A photograph of a narrow alleyway in a Rohingya refugee camp. On the left, a building with green corrugated metal siding has a red sign with a flame symbol. On the right, a multi-story building is under construction with exposed wooden frames and some red brickwork. A person in a red shirt is walking up a wide set of concrete stairs on the right, carrying a large white water pot on their head. In the foreground, several large, dark, rounded earthenware pots are on the ground, and a small, light-colored chicken stands near the base of the stairs. The sky is clear and blue.

Echoes of Displacement:
Exploring Early Marriage
and Fertility Among

ROHINGYA ADOLESCENTS

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and Fertility Among

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THIS PICTORIAL BOOKLET IS AN OUTPUT OF THE RESEARCH
Early marriage and fertility decision-making among conflict-affected and displaced adolescents in Bangladesh

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DEDICATED TO
All the participants who shared their narratives



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Foreword

Humanitarian emergencies, particularly those stemming from conflict, such as the prolonged Rohingya genocide, deeply impact all facets of existence. Escalating poverty, cramped living environments, and limited economic prospects contribute to deteriorating health among displaced individuals of all ages, including worsening sexual and reproductive health. The sexual and reproductive health of adolescents is an especially critical issue to address in humanitarian response as adolescents are at the beginning of their reproductive lives, just beginning to form relationships and patterns that will be carried forward in life. Addressing challenges such as child marriage and early childbearing at this critical stage is imperative to safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable youth.

The underlying drivers of child marriage, such as poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunity, are often exacerbated during emergencies, increasing the risk of child marriage. Previous research has documented some of the ways humanitarian emergencies can influence child marriage, although many gaps in knowledge remain. Yet, even less research has moved beyond marriage to understand how emergencies affect the process of family formation—the progression from marriage into childbearing. Given the heightened risks of maternal morbidity and mortality for adolescent girls and the long-term consequences of child marriage, including a greater lifetime risk of maternal death, it is of paramount importance to comprehensively understand how adolescents in humanitarian settings conceptualize and initiate the foundational process of starting a family. Moreover,

exploring the multitude of external factors that shape this pivotal journey is essential for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

In this research, we explore the various ways that displacement has affected the process of family formation among Rohingya adolescents in Cox's Bazar. We investigate the underlying reasons driving early marriage among both boys and girls, as well as the factors influencing childbearing once they enter into marriage. We explore childbearing desires and intentions amongst married adolescents for first births and subsequent births, alongside the demand for contraception and various factors shaping this demand. Lastly, we extend our research to examine how concerns surrounding sub-fecundity and the pressure to demonstrate fertility accelerate childbearing among adolescents. This occurs even as adolescents acknowledge the formidable challenges associated with forming families and raising children within an extremely constrained context.

We aim to use these stories to inform strategies addressing child marriage and early childbearing among adolescents in Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. By understanding their unique contexts and constrained choices, we can develop better programs and policies to assist them in avoiding premature marriage and childbearing, while providing support to those already in the process of family formation. This approach empowers adolescents to make informed decisions and build brighter futures.



Background

The scars of displacement run deep, leaving lasting impacts on individuals and communities. Trauma, loss, and uncertainty are constant companions. Yet, there is resilience and hope within people, resilience to adapt and survive, and hope to return to their homeland.

Currently, one-third of the population in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh are Rohingya of whom about 52% are children^{1,2}. Though the Rohingya people have been taking refuge in Bangladesh since 1977, the mass exodus from Myanmar took place in 2017 with more than 742,000 Rohingya people fleeing to Bangladesh^{1,3,4}. The Rohingya community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, predominantly known as Forcefully Displaced Myanmar

Nationals (FDMNs), has faced significant challenges in maintaining health and well-being due to displacement, as they receive minimum public services, food, and assistance to maintain a healthy life. One of the challenges posed by displacement to this community is access to healthcare, especially sexual and reproductive healthcare. The community's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) situation has become more vulnerable due to early childbearing resulting from early marriage.

Early marriage is a social norm and a common cultural phenomenon in the Rohingya community. Displacement may have made early marriage and early childbearing more prevalent in this community. According to the

official data, the population has now grown to about one million, an increase of about 300,000 people in the last 7 years⁵. The Rohingya community has high maternal mortality and neonatal deaths^{6,7,8}, one of the major contributing factors to which is childbearing among adolescents, which is itself, driven by early marriage. There is a gap in research evidence on the current scenario of early marriage and early childbearing in the Rohingya camps.

This pictorial booklet aims to reflect the early marriage and early childbearing scenario in the

Rohingya community with their causes by documenting the experiences of Rohingya adolescents and young adults through visual narratives, highlighting the impact of displacement on early marriage and childbearing. It seeks to serve as a resource for service providers from government and non-government organizations (NGOs), United Nations organizations, and policymakers who work to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of Rohingya people in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

¹ <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/>

² World's largest refugee camp: 920,000 refugees | DRC Danish Refugee Council

³ <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/timeline-visual-history-rohingya-refugee-crisis>

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/historical-review-rohingya-influx-1978>

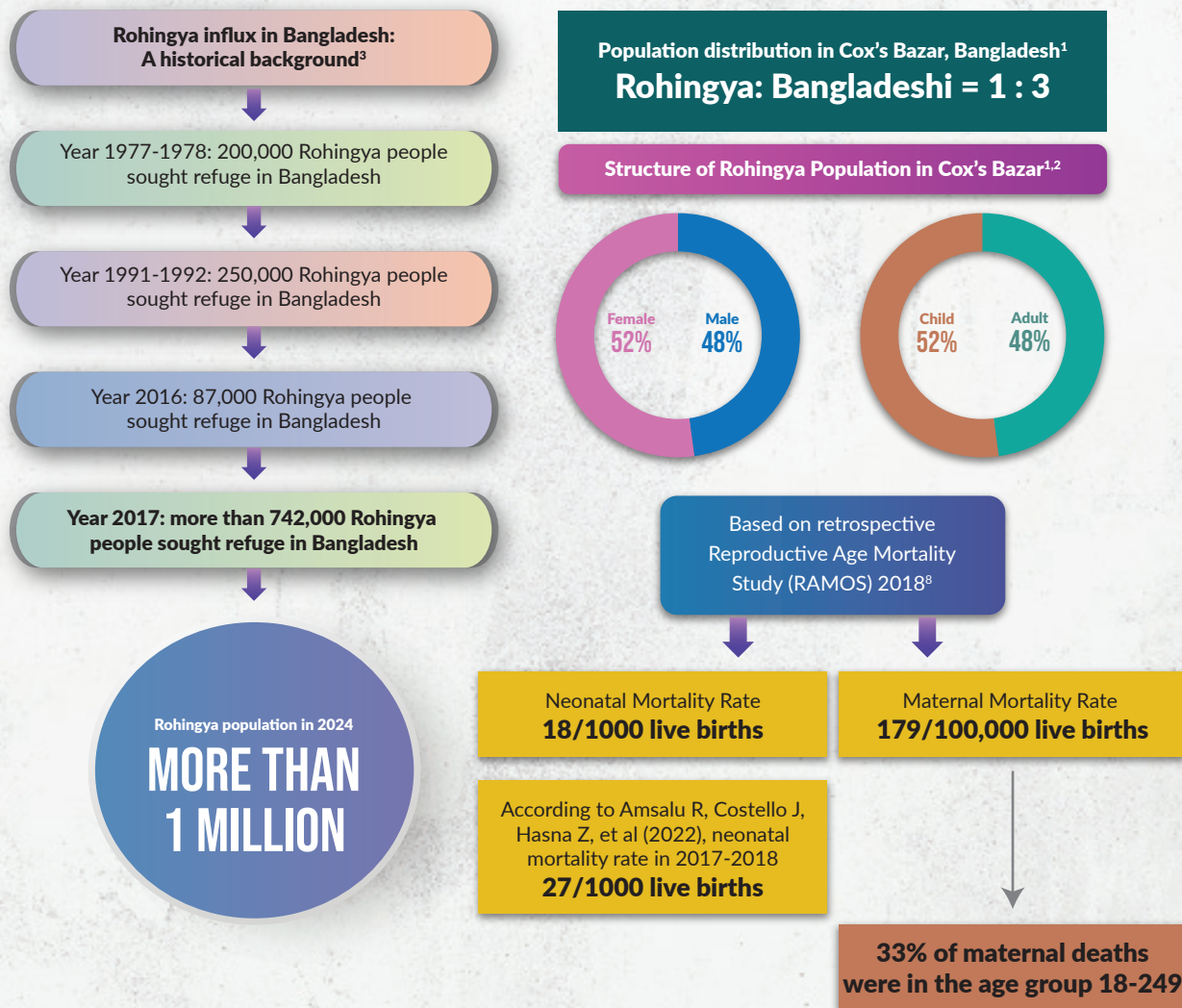
⁵ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/bgd>

⁶ <https://gh.bmj.com/content/7/4/e008110>

⁷ https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Final%20RAMOS%20Summary%20Report%20for%20circulation_0.pdf

⁸ <https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/en/publications/annual-report-2021-maternal-and-perinatal-mortality-surveillance-and-response-mpmsr>

Digging Deeper





Aim of the Study

To explore how conflict and displacement influence early marriage and childbearing, affect fertility intentions and concerns about sub-fecundity, and gather data to support adolescent SRH programs and policies in humanitarian settings.

Methodology

The study adopted a sequential mixed-method design that included a representative household survey and qualitative interviews. Data for this booklet come from qualitative interviews conducted between March – April 2023 in three camps in Cox's Bazar. Participants were identified via snowball sampling, with initial participants identified via convenience sampling. Forty-nine (49) in-depth interviews (IDIs) and sixteen (16) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with adolescents aged 15-24 who arrived at Cox's Bazar during or after October 2016. All data in this report come from IDIs. IDIs were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and included a Life History and Timeline participatory method, in which participants were asked to outline what they considered to be the major events in their life from birth to the present day. Participants aged 18 years of age or older, as well as married, emancipated participants under the age of 18, provided verbal consent prior to being interviewed. Verbal assent was collected from adolescents aged 17 and younger, in addition to verbal consent from either their parent or the eldest member responsible for the participant within the household.

Ethical approval was provided by both The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board (FWA00000287) and BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University's review board (IRB protocol no.: IRB-25 June'22-022).

Mixed Method Study

Quantitative Survey
December 2022 – February
2023 7 Rohingya camps



730



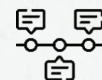
1600

Age group 15-24



Qualitative Interviews
March 2023 – April 2023
3 Rohingya camps

IDIs



49

FGDs



16

KIs



24

Age group 15-24



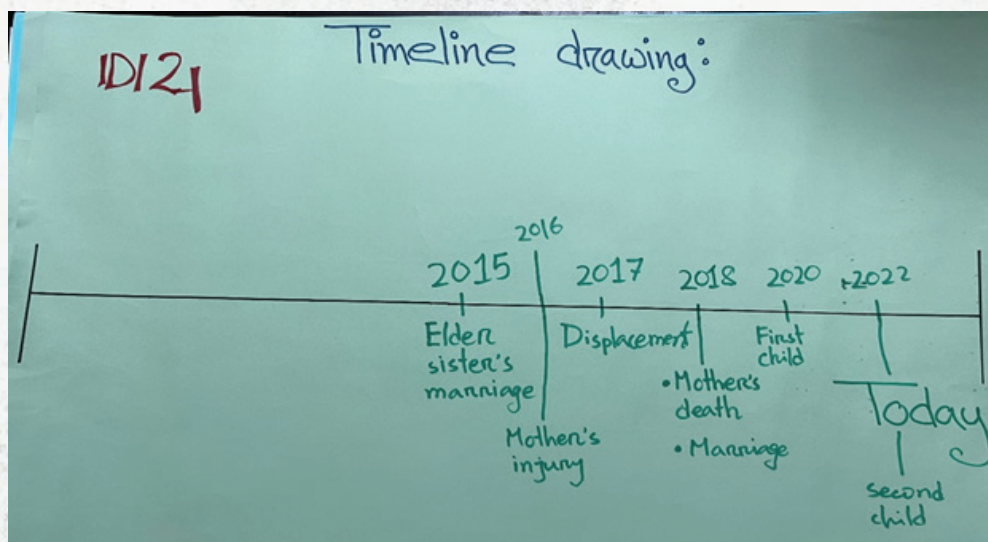
© Adrita Kaiser, BRAC JPGSPH





All the names used in this pictorial booklet are pseudonyms to respect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The pictures are taken with verbal consent, including from the parents of the children

PHOTO NARRATIVES



From Early Marriage to Parenthood: Sohail's journey in the Rohingya camps

Sohail, a farmer from Myanmar, couldn't go to school due to poverty and instead worked the land. He led a normal life in Myanmar with his family until the persecution of Rohingya Muslims began in 2012. The oppression worsened in 2016 and became unbearable in 2017, with many Rohingya people being beaten to death and their homes burned. Sohail fled to Bangladesh with his family with many hurdles.

After arriving in Naikkhanchari, Sohail lived there for seven months before being brought to the Kutupalong camp by the Bangladesh Border Guard (BGB). He was relocated two more times, first to Camp 17 and finally to Camp 4, where he built a house with bamboo provided by an NGO. During this chaotic time, his mother became ill. They managed to get her some treatment at the nearby camp hospital, where she was diagnosed with kidney disease. Her condition deteriorated greatly, affecting even her eyesight. She died in 2018, just a year after coming to Bangladesh. If they were in Myanmar, Sohail thinks his mother might have lived longer.

"My mother was not so sick when she came here from Burma. After coming here, due to not getting to the doctor on time, and not being able to take medicine, my mother's kidneys were weak, and her eyesight was getting weak."

After his mother's death, there was no one to take care of Sohail and his younger siblings. So, his father suggested that Sohail should get married. Despite being reluctant to get married at such a young age, he gave in to the pressure from older family members. He got married at 16, ending his dream of studying at Madrasa as he had to take on the financial responsibilities since his marriage. He was married to a girl of age 14. Sohail thought that, as he married at such an early age, everyone would make fun of him if his wife gave birth to a child within one year of marriage.

Within a year, Sohail's father also remarried. His wife and his stepmother became pregnant around the same time, leading to disputes with Sohail's father. His father advised Sohail's wife to abort the baby, but Sohail refused because he had already waited a year to have a child to avoid being judged by others. Following the birth of the babies, the conflict between Sohail

and his father was resolved. Two years after the first baby, Sohail had another child in 2022. After the birth of his second child, Sohail and his wife started using family planning. Although Sohail does not support using family planning methods and wouldn't use any if they were in Myanmar, he feels compelled to use them given the camp circumstances as children in the neighborhood are becoming disobedient day by day and using curse words from a very early age. Sohail decided his wife could use oral contraceptive pills because he believed that terminating a pregnancy after conception was a sin. In his opinion, the birth control pill is preferable as it prevents conception rather than terminating a potential pregnancy.

"The monthly birth control pills are fine; the baby is not killed. But if the injection is taken, it kills the baby after the baby enters the womb. Sometimes the injection leads to the death of the baby, and sometimes it does not. So, I think monthly birth control pills are better than injections."

However, according to Sohail, even birth control pills should only be used after having at least one child. Otherwise, it may become difficult to conceive later on after using family planning for some time.

"People who have been on birth control for 2-4 years, can no longer have children. This is why having the first child is important."

With these beliefs and their situation, Sohail is now living with his wife, two children, two siblings, and his father and stepmother. He is working hard to fulfill his responsibilities as a husband and father, while constantly worrying about the camp conditions, reduced ration money, and transportation issues.

Key message from the story of Sohail

Engaging with male partners who wish to delay pregnancy, like Sohail, is critical. Efforts to educate and address myths and misperceptions regarding the safety of contraception are crucial.

Shackled Silence: A Tale of Early Marriage, Domestic Violence and Survival

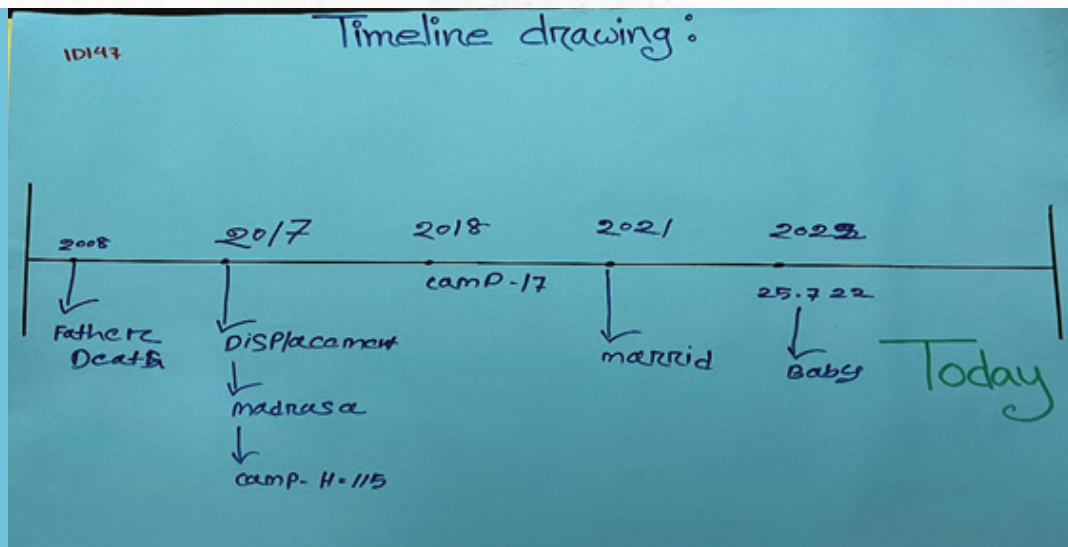
This story is shared by Rehana, a 16-year-old Rohingya girl who fled during the 2017 conflict in Myanmar. In her own words, she shares her experience-

We had to walk up hills from dawn to night, carrying my mother. We were checked multiple times by the Myanmar military, police, and other security personnel. They kept beautiful girls for themselves. Somehow, I managed to sneak through, using makeup to disguise myself. We were robbed on a boat during our journey. Finally, we reached Bangladesh, where we were checked by the Bangladeshi military and given food. We stayed at Musini (a place in Kutupalong where Rohingya camps are located) for 3 days before moving to Jamtoli Musini (another place in Kutupalong where Rohingya camps are located), where we remained for a year. Then we were moved to another camp and eventually ended up here after being relocated 4 times.

I was studying in a madrasa in the camp when marriage proposals started coming in. My

mother agreed to one proposal without consulting me. I saw the guy from afar and found him unattractive. So, I threatened my mother of committing suicide if she married me off to that man, so she rejected the proposal which resulted in lots of struggles. I wanted to finish my studies before getting married but another proposal came a few days later, and although I wanted to decline and focus on my studies, I was married off without my consent at age 13. In our culture, the girls' opinions are not considered when it comes to marriage. I didn't have a good relationship with my husband, and we quarreled frequently since the beginning of our marriage. My husband started misbehaving with me after our marriage, causing me constant worry. His mistreatment was often due to my darker complexion. He would resort to physical violence, such as hitting me, when I failed to carry out certain tasks, like forgetting to feed the chickens my mother sent. On one occasion, my mother-in-law asked me to request that my husband recite a surah from the Holy Quran. When I asked him to recite dua Qunoot, he responded by beating me with his belt. This incident occurred just days after we were married.

In addition to his physical abuse, my husband would interact and engage with other women



at work, even spending money on them, despite numerous appeals from respected members of the community to stop. A meeting on these issues took place with the respected community leaders and members while I was pregnant with my first child. Another incident took place when I was nine months pregnant. During a routine check-up, my husband took us to a restaurant and forced me to eat something I didn't want. When I confronted him, he began yelling and insulting my mother. Unable to control my anger, I responded with insults. In return, he physically assaulted me at the restaurant. Later that day, while he was lying in bed, he demanded I bring him his medicines. In my anger, I refused, prompting him to kick me so forcefully that my water broke, resulting in premature labor and the birth of our first son.

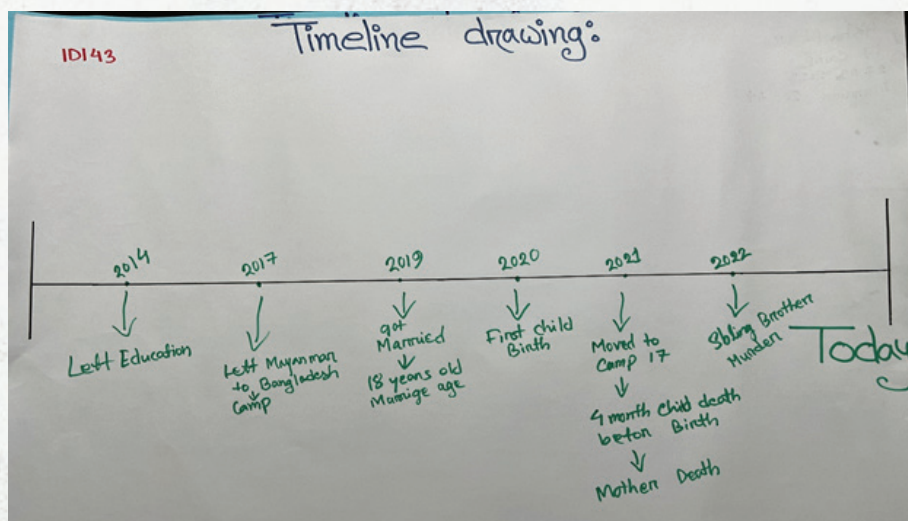
Before our marriage, we were unaware of my husband's true character. My mother-in-law told my mother that she was taking me to make her son a better person. In our religion, turning a bad person into a good person is a good deed. We trusted her, as she too was a Muslim. I remained silent the entire time because I couldn't turn down another

proposal. I was terrified my mother would kill me if I rejected another one. Meanwhile, my mom accepted the gifts from my husband's family. I was not allowed to argue with my mom.

If I were in Myanmar, my relatives would gather all the information about my husband's family to decide whether it was a good or bad proposal. Here, my mother couldn't properly judge my husband's family. Besides, if I were in Myanmar, I would happily get married after fulfilling my dream. Unfortunately, I couldn't do that here. People were afraid for their daughter's well-being after coming here. As a result, I had to get married. They thought others would start bad-mouthing their daughters and they wouldn't get married later due to this reason. If we were in Myanmar, this fear wouldn't arise because we had our land and no one would attempt to spread slander about us.

Key message from the story of Rehana

Adolescent SRH services should incorporate violence screening and safety strategies to support young women like Rehana.



Shattered Dreams of Amina: Victim of Dowry

Amina's father faced immense hardship supporting his family of five as a rickshaw puller in Myanmar. Poverty was a constant reality. Despite their circumstances, he tried to provide education for his children, including his daughter, Amina. However, when the school asked for 500 kyat initially following 1000 kyat for a school picnic, Amina dropped out of the school. Amina's life has never been easy.

Amina came to Bangladesh during the 2017 conflict. She got into a relationship with a boy and was beaten by his father when the relationship got exposed. In order to maintain the family's honor, she was forced to marry in 2019. But the reality soon changed. According to Amina, "I have to obey my husband if I eat from his income". Moreover, Amina's in-laws were displeased because she didn't bring a dowry, making her a target for their violence. The abuse began shortly after her marriage and continued even during her pregnancy.

"They got my brother-in-law married and took a huge amount of dowry. When I was pregnant with my first child, my mother-in-law beat me up, my father-in-law strangled me, and my Brother-in-law beat me. I didn't complain against them"

Within a year of marriage, Amina gave birth to her first child at home because the camp facility was too far, making it impossible to reach at night. However, she was happy because a woman married at the right age should immediately give birth after marriage. But, after the birth of her first child, the relationship between Amina and her husband deteriorated. Her husband wanted to divorce her and even hit her several times. Her in-laws wanted their son to marry somewhere else with a high amount of dowry. In this situation, she became pregnant again because she had never used any form of family planning, believing it to be a grave sin. But her husband wasn't happy with her pregnancy this time and wanted her to abort the baby. This time she protested to save her baby. Nonetheless, her in-laws gave her medicine deceptively, which led to excessive bleeding. She had to be taken to Chittagong for treatment, where she eventually suffered a miscarriage when her first child was seven months old.

"My whole family had to sell gold and other things to collect the money for my hospital bills. My husband didn't even sell his mobile phone. When my parents had nothing more left, they had to run to NGOs for blood. I was hospitalized for two days there. They gave up on me. My body wasn't responding. I was given four bags of blood. They called Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital but they said they won't take me. So, my family shifted me to Chittagong."

Despite her heartbreaking loss, Amina longs to have another child, hoping it will stop her husband from abandoning her. She believes that another baby might be the only way that can save her marriage and prevent him from divorcing her.

"We discussed it. I said, "We have one child, that's why you can have the option of leaving me."

Desperate to save her marriage, Amina is eager to conceive again. However, it has been a year since her miscarriage, and she has not become pregnant, causing her to worry about her future. She also experiences abdominal pain and other health issues which she thinks

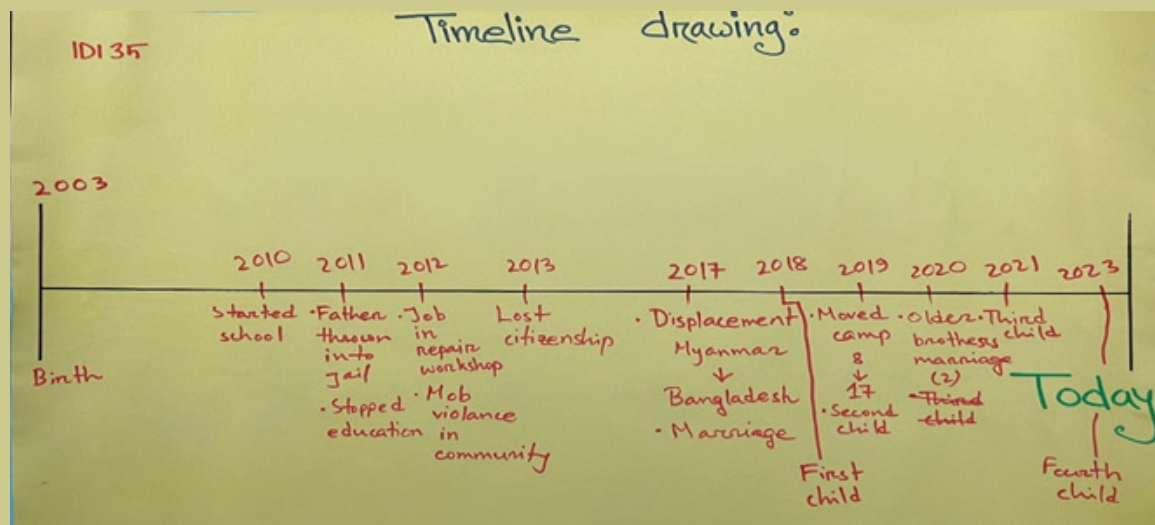
is because of her cesarean section. According to her, the camp hospitals do not offer cesarean section services which is why she has not yet visited any camp facility. She is waiting for her husband to take her to a hospital where she can receive better care. Amina is determined to preserve her marriage, no matter the cost.

"I struggled for two years. If I had gone away, He would just got married to someone else and my child would not have had anyone to call father. Even if I had to struggle for 5 years I would."

Key message from the story of Amina

Amina's journey for a better life continues. Support services for women like Amina, who experience domestic violence but wish to remain with their families, are essential in this journey.





Fertility and Faith: Monir's Struggle with Family Planning

Monir, the third of five brothers, had a normal childhood in Myanmar. He began his studies in 2010 but his life took a turn in 2011 when his father and two older brothers were detained. Forced to leave school, Monir started working in a garage to support his family. From that point on, he witnessed a great deal of violence in his community. At the age of 10, their citizenship was revoked and they were forced to flee from place to place. Despite his young age, Monir was determined to support his family, so he continued to work and eventually opened his own garage.

In early 2017, at the age of 16, Monir followed his father's advice and married a 14-year-old girl in exchange for a dowry hoping to use the money to release his brothers from jail. Unfortunately, luck was not on his side. Chaos erupted in 2017 when Monir's elder brother was murdered and his shop was set on fire. Meanwhile, Monir's wife became pregnant with their first child. Fleeing from place to place in search of safety proved futile, as violence and open firing persisted everywhere. Finally, they sought refuge in Bangladesh, where they received support from local people and settled in the Balukhali camp.

Fortunately, they welcomed a healthy baby boy at the end of that year. Having a baby further fueled Monir's determination to support his family. He worked long hours, from early morning until 10 or even 11 pm, earning a meager daily wage of 100 taka (\$0.86). In 2019, they moved to Camp 17 due to flooding and Monir took up work in a mobile shop. It was during this time that their second child was born. Despite facing numerous hardships, Monir chose not to use any family planning methods. Although he is aware of the benefits of family planning and has heard about it, he still has some misconceptions about it and believes family planning is a sin according to Islam.

"I heard a hadith about the sin of aborting a child. No one knows what the unborn child would become if it were alive. Allah will punish that couple who aborted a child on the day of judgment"

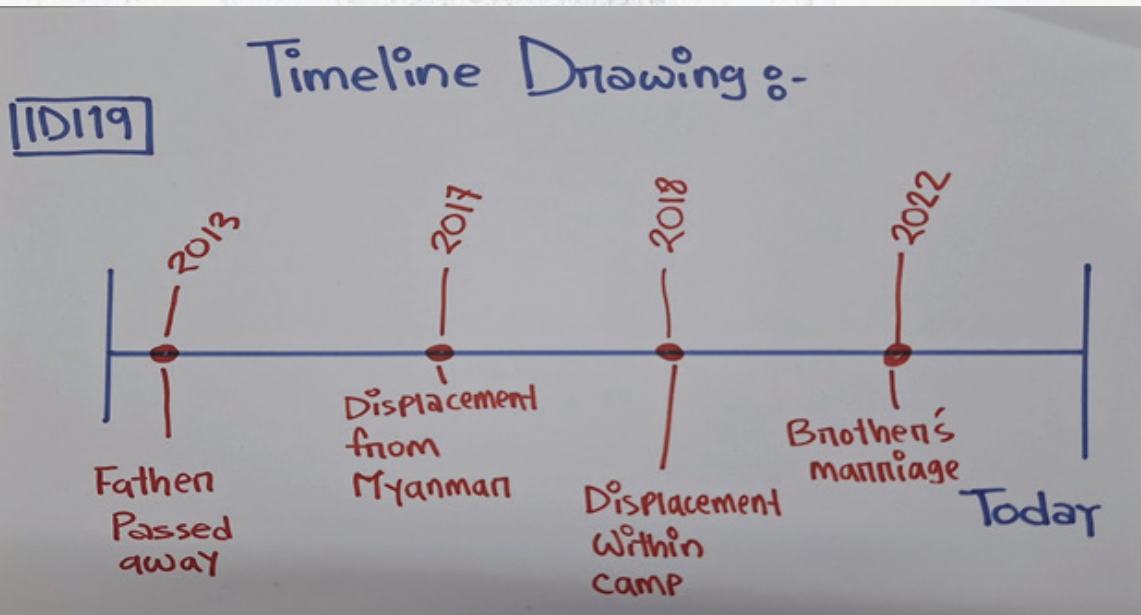
Instead, he relies on Allah to determine the number of children he can have. He even believes that having more children will lead to greater earnings. Because of this belief, he hasn't allowed his wife to use any family planning method.

"If my wife faces any difficulties after having a baby, I won't force her to have another one. I just won't allow her to use family planning methods. If she wants, we can have a baby after a break"

As a result, their third and fourth children were born in 2021 and 2023, respectively. He works diligently to provide for his family, trusting that Allah will help manage everything, even the expenses of raising ten children. Therefore, he is not worried about the future.

Key message from the story of Monir

Services must engage with men and challenge practices that prohibit shared decision-making, including through encouraging the couple's communication.



Shadows of Displacement: Bridal Bargains

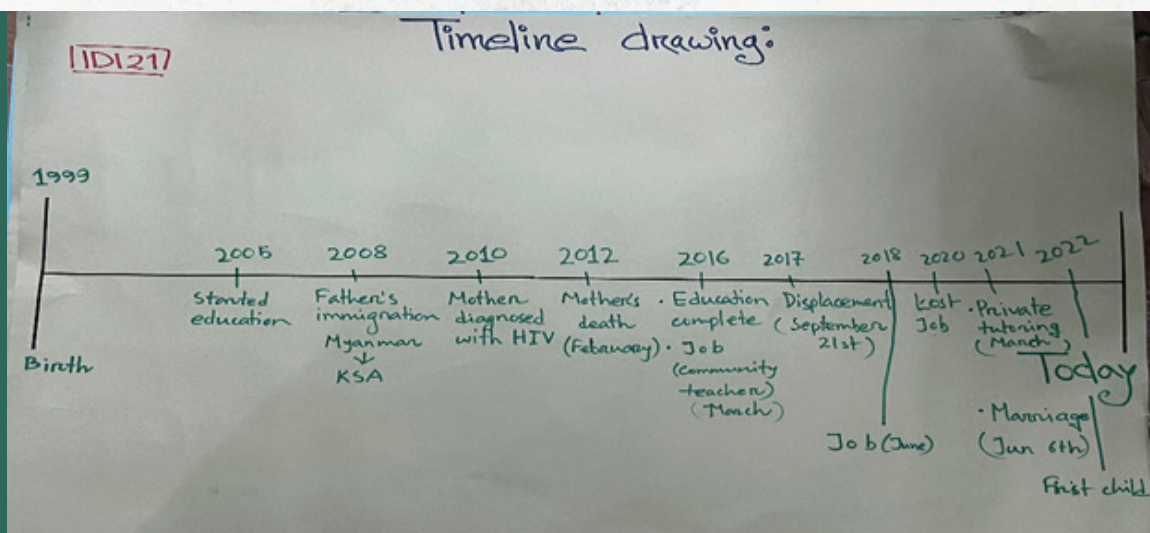
It wasn't Sohana's first visit to Bangladesh during the 2017 emergency situation in Myanmar. She had been to Bangladesh before when she was 7 or 8 years old. She still remembers the boat journey. However, both of her visits to Bangladesh were filled with sorrow, although not for similar reasons. She came to Bangladesh for the first time with her father and with high hopes for his treatment. Young Sohana came to assist her father with household chores while they were seeking treatment. Unfortunately, she had to return to Myanmar alone as her father passed away a week later in a government hospital in Cox's Bazar.

The second time Sohana came to Bangladesh was during the difficult times of 2017. She arrived with her siblings and found refuge with the help of her cousin. Their cousin provided shelter for one year before they moved to a camp in 2018. After arriving at the camp, Sohana's brother found a job and started earning money. Eventually, he got married at the age of 18 in 2022. Meanwhile, Sohana liked a boy in the camp and started a relationship with him. She dreamt of marrying

him. However, Sohana was heartbroken as her boyfriend's parents did not agree to the marriage because of their financial difficulties. Sohana's family couldn't afford to provide the demanded goods and cash for the marriage. As a result, the relationship ended, and Sohana's words reflect her disappointment,

My father passed away, and my brother got married. We don't have enough money to fulfill all the demands and make arrangements for the marriage. That's why my marriage couldn't take place."

According to Sohana, though dowry was common in Myanmar as well, the displacement to Bangladesh has exacerbated it even further as families view it as an attainable way to earn some goods and cash from the bride's family. Life has become much more challenging, and it is no longer the same as it was in Myanmar.



Seeds of Change: Jamal's Positive Mindset on Family Planning and Repatriation

Jamal's father recognized the limited opportunities at home in Myanmar and ventured to Saudi Arabia in 2008 in search of better prospects to support his family from afar. Inspired by his family's strong belief in education, Jamal began his schooling in 2005 at age 6. However, the harsh realities of life soon intervened. In 2012, Jamal's mother, passed away. Despite the challenges, Jamal completed his matriculation (class 10) in 2016. He dreamt of pursuing higher education at the university. His family shared the same dreams, with two of his elder brothers sacrificing their education to work and support their younger siblings to study. Jamal's dream became a reality when he was accepted into a university in Myanmar.

However, in 2016, violence against his community escalated, disrupting lives and education across the region. By 2017, the danger had become too great, compelling Jamal and his family to seek refuge in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. In the sprawling refugee camps, Jamal found a new role as a teacher.

Though having a tight bond with his brothers, Jamal decided to marry and leave the house to allow more space for his brother's family, and the whole ration to themselves, as ration, a monthly allowance of food and necessary items are provided to the Rohingya families. So, in 2021, at the age of 22, Jamal's life took another turn when he married a girl from another camp.

"As my brother's family started growing in number, I didn't think it would be good to bother them anymore. I thought I would get married and go to a different place. I will also get the rest of the benefits separately (ration)."

The marriage didn't only bring happiness in his life but also changed how he was perceived in the community.

"There have been some changes in the community. Before marriage, people used to talk behind my back... Now, there are different responsibilities, and the people around have a positive view of me."

In 2022, Jamal and his wife welcomed their first child, further increasing his responsibilities and fueling his desire to contribute to his family and community. However, he acknowledges the difficult circumstances in which they are living, prompting him to consider using family planning methods. Although he would not have considered using family planning methods in Myanmar, the limited space and lack of educational and healthcare facilities in camps have forced him to reconsider. Nonetheless, he dreams of returning to his country one day and providing his children with a good education and environment in Myanmar. Only after his first child reaches the

age of 6 or 7 years, he plans to have another child in Myanmar. He believes this decision aligns with his understanding of Islam.

“From our understanding of Shariah, there is no requirement to have one child after another; instead, it is advised to consider societal and situational factors when planning a family. Islamic scholars can guide the rules and regulations regarding family planning. Given the circumstances, it is permissible for us. This is not just our opinion; these are the insights we have heard and learned.”

Key message from the story of Monir

Jamal's story highlights two potential interventions to improve adolescent SRH. First, supportive partners like Jamal, who use family planning in shared decision-making with their wives, can be held up as models in the community. Secondly, engaging with religious leaders in the community to promote family planning in alignment with religious beliefs can be an effective means to address misinformation.



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Price of a Bride: Nusrat's battle against burdens of tradition

Nusrat's life unfolded beneath the looming shadow of unrest in Myanmar, her days once filled with the typical concerns of a tenth grader—exams, friends, and future dreams. These mundane worries were abruptly replaced by a survivalist urgency when violence erupted in her hometown, disrupting her education and casting a long shadow over her youth. As schools shut down, the chaos culminated in Nusrat being unable to sit for her crucial board exams.

Escaping the violent conditions in Myanmar, Nusrat along with her family arrived at the Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar. Amid the vast tents and crowds of fellow refugees, she aimed to regain a sense of normalcy by participating in educational programs offered within the camp. Transitioning from student to teacher, she found solace in the roles she took on, educating others and weaving threads of hope among her community.

However, as Nusrat grew older, the societal pressures to cease working and settle down grew. Conversations about marriage and the hefty dowries expected in her community

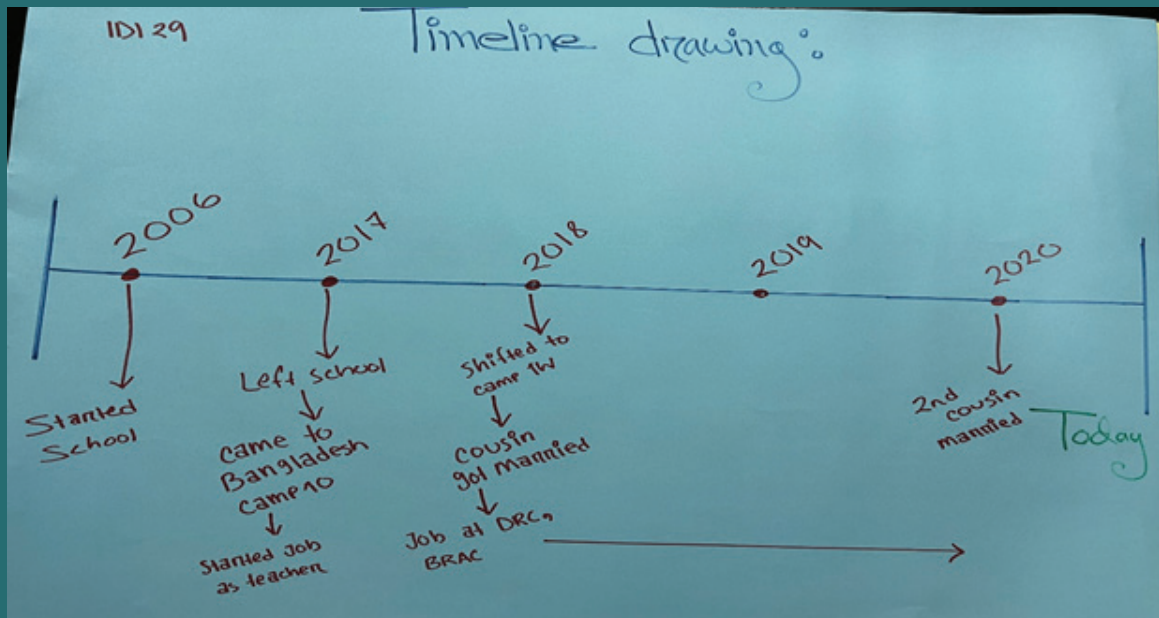
began to surface within her family. Nusrat observed the struggles of those around her, noticing how the age and appearance of a bride influenced the dowry negotiations. Nusrat talks about how families within the camps struggle to arrange the amount of money demanded in dowries, and as a result, many girls belonging to poor families struggle with marriage. Since the amount of dowry demanded goes higher with the age of the bride, families choose to marry off their daughters at an earlier age.

"Their parents marry them off as soon as they can afford it, and they even go as far as taking loans for this. If they still cannot manage to get their daughters married, they marry them off abroad to much older men."

Determined to carve her own path, Nusrat resisted the pressure to marry young, despite the community's expectations.

"There's a lot of negative physical as well as mental aspects, that come with getting married early."

She explains how getting married early can result in the girl feeling lost since she isn't mentally ready to navigate through marriage in



the first place. And to add onto that, Nusrat adds that her knowledge from the local counselors has enabled her to understand the negative impacts of conceiving a child too early for the mother and child. As a result, Nusrat actively chooses to get married at the “right time” so that she is both physically and mentally ready for the new journey.



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Way Forward

These are just a few of the stories that highlight the struggles faced by Rohingya adolescents and young adults when it comes to early marriage and early childbearing. These stories offer a glimpse into their culture, challenges, and sufferings. Unfortunately, for many, displacement has worsened an already difficult situation. In addition to the hardships of being displaced in 2017, they have endured multiple displacements within camps, which have increased stress and uncertainty.

Early marriage continues to be prevalent in this community, driven by different reasons for males and females, generally resulting in early childbearing as adolescents quickly have their first child. Family planning remains a contentious issue for many in the community due to preconceptions about religious beliefs, societal norms, and cultural practices. Stories like Jamal's and Nusrat's, however, demonstrate that there is a demand to delay marriage and childbearing among many youths. Addressing social norms and providing alternative means for families to generate income, beyond dowry, are critical to reduce pressures to marry early. Efforts to increase family planning for couples who wish to prevent pregnancy must engage with male partners to educate and dispel misperceptions

about the safety of contraception. Moreover, it is important to understand and address the many underlying factors that affect decision-making regarding marriage and childbearing, including dowry, the role of older family members as decision-makers, and religious misconceptions.

Access to sexual and reproductive health education for adolescent boys and girls must be prioritized. Awareness campaigns on the consequences of early marriage and childbearing should be organized regularly, using vibrant visuals and accessible language. In addition to addressing the impacts of early marriage and early childbearing, these campaigns should address the limited knowledge of reproductive health, among both boys and girls, including topics such as puberty, menstruation, and family planning. Education is key for the Rohingya people to gain the knowledge and skills required to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

All stakeholders including the government of Bangladesh, need to work together to improve the SRH situation of Rohingya adolescents and youths. Through this pictorial booklet, we aim to elevate the voices of Rohingya adolescents and encourage increased efforts towards enhancing the SRH welfare of Rohingya adolescent boys and girls.



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