norms in the Cox’s Bazar context (ACAPS 12/11/2019). Most stand-alone gender

assessments that adopted mixed methods relied on quantitative data as their primary resource. Qualitative information was often just an ad hoc supplement to quantitative data and was not a leading research method (ACAPS 28/11/2021).

This review identified ten quantitative studies, 13 qualitative studies, and nine mixed-method studies that included gender data and analysis. While the number of solely qualitative or quantitative studies has increased, the number of those using mixed methods is still quite low, meaning that evidence produced from synergised quantitative and qualitative data remains lacking.

Sampling biases in quantitative surveys

The interviewed population for many of the quantitative gender-related surveys often does not constitute a representative sample of the population because of the use of non-probability sampling techniques or sampling biases (ACAPS 14/10/2020; BMJ 13/12/2021). This status is especially the case for survey designs where all individuals meeting the inclusion criteria, such as all pregnant women or all men between 15–35 years of age, are invited to participate in the study, leading to self-selection or voluntary response bias (Mofizul Islam et al. 05/02/2021). Another issue is that since all the survey responses are self-reported with no possible way of observing or validating the data, there is always a chance of reporting bias, especially in the case of sensitive topics like gender.

Many of the surveys in this review are household surveys, which are prone to non-response bias and proxy response bias. Although annual assessments, including the Joint Multi-Sector Needs Assessment and the Refugee Influx Emergency Vulnerability Assessment, are essential to understanding household needs, they can only provide a limited understanding of gendered needs, like, the difference in needs between female-headed households and male-headed households (REACH 08/11/2021; ISCG 30/09/2019 and 06/05/2021). These assessments do not provide a gendered understanding of other gender dynamics at play within a household and cannot be used on their own to identify gendered vulnerabilities (WFP 04/2021; ISCG 05/2021). The specific definitions of households or heads of households in each survey can also create biases, leading to the varying prevalence of outcome variables (ACAPS 28/11/2021). Thus, household surveys are generally not suitable for collecting gender-specific information. As almost all the surveys and assessments done in the Rohingya camps are cross-sectional in nature, they do not identify causes and effects over time.

A shortage of Rohingya enumerators and interviewers

Because of the lack of trained Rohingya enumerators, qualitative interviewers, and the time to train such enumerators, most studies and assessments collect data using Bangladeshi enumerators or NGO programme staff or service providers (ActionAid 15/09/2020; UN Women 17/05/2021). There have also been instances of data collection by US and European

researchers with Bangladeshi or Rohingya interpreters (Chynoweth et al. 08/07/2020). This setup poses several problems. The power dynamics between organisational programme staff and people dependent on the organisations for their essential needs might produce data that is severely biased towards the programmes and organisations.

Studies have found interviewer ethnicity bias in data when enumerators are Bangladeshi and not Rohingya (Ground Truth Solutions 27/05/2021). As non-Rohingya individuals generally conduct interviews in Chittagonian or Cox's Bazar dialects, nuanced differences between the languages also create a language barrier and translation errors (Chynoweth et al. 08/07/2020; Guglielmi et al. 09/12/2020; ACAPS 12/11/2019). This language barrier is especially pronounced for women, as the majority of women are illiterate and less likely to have been exposed to or understand Chittagonian or Cox's Bazar dialects (ACAPS 12/11/2019).

When trained Rohingya enumerators are available, most of them are men. There is a lack of trained female Rohingya enumerators or interviewers. Based on Rohingya culture and traditions, it is important that the gender of an interviewer matches that of a respondent (ACAPS 12/11/2019). It was found that in one study, white female researchers conducted focus group discussions of Rohingya men (HPG 07/06/2019). While this was somehow acceptable in the Rohingya cultural context, the opposite (i.e. male researchers conducting discussions with Rohingya female respondents) would be risky and unacceptable. As a result, fewer Rohingya women are usually included in assessments. (ACAPS 12/11/2019).

Female enumerators recently recruited by the Needs and Population Monitoring (NPM) team of IOM also face multiple gendered barriers when participating in CGA data collection. Female Rohingya enumerators, in particular, face barriers with their family members, especially fathers, as collecting data means they have to go out of their shelters and commute within and between camps. Female enumerators also generally face harassment from law enforcement when moving from camp to camp for data collection. Travelling far distances is also a challenge with the lack of available transportation methods, while there are safety and health concerns in walking long distances while fully covered in a burqa. Female Rohingya enumerators are also generally less educated than male Rohingya enumerators and lack the confidence and specific enumeration skills for data collection despite receiving the same amount of training on the topic.

A lack of male-focused gender research

A severe lack of male focused gender research was noted in this review. While there were male respondents in most of the studies reviewed, there were no studies focusing on male gender norms and perceptions. There were also only a handful of studies focusing on women's gender roles and identities, many of which had only female respondents and lacked a male insight (Sanchez Bean 2021; Oxfam 01/04/2020).

During data collection for the CGA, enumerators remarked that divorced male and widowed male respondents were the most challenging to identify, as most of them had already remarried. Young unmarried men were also difficult to access as they usually worked outside their shelters during operational hours. Enumerators also found an increase in polygamy among men in the community as more Bangladeshi men had begun to marry Rohingya women, for example, to gain humanitarian assistance. Polygamy was also found to have increased during the pandemic (UNHCR, WFP 07/2021). In a report on intersectionality, polygamy was listed as a negative coping mechanism to the changing gender roles of refugee men. This report also mentioned that polygamy among men in both the Rohingya and host communities had increased intimate partner violence and violence between the communities and families (ActionAid 15/09/2020; Melnikas et al. 25/05/2020). Overall, the impacts of changing gender norms on men and boys within and outside the camps are not well understood or documented. or documented.

SGBV directed towards men and boys is another largely overlooked issue. Only three studies in this review focused on or mentioned SGBV against men and boys. There is evidence that during the genocide in 2017, the Myanmar army also subjected men to sexual and genital violence. The violence included castration, penile amputation, and penile- and object-anal rape (Legal Action Worldwide 09/2021; Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020). In one study, 11 of 89 Rohingya men and boys in focus group discussions reported seeing dead bodies with violently amputated genitals during the military attacks in 2017 (Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020).

There are also indications of the continued sexual abuse of men and boys in refugee camps in Bangladesh, however there is a serious lack of information on the types and causes of these violences (Legal Action Worldwide 09/2021; Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020). Currently, the SGBV referral pathway in refugee camps does not consider male victims (Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020). Despite high levels of critical needs reported, only 35.7% of male respondents in a recent study reported receiving any medical, mental health/psychosocial, protection, or legal service in the refugee camps (Legal Action Worldwide 09/2021). In one study, key informants, including SGBV specialists, admitted that the response to the Rohingya crisis did not consider male survivors of rape and SGBV. As a result, there was no room for male SGBV survivors to seek any health or psychosocial services. There is also a heavy stigma surrounding this subject, which remains taboo in both the Rohingya and host communities (Chynoweth et al. 08/07/2020).

A lack of research on the host community

While the number of gender studies and assessments for the Rohingya community has increased, the same has not increased as much for the host community. No reports or studies identified in this review focused solely on the host community, and only eight studies included both host community and Rohingya respondents. This finding is supported by a

review that found that as at April 2019, 57% of all assessments, independent of the type of focus, covered Rohingya refugees only, 36% assessed both refugee and host communities, and only 8% focused exclusively on host communities (ACAPS 04/04/2019). As another review noted, there is limited information available on host community vulnerabilities across different demographic groups and in Cox's Bazar district as a whole (ACAPS 04/10/2020). Currently, there is very limited information on the gender norms and dynamics of the host communities in Cox's Bazar.

The inefficient use of existing gender research tools and data

While many organisations and governing bodies have started incorporating disaggregated sex and age data into their assessments, studies, and reporting systems, some problems remain, including the insufficient use of this data in planning and informing programmes or interventions (ACAPS 12/11/2019; ActionAid 15/09/2020). The inconsistent use, analysis, and application of this data have left the specific needs of men, women, boys, girls, and gender diverse populations unaddressed.

Several reports noted that there is a gap in the understanding of and sensitisation to the Rohingya patriarchal cultural context among humanitarians, especially regarding gender and protection issues (ActionAid 15/09/2020). According to a report by ISCG, as at December 2020, only 646 of a targeted 3,500 service providers and authorities (18.5%) received training on gender and protection (ISCG 08/02/2021). It is also difficult to implement culturally sensitive interventions, such as those to prevent SGBV, in this context (ActionAid 15/09/2020).

Humanitarian responders lack knowledge of gender analytical frameworks and tools. Existing tools and methodology for gender analysis are also not standardised, with researchers inconsistently using methods that produce varying and incomparable results. Because of inadequate competencies, humanitarian responders are also generally unable to practically analyse gender power dynamics and the intersection of gender and other factors (ActionAid 15/09/2020). Lastly, there is a misconception that gender experts are also experts in designing and analysing gender studies, which is generally not the case (ACAPS 12/11/2019).

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING GENDER RESEARCH

Sociocultural barriers to women's participation

There are other factors that lead to the majority of assessment respondents being men and to women's perspectives being underrepresented. Given the conservative cultural, religious, and gender norms in the Rohingya population, women and teenage and adolescent girls are generally not allowed to leave their shelters. As a result, women are grossly underrepresented in most surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, which take place outside

individual shelters. For example, given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed in one study, interviews were conducted in a private location, making it difficult for female participants to attend (The Asia Foundation 09/09/2020).

Interactions between Rohingya refugees and humanitarians also differed based on the presence or absence of an adult male in the household. Households without an adult male were significantly more likely to report that they had rarely or never been consulted on needs, preferences, or the delivery of humanitarian assistance (ISCG 06/05/2021). This can be explained by the lack of door-to-door consultations with women and the limited number of female enumerators. (ACAPS, IOM 22/04/2021; ISCG 06/05/2021). Efforts to increase women's participation in assessments and consultations remain largely unstandardised, with little information on how the situation differs from camp to camp and how gender-diverse populations are included (ActionAid 15/09/2020). There is a particular need to conduct consultations with women at the shelter or block level. Moreover, female participants of focus group discussions were largely unaware of how to report complaints or feedback in contrast to most male participants (ACAPS 27/04/2021).

While the unelected Majhi governance system lacks female representation, the Government of Bangladesh has created a policy to make gender representation equal in elected camp management committees and block management committees. Despite this initiative, equal gender representation remains rare in reality (Oxfam 03/02/2020). Only a limited number of committees had almost 50% female members – most established with support from UNHCR (ActionAid 15/09/2020).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all studies had to transition to a virtual modality instead of the usual face-to-face interviewing method. Both qualitative and quantitative interviews had to be conducted over mobile phones. As a consequence, only the population that owned mobile phones and had good connectivity could be included, skewing the data towards wealthier and better-educated households (REACH 08/11/2021; IOM 23/12/2021; ISCG 06/05/2021; Guglielmi et al. 09/12/2020). This arrangement also made it very difficult to achieve gender balance, as men owned the majority of mobile phones, and the majority of women who owned mobile phones were household heads (REACH 08/11/2021; IOM 23/12/2021; ISCG 06/05/2021; Guglielmi et al. 09/12/2020; CARE 07/05/2020). In one phone survey, only 23% of the respondents were women, of which 86% were female household heads (ISCG 06/05/2021). While data collection is no longer remote, COVID-19 unveiled a dire need for alternative methodologies to include a population-representative number and composition of female respondents in studies and assessments while maintaining health and safety measures.

Gaps in the inclusion and participation of women's groups

According to an Oxfam report, there are currently a few women's organisations led by Rohingya women. Two of the groups are Shanti Mohila (Peace Women), which is involved with an international investigation of the Myanmar genocide, and Rohingya Women's Welfare Society, which provides counselling services to Rohingya women (Oxfam 03/02/2020). Available literature does not reflect the current commitment to promote the participation of women in decision-making processes and increase the inclusion of women-run local groups, and these groups have not played a growing role in conducting assessments (ISCG 31/03/2019; UN Women 27/10/2020; ISCG 12/2021). There remains a lack of literature on and perspectives from locally led women's groups. These groups are expected to better understand gender dynamics in the community and the risks women face in participating in the response. They are also likely to know the most appropriate form of humanitarian assistance for them and how to better address gendered needs. According to one report in 2020, no local women's organisations appear to be part of the SGBV subsector. No local or national women's organisation also appears to be an active member of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, which is working to mainstream gender in the Rohingya response (Oxfam 03/02/2020).

A lack of inclusion of minorities in gender research

Only three of the documents reviewed included respondents with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and all of those included in these three studies were assigned male at birth (UN Women 17/05/2021; Legal Action Worldwide 09/2021; Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020). From 2017 till the present, there is no estimate of the number or percentage of SOGIESC individuals in Rohingya camps. Only one report from 2018 showed that 7% of refugee respondents knew of transgender individuals in their community (UN Women 17/05/2021). While some studies have tried to include transgender men and hijra (people assigned male at birth but who identify as female or as neither male nor female) respondents, there is currently no evidence on SOGIESC individuals assigned female at birth, such as lesbians, bisexual women, or transgender women (Oxford Dictionary accessed 22/02/2022; UN Women 17/05/2021; Chynoweth et al. 29/10/2020). One reason is the existing social stigma and the lack of safe spaces for these individuals, making them very difficult to access or interview. Therefore, the data required to complete intersectional analysis remains largely unavailable (ACAPS 12/11/2019; ActionAid 15/09/2020). Information on other minorities, such as people with disabilities, is also very limited (ISCG 06/05/2021; ACAPS 12/11/2019; ActionAid 15/09/2020).

RECOMMENDED AREAS OF ANALYSIS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

This report finds that the current landscape of gender data and analysis in the Cox's Bazar response is not sufficiently capturing the in-depth gender needs and perspectives necessary to make informed policy decisions. Even though 32 of the studies conducted between 2019–2021 were primary research studies that included gender analysis, several gaps in information and unanswered questions remain. It is recommended that some of the following topics be explored in the CGA:

- Little information exists on variances in women's participation from camp to camp and the inclusion of gender diverse populations.
- More information on community participation and the role of committees is needed to better understand how they can be more inclusive of women, men, girls, and boys. Despite existing government policies, there is a need to further analyse practical barriers to equal gender representation in camp management committees and block management committees.
- There is a need for more gender-focused research on masculinity and male gender norms and practices in the Rohingya camps, including the impacts of changing gender norms on men.
- There is a serious dearth of research in general, and more specifically with a focus on gender, on host communities.
- A better understanding of what self-agency and empowerment look like from a Rohingya perspective may reduce the risk of responders imposing norms that could otherwise cause harm.
- There is a need to better understand the actors influencing changes in gender norms in the Rohingya and host communities.
- Another topic to be explored is how women engage in religious spaces and negotiate religious norms which influences gender norms and practices.
- An in-depth understanding of the different roles of Rohingya women and men in decision-making, both at home and outside, would allow responses to better target relevant decision makers.
- There is a need for further information on how SOGIESC people can or cannot access health, shelter, protection, and other humanitarian services and assistance and identify themselves safely, as well as the elements that allow for safe access. Ways to engage the SOGIESC communities and increase their acceptance in society should also be explored.
- A better understanding of the gendered experiences of people with disabilities would ensure that humanitarian assistance and services are accessible and that protection mechanisms work for people with disabilities based on their specific gendered experiences.