

## Working Title

# Rethinking Discourse of Approaching Trafficking of Rohingya Women and Girls in Cox's Bazar

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Being subjected to miserable living conditions and inadequate access to basic needs, Rohingya women experience various forms of intersecting forces operating at individual, community, and societal levels shaping inequalities and discrimination differently for men and women in the camp. The stateless situation is in the form of a lack of rights to protection as a citizen and patriarchy-only compound camp exploitation, especially in gender-based violence, including trafficking. Scholars and practitioners have widely acknowledged such vulnerabilities, and the severity demands a different prism of addressing trafficking women and adolescent girls among the Rohingya community living in Cox's Bazar. Trafficking of Rohingya women is a complex phenomenon that is interlinked with an extremely sensitive array of concerns stemming from beliefs, norms, and attitudes toward understanding and approaching the phenomenon itself. The contemporary discourse of addressing the trafficking of Rohingya women can be understood through epistemic injustice, which excludes marginalized and oppressed people from being heard and from the agenda, resulting in underreporting and a lack of understanding of actual trafficking practices. This paper argues that approaching the trafficking of Rohingya women and girls from the feminist framework can allow us to observe women as a referent to security and provide a lens to include knowledge from voiceless women whose future is undermined.

## Introduction

Human trafficking, also called “modern slavery,” is a form of transnational organized crime adversely affecting more than 40 million men, women, and children.

<sup>1</sup> Human trafficking is a 150 billion dollar industry globally, with \$99 billion attributed to commercial sexual exploitation, and is a leading human right challenge disproportionately affecting youth and women (ILO, 2014). Women and girls are disproportionately affected, particularly by trafficking for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced marriage,<sup>2</sup> which account for more than 70%.<sup>3</sup> Relatively open borders across South Asia facilitate higher rates of trafficking. On top of the rate of poverty, the unstable and repressive nature of the national government, and the lack of a robust monitoring mechanism.

While Bangladesh is making gradual progress in combating trafficking in person, setting up anti-trafficking tribunals, putting regional arrangements in place, and taking action against recruiting and exploiting Bangladeshis seeking work abroad, it has been consistently identified as one of the source countries as well as transit points for human trafficking.<sup>4</sup> Against this backdrop, the influx of the Rohingya community from Myanmar has brought many challenges and raised new concerns about the prevention and protection of trafficking in person, especially among women. The Global Trends report identifies the Rohingya community as one of the most ‘persecuted ethnic minorities who are stateless and repressed by the decades-long structural oppression by the Myanmar military government.’<sup>5</sup>

The data suggests that 912,114 Rohingya individuals (as of July 2019) residing in Kutupalong live in distressing conditions with the limited-service provision. The vulnerabilities of the Rohingya community include, but are not limited to, patriarchy, violence against women, uncertain future, lack of education, absence of livelihood options, safety, and security. Human trafficking is considered a gender-based phenomenon, disproportionately impacting the lives of women and girls.<sup>6</sup> The complex set of vulnerabilities of women and girls in the camp make them easy targets of traffickers and cannot be ignored or underestimated<sup>7</sup>. The concerns of trafficking of women and girls tend to become more sensitive due to the societal norms, beliefs, and attitudes toward understanding and addressing the issues, which often go against survivors’ interests and undermine social dignity. The perception becomes more problematized by the construction of fear of family, community, and state who perceived it as a threat to the safety and the state’s image, resulting in a lack of data and a deep understanding of actual trafficking practices.

The goal of the paper is two-fold: first, to understand the concurrent features of trafficking of women and girls in the camp and how actors perceived human trafficking, where global and national reports have consistently highlighted stories of trafficking and indicated rising figures; second, to provide a wide lens of approaching human trafficking which does not undermine the credibility of women’s experience and their stories, and address gender-related human rights abuses. The literature review and in-depth interviews were planned to collect the information from the ground. This paper aimed to interview some trafficked survivors and collect their narratives, which was impossible due to the permission issue. The paper could

manage interviews of the service providers working in the camp to understand the prevailing practices for handling human trafficking.

### **Approaches to address Trafficking of Women and Girls**

As a global problem, all anti-trafficking initiatives share the same goal of eradicating human trafficking, but the approach usually varies. Each perspective and theoretical framework lends a unique understanding of the issue and the factors influencing it. Trafficking of Rohingya women is a complex phenomenon that is interlinked with an extremely sensitive array of concerns stemming from community beliefs, norms, and attitudes. The paper attempts to use the concept of epistemic injustice to unfold the phenomenon of human trafficking to shed light on the voicelessness of the most vulnerable community of the world—Rohingya women and girls living in Cox's Bazar. Similarly, it attempts to offer a feminist framework of intervention that can capture all the nuances of the problem and focus on the human rights aspects of the victims.

A couple of the most prevalent and traditional theoretical approaches to human trafficking are placed on how the justice system identifies and classifies the victims and what legal measures are used to prosecute the traffickers. However, most importantly, it criminalizes offenses such as prostitution and illegal immigration,<sup>8</sup> thereby ignoring the fundamental human rights of the victims and even opening them up to prosecution by the justice department.<sup>9</sup> The former view human trafficking as a criminal activity that violates the state's legal provisions.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the economic approach focuses heavily on the economic factors that contribute to human trafficking.<sup>11</sup> A capitalist model is proposed where human trafficking is seen as a profit business. This economical approach relates to migrants seeking employment in more developed or wealthier countries and falling victim to trafficking. The simple remedy in this situation is providing jobs and better opportunities, so people do not need to migrate. However, this approach, and the former one, greatly discounts the vulnerability of women and children as trafficking victims and the gross human rights violations of being trafficked.

To capture the underrepresentation of Rohingya women's voices and experiences, Fricker's (2007) philosophical framework of epistemic justice/injustice can provide us to unfold the limitation of understanding the concerns of trafficking. Epistemic injustice is "a wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower." It manifests the process through which marginalized and oppressed people are excluded from being heard and understood by others in interpersonal

communications. It also highlights the importance of broadening and deepening the understanding of the human experience through increasing integration of justice and knowledge of stories (Fricker, 2007, p1). The purpose of such transformation denotes a societal change that is more equitable and inclusive.

The epistemic injustice occurred in two ways. Society, as a receiver of the knowledge, tends to undermine the experiences and knowledge of the holder due to the prejudice or existing construction and questions the speakers' credibility. The result is dysfunction in knowledge dissemination in two ways, first by ignoring the critical knowledge called epistemic wrong and second, by undermining the groups of knowers from participating in the knowledge formation. The later form of epistemic injustice looks at how the process of marginalization of a specific group excludes a group of knowers from contributing to the social understanding of the human experiences is shaped. Here, groups are excluded either by systematically excluding the fundamental knowledge they hold from the dominant narratives or by ignoring their method of expressing knowledge as a legitimate form of expression by the dominant culture. Fricker named this epistemic injustice an ethical wrong. This phenomenon of epistemic injustice is applied to explore the nuances of the trafficking of women and girls in the camp.

Rohingya's fled from Myanmar, a minority and stateless community, living in a unique condition in the camp—where neither their home country is willing to accept them back nor does the host country assimilate them into the economy and society. Rohingya's life is becoming more complicated as they feel safer in the host country than in their home state. One could easily sense the vulnerability and lack of agency this group already has. Due to this circumstance, their voices are not heard as much, or they do not have enough opportunities to explore and exert their agency. Trafficking of women and girls has complex effects in addition to violating their human rights and exposure to violence, drug abuse, trafficking, and prostitution. These vulnerabilities often go unchecked due to the fear of the family of the victims and the community in general. The social stigma associated with the trafficking cause further harm to the victim's safety and dignity. The epistemic injustice can better explain why the trafficking of women has been under-reported, under-detected, and under-persecuted, where the crime remains hidden due to the fear of further intimidation and reprisals that oppressed the victims' human rights. The relevance of epistemic justice/injustice for the engagement of victims of trafficking is potentially in a)

focusing on the construction of knowledge and what is considered legitimate knowledge (when it is about understanding trafficking) and b) placing the victims at the center of analysis not only from intellectual dimension but from ethical dimension too. The concept also allows understanding the system that promotes silence and delegitimizes knowers and ways of knowing.

The topic of epistemic justice/injustice suggests what can be practically done for societal interaction and applied to transform the inherent injustice (Butin, 2006; Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell & Yep, 2017; Oden & Casey, 2007; Singh, 2012; Stoecker, 2016; Saltmarsh, 2011).<sup>12</sup> This paper argues that the feminist approach can only move beyond legal-only and social-only to a broader and more holistic approach to understanding the issue of human trafficking and is more focused on lending a voice to the victims. The traditional security approach to human trafficking focuses on border issues and the deportation of trafficking victims considered to be illegal immigrants in opposition to the feminist approach.<sup>13</sup> First, feminist theorists attempted to look beyond the traditional security framework instead to consider the safety and security of the trafficking victims—they focus on both traffickers and the state itself, posing security threats to the victims. Second, it attempts to widen the base of security by moving beyond human security, which focuses on freedom from fear and freedom from want, putting individuals' security as the central unit of analysis. Despite all the issues that human security brings under its umbrella, it is still deficient in helping to understand human trafficking fully. This is because human security ignores the intersectional nature of human trafficking, mainly the existing power differences.<sup>14</sup> The policies being formulated are by those who have never gone through the experiences of being trafficked and pushed upon those who are trafficked or who understand the issue better.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, feminist literature can challenge the notion of traditional security and human security on two levels: ethical and pragmatic. Human trafficking should, first and foremost, be looked at as a human rights violation, and focusing simply on the state means ignoring the voices of the trafficking victims.<sup>16</sup>

This approach allows for an understanding of human trafficking from the viewpoint of victims. It also focuses on defining and widening the scope of the issue so that prosecution of traffickers, protection and rehabilitation of victims, and their proper recognition are ensured. This completes only one piece of the puzzle. Unless states are brought into the discourse of human trafficking, the picture remains incomplete, and anti-trafficking efforts are rendered

useless. States are the main agents in this global arena responsible for the protection of the human rights of their citizens. Their compliance with international treaties and human rights laws is of the utmost importance, as is their formulation of internal policies and legislations that strengthen their governance structures. States tend to comply with the agreements or treaties because of the international acceptance of those protocols and thus help them to build their national and international reputation for future negotiations on other issues. The acceptance of the US State Department's tier system as an international marker for state compliance with the Protocol can also be explained by the United States' reputation. It hinges significantly on the success and accuracy of the reports being published yearly and the steps the United States takes in formulating its foreign relations with other countries based on the *TIP Report*. If the United States maintains this reputation, other countries may prioritize the *TIP Report* and fix their anti-trafficking governance structure. However, the construction of fear of the state, which may perceive human trafficking as a threat to the safety, security, core values, and image of the state, may cause in lack of data and interest in tracking human trafficking. On the other hand, focusing on trafficking as a perceived security threat to the state may go against the interest of victims and expose them to further insecurity.

The lack of reporting and narratives of the plight of victims is grossly missing due to the panic related to the shame and dignity of the family that exists inside the community, in general. The existing social and cultural norms among the Rohingya community often go against the benefit of the women themselves when women's bodily integrity is associated with the family's dignity. Parents often hide the incident and avoid reporting it to law enforcement agencies, thinking of their daughters' future. The consequences of the behaviors cause more harm to victims as their rights; interests receive less attention in front of the family dignity. The victim's voices are ignored in constructing a real threat perception where trafficking is seen as a security threat to families and communities. Lack of data and discussion on the experiences of the victims and their families are mostly missing in the mainstream narratives. The survivor's story is not brought forth due to the fear of moral panic. Lack of information on the trafficking stories is not shared, thereby this cause further misinformation and ambiguity in the community. The perpetrators are aware of the loopholes, and often they take advantage of the ambiguity and adapt new strategies for exploiting the emotions of the targeted family.

Reimagining security through a feminist security lens highlights the importance of gender-based analysis of the trafficking problem. It looks at the intersectionality of social, cultural, and religious issues as well as gender, age, race, and nationality constituting the trafficking victim's profile.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, feminist researchers focus heavily on the experiences of the victims in trying to understand the plight of the women who are sexually exploited.<sup>18</sup> While gender is not the only unit of analysis, it is at the core of the problem because it establishes the practices and stereotypes and creates perpetrators and victims. Therefore, the two main contributions of this field: it gives voice to the trafficking victims and promotes human trafficking being socially constructed.

For this study, the distinction between the institutional and community-level approaches to tackling human trafficking can be made. At the institutional level, the state, international organizations, and regional organizations are the main actors, while at the community level, the individuals become the main actors. In that sense, if trafficking victims are not stigmatized at the community level and given their due respect, it can be easier to break the cycle of exploitation, especially sexual ones. Similarly, the role of the states and other actors is essential because human trafficking is a global problem encompassing the authority of individual governments, thus rendering them inadequate to protect victims and prevent trafficking.

### **Understanding the Trafficking of Women and Girls in Cox's Bazar:**

Over 909,000 stateless Rohingya people reside in Ukhiya and Teknaf in Bangladesh. Not only in Bangladesh but also in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand became other destinations for Rohingyas, often falling into the hands of traffickers. Being the world's most persecuted and neglected people, Rohingyas living in camps are often victims of brutal networks due to their desperation to live a good life. Geo-strategic location of Cox's Bazar, its border with Myanmar, and its proximity to the divisional headquarters of Chittagong make its location a blessing and a curse of illegal activities, i.e., smuggling, drug, and human trafficking.

Unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities are severe concerns for the Rohingya community. Tourism, finishing, and salt cultivation is some professions for people in Cox's Bazar, which can provide job opportunities to host communities. On top, the presence of Rohingyas put pressure on the already stressed resources and service options. It becomes easy for traffickers to target vulnerable people by promising job opportunities with higher salaries at

home and abroad. They easily trust the traffickers as they do not have any better alternative or idea on how to verify the offer the traffickers make to them.

Being in the camp means Rohingyas cannot leave or look for a job outside. They struggle daily to fulfill their needs as they cannot get any jobs and are also not officially allowed to work outside the camp. Women suffer the most in the absence of any suitable work for them. Rohingyas often receive offers from outside the camp to work, which creates an avenue for them to be abused and cheated by employers. These people have become more vulnerable to trafficking as the economic situation is so severe. Several local newspapers reported on the helpless situation of Rohingyas, where they receive significantly less, even with no payment, after working long hours and even being abused by their employer.<sup>19</sup> The stories of men and women being approached by traffickers with false promises of work and a better life are also familiar. Their status as forcefully displaced people and entitlement to living in the camp increase their vulnerability further when they seek a better life outside the camp. Some knowingly and unknowingly become victims of forced labor and trafficking. Those aware of the risk are still willing to take extreme measures and risk their lives out of desperation. In conversation, a protection officer from an international organization informed me that some of the Rohingyas are even ready to sacrifice family members for the sake of the rest of the family. The other group of victims of false hope does not feel safe and comfortable complaining to law enforcement agencies as they were not supposed to look for a job outside of the camp. An NGO official working in the camp mentioned that this reality could not be overlooked. A framework is required to understand the comprehensiveness of the under-reported cases of trafficking and the sufferings of voiceless victims whose future is uncertain due to this contemporary notion of legality vs. illegality and good life vs. limited work option.

The rising number of child marriages, utterly different from the practices in Myanmar, where early marriage is forbidden, also contributes to the risk of human trafficking. The Rohingya community can practice the culture of early marriage without restriction in the camp, as historically, they are prone to a religion-backed patriarchal culture. The Malaysia dream is another reality in camp life. Some are unaware of the reality in other countries like Malaysia; they only hear the sound and successful stories. Those who have suffered in other countries tend



not to share their hard struggles. On the other hand, many parents are worried about their girls' safety and security and want to marry off their girls to acquaintances. The practice of high dowry for marriage is also a contributing factor to the community's vulnerability. Rohingya parents feel safer sending their daughters for marriage to Malaysia as they heard about a better life for Rohingyas and quickly found a suitable groom for their daughter. Many Rohingya men escaped from the persecution of the Myanmar government to Malaysia before, and now their wives and family members living in the camp are desperate to reunite with them. Traffickers target those low-income families and daughters for exploitation and come up with false marriage proposals, and many girls have fallen prey to the traffickers and are exploited eventually. The practice of high dowry for marriage is also a contributing factor to the community's vulnerability. Poverty, lack of livelihood options, and resource scarcity make them unable to pay a large amount of dowry and become an easy target of trafficking and forced domestic work. Some often send their daughter across Southeast Asia and deceive them into slavery with false marriage promises and are typically sold to various businesses, including prostitution.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, some women are desperate to reunite with their husbands and are easily trapped by the traffickers and ended up in miserable and abusive situations. Therefore, the hope of reuniting with family members and finding a solvent groom has been at the forefront of why many Rohingya refugees, especially women, are coerced by human traffickers and prone to exploitation. The exploitation takes place on multiple levels and stages in the treacherous clutches of human traffickers. Particularly the Muslim women and girls who, in many instances, feel obliged to act or go on the journey in order to help their families but are even more marginalized after their return being cheated due to the social stigma surrounding human trafficking. A conversation with a human rights activist mentioned how the survivors' families feel insecure about disclosing the story to others, thinking of their prospect of getting a husband. Once the story spreads, it would be difficult for the survivors to live in the community if the women are known to be victims of human trafficking, even if, for labor exploitation, they are presumed to be involved in sex trafficking or have been sexually exploited. Women and the family were perceived to lose their value as women and agency. Such cultural backlash has created a loop where the victims and their families are reluctant to report an instance or share

experiences of human trafficking. This reality forces victims and their families to remain silent and not share failed stories and their sufferings.

Human trafficking of Rohingyas is also growing, exacerbated by their isolation and sense of desperation at the failed repatriation efforts. Traffickers are not strangers. Instead, they are from the campsite and well-informed about the vulnerable household and individuals who may be easy to exploit. They take the opportunity of the ignorance of vulnerable people about the routes to different countries and the risk involved. Recently Malaysia turned away a trawler-load of Rohingyas who sought refuge, citing the COVID-19 scare as a reason, forcing them to return to Bangladesh. Such cases of Rohingyas undertaking dangerous voyages in inhuman conditions had been widely reported 32 in 2012 and 2015 and were confirmed as human trafficking. The traffickers from similar communities have more leverage over the vulnerable family in terms of information and weaknesses of the target family. The following section will examine the policies and strategies taken so far in combating trafficking and whether these are enough to address the multi-faceted challenges women face in the camp.

### **Existing Legal Strategies and Policies**

The Palermo Protocol defines human trafficking or trafficking in persons:

*"Trafficking in Persons"... mean[s] the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, using the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation. (Article 3, paragraph (a)).<sup>21</sup>*

Article 4, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Therefore, human trafficking can be seen as a gross violation of human rights because victims are forced into labor and sexual exploitation in inhuman ways. Coercion and exploitation are essential in human trafficking because these terms help differentiate it from human smuggling. Smuggling is meant to provide illegal transport for migrants across international borders in exchange for money. In cases of smuggling, there may be the presence of exploitation and even

fraud, but these may not continue after the migrants have reached the country of destination. Further differentiation exists between trafficking for sexual exploitation and labor exploitation. This differentiation will allow a better understanding of the diverse nature of trafficking.

When dealing with human trafficking issues, the focus was predominantly on its effects.<sup>22</sup> However, a growing literature highlights the various drivers of human trafficking: the universal and country-specific causes; the national policies; and the regional, multilateral, and international anti-trafficking instruments. Governments around the world have adopted various anti-trafficking policies. In the cases of the European Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations member countries, regional (and multilateral) treaties are in place to combat the issue. Despite these measures, trafficking in Southeast Asia is still a cause of great concern, given the vast number of victims still trafficked between and within the countries in and outside the region.<sup>23</sup> Given that human trafficking has grown into a transnational crime, with globalization breaking down borders between countries and creating an open market economy, its prevalence keeps increasing.

Twelve years later, the government of Bangladesh adopted a similar law titled “The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012” to make provisions to prevent the growing trend of human trafficking in the country back then. It becomes necessary to protect victims of human trafficking and their rights and ensure safe migration. This Act<sup>24</sup> sets the legal parameter regarding trafficking in person in Bangladesh. There is still a struggle to differentiate perpetrators to hold them accountable while providing adequate services, treating them humanely, and not letting the victim return to the same abusive place.

Bangladesh remained on the tier 2 Watch List for the third consecutive year because of the lack of efforts to eliminate trafficking. According to the report, the government identified significantly fewer trafficking victims and did not consistently refer victims to care. The Bangladesh High Court did not entertain anti-trafficking cases Rohingya filed. Because of the legal status of the Rohingya community, clear procedures to file complaints in the legal system are challenging, which exposes them to more vulnerability. Victim care remained insufficient, and Rohingya and foreign trafficking victims could not access protective services in Bangladesh.<sup>25</sup>

The government has taken timely measures to counter human trafficking in the country by adopting a national action plan, emphasizing the importance of partnership among the government, INGOs, and NGOs, and carrying out activities in a planned way to fight against organized trafficking. A better criminal justice system that effectively enforces the anti-trafficking laws and endorses socio-economic and political dynamics of trafficking—placing survivors at the center of the intervention. As a part of joint efforts, improving the prosecution of all traffickers, supporting and protecting all trafficked victims, and working to prevent trafficking in the first place by ensuring safety for the migrated people, are key recommendations mentioned in the TIP report.

Rohingyas are mainly left without protection, as no national law regulates their refugee status.<sup>26</sup> As a result, this community lacks access to rights and services, which makes them more exposed to the risk of trafficking. Rohingyas will be entitled to protection as victims of trafficking only if they are recognized as refugees. In this case, there is an urgent need to prevent the trafficking of Rohingya women and look after the rescue process and persecution of victims, including safe repatriation.

### **Rethinking Approaches to the trafficking of Rohingya women and girls**

The humanitarian agency in Cox's Bazar took a collective strategy to prevent and respond to human trafficking in line with the government's national action plan. There are four pillars of the combined strategies: a) prevention of trafficking through awareness raising (awareness meetings, workshops, campaigns, radio/ TV programs, mobile messaging, etc.); b) ensuring access to protection services for victims of trafficking, c) capacity building of partners and authorities through technical guidance and training. A forum like the Ant-trafficking Working Group (ATWG) is formed to develop and implement collaborative strategies against trafficking for the Rohingya humanitarian response. For instance, the sensitization efforts of the organizations are usually made through door-to-door visits, small group discussions, courtyard sessions, and audio and video sessions in the camps and host communities. A bottom-up approach is used to share information and spread awareness about the sufferings of human trafficking and the dangers of making journeys for labor or marriage. Rohingya women and girls often do not have enough information about the legal framework and their rights. However, more work needs to be done to change the mindset of the people who decide voluntarily go with a trafficker because they feel a

kinship with the traffickers as they feel these people are helping them to get a better life. Most importantly, these vulnerable people do not have all the information on the geography of the journey. Door-to-door information may not be enough to change the mindset unless people realize that the journey via sea illegally is not worth the cost they have to pay, in cases by giving their life. This cost-benefit analysis needs to be instilled, which can be done in a participatory manner as suggested by the feminist approach—sharing knowledge of the survivors to voice their experiences. Sharing accounts of real-life experiences and realization is more potent than sharing some information materials and will be more instrumental in deterring future desires. In this way, survivors get their voices heard and can help improve the agency and knowledge of the individual in the camp.

The social stigma and presumed sexual exploitation associated with human trafficking amongst the Rohingya refugee families make it extremely difficult for Rohingya women to share their experiences in order to protect their future in the camp, resulting in epistemic injustice. This further prevents them from accessing adequate and proper rehabilitation services, making them more vulnerable. The underreporting of the trafficking cases by the family and community and formally reported victims are far fewer than the number of victims in different reports.<sup>27</sup> Human traffickers usually take this helpless situation and prey on vulnerable women and girls. The risk of re-trafficking remains a problem within the camp only because of a lack of awareness among the community. When survivors share their stories of suffering, captivity, and the entire rescue process, that message carries more value and makes more impact. Storytelling can be a very effective method of improving the agency and knowledge of the individuals in the camp, especially the victims/survivors of human trafficking. T humanitarian agencies are not involved in rescuing survivors but receive referrals and provide services per the survivors' needs and the standards set by the protection regime. Most survivors came for support after the exploitative situation ended and returned to Cox's Bazar.

Regarding the repatriation, there is no information available on the number of women and girls or even men and the names of the countries from which they were repatriated. In terms of recovery services, i.e., medical support/counseling services, shelter support, etc.), humanitarian agencies provide a comprehensive case management service to all victims of trafficking. The assistance to victims of trafficking was provided based on identified needs, which may have

included counseling or psychosocial support, referrals to cash-for-work programs, dignity kits, food support, and shelter support. Interns of legal services, the agencies follow not harm principles where if victims do not give consent or do not want to receive legal assistance, they do not provide the legal services. The service providers' main priority is victim consent, safety, and security. The problem arose when trafficking victims and their families did not want to go to the police for remedies or legal services due to the cultural backlash. The perceived association of human trafficking with sexual exploitation has created a moral panic that has created a loop where the victims and their families are reluctant to report or seek justice, for instance, for human trafficking. Some of the agencies also provide reintegration services, including employment opportunities. Survivors receive reintegration support in sewing machines, cattle and goat farming, confectionary, grocery, and cloth businesses. It is time to consider whether these support systems are enough for survivors' reintegration and to reduce the risk of re-trafficking.

The complexity of the challenges cannot be tackled by any single actor, such as the state or national and international actors. Similarly, focusing only on one aspect of the issue will not be enough to counter trafficking. A more comprehensive, more human-centered approach can look deeper into multiple drivers of trafficking, reporting, and the system that overlooks the voices of victims. Active participation and partnership between the community, government and civil society groups, the private sector, and international foundations are required in the camp.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Rohingyas were subjected to crimes against humanity in Myanmar, and their suffering and struggle continued in the Kutuppalong camp, where they sought refuge. As long as the persecution in Myanmar continues, and the stateless Rohingyas living in the camp have limited access to protection, especially when there is little hope of returning home, the human trafficking network will flourish. The paper showed how poor living conditions, infrastructure, overcrowding, little hope to return to their home country, lack of livelihood, and lack of protection make the Rohingyas vulnerable to trafficking.<sup>28</sup> It also explored how Rohingya

women and girls are more exposed to multi-dimensional gender-based discrimination in the community, which increases the chances of their further exploitation, manipulation, and destitution by traffickers. This paper argues that the existing intervention to tackle and address trafficking are narrow and lack focused and insightful mechanisms; barely do survivors' or their family's voices taken into consideration. The research suggested that the concept of epistemic injustice can only explain the reason behind the missing narratives of survivors and their family members, which can turn into essential knowledge in fighting against trafficking and community mobilization. To address the trafficking of women and girls, a feminist right-based participatory approach to empower the voices of the victims through effective and thorough awareness programs and enriching rehabilitation mechanisms to empower the vulnerable individuals' agency throughout the company. It hopes to increase awareness of the costs and benefits and more reasons to try and stay in the camp and empower/enrich their lives; they need to feel included. Humanitarian agencies are trying their best to empower individuals through rigorous campaigning strategies. However, they do have their limitations and constraints. On the other hand, States have to move away from their security-focused approach to countering trafficking and be part of community mobilization, which may reduce the problem of under-reporting. The study concludes that to counter trafficking; there is no alternative to giving voice to women and working on individual agency.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation. 2017. *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage*. Geneva, p 9.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State. 2020. Trafficking in Person Report.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2016. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*. UNODC.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of State of the United States of America is to evaluate the overall human trafficking situation of the country. On 25th June 2020, the United States Secretary of State released the 2020 global Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report (20th), upgrading Bangladesh's ranking from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2.4. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. 2021. Global Trends report on forced displaced. UNHCR

<sup>6</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO) and Walk Free Foundation. 2017. Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage (Geneva, Switzerland);

<sup>7</sup> Ebbe & Das, 2008; Territo & Kirkham, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Karen Beeks and Delila Amir, *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2006). See also, John Salt, "Trafficking and human smuggling: A European perspective," *International Migration* 38, no.3 (2000): 31-56.

<sup>10</sup> Beeks, Karen and Delila Amir. 2006. Trafficking and the global sex industry. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

<sup>11</sup> John Salt, "Trafficking and human smuggling: A European perspective," *International Migration* 38, no.3 (2000): 31-56.

<sup>12</sup> Miranda Fricker. 2007. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Lobasz. 2009. Beyond border security: Feminist approaches to human trafficking, *Security Studies*, vol. 18: 320.

<sup>14</sup> Erin Hogan. 2020. Human security versus feminist security approaches to human trafficking in the Mediterranean. Atlas Institute for International Affairs, from: <https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/human-security-vs-feminist-security-approaches-to-human-trafficking-in-the-mediterranean/>, date accessed: 20 June 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Lobasz, *op. cit.*, 323.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>17</sup> Erin Hogan, *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> Lobasz, *op. cit.*, 322.

<sup>19</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Barua, Jishu. 2021. Factors behind Human Trafficking in Host and Rohingya Communities in Cox's Bazar: An Overview. *Social Change* Vol 10, No 1, pp195-220.

<sup>21</sup> The Palermo protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons was adopted in 2000 by the United Nations

<sup>22</sup> Diana Betz. 2009. Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia: Causes and Policy Implications. A Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 2.

<sup>23</sup> US Department of State. 2021. Trafficking in Person Report.

<sup>24</sup> According to section 3(1) of the Act (2012), "Human trafficking" means the selling or buying, recruiting or receiving, deporting or transferring, sending or confining or harboring either inside or outside of the territory of Bangladesh of any person for the purpose of sexual exploitation or oppression, labor exploitation or any other form of exploitation or oppression by means of (a) threat or use of force; or (b)



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deception, or abuse of his or her socio-economic or environmental or other types of vulnerability; or (c) giving or receiving money or benefit to procure the consent of a person having control over him or her.

<sup>25</sup> Sagarika Naik and Yasser Arafath. 2022. 'Voiceless Rohingya: From Refugee to Modern Slaves' in *Human Trafficking: Global History and Perspectives*, edited by ELISHA JASPER DUNG AND AUGUSTINE AVWUNUDIOWBA. (London: Lexington Books).

<sup>26</sup> UNODC, 2022. First National Study on Trafficking in persons in Bangladesh. United Nations

<sup>27</sup> Sagarika Naik and Yasser Arafath, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Anne P. Wilson, 2011. Trafficking Risk for Refugees. Third Annual Interdisciplinary Conference on Human Trafficking at the University of Nebraska (Baltimore, Maryland).