

Rohingya Fathers' Perceptions of Play



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Background: Rohingya Camp in Bangladesh

Children have no access to early or formal education

Adults have no access to employment



1. Background: Rohingya refugee camps

- The Rohingya community is **one of the most persecuted minorities in the world** – previously residing in Arakan – the historical name for the border region of Myanmar now known as the East Rakhine state – for thousands of years [Kiragu, et.al., 2011]
- In August 2017, **about 750,000 Rohingya people fled persecution and violence in Myanmar en masse.**
- There are approximately **1 million Rohingya people living in 34 extremely populated camps**, the largest refugee camp in the world in Cox's Bazar district in Bangladesh [UNFPA, 2021]
- More than **50% of the population in the camps are children** who live with parents with very little to no access to early childhood development education [UNICEF, 2022]

1. Background: Humanitarian Play Lab (Translation: *kela khanas*)

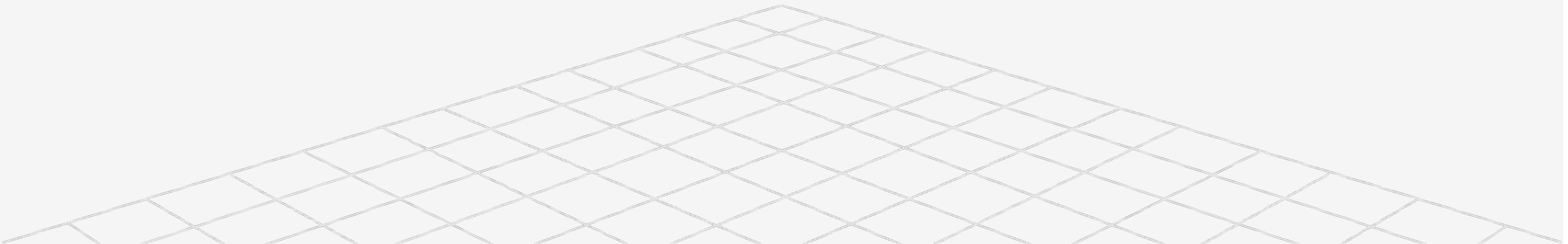
- In 2019, the BRAC Institute of Educational Development (IED) launched **300 humanitarian play labs (HPLs)** for the Rohingya children between the years **0-6** (BRAC, 2019).
- Next, the community home model was added with **1,400 sites in 2020**.
- The HPL model **promotes learning and healing through play** for the children living in the refugee camps with minimal resources.
- The lessons at HPL are imparted by **Rohingya language-speaking female facilitators, commonly known as play-leaders** (Sunny, 2021).

1. Background: Why do Rohingya fathers matter?

- Fathers contribute to **children's emotional health, overall wellness, social development and self-respect** [Rosenburg and Wilcox, 2006]
- Fathers' **presence and engagement create protective environment** [Gourdon, 2012; Symonds, 2020]
- **Father-child interactions**, starting from a very young age (i.e., 3 months) may **impact children's cognitive development** [Sethna et al. 2017]
- There is **limited literature on father's engagement globally** [Khani et al, 2018] with almost **no literature on fathers' involvement in children's development and psychosocial wellbeing involving play** in refugee context.
- Research on father engagement, outside of play based literature, is **heavily focused on Western families** (Hossain, 2013).
- Western-based programs to support fathers often do so in an individualistic manner, **failing to**

2. Method: Research Question

How do fathers **perceive play** (both structured i.e. HPL and unstructured i.e. playing by themselves, with siblings, neighbors, etc.)?



2. Method: Data/Sample

Data: Collected for the pilot study for 2-4 home-based HPL impact evaluation

Sample:

25 fathers (we have interviews for both mother and father in dyad)

Age: 23 – 48

Number of children (range): 1 – 7 (between the ages of 3-4 years old)

Unemployed – those who work are mainly day laborers (a few work as volunteers for Majhi) in building roads/construction

Almost all of them have access to cell phone/sim card

Location: A total of 6 camps [5, 6, 9, 10, 11, and 12]

Program Specification: Both HPL vs. non-HPL households in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

2. Method: Iterative Analytical Process



3. Results: Eight major findings (three different thematic categories)

Fathers are **spending more time** with children

Fathers' see **play as integral to children's social emotional well-being**

Fathers **pay attention** to children's play

Fathers **identify imagination and pretend-play** among children

Fathers' notice **who children play with**

However, fathers are **not familiar with pre-school early childhood development (ECD), irrespective of their affiliation with HPL**

HPL affiliated fathers view **HPL as a place for children to play and learn, but refer to it less as a space for healing**

Fathers are concerned about **physical safety and security** of their children at play

3. Results: #1 Increased availability and positive perception of play

Fathers acknowledge **spending more time with children**

- *... I take him to the shops and buy him snacks. (Father of boy)*
- *My daughter loves to go outside. Whenever I come home, she would always insist that I take her out for a short walk. (Father of girl)*

Fathers reported that **children play all the time**, and believe that **it helps them stay active, happy, and calm**, mentioning that children get upset when they are taken away from play environment.

- *Every afternoon, my son doesn't want to come back home for lunch or take a nap. I call him, his mother calls him, but he wants to play outside, and this is difficult for us. (Father of boy)*
- *My son gets angry sometimes when I forbid him to play. He wants to play all the time. If he gets into a play-fight with children, he starts crying. (Father of boy)*

3. Results: #2 Activities & Playmates

Fathers have been paying attention to children's play and the types of play they engage in.

- *He plays with kites and makes houses with papers and cars with bamboo sticks. Sometimes he makes bullets with rubber and sticks. He often plays football with other kids. [Father of boy child]*

Fathers encourage pretend play or role play

- *I saw my daughter playing 'ghor ghor' and she would make cakes with mud. And then she will pretend to feed her younger sister. [Father of girl child]*

Fathers have been noticing who children play with

- *"My son usually plays with her younger brother. Sometimes, he plays with some children who live nearby, especially one child named Abbas." (Father of boy)*
- *He plays mostly with his younger brother. Sometimes he plays with his mother and me. [Father of boy child]*

3. Results: Play – Perception of Early childhood development

Fathers are not familiar with early childhood development programs.

- *Our children could hardly go to elementary or any primary schools back in Rakhine state. As an alternative, we send our children to local maktab (Muslim elementary school).” (Father of a boy)*

Fathers consider HPL as a place for learning and play

- *She loves to go to BRAC HPL because she can play. She is also learning Burmese alphabets, and a few poems with other kids. (Father of girl)*
- Previously, my son didn't know how to play, build different things and recite a poem. Now, he is more friendly. He made friends and learned about basic numeracy. (Father of a boy)

3. Results: Play – Safety and Security

Fathers expressed concern around physical safety of their children during play*.

Concerns	Fathers' Statements
Fear of Kidnappers	<i>"...they play on the streets- there is always a chance of being kidnapped"</i>
Fear of road and other accidents	<i>"Because children always play on the roads, and I fear that any accident can happen at any time"</i>
Fear of physical harm during play	<i>...My son gets into a quarrel often and fights with other children. One time he bruised his arms. And then we had to interfere.</i>

*Mothers are more concerned about hygiene and what children are eating / ingesting

4. Summary and Next Steps

- In summary, this **research advances the literature and programming concerning refugee fathers' engagement in early development and child's play**
- **Rohingya fathers are playing a critical role in children's development** including spending time, paying attention, and ensuring children's safety, including noticing who children play with, where they play, and the types of objects and games they use to play.
- This raises **opportunities to consider culturally responsive approaches emphasizing collective monitoring, and social capital of parents** as a focus of future ECD models
- Fathers' concerns about safety can be leveraged to **create favorable perceptions of HPL and fathers' participation** in these spaces.

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Appendix: Emerging Themes: Past, Present and Future

The past

- Nostalgia/Comparing lives in Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar)
- Experiences of journey to Bangladesh
- Trauma of forced displacement

The present

- Play
 - Activities & Playmates
 - Safety
- Gender: differential treatment of boy and girl children
 - Education
 - Expenses
 - Behavioral norms
- Social life in the camp (economic security, mental wellbeing, and physical safety)

The future

- Aspirations for integration
 - Education
 - Marriage & Finances
- Hope of repatriation

Preliminary Results (The Present): Gender - Education

“

I really want to educate my children. But I don't have the courage to educate them because I don't even have 10 taka to go get food for the family.

”

(Father of 4 year old child, 48 years old, Camp 20-ext)



Photo Credit: UNICEF / Brown

- **Perceived equality:** Fathers believe in the value of educating both boys and girls. In practice, boys get preferential treatment.
- **Private tuition:** In absence of formal education in the camps, some families can afford private tuition, most cannot.
- **High value placed on religious education:** Educated members in Rohingya culture are respected more than those without education. Being a “*Hafez*” is very respectable in Rohingya society.

Preliminary Results (The Present): Gender- Expense

Expenses: Marriage vs. education

Advice for those with girl children:

My advice to someone with a girl would be...a girl is very expensive, and you have to marry her off, which is another problem. There are a lot of unmarried girls near us because they [their families] don't have the money. So even if we don't get to eat, we must save money for this [marriage].
[child is 4 yr. old, Dec 21)

Aspirations for boy children:

"The only worry is to educate him.. When he can read" "That he is running makes me not worry about him." [3-year-old child, father in his 40s]

Overall:

For a girl we need to think how to raise her with cover and for future marriage. For boy child, we need to think about his education – [Father of two children, 27 years old, daughter is 3-year-old]

Preliminary Results (Present): Gender – Behavioral norms

Gendered norms: *Girl child is easy to raise because they listen to their parents and always stay at home. If I say don't do anything then they listen. But boys don't listen to parents.* [Father of two children, 27-year-old, daughter is 3-year-old]

Girls	Boys
<i>"Girls are supposed to talk calmly"</i>	<i>"Boys will be loud/angry"</i>
<i>"Girls are patient when they cannot get something like food"</i>	<i>"[It is okay for] boys to be angry and impatient"</i>
<i>Girls will wear frocks</i>	<i>Boys will wear pants</i>

[Father of six children, child (son) is 1.5 years old]

In our country if boys and girls were sitting together in our society that is looked upon with disgust...people will say bad things if women go out of the house [Dec 21, Child, 4 years old]

Preliminary Results (Future): Aspirations - Education

Aspirations for Education

Religious education is a means to have a respectable position in the society, mostly for sons.

"....I send my kids to Moktob and want him to become a Hafez which will bring heaven for his parents. I want my kids and us to go to Heaven." (40 years)

Aspirations for boy children:

*"The only worry is to educate him.. When he can read"
"That he is running makes me not, worry about him." [Father in his 40s]*

Results: Aspirations – Marriage & Finances

Aspirations for Marriage and Financial Security

Fathers worry more about daughters compared to sons when it comes to marriage.

“I don’t worry for my boy child. But for my girl child I’m always worried. She gets sick easily and I need to take her to hospital this is my short-term worry. For long term I’m worried because she can’t do any work and her marriage in future.” [Father, 32-year-old, daughter 2 years old]

Aspirations for girl children:

My advice to someone with a girl would be...a girl is very expensive, and you have to marry her off, which is another problem. There are a lot of unmarried girls near us because they [their families] don’t have the money. So even if we don’t get to eat, we must save money for this [marriage]. [child is 4 yr. old, Dec 21]

2. Method: Research Design

Part A: Getting Started

Part B: Child Routines and Characteristics

Part C: Play with Child

Part D: Discipline/Behavior Management

Part E: Gender Socialization

Part F: Child's participation in HPL/Other ECD program

Part G: Experiences of arriving and living in Bangladesh

Part H: Agency

Part I: Coping Strategies

Part J: Role of Religion

Part K: Access to Resources

Part L: Social Networks/Social Supports

Part M: Demographics