

Exploring Rohingya Adolescent Girls' Perceptions of Marriage, Educational Challenges, and Motivations for Change: A Mixed-Method Study

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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Declaration

I hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate reference.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Throughout the study, I have intentionally kept myself aware of prejudices, biases and perceptions that might obstruct the objectivity and neutrality of the data. I was cautious while upholding any values or ideas. Therefore, the findings presented here in this study are authentic and without any manipulation. At the same time, I was strict about maintaining the highest possible ethical and professional research code of conduct, such as the willingness to non-participation, the right to remain anonymous, the confidentiality of the research participants, etc.

Abstract

This study explores perceptions of marriage, educational barriers, and motivational factors influencing Rohingya adolescent girls' continuation in secondary education within refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Despite efforts toward inclusive education, child marriage and sociocultural norms remain significant barriers for girls aged 15–18. Using a mixed-method approach, the study combined surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with 112 participants, including adolescent girls, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and education staff. Thematic and descriptive analyses indicate that early marriage is widely perceived as a family-driven decision shaped by protection concerns, community expectations, religious interpretations, harassment, and limited access to higher education. Structural challenges—such as lack of female teachers, inadequate school facilities, and unsafe learning environments—further reduced girls' attendance and motivation. Despite these constraints, participants consistently recognized education as a potential pathway to delay marriage when it is formal, gender-segregated, culturally aligned, and linked to future opportunities. The study underscores the need for culturally responsive education systems and coordinated action among education, community, and child protection actors in crisis settings.

Keywords: Rohingya refugees; adolescent girls; early marriage; secondary education; education in emergencies; gender norms

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated, first and always, to the Rohingya adolescent girls. Thank you for trusting me with your time, your stories, and your hopes. Working alongside you over the past eight years in the Rohingya response shaped not only this research, but also my purpose. This work exists because of you and for you. To the education partners who opened the doors to the field and supported me in choosing the study locations—thank you for your trust and collaboration.

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List of Acronyms

BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
BRAC IED	BRAC Institute of Educational Development
CODEC	Community Development Centre
CP	Child Protection
EiE	Education in Emergencies
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
WG	Working Group
ISNA	Inter-Sectoral Needs Assessment
KII	Key Informant Interview
LC	Learning Centre
MC	Myanmar Curriculum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SBC	Social and Behaviour Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The Rohingya refugee crisis is said to be one of the most prolonged humanitarian emergencies in the world currently. As of April 2025, there are over 1,006,000 registered Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, most of whom reside in the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar (UNHCR, 2025). In addition, approximately 150,000 more have arrived in the last 18 months (UNHCR, 2025). The Rohingya community continues to face difficulties with limited access to essential services such as healthcare, protection, and most critically, education while living in extremely overcrowded and resource-constrained camps (GiHA WG, 2022). For adolescent girls in these camps living in a pro-conservative community, the compounded effects of displacement, cultural or religious conservatism, poverty, and gender-based violence often result in significant barriers to access and retention to education, especially as they reach puberty (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

Education is often disrupted due to instability and lack of infrastructure in many humanitarian contexts. However, the situation is further intensified in the Rohingya camps by deeply embedded cultural and religious norms that dictate gender roles which restrict girls' mobility, freedom, and choices (Ripoll, 2017). The efforts that have been made by the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian actors to provide a structured education through the Myanmar Curriculum have largely benefited younger children. Girls aged 5–14 have an enrollment rate of around 75%, but this declines to only 8% for girls aged 15–18 (ISNA, 2024). Nearly 49% of 18-year-old girls are not engaged in any form of education. This drop in enrollment among older

girls signifies a systemic challenge, where structural inequalities, community expectations, and socio-religious pressures converge to deprioritize girls' secondary education (CODEC, 2024).

Child marriage emerges as one of the most influential and socially accepted practices that directly undermine their ability to continue schooling among the many barriers to girls' education in the camps. The widespread practice and social acceptance of child marriage lies at the heart of this educational exclusion. Marriage in the Rohingya communities in this camp is not only a family arrangement but a cultural milestone closely linked with notions of honor, protection, and religious duty (Melnikas et al., 2020). Girls are often expected to marry soon after menarche, with very little to no consideration of their personal development or educational aspirations (Guglielmi et al., 2024). These early marriages are often justified by community elders and religious leaders using historical or religious scripts and reinforcing norms that equate a girl's value with her role as a wife and mother (Elnakib, 2022). A girl's chances of continuing or resuming education become almost nonexistent due to increased domestic responsibilities, isolation, and social stigma after getting married (Sameen, 2020).

Parents that are driven by the fear of harassment, community gossip, and potential sexual violence often think of early marriage as a coping and protective mechanism (Ripoll, 2017). Marriage becomes a socially acceptable "solution" to safeguarding daughters, even though it may undermine their education and agency in a context where formal protection systems are weak and law enforcement is minimal, especially regarding child marriage regulations (UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020). This often leads to adolescent girls having little to no say in decisions affecting their futures, with education being perceived as optional or even risky beyond a certain age. The notion of an unmarried girl studying in secondary grades, especially beyond

Grade 6 or 7, is not just undesirable but may even be viewed as dishonorable for many families (GiHA WG, 2022).

The current education infrastructure in the camps, while offering basic services, lacks several critical elements necessary to retain girls in school after puberty. The shortage of female teachers, absence of gender-segregated classrooms, inadequate menstrual hygiene management facilities, and poor safety measures on the way to and from school collectively deter adolescent girls from attending school (UNICEF, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of flexible or re-enrollment pathways for married girls makes it nearly impossible for them to return to education, even if they wish to. This perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, disempowerment, and dependency that severely limits the personal development and future opportunities of adolescent girls in the camps (Plan, 2022).

The dropout of girls from education has broader societal consequences beyond individual academic loss. The pool of potential female role models and educators reduce due to the absence of educated women in the community (World Bank, 2013). In such conservative societies such as the Rohingya refugees residing in the camps, it has been observed that gender-segregated educational systems are more effective and the lack of female teachers often means fewer safe spaces for girls to learn, interact, and grow which in turn limit the community's long-term ability to support gender equity and rebuild itself with inclusive leadership. Girls being systematically excluded from education due to cultural or religious norms reinforces gender stereotypes among boys and young men which perpetuate belief that a woman's role is confined to the domestic sphere (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

One of the most effective tools recognized for delaying child marriage and improving gender equality globally is education. Girls who complete secondary education are significantly less

likely to marry before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2022). However, education has not yet been effectively positioned or resourced to play this transformative role in the Rohingya refugee camps (Melnikas et al., 2020). While education actors continue to expand access and quality at the primary level, the gap at secondary level remains deeply problematic and under-researched especially for adolescent girls, (CODEC, 2024).

Given these intersecting dynamics, it becomes imperative to explore the perceptions of adolescent girls about themselves regarding marriage and education. Girls' understandings of their social roles and futures in such a restricted context—along with what options they view as attainable, valued, or negotiable—form a critical part of this inquiry. Understanding their perspectives, alongside those of their families, community leaders, and teachers, is critical to developing interventions that are context-sensitive and culturally relevant. Moreover, identifying motivators that can help girls continue their education and shift parental and community attitudes will be key to ensuring sustainable change (Elnakib, 2022).

This study is situated in the Rohingya context and aims to explore how perceptions of marriage influence adolescent girls' decisions regarding education in the Rohingya refugee camps, the barriers they face at individual, familial, and structural levels, and what might be done to support their continued education. This research hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex socio-cultural ecosystem governing girls' lives and learning and identify potential entry points for change by bringing together the voices of girls, parents, educators, and religious leaders.

1.2 Research title

Exploring Rohingya Adolescent Girls' Perceptions of Marriage, Educational Challenges, and Motivations for Change: A Mixed-Method Study

1.3 Statement of The Problem

Adolescent girls aged 11 and above in refugee camps face significant challenges to access education, hence the age group 15 to 18 face the worst consequences as highlighted in the recent Intersectoral (Joint Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment Report 2022-2023). Enrollment rates sharply decrease as girls grow older. While 75% of girls aged 5-14 are enrolled in learning facilities, only 8% of girls aged 15-18 continue their education. Among 18-year-old girls, 49% do not attend any learning facilities (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020).

Menstruation is one of the cultural barriers limiting girls' access to education, with 9% of girls reporting it as a reason for discontinuing school. Another 15% noted that they were considered “too old” to continue their education, reflecting age-related norms that restrict older girls' mobility and participation. Early marriage also contributes significantly to dropout, with 12% of girls leaving school due to marriage-related expectations and pressures (ISNA, 2024).. These barriers are particularly prominent among girls enrolled in secondary grades with high dropout rates escalating as they progress. A total of 242,485 children aged 3 – 18 has received education following the Myanmar Curriculum where only 37% girls of the enrolled students. Further concerns were observed in the higher grades as only 37% girls enrolled in Grade 5, 19% in Grade 6, 26% in Grade 7, and 9% in Grade 8. Moreover, there are no girls reported to be enrolled in Grades 10 and 11 (Cox's Bazar Education Sector Dashboard, 2024).

This cycle of dropout among Rohingya adolescent girls presents dire consequences at personal, community and overall education level. If the current trend continues, the absence of girls in higher grades will severely limit their ability to gain essential knowledge and skills that is required to prepare for the world, especially as refugees. Girls' eligibility for any opportunities to engage within camp will be almost zero without completing at least Grade 8 as opportunities such as training programs or even volunteering requires minimum education. As a result, marriage becomes the default path for many girls to reduce family burden, ensuring honor of the family by being married indoctrinated by religion at the right time and making the husband responsible for protecting their dignity.

Child marriage has broader implications for the overall educational landscape and development of the Rohingya community within the camps. Girls still enrolled in school begin to see early marriage as the norm therefore promoting perception to limit their educational aspirations to certain level, while boys, witnessing these patterns, perpetuate the belief that girls' education holds limited value beyond a certain age. Teachers that are caught in this cycle reported facing a dual challenge coming from the same culture and are unable to challenge the norms at classroom levels. Girls unable to complete higher grades perpetuate a systemic gender inequality within the Rohingya community. By losing the voices and potential of female students, it loses chances of having female teachers, who can be the role model and in lack of role model, both girls and woman role in society continue to be a caregiver role (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

1.4 Research Questions

Key Question 1:

What are adolescent girls' perceptions of marriage, and its implications on their education?

Sub-questions:

- a) How do adolescent girls define child marriage within their cultural and societal context?
- b) How do girls perceive the impact of child marriage on their education?

Key Question 2:

What other factors contribute to adolescent girls' drop out from education at higher grades?

Sub-questions:

- a) What barriers prevent girls from continuing their education?
- b) How do cultural expectations, such as gender roles, affect girls' decisions to leave school?

Key Question 3:

What can motivate girls, parents, communities, and local leaders to actively support adolescent girls in completing their education and delaying marriage?

Sub-questions:

- a) What could motivate the girls to complete their secondary education?
- b) What support would parents need to allow the girls to complete education?
- c) What role do parental and community support play in influencing girls' continuing education?

1.5 Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it seeks to understand how Rohingya adolescent girls perceive marriage and how these perceptions shape their educational opportunities. Second, it explores the broader factors that contribute to girls' dropout at higher grades. Third, it identifies the motivators that could encourage girls, parents, and community leaders to support continued education and delay marriage.

The study aims to generate context-specific insights that can guide culturally sensitive and practical strategies for improving girls' access to education and reducing child marriage within the refugee camps by addressing these dimensions.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Despite various studies identifying child marriage as a barrier to adolescent girls' education, there is limited evidence on how adolescent girls perceive marriage and how these perceptions

influence their decisions to drop out from education, particularly in the context of Rohingya refugee camps.

While global literature consistently highlights the strong relationship between child marriage and girls' school dropout (UNICEF, 2021; Girls Not Brides, 2020), very limited research has examined how these dynamics manifest within the Rohingya refugee camps. Existing studies have explored adolescent girls' vulnerabilities and sociocultural pressures in displacement settings (Guglielmi et al., 2024; Elnakib et al., 2022), yet there remains a critical gap in understanding how Rohingya adolescent girls themselves perceive marriage, and how these perceptions influence their educational decisions. Additionally, few studies have documented the perspectives of parents, teachers, and community leaders on the factors contributing to girls' dropout or the motivators that could support their continued education.

This study is therefore significant because it focuses specifically on understanding the perceptions, barriers, and motivators that shape Rohingya adolescent girls' educational pathways. Instead of examining the effectiveness of school-level interventions, this research seeks to generate context-specific insights into how marital expectations, cultural norms, and community attitudes intersect with girls' decisions to stay in or leave school. By deepening understanding of these interconnected issues, the study aims to inform education and protection actors about the factors that must be considered when designing culturally responsive strategies to support girls' learning and delay harmful practices such as early marriage.

The findings from this study can provide new insights to the education actors to review the current programme, inspire to gather more evidence and initiate conversation and collaboration point with child protection sectors. Lastly, as the Girls' Education Lead, the findings from this study will strengthen my ability to collaborate with other sectors by providing evidence on the

drivers of dropout and early marriage that require cross-sectoral action. For example, insights on girls' safety concerns and mobility restrictions can inform joint planning with Child Protection and GBV actors, while findings on menstruation-related barriers can guide coordinated efforts with the MHM and WASH teams to improve facilities and support systems around learning centres. Initiatives such as commissioning more large-scale research study to gather evidence for fund allocation dedicated to work for child marriage in education can be taken and as more immediate steps, comprehensive training for teachers and education staff who are the frontlines as well as mapping of the services near the learning facilities and etc. can be proposed.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis has been organized into five chapters.

- **Chapter One** introduces the study and provides the background and context of the Rohingya refugee crisis and its implications for adolescent girls' education. It outlines the research problems, objectives, research questions, purpose, and significance of the study.
- **Chapter Two** will present the literature review. It examines existing studies on child marriage, girls' education in humanitarian settings, cultural and religious influences on adolescent girls' lives, and the global evidence linking education to the prevention of early marriage. This chapter also highlights gaps in the current knowledge base and situates the present study within that broader body of literature.
- **Chapter Three** will discuss the research methodology. It describes the mixed-methods design, study setting, participants, sampling strategies, data collection tools, and analysis procedures. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations and measures taken to ensure validity and reliability.

- **Chapter Four** will present the findings of the study. It explores adolescent girls' perceptions of marriage, the barriers that contribute to their educational dropout, and the motivators that can support their continued education. Voices from girls, parents, educators, and community leaders are incorporated to provide a holistic perspective.
- **Chapter Five** will provide discussion and conclusion. It interprets the findings in light of the research questions and relevant literature, highlighting the implications for education and child protection actors in the Rohingya camps. This chapter also presents recommendations for practice, policy, and further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review and critically analyze existing literature related to adolescent girls' education, child marriage, and the socio-cultural factors influencing these issues within humanitarian contexts, with a particular focus on the Rohingya refugee community in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. This review situates the current study within the broader body of knowledge, highlights gaps in existing research, and provides a conceptual basis for addressing the study's research questions.

The chapter begins by examining global evidence on the relationship between education and child marriage, followed by a discussion of adolescent girls' educational challenges in displacement and refugee settings. It then explores cultural and religious drivers of child marriage, including gender norms, parental and community perceptions, and intergenerational practices. Attention is also given to existing evidence on girls' perceptions of marriage and education, as well as the role of community influencers and structural barriers in shaping these perceptions. Finally, the chapter reviews available data on girls' dropout rates and the contributing factors, before concluding with a synthesis that identifies gaps this study seeks to address.

2.2 Thematic Overview:

Child marriage, defined as a formal or informal union where at least one party is under the age of 18, remains a global issue mostly affecting adolescent girls. Adolescent girls, typically defined as

individuals aged 10 to 19, represent a population navigating a critical stage of physical, emotional, and social transition (UNICEF, 2023). Globally, there are approximately 600 million adolescent girls, many of whom face intersecting vulnerabilities related to gender, poverty, and restricted access to education (UNFPA, 2022). Within the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, an estimated 56,000 adolescent girls reside in extremely constrained environments where cultural norms, mobility restrictions, and protection risks intensify as they reach puberty (ISCG, 2024). This phase of adolescence shapes their emerging identities, aspirations, and decision-making, making it essential to understand how they perceive marriage, education, and their future opportunities within the camp context. Child marriage is deeply rooted in cultural, socio-economic, and legal structures, pushing the cycles of poverty, limited education, and gender inequality. This literature review explores the intersection of child marriage and education, factors influencing adolescent girls' decision to avail educational opportunities as well as Role of education to address the child marriage related issues at school level, at global and particularly in the context of the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh and the review is organized under the following themes:

- Child Marriage in Global and Crisis Contexts
- The Link Between Child Marriage and Education
- Cultural and Religious Drivers of Child Marriage Among the Rohingya Community
- Perceptions of Child Marriage Among Girls and its Influence in Decision Making
- Evidence of Girls' Dropout and Contributing Factors
- Barriers at the School Level in Addressing Child Marriage
- Good Practices and School-Level Interventions to Combat Child Marriage

2.3 Child Marriage in Global and Crisis Contexts

Globally, 12 million girls are the victim of child marriage annually (UNICEF, 2013; Guglielmi et al., 2024). Disparities at regional level persist despite a decrease in prevalence from 31% to 21% over the past two decades, with South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa having the highest rates.

Sub-Saharan Africa has now surpassed South Asia as 37% of women aged 20–24 was found to have been married before 18 in comparison to 28% in South Asia (UNICEF, 2023). Protecting family honor and prevalence of poverty leading to dowries or bride prices had contributed to early marriages. Weak enforcement of marital laws in many regions allows cultural and religious rituals to override legal age restrictions (Vogelstein, 2013).

The situation is more dire in humanitarian crises. Among the top 20 high-prevalence countries, 12 are in crisis context, where displacement, insecurity, and economic and political instability force families or refugees to sought child marriage as a coping mechanism. For example, in the Rohingya camps in Cox’s Bazar, 47% of girls face the risk of child marriage due to cultural norms, overcrowding, and absence of law enforcement agencies (Melnikas et al., 2020; JRNA, 2017). Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global efforts aim to eliminate child marriage by 2030; however, progress requires an eleven-fold acceleration.

2.4 The Link Between Child Marriage and Education

It is evident that child marriage is one of the major barriers for girls to access education, particularly in low-income and crisis-affected regions. The relationship between child marriage and education is bidirectional, as limited access to education increases the likelihood of early marriage, while child marriage frequently leads to school dropouts, perpetuating cycles of disempowerment and limited opportunities. Globally, girls with secondary or higher education

are three times less likely to marry before the age of 18 compared to their peers with no education (UNFPA, 2022). Conversely, the absence of education increases exposure to early marriage, with girls lacking education six times more likely to marry early. It is suggested by evidence that each additional year of schooling decreases the likelihood of child marriage by approximately 5.6% (Nguyen & Wodon, 2015; Sameen, 2020). An analysis indicates that child marriage rates could drop at global scale by 66% if all girls completed secondary education (UNFPA, 2022). Education often becomes deprioritized for adolescent girls in contexts where cultural, economic, and societal norms favor early marriage.

For instance, while 75% of girls aged 5–14 in Cox’s Bazar is enrolled in learning facilities, only 8% of girls aged 15–18 continue their education. Nearly half of 18-year-old girls are not attending any learning facilities (ISNA, 2024). Married girls are 10 times more likely to drop out of school than their unmarried peers, with 88% of such dropouts occurring before they complete secondary education (Sameen, 2020; CODEC, 2024). In regions like South Asia, particularly during grades 7 and 8 is the peak for child marriage (Ripoll, 2017; Plan, 2022).

And once married, the barriers are beyond girl’s age where getting education becomes a far-reaching dream. They have increased household and childcare responsibilities, leaving little time or energy for academic pursuits. For instance, one 15-year-old girl mentioned, “Marriage made school impossible; I had to take care of my family” (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Social isolation and stigma further exclude the girls, as married girls often lose connections with peers and educational environments, making it difficult to return to school. Additionally, families frequently withdraw girls from school post-menarche due to fear of harassment during travel to school that might damage family honor which increase dropout rates (Ripoll, 2017; Guglielmi et al., 2024).

Married girls are 50% less likely to achieve basic literacy compared to their unmarried peers. Grade level competency is inversely correlated with early marriage rates in regions with high child marriage prevalence, such as Bangladesh (Field & Ambrus, 2008; ICRW, 2006). Moreover, countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage consistently report low secondary school completion rates, with none exceeding 15% (UNFPA, 2022). These disparities highlight the long-term educational and economic consequences of child marriage.

The emotional and psychosocial impacts of child marriage further reduce girls' ability to participate in education. Married girls often report higher levels of depression and anxiety due to isolation, reduced freedom, and increased domestic roles. Marriage signals the end of their educational journey for many and subsequently leading to destroying aspirations for personal or professional growth. This resignation is often reinforced by societal expectations that prioritize marriage over education (Islam & Habib, 2024; Guglielmi et al., 2024).

2.5 Cultural and Religious Drivers of Child Marriage Among the Rohingya Community

Child marriage within the Rohingya community was found to be deeply influenced by cultural norms, religious interpretations and the nature of the emergency. Cultural norms place a high value on family honor and girls' reputations and are closely tied to their ability to get married on time. Parents often see marriage as a safeguard against community judgment or harassment that leads to early withdrawal of girls from school, especially after puberty. These norms confine girls to domestic roles and prioritize marriage over education (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Marriage is often viewed as a religious duty over culture that must be fulfilled once a girl reaches menarche and is a belief that is reinforced by religious leaders who regulates the community behavior.

While Islam does not explicitly mandate early marriage, local interpretations emphasize it as a moral safeguard in Rohingya camps, further pressuring families for early marriages to avoid dishonor (Melnikas et al., 2020).

While the different agencies and humanitarian actors provide the needs for families, the need is beyond due to the ever-increasing population and polygamy. Thus, Marriage is seen as a pragmatic solution to financial burdens and a way to secure a girl's future and dignity. Parents were found to often view daughters as financial liabilities and perceived marriage as a way to reduce household expenses. This view is reinforced in settings where resources are limited, and poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities increase reliance on traditional coping mechanisms. Surveys reveal that poverty and societal risks are among the key factors driving child marriage (Guglielmi et al., 2024; Sameen, 2020).

The key influences such as Community leaders, religious authorities and traditional leaders further contribute to cultural and religious norms on early marriage. These leaders often act as de facto authorities in the absence of formal governance in the camps and force early marriage as a cultural or religious necessity. Their influence creates significant barriers to promoting education or delaying marriage, particularly in contexts where legal enforcement is absent. Despite legal frameworks like Bangladesh's Child Marriage Restraint Act, enforcement in the Rohingya camps remains limited which allow traditional practices to go unchecked (UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020).

Intergenerational practices also sustain child marriage. Such as parents who married early view the practice as a continuation of tradition. These narratives often equate a girl's value with her ability to fulfill traditional expectations, leaving little room for alternative pathways such as education (Ripoll, 2017). Hence the emergency context amplifies these challenges further where

the families in the camps are exposed to vulnerabilities, including lack of income being refugee, overcrowded living conditions, and limited access to education or livelihoods. Traditional practices in this environment such as early marriage are seen as coping mechanisms to manage risks and protect family honor. The intersection of cultural and religious norms with the structural barriers of displacement creates a complex environment where efforts to address child marriage must navigate deeply ingrained beliefs and systemic challenges (GiHA WG, 2022).

2.6 Perceptions of Child Marriage Among Girls and their Influence in Decision Making

Adolescent girls in humanitarian settings often perceive marriage as a cultural expectation that is driven by religious rituals. Particularly after girls reach puberty, marriage becomes less as a personal choice and more as a duty imposed by parents and community. For many, this signals a loss of freedom, childhood joy, and educational opportunities. Testimonies from adolescent girls reveal that they often withdraw from public spaces to avoid shame following puberty, which leads to a loss of childhood freedoms (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Such restrictions on mobility and agency contribute to the perception of marriage as a socially sanctioned means for girls to leave the home.

While some girls see the value of education and an opportunity to challenge traditional roles, parental pressures often undermine these motivations. Data shows that 68.8% of married Rohingya girls aged 15–17 is out of school that helps to underscore the exclusion caused by early marriage (Sameen, 2020). As families often view marriage as a coping mechanism to reduce financial burdens, economic hardships further complicate the issue. In such cases, girls may accept marriage as a reality, though it often leads to feelings of sadness and regret (GiHA WG,

2022). Additionally, cultural and religious beliefs that equate maturity with menarche contribute to the normalization of early marriage that leave girls with little agency in the decision-making process (Melnikas et al., 2020).

Married Rohingya girls frequently express frustration over missed opportunities and have no power on decision-making processes, with families and community leaders often dictating marriage. This further discourages married girls from returning to school and isolating them from peers and prepare to become bride (Plan, 2022; Guglielmi et al., 2024).

These perceptions reflect broader issues of community control and gender inequality, which profoundly influence girls' own decision to pursue education as it holds no value against buying freedom through marriage.

2.7 Evidence of Girls' Dropout and Contributing Factors

The link between child marriage and education discontinuation is well-documented, with evidence showing that girls with no education are six times more likely to marry before the age of 18 compared to those with secondary education (ICRW, 2006). Globally, married girls are estimated to be ten times more likely to leave school than their unmarried peers, with most dropouts taking place before secondary education (Sameen, 2020). Similar patterns are observed in the Rohingya camps, where child marriage significantly contributes to girls' withdrawal from learning facilities. Only 8% of girls aged 15–18 in Rohingya camps remain in learning facilities, and 19.24% of girls here left school due to marriage-related responsibilities in 2024 (ISNA, 2024; CODEC, 2024). Evidence from humanitarian and low-income contexts shows that girls who are out of school are 4.5 times more likely to marry early than those who remain enrolled, illustrating the bidirectional relationship between education and child marriage (Elnakib, 2022).

While this statistic is not specific to the Rohingya camps, it underscores a global pattern that resonates strongly with the situation in Cox's Bazar. Practices like purdah (veil) among Rohingya girls and concerns about family honor led families to withdraw girls from school that viewed long term education as a potential barrier to their eligibility for marriage (Ripoll, 2017). Rohingya parents often view marriage as a safeguard against harassment and insecurity, prioritizing their daughters' safety over education (UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020). This cultural expectation places immense mental pressure on girls to leave school and take the caregiver role.

Evidence from Cox's Bazar shows that adolescent girls often discontinue schooling after marriage due to domestic responsibilities. For example, one 15-year-old girl reported that marriage made education impossible as she had to take care of her family (Guglielmi et al., 2024). These challenges are compounded by societal stigma, which discourages married girls from returning to school and further isolates them from academic opportunities. The lack of supportive environment at school level, such as childcare facilities or flexible learning programs, adds to these challenges and limits their options for re-enrollment (Plan, 2022). The transition from student to wife led to psychological and social isolation for adolescent girls. Married girls report higher levels of anxiety due to sudden exclusion from education and social networks (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Feelings of disconnection and concern over their new domestic roles hinder their ability to reimagine of education. Research in Cox's Bazar shows that married adolescent girls often experience anxiety over new domestic roles and family separation. One 17-year-old participant explained that she worried about cooking, cleaning, and leaving her parents behind (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

2.7 Barriers at the School Level in Addressing Child Marriage

Schools should be instrumental to fight child marriage by providing education, life skills, and safe spaces for girls. However, their efforts are often distracted by a combination of systemic challenges, cultural resistance, and resource constraints, particularly in displacement settings like the Rohingya refugee camps. Inadequate infrastructure, such as the lack of gender-segregated classrooms, menstrual hygiene facilities, and safe sanitation, discourages girls from attending school, especially during puberty. For instance, in the Rohingya camps, only 3.9% of married girls have access to education, highlighting the inadequacy of facilities (Sameen, 2020; UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020). Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient female teachers further limit participation, as female educators play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment for girls (Elnakib, 2022; World Bank, 2013).

Safety concerns also significantly hinder girls' education. Risks of harassment and violence during travel to school, including reports of acid attacks, deter attendance (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

Institutional gaps further prevent girls' ability to remain in school or re-enroll post-marriage. Refugee camps often lack gender-sensitive facilities, such as gender-segregated classrooms, menstrual hygiene facilities, and female teachers, which are critical for adolescent girls' retention in school (UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Safety concerns, including harassment and violence during travel to school, further discourage attendance, with reports of acid attacks amplifying these fears (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Resistance from families and community leaders also undermines efforts to retain girls in school, as cultural norms continue to prioritize marriage over education (Ripoll, 2017). These infrastructural and institutional

shortcomings highlight systemic failures that prevent educational institutions from serving as viable alternatives to early marriage.

The lack of adequately trained teachers is another critical barrier. Many educators are not trained to address the unique challenges faced by adolescent girls, such as creating gender-sensitive learning environments or providing psychological support for students dealing with pressures like early marriage (Cox's Bazar Education Sector, 2023; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). In some cases, teachers may even hold cultural biases that align with societal norms supporting early marriage, limiting the effectiveness of school-based interventions (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

Gap in policy and interventions further undermine school efforts to combat child marriage. Rigid school schedules fail to accommodate the needs of married girls or those with household chores. Flexible learning options are limited, making it difficult for girls to manage attending class and family obligations (UNICEF, 2023). Child protection mechanisms are often absent, and re-enrollment pathways for married girls are limited, with stigma and lack of tailored programs further restricting girls access (Plan, 2022; UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020).

Many families view sending girls to school as a financial burden, given the opportunity costs of lost labor or domestic contributions. Early marriage is often seen as a pragmatic solution to economic hardships (JRNA, 2017; CPSS, 2024). While initiatives like Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) have successfully encouraged girls' education in some settings, such programs are not universally accessible, particularly in Rohingya contexts (Khandker et al., 2003; McCleary-Sills & Benveniste, 2015).

2.8 Good Practices and School-Level Interventions to Combat Child Marriage

Initiatives like the Bangladesh Female Stipend Program have successfully increased enrollment in secondary school and literacy rates while reducing child marriage prevalence. This initiative links incentive support to school attendance, motivating families to prioritize education over early marriage (Khandker et al., 2003; McCleary-Sills & Benveniste, 2015). Similarly, Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan Project provided incentives with education and mentoring girls, reducing child marriage rates by 90% among girls aged 10–14 (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009). These programs address economic pressures by providing families with alternatives to child marriage. Providing gender-segregated classrooms, menstrual hygiene facilities, and safe sanitation is key for making the school environment female friendly. In countries like India and Ethiopia, such gender-sensitive infrastructure has significantly improved retention rates (UNESCO, 2015; McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). Secure school premises with well-lit and fenced compounds also alleviate safety concerns, encouraging parents to send their daughters to school, particularly in crisis settings like refugee camps (UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020).

Teachers play a critical role in challenging cultural norms and supporting girls. Programs such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists equip educators with gender-equitable materials and strategies to prevent harassment and foster inclusive classrooms (McCleary-Sills et al., 2015). Recruiting female teachers, as seen in Yemen's education initiatives, provides girls with role models and a supportive learning environment, which is particularly impactful in conservative settings (World Bank, 2013). Programs like Girl Shine provide structured sessions that build self-confidence, social networks, and decision-making skills for adolescent girls. These initiatives empower girls to resist societal pressures and assert their rights (Guglielmi et al., 2024). Community dialogues involve religious and cultural leaders to promote education and

discourage early marriage (GiHA WG, 2022; UNHCR, CARE, & ActionAid, 2020). Parent-Teacher Associations foster collaboration between schools and families, ensuring a joint approach to retaining girls in education (Sameen, 2020). Such engagement ensures sustainable and impactful interventions. Alternative education models cater to girls who face barriers to traditional schooling. Community-Based Learning Facilities (CBLFs) in the Rohingya camps, for example, offer flexible schedules and localized learning environments, enabling married girls and those at risk of dropping out to continue their education (UNICEF, 2023). Second-chance education programs provide tailored support, including catch-up classes and psychosocial assistance, helping married girls reintegrate into the education system (Plan, 2022).

2.9 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is informed by the literature review and highlights the interconnectedness of cultural norms, religious interpretations, marriage practices, and education within the Rohingya refugee camps.

First, cultural and religious norms play a decisive role in shaping girls' lives. Local interpretations of religion often restrict girls' mobility after puberty, discouraging them from attending school and positioning marriage as the most acceptable pathway (Melnikas et al., 2020; Ripoll, 2017). Religious and community leaders reinforce these norms, framing them as essential for protecting family honor and girls' dignity. These expectations influence marriage eligibility and create strong pressures for adolescent girls to conform.

Second, these norms directly affect girls' perceptions of education. Many Rohingya adolescent girls anticipate dropping out of school once they reach secondary level, either because of marriage or because they view education as incompatible with cultural expectations (Guglielmi

et al., 2024). Married girls face additional barriers such as domestic responsibilities, stigma, and isolation that make continuation nearly impossible (Sameen, 2020).

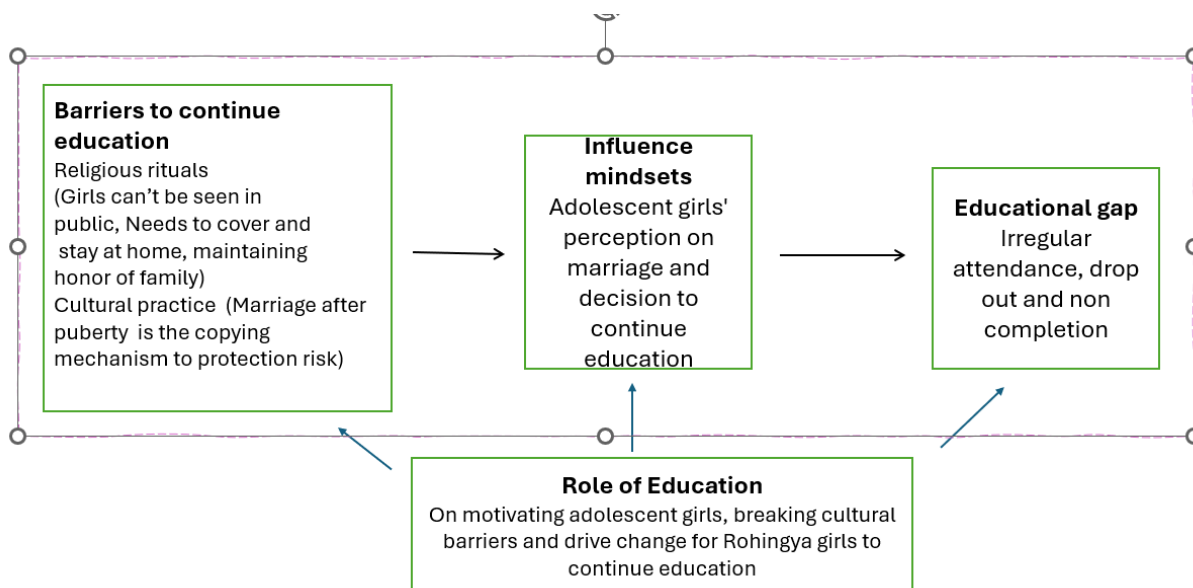
Third, education itself has the potential to challenge and transform these patterns. Evidence shows that girls who remain in school are less likely to marry early (UNFPA, 2022). In the camp setting, schools can act as protective spaces when supported with adequate female teachers, gender-sensitive facilities, and linkages to child protection services (UNICEF, 2023). However, where these supports are absent, schools risk reinforcing rather than countering exclusion.

Bringing these strands together, the framework illustrates how cultural and religious norms shape perceptions of marriage, how these perceptions influence education, and how education can act both as a barrier and a potential tool to delay marriage. It also emphasizes the importance of community and parental support, as well as school-level initiatives, in creating an enabling environment for girls to complete secondary education.

This framework therefore guides the study in examining:

- How cultural and religious norms influence girls' perceptions of marriage and education.
- How marriage and dropout are interlinked in the Rohingya context.
- What motivators and education interventions can support girls, parents, and communities in delaying marriage and promoting secondary education.

Diagram: Conceptual Framework



2.10 Key Points

The highest prevalence rates are found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where early marriage remains deeply rooted in social and cultural traditions. In South Asia, nearly 45% of young women are married before the age of 18, while in Sub-Saharan Africa the rate is around 35%, making these regions the most affected globally (UNICEF, 2023). Education and child marriage are closely connected: when girls lack access to education, they are more likely to marry early, and when they marry, they are more likely to drop out of school. In the Rohingya refugee camps, cultural and religious norms, poverty, and the challenges of displacement contribute to early marriage and limit adolescent girls' access to education. Many girls view marriage as a cultural expectation and a duty rather than a personal choice, and they often lose the opportunity to continue learning after puberty or marriage. Factors such as household responsibilities, social stigma, and limited re-enrollment options led to higher dropout rates among adolescent girls. In addition, shortages of female teachers, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and safety concerns make

it difficult for girls to remain in school. Some good practices, such as incentive programs, gender-sensitive infrastructure, and community-based interventions, have shown positive results in other contexts, but they have not yet been widely implemented in the Rohingya camps. Despite these efforts, there is limited research on how Rohingya adolescent girls themselves perceive marriage and education, and what could motivate them, their parents, and their communities to support continued learning.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and justify the research methodology adopted to address the study's objectives. This study seeks to explore Rohingya adolescent girls' perceptions of marriage, the challenges they face in continuing education, and the motivators that may support change. Given the complex interplay of cultural, religious, and structural factors influencing these issues, a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach was selected. This allows the study to capture both the measurable patterns of girls' educational access and dropout, as well as the nuanced perspectives of girls, parents, teachers, and community leaders.

This chapter presents the research design, site, participants, and sampling strategies, followed by an overview of the tools and data collection methods employed, including surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The processes of qualitative and quantitative data analysis are then described, along with the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and measures taken to ensure credibility, validity, and rigor. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations encountered in conducting the research.

3.1 Research Approach

This study followed a convergent parallel mixed-methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) research approach, including qualitative and quantitative tools to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of girl's perception of marriage in shaping their decision to continue education further in higher grades in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar where quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed during the same phase of the research. The Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods design was used as it provides a

comprehensive framework to address the complexity of the research problem by capturing both the prevalence of adolescent girls' educational decisions and the underlying meanings they attach to marriage within the Rohingya refugee context by combining breadth (quantitative) and depth (qualitative), ensuring that the voices of Rohingya adolescent girls are understood alongside the measurable patterns of their educational access and dropout. The **qualitative component** explored the perspectives of adolescent girls, parents, and religious leaders to understand the sociocultural and familial factors that shape educational choices. Quantitative data provided insights into enrolment rates, dropout patterns, and reported barriers, while qualitative data captured the perceptions of adolescent girls, parents, community leaders, and educators. The two datasets were then integrated to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between child marriage, educational challenges, and potential motivators for change. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, it examined the interplay between education, cultural norms, and early marriage, highlighting underlying motivations, barriers, and community attitudes toward girls' schooling. This approach allowed for a deeper exploration of the social and emotional aspects influencing decision-making, providing context to the statistical trends observed in the quantitative data. The **quantitative component** of this study identified patterns and trends related to adolescent girls' education and marriage perceptions in the Rohingya refugee camps. It collected data on school attendance and dropout rates, categorizing reasons for dropout by age group (e.g., 10-12, 13-15, 16-18) to analyze key influencing factors such as marriage expectations, household responsibilities, or mobility restrictions. A structured questionnaire assessed girls' perceptions of marriage, family expectations, and their impact on education decisions through a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions. The study also examined factors contributing to educational discontinuation such as economic constraints,

family pressures, safety concerns and explored motivating factors for continued schooling, such as parental support, financial incentives, access to female teachers, and flexible learning opportunities. This approach is suitable as it combines the depth of qualitative insights with the quantitative data, offering a broader view of the research area (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Also, it allowed the study to increase the validity and reliability of its findings by triangulating data from different methods (Flick, 2018; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

3.2 Research Site

The research site was located in three refugee camps (Camps 4, 9, and 18). Data collection took place across multiple locations within the camps to accommodate different participant groups and ensure comfort, privacy, and open participation.. Adolescent girls' survey data were collected

in classrooms within the Learning Centres (LCs) where the girls were enrolled. In-depth qualitative engagements with girls, including key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), were conducted in group settings at households and in private spaces (LC and partner field office) near the girls' shelters within the camps, depending on their convenience. Wherever possible, engagements with the girls were held away from their shelters in girls friendly spaces built only for girls in the camps so that they would not feel pressured and could participate comfortably in the key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs with parents were conducted at the shelter level, while FGDs with religious leaders, teachers, and education partners were held in Learning Centres within the camps. These different arrangements were made to ensure participants' comfort and to create an environment conducive to open and meaningful discussion.. These different arrangements were made to

respect participants' preferences and to create an environment conducive to open and meaningful discussion.

3.3 Research Participants

The study included a diverse group of participants to ensure comprehensive insights:

- **Adolescent girls** aged 15–18 currently enrolled in Myanmar Curriculum secondary grades or who have recently dropped out.
- **Parents** of adolescent girls represent diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- **Teachers** working in the selected learning centers.
- **Religious and community leaders**, who are influential community stakeholders and organizers of marriage ceremonies for girls.
- **Education partners (field officers and field assistants)**, responsible for implementing education programs in the learning centers.

This diverse participant group ensured a holistic understanding of the factors influencing girls' educational and marital decisions. The age range of 15–18 captured the critical period when dropout and marriage decisions are most prevalent among Rohingya girls.

3.4. Sampling Procedure

The study used the purposive sampling method for the qualitative data collection to ensure that the correct respondents are chosen that can provide proper insights for the study and random sampling for the quantitative data collection to select participants who represent the reality of the context.

a) **Criteria for Participant Selection:**

Adolescent girls aged 15–18 who are currently enrolled in secondary grades in learning Centre. Parents of the selected girls as their view will be a key influence to make decision if those girls are able to continue education. Teachers who are teaching the selected girls for a period for at least one grade. Religious leaders from the blocks of where the girls are currently living.

b) Sample Size:

A total of 112 participants out of 120 targeted were part of the sample size, including: 24 adolescent girls, 23 parents, 30 teachers, 10 religious leaders, 25 education staffs. This sample size ensured a balance between depth and diversity in perspectives while remaining manageable within the scope of the study.

Category	Total	Survey	FGD	KII
Adolescent girls	24	0	18	6
Parents of the girls selected	23	0	23	0
Teachers of the girls' classes	30	25	0	5
Religious/community Leader of the girl's class blocks	10	0	10	0
Field assistant/field officer of the girl's class	25	20	0	5
Total	112	45	51	16

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs), which I selected and tailored to address specific aspects of the research questions. I designed these methods to combine quantitative and qualitative insights, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

a) Survey

I used a survey as the primary method for collecting quantitative data. I administered the survey to 25 Rohingya teachers and 20 education staff. I selected the survey method for several reasons. First, surveys enable the collection of standardized information from a relatively large group of participants, allowing for systematic comparison and statistical analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fowler, 2014). In humanitarian education settings such as the Rohingya refugee camps, where time, access, and resources are constrained, surveys provide a practical and efficient means of gathering data from dispersed respondents.

I purposively selected teachers and education staff based on predefined study criteria, including their involvement in implementing the Myanmar Curriculum and their active teaching roles in the selected learning centres. I collected quantitative data with education partner staffs through an online survey administered via Google Forms. I shared the survey link with identified respondents through official communication channels and sent follow-up reminders to ensure maximum participation. Respondents completed the survey independently using mobile devices or computers, providing responses on their professional experiences, motivation, and challenges.

b) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

I used key informant interviews as a core qualitative method to generate in-depth insights into individual experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes. I conducted the interviews to explore how different stakeholders understood and experienced issues related to girls' education and child marriage and to capture perspectives that could not be obtained through quantitative data alone. This approach allowed me to facilitate open discussion and flexibly probe sensitive issues, enabling participants to share personal experiences in a safe and comfortable setting.

I encountered some challenges, including ensuring participants' privacy within the camp environment and managing time constraints related to participants' daily responsibilities. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals who possessed specialized knowledge, lived experience, or decision-making influence relevant to the research topic (Patton, 2015).

I conducted a total of 16 KIIs, including interviews with 6 adolescent girls aged 15–18, 5 teachers with at least two years of experience in the learning centres, and 5 education partners involved in education provision in the selected learning centres. I identified these participants as key informants because each group held a distinct and complementary perspective essential to understanding the research problem.

I selected adolescent girls as direct beneficiaries of education interventions who could articulate first-hand experiences of barriers, motivations, and community perceptions surrounding girls' education. I included teachers as frontline implementers who shape classroom practices and influence girls' engagement and learning outcomes. I selected education partners for their managerial and programmatic roles in planning, monitoring, and decision-making, which enabled them to provide institutional perspectives on enabling and constraining factors within the education response.

I conducted the interviews in the Chittagon dialect which is close to Rohingya dialect, as per participants' preferences, with support from a trained female translator. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and took place in a private space inside girls' shelters to ensure confidentiality and comfort. Before beginning each interview, I introduced myself, explained the study purpose in simple language, and clarified that participation was voluntary. I assured participants that their responses would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw at any

point without consequence. I obtained verbal consent due to cultural sensitivities around written signatures.

During the interviews, I followed a semi-structured interview guide and adopted a conversational approach, allowing participants to express their views freely while I used probing questions for clarification. I asked questions in a respectful, non-judgmental manner and closely monitored participants' comfort, pausing when participants appeared hesitant or emotional. I began with general questions before moving to more sensitive topics related to marriage and education. When necessary, I rephrased questions and used culturally familiar terms to ensure understanding.

c) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

I conducted focus group discussions to complement the KIIs by capturing community-level perspectives and shared experiences. I conducted a total of nine FGDs, including four FGDs with parents of adolescent girls (including both mothers and fathers), three FGDs with adolescent girls, and two FGDs with religious leaders and majhis, with approximately ten participants in each group.

I included FGDs to explore how shared norms, beliefs, and expectations shape adolescent girls' education and marriage decisions through group interaction and collective reflection (Krueger & Casey, 2015). I conducted the FGDs in a mix of Bangla and the Rohingya dialect with support from a trained female Rohingya translator. Each FGD lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and took place in safe and appropriate locations within the camps, including girls' shelters for adolescent girls and learning centres for parents and religious leaders, to ensure participants' comfort and privacy. Group sizes ranged from five to eight participants to facilitate interactive but manageable discussions.

At the start of each FGD, I explained the purpose of the discussion, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality principles. I encouraged participants to speak freely and established ground rules collectively, such as respecting differing opinions and allowing one person to speak at a time. I used a semi-structured FGD guide and introduced topics gradually, beginning with general discussions on daily routines and community norms before addressing more sensitive issues related to education and marriage.

Throughout the FGDs, I actively facilitated group dynamics, ensuring that quieter participants had opportunities to contribute and that more vocal participants did not dominate discussions. The translator supported the discussions by accurately conveying questions and responses and clarifying culturally specific expressions. I used follow-up questions and prompts to deepen discussions and probe emerging themes. I took notes discreetly to avoid disrupting the discussions and conducted brief debriefs after each FGD to reflect on key insights and emotional responses. I did not audio-record the FGDs due to cultural sensitivities and protection considerations.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study used both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods to synthesize findings.

Qualitative Analysis:

The qualitative data from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were analyzed using thematic content analysis supported by method triangulation. The aim was to identify patterned meanings related to girls' education and child marriage and to corroborate or qualify patterns emerging from the quantitative surveys.

All FGD and KII materials were organized by participant group (adolescent girls, parents, religious leaders, teachers, education partners). Transcripts/notes were read and re-read to gain

familiarity, with brief memos written after each read. *Example:* During familiarization of the adolescent girls' FGDs, repeated mentions of aspirations to "become a teacher/doctor" and of viewing marriage as "a duty" were noted in memos.

Line-by-line and segment-by-segment open codes were generated to capture salient ideas using participants' own words where possible. Coding was inductive but informed by the research questions (education–marriage link, decision-making, barriers/enablers). Coding was done in Microsoft Excel to maintain an audit trail (columns for excerpt, initial code, focused code, theme). *Example (girls' FGD):* Excerpt— "Marriage means keeping family honor" → initial codes: *family honor, cultural duty, limited choice*. *Example (religious leaders' FGD):* Excerpt— "Girls should study, but within Islamic rules" → initial codes: *pro-education (conditional), religious boundary, safe environment*.

Initial codes were compared and clustered into focused codes that appeared frequently or were conceptually strong. *Example:* Initial codes *family honor, religious duty, community expectation* was grouped under the focused code "marriage as obligation". Focused codes were synthesized into themes and sub-themes. Themes were iteratively checked against the dataset to ensure representativeness.

Illustrative themes (with sub-themes):

- Perceived role of education (aspiration; instrumental value for "better proposal"; conditions for acceptability—female teachers, safety, "Islamic rules")
- Marriage decision-making norms (father/relatives as primary decision-makers; limited adolescent voice)
- Barriers to retention (household responsibilities; parental/religious restrictions; safety/harassment; lack of female teachers; menstruation-related constraints)

- Enablers and proposed solutions (incentives; awareness; girls-only spaces; more female teachers; flexible schedules)

Themes were cross-checked across groups and methods (KIIs vs FGDs) and compared with quantitative surveys to enhance credibility and consistency (Denzin, 2012; Patton, 2015).

Example:

- Quant: Large shares of teachers/field staff cited early marriage, parental restrictions, lack of female teachers, and safety as key barriers.
- Qual (girls/parents/leaders): Corresponding patterns emerged—girls and parents referenced household duties, harassment fears, menstrual issues, and female teacher shortages; religious leaders often supported education with conditions (safe, gender-sensitive, culturally appropriate).

Convergence across these strands strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Credibility was supported through an audit trail, peer debriefing (periodic review of themes against excerpts), and thick description (use of characteristic quotes in reporting). Where direct member-checking was constrained by context, method triangulation (surveys + KIIs + FGDs) and source triangulation (girls, parents, leaders, teachers, partners) were used to bolster trustworthiness.

Coding table: (Example)

Excerpt)	Focused code	Theme
FGD “Three girls said that marriage means family honor and responsibility.” (girls, Camp 4/18)	Marriage as obligation	Marriage decision-making norms

FGD “Imams said girls should study, but within Islamic rules and safe environment.” (religious leaders)	Conditional support for education	Perceived role of education
KII “Girls stop after marriage due to family duties, and husbands may not allow.” (teachers/field staff)	Domestic/spousal constraints	Barriers to retention
KII “If there were more female teachers and separate learning spaces, girls would continue.” (parents/teachers)	Gender-sensitive provision	Enablers and proposed solutions

Quantitative Analysis:

The quantitative component of this study was based on data collected through a structured questionnaire administered via google form. Once the data were gathered, they were exported into Microsoft Excel for cleaning and analysis. The data cleaning process involved checking for missing responses, duplicate entries, and inconsistencies in coding to ensure accuracy and reliability of the dataset. Responses were then coded numerically where applicable to facilitate quantitative analysis. The cleaned data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarize key variables such as age, educational status, reasons for dropout, and perceptions of marriage. To examine associations between variables, cross-tabulation analysis was conducted in Excel. Cross-tabulation was used to explore the relationships between demographic factors (e.g., age, marital status, schooling status) and outcomes such as dropout rates, perceptions of marriage, and motivations for continuing education. This approach allowed for the identification of patterns and potential correlations across the dataset. The choice of cross-tabulation was justified as it provides a straightforward yet powerful method for identifying relationships between categorical variables, especially in small-to-medium datasets typical of

humanitarian field research (Bryman, 2016). The findings from the quantitative analysis were then integrated with the qualitative results during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study questions, consistent with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.7 Role of the Researcher

As an education provider in the refugee response for the past six years, I recognize that my experience puts me in a position where assumptions and biases could emerge. This is why I had carefully selected a topic that, while critical to understand as an implementer, was not directly affiliated with my previous work. My interest lies in exploring this topic as any researcher would, to gain deeper insights and contribute to the broader understanding of the issue. My role included identifying participants, facilitating interviews, FGDs, and surveys, observing interactions, and maintaining objectivity throughout data collection. While my professional background may influence my perspective, I adopted reflexive practices, such as journaling and peer debriefing, to acknowledge and mitigate any biases in data interpretation. For example, after an FGD with adolescent girls, I noted my initial tendency to interpret their reluctance to speak as disinterest. Upon reflection, I recognized it was more likely a result of cultural shyness and social hierarchy, which reminded me to remain patient and create safer spaces for discussion in later sessions. I was also accompanied by a note-taker with an education and research background to cross-check observations and thoughts after each interview and FGD. This collaborative and reflective approach ensured that the research findings remain credible and grounded.

3.8 Ethical Issues and Concerns

The study followed the ethical research principles to protect participants and ensure data integrity. Participants received clear information about the study and provided written consent before participating. Identifiable information was anonymized, and data was stored securely. Participants' rights to withdraw or refuse participation were upheld without prejudice. Reflexivity was practiced by acknowledging and addressing any potential biases in data collection and interpretation.

3.9 Credibility and Rigor

Ensuring credibility and rigor in qualitative research is essential to establish the trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2018). To ensure credibility, I engaged with participants through multiple data collection methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, allowing for triangulation of data sources. This methodological triangulation enhanced the validity of interpretations by cross-verifying perspectives from girls, teachers, and education partners. In addition, prolonged engagement within the education response context strengthened contextual understanding and accuracy of interpretation, while member checking—sharing emerging findings with a few participants for validation—was applied to confirm accuracy of representation.

Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of all steps in the research process, including data collection tools, field notes, coding decisions, and analytic memos. An audit trail was maintained to allow transparency and replicability of the research procedures.

Finally, confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, in which I critically examined my own positionality as UNICEF's Girls' Education Lead, acknowledging potential

biases and assumptions that could influence data interpretation. Data triangulation, peer debriefing with colleagues external to the study, and adherence to ethical principles further enhanced the study's rigor and objectivity.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

A major challenge of this study arose from the timing of data collection, which coincided with a period of global funding cuts in the education sector. The sudden withdrawal of funds led to the discontinuation of volunteer teachers and a large-scale protest across the camps, resulting in the temporary closure of learning facilities throughout June. This disruption created challenges in accessing participants and completing data collection within the planned timeframe. Moreover, as many teachers were directly affected by the funding cuts and job uncertainty, their responses may have been influenced by heightened anxiety and frustration during the period of unrest.

To overcome these limitations, I adapted the data collection plan by extending the timeline and scheduling interviews and FGDs once learning facilities reopened and the situation stabilized. I engaged community volunteers and education partners to help identify participants who were available and willing to participate despite the disruptions. Where teachers were emotionally distressed, I ensured additional time was allotted to build rapport and create a supportive atmosphere before beginning the interviews. I also triangulated data across different respondent groups—girls, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and field staff—to reduce potential bias arising from teachers' stress during the funding crisis. These adjustments enabled the study to gather sufficiently rich and reliable data despite the challenging context.

Additionally, given the sensitivity of the research topic—particularly issues related to girls' education and social norms—some religious leaders expressed discomfort in participating in the

interviews. Consequently, only ten religious leaders participated instead of the targeted twenty, which may have limited the diversity of views from this key stakeholder group. Their hesitation reflects broader sociocultural sensitivities around discussing girls' education, particularly with external researchers, and highlights the challenges of conducting gender-focused research in conservative humanitarian contexts. To address this, I approached them through trusted community intermediaries, clarified the purpose of the study, and emphasized that the focus was on understanding community perspectives rather than judging or criticizing cultural practices. I also reassured them about confidentiality and offered the option to participate in a group setting instead of a one-to-one interview if they felt more comfortable. These steps helped reduce hesitation, although a few leaders still declined to participate, which was respected in line with ethical considerations.

Although data were collected from 112 out of the targeted 120 participants, the overall representativeness of teacher perspectives may have been partially affected by the contextual instability at that time. the contextual instability in the camps during the data collection period, such as frequent movement restrictions, sudden school closures, and staff turnover among education partners. These factors made it difficult to access some teachers and may have influenced the responses of those who participated, as many were preoccupied with operational uncertainties and workload pressures. Despite this constraint, the study's findings remain valuable in capturing authentic experiences and perceptions during a critical moment in the education response, offering insights into how external systemic factors shape teachers' motivation and engagement in humanitarian settings.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study, derived from a mixed-methods data analysis that combined quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of adolescent girls' education and early marriage practices in the Rohingya refugee camps. Data was collected through 45 surveys, 9 focus group discussions (FGDs) involving 51 participants, and 16 key informant interviews (KIIs). Participants represented five key groups: adolescent girls, their parents, teachers, religious leaders, and education field staff. These groups were selected to capture both individual and collective perspectives across community and institutional levels, offering a multidimensional view of the factors influencing girls' education and marriage decisions.

The findings are organized around three overarching themes, each containing relevant sub-themes that emerged through thematic content analysis and triangulation of data sources:

- a) Perceptions of Marriage and Decision-Making – explores how marriage is understood within the community, who makes marriage-related decisions, and how these perceptions shape girls' educational opportunities.
- b) Barriers to Girls' Education and Retention – examines the social, cultural, and structural challenges that hinder girls' continued participation in education, including safety concerns, domestic responsibilities, and institutional constraints.

- c) **Motivating Factors and Enablers for Continuing Education** – identifies the positive influences and support mechanisms that encourage girls to pursue learning, such as awareness programs, religious endorsement, and institutional incentives.

Each theme integrates findings from surveys, FGDs, and KIIs, ensuring a cohesive presentation of both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights. Graphs and tables are accompanied by interpretive discussions and illustrative quotes from participants to contextualize the data.

Together, these results illuminate the intersecting perceptions, gender norms, and systemic barriers that continue to shape the educational experiences and life trajectories of adolescent girls in the Rohingya refugee response.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Marriage and Decision-Making

Marriage emerged as one of the most significant social and cultural institutions influencing adolescent girls' educational choices in the Rohingya refugee camps. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data highlight that marriage is predominantly perceived as a family duty tied to social expectations and religious identity rather than as an individual choice.

1.1 Marriage as a Family Duty and Social Expectation

Survey findings revealed that around two-thirds (approximately 65%) of respondents associated marriage with fulfilling family obligations, preserving honor, and ensuring girls' protection. This pattern was consistent across both Rohingya teachers and education field staff. Among field staff, 27% specifically mentioned family honor as a key reason for early marriage, while 18% viewed it as a family responsibility. The qualitative data reinforced these trends. In FGDs with adolescent girls, participants frequently described marriage as a duty rather than a personal aspiration. One girl expressed, "A good girl marries when her parents decide—it brings respect to the family." Similarly, in the FGDs with parents, many mothers echoed the belief that early

marriage is a way to secure social stability and maintain moral order within the community. Religious leaders also supported this view, emphasizing that marriage protects girls' dignity, although some acknowledged that this practice often interrupts education. With KIIs with teachers and field staff, respondents explained that parental fears of reputational harm drive decisions to marry girls early, particularly after puberty. As one teacher summarized, "Parents believe that once a girl grows older, keeping her unmarried invites gossip. They prefer marriage to protect her honor. These combined perspectives indicate that early marriage is sustained not merely by economic hardship but by social expectations and gendered norms that define a girl's virtue and family value through marriage.

1.2 Decision-Making and Girls' Agency

Findings from the KIIs show that about two-thirds (67%) of girls reported having no decision-making power in matters related to their marriage, while 75% stated that fathers were the main decision-makers. Teachers and field staff corroborated these findings, noting that decisions are typically made collectively by fathers, relatives, and religious elders, with little input from the girls themselves. As one field staff member explained, "In most families, the father and the elders decide everything. The girl is only informed when the decision is already made." In FGDs, adolescent girls often spoke about being informed of marriage decisions rather than being consulted. One adolescent shared, "My parents will decide when I marry. I don't have a say—it is not my choice." Another added, "Even if I want to study, it depends on my father's permission."

These narratives align with parents' own admissions during FGDs. Several fathers expressed that girls are "too young to understand" or that "decisions should stay within the family. One father stated, *"A girl cannot judge what is good for her. We make these decisions because we know what is best."* Religious leaders, while supportive of parental authority, emphasized that Islam encourages consultation but ultimately upholds the guardian's role in arranging marriage. As one Imam explained, *"We advise families to discuss matters with their children, but the final responsibility lies with the guardian. This is our tradition and our duty."* Such accounts highlight the limited agency of adolescent girls within family structures, where obedience and compliance are valued over autonomy. This dynamic reinforces a cycle where educational and marital decisions are made by male guardians, limiting girls' ability to negotiate continued schooling.

1.3 Perceived Link Between Education and Marriage

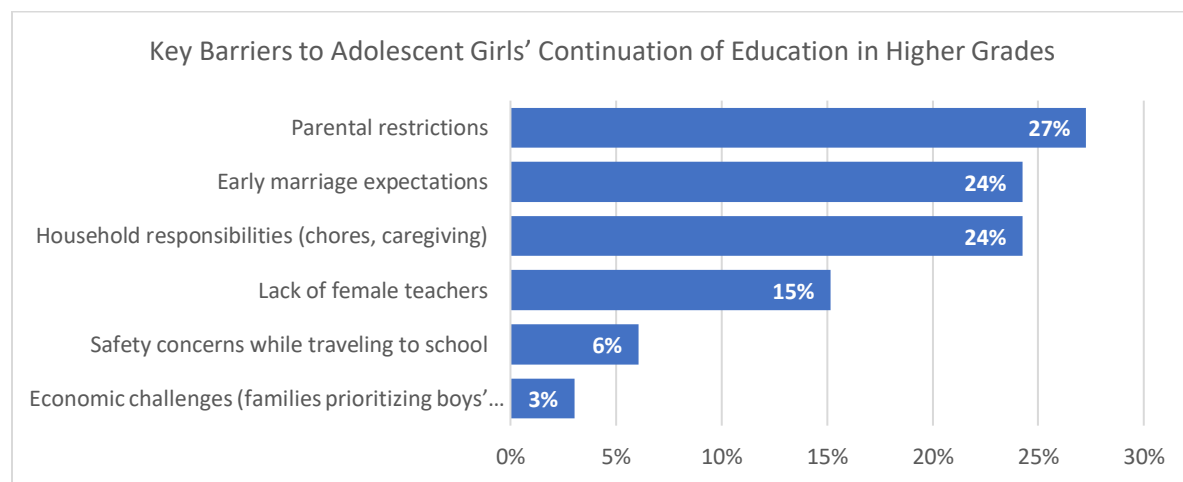
Quantitative findings from both teacher and field staff surveys showed that 83% of respondents believed education does not act as a barrier to marriage, yet 100% agreed that educated girls receive better marriage proposals. This paradox suggests that while education is socially acceptable to a point, it is valued primarily to enhance marital prospects rather than to promote independence. Qualitative insights reflected the same duality. Teachers explained that parents often allow girls to study "until an appropriate marriage is found," while girls themselves viewed education to gain respect in the community. One adolescent girl stated, "If I study, people will respect me more and I can marry a good person." Religious leaders supported girls' education within "religious boundaries," emphasizing that learning is beneficial if it aligns with Islamic teachings.

This convergence of data demonstrates that education is instrumentally valued—as a moral, social, and matrimonial asset—but not necessarily seen as an end or as a pathway to empowerment. The subtle endorsement of education as a complement to marriage, rather than an alternative to early marriage, reveals deep-seated cultural norms shaping girls’ life trajectories. Overall, the integrated results show that marriage among Rohingya adolescents is widely perceived as a collective family responsibility rather than a personal milestone. Across respondent groups, marriage decisions are strongly influenced by patriarchal authority, community expectations, and religious interpretations that link female virtue to early marriage. Girls’ education is tolerated and sometimes encouraged but within cultural and religious parameters, primarily serving to improve their suitability for marriage rather than to expand their autonomy. The alignment between quantitative data (survey frequencies) and qualitative narratives (FGDs and KIIs) strengthens the reliability of these findings. Together, they reveal a persistent tension between traditional norms and emerging aspirations, suggesting that while attitudes toward education are gradually shifting, marriage remains the dominant marker of social acceptance for adolescent girls in the refugee camps.

Theme 2: Barriers to Girls' Education and Retention

Barriers to education for Rohingya adolescent girls were multifaceted, shaped by intertwined social, cultural, and institutional factors. Across the quantitative survey, KIIs, and FGDs, five major sub-themes consistently emerged: (a) parental restrictions, (b) early marriage expectations, (c) household responsibilities, (d) lack of female teachers, and (e) safety and mobility concerns.

Graph 1 illustrates key barriers reported by adolescent girls when asked why continuing their studies becomes difficult in higher grades.



The survey required respondents to identify the primary barrier affecting continuation. Parental restrictions (27%) emerged as the most frequently selected constraint, followed by early marriage expectations (24%) and household responsibilities (24%). Lack of female teachers (15%) and safety concerns during travel (6%) were also identified, while economic challenges were reported by a smaller proportion of respondents (3%). These quantitative findings provide a structured overview of the relative weight of different barriers.

The qualitative findings from KIIs and FGDs deepen this understanding by explaining how these constraints operate within everyday social and family contexts.

2.1: Parental restrictions:

Parental restriction emerged as the most frequently identified barrier in the survey, with 27 percent of respondents selecting it as the primary reason girls struggle to continue education in higher grades. FGDs and KIIs highlighted the deep intersection between cultural expectations and religious interpretations in shaping parental restriction on girls' educational participation. Parents, teachers, and religious leaders consistently linked girls' schooling to ideas of modesty, honor, and "appropriate behavior" for adolescent girls. During KIIs, teachers explained that parents often become increasingly cautious once girls reach puberty, viewing continued schooling as a potential threat to girls' reputation. One teacher noted, *"After puberty, parents worry more. They think the girl should stay inside to protect her honor."* Field staff echoed this, describing frequent cases where girls were quietly withdrawn from learning centers once they began menstruating. and they frequently clarified that these boundaries require gender-segregated spaces, modest dress, limited mobility, and avoidance of interaction with male teachers. As one Imam stated, *"Education is good, but the environment must be proper. Girls should not mix with boys after they mature."* These interpretations, while not opposed to education itself, create strict conditions that often lead parents to halt girls' schooling when such requirements cannot be met. This perception aligns with survey results, where 16 percent of respondents cited preference for religious education and 56 percent mentioned community disapproval after puberty as major causes of dropout. Girls explained being told to "stay home after menstruation" or that "education is not suitable after maturity." These findings illustrate how religion is often invoked to legitimize gendered boundaries, transforming education from a right into a conditional privilege. Schooling becomes acceptable only within narrowly defined moral limits, effectively timing out girls' participation as they transition into adolescence.

2.2: Early Marriage Expectation:

Early marriage expectations were identified by 24 % of respondents as the primary barrier to continuing education in higher grades, placing it among the most significant constraints alongside parental restriction and household responsibilities. These findings reinforce the patterns identified under Theme 1, where marriage was framed as a collective family responsibility rather than an individual choice.

Qualitative data further demonstrates how the anticipation of marriage shapes educational trajectories even before formal arrangements occur. Teachers reported that attendance often declines once marriage discussions begin within families. One teacher explained, “When a proposal comes, parents stop focusing on education. They think there is no need to continue if she will marry soon.” Field staff described similar patterns, noting that girls are sometimes gradually withdrawn from classes once informal engagement is discussed.

Adolescent girls acknowledged the inevitability of these expectations. In FGDs, several participants expressed uncertainty about completing higher grades due to anticipated marriage. One girl shared, “My parents say I will marry in two years, so maybe I will not finish higher grades.” Parents and religious leaders often framed marriage as protective and socially appropriate after puberty. In this context, education is frequently viewed as temporary, continuing only until marital arrangements take precedence. Early marriage thus functions not only as an event that interrupts schooling, but also as an expectation that shapes decisions about continued education.

2.3 Household Responsibilities

Household responsibilities were identified by 24 % of respondents as the primary barrier affecting continuation in higher grades. Although equal in frequency to early marriage in the structured survey question, qualitative findings reveal how domestic labor gradually limits girls' educational engagement over time. These responsibilities intensify as girls reach puberty, reflecting culturally embedded expectations that prioritize daughters' contributions to household labor over schooling. Before presenting the qualitative insights from KIIs and FGDs, it is important to examine the quantitative responses that highlight the scale of this issue. In the survey, 61 % of respondents identified household chores and sibling care as key reasons girls miss or leave school. This aligns with graph 3 below, where parental restrictions (27%), early marriage expectations (24%), and household responsibilities (24%) emerged as major constraints. KIIs confirmed that girls' home-based labor is culturally normalized and often expected after puberty. One father stated, "After twelve, a girl must help her mother. Studying is for boys." Adolescent girls expressed frustration but acceptance: "I like studying, but my mother needs me at home. When I finish work, it is too late.". Domestic and caregiving roles serve as structural gender barriers, limiting both time and opportunity for education. Though not explicitly coercive, these norms create invisible forms of exclusion that gradually detach girls from formal learning, prioritizing domestic utility over personal development.

2.4: Lack of Female Teachers:

15% of respondents identified the lack of female teachers as the primary barrier to continuing education in higher grades. Although it is lower in frequency than family-related factors, this issue was consistently emphasized across datasets.

In the survey, approximately 70 percent of respondents indicated that the presence of more female teachers would improve girls' attendance and comfort in learning centers. KIIs revealed that limited numbers of female educators result in heavier workloads and reduced opportunities for mentorship and support. FGDs with parents reinforced these findings. As one father explained, "If there is a lady teacher, I will send my daughter. Otherwise, people will talk."

The shortage of female teachers interacts with parental restrictions and safety concerns, as families are more willing to allow girls to continue education in environments perceived as culturally appropriate and supervised by women. While not the most frequently selected primary barrier, the absence of female teachers influences parental confidence in permitting girls' continued schooling.

2.2 Safety and Mobility Concerns

Safety and mobility concerns were identified by 6 % of respondents as the primary barrier to continuation in higher grades. Although reported less frequently in the structured survey question, qualitative findings reveal that safety perceptions significantly influence parental decision-making.

Respondents highlighted risks such as harassment along walking routes, overcrowded pathways, long travel distances between shelters and learning centres, and limited adult supervision during

transit. These concerns were perceived to intensify after puberty, when girls' mobility becomes more closely monitored within families.

FGDs and KIIs indicated that safety fears extend beyond physical harm to include reputational risk. Parents described concerns about gossip or social judgment if girls are seen traveling alone. Girls reported feelings watched or commented upon when moving through public spaces. In several cases, even minor incidents were interpreted as indicators that continued schooling was no longer appropriate. These findings suggest that safety concerns operate both as practical considerations and as social perceptions shaping mobility restrictions.

In addition, Participants identified poor infrastructure, overcrowded classes, and lack of privacy in learning centres as additional deterrents. About 42 percent of survey respondents cited unhygienic facilities or lack of menstrual management spaces as key factors discouraging attendance. FGDs with girls described embarrassment and discomfort during menstruation: “There is no private place if we have period pain. Boys laugh when we miss class.” Teachers and field staff confirmed that mixed-gender classrooms and insufficient sanitation facilities cause many parents to question whether schools are safe for adolescent girls. The absence of gender-sensitive facilities not only undermines physical access but also reinforces social discomfort around adolescent female education. This demonstrates that infrastructure gaps and cultural perceptions are mutually reinforcing rather than separate issues.

Across all data sources, barriers to girls’ education form a reinforcing web: social restrictions justify programmatic shortcomings, and institutional limitations reinforce cultural caution.

Quantitative data (Figures 1–3) identify early marriage, household responsibilities, and safety concerns as leading barriers, while qualitative narratives reveal the deeper social meanings of protection, propriety, and gendered labor underpinning these patterns.

Effectively addressing these barriers therefore requires dual strategies—material interventions (such as increasing female teachers and gender-responsive facilities) and normative change through community engagement to challenge the underlying gender ideologies restricting girls’ education.

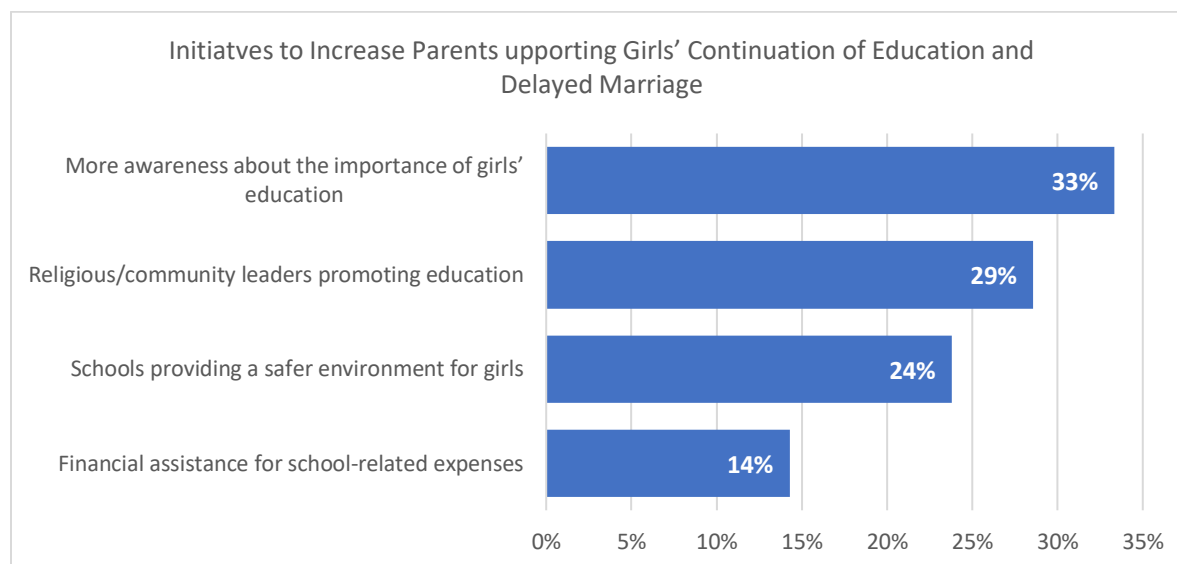
Theme 3: Motivating Factors and Enablers for Continuing Education

Despite numerous challenges, both quantitative and qualitative findings revealed signs of emerging optimism and evolving community attitudes toward girls' education in the Rohingya camps. Participants highlighted several motivating factors and enabling conditions that could strengthen girls' participation in and transition through education. Three sub-themes were identified: (a) community awareness and attitude change, (b) institutional support and incentives, and (c) the role of religious and community leaders.

3.1 Community Awareness and Attitude Change

Shifting community beliefs about girls' education emerged as a powerful enabler for delaying marriage and supporting continued schooling. Parents, teachers, and adolescent girls repeatedly emphasized that awareness-raising efforts have begun to challenge long-standing misconceptions about girls' learning, especially in communities that traditionally viewed education as unnecessary or inappropriate for adolescent girls. Before exploring the qualitative insights, it is important to understand which awareness-related interventions girls themselves believe would most influence parental attitudes.

Graph 2: presents the initiatives respondents identified as most effective for increasing parental support for girls' education, including awareness sessions, endorsements from religious leaders, and safer school environments.



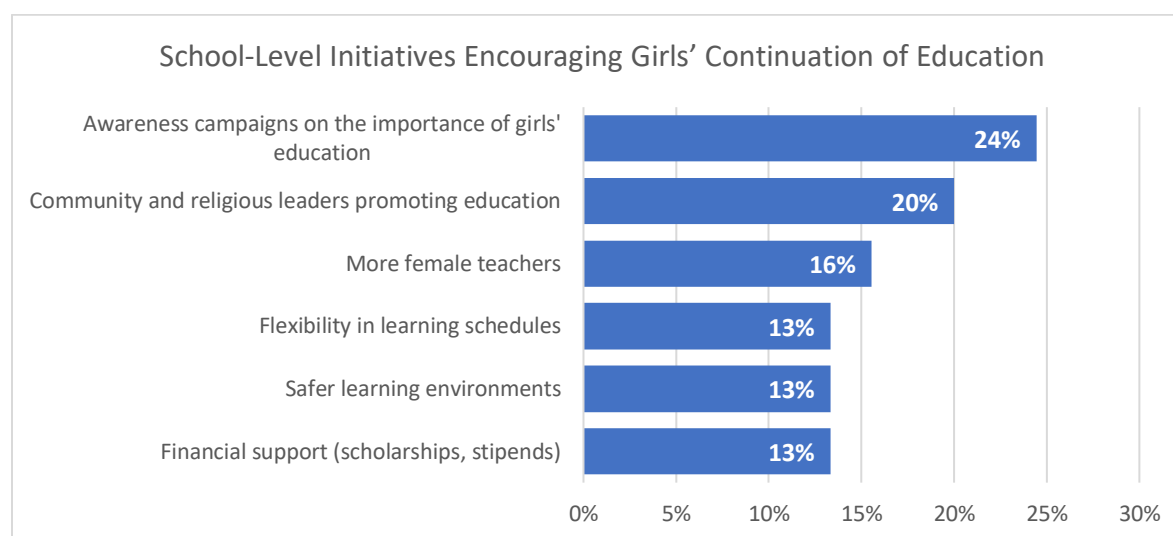
As shown in Figure 4, 33 percent of respondents emphasized awareness about the importance of girls' education as the most effective way to increase parental support, followed by promotion of education by religious/community leaders (29%) and safer school environments (24%). These findings strongly align with qualitative insights from FGDs, where parents explained that recent exposure to awareness sessions conducted by education partners and NGOs had challenged long-held misconceptions. One mother said, "Before, we thought school spoils girls. Now we understand it helps them learn good behavior."

Adolescent girls echoed this sentiment, noting that encouragement from parents and teachers boosts their motivation. Education field staff also observed that attitude shifts were more common in households where fathers participated in awareness discussions or community dialogues. Collective sensitization—especially through trusted voices—emerges as a key enabling factor for both parental approval and community acceptance of girls' education. Awareness efforts that highlight education as compatible with religious and moral values have proven effective in reducing resistance and fostering community ownership.

3.2 Institutional Support and Incentives

Institutional support mechanisms—such as safe learning environments, flexible schedules, and the presence of female teachers—play a critical role in determining whether adolescent girls remain in school. Teachers, parents, and girls emphasized during KIIs and FGDs that institutional measures which reduce safety risks or lighten household burdens significantly increase girls' ability to continue learning. Before presenting these qualitative insights, it is useful to look at the specific institutional interventions girls themselves identified as most motivating.

Graph 3: presents the initiatives respondents felt would most encourage adolescent girls to stay in school, including parental and community support, awareness campaigns, safer learning environments, and increased availability of female teachers.

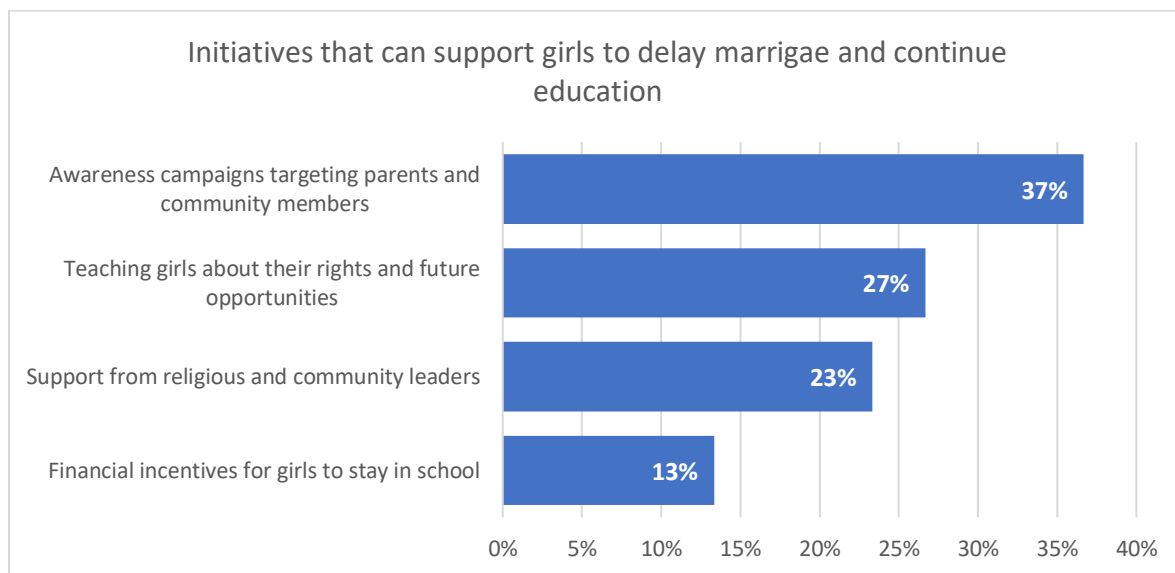


Survey results presented in Graph 5 show that 24 percent of respondents viewed awareness campaigns on the importance of girls' education as most effective, followed by advocacy from community and religious leaders (20%) and increased presence of female teachers (16%). Other frequently mentioned interventions included flexible learning schedules and financial support schemes (13% each). These patterns reflect the views of teachers and field staff in KIIs, who reported that girls' attendance improved when learning centres offered basic materials, flexible timing, and personal encouragement. Parents appreciated that such initiatives "reduce the burden" of education costs, while girls valued small incentives like menstrual kits or certificates of achievement as recognition of their commitment. Institutional incentives serve a dual function—they alleviate financial barriers and signal that girls' education is valued by the broader system. Combined with flexible schedules and safe environments, such measures make learning both accessible and socially acceptable.

3.3 Role of Religious and Community Leaders

Religious and community leaders hold strong influence over attitudes toward girls' education and marriage within the Rohingya community. Their endorsement—or disapproval—significantly shapes parental decisions, as many families depend on these leaders for moral guidance and community direction. Before presenting the qualitative evidence from KIIs and FGDs, it is useful to understand which forms of leadership support girls themselves perceive as most effective for keeping them in school.

Graph 4: presents respondents' views on the interventions that would help more girls stay in school, including awareness campaigns, endorsements from community and religious leaders, and increased availability of female teachers.

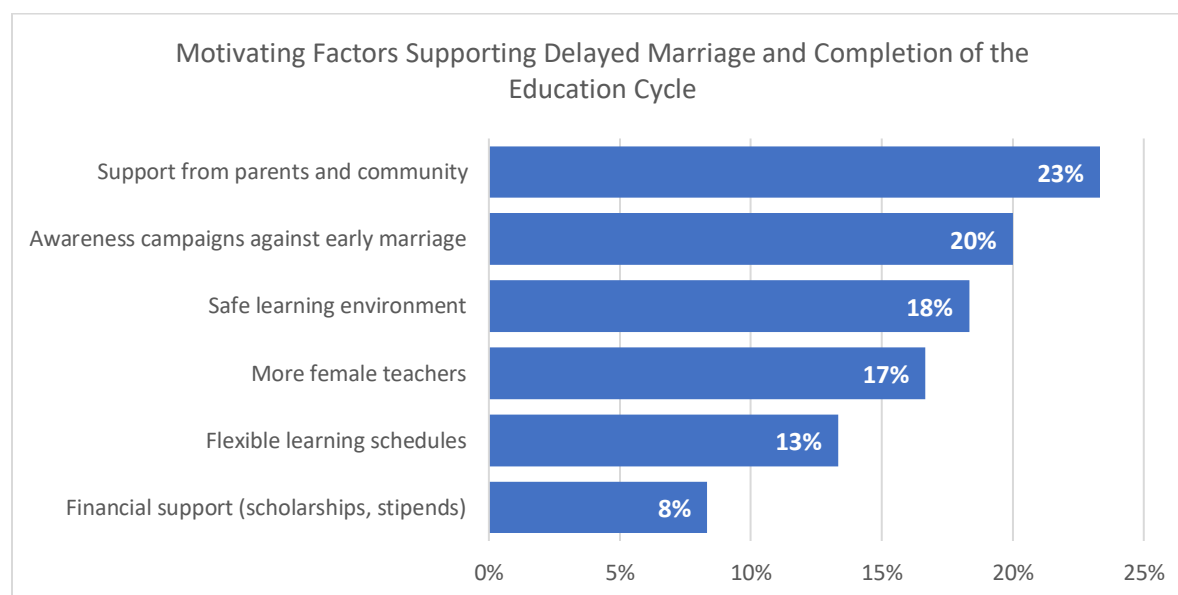


According to Graph 6, 37 percent of respondents identified awareness campaigns targeting parents and community members as the most effective way to delay early marriage, followed by teaching girls about their rights and opportunities (27%) and support from religious and community leaders (23%). Qualitative findings reinforce this: FGDs with imams and majhis revealed that when respected leaders publicly support girls' education, parents become more receptive. One imam stated, "Islam encourages both men and women to learn. If girls study in a safe place, it is good for the whole family." Teachers and field staff also observed improved attendance in areas where religious figures were actively engaged in advocacy. Religious endorsement functions as a moral and social legitimizer. When education is framed within Islamic values and community identity, it gains credibility and counters the narrative that schooling contradicts religious obligations.

3.4 Social Support Networks and Collective Motivation

Support from parents, teachers, and peers emerged as a powerful motivating force for girls' continued participation in education. Across KIIs and FGDs, respondents emphasized that emotional encouragement and social recognition often matter more than material or financial incentives. To understand which forms of support girls consider most effective, the survey asked respondents to identify strategies they believe would help delay early marriage and motivate girls to stay in school.

Graph 5: reveals the different ways/motivating factors to delay the marriage for adolescent girls so that they can continue education and complete the full cycle.



As indicated in Figure 7, support from parents and the community (23%) ranked highest among motivating factors, followed by awareness campaigns against early marriage (20%) and safe learning environments (18%). FGDs with adolescent girls confirmed that emotional encouragement from family members and teachers plays a decisive role in sustaining motivation. One girl explained, “When my parents say they are proud of me, I want to study more.” Teachers also highlighted the importance of group-based learning and peer encouragement, noting that “girls who study together inspire each other to continue.” These results suggest that social affirmation and relational support—rather than material incentives alone—create sustained commitment among adolescent girls. Strengthening parent–teacher collaboration and community peer networks could therefore help consolidate these positive trends.

Across all data sources, enabling factors coalesce around three reinforcing dimensions:

- Normative change driven by awareness and community dialogue,
- Institutional responsiveness through flexible schedules, incentives, and female teachers,
and
- Moral legitimacy is fostered by religious and community endorsement.

Quantitative data (Figures 1–4) reveal strong convergence with qualitative narratives: awareness and social support consistently rank higher than financial incentives alone, indicating that sustainable change depends on shifting mindsets alongside improving access. Together, these findings demonstrate that when educational initiatives are culturally grounded, participatory, and inclusive, they can transform social attitudes toward girls' education and delay early marriage, even in conservative humanitarian settings.

Chapter 5:

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter brings together the findings presented in Chapter Four and examines their meaning within the broader context of adolescent girls' education and early marriage in the Rohingya refugee camps. Building on the study's research questions and objectives, the chapter interprets the key results through critical reflection and engagement with relevant literature. The discussion explores how cultural norms, gendered decision-making, and structural barriers interact to shape girls' educational experiences and marital outcomes. The chapter then concludes by reflecting on the overall research process and its contributions, followed by a set of recommendations grounded in the study's findings.

5.1 Discussion

This section discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four by interpreting what they reveal about Rohingya adolescent girls' perceptions of marriage, the barriers they face in continuing education, and the conditions under which change may be possible. The discussion does not introduce new data; rather, it reflects on what has been learned through the analysis of results and examines how these findings align with, extend, or complicate existing literature on child marriage and girls' education in humanitarian settings. The discussion is organized in line with the major themes emerging from the results and is grounded in the study's research questions and assumptions.

5.1.1 Normalization of Early Marriage within Rohingya Social Structures

The findings of this study suggest that early marriage is widely normalized within the Rohingya refugee community and is commonly understood as an expected stage in a girl's life, particularly

after puberty. Marriage was frequently described by participants not as a personal choice but as a socially appropriate response to growing up, insecurity, and family responsibility. This perception aligns with existing literature that identifies child marriage in displacement settings as a culturally embedded practice that becomes further reinforced during periods of crisis and instability (Ripoll, 2017; Melnikas et al., 2020).

At the same time, the data indicates that this normalization is shaped by the realities of prolonged displacement. In the Rohingya camps, limited access to secondary education, lack of livelihood opportunities, and uncertainty about the future appear to strengthen reliance on familiar social norms. In such a constrained environment, marriage may be perceived by families as one of the few available mechanisms for ensuring social order and protection. Similar observations have been made by Guglielmi et al. (2024), who note that humanitarian crises often intensify existing gender norms rather than disrupt them.

From an analytical perspective, these findings challenge assumptions that early marriage persists primarily due to lack of awareness. Instead, the results suggest that early marriage is often viewed as a rational and socially legitimate response within a context where alternative pathways for adolescent girls are limited. Understanding early marriage as a normalized social practice, rather than isolated harmful behavior, is essential for interpreting why education interventions alone have struggled to alter marriage patterns in the Rohingya camps.

5.1.2 Gendered Decision-Making and the Constraint of Adolescent Agency

The findings indicate that adolescent girls have limited agency in decisions related to marriage, with fathers and male relatives typically acting as primary decision-makers. Girls frequently describe being informed of marriage decisions rather than being consulted, which reflects deeply

gendered power relations within families. This pattern is consistent with previous studies that document patriarchal decision-making structures in conservative and displacement-affected communities (Ripoll, 2017; Melnikas et al., 2020).

The results are also echo findings by Elnakib et al. (2022), who highlight that girls' voices are often marginalized in decisions that directly affect their education and life trajectories. In this study, girls' limited participation in decision-making was not always expressed through overt resistance but rather through quiet acceptance, suggesting that restricted agency has become normalized. This internalization of norms has also been observed by Guglielmi et al. (2024), who argue that adolescent girls in crisis settings often adjust their aspirations to align with what is socially permissible.

From a research standpoint, this finding extends existing literature by illustrating how agency is constrained not only by external authority but also by internalized expectations. Girls' acceptance of limited choice appears to be shaped by repeated exposure to norms that prioritize obedience, family honor, and conformity. This has important implications for education interventions, as efforts to promote girls' schooling must address both structural barriers and the social processes that shape girls' perceptions of what choices are realistically available to them.

5.1.3 Marriage as a Protective Strategy and the Reframing of Educational Risk

An important insight from the findings is the widespread framing of marriage as a protective strategy. Parents and teachers often describe early marriage as a means of safeguarding girls from harassment, gossip, and social judgment. This perception closely aligns with earlier research in the Rohingya camps and other humanitarian settings, where families view early marriage as a response

to weak protection systems and heightened insecurity (Ripoll, 2017; UNHCR, CARE & ActionAid, 2020).

However, the findings complicate the assumption—common in education policy discourse—that schooling is universally perceived as protective. While global literature consistently emphasizes education as a key factor in delaying marriage (UNFPA, 2022; Nguyen & Wodon, 2015), this study suggests that education may be viewed as risky when learning environments are unsafe, culturally contested, or poorly resourced. In such circumstances, schooling can be perceived as exposing girls to harm rather than shielding them from it.

This reframing of risk helps explain why education has not consistently functioned as a deterrent to early marriage in the Rohingya camps. The results indicate that families weigh education and marriage not in absolute terms, but in relation to perceived safety, dignity, and social acceptance. From a research perspective, this highlights the importance of examining how protection is understood locally, rather than assuming alignment with humanitarian definitions of safety and well-being.

5.1.4 Institutional and Environmental Barriers to Educational Continuity

The study findings reveal that institutional and environmental barriers play a significant role in shaping girls' educational participation. Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate WASH facilities, lack of female teachers, and safety concerns during travel to learning centers were frequently cited as factors discouraging attendance. These findings are consistent with existing literature emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive infrastructure for retaining adolescent girls in school (UNESCO, 2015; Elnakib et al., 2022).

What emerges from this study, however, is the way these structural barriers interact with social norms. Similar to findings by Sameen (2020) and Plan International (2022), inadequate school conditions appear to reinforce parental perceptions that education is unsuitable for adolescent girls. When schools fail to provide privacy, safety, and dignity, families are further discouraged from prioritizing education over marriage.

From an analytical standpoint, this suggests that structural barriers do more than limit access; they actively shape social attitudes toward girls' education. The absence of supportive learning environments strengthens the belief that schooling is incompatible with cultural expectations surrounding modesty and protection. This finding underscores the need to view infrastructure and institutional quality as central, rather than peripheral, to efforts aimed at delaying early marriage.

5.1.5 Perceived Legitimacy of the Myanmar Curriculum and Community Acceptance

Dissatisfaction with the Myanmar Curriculum emerged as an important factor influencing community attitudes toward girls' education. Parents and community members often questioned the value of continued schooling when the curriculum was perceived as disconnected from cultural and moral expectations. This finding aligns with literature emphasizing that curriculum relevance and social legitimacy are critical for educational engagement in displacement contexts (GiHA WG, 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

While earlier studies have focused on curriculum accreditation and learning outcomes (CODEC, 2024), this study highlights the importance of perceived legitimacy, particularly for adolescent girls. When education is not viewed as culturally acceptable or socially meaningful, families may struggle to justify continued enrollment, especially as girls approach marriageable age. This helps

explain why access to schooling alone has not translated into sustained participation at the secondary level.

From a research perspective, this finding extends existing literature by demonstrating that legitimacy is negotiated through community values as much as through formal recognition. Education systems that fail to engage with these values risk being viewed as irrelevant, thereby limiting their potential to challenge early marriage norms.

5.1.6 Educational Aspirations and Conditional Support for Girls' Schooling

Despite the barriers identified, the findings also reveal that adolescent girls continue to hold aspirations for education and professional futures. Girls expressed interest in becoming teachers, healthcare workers, or contributing to their communities in meaningful ways. This aligns with previous research showing that girls in humanitarian settings often retain strong educational aspirations even when opportunities are constrained (Guglielmi et al., 2024).

In addition, the study identified forms of conditional support for girls' education among mothers and some community leaders. While this support was often tied to conditions such as safety, segregation, or cultural appropriateness, it suggests that norms surrounding girls' education are not entirely fixed. Similar observations have been made in studies emphasizing the potential of community-engaged and culturally responsive approaches to shift attitudes over time (GiHA WG, 2022; UNHCR, CARE & ActionAid, 2020).

From an analytical standpoint, these findings point to important entry points for change. While resistance to girls' education remains strong, the presence of aspirations and conditional acceptance suggests that norms may be negotiated rather than simply enforced. This underscores

the importance of interventions that work within existing social frameworks while gradually expanding the space for girls' educational participation.

5.1.7 Synthesis of Findings in Relation to Existing Literature and Research Gaps

Overall, the findings of this study largely confirm existing literature on the relationship between child marriage and girls' educational exclusion in humanitarian settings. Consistent with previous research, early marriage emerges as a practice shaped by gender norms, insecurity, and limited opportunities (Ripoll, 2017; Melnikas et al., 2020; Guglielmi et al., 2024). However, this study contributes additional nuance by illustrating how education is evaluated through lenses of protection, legitimacy, and future viability, rather than access alone.

The study also highlights gaps that warrant further research. In particular, deeper exploration of fathers' perspectives, long-term shifts in community attitudes, and the impact of culturally adapted secondary education pathways could provide valuable insights. While the findings offer a grounded understanding of the current context, they also point to the need for longitudinal and intervention-focused research to better understand how educational participation may influence marriage practices over time.

5.2 Conclusion

This study sought to explore how adolescent girls' access to education and experiences of early marriage are shaped within the Rohingya refugee camps, with particular attention to perceptions, social norms, and structural barriers. Drawing on the findings presented in Chapter Four and interpreted in the preceding discussion, the research has achieved its primary objective by offering a contextualized understanding of why early marriage persists alongside limited educational participation for adolescent girls in a humanitarian setting.

The findings indicate that decisions surrounding girls' education and marriage are not driven by a single factor, but rather emerge from the interaction of cultural expectations, gendered power relations, insecurity, and constrained educational opportunities. Early marriage appears to be widely understood within the community as a socially legitimate and protective response to these conditions, while education is often evaluated based on its perceived safety, relevance, and future value. As discussed in Chapter Five, when education does not meet these expectations, it struggles to function as a viable alternative to marriage.

From a reflective standpoint, this study has highlighted the importance of moving beyond simplified explanations of early marriage that focus solely on awareness or attitudes. Engaging with the perspectives of adolescent girls, parents, teachers, and community members revealed that many decisions that limit girls' education are made within a framework of perceived rationality and care, even when they result in long-term disadvantages. This realization challenged initial assumptions that increased access to education alone would be sufficient to delay marriage, underscoring the need to consider how education is experienced and understood within its social and cultural context.

Conducting this research also contributed to my development as a researcher. The process emphasized the value of reflexivity, particularly in recognizing how my own expectations shaped early interpretations of the data. Listening closely to participants' narratives required careful attention to nuance, contradiction, and uncertainty, reinforcing the importance of ethical sensitivity and contextual awareness in education research. It also highlighted the limitations of applying universal frameworks without sufficient engagement with local meanings and lived realities.

Overall, this study suggests that efforts to support adolescent girls' education in refugee settings must be understood as part of a broader social ecosystem, where education, protection, cultural

norms, and future aspirations are closely interconnected. While the findings point to significant and persistent barriers, they also reveal areas of potential change, particularly in the aspirations expressed by girls and the conditional support observed among some community members. These insights provide a grounded basis for the recommendations presented in the following section and contribute to ongoing discussions on how education in emergencies can be made more responsive to the lived experiences of displaced adolescent girls.

The findings demonstrate that adolescent girls' educational participation and early marriage in the Rohingya refugee camps are shaped by the interaction of social norms, household decision-making structures, institutional conditions, and perceptions of risk and protection. Community-level norms normalize early marriage as a protective and socially legitimate practice, while gendered household power relations limit girls' agency in educational decisions. At the same time, institutional factors such as school safety, infrastructure, availability of female teachers, and the perceived legitimacy of the Myanmar Curriculum mediate whether education is viewed as a viable alternative to marriage. These interacting influences create feedback loops in which perceived risks associated with schooling reinforce reliance on early marriage, while girls' aspirations and conditional community support signal potential entry points for change. This integrated analysis confirms the relevance of the conceptual framework and explains why interventions focused solely on access or awareness have had limited success in delaying early marriage in humanitarian settings.

5.3 Recommendation

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this study, the following recommendations are proposed to help address the educational exclusion of adolescent girls and the persistence of early

marriage in the Rohingya refugee camps. These recommendations are grounded in the perspectives of participants and reflect the limitations and scope of the research.

For Educational Practice

- Strengthening access to continuous secondary education opportunities for Rohingya adolescent girls, as the absence of education beyond the primary level emerged as a key factor contributing to dropout and early marriage. Providing clearer progression pathways may help families view education as a meaningful alternative to marriage.
- Improve the safety and gender sensitivity of learning environments, particularly in relation to overcrowding, sanitation facilities, and girls' mobility.
- Increase the presence of female teachers in learning centres, as girls' comfort and engagement were closely linked to the availability of women educators. This may be particularly important during adolescence, when issues of privacy and modesty become more pronounced.
- Enhance the perceived relevance and acceptability of the curriculum, as community concerns regarding the alignment of education with cultural values influenced support for girls' continued schooling. Greater community engagement around curriculum content may contribute to increased trust in formal education.

For Community Engagement and Policy Consideration

- Encourage dialogue with parents and community members around girls' education and early marriage, recognizing that many decisions are shaped by protection concerns rather

than opposition to education itself. Approaches that acknowledge these concerns may be more effective than those that rely solely on awareness-raising.

- Promote closer alignment between education and protection initiatives, as the study indicates that families often evaluate schooling through a protection lens. Addressing safety concerns alongside educational access may improve retention for adolescent girls.

For Further Research

- Further research is needed to explore fathers' roles in educational and marital decision-making, as this study identified male authority as a central influence but did not examine these perspectives in depth.
- Longitudinal research could help examine how sustained access to secondary education influences attitudes toward early marriage over time, particularly in protracted displacement settings.

In summary, this chapter has interpreted the study's findings to deepen understanding of the complex and interconnected factors influencing adolescent girls' education and early marriage in the Rohingya refugee camps. Through discussion, reflection, and the development of contextually grounded recommendations, the chapter highlights how social norms, protection concerns, and institutional constraints shape educational decisions and opportunities for girls. Together, the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations provide a coherent synthesis of the research, linking empirical findings to broader academic debates and practical considerations, while laying the groundwork for future research and informed action in similar humanitarian contexts.

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ANNEXS

- Annex 1 : Survey Questionnaire for Adolescent Girls
- Annex 2 : Survey Questionnaire for Teacher
- Annex 3: Survey Questionnaire for Education Field Staffs
- Annex 4: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Adolescent Girls
- Annex 4: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Parents
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Annex 1 : Survey Questionnaire for Adolescent Girls

Study Title: Exploring Adolescent Girls’ Perceptions of Marriage, Educational Challenges, and Motivations for Change: A Mixed-Method Study

Target Group: Adolescent girls (aged 15-18) enrolled in Secondary Grades in Learning Centres in Rohingya refugee camps

Purpose of the survey: This survey aims to explore adolescent girls’ perceptions of marriage, the challenges they face in continuing education, and the factors that could motivate them, their parents, and their communities to support their education and delay marriage. The study focuses on girls aged 15-18 who are enrolled in Learning Centres in Rohingya refugee camps.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. How old are you? (*Select one*)

- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18

2. What is the highest grade you have completed?

- Grade 5
- Grade 6
- Grade 7

- Grade 8
- Other (please specify) _____

3. Who do you currently live with?

- Both parents
- Mother only
- Father only
- Relatives
- Others (please specify) _____

4. Do any of your siblings (sisters) go to school?

- Yes
- No

Section 2: Perceptions of Marriage and Its Impact on Education

5. What does marriage mean for a girl in your community? *(Select all that apply)*

- A way to secure a better future
- A family responsibility
- A personal choice
- A duty to uphold family honor
- Other (please specify) _____

6. At what age do you think girls should get married? *(Write your answer in years)*

- _____ years

7. At what age do girls in your community usually get married? *(Select one)*

- Before 15
- 15-17
- 18-20
- Above 20

8. Who influences a girl's decision to marry the most? *(Select one)*

- Parents
- Relatives
- Religious leaders
- Peers
- The girl herself
- Other (please specify) _____

9. Have you ever felt pressure from your family to marry or leave school? (*Select one*)

- Yes, pressure to marry
- Yes, pressure to leave school
- Yes, pressure for both
- No, I have not felt pressure

10. Have you ever felt pressure from your community to marry or leave education? (*Select one*)

- Yes, pressure to marry
- Yes, pressure to leave school
- Yes, pressure for both
- No, I have not felt pressure

11. If yes, who is pressuring you the most? (*Select one*)

- Parents
- Extended family members
- Religious leaders
- Peers
- Other (please specify) _____

11. Do you think girls can continue education after marriage?

- Yes
- No

12. How does marriage affect a girl's education? (*Select all that apply*)

- No impact, girls can continue studying after marriage
- Girls must drop out after marriage
- Family responsibilities increase, making education difficult
- Husband/family may not allow further studies
- Other (please specify) _____

13. Have you seen any of your friends leave school because of marriage?

- Yes
- No

14. If yes, at what age did they leave school to get married? (*Write the age in years*)

- _____ years

Section 3: Barriers to Education and Cultural Expectations

15. What are the biggest challenges for girls in continuing education? (*Select all that apply*)

- Distance to school is too far
- Lack of safe transportation
- Lack of female teachers
- Family responsibilities (household chores, caregiving)
- Menstruation-related challenges
- School facilities (e.g., lack of toilets, inadequate classrooms)
- Economic difficulties (family cannot afford school-related expenses)
- Parents do not allow further education
- Fear of harassment or safety concerns
- Marriage expectations
- Other (please specify) _____

16. How far is your learning center from your home? (*Select one*)

- Less than 15 minutes walking distance
- 15-30 minutes walking distance

- More than 30 minutes walking distance

17. Do you feel safe traveling to and from school?

- Yes
- No

18. If no, what are the main safety concerns? (*Select all that apply*)

- Fear of harassment
- Risk of kidnapping/violence
- Road conditions (e.g., unsafe pathways, flood-prone areas)
- Other (please specify) _____

19. What is the most common reason girls stop attending school? (*Open-ended response*)

- Answer: _____

Section 4: Motivating Factors for Girls' Education

20. What would encourage you to stay in school and complete your education? (*Select all that apply*)

- Financial support (scholarships, stipends)
- More female teachers
- Safe learning environment
- Flexible learning schedules
- Support from parents and community
- Awareness campaigns against early marriage
- Other (please specify) _____

21. If you had to choose between education and marriage, what would you choose?

- Education
- Marriage

22. What kind of career or future do you hope to achieve after completing education? (*Open-ended response*)

- Answer: _____

Section 5: Role of Parents and Community in Supporting Education

23. Do you get support from your parents to attend school every day?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

If yes, what kind of support you receive from your parents?

Ans.

24. What would make your parents more supportive of your education? (*Select all that apply*)

- More awareness about the importance of girls' education
- Financial assistance for school-related expenses
- Religious/community leaders promoting education
- Schools providing a safer environment for girls
- Other (please specify) _____

24. Do community and religious leaders support girls' education? (*Select one*)

- Yes
- No
- Some do, but others do not

Overall open-ended questions

25. What changes are needed in your community to encourage more girls to complete secondary education?

- Answer: _____

26. If there was one thing that could help more girls stay in school, what do you think it would be?

- Answer: _____

27. Do you have any additional comments or thoughts about girls' education and marriage?

- Answer: _____

Annex 2: Survey Questionnaire for Rohingya Teachers

Study Title: Exploring Adolescent Girls' Perceptions of Marriage, Their Educational Challenges, and Motivating Factors for Change: A Mixed-Method Study

Target Group: Rohingya and Bangladeshi teachers (both male and female) teaching in Learning Centres in Rohingya refugee camps

Purpose of the Survey: This survey explores teachers' perspectives on the continuation of adolescent girls' education, barriers they face, and factors influencing early marriage. It seeks to understand how teachers perceive challenges and what strategies they believe could support girls to remain in school and delay marriage.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your age? (Select one)
 - ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-30
 - ☐ 31-40
 - ☐ Above 40
2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - ☐ Primary level (Grade 1-5)
 - ☐ Secondary level (Grade 6-8)
 - ☐ Higher secondary level (Grade 9-10)
 - ☐ Other (please specify) _____
3. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
4. How many years have you been teaching in Learning Centres?
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1-3 years
 - ☐ 4-6 years
 - ☐ More than 6 years

Section 2: Perceptions of Marriage and Its Impact on Education

5. What do you think marriage means for a girl in Rohingya community? (Select all that apply)
- ☐ A way to secure a better future
 - ☐ A family responsibility
 - ☐ A personal choice
 - ☐ A duty to uphold family honor
 - ☐ Other (please specify) _____
6. At what age do girls in Rohingya community usually get married? (Select one)
- ☐ Before 15
 - ☐ 15-17
 - ☐ 18-20
 - ☐ Above 20
7. Who influences a girl's decision to marry the most? (Select one)
- ☐ Father
 - ☐ Mother
 - ☐ Brother
 - ☐ Relatives
 - ☐ Religious leaders
 - ☐ The girl herself
 - ☐ Other (please specify) _____
8. Have you seen cases where adolescent girls leave school due to pressure to marry?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
9. If yes, who do you think is pressuring girls the most? (Select one)
- Father
 - Mother

- Brother
- Extended family members
- Religious leaders
- Other girls who got married
- Other (please specify) _____

11. Do you find Rohingya girls to continue education after marriage in the camps?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

12. According to your observation, How does marriage affect a girl's education in Rohingya camps? (Select all that apply)

- No impact, girls can continue studying after marriage
- Girls must drop out after marriage
- Family responsibilities increase, making education difficult
- Husband/family may not allow further studies
- Other (please specify) _____

13. Have you experienced any of your female students drop out due to marriage?

- Yes
- No

14. If yes, at what age do most girls leave school to get married? (Write the age in years)

- _____ years

Section 3: Barriers to Education and Cultural Expectations

15. What are the biggest challenges for adolescent girls in continuing education in camps? (Select all that apply)

- Distance to school is too far
- Lack of safety and security
- Lack of separate session

- Eve teasing
- Lack of female teachers
- Family responsibilities (household chores, caregiving)
- Menstruation-related challenges
- School facilities (e.g., lack of toilets, inadequate classrooms)
- Economic difficulties (family cannot afford school-related expenses)
- Parents do not allow further education
- Fear of harassment or safety concerns
- Marriage expectations
- Other (please specify) _____

16. What is the highest distance from Learning Centre to most of your students' shelter?
(Select one)

- Less than 10 minutes walking distance
- 15-30 minutes walking distance
- More than 30 minutes walking distance

17. Do you think adolescent girls feel safe traveling to and from school?

- Yes
- No

18. If no, what are the main safety concerns? (Select all that apply)

- Fear of harassment
- Risk of kidnapping/violence
- Eve teasing
- Shyness from the community members
- Road conditions (e.g., unsafe pathways, flood-prone areas)
- Other (please specify) _____

19. What do you think is the most common reason girls stop attending school? (Open-ended response)

- Answer: _____

Section 4: Motivating Factors for Girls' Education

20. What do you think would encourage more adolescent girls to stay in school? (Select all that apply)

- Financial support (scholarships, stipends)
- More female teachers
- Safe learning environment
- Flexible learning schedules
- Support from parents and community
- Awareness campaigns against early marriage
- Other (please specify) _____

21. If girls had to choose between education and marriage, what do you think they would choose?

- Education
- Marriage
- Education and marriage

22. If girls had to choose between education and marriage, what do you think their parent would choose?

- Education
- Marriage
- Education and marriage

23. In your opinion, what kind of career or future do most adolescent girls hope to achieve after completing education? (Open-ended response)

- Answer: _____

Section 5: Role of Parents and Community in Supporting Education

23. Do you think most parents support their daughters to continue education?

- Yes

- No
- Sometimes

24. If yes, what kind of support do parents provide? (Open-ended response)

- Answer: _____

25. What would make parents more supportive of their daughters to continue education and delay marriage? (Select all that apply)

- More awareness about the importance of girls' education
- Financial assistance for school-related expenses
- Religious/community leaders promoting education
- Schools providing a safer environment for girls
- Other (please specify) _____

26. Do community and religious leaders support girls' education?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Overall Open-Ended Questions

27. What changes are needed in the community to encourage more girls to complete secondary education and avail opportunities?

- Answer: _____

28. If there was one thing that could help more girls stay in school, what do you think it would be?

- Answer: _____

29. Do you have any additional comments or thoughts about girls' education and marriage?

- Answer: _____

Annex 3: Survey Questionnaire for Education Field Staff

Study Title: Exploring Adolescent Girls' Perceptions of Marriage, Their Educational Challenges, and Motivating Factors for Change: A Mixed-Method Study

Target Group: Education staff supporting Learning Centres in Rohingya refugee camps

Purpose of the Survey: This survey seeks to explore education field staff's observations and experiences in supporting adolescent education. It will assess barriers, gender-specific challenges, community attitudes, and strategies for improving access to and retention in education for both girls and boys.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your age? (Select one)
 - ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-30
 - ☐ 31-40
 - ☐ Above 40
2. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other (please specify) _____
3. How many years have you been working in education programs in the refugee camps?
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1-3 years
 - ☐ 4-6 years
 - ☐ More than 6 years
4. What is your role in the education program? (Select one)

- Learning Centre Supervisor
- Education Officer/Coordinator
- Community Mobilizer
- Field Monitor
- Other (please specify) _____

Section 2: Observations on Gender and Education

5. In your observation, do boys and girls have equal access to education in the refugee camps?

- Yes
- No

6. If no, what are the main reasons girls have lower access to education? (Select all that apply)

- Household responsibilities (chores, caregiving)
- Parental restrictions
- Early marriage expectations
- Safety concerns while traveling to school
- Lack of female teachers
- Economic challenges (families prioritizing boys' education)
- Other (please specify) _____

7. Who influences the decision for a girl to continue or drop out of school the most? (Select one)

- Father
- Mother
- Borthor
- Extended family members
- Religious leaders
- Community elders
- The child themselves
- Other (please specify) _____

8. What age do most girls stop attending school in your observation?

- Before 12
- 12-14
- 15-17
- 18 and above

Section 3: Barriers to Education for Girls

11. What are the most common barriers preventing girls from continuing education? (Select all that apply)

- Distance to Learning Centres
- Safety concerns while traveling
- Economic difficulties (families prioritizing work over school)
- Early marriage (especially for girls)
- Preference for religious education
- Lack of trained teachers
- Poor school infrastructure (e.g., lack of classrooms, toilets, learning materials)
- Other (please specify) _____

12. Have you observed girls dropping out due to early marriage?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

13. What impact does early marriage have on a girl's education? (Select all that apply)

- Girls must drop out after marriage
- Increased family responsibilities make studying difficult
- Husband/family may not allow further education
- Some girls return to education after marriage

- Other (please specify) _____

14. Have you observed cases where married girls continue their education in the camps?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Section 4: Community Attitudes Toward Education

17. Do you think parents in the refugee camps support their daughters education?

- Yes
- Yes, but they prioritize boys' education over girls'
- No, many parents discourage school attendance
- Sometimes

18. If parents do not support girls to continue education, what are the main reasons? (Select all that apply)

- Financial struggles
- Preference for religious education
- Belief that education is not useful for their children's future
- Cultural norms that discourage girls' education
- Other (please specify) _____

19. How do religious and community leaders influence girls access and completion in education in the camps?

- They encourage children to attend school
- They discourage formal education and prioritize religious learning
- Their influence varies by community
- Other (please specify) _____

Section 5: Recommendations for Improving Adolescent Education

20. What do you think would help more girls stay in school? (Select all that apply)

- More female teachers
- Awareness campaigns on the importance of girls' education
- Financial support (scholarships, stipends)
- Safer learning environments
- Flexibility in learning schedules
- Community and religious leaders promoting education
- Other (please specify) _____

22. What do you think is the most effective way to delay early marriage among girls? (Select all that apply)

- Awareness campaigns targeting parents and community members
- Financial incentives for girls to stay in school
- Support from religious and community leaders
- Teaching girls about their rights and future opportunities
- Other (please specify) _____

23. If you could implement one change to improve secondary education for girls in refugee camps, what would it be? (Open-ended response)

- Answer: _____

Overall Open-Ended Questions

24. What are the most urgent changes needed to support girls' secondary education completion in refugee camps?

- Answer: _____

25. Do you have any additional comments or observations regarding girls' education and child marriage related challenges in the refugee camps?

- Answer: _____

ANNEX 4: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for Adolescent Girls

Target Group: *Adolescent girls (aged 15-18) enrolled in Learning Centres in Rohingya refugee camps*

Purpose of the FGD

This FGD will explore adolescent girls' perceptions of marriage, education, and cultural expectations, as well as barriers and motivations influencing their educational decisions. The goal is to gain deeper qualitative insights that complement survey findings and inform intervention strategies.

A. Introduction & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

1. Can you introduce yourself by telling us one dream you have for your future?



Notes from responses:

B. Understanding Perceptions of Marriage (20 minutes)

2. What does marriage mean to you?



Notes from responses:

3. At what age do girls in your community usually get married?



Notes from responses:

4. How do you feel about getting marriage at early age? Is it seen as something positive or negative? Why?

 **Notes from responses:**

C. Barriers to Education ()

5. Do you face challenges to attend class regularly in Learning Centre? Why? you face in attending classes in Learning Centre regularly??

 **Notes from responses:**

6.What are your main concerns to while attending LC regularly? Can you elaborate the concerns? ?

 **Notes from responses:**

7. Do you see a challenge to attend LC with male teacher? Do you find such concerns from your parents?

8. Who do you find the most difficult to convince to attend LC regularly?

9. How do household responsibilities and family expectations impact continue learning in LC?

 **Notes from responses:**

8. Do boys and girls have the same opportunities in education? If not, why?

 **Notes from responses:**

D. Motivating Factors for Girls' Education (25 minutes)

9. What would help girls continue their education?

 **Notes from responses:**

10. what would motivate you to continue education and delay early marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

11. What would motivate your parents to allow you to continue education and delay early marriage?

11. What do you think on the role of religious leaders and how can religious and community leaders support girls' education?

 **Notes from responses:**

12. According to you, What kind of support you are seeking from your parents to continue education and get more opportunities in camps? ?

 **Notes from responses:**

13. What role your parents should play in delaying your marriage?

E. Conclusion & Final Reflections (10 minutes)

13. If you could change one thing to help girls stay in school, what would it be?

 **Notes from responses:**

14. What is your message to other girls about education and marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

15. is there anything you would like to share or ask?

Additional Note-Taking Space for Observations

Group Dynamics Observations:

- Were participants **actively engaged or hesitant**?
- Did any **disagreements or conflicting views** emerge?
- Any **notable emotional reactions** to specific topics?

 **Observations:**

Key Themes & Patterns Emerging from the Discussion:

- **Common concerns:**

- **Shared motivations:**

- **Unexpected insights:**

ANNEX 5: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for Parents

Purpose of the FGD:

This FGD will explore parents' perspectives on adolescent girls' marriage, education, and future opportunities. It aims to understand the cultural and social factors influencing their decisions, the support they need to allow girls to continue education, and their attitudes toward girls engaging in income-generating activities. The discussion will help design strategies to encourage parents to delay marriage and support girls' education.

A. Introduction & Icebreaker

1. What kind of future you envision for your daughter who is currently studying in learning facilities?

Notes from responses:

B. Parents' Perceptions of Adolescent Girls' Marriage

2. What does marriage mean for a girl in your community?

 **Notes from responses:**

3. At what age do adolescent girl in Rohingya community usually get married? What are the main reasons for early marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

4. What are the key benefits and challenges of marrying a girl early?

- How do you decide when a girl is ready for marriage?

- Who else do you need to consult to finalize the marriage? Who holds the most decision-making power?
 -  **Notes from responses:**
-

5. Have you ever considered delaying your daughter's marriage? Why or why not?

- What concerns or fears do you have about delaying marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

6. If you could decide freely, at what age would you prefer your daughter to get married? Why?

 **Notes from responses:**

C. Future Plans for Daughters – Education vs. Marriage

7. What plans do you have for your daughter's future?

- Do you want her to continue studying? Until what level?
- Do you think completing education will benefit her and your family? In what way?

 **Notes from responses:**

8. How do you balance your daughter's education with household responsibilities and marriage expectations?

- What challenges do you face in allowing her to continue school?
- Do you think education helps or delays a girl's ability to fulfill her family responsibilities?

 **Notes from responses:**

9. If your daughter wants to continue education beyond what is typical in the community, would you support her decision? what would influence your decision to support or stop her?

 **Notes from responses:**

D. Barriers and Motivational Factors for Girls' Education

10. What are the barriers you face to send your daughter to education? What are the reasons you need your daughter at home?
11. What would encourage you to allow your daughter to continue her education instead of marrying early?
- What is the most important support you need to continue her education? financially support, social approval, or religious guidance help?

 **Notes from responses:**

11. What concerns or pressures do you face from relatives or the community when making decisions about your daughter's education and marriage? Who makes decision on girls early marriage from community?

 **Notes from responses:**

12. If there were more learning opportunities for girls in the camp (such as skills training or secondary education), would you support your daughter's participation? Why or why not?

 **Notes from responses:**

13. What role do religious leaders and community elders play in your decision about your daughter's education?

- Would it help if they actively encouraged girls' education?

 **Notes from responses:**

E. Girls' Participation in Income-Generating Activities

14. Do you believe girls should be involved in income-generating activities? Why or why not?

- What kinds of work do you think are suitable for girls?
- Are there concerns about girls working and earning money?

 **Notes from responses:**

15. If your daughter had an opportunity to learn skills (such as tailoring, handicrafts, or digital skills) that could help her earn money in the future, would you allow her to participate? Why or why not?

 **Notes from responses:**

16. Do you think earning an income would help your daughter delay marriage? Why or why not?

 **Notes from responses:**

F. Conclusion & Final Reflections

17. If you could change one thing to help your daughter continue education and gain opportunities, what would it be?

 **Notes from responses:**

18. What message would you like to give to other parents about supporting girls' education and delaying marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

19. Is there anything else you would like to add or ask?

 **Notes from responses:**

A. ANNEX 6: Demographic profile

- **Camp and block information.**
 - **Notes from responses:**
-
-

Add questions related to other factors (your research questions 2)i

B. Religious and Cultural Views on Marriage & Education

2. What does Islam (or your religious perspective) say about girls' education?

- Are there any religious teachings that support girls' education?

 **Notes from responses:**

3. At what age do girls should get married?

- What are the main reasons for early marriage?

 **Notes from responses:**

4. How do you think early marriage impacts a girl's life and her family?

 **Notes from responses:**

5. In your opinion, should girls be encouraged to complete their education before getting married? Why or why not??

 **Notes from responses:**

C. Barriers and Community Concerns

6. What are the biggest concerns that parents have about sending their daughters to school?

- How do parents seek your guidance when they have concerns about sending their daughters to school??

 **Notes from responses:**

7. Do you believe that formal education does not align with religious or cultural values. What are your thoughts on this?

 **Notes from responses:**

8. Do you think there are concerns about girls being taught by male teachers?

Notes from responses:

9. How does this impact parents' decisions?

 **Notes from responses:**

D. Role of Religious Leaders in Supporting Girls' Education

9. What role do you think religious leaders can play in encouraging parents to support their daughters' education?

 **Notes from responses:**

10. Have you ever spoken to families about the importance of girls' education? What reactions have you received?

 **Notes from responses:**

11. If religious leaders actively encouraged girls' education in Friday sermons or community meetings, do you think it would change parents' attitudes? Why or why not?

 **Notes from responses:**

E. Opportunities for Change & Future Support

- 12.

 **Notes from responses:**

13. What kind of support or training would help religious leaders to advocate for girls' education more effectively?

 **Notes from responses:**

14. What message would you like to give to parents and the community about the importance of education for girls?

 **Notes from responses:**

Annex 6: Consent Letter for Focus Group Discussion for Teacher

[Date]

Dear [Teacher's Name],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to inform you about an exciting opportunity to participate in an in-depth interview as part of my research study. The purpose of this interview is to gain insights into your experiences and perspectives on English language instruction at your school.

Interview Details:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. If you are willing to participate, please read and complete the enclosed consent form and return it to me by [Deadline].

Consent Form:

I, [Teacher's Name], hereby provide permission for my participation in the in-depth interview as part of the research study on English language instruction.

Signature of Teacher: _____

Date: _____ 77

Your contribution to this study is invaluable, and I appreciate your willingness to share your insights with me. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [Contact Information].

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A

Appendix F. Consent Letter for the FGD for Parents

Dear Parents/ Guardian,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. We are pleased to let you know about an amazing chance for your child to take part in a focus group discussion (FGD). The purpose of this FGD is to learn about your child's and a few of their classmates' experiences and perspectives about their English language learning in a small group discussion.

Date and Time:

The involvement of your child is completely voluntary. If you consent to your child's participation, kindly fill out and submit the enclosed form.

Consent Form:

I, [Parent/Guardian Name], hereby provide permission for my child, [child's Name], to attend the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date: _____

As the child participating in the focus group discussion, I, [Child's Name], agree to take part voluntarily.

Signature of Child: _____

Date: _____

Kindly return this signed consent form to the school by [Deadline].

Regards,

X Community School (Keeping the anonymity of the school for this paper)