

Displacement and Domestic Violence among Rohingya Refugees: Nepal

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Abstract

This paper discusses the effects of displacement on Rohingya refugees' perceptions for justification of domestic violence. The risk of domestic violence increases during displacement, especially for refugees and other forced migrants. One hundred fifty-two respondents were interviewed at the Rohingya camps in Kapan, Nepal. Multiple Linear Regression was then used to analyse the data. Income-generating activities of Rohingya refugees post displacement were identified as a significant effect of displacement. Compared to females, male respondents found domestic violence to be justified in all scenarios, except that of when she argues with her husband, with a majority agreeing with domestic violence being justified in the case of women earning. However, our findings suggest a low domestic violence justification score when both men and women have an income and share decisionmaking. Hence, it is recommended that equal opportunities for income generation for both genders, along with sensitization programmes concerning women earning, be introduced to reduce domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Rohingya, Refugees, Displacement

1. Introduction

According to a report released by the International Rescue Committee (2022), among refugee and displaced women living within some of the underfunded and forgotten humanitarian crises, seventy three percent reported an increase in domestic violence, fifty one percent reported a rise in sexual violence and thirty two percent observed growth in early and forced marriages. Forced migration results in increased complexities in the gender roles of men and women due to conflict and displacement (Gurjara, 2000; El-Bushra, 2000). Such complexities challenge the adaptability of both men and women in their new environment, which changes their lifestyle and traditional roles. Additionally, post-displacement household structures show that a change in women's access to economic opportunities affects gender roles in society and may increase domestic violence (Gulesci.S et al., 2017).

The Rohingyas, a stateless ethnic group from Myanmar, are currently the fifth largest group of refugees in the world. As of 2021, around 1.6 million Rohingya refugees have been displaced across the Asia-Pacific (OCHA, 2021). Among these refugees residing in Bangladesh, the most vulnerable were women and girls (52%) and children under the age of eighteen (55%) (ISCG, 2019). According to a report by Toma L et al. (2019), domestic violence among Rohingya refugees is considered an acceptable social norm that got aggravated by the crisis due to the difficult environment and the lack of livelihood opportunities. Eighty one percent of gender-based violence in the Rohingya camps is said to be perpetrated by intimate partners, while fifty six percent of the incidents were physical violence (International Rescue Committee Report, 2020).

Although forced migration affects millions of people and a large amount of literature explores the perceptions of refugees' concerning the consequences of this displacement process (Davis, 2000; Pavlish, 2007, Ai et al., 2002), a majority of the analysis is qualitative. Therefore, with the lack of adequate quantitative data on the specific reason for the increase in domestic violence among Rohingya refugees, this study aims to understand the effects of forced displacement on refugees' justification for domestic violence. A brief description of the social norms and risks of domestic violence among these refugees is presented in the next section, followed by the study's methodology in Section 3 and the findings in Section 4. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

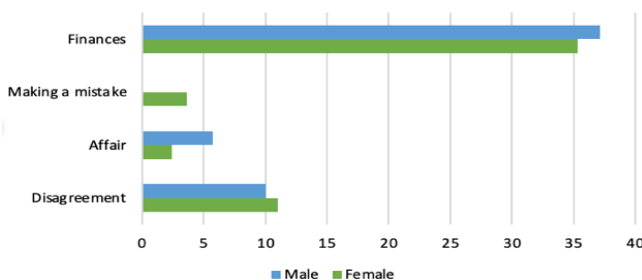
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2. Social norms and risk of domestic violence

A humanitarian crisis can often aggravate pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination, resulting in the disruption of gender inequalities and a consequent shift in power relations. In addition, displacement from a forced migration can result in a reversal of these traditional gender roles caused due to the unavailability of easy access to economic opportunities. This role reversal may exacerbate frustration in men, leading to tensions in the family and men taking up alcoholism (El-Bushra, 2003). This is further supported by the work of Abramsky et al. (2019) and Nelson (2021), which provide evidence of a direct correlation between changes in men’s income-generating activities and domestic violence.

The Rohingya society is patriarchal, where the traditional gender roles constitute the men being the breadwinners and decisionmakers of the household, while the women are absent from public spaces and hold responsibilities limited to childcare, food preparation, cleaning, laundry and caring for the elderly. Post displacement, while the Rohingya men found it difficult to get work based on their skills, women, on the other hand, found it relatively easy to adapt, find work and use their housemaker skills. The frustrations of being incapable to be the provider for the family result in the men inflicting violence on the women (Women’s League, 2002). Additionally, Mamun et al. (2018) report that within relationships, violence against women and girls is normalised in the Rohingya community, and women rarely seek support. Figure 1 displays the various scenarios reported by respondents wherein domestic violence has occurred.

Figure 1: Scenarios wherein domestic violence occur



Note: n=152
Source: Own Survey, 2022

Women’s economic empowerment has been noted as a fundamental premise for increasing women’s household bargaining power. It gives them some power to make individual decisions that they previously could not (Holmes et al., 2020). However, the positive impacts of women’s economic empowerment do not necessarily seem to extend to domestic violence. Views of scholars on the association between domestic violence and economic empowerment are mixed. While some scholars document the positive effects of economic empowerment (Ildephose, 2013; Holmes et al., 2020), other studies report no change or increase in domestic violence among women having financial autonomy (Raj et al., 2018; Litwin, Perova and Reynolds, 2019; Green et al., 2015). According to the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (2022), there is an increase in women’s economic participation among the Rohingyas living in refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. This has led to significant changes in the Rohingya community, with women developing progressive views towards women holding leadership roles. However, the Rohingya community has reported mixed feelings towards this change. Table 1 displays the decision-making percentages of the Rohingyas living in Nepal.

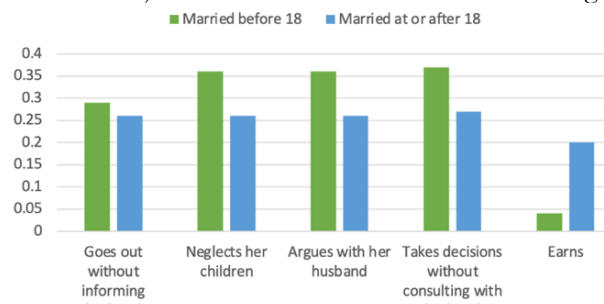
Table 1: Percentage of decision-making power of female and male Rohingya

	Decision-making elements	Female	Shared	Male
	Household-related matters			
1	Purchases on food	13.15	61.18	23.68
2	Household purchases	11.84	57.89	26.97
	Income-related matters			
3	How to spend family income	11.18	35.52	50.65
4	Woman working	13.15	32.89	50
5	Kind of work woman can do	12.5	36.18	46.05
	Women and child healthcare-related matters			
6	Child healthcare	13.81	55.92	27.63
7	Number of children to have	5.92	69.07	25
8	Contraception use	14.47	55.92	30.26

Note: n=152
Source: Own Survey, 2022

Marriage for women in the Rohingya society is considered as a means of attaining social and economic security for Rohingya women and girls, who are traditionally discouraged from working (ISCG, 2017; Ripoll, 2018). Since the crisis, child and forced marriages have been documented involving girls as young as fifteen (Toma et al., 2018). These marriages have been conducted as a strategy for coping in times of crisis. Child marriages limit young girls' skills, knowledge, social support, mobility and autonomy. With very little power in relation to their husbands' in-laws, they are extremely vulnerable to domestic abuse and abandonment (Heise et al., 1994). Research suggests that young girls married before eighteen are susceptible to domestic violence, which could be physical, sexual or emotional (Nasrullah et al., 2015). Figure 2 displays respondents' perceptions of the statements justifying domestic violence according to respondent's age of marriage.

Figure 2: Perceptions of situations justified for domestic violence according to the age of marriage



Note: n= 152

Source: Own Survey, 2022

3. Materials and methods

The study's respondents were selected randomly to understand their perceptions for the justification of domestic violence. One hundred fifty-two Rohingya refugees residing in Kapan camps in Nepal were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The target size required for sufficient statistical power was calculated with the help of a sample size calculator (RAOSOFT). The result was one hundred fifty-five, with a margin error of $\pm 5\%$, a confidence level of 90%, and a 50% response distribution for a population of three hundred sixty.

The study was conducted through face-to-face interviews. In addition, interviews of both genders were conducted separately, with a same-sex interviewer as the respondent. To understand the perceptions of Rohingya refugees towards the situations in which domestic violence is justified, respondents were asked statements on the justification of domestic violence, socio-economic characteristics of their household, their perception of what a woman should do when subjected to physical violence, and finally their knowledge of a safe space.

a) Instruments and Data Analysis

The structured questionnaires were drafted in English; however, the interviews were conducted in Nepali. Respondents were informed of the purpose and background of the study. Additionally, they were assured that the data was being collected for educational purposes and details leading to individual identification would not be collected. Finally, the respondents were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate or withdraw consent to participate at any given time during the interview.

The questionnaire consisted of four primary sections. The first section consisted of the respondent's socio-demographic characteristics like age, gender, marital status, education level, and relationship to the head of the household. The second section consisted of detailed information regarding their employment and employer. This section included questions regarding the respondent's current occupation, employer and the kind of work the respondent was involved in. The third section dealt with respondents' knowledge of a safe space in case of domestic violence and their perceptions of what would be appropriate for a woman subjected to physical abuse should do. Lastly, the fourth section dealt with statements regarding situations wherein domestic violence is justified. Respondents were made to react to the statements based on a three-point Likert scale. For each of the statements, they were asked to state their level of agreement from 'disagree', 'neutral' and 'agree'.

b) Dependent Variables

Respondents were to score the statements related to situations wherein domestic violence is justified. Based on the three-point Likert scale, scores were calculated by averaging respondents' answers to the statements, with high scores indicating that the respondents found domestic violence to be justified. The scores of the five statements ranged from 0-10. Cronbach's alpha was then used to assess the Likert scale's internal reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for domestic violence was 0.85, indicating internal reliability.

c) Independent Variables

For socio-demographic variables, gender was coded as one for men and zero for women. The age of respondents was grouped into respondents below the age of twenty, ages between twenty to thirty, ages between thirty-one to forty, ages between forty-one to fifty, ages between fifty-one to sixty and ages above sixty. Each group was recorded as a binary, where one value indicated which age group the respondent belonged to. The marital status of respondents was grouped into single, married and widowed. They were recorded as binary, with a value of 1 indicating the marital status group the respondent belongs to. Education was recorded as number of years, average of the respondent's education being 3.77 years. Decision-making power was grouped into man (reference category), woman and shared, which was recorded as a binary, wherein a value of 1 indicates which group took decisions. The income situation of a household was registered as a man earning, a woman earning (reference category) or both. The answers were recorded as binary, wherein the value of 1 indicates the earning situation of the household.

Additionally, the respondent's employment status was categorized based on the employer- Nepali, self-employed, NGO and unemployed (reference category). Each category is captured as a binary. Respondent's views on what a woman should do if subjected to physical abuse were categorized into- Stay and handle, Report to community head, Report to police, leave home and talk to family. Again, each category was captured as binary. Lastly, we controlled for variable access to the internet, which was recorded as a binary.

d) Analysis Method

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using STATA. The analysis was performed to identify factors affecting respondents' scores for justification for domestic violence.

$$Y_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11}\text{Respondent Characteristics} + \beta_{12}\text{Employer} + \beta_{13}\text{Forced Migration} + \beta_{14}\text{Other Characteristics}$$

Where Y_1 = Domestic Violence Score

4. Results and Discussion

a) Respondent Characteristics

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the respondents. The mean domestic violence score was 8.23 (SD=3.45; range= 5-15), indicating that the respondents have a low justification for domestic violence in the provided scenarios. Forty-five percent of the respondents were male. Twenty-six respondents (17%) were below the age of thirty, fifty-five respondents (36%) were between the ages of twenty-one to thirty, thirty-two respondents (21%) were between the age group of thirty-one to forty, seventeen respondents (11%) were between the ages forty-one to fifty and sixteen respondents (7%) were between the age groups of fifty-one to sixty. Of the respondents, seventeen were unmarried (11%) and a hundred twenty-one of respondents were married (80%). The average years of education attained was 3.77 years. The decision-making score of a woman was 2.82 (SD=2.73, range= 0-8) and the decision-making score of a man was 4.04 (SD =2.97, range=0-8).

The employment variable was chosen to represent the impact of displacement. Fifty-eight respondents (38%) reported that the male member was earning for the family, while ten respondents (7%) reported that both the male and the female members were earning for the family. Sixty-nine respondents (45%) were employed, with forty-four respondents being self-employed (29%), followed by twenty-three respondents being employed by local Nepalis (15%) and two respondents being employed by an NGO (1%).

Regarding a respondent's view of how a woman should handle physical abuse, fifty-one respondents (38%) reported that the woman should stay and handle the situation, thirty respondents (20%) reported that the woman should report violence to the community head, twelve respondents (8%) reported that the woman should report violence to the police, three respondents reported that the woman should leave home and eleven respondents reported that the woman should talk to the family. Additionally, a hundred nine respondents (48%) reported that they knew a safe space where they could go in case they experienced domestic violence. Lastly, seventy-seven respondents (51%) had access to the internet.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variables		Description	Average	SD
Dependent variables				
DV score	Score	Respondent's view of domestic violence justification	8.23	3.45
Respondent characteristics				
Gender	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent is male	0.45	0.49
Age below 20	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's age is below 20	0.17	0.37
Age (21-30)	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's age is between 21-30	0.36	0.48
Age (31-40)	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's age is between 31-40	0.21	0.41
Age (41-50)	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's age is between 41-50	0.11	0.32
Age (51-60)	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's age is between 51-60	0.07	0.27
Marital status: single	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent is unmarried	0.11	0.31
Marital status: married	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent is married	0.80	0.39
Years of education	Years	Number of years of education	3.77	3.55
DM woman	Score	Decision-making score of woman	2.82	2.73
DM shared	Score	Shared decision-making score	4.04	2.97
Employment				
Man earning	Dummy	Take 1, if the male member is earning	0.38	0.48
Both earning	Dummy	Take 1, if both members are earning	0.07	0.27
Employer				
Nepali	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's employer is a Nepali	0.15	0.36
Self employed	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent is self-employed	0.29	0.45
NGO	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent's employer is an NGO	0.01	0.13
Physical abuse				
Stay and handle	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent stays	0.34	0.47
Report to community head	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent reports to the community head	0.20	0.40
Report to police	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent reports to the police	0.08	0.28
Leave home	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent leaves home	0.02	0.16
Talk to family	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent talks to family	0.07	0.26
Knowledge of a safe space	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent is aware of a safe space	0.48	0.50
Access to internet	Dummy	Take 1, if the respondent has access to the internet	0.51	0.50

b) Statements Regarding Domestic Violence Justification

Table 3 records respondents' perceptions of the statements regarding situations where domestic violence is justified. Twenty female respondents (24.39%), compared to twenty-two respondents (31.42%), felt it justified for domestic violence if the woman steps out without informing her husband. For the statement of domestic violence being justified for neglect of children, twenty-four women (29.26%), as compared to twenty-one male respondents (30%), agreed with the statement. Twenty-seven female respondents (32.92%), compared to eighteen male respondents (25.71%), agreed with the statement that domestic violence is justified if women argue with their husbands. For the statement regarding the justification of domestic violence in the scenario of the woman taking a decision without informing their husband, twenty-four female respondents (29.26%) and twenty-one male respondents (31.42%) agreed. Finally, in the statement wherein domestic violence is justified for a woman earning, six female respondents (7.31%) as compared to eighteen male respondents (25.71%) agreed.

For all of the above statements, except for domestic violence being justified in the scenario of the woman arguing with her husband, it was found that the percentage of men finding domestic violence to be justified was higher.

Table 3: Statements on Domestic Violence Justifications (figures in %)

	Domestic Violence Justification	Female (n=82)			Male(n=70)		
		1	2	3	1	2	3
1	Domestic violence justified if she steps out without informing the husband	68.29	7.31	24.39	61.42	7.14	31.42
2	Domestic violence justified if she neglects the children	69.51	1.21	29.26	62.85	7.14	30
3	Domestic violence justified if she argues with him	67.07	0	32.92	65.74	8.57	25.71
4	Domestic violence justified if she takes decisions without informing her husband	65.85	4.87	29.26	60	8.57	31.42
5	Domestic violence justified if she earns	43.90	48.78	7.31	52.85	21.42	25.71

Note: 1= Not agree, 2= Neutral; 3= Agree; n=152

Source: Own Survey, 2022

c) Econometric Results

The domestic violence score of the respondents was logged for all the variables, the results of which are presented in Table 4. From the results, it could be deduced that gender was statistically significant at the 5% level ($\beta=2.33$, $p<0.05$), and age were significant for the lower 20 groups ($\beta=-1.79$, $p<0.10$). The respondent's marital status was significant for being single ($\beta=4.24$, $p<0.001$) and married ($\beta=2.85$, $p<0.10$). The decision-making score of the respondent was significant for both the variable 'DMWoman' ($\beta=1.97$, $p<0.05$) and 'DM Shared' ($\beta=-2.00$, $p<0.05$).

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Variables	Domestic Violence Score	
	Coef	P> t
Respondent characteristics		
Gender	2.73	0.02**
Age Lower 20	2.51	0.07*
Age (21-30)	0.12	0.92
Age (31-40)	0.04	0.97
Age (41-50)	0.22	0.87
Age (51-60)	2.22	0.12
Marital status: single	5.66	0.00***
Marital status: married	2.87	0.00***
Years of education	-0.05	0.49
DM woman	0.57	0.05*
DM shared	-0.20	0.04**
Employment		
Man earning	-0.83	0.53
Both earning	-1.84	0.07*
Employer		
Self-employed	-1.73	0.07*
Local Nepali	-2.10	0.09*
NGO	-1.81	0.38
Physical abuse		
Stay and handle	0.46	0.49
Report to community head	-0.23	0.75
Report to police	-2.05	0.03**
Leave home	-0.52	0.75
Talk to family	1.78	0.10
Knowledge of safe place	-1.64	0.10*
Access to internet	-4.65	0.00**
_Cons	8.10	0.04

Source: Authors, 2022

Note: ***, **, * indicate significance levels of 1%, 5% and 10% ; n=15

Regarding the variables for employment, it was found that the variable 'Both earning' was statistically significant at the 10% level ($\beta=-1.83$, $p<0.10$). Furthermore, under employer, the variables 'Self-employed' ($\beta=-1.79$, $p<0.10$) and 'Local Nepali' ($\beta=-1.70$, $p<0.10$) were both statistically significant at 10%.

For variables under physical abuse, it was found that the variables 'Report to police' ($\beta=-2.13$, $p<0.05$), 'Leave home' ($\beta=-2.63$, $p<0.10$) and 'Talk to family' ($\beta=-1.64$, $p<0.10$) were statistically significant at 5% and 10% respectively. Lastly, the variable 'Access to internet' ($\beta=-2.98$, $p<0.001$) was statistically significant at 1%.

(d) Discussion

Our findings indicate that male respondents, compared to female respondents and respondents with ages lower than or equal to twenty years had a higher score of justification for domestic violence than those above 60 years. This finding is consistent with Table 3 and Figure 2, as well as with the literature (Akhter & Kusakabe, 2016; Islam et al., 2021). According to Islam et al., individuals below eighteen years found domestic violence justified as they consider it a 'perceived normalcy'. Additionally, according to Tenkorang (2019), the low education levels of respondents married below the age of eighteen were more likely to support patriarchal gender norms and have lower household autonomy levels.

Respondents who weren't married yet and married, compared to those who were widowed or separated, reported a higher score of justification for domestic violence. This finding is consistent with Islam et al. (2021) and Guglielmiet al. (2021). According to Guglielmiet al. (2021), married Rohingya girls experienced increased gender-based violence as they experienced gender inequality in their daily lives. Burnett and Michael (2001) also stated that married women tend to tolerate this violent behavior and justify it for the men being frustrated. As for decision-making power, it was interesting to note that respondents who reported women to have a higher decision-making power than men had a comparatively higher score for justification of domestic violence. However, respondents who reported a higher shared decision-making score had a low justification score for domestic violence. According to Donald et al. (2021), sole decisionmaking by a woman in sub-Saharan Africa was associated with a ten-percentage point higher as compared to sole decisionmaking by a man, which was associated with a 3.3 percentage point higher incidence of domestic violence. Additionally, this finding is supported by Svec and Andic (2018), who add that joint decisionmakers have a lower risk for intimate power violence.

With an increase in employment opportunities for Rohingya women postmigration (Akhter & Kusakabe, 2014), it was found that respondents who reported both men and women having an income reporting a lower score for justification of domestic violence as compared to when only the woman is earning. This finding is consistent with that of Mukta et al. (2021), who reported on the strong patriarchal norms of the Rohingya society, and of a woman who was provided with an income opportunity and was subjected to domestic violence. It was also interesting to note that respondents who were either self-employed or employed by a local Nepali reported a lower score of domestic violence justification than the unemployed. This finding is consistent with that of Akhter & Kusakabe (2014), who stated that unemployed men tend to resort to alcohol and vent their frustrations on women, leading to increased domestic violence.

For respondents' reactions to physical abuse, it was found that the ones who reported their case of physical abuse to the police and respondents who were aware of a safe place to go to in case of domestic violence had a lower score for domestic violence justification. Information on steps to be taken in case of domestic violence or physical abuse is disseminated by non-government organisations and various host communities in the Rohingya refugee camps. These organisations recruit Rohingya volunteers from refugee camps to circulate information on preventing gender-based violence (OCHA, 2022). Hence, respondents who were aware of these steps and received this information had a lesser tolerance for domestic violence.

Lastly, it was interesting to note that respondents with access to the internet had a lower score for domestic violence justification. This is because the Rohingyas consider cell phones a vital asset in keeping in contact with their relatives and friends across the camps while having access to the internet helps them stay in touch with friends and relatives worldwide. Additionally, various host communities and non-government organisations circulate information regarding safe spaces in case of domestic violence and related matters through messaging applications.

5. Conclusion

This study attempts to look into the effects of displacement on respondents' perceptions of scenarios where domestic violence is justified.

The study identified the change in income-generating activities of Rohingyas post displacement as a significant effect on domestic violence. It was found that a majority of respondents reported having experienced domestic violence due to finance-related matters. Male respondents found domestic violence to be justified for all the scenarios, excepting that of when she argues with her husband, with a majority agreeing with domestic violence being justified in the case of women earning. However, our findings suggest a low domestic violence justification score for when both men and women have an income or share decision making.

Despite certain limitations such as generalisation, sample size and timeframe, this study's identification of women's sudden participation in income-generating activities being a major factor in the justification of domestic violence should be acknowledged. Hence, it is highly recommended that the host community as well as national and international aid agencies create income-generating opportunities for both genders equally. Additionally, gender sensitization programmes on the advantages of women having an income should be introduced to the Rohingya community.

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