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The Turning Point of Puberty:

Social Norms, Household Decision-Making, and Institutional Conditions

Shaping Educational Participation Among Rohingya Adolescent Girls

in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

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Declaration of Originality

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been presented in fulfilment of other course requirements at any university.

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Abstract

Rohingya adolescent girls in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, face educational participation conditions that deteriorate sharply after puberty. While younger girls attend learning centres with moderate family support, older girls are increasingly subject to mobility restrictions, domestic labour demands, marriage expectations, and social monitoring that make continued participation difficult. This thesis asks: how do social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar?

The study uses a qualitative case study design. Data were collected during fieldwork in December 2025 and January 2026, comprising 15 in-depth interviews with Rohingya adolescent girls aged 12 to 18, 10 interviews with parents and caregivers, and 5 key informant interviews with education practitioners. Analysis followed a hybrid thematic approach combining deductive codes drawn from the research question and literature with inductive codes emerging from the data, oriented toward identifying social mechanisms rather than listing barriers.

The central finding is that puberty functions as a social threshold that transforms girls' education from a relatively accepted childhood activity into a socially monitored and reputation-sensitive one. This reclassification activates interlocking mechanisms: honor and reputation concerns restrict older girls' public visibility; safety fears - physical and socially interpreted - produce escort requirements that make attendance conditional on family availability; household labour conflicts with learning centre schedules; inadequate Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) facilities make attending school during menstruation undignified; and low institutional trust reduces parents' willingness to bear the social costs of daughters' participation.

The thesis offers a mechanism-based account of gendered educational exclusion in a protracted displacement context, moving beyond enumerating barriers to explain how and why attendance declines. Practically, the findings suggest that gender-responsive education in this setting requires attention to social acceptability alongside physical access - through female staff, girls-only spaces, MHM support, flexible scheduling, parent engagement, and safeguarding pathways. These are context-sensitive implications drawn from participant accounts, not claims about proven interventions.

Keywords: Rohingya; refugee education; adolescent girls; gender norms; educational participation; menstrual hygiene management; qualitative case study; Cox's Bazar

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List of Abbreviations

BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities (NGO)
CiC	Camp-in-Charge
EiE	Education in Emergencies
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence
HBL	Home-Based Learning
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LC	Learning centre
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WVS	World Values Survey

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and research problem

Rohingya adolescent girls in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, face educational conditions that change markedly as they grow older. Younger girls - those aged ten, eleven, twelve - attend learning centres run by NGOs and community volunteers with moderate family support and relative freedom of movement. By the time the same girls reach thirteen or fourteen, that support begins to erode. By fifteen or sixteen, many are no longer attending at all. The change is not simply a function of distance, cost, or institutional availability. It reflects something more specific: what it means, socially and institutionally, for a girl of that age to be seen in public, to be learning alongside or near boys, to be moving through camp space without escort, and to be developing aspirations that may conflict with the domestic and marital futures her community expects of her.

This thesis takes that age-specific deterioration in girls' educational participation as its central empirical problem. Cox's Bazar hosts one of the world's largest concentrations of displaced people, with over one million Rohingya refugees living in a settlement of camps that has grown dramatically since the mass displacement of August 2017. Within this settlement, education is provided through an NGO-mediated system of learning centres that is present but structurally fragile: under-resourced, age-limited, and variable in quality. For older adolescent girls in particular, the system offers few adapted options, and the social conditions surrounding participation are, if anything, more constraining than in settled communities, due to the density and permeability of camp life. Understanding why older girls leave - or never enrol - requires attending to the mechanisms through which social norms, household decisions, and institutional conditions operate on participation, not only to the structural facts of what provision is available.

The documentation of girls' educational disadvantage in Cox's Bazar is not new. Research by Guglielmi et al. (2020), Plan International (2018), Hossain (2024), and Østby et al. (2023) has

established that a sharp attendance decline begins around ages 12 to 14 and that girls' participation lags substantially behind boys from that point onward.

What remains less fully developed is an account of the processes behind that pattern - the mechanisms through which puberty, social monitoring, safety concerns, domestic labour, facility inadequacy, and institutional distrust collectively shape whether a girl continues, reduces, or ends her educational participation. This thesis attempts to provide that account.

1.2 Research question and sub-questions

The main research question guiding this thesis is:

How do social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?

This question is explanatory rather than evaluative: it asks how and why, not how can. Recommendations and practical implications are developed later in the thesis, after the empirical analysis, rather than serving as the framing orientation. Four sub-questions guide the analysis:

1. What sociocultural, economic, and institutional conditions shape adolescent girls' participation in learning centres, and through what processes do they operate?
2. How do girls, caregivers, and education providers explain these barriers and the decisions surrounding girls' attendance?
3. What mechanisms link puberty, safety perceptions, reputation concerns, household labour, and institutional trust to girls' educational participation or dropout?
4. What program conditions appear to make education more acceptable, dignified, and feasible for older adolescent girls?

Together, these sub-questions move from description (what conditions exist) through explanation (how they operate) toward implication (what conditions help). The analytical emphasis falls on the third sub-question - the mechanism question - which is the level at which this thesis aims to make its primary contribution.

1.3 Significance of the study

The study contributes to two overlapping debates. The first is the literature on gendered educational exclusion in displacement settings, which has documented a decline in attendance among adolescent girls through quantitative work (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Hossain, 2024; Østby et al., 2023) but has yet to produce process-level accounts of how and why this decline occurs. Most existing work identifies correlates - age, gender, poverty, safety - without explaining the mechanisms through which they produce exclusion. This thesis argues that mechanism explanation requires a different method and analytical orientation; it challenges the implicit assumption that identifying correlates is equivalent to understanding processes. The second debate concerns how social norms, household agency, and institutional conditions interact in contexts of protracted displacement. The camp setting in Cox's Bazar is analytically distinctive - not merely a difficult background condition - because the density of living arrangements, the governance role of majhis, and the protracted nature of displacement together create a specific ecology of norm enforcement that shapes what puberty means for girls' education. Cox's Bazar is chosen not for convenience; these features make the mechanisms more visible and their interactions more traceable than in more dispersed settings.

The study does not claim to be representative of all Rohingya communities or to establish causal effects. It is a qualitative case study with an interpretive orientation, and its claims are analytic rather than inferential. Within those boundaries, however, it addresses a gap that both academic researchers and humanitarian practitioners have identified: the need for a deeper, more process-oriented understanding of why older girls in protracted displacement settings stop going to school.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is organized in six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on refugee education, gender-inclusive education, adolescence and puberty, social norms and honor, safety and mobility, household decision-making, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), and institutional trust, concluding with a conceptual framework that structures the analysis. Chapter 3 describes the research design, fieldwork process, dataset, and analytical approach, including the hybrid thematic coding strategy and the mechanism focus. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings from 30 interview files across three stakeholder groups - 15 girl interview files, 10 parent/caregiver interview files, and 5 key informant interview files - organized around the mechanisms through which educational

participation is shaped. Chapter 5 interprets the findings in relation to the research question and literature, discusses the theoretical contribution, and draws out practical implications for gender-responsive education programming. Chapter 6 concludes by summarizing the central argument and the study's contributions and identifying directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framing

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature necessary to understand how social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar. Rather than aiming for comprehensive coverage of any single field, it selects the conceptual tools needed to interpret the empirical findings in Chapter 4. The organizing principle is mechanism-based: each section corresponds to a process through which a social, material, or institutional factor shapes girls' educational participation, not merely a condition that correlates with it. Section 2.10 draws the threads together into a conceptual framework that structures the analysis.

2.2 Education in emergencies and refugee education

Access to education in humanitarian settings is understood in international policy frameworks as both a fundamental right and a critical protective mechanism. Formal commitments to education in emergencies, articulated through instruments such as the Incheon Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals, proceed from the recognition that schooling provides structure, psychosocial protection, and future opportunity for displaced children (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). In practice, however, the realization of these commitments in protracted refugee situations is fragile. Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) demonstrate that even where refugees are nominally included in national education systems, meaningful participation remains constrained by questions of language, certification, quality, and social acceptance. The formal presence of educational provision does not guarantee substantive access, particularly for older children and for girls.

The Rohingya refugee situation in Cox's Bazar is a case of protracted displacement on an exceptional scale. Shohel (2022) documents that the learning centres established in the camps by NGOs and coordinating agencies operate under severe resource constraints, rely heavily on Rohingya community teachers with limited training, face persistent instability in funding cycles, and until recently lacked a standardized curriculum. The language question - Rohingya children are taught in

a context where neither Bengali nor formal Burmese is their primary spoken language - creates additional barriers to literacy and retention (Shohel, 2022). The consequence is an educational system that is formally present across the camps but functionally patchy, particularly for older children who have outgrown the level of instruction available at most learning centres.

Gendered exclusion compounds these structural limitations. Hossain (2024), drawing on multilevel analysis of survey data from Rohingya refugee communities in Bangladesh, finds that being female is a significant independent predictor of educational non-participation after controlling for household-level variables, and that this gender gap widens substantially with age. Guglielmi et al. (2020), in a GAGE/ODI policy brief focused specifically on Cox's Bazar, document a sharp drop-off in girls' attendance beginning around ages 12 to 14, with attendance among girls aged 15 to 18 substantially lower than among boys of the same age. The pattern is not unique to this context - refugee girls consistently face higher dropout rates and lower continuation rates than refugee boys in protracted settings - but its steepness and early onset in Cox's Bazar are distinctive features that require explanation beyond the structural characteristics of the learning centre system alone (Østby et al., 2023).

2.3 Gender-inclusive education in displacement

Gender inclusion in education is routinely measured through enrollment ratios, but this metric obscures the distinction between getting girls into a classroom once and sustaining their participation over time. The literature on gender-inclusive education, particularly as applied to humanitarian contexts, has increasingly moved toward understanding participation as a multi-dimensional condition that depends on safety, dignity, social acceptability, the gender of teaching staff, the physical infrastructure of the learning environment, and the everyday conditions - scheduling, route distance, available escort, domestic labour demands - that make attendance possible or impossible on any given day (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Plan International, 2018). Framing inclusion in these terms shifts the analytical question from why girls are absent to what conditions must be in place for their presence to be sustainable. Gender-inclusive education refers to the broader goal of equitable access, participation, dignity, and recognition, whereas gender-responsive education refers to the specific institutional and programmatic practices through which that goal may be pursued; the two terms are used in this thesis with that distinction in mind.

Plan International's (2018) research among Rohingya adolescent girls illustrates why this shift matters. Girls in the camps describe wanting to attend school, express clear aspirations for learning and future employment, and identify specific features of educational programs - female teachers, girls-only spaces, accessible locations - as conditions under which their attendance would be supported by their families. Their accounts do not primarily describe opposition to education as a value; they describe the gap between a valued activity and the conditions under which that activity is practically and socially feasible.

A methodological note is warranted here. Feminist scholars have cautioned against representing women and girls in the Global South as a homogeneous, passive, and uniformly victimized category - an interpretive move that substitutes the researcher's framework for the diversity of women's actual experiences (Mohanty, 2003). The girls in this dataset are not a uniform group; they differ by age, marital status, household composition, and the specific conditions of their interview settings. The analysis that follows treats these differences as analytically significant rather than as noise around a single experience of exclusion.

2.4 Adolescent girls, puberty, and education

Adolescence is not simply a biological stage that all individuals pass through in the same way; it is a socially managed transition whose content is shaped by context, gender, and community values. The social meaning assigned to puberty varies considerably across settings, but in contexts organized around traditional gender norms and family authority, girls' bodily maturation tends to produce a reorganization of their social status that has direct educational consequences. Menstruation functions as the publicly legible signal of this reorganization: it marks a girl as having crossed into a new social category - young woman, potential wife, bearer of family reputation - and activates a set of expectations about modesty, domestic role, and public visibility that were not applied to her as a child (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Hossain, 2024).

The educational consequence of this status shift is an age-graded dropout pattern that the literature documents repeatedly across conservative and resource-constrained settings. Guglielmi et al. (2020) find that in Cox's Bazar, attendance among girls is relatively stable through early adolescence and then declines sharply beginning around ages 12 to 14. Hossain's (2024) multilevel analysis confirms that age functions as an independent risk factor for educational non-participation among Rohingya girls, even after household poverty and other structural variables are accounted for.

The pattern indicates that something specific to older adolescence - distinct from poverty alone - is driving dropout, and the literature consistently identifies puberty-linked social expectations as the proximate mechanism.

The literature on household decision-making adds an important clarification: it is often the anticipation of puberty's social consequences, rather than puberty itself, that triggers educational withdrawal. Lloyd and Mensch (2008), analyzing data from sub-Saharan Africa, find that union formation - marriage or cohabitation - is more strongly associated with girls leaving school than pregnancy or childbirth, and that this association holds even for girls who leave school before a union is formally contracted. The implication is that families begin repositioning daughters toward marriage and domestic roles before marriage occurs, and that this repositioning reduces investment in continued education. The mechanism is anticipatory: families respond to girls' changed or anticipated social status, not only to events after they occur.

2.5 Social norms, honor, reputation, and gendered social control

Social norms are not simply individual beliefs about appropriate behaviour; they are conditional expectations about what others will do and how others will respond to one's own behaviour. Bicchieri's (2006) account of norms is useful here: a norm is sustained when individuals both expect others to follow it (an empirical expectation) and expect sanctions for non-conformity (a normative expectation). This means that norms can persist even when many individuals privately disagree with them, because the expectation of social sanction is sufficient to generate conformity regardless of private preference. Applied to girls' education, this insight matters considerably: parents who might individually support their daughters' schooling may nonetheless withdraw them if they expect neighbours and community members to sanction that decision. The community-level enforcement of the norm, not the household-level belief in it, is what makes the norm behaviourally effective.

In the context of Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazar, the norms most directly relevant to girls' education are organized around family honor and female reputation. The underlying logic is that girls' bodies and behaviour are understood as carriers of family status: a girl who is seen in public without appropriate covering or escort, who is observed interacting with unrelated men, or who remains in education past the age at which marriage is expected is understood to be exposing her family to reputational risk. Guglielmi et al. (2020) document this dynamic explicitly, showing that

parents in Cox's Bazar consistently cite family honor and community opinion - not only safety in the physical sense - as reasons for restricting older girls' mobility and educational participation. The 'spoiled girl' narrative, in which continued education after puberty is read as evidence of romantic or sexual engagement, functions as the specific reputational threat that makes educational continuation risky for families, not only for girls.

The modesty or *purdah* framework reinforces this logic by providing a positively framed account of girls' spatial confinement to the home. Girls' presence in the domestic space is not experienced solely as a restriction; it is also understood as respectful, protective, and consistent with religious and cultural values (Plan International, 2018). The consequence is that educational withdrawal can be framed, by families and communities, as a caring and responsible act - protecting a daughter from public scrutiny and preparing her for married life - rather than as an act of exclusion. This framing makes the norm harder to challenge from the outside, because it is embedded in value commitments that families hold sincerely.

Community surveillance operates as the enforcement mechanism for these norms. Guglielmi et al. (2020) note that in Cox's Bazar, community members actively comment on families whose older daughters are visibly mobile, attending learning centres, or seen in public without appropriate covering. This surveillance need not result in a formal sanction to be effective; the anticipation of comment is sufficient to shape household decisions. Norris and Inglehart (2003, 2004) provide useful macro-level context here: in settings oriented toward traditional and survival values, community cohesion and communal reputation carry structurally higher social weight than individual autonomy or self-expression.

2.6 Safety, mobility, and protection concerns

Safety concerns operate as a mechanism that restricts girls' attendance through two analytically distinct yet practically intertwined channels. The first is physical: real or perceived risks on routes to learning centres - harassment, abduction, violence - that parents cite as reasons for restricting girls' independent movement. The second is social: the norm that an unescorted girl is inherently unsafe regardless of actual incident risk, because her visible, unaccompanied presence exposes her to community gossip, unwanted male attention, and the reputational harm that the honor system treats as functionally equivalent to physical harm. Both channels produce the same

behavioural requirement - a family member must accompany the girl - but they produce it through different logics.

The analytical separation of these two channels matters because each calls for a different response. Improved physical security along routes - lighting, patrolling, learning centre relocation - addresses the first channel without necessarily affecting the second. A family that withholds a daughter's attendance because unescorted mobility is itself read as dishonorable will not change its behaviour simply because the route becomes demonstrably safer. Guglielmi et al. (2020) document both channels in Cox's Bazar: parents cite physical risks including harassment and kidnapping fears, but they also describe the social unacceptability of older girls moving independently through camp spaces, even in the absence of specific incidents. Plan International (2018) and Hossain (2024) similarly find that safety concerns - both physical and reputationally interpreted - are among the most consistently cited factors limiting older Rohingya girls' educational participation.

The escort requirement that both channels produce functions as an indirect structural barrier. It makes attendance conditional on the availability and willingness of a male family member or a senior woman - a condition that is not always met. Where no escort is available on a given day, attendance is impossible regardless of the girl's own desire to attend or the family's general willingness to support her education. This conditionality means that the safety barrier is not uniformly present or absent for any given girl; it varies with household composition, the availability of adult family members, and the relationship between the learning centre's schedule and the times when escorts are available. Østby et al. (2023) note that this conditionality is one reason why girls' attendance in displacement settings tends to be more irregular and more vulnerable to sudden disruption than boys', even within the same household.

2.7 Household decision-making, poverty, care work, and marriage expectations

Decisions about girls' education are not made by autonomous individuals but by households operating under constraints of poverty, gendered labour expectations, and community norms about female futures. The literature on household decision-making in low-income and displacement settings consistently shows that families assess educational investment for girls against a set of competing demands: domestic labour that girls are expected to perform, the timing of marriage, and the immediate costs of schooling relative to immediate household needs (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Hossain, 2024). These competing demands are not constant across a girl's adolescence; they intensify

after puberty, as girls are progressively prepared for the domestic and marital roles that community norms assign to adult women.

Poverty amplifies each of these mechanisms. The direct costs of schooling - materials, uniforms, transportation - are genuinely prohibitive for many families in the camps, where livelihoods are constrained, and aid rations are the primary food source. Guglielmi et al. (2020) document that families in Cox's Bazar frequently describe an inability to afford school materials as a reason for irregular attendance or dropout. The indirect cost of girls' labour - the domestic work foregone when a girl attends school - also carries real economic weight in households where cooking, cleaning, sibling care, and water-fetching are essential daily tasks that would otherwise fall to mothers already stretched by caregiving responsibilities. The schedule of learning centres, typically morning-based, conflicts with the peak demand period for domestic labour, creating a practical incompatibility that is experienced differently by younger girls (whose labour burden is lighter) and older girls (whose labour burden has intensified with puberty).

2.8 Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), facilities, and dignity

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) refers to the conditions under which women and adolescent girls are able to manage menstruation safely, privately, and without shame - conditions that require access to appropriate materials, adequate and private sanitation infrastructure, and an institutional environment that supports rather than stigmatizes girls' bodily needs (Sommer & Sahin, 2013). The literature consistently shows that where any of these conditions is absent, menstruation becomes a barrier to girls' school attendance. The mechanism is not simply material, however. Sommer and Sahin (2013) argue that menstruation functions as a social taboo as well as a practical management challenge, meaning that the shame associated with menstruation suppresses girls' disclosure of their needs and prevents institutions from addressing those needs explicitly. A girl who starts her period at school without appropriate supplies typically does not report it to a teacher; she quietly leaves and may not return for several days. This pattern makes MHM-related attendance loss largely invisible in aggregate data, where it accumulates as unexplained absence.

In humanitarian settings, MHM conditions are routinely inadequate. Shared toilet facilities - where they exist - lack the privacy and cleanliness necessary for girls to change materials during the school day. Supply chains for menstrual materials are disrupted in protracted displacement contexts, requiring girls and families to purchase materials they often cannot afford. Health facilities, where

girls might otherwise seek support for menstrual pain or irregular cycles, are under-resourced and may not offer appropriate menstrual health guidance (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Shohel, 2022). The cumulative effect is that older girls face a set of conditions in which managing menstruation at school is undignified and practically difficult, and in which asking for help would require disclosing something that community norms treat as unspeakable. The dignity argument is central here: education is not only a technical question of whether a girl can physically reach a learning centre, but a social question of whether she can participate in ways that do not require her to compromise her bodily privacy or her sense of respectability.

2.9 Institutional trust, learning centre quality, and parental engagement

Parents' decisions about sustaining their daughters' educational participation are conditioned not only by social norms and perceptions of safety but also by their assessment of what learning centres actually deliver. Where teaching is irregular, learning outcomes are perceived as low, and communication between the institution and the family is weak, the social and logistical costs of sending older girls out become harder to justify. Coleman (1988) argues that parental engagement and trust in educational institutions function as a form of social capital that supports educational continuation: where parents are integrated into the life of the school through regular communication and transparent information about their children's progress, they are more likely to invest in sustaining that involvement. The inverse also holds where institutional trust is low, parents are less likely to bear the costs of participation. Taken together, the literature reviewed in Sections 2.2 to 2.9 establishes a documented pattern: girls' educational participation in Cox's Bazar declines sharply after puberty (Guglielmi et al., 2020; Hossain, 2024; Østby et al., 2023). What the existing literature has done less fully is explain the processes through which this decline occurs - the mechanisms through which puberty, honor and reputation norms, safety perceptions, household labour demands, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) inadequacy, and institutional trust interact to produce that outcome. This thesis addresses that explanatory gap through a qualitative, mechanism-focused analysis grounded in first-hand interview data from three stakeholder groups.

In the context of the Cox's Bazar learning centre, Shohel (2022) documents concerns about teaching quality, inconsistent attendance by community teachers, and a lack of systematic communication with families. Guglielmi et al. (2020) find that parents express reservations about the educational value of learning centres and that, where affordable, families prefer private tutors who

offer more reliable and individualized instruction. The preference for private tutors is not simply an aesthetic one; it reflects a rational response to low institutional trust in a context where the social costs of educational participation are already high. A family is willing to incur those costs only if the educational return is meaningful. Where it is not perceived to be, the cost-benefit calculation shifts.

2.10 Conceptual framework

The preceding sections have assembled a set of conceptual tools from across several bodies of literature. This section draws them into a single analytical framework that structures the empirical analysis in the chapters that follow. The framework's central argument is that *puberty changes the social meaning of girls' education*. Before puberty, attending school is a relatively normal childhood activity, broadly accepted even in traditional value contexts because children - girls included - are not yet subject to the honor-based monitoring of sexuality and mobility that applies to adult women. After puberty, a girl who attends school is a girl who is publicly present, potentially mixing with boys, potentially developing aspirations that conflict with family and community expectations, and potentially exposing her family to the reputational risks that the honor system generates. This social reclassification of education - from ordinary childhood activity to reputation-sensitive adult

behaviour - activates a set of interlocking mechanisms that together determine whether girls continue, reduce, or stop participating.



The program features that participants and practitioners identify as supporting girls' participation - female teaching staff, girls-only learning spaces, flexible scheduling, parent engagement, safeguarding pathways, and MHM support - are not standalone solutions to isolated problems. Each addresses a specific mechanism in the framework: female staff reduces the honor-based objection to mixed-gender environments; girls-only spaces remove the moral regulation concern about boy-girl interaction; flexible scheduling addresses the household labour conflict; parent engagement builds the institutional trust that makes participation feel worth its social cost; safeguarding addresses the physical safety register; and MHM support restores the dignity condition that shared and inadequate facilities undermine. The framework predicts that these features function as buffers precisely because they are mechanism-specific - and that their effects are conditional on the intensity of the mechanisms they are designed to address.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how the study was designed, how data were collected and managed, how analysis was conducted, and what methodological boundaries shape the claims the thesis can responsibly make. Research questions about how social norms, household decisions, and institutional conditions shape girls' educational participation cannot be answered through statistical measurement alone. They require attending to meaning, process, and context - to how participants understand and explain their own experiences and decisions. The methodological choices described here reflect that requirement. The chapter closes by acknowledging limitations that qualify the findings developed in Chapter 4 but do not invalidate them.

3.2 Research design

This thesis uses a qualitative case study design. The case is the Rohingya refugee camp setting in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, examined through the specific lens of adolescent girls' educational participation. A case study design is appropriate when the research question asks how or why a phenomenon occurs within a bounded, real-world context, and when the conditions of that context are integral to the explanation rather than variables to be controlled away (Yin, 2018). Both conditions apply here: the social norms, household dynamics, and institutional arrangements that shape girls' education are inseparable from the specific conditions of protracted refugee displacement in Cox's Bazar, and they cannot be understood in abstraction from that setting.

The study is interpretive rather than positivist in orientation, situated within an interpretivist paradigm in which the aim is to understand social phenomena through the meanings participants assign to them rather than to measure or predict outcomes. It does not aim to measure the frequency of barriers or to test hypotheses about causal effects. It aims to understand the processes through which social, normative, and institutional factors shape participation - to open the 'black box' between

observable social conditions and educational outcomes by explaining how norms, household decisions, and institutional arrangements produce participation or exclusion, rather than simply documenting that they do. Consistent with this aim, the analysis is organized around mechanisms rather than around a list of variables, and claims are analytical rather than inferential. As is appropriate for qualitative design, the study interprets mechanisms and meanings but does not claim to establish causal effects; causal evaluation would require a different methodological approach and is deferred to future work.

3.3 Research site and context

Fieldwork was conducted in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, between December 2025 and January 2026. Cox's Bazar hosts one of the world's largest concentrations of displaced people, with over one million Rohingya refugees living in a cluster of camps that have expanded substantially since the mass displacement of 2017. The camps are densely populated, informally structured, and NGO-mediated: most services - including education, health, water, and sanitation - are provided through international and national NGOs operating under coordination frameworks led by UNHCR and the Government of Bangladesh, rather than through formal state infrastructure.

The camp setting is analytically relevant to the research question in ways that go beyond background context. Educational provision in the camps takes the form of learning centres run by NGOs, operating under resource and staffing constraints that directly affect the quality and continuity of instruction available. Community governance is organized partly through majhis - camp-level community leaders who play a significant gatekeeping role in household access, information flow, and social norm enforcement. Mobility within the camps is constrained by physical geography, security concerns, and gendered norms about who may move where and when. All these features shape the conditions under which girls' educational participation is negotiated, and they are treated in this thesis as part of the social ecology of the research question rather than as incidental background.

Specific camp numbers, block identifiers, and household-level location details are not included in this thesis. This is consistent with the ethical commitment to participant anonymity in a closely networked community setting where identifying details could inadvertently expose individuals.

3.4 Participants and sampling

The final analysis dataset comprises three stakeholder groups. The first group consists of 15 in-depth interviews with Rohingya adolescent girls aged 12 to 18. Girls in this age range were targeted because they span the transition period during which educational participation is most socially precarious, encompassing those still attending, those who have reduced attendance, those who have dropped out, and those who were married before the standard school-leaving age. The second group consists of 10 interviews with parents and caregivers, including both mothers and fathers, providing the household decision-making perspective on girls' education. The third group consists of 5 key informant interviews with education practitioners and community-relevant actors, providing an institutional and practitioner vantage point on the conditions affecting girls' participation. The 30 interview files provide a rich multi-perspective qualitative dataset spanning three stakeholder groups

Sampling was purposive throughout. Participants were selected to achieve variation across analytically relevant dimensions: age band within the adolescent range (12-14 versus 15-18), current schooling status (attending versus not attending or dropped out), and marital status, where relevant. The multi-stakeholder design was deliberate: girls, caregivers, and practitioners experience and explain the same educational participation decisions from different positions, and comparing those accounts is part of the analytical strategy rather than a secondary concern. No claim is made that the sample is statistically representative of the broader population of Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar. Purposive, qualitative samples are designed to generate analytical depth rather than to support population-level inference, and findings are presented accordingly.

3.5 Access negotiation and fieldwork process

Access in a refugee camp setting operates at two levels: administrative and relational. Fieldwork was conducted within the standard access requirements for research in Cox's Bazar, including coordination with the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) and the Camp-in-Charge (CiC). Administrative permission is, however, only the first layer. Reaching households depended on relational trust built through community-level introduction: a local volunteer accompanied the researcher and facilitated introductions to majhis-camp-level community leaders, whose recognition of the research purpose was essential for household access. This gatekeeper

pathway has methodological implications, noted in Section 3.11: households reached this way may differ from the most isolated or least connected in the camps.

3.6 Data collection methods

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) are the primary empirical data for this thesis. Interview guides were developed separately for each stakeholder group - adolescent girls, parents/caregivers, and key informants - but all three guides were organized around a shared thematic architecture aligned with the research question and sub-questions. For girl participants, the guide covered daily routines and time use; current and past learning centre attendance; reasons for participation or non-participation; perceptions of safety and mobility; experiences of household labour and caregiving responsibilities; aspirations and self-described constraints; and views on program features. For parent and caregiver participants, the guide covered daughters' daily routines and educational trajectories, household decision-making processes regarding schooling, safety and reputation concerns, economic pressures, and views on the quality of learning centres. For key informants, the guide covered enrollment and attendance patterns, observed barriers and current programmatic adaptations, staffing, facilities, and parent engagement.

Interview guides were semi-structured in form: they established thematic areas and provided probing questions but allowed the interviewer to follow participant-led directions where these opened analytically relevant ground. This flexibility is appropriate for research into social processes in which the way participants frame and sequence their accounts is analytically informative.

Standardized questionnaires were administered to five participants in each stakeholder group - fifteen in total. These instruments used closed and Likert-scale items to capture structured descriptive information about attendance patterns, safety perceptions, facilities assessments, and household expectations. They are treated throughout this thesis as structured contextual inputs for triangulation rather than as quantitative evidence. The sample sizes involved - five per group - are far too small for statistical inference, and the questionnaires were not designed or administered as a representative survey instrument. Any reference to questionnaire data in the findings chapters describes patterns in structured responses as corroborating or contextualizing interview themes, not as population-level findings.

Field notes and observation notes constitute a third, supplementary data layer. Observation notes documented camp-level conditions relevant to the research question, including the security

environment, the state of WASH infrastructure, and the operating conditions of learning centres. Post-interview field memos recorded contextual information about each session - who was present, whether privacy was maintained, how the participant presented, and any observations relevant to interpreting the account. These materials are not analyzed as formal observational data but are used to contextualize and corroborate interview findings where relevant.

3.7 Interview setting, privacy, and data production

The conditions under which interviews take place shape what participants feel able to say - and this matters especially when research topics include household decision-making, gendered mobility, puberty, and family reputation. In a camp setting where household boundaries are permeable and community surveillance is a documented social mechanism, the presence or absence of privacy is not a minor procedural matter; it is connected to the same dynamics the research investigates. Two settings characterized fieldwork: household interviews, where privacy was frequently incomplete, and participants sometimes gave brief or low-voiced responses on sensitive topics; and learning centre or safe-shelter settings, where privacy was stronger, and girls appeared more forthcoming. The researcher documented setting conditions in post-interview memos and treated the variation as analytically significant -not merely a limitation but a substantive observation. Silence on sensitive topics, including one participant's visible discomfort when menstruation was raised, is treated as data about the shame barrier surrounding disclosure, not as a gap in the record.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Research with adolescents in a refugee context carries heightened ethical responsibilities. Voluntary participation was established at the outset of each interview: participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to decline any question or withdraw at any time, and the fact that participation was unrelated to aid or services. For adolescent participants, explanations were given in age-appropriate language, and interviews were relocated or restructured when caregiver proximity appeared to inhibit free response. Confidentiality is maintained throughout using a consistent anonymization system: girls are identified by codes G01 to G15, parents and caregivers by P01 to P10, and key informants by KII01 to KII05. Sensitive topics -menstruation, harassment, early marriage, family restriction -were approached with a trauma-informed stance; the researcher did not press for incident-level detail beyond what participants offered voluntarily. Fieldwork was conducted

within the standard administrative access requirements for research in Cox's Bazar. Full ethical procedures are documented in Appendix E.

3.9 Data analysis

Analysis followed a hybrid thematic analysis approach, combining deductive and inductive coding in a single shared codebook applied across all three stakeholder groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductive codes were derived prior to systematic coding from the research question and sub-questions, the interview guides, the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, and the researcher's fieldwork experience. These codes established the primary thematic areas - puberty and adolescence as a turning point, safety and mobility, honor and reputation, household labour, facilities and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), institutional trust, and girls' aspirations - and ensured that the analysis remained oriented toward the research question throughout. Inductive subcodes were developed during the coding process as patterns emerged in the transcripts that were not fully anticipated by the deductive framework.

The codebook comprised 79 codes organized across 13 code families. Nine mechanism memos were written during and after coding to develop analytical interpretations of the processes through which coded patterns connect to educational participation outcomes. These memos represent the analytical bridge between the coded segments and the findings presented in Chapter 4 - they document the interpretive reasoning rather than simply the presence of codes, and they serve as the main audit trail for the analysis alongside the coded-segment matrix (Miles et al., 2014); MAXQDA was used pragmatically to support coding organization and retrieval throughout.

3.10 Trustworthiness and reflexivity

Qualitative research is assessed for quality through criteria appropriate to its aims: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) influential formulation. The strategies used in this study to address these criteria are described below, without claiming that any single strategy is sufficient on its own.

Credibility was supported primarily through triangulation across three stakeholder groups. When the same mechanism or pattern is described independently by girls, parents, and practitioners, the interpretation carries greater weight than when it rests on a single stakeholder account. Triangulation was supplemented by fieldwork observation notes (see Appendix F) and post-interview

memos, which provide independent contextual corroboration of interview accounts without being mistaken for a systematic observational dataset. Contrasting and negative cases were actively sought during analysis and are included in the findings rather than suppressed, which is consistent with the requirement that qualitative research be transparent about the limits and complexity of its interpretive claims.

Dependability was addressed using a documented, structured codebook with written definitions for each code, a coded-segment matrix that provides a retrievable record of coding decisions, and analytic memos that make the interpretive reasoning visible for review. These constitute an audit trail appropriate to the study's scale and scope, though it is acknowledged that a master's thesis conducted by a sole researcher under time pressure does not have the same replication infrastructure as a multi-researcher study with independent inter-rater reliability checks.

The researcher's positionality is relevant to both credibility and reflexivity. The researcher has prior professional experience in Cox's Bazar in gender and protection programming roles, which facilitated access, informed contextual interpretation, and supported the cultural appropriateness of the interview approach. This prior experience is a genuine analytical asset. It also introduces a reflexive responsibility: someone who has worked in the camps in an advocacy-adjacent role brings normative commitments to the field that must be actively managed to prevent them from shaping the analysis in ways that exceed what the data support. Several further dimensions of positionality bear on this study. The researcher occupied a structurally asymmetric position relative to all participants: an adult academic researcher, affiliated with a European master's programme, conducting interviews with adolescent girls and caregivers living in conditions of acute material constraint. That asymmetry shapes what participants felt able to say, how questions were understood, and how the researcher's presence was interpreted within households and learning centre settings. Linguistic access, while genuine, is not neutral: conducting interviews in Burmese and Bangla is simultaneously a condition of access and a reminder that bilingual competence is itself a form of power in a setting where many aid workers and researchers depend on interpreters. Reflexive practices applied throughout the study included field notes, post-interview memos, and analytic memos that made the interpretive reasoning visible for review. Supervisor feedback throughout the study has reinforced the need for epistemological distance - for treating participants' accounts as data about their subjective perceptions rather than as direct descriptions of structural reality, and for being alert to the difference between what participants say and what the analysis can claim. This methodological stance has been applied throughout.

3.11 Methodological limitations

The limitations of this study shape the scope of its claims without invalidating its analytical contributions. The sample is purposive and non-representative: 30 interviews drawn from one field site through gatekeeper-mediated recruitment cannot support generalization to the full population of Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar. Findings are analytic rather than representative -they illuminate mechanisms and processes for the participants in this dataset. Gatekeeper access through majhis means that the most isolated or constrained households are likely underrepresented; families willing to participate through community introductions may hold more moderate views than the broader population. Privacy constraints and social desirability effects are real, particularly in household interview settings where participants sometimes moderated their accounts in the presence of caregivers; accounts are interpreted in light of their setting conditions rather than taken at face value. Translation from Burmese and Bangla may have shifted some nuance; quoted passages are the best available representations, not verbatim reproductions of meaning. The standardized questionnaires are used solely as contextual triangulation inputs, not as statistical evidence. Finally, the study cannot establish causal effects: it identifies plausible mechanisms grounded in participant accounts, not causally verified chains of effect.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction to the findings

This chapter presents empirical findings drawn from 15 interviews with Rohingya adolescent girls, 10 interviews with parents and caregivers, and 5 key informant interviews with education practitioners and community-relevant actors. Analysis also draws on fieldwork observation notes produced during data collection (see Appendix F). The chapter is organized around the mechanisms through which social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape girls' educational participation - rather than treating these factors as a simple inventory of barriers. Findings are organized as follows: puberty as a social turning point; honor, reputation, and the regulation of girls' mobility; safety concerns and route-related restrictions; household labour, poverty, and competing responsibilities; facilities, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), and dignity; learning centre quality and institutional trust; girls' aspirations under constraint; and, finally, the program conditions that participants identify as making education more acceptable and feasible. A summary of the central mechanism is offered at the close of the chapter. The conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 identifies the main mechanisms guiding the analysis; this findings chapter develops these mechanisms empirically across eight thematic sections, including puberty as a turning point and program conditions as a potential buffer alongside the core mechanisms of honor and reputation, safety and mobility, household labour, MHM and dignity, and institutional trust.

4.2 Puberty as a social turning point

This section traces what the conceptual framework calls the puberty-to-restriction mechanism: the process through which girls' bodily maturation reorganizes their social status and activates downstream constraints on educational participation. The most consistent finding across the dataset is that puberty reorganizes girls' social position in ways that directly curtail educational participation. Before menstruation, girls move through the camp with relative freedom - attending learning centres, playing outside, and travelling short distances without escort. After it, the same activities become

subject to new scrutiny and, progressively, to restriction. This is not simply a story of changing individual circumstances; it is recognized as a social transition that participants across all three groups describe in similar terms.

G07, an 18-year-old married woman, articulates the age-graded logic clearly: 'Girls can't go out after they are grown up. Old women can go. Young girls can't go... They can go anywhere they want until they grow up.' G11 places a precise age on this transition: 'At the age of 12, they become unable. Girls aged 10 and 8 years old can go outside. In Burma, girls of 12 years become restricted within the home... I was also restricted at 12.' These accounts are not presented as grievances; they are offered as descriptions of how the social world works. The matter-of-fact quality of the telling is itself analytically significant: the shift is so thoroughly normalized that it requires no explanation beyond itself.

The contrast between younger and older girls in the dataset makes the mechanism visible in concrete terms. G01, aged 13 and attending school six days a week at the time of the interview, describes her life as organized around school, play, and household chores shared with siblings - a profile consistent with what fieldwork observation notes describe as typical for girls aged 10 to 12: 'They can go outside easily. They walk to learning centres and play with friends without any problem.' G10, aged 19 and married, spends her days at home, describes herself as having 'no happiness,' and leaves the house only to visit her maternal family with her husband. Between these two girls, separated by six years and a marriage, lies the full arc of what puberty as a social turning point produces: the progressive narrowing of a girl's world.

Fieldwork observation notes describe this shift as dividing life 'into two parts, before they get their period and after... once a girl gets her period (around age 15), things change. She is suddenly expected to stay at home.' The same notes document that attendance among 12- to 14-year-old girls is relatively stable, while attendance among 15- to 18-year-olds is more pressured and more prone to disruption. The age 12-to-15 window is the period during which educational participation becomes most vulnerable - not because girls stop wanting to attend, but because the social expectations attached to their bodies change.

4.3 Honor, reputation, and the regulation of girls' mobility

Puberty does not simply change what girls are permitted to do; it changes what their behaviour is understood to mean. This section traces the honor-reputation-control mechanism: the process through which puberty activates family and community monitoring of girls' public behaviour in ways that make educational participation socially costly. The social reclassification that accompanies puberty activates a set of concerns about family honor and community reputation that bear directly on whether

girls continue their education. In the interviews, these concerns are expressed by parents and caregivers most explicitly, but they appear in girls' own accounts as well - internalized as part of how social life is understood rather than experienced only as an external constraint.

P01, a 45-year-old mother of five daughters, explains her reluctance to let daughters work or move freely outside the home in explicitly reputational terms: 'People will say bad things about our girls... we are afraid of losing our respect... It is a sin for girls to go out.' P02, another mother, describes post-puberty life in her own generation as a form of captivity: 'They were captive in the house after growing up... They will cook, clean the house, obey parents, say their prayers five times, and read the Quran.' What is striking in both accounts is that the restriction is not framed as a failure of rights or opportunity - it is framed as the correct social response to girls' changed status.

The operative social threat is the 'spoiled girl' narrative: the possibility that a girl who is seen publicly, interacts with boys, or attends school past a certain age will be understood by the community as having engaged in or become available for romantic relationships, thereby damaging both her own marriage prospects and her family's reputation. Fieldwork observation notes record this directly: 'There is a perception that if girls continue their education after the age of 13 to 14, they may become spoiled, for example, by engaging in romantic relationships and marrying without family consent. Due to concerns about family honor, parents often hesitate to continue their daughters' education.' The same notes document that community pressure operates not just on girls but on parents: 'Due to community pressure, most parents are reluctant to send their daughters to the Learning centre (LC). When parents want to send girls aged 12 to 13 or above, community members often discourage them.'

This means the mechanism is not only dyadic - a parent restricting a daughter - but triangulated through community opinion. Parents who might individually be willing to support their daughters' education face social costs from neighbours and community members for doing so. The family's reputation is at stake in a way that an individual household decision cannot fully control, which is why even parents who express support for girls' education in principle (as several do) ultimately limit girls' attendance in practice.

G11, a young woman without a father or male guardian in the household, describes the vulnerability that this creates for girls outside the standard family structure: 'We don't have a father, that is why people can say offensive words.' Her account illustrates how the honor mechanism requires not only female compliance but a male guardian as a visible legitimizing presence. Without one, girls are exposed to community commentary regardless of their own behaviour. G07 frames the same logic through religion: 'It is prohibited in our religion. Does any girl go anywhere alone? Someone must go along with her.' Whether framed as cultural expectation, community pressure, or religious obligation, the underlying structure is consistent: girls' public presence

after puberty is a social liability that households manage by withdrawing girls from public life, and education is understood as part of that public life.

It is worth noting that this mechanism is not uniform. G06, an 18-year-old married woman whose husband is largely absent, states plainly that she can go to the clinic alone when he is not home and that she finds no obstacle to doing so. Her account suggests that the honor-based restriction is enforced through active household monitoring rather than through community sanction alone - and that its reach is uneven depending on who is present to enforce it.

4.4 Safety, mobility, and route-related restrictions

Honor and reputation concerns set the normative conditions within which safety operates. This section traces the safety-mobility mechanism: the process by which physical and socially interpreted safety concerns produce an escort requirement that makes girls' attendance contingent on family availability. Safety concerns constitute a second, partially distinct mechanism that restricts girls' attendance. The interviews reveal two registers of safety that operate simultaneously but are analytically separable: physical safety (the risk of harassment, abduction, or harm on the route to a learning centre) and socially interpreted safety (the norm that an unescorted girl is, by definition, unsafe, regardless of actual incident risk). Both registers produce the same behavioural outcome - girls do not travel alone - but through different logics.

On the physical side, kidnapping narratives circulate widely in the dataset. G10 reports: 'They can't go out after Esha [evening prayer]. We have heard that some people cut heads and take away.' She learned this from male household members who bring news from outside. Fieldwork observation notes confirm that 'security concerns are rising alarmingly due to kidnapping, fire incidents, and online gambling,' and that 'fear of kidnapping has increased' even as reported incidents of eve-teasing have declined. The observation notes further document that 'if the LC is far away, parents are unwilling to send their daughters.' Distance amplifies physical safety concerns: a learning centre accessible only via unfamiliar or poorly lit routes poses a particular obstacle for older girls, who cannot travel unescorted.

The escort requirement is the behavioural output of both registers operating together. G07 describes her movement as entirely mediated by male or senior-female accompaniment: 'My husband or my mother-in-law goes with me. Or my sister-in-law.' G01, still in school at 13, reports that her mother permits her to visit a nearby aunt independently during the day but sends her brother to accompany her in the evenings: 'Not in the evening - in the evening mother forbids me to go alone and my brother takes me there.' The evening restriction marks the point at which the social interpretation of safety becomes absolute, regardless of whether physical risk changes at dusk.

The escort requirement creates an indirect attendance barrier that is structural rather than intentional. A girl whose father, brother, or husband is unavailable, uninterested, or working cannot attend school on those days. No interview records a family explicitly refusing a girl's education on principle; rather, the condition for attendance is an escort, and the escort is not always available. G06 illustrates the most extreme version of this dynamic: her husband controls her movements and has told her, 'If you are ill at night, you should die. You can't do anything without my permission' - meaning the escort requirement is, in her case, a mechanism through which her husband exercises total control over her mobility. The safety and control rationales have become indistinguishable.

Several girls draw an analytically important distinction, however. G06 notes that at the camp, she can go to the clinic alone when her husband is absent and that no one harasses her. G10 says directly that there is 'no problem' on the roads during the day. These accounts suggest that the physical safety risk and the socially imposed escort norm are not always aligned - and that the escort requirement reflects the second register (social interpretation) as much or more than the first (actual incident risk). This distinction matters because it implies that the escort barrier is not fully reducible to physical security interventions; it is partly a product of the social meanings attached to girls' independent movement.

4.5 Household labour, poverty, and competing responsibilities

This section documents the household-labour mechanism: the process by which domestic work demands, which intensify after puberty, compete directly with girls' attendance at learning centres. Educational participation does not exist in isolation from the domestic economy of households. For girls in this dataset - particularly older girls - attending a learning centre requires negotiating a prior claim on their time: domestic labour. The volume and nature of this labour shift after puberty, as girls are progressively prepared for married life and take on more cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings, and fetching water. The conflict between domestic labour and attendance is therefore not coincidental; it is structured by the same post-puberty expectations that generate the honor and safety mechanisms described above.

G07, who dropped out of school in class 1 in Myanmar, explains her departure from education in straightforward terms: 'We had to work in the field. So, I had to do a lot of work. I didn't have time to study.' G01, who is still in school at 13, already manages cooking and household chores alongside her studies: 'I would like to play; alongside, I do some household work and cooking.' The trajectory from G01's situation to G07's is not a dramatic rupture - it is a gradual intensification of existing domestic demands that eventually displaces education entirely.

Poverty compounds this conflict in several ways. First, the material costs of schooling - pens, notebooks, umbrellas, shoes - are genuinely prohibitive for many families. P08 describes children who cannot attend school in the rainy season because they have no umbrella and no spare clothes: 'Our children must get wet to go to school... during the rainy season, if they get wet, they can't go to school the next day. Because they don't have extra clothes to wear.' The apparent logistics of attendance - clothes, materials, a dry walk to school - represent real economic barriers for the poorest families.

P03, a widowed mother who works outside the home in decoration and event labour, describes sending her daughters to a learning centre she considers inadequate, not because she believes it will serve them, but because she has no financial alternative: 'They are going to the learning centre. But they are not learning anything there. It is not an education. Still, we must send our children there as we can't spend any money on their education.' Her account reveals how poverty operates not as a single barrier but as a constraint that compounds across all others - making it harder to access quality instruction, harder to supply materials, and harder to contest the domestic labour demands that compete with attendance.

It is worth noting that P03's situation also complicates a simpler account of household labour dynamics. As a widow working outside the home, she does not fit the pattern in which female domestic labour keeps girls indoors. Yet her daughters are still not receiving adequate education. This suggests that domestic labour arrangements do not simply mediate poverty's effect on educational participation - it operates through multiple channels simultaneously, including institutional quality and material access, which do not resolve simply because a mother works.

4.6 Facilities, Menstrual Hygiene Management, and Dignity

Another aspect of girls' bodily experience after puberty is linked with hygiene and privacy, which also shapes educational participation in ways that are rarely named explicitly. Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) represents a mechanism that receives relatively little explicit attention in the interviews - partly, this analysis suggests, because the shame surrounding menstruation makes it difficult to discuss openly - but which education practitioners in the dataset identify as a significant driver of irregular attendance and dropout among older girls. The silence around the topic in the girl interviews is itself a data point: G15 is visibly uncomfortable when the interviewer raises menstruation, and the transcript records '[feeling shy]' in place of a verbal response. The social meaning of menstruation - as something private, shameful, and not to be disclosed in mixed or semi-public settings - creates a condition in which the practical barriers to attending school during menstruation go unaddressed, because naming them requires discussing something that cannot be discussed.

The practical barriers are real. KII02, a teacher with over a decade of experience at a girls' school, describes what happens when girls are unprepared: 'Some girls miss school. They don't come to school at that time. Or it also happens that they have a period after coming here. Then we send her home if we don't have a pad.' The follow-up question: When does this happen? - receives the answer: 'Most of the time.' Girls who start their period at school without supplies are sent home, may not return that day, and over time may build a pattern of avoidance around the days when menstruation is expected but uncertain. KII02 also notes that toilet facilities, while technically available, are inadequate for the number of students using them - not enough stalls, inconsistent cleaning - which makes managing menstruation privately during a school day genuinely difficult.

In the camp context, the material situation is worse. G07 reports that NGO-distributed cotton pads were available in the past - 'They give cotton here. They don't give now. They gave it a long time ago... now it has to be bought - but that supply has since lapsed, and girls and their families must purchase products they often cannot afford. G06, who experiences menstrual pain, describes accessing only paracetamol from the health facility: 'They don't even check the prescription for any medicine. They give us Napa and tell us to go away.' The health system's inadequacy compounds the MHM barrier: even when girls experience physical discomfort during menstruation, they do not expect to receive adequate care.

The mechanism here operates cumulatively. Individually, any one element - no pad, shared toilets, no health support, shame about disclosure - might be manageable. Together, they make attending school during menstruation undignified, uncomfortable, and practically difficult for older girls who cannot predict when their period will arrive. The cumulative effect is irregular attendance that is not always visible as an MHM problem because girls and families rarely name it as such. Instead, a girl does not attend school on certain days, and her absence is recorded without explanation.

4.7 Learning centre quality, institutional trust, and private tutor preference

Alongside the social and bodily mechanisms documented above, families also weigh the institutional dimension of participation: what learning centres deliver relative to their social cost. Parents' decisions about whether to send their daughters to learning centres are not made in isolation from their assessments of what those centres deliver. Across several parent interviews, learning centres are described as offering instruction that is inconsistent, age-limited, and insufficient to generate the educational outcomes that would justify the costs - including the social costs - of sending girls out. Where trust in the quality of learning centres is low, the calculus shifts: the honor and safety risks of girls' public movement become harder to justify if the education at the end of the journey is poor.

P08's account of teaching quality is telling, particularly because it follows an initial statement that teachers are 'good.' When pressed, she offers a different picture: 'The teachers don't teach them properly. Sometimes they teach English if they want. Sometimes they teach Burma. They just come and go to school.' The inconsistency she describes - teachers who arrive, occupy a classroom, and leave without systematic instruction - is not experienced as total failure but as unreliability. Parents cannot predict whether a day of attendance will lead to meaningful learning, undermining their investment in getting their daughters there.

P03 is more direct: 'They are going to the learning centre. But they are not learning anything there. It is not an education. Still, we have to send our children there as we can't spend any money on their education.' Her statement captures a trap that acutely affects the poorest families: they distrust the learning centres, know the instruction is inadequate, and cannot afford the private tutors that better-off families use as an alternative. The private tutor market - at 300 to 400 taka per month, according to P08 - is explicitly beyond reach for families who describe not having money to buy umbrellas or extra sets of clothes. The result is a tiered educational landscape in which the poorest girls receive the least trusted instruction while remaining, for their families, too costly to educate through other means.

Observation notes document that the preference for private tutors is growing: 'Many community members prefer private tutors in their respective blocks, and this trend is increasing... They believe that the LC does not have sufficiently qualified teachers, resulting in lower learning outcomes.' This preference is not simply about quality in the abstract - it is about the relationship between perceived quality and the cost of attendance. A private tutor operating within or near the family's block can reduce the distance a girl must travel, lighten the escort burden, and offer more individualized instruction. For families weighing the risks of sending older daughters out, a nearby, trusted tutor reduces some of the exposure to safety and honor risks while delivering better perceived educational outcomes.

One pattern worth noting is the distinction between distrust of learning centre institutions and opposition to girls' education in principle. P01 expresses a genuine wish to educate her daughter - 'I'll give her education as much as Allah wants' - while simultaneously describing the conditions that constrain this. Institutional low trust and educational aspiration coexist. This means that improving institutional quality is not simply a matter of changing community norms about girls' education; it is also a pragmatic matter of offering an institution that parents believe will deliver what they want for their children.

4.8 Girls' aspirations under constraint

This section documents girls' aspirations under constraint - an agentic dimension of the analysis that sits alongside and within the mechanisms described above. The preceding sections risk giving the impression that the girls in this dataset are passive, that educational exclusion is something done to them without remainder. The interviews do not support this reading. Girls and young women express persistent aspirations for education, economic participation, and financial independence - and they do so while also demonstrating a clear, sober understanding of the conditions under which those aspirations must be pursued. What is distinctive about these aspirations is not their content, which is recognizable, but the negotiation structure that surrounds them: girls know they must seek permission before acting, and they have incorporated this knowledge into how they think about their futures.

G07 wants to learn sewing and build a small business: 'I wanted to learn sewing... I had a wish to do business. But I couldn't buy a machine.' She also knows that working outside the home is not available to her: when asked whether she would take an outside job if one were offered, she says, 'He won't allow me' - her husband. The aspiration and the constraint coexist without apparent contradiction in her account because she has already incorporated the permission structure into her planning. She is not, in her own framing, being stopped from something she is trying to do; she is describing the available options within a world where certain options require permissions she does not have.

G06, also married and also experiencing severe economic hardship, says: 'I wanted to study. But we didn't... I wish to learn tailoring. But I want to do a job. He won't let me.' Her trajectory - a forced early marriage to an older man, no education, no income of her own, a husband largely absent - is the most constrained in the dataset. Yet she still names what she wants. G01, the youngest girl in the dataset at 13, is already thinking ahead to the conditions under which she might pursue economic participation: 'I dreamed of [earning money], and at first I have to convince my family to do so.' At 13, she has already identified persuading her family as the prior step to any aspiration.

G11 illustrates a different mode of agency - the careful navigation of movement within permitted space. Without a father in the household, she and her family face reputational exposure simply by existing without a male guardian. She manages this by visiting only friends and relatives, always with permission, and by making sure those she visits reciprocate so that relationships are maintained without her being seen as someone who moves without sanction: 'I visit my friend's house. If my parents don't allow it, how could I go? They must get a permit first. After taking permission I visit to my friend's house.' The permission structure is explicitly named, without resentment, as the condition under which her social world operates.

Fieldwork observation notes describe this aspiration-under-constraint as widespread among older girls in the camp: 'The older girls really want to learn. They are asking for classes at times that work for them, like midday or afternoon... They see women working and earning money in the world, and

they want the same thing. They want to be strong, independent, and help their families financially.' The request for adjusted class schedules is itself a form of negotiation: older girls are neither simply refusing to attend nor unaware of alternatives. They are identifying the specific condition - a different time of day - under which attendance becomes compatible with the domestic and social demands that currently preclude it.

G10's case offers a necessary counterpoint. At 19, married into her in-laws' household, she says she feels 'shy' about working and expresses no desire to participate in the economy. Her interview, however, was conducted under significant constraints: her in-laws were present in adjacent rooms during the meeting, her husband controlled her movements, and the transcriber noted that she spoke in a low voice and appeared uninterested in the conversation. The suppression of aspiration in her account may reflect genuinely different preferences, or it may reflect a disclosure environment in which honest aspiration expression was not possible. The interview setting - which is itself a methodological finding - makes it impossible to determine which reading is correct. This uncertainty should be held explicitly rather than resolved in either direction.

4.9 Program conditions that may buffer exclusion

This section documents what the framework calls the program-buffer mechanism: the institutional and design conditions under which gender-responsive features reduce the friction generated by the preceding mechanisms. Across all three stakeholder groups, certain institutional and program features are identified as conditions under which girls' educational participation becomes more feasible and more socially acceptable to families. These findings are presented here as empirical evidence of what participants describe, not as recommendations. Analytically, their significance lies in what they reveal about the mechanisms documented above: each feature that participants identify as helpful corresponds to a specific mechanism of exclusion, which is evidence that those mechanisms are recognized - even if not always named - by the people living within them.

The feature mentioned most consistently across parents and fieldwork observation notes is female teaching staff. Observation notes record that 'most parents prefer having more female tutors in the learning centres,' and that the presence of female staff is especially important in encouraging older girls to attend. This preference is directly intelligible within the honor mechanism: a learning environment staffed by women reduces the gender mixing that activates honor concerns and signals to families that the institution has organized itself around the social norms they are required to

observe. G03 and G14 mention approvingly that female teachers are more numerous in their learning environment - evidence that girls also recognize staff composition as relevant to their experience.

The second consistently mentioned feature is the separation of boys and girls in learning spaces. Observation notes document that 'parents feel it would be better if boys and girls were taught separately.' The reasoning here also maps onto the honor mechanism: a girls-only section removes the risk of mixed-gender interaction that the 'spoiled girl' narrative treats as the primary reputational threat. KII01 describes the value of indoor spaces and structured club activities for girls that provide social and educational engagement without requiring girls to be publicly visible - another variant of the same logic. The space does not need to be a classroom; what matters is that it is organised to avoid exposing girls to the social costs of mixed-gender public participation.

Flexible scheduling is the third feature and maps most directly onto the household labour mechanism. Observation notes document older girls' requests for classes in the midday or afternoon slot, after domestic duties have been completed. Morning-based learning centres require girls to leave the house before chores are done, creating a genuine conflict with household expectations. A schedule adjustment that recognises domestic labour as a prior demand - rather than treating it as an excuse - could reduce the practical incompatibility between attendance and household role without requiring the family to change its labour arrangements.

Parent engagement is identified as particularly relevant to the institutional trust mechanism. Fieldwork memos document that parent engagement meetings are already in place in some settings and are associated with more sustained attendance. Where parents understand what is being taught and have a channel through which to raise concerns, their assessment of learning centres on trustworthiness and on the social cost of sending daughters, improving. This is consistent with the analysis in section 4.7: institutional trust, not only attitudes toward girls' education in principle, is what parents are responding to when they withdraw daughters or prefer private tutors.

Safeguarding and reporting pathways are mentioned as an existing feature of some programs: 'Safeguarding systems are present, and there is a clear reporting pathway if a girl feels unsafe.' This addresses the safety mechanism directly. A girl who knows that there is a named, accessible process for reporting harassment or discomfort is in a different institutional position from one who has no such recourse. The pathway does not eliminate risk, but it changes the institutional response to risk in ways that may make attendance feel less exposing.

Finally, MHM support - the provision of menstrual products, adequate toilet facilities, and a staff member who can respond when a girl has her period at school - is identified by KII01 as currently insufficient and directly linked to absences. The mechanism is straightforward: girls who can manage menstruation privately, with institutional support, do not need to leave school or avoid it on uncertain days. The current absence of reliable MHM support, combined with the same barrier that prevents girls from naming the problem, means that this mechanism operates largely invisibly - absences accumulate without being attributed to their actual cause.

4.10 Summary of findings

Before summarizing the findings, a note on their interpretive scope is warranted. The accounts analyzed in this chapter were produced under variable interview conditions - some in household settings where caregivers or community members were nearby, others in learning centre spaces that offered stronger privacy. As Chapter 3 documents, the interview setting and girls' educational lives involve the same social monitoring dynamics, so accounts produced in less private conditions should be read as shaped by those conditions rather than as transparent reports of private belief. This is particularly relevant to the aspiration accounts in Section 4.8, where suppressed or absent aspiration expression may reflect the disclosure environment rather than the absence of aspiration. The analysis holds these findings accordingly. The findings in this chapter converge on a central mechanism: puberty transforms girls' education from a relatively accepted childhood activity into a socially monitored and reputation-sensitive one. Before menstruation, girls participate in learning centres with moderate family support and significant personal freedom of movement. After it, that participation requires navigating an interlocking set of conditions - honor and reputation concerns, escort requirements, household labour demands, inadequate facilities, low institutional trust, and the social costs of public female visibility - that together make continued attendance progressively harder.

These conditions do not operate as independent barriers. They are connected through the logic of puberty as a status transition: honor concerns, safety norms, household labour demands, MHM inadequacy, and low institutional trust all draw from the same underlying shift -that girls' public presence has become a social liability where it once was not. The result is not simple exclusion but conditional, negotiated, and increasingly precarious participation. Girls' names, aspirations, seek permission, and identify the adjustments that would make attendance possible. That agency is real; it is not sufficient to override the structural conditions within which it operates.

The program features that participants across stakeholder groups identify as helpful - female staff, girls-only spaces, flexible scheduling, parent engagement, safeguarding pathways, and MHM support - are not standalone responses to isolated problems. They are, in effect, a set of institutional adjustments that address specific mechanisms within the broader system described in this chapter. Their analytical significance is taken up in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reads the empirical findings through the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, connecting them to the literature on gendered social control, household decision-making, and institutional trust. Practical implications and limitations are addressed at the close.

5.2 Answering the research question

The main research question asks how social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar. The findings in this dataset support an answer organized around a single pivoting event: puberty. Before puberty, educational participation is relatively accepted - younger girls attend learning centres, move within the camp with moderate freedom, and are not yet subject to the honor-based monitoring of their public behaviour that applies to older girls. After puberty, the same activity carries different social weight. A girl who continues her education is visibly mobile,

potentially in contact with unrelated males and developing aspirations that may conflict with community expectations of domestic role and early marriage. This is not only a change in circumstances; it is a reclassification of what education means for a girl of that social status.

That reclassification activates a set of interlocking mechanisms - honor and reputation concerns, safety and escort requirements, intensified household labour demands, inadequate facilities for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), and reduced institutional trust - which together determine whether girls continue, reduce, or stop participating. The mechanisms do not operate independently: they reinforce one another. A family whose daughter is subject to community gossip about her public movement is also more likely to assess an escort requirement as non-negotiable; a learning centre that sends girls home for lack of menstrual supplies is also the one whose irregular teaching quality P08 and P03 describe. The social, material, and institutional conditions are part of the same system, which is activated by puberty.

This finding is consistent with the existing literature but adds a mechanism-level account of why the well-documented age-based decline in attendance occurs. Guglielmi et al. (2020) document a sharp fall-off in Cox's Bazar beginning around ages 12 to 14; Hossain (2024) finds age functions as an independent risk factor for educational non-participation. What this study adds is an explanation organized around process: it is not age itself, but the social meaning attached to female bodily maturity that reorganizes the conditions governing participation.

5.3 From barriers to mechanisms

A recurring risk in research on girls' education in humanitarian settings is that findings become a list - safety, poverty, distance, household chores, lack of female teachers - that is accurate but not analytical. Lists of barriers describe what exists without explaining how it works, and they imply that removing any single item would address the problem. The findings in this study resist that framing.

Bicchieri's (2006) account of social norms helps explain why. A norm persists, in her framework, not because everyone privately endorses it but because individuals hold two simultaneous expectations: that others will conform (an empirical expectation) and that deviance will be sanctioned (a normative expectation). Both expectations are sufficient to produce compliance even when private

preferences differ. P01's account - 'people will say bad things about our girls... we are afraid of losing our respect' - captures this exactly: the anticipation of sanction, not the sanction itself, produces compliance.

This means the mechanisms in this study are not reducible to individual attitudes or household preferences alone. They are embedded in the social structure of the camp community - in relations between households, in majhi governance, in the collective surveillance of girls' behaviour. Addressing any one mechanism without attending to this structure is likely to produce only partial effects. Female teachers reduce the honor-based objection to mixed-gender environments; they do not change the underlying norm that treats older girls' public presence as reputationally risky. The mechanism-based framework makes this distinction legible and is one reason this study's contribution extends beyond producing a richer barrier list.

5.4 Puberty, honor, and gendered social control

The findings document in empirical detail what the literature on gendered social control has theorized more generally: that puberty in conservative social contexts functions as a social status transition that reorganizes girls' relationship to public space, mobility, and community scrutiny. G07's observation that 'girls can't go out after they are grown up' and G11's recollection that restriction began at age 12 are not idiosyncratic; they describe a threshold that is widely recognized, consistently enforced, and - in participants' framing - understood as natural rather than as a choice made by any individual actor. This naturalization is itself analytically significant: norms that feel obvious do not require active enforcement because anticipation of sanctions has already been internalized.

The honor system surrounding that threshold gives the mechanism its specific shape. Family reputation in this dataset is partly a function of daughters' visible behaviour in public. The 'spoiled girl' narrative - the community reading of continued post-puberty education as potential exposure to romantic relationships and family dishonor - functions as the specific reputational threat that makes educational continuation costly for families. Applying Bicchieri's (2006) framework, the threat does not need to materialize: the anticipation of gossip and sanction is sufficient. Observation notes and interview accounts confirm that neighbours and community members do comment on families whose older daughters are visibly mobile, which makes the anticipation rational. P01's fear of losing family respect, G11's knowledge that going to the bazaar alone would lead to social exclusion, and G06's

husband's injunction that she cannot leave without permission all describe versions of the same underlying norm operating at different points in the life course.

Norris and Inglehart (2003) offer useful macro-level context. Societies positioned toward the traditional and survival end of the World Values Survey's cultural axes tend to assign higher social weight to communal reputation and family authority relative to individual self-expression - a pattern relevant to both Bangladesh and Myanmar. This should not be read as a direct causal claim from national-level data to behaviour in the camps; community-level variation within Rohingya society is documented and analytically significant. But the macro-level context helps explain why honor-based mechanisms carry structural weight in this setting and why the social cost of norm deviation is experienced as genuinely high. One place where the findings extend rather than confirm this framework concerns the role of displacement density. Bicchieri's (2006) norm theory was developed in non-displacement contexts; the findings here suggest that the conditions of protracted displacement - dense living quarters, permeable household boundaries, concentrated community governance through majhis - may amplify the surveillance component of honor-based norms beyond what the general theory anticipates. Girls in this dataset face monitoring not only within their households but across contiguous living spaces where visibility is essentially continuous. That intensification is not a direct derivation from either Bicchieri's account or the WVS macro-level data; it emerges from the camp-specific conditions described in the interview material.

5.5 Household decision-making and agency under constraint

The girl interviews show that genuine aspirations coexist with the constraints documented in Chapter 4. But reading those aspirations straightforwardly as evidence that restrictions are merely external impositions would be a mistake. G10's expressed contentment -recorded in her in-laws' home with a meeting audible in the next room -may reflect genuine preference or a disclosure environment in which candid expression carried social risk. As Mohanty (2003) cautions, treating Rohingya girls as uniformly passive or uniformly resistant misrepresents the actual variation in their responses to constraint. The monitoring mechanism operates in research encounters as much as in daily life: the environment that restricts what a girl can do also shapes what she can say about it. Where girls' agency is visible, it operates within a permission structure it cannot simply override. G11 visits friends only with parental permission; G07 redirects aspirations toward home-based sewing; G01, at 13, knows she must negotiate family permission before pursuing anything. These are genuine

negotiations -but they are negotiations within the system. Lloyd and Mensch (2008) find that union formation most consistently ends girls' schooling, suggesting families begin repositioning daughters toward marriage before it formally occurs. The anticipatory repositioning documented here reflects collective household logic that is forward-oriented rather than merely reactive to events.

5.6 Institutional conditions and program acceptability

The findings show that institutional features of education provision are not neutral technical matters. They function as social signals that either confirm or mitigate families' existing concerns about older girls' participation. A learning centre with male-only staff, shared toilets inadequate for menstrual management, morning scheduling that conflicts with domestic labour, and no regular parent communication does not merely fail to attract older girls - it actively reinforces the concerns that make their participation socially costly. P08's account of irregular teaching and the private-tutor preference documented across several parent interviews reflects not only a quality complaint but also a calculation. If the educational return is low and the social cost of attendance is high, continued enrollment is harder to justify.

Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital is relevant here. Parent engagement and institutional trust function as forms of social capital that support educational continuation: when parents are integrated into the life of the learning centre through regular communication and observable learning progress, they are more likely to sustain investment in daughters' attendance and to accept its social costs. The inverse is documented in the findings: low institutional trust allows honor-based concerns to dominate household decisions without a competing educational justification.

Sommer and Sahin (2013) argue that MHM is a public health issue that institutions are responsible for managing, not a private matter that girls must resolve individually. The findings corroborate this in a humanitarian setting: when MHM support is absent, girls are sent home without supplies (KII02), NGO-distributed cotton pads are no longer available (G07), and toilets are shared and inadequate - menstruation becomes a structural attendance barrier that remains invisible in aggregate data because it produces absence without stated reason.

Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) identify stratification as a structural feature of refugee education systems: families with resources exit to better alternatives, while the poorest use what they have. This study documents that dynamic precisely - private tutors preferred where affordable,

learning centres used as a fallback - and adds that the stratification is amplified by the social costs of older girls' participation. For wealthier families, a nearby private tutor reduces both the quality problem and the route-safety problem. For the poorest families, neither is solvable, and the justification for continued enrollment is thinnest for those most dependent on what the learning centres provide.

This finding has implications for the EiE literature specifically. Most EiE research treats access and quality as the central institutional variables; this study shows that social acceptability - the degree to which an institution is organized in ways that reduce the honor-based costs of participation for older girls - is a third, analytically distinct dimension. A learning centre can be physically accessible and of adequate quality yet still systematically exclude older girls if it does not address the social conditions under which their participation is negotiated. Incorporating social acceptability as an explicit institutional variable would strengthen both the EiE conceptual framework and the design criteria used to evaluate programs.

5.7 Practical implications for gender-responsive education

The findings, read through the mechanism framework, suggest a set of design principles supported by the findings for humanitarian education programming. These principles are not guaranteed solutions, and this study does not evaluate program effectiveness. They follow analytically from the findings: if the mechanisms identified here are real, then addressing their institutional correlates could reduce the friction surrounding older girls' participation. Table 5.1 maps each implication to the mechanism it addresses.

Table 5.1

Practical implications derived from the findings, mapped to the mechanism addressed

Program feature	Mechanism addressed	Why it matters based on the findings	Caution
Female teaching and support staff	Honor/reputation; modesty norms	Parents consistently prefer female teachers, linking mixed-gender teaching to reputational risk for	Recruiting and retaining female staff in the camp context faces its own

Program feature	Mechanism addressed	Why it matters based on the findings	Caution
		older girls. G03 and G14 mention female teachers approvingly; observation notes document this preference across multiple parent accounts.	logistical and social barriers. Supply is not a simple policy switch.
Girls-only learning spaces or sections	Moral regulation of boy-girl interaction; honor mechanism	Families identify mixed-gender learning as a reputational risk for older girls. Separation removes a specific trigger of the spoiled-girl narrative. Observation notes document parent preference for separate sections.	Separation alone does not address route safety, domestic labour, or MHM inadequacy. It reduces one concern without resolving the system.
MHM support: menstrual materials and adequate private toilet facilities	MHM/dignity mechanism	KII02 documents girls being sent home when supplies are unavailable. G07 notes NGO supply has lapsed, and materials must now be purchased. Inadequate toilets make managing menstruation at school undignified, producing irregular absence rarely attributed to MHM explicitly.	Shame around menstrual disclosure may persist even when materials are available, requiring complementary staff training and a non-stigmatizing institutional culture.
Flexible scheduling aligned to domestic routines	Household labour conflict	Older girls and parents identify midday or afternoon scheduling as more feasible than morning scheduling, which conflicts with peak domestic labour demand.	Schedule adjustment requires coordination with learning centre staff, community leaders, and NGO program managers. Community acceptability of girls being outside at different times of day also varies.
Parent engagement and regular communication	Institutional trust mechanism	P08 and P03 describe teaching quality concerns that reduce willingness to bear the social costs of daughters' attendance. Regular	Communication mechanisms must be designed around parents' actual literacy, language, and availability.

Program feature	Mechanism addressed	Why it matters based on the findings	Caution
		communication about learning progress makes the educational return more tangible and strengthens the justification for continued enrollment.	Written notes or SMS may not reach all families equally.
Safeguarding and clear reporting pathways	Physical safety mechanism	The observation notes document existing safeguarding systems in some settings and their association with higher parental confidence. Part of the escort requirement stems from the perception that there is no institutional recourse if something goes wrong.	Safeguarding pathways address physical safety but not socially interpreted safety. Normative change around girls' unescorted movement requires community engagement over longer timescales.

Two observations follow. First, no single program feature addresses more than one or two of the mechanisms documented in this study. Piecemeal interventions - adding female staff without addressing MHM or adjusting scheduling without improving parent communication - are unlikely to produce sustained change in older girls' attendance, because the mechanisms form a system and partial responses leave most of that system intact.

Second, these implications require implementation judgment that this study cannot provide - they are grounded in participant accounts, not controlled evaluations, and translation into programming requires practitioners' knowledge of current camp conditions and organizational capacity.

5.8 Limitations

The limitations documented in Chapter 3 apply throughout this discussion. The mechanisms identified are analytical constructs grounded in this dataset -not empirical laws that apply uniformly across all Rohingya communities or displacement settings. Social desirability effects are most relevant to the aspiration accounts in Section 5.5, where the accounts appear to suppress aspiration; the interpretive uncertainty is left open rather than resolved. Safety concerns reported by participants are interpreted as perceptions that shape behaviour, rather than independently verified incidents. The study's claims are analytic, context-specific, and interpretive rather than causal or representative.

5.9 Future research

Several research directions follow from the limitations and findings. The most analytically significant extension would be a longitudinal design that tracks girls' educational trajectories before and after puberty, ideally using repeated qualitative interviews with the same participants across the 12-to-16 age window. This would allow the mechanisms identified here to be observed as they operate, rather than inferred retrospectively from accounts that compress years of transition into a single interview. Longitudinal data would also allow the relationship between marriage timing and school exit - documented by Lloyd and Mensch (2008) as the dominant demographic event in girls' departure from education - to be examined directly in the Rohingya displacement context, rather than approximated through retrospective accounts. A panel design with even six-monthly check-ins would represent a substantial methodological advance over the cross-sectional qualitative and quantitative work currently available.

Comparative research across camp blocks or between camp and host-community settings would address the geographic specificity of this study. The findings document variation in governance, learning centre provision, and family composition that could not be examined systematically within a single-site design. A comparative design could test whether the mechanisms operate with different intensities or forms in settings with different majhi authority structures or community densities.

Fathers' perspectives are underrepresented relative to mothers' in this dataset, despite appearing in multiple accounts by girls and caregivers as the primary decision-makers regarding daughters' permission to attend. Dedicated research on fathers' reasoning about girls' education, honor concerns, and permission-granting would strengthen the household-level analysis considerably.

Program evaluation research would complement the implications identified in section 5.7. This study suggests but cannot demonstrate that female staff, girls-only spaces, MHM support, flexible scheduling, and parent engagement reduce barriers to older girls' attendance. Quasi-experimental or mixed-methods evaluations comparing learning centres with and without these features would provide the evidence base that policy and programming decisions ideally require.

Finally, the roles of community leaders and male peers in shaping girls' mobility are visible in this dataset - majhis facilitate or block access, brothers provide or withhold escort - but their own perspectives on girls' education are not examined in depth. Research centering these actors' reasoning and the social pressures they navigate would provide a fuller account of the community-level dynamics that this study examines primarily from the outside.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Restating the research problem

When Rohingya girls reach puberty in the camps of Cox's Bazar, something shifts. Not all at once, and not the same for every girl, but recognizably and consistently across this dataset: the same families who sent daughters to learning centres at ten or eleven begin pulling them back at thirteen or fourteen. The same girls who played outside with friends now spend most of the day at home. The explanation is not simply that the learning centres ran out of places, or that families could not afford materials, or that the walk became too long. Those things matter. But they do not account for the age-specificity of the drop-off, or for why boys in the same households do not experience the same transition. This thesis set out to explain what accounts for it.

6.2 Main answer to the research question

The thesis answers the main research question by locating its explanation in puberty -understood as a social threshold rather than a biological one. Before it, girls' education was a relatively ordinary childhood activity. After it, the same activity carries different social weight: a girl who attends school is now visibly mobile, potentially in contact with unrelated males, and developing aspirations that may conflict with community expectations. Education stops being just learning. It becomes a reputationally significant act. That reclassification activates the five interlocking mechanisms documented in Chapter 4 -honor and reputation, safety and escort requirements, household labour, MHM and dignity, and institutional trust -which together determine whether a girl continues, reduces, or stops participating. The mechanisms reinforce one another. A family managing reputation concerns is also more alert to route safety. A girl sent home for lack of menstrual supplies is also the one whose mother described the teachers as unreliable. The system holds together because all its parts share the same underlying logic: puberty changed the social meaning of this girl's education, and nothing in the institutional environment has yet changed to meet that.

6.3 Main contributions of the thesis

The main analytical contribution of this study is to move from a description of barriers to an account of mechanisms. Most research on girls' education in displacement - including good research - identifies what the obstacles are. This thesis tries to explain how they work: how puberty functions as a trigger that sets multiple social and institutional processes in motion simultaneously, and why those processes interact rather than operate independently. That is a different kind of answer, and it leads to different practical conclusions.

The study also contributes a multi-stakeholder, qualitative account that complements the existing quantitative work on the Cox's Bazar attendance cliff. Guglielmi et al. (2020) and Hossain (2024) clearly show the statistical pattern: girls' attendance falls sharply between ages 12 and 14. What this study adds is an account of the social processes under that pattern - what girls, parents, and practitioners say about why it happens and how it happens, from where each of them stands. The comparison across stakeholder groups is analytically productive precisely because the accounts both diverge and converge. Parents and girls do not always frame the same decision in the same terms, and those divergences are part of the finding.

A smaller but genuine methodological contribution is the treatment of the interview setting itself as data. The finding that girls speak more guardedly in household settings than in learning centres or safe shelters is not only a limitation to acknowledge. It is evidence of the same monitoring dynamic that shapes their daily lives. The social environment that restricts what a girl can do also restricts what she can say about it, and taking that seriously requires treating interview conditions as analytically meaningful rather than merely as noise.

6.4 Practical significance

The practical significance of the thesis is in making the mechanism system visible. Section 5.7 maps six findings-supported design principles -female staff, girls-only spaces, MHM support, flexible scheduling, parent engagement, and safeguarding pathways -to the specific mechanisms they address. No single feature resolves the full system. The study's value for practitioners lies not in a checklist but in showing how the pieces connect, so that program decisions can be made with an understanding of what each element is doing and why piecemeal responses produce limited results.

6.5 Final concluding statement

The girls in this dataset wanted to learn. That comes through repeatedly and across different interview conditions - in G07's wish to learn sewing and build something of her own, in G06's quiet statement that she wanted to study but it never happened, in G01's practical acknowledgement at thirteen that she would need to convince her family before she could pursue anything. The aspiration exists. What does not yet exist, for many of these girls, is the conditions under which it can be pursued safely and without cost to their families' standing.

This is, at bottom, what the thesis has been about. Not whether Rohingya adolescent girls want an education - they do - but what has to be true about the social world around them, about the institutions available to them, and about the way those institutions are organized, before that wanting can translate into regular, sustained, dignified participation. The answer this study offers is partial and context specific. But it is grounded in what girls, their families, and practitioners said, and it tries to take those accounts seriously enough to explain rather than only describe what makes education possible - or not - for girls who have already been asked to give up too much.

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Appendices

The following appendices provide supporting materials referenced in the thesis. Appendix A presents the interview guides used in fieldwork. Appendix B presents the standardized questionnaires administered to each stakeholder group. Appendix C describes the codebook structure. Appendix D provides an example coded-segment excerpt for illustrative purposes. Appendix E notes the ethical framework and consent approach. Appendix F provides some photos taken from the field. Appendix F provides the fieldwork observation notes. All participant codes used in the appendices match those used throughout the thesis. No identifying details are included.

Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interview Guide - Adolescent Girls

Section	Questions and Probes
Opening and Grounding	Thank you for meeting with me. You can skip any question or stop at any time. Is this a comfortable place to talk? Would you like to move somewhere quieter? Is it alright to begin?
Warm-up and Daily Context	1. How is your day going so far? (<i>Probe: What have you done since morning?</i>) 2. What do you enjoy learning-at home, with friends, or in any class? (<i>Probe: Stories? Numbers? Languages? Practical skills?</i>) 3. Who do you usually spend time with during the day? (<i>Probe: Friends, siblings, cousins?</i>) 4. When you think about school or learning, what feelings come first? (<i>Probe: Excited, worried, unsure-anything is okay.</i>)
Education and Attendance	5. Are you currently attending any learning centre, home-based learning group, or maktab? Tell me about it. 6. Have you ever stopped attending, even for a short time? What happened? 7. What makes it easy or difficult to attend regularly? (<i>Probe: Distance, time of day, family, personal feelings.</i>) 8. Do you go alone or with someone? Who decides?
Safety and Mobility	9. How do you travel to the learning centre? Is the journey easy or difficult? 10. Do you feel safe on the way? What concerns do you have? (<i>Probe: Time of day, distance, people encountered.</i>) 11. Are there times when you are not allowed to go out? Why?
Household Responsibilities	12. What do you usually do at home before and after attending school? 13. Do household responsibilities ever prevent you from attending? How?

Section	Questions and Probes
Puberty, Privacy, and Health	<i>(Privacy check before beginning this section.)</i> 14. Some older girls say things change after they grow up-in what they can do or where they can go. Has that been true for you? 15. If you have your period while at school, is there somewhere private to go? Do you have what you need?
Aspirations	16. What do you hope to learn or do in the next few years? 17. If you could change one thing about your learning centre, what would it be? 18. What would make it easier for girls your age to continue attending school?

Interview Guide - Parents/Caregivers

Section	Questions and Probes
Opening	Thank you for speaking with me. Is this a comfortable time and place to talk? May we begin?
Daily Routine and Context	1. Could you describe your daughter's daily routine? <i>(Probe: Mornings, evenings, household chores, sibling care.)</i> 2. What learning opportunities are available nearby? <i>(Learning centre, home-based learning, maktab/madrasa.)</i>
Perceived Value and Goals	3. In your view, what is the purpose of education for girls aged 12-18? <i>(Probe: Life skills, religion, marriage, employment, family.)</i> 4. Up to what age do you think girls should attend school? Why?
Attendance and Barriers	5. Is your daughter currently attending a learning centre or home-based learning? If not, why? 6. What makes regular attendance difficult? <i>(Probe: Distance, safety, household work, family rules, costs, facilities.)</i> 7. Have you ever decided to stop sending her? What influenced that decision?
Safety, Reputation, and Community	8. What concerns do you have about your daughter travelling to a learning centre? 9. Do you worry about community opinions or family reputation? 10. What changes would make you feel more comfortable supporting her attendance?
Programme Features	11. What features of a learning centre would increase your willingness to support attendance? <i>(Probe: Female teachers, girls-only classes, location, schedules, sanitation.)</i> 12. Do you know and trust the teachers? 13. How do you learn about what your daughter studies?
Closing	14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your daughter's education?

Interview Guide - Key Informants

Section	Questions and Probes
Opening and Grounding	Thank you for speaking with me. Is this a comfortable time and place to talk? May we begin?
Enrolment and Attendance Patterns	1. How would you describe current enrolment and attendance patterns by age and gender? (<i>Probe: Turning points at ages 12-14 and 15+, differences across blocks or seasons.</i>) 2. What are the most common reasons girls attend regularly or discontinue? (<i>Probe: Safety, household work, social norms, marriage, teacher gender.</i>)
Observed Barriers and Adaptations	3. What barriers most affect girls aged 12-18? 4. What programme adaptations are currently in place? (<i>Girls-only spaces, female teachers, flexible schedules, parent engagement, etc.</i>) 5. Which adaptations have worked best, and why? Which have not?
Female Staff	6. What challenges exist in recruiting and retaining female staff? 7. How does the presence of female staff affect girls' participation?
Safeguarding and Reporting	8. What safeguarding practices are in place? 9. If a girl experiences harassment or feels unsafe, what reporting mechanisms are available?
Facilities and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)	10. How adequate are toilet and water facilities for older girls? 11. What support is available for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)? Has inadequate support affected attendance?
Future Priorities	12. What changes would most improve educational participation among girls aged 15-18 over the next year? 13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Standardized Questionnaire

The standardized questionnaires were used solely to provide structured contextual information and to support data triangulation alongside the qualitative interviews. They were not intended for statistical analysis or hypothesis testing, and no inferential quantitative claims are made in this thesis. The questionnaires are reproduced in their original form below:

Standardized Questionnaire Adolescent Girl

Date: Camp: Household code (for girl-parent linkage): -

Opening script:

Thank you for speaking with me. You can skip any question or stop at any time. We are not collecting your name. Your answers are confidential and used for research only. May we begin?

Privacy check: Is the place private from unintended listeners? ☐ Yes ☐ No (move, then proceed)

1. Age group: ☐ 12-14 ☐ 15-18 ☐ Prefer not to say

2. Current attendance at any learning center (LC) or home-based learning (HBL): ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
3. If attending now: On a usual week, how many days do you attend? ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4-5
4. If not attending now: Main reasons (tick all that apply). ☐ Distance/route ☐ Time clashes (chores/work) ☐ Safety on the way ☐ Family rules (e.g., purdah) ☐ No female teacher ☐ Facilities (toilets/water/privacy) ☐ Costs/materials ☐ Health/illness ☐ Not interested ☐ Other: _____ ☐ Prefer not to say
5. Safety on the way to learning (1 = very unsafe, 5 = very safe): 1 2 3 4 5 ☐ Prefer not to say
6. Do you usually go with a maharam or in a group? ☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐ Prefer not to say
7. Learning facilities feel adequate for older girls (toilets, water, privacy). 1 2 3 4 5 ☐ Prefer not to say
8. Having female teachers makes me more comfortable to attend/participate. 1 2 3 4 5 ☐ Not applicable (no female teacher yet)
9. In class, I feel comfortable speaking or asking questions. 1 2 3 4 5 ☐ Prefer not to say
10. What topics feel most useful to you now? (tick all that apply) ☐ Literacy ☐ Numeracy ☐ Language (Burmese/English) ☐ Health & hygiene ☐ Life skills/vocational ☐ Religious study ☐ Other: _____
11. Family/household expectations make it hard for me to attend regularly. 1 2 3 4 5
12. Time of day that would help you attend (tick all that apply): ☐ Early morning ☐ Late morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ After chores/evening ☐ Weekend/holy day adjustments
13. Choose up to three changes that would help you most (select ≤ 3): ☐ Girls-only classes ☐ More female teachers/assistants ☐ LC closer to home ☐ Safer route/lighting ☐ Go in group/with mahram/volunteers ☐ Better toilets/privacy ☐ Flexible class times ☐ Materials (pads/books) ☐ Language support ☐ Other: _____
14. Open question (optional): Is there anything else that would make learning better for girls your age? _____

Standardized Questionnaire Parent/Caregiver

1. Relationship to focal girl: ☐ Mother ☐ Father ☐ Other caregiver (specify): _____
2. Age group of focal girl: ☐ 12-14 ☐ 15-18 ☐ Prefer not to say
3. Is she currently attending LC/HBL? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
4. In our household, education for girls 12-18 is important. 1 (Strongly disagree) 2 3 4 5 (Strongly agree)
5. Concerns when a girl attends (tick all that apply): ☐ Safety on route ☐ Facilities/toilets/privacy ☐ Mixed classes ☐ Male teachers ☐ Time clashes (chores/work) ☐ Reputation/rumors ☐ Costs/materials ☐ Health ☐ Other: _____ ☐ None
6. Features that would make attendance acceptable (tick all that apply): ☐ Girls-only classes ☐ Female teachers/assistants ☐ LC near home ☐ Group/volunteer travel ☐ Safer route/lighting ☐ Separate toilets/water ☐ Flexible times (after chores) ☐ Regular updates to parents ☐ Other: _____

7. Who mostly decides about the girl's attendance? ☐ Girl herself ☐ Mother ☐ Father ☐ Joint family decision ☐ Elder/other ☐ Prefer not to say
8. If the LC provided the features you chose in 6, how likely are you to support regular attendance? 1 (Very unlikely) 2 3 4 5 (Very likely)
9. What time of day best fits your household for the girl's attendance? ☐ Early morning ☐ Late morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ After chores/evening
10. Choose up to three changes that would help your daughter attend (more than 3 can be chosen): ☐ Girls-only classes ☐ Female teachers ☐ LC closer ☐ Safer route/lighting ☐ Group travel ☐ Better toilets/privacy ☐ Flexible times ☐ Learning materials ☐ Other: _____
11. Open question: What do you hope education will give your daughter in the next 2-3 years?

Standardized Questionnaire Key Informants (Teachers and NGO Education Staff)

1. Role: ☐ Teacher ☐ Facilitator ☐ LC manager ☐ NGO education staff ☐ Other: _____
2. Time in current role: ☐ <3 months ☐ 3-6 months ☐ >6 months
3. Current attendance patterns (typical last month):
☐ Girls 12-14 regular attendance: 1 (Very low) 2 3 4 5 (Very high)
☐ Girls 15-18 regular attendance: 1 2 3 4 5
☐ Trend last 6 months: ☐ Decreasing ☐ Stable ☐ Increasing
4. Main barriers for girls 12-18 (tick all that apply): ☐ Distance/route ☐ Safety concerns ☐ Family norms/purdah ☐ Lack of female staff ☐ Inadequate facilities ☐ Time clashes (chores/work) ☐ Curriculum relevance ☐ Language support ☐ Other: _____
5. Adaptations currently in place (tick all): ☐ Girls-only sections ☐ Female teachers/assistants ☐ Flexible/shifted hours ☐ Group/volunteered travel ☐ Satellite/HBL near homes ☐ Parent engagement meetings ☐ SMS/attendance updates ☐ Enhanced WASH/privacy ☐ Other: _____
6. Perceived effect of female staff on older girls' participation: 1 (None) 2 3 4 5 (Large) ☐ Not applicable
7. Safeguarding systems present (classroom/LC perimeter): ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know
8. If a girl feels unsafe, a clear reporting pathway exists and is used: 1 (Strongly disagree) 2 3 4 5 (Strongly agree) ☐ Don't know
9. Timetable flexibility helps older girls attend: 1 2 3 4 5 ☐ Not tried
10. Feasible changes in the next 12 months (choose up to three, more than 3 can be chosen): ☐ Recruit/retain female staff ☐ Adjust timetable (after chores) ☐ Improve toilets/privacy ☐ Safer route/lighting ☐ More satellite/HBL ☐ Parent communication ☐ Language support ☐ Curriculum adjustments ☐ Other: _____
11. How would you measure the success of these changes? (tick all): ☐ Attendance % of 12-14 ☐ Attendance % of 15-18 ☐ Retention over term ☐ Participation in class ☐ Parent satisfaction/complaints ☐ Other: _____
12. Open question: Any additional suggestions to improve access for girls 15-18? _____

Appendix C: Codebook Structure

The thesis used a shared hybrid thematic codebook applied across all three stakeholder groups. The codebook was developed before coding (deductive codes from the research question, literature, and interview guides) and refined during analysis (inductive subcodes emerging from the data). The full codebook comprises 79 codes organized across 13 code families. A summary of the code families and selected codes is provided below. The full codebook with code definitions is on file with the researcher.

Code family	Selected codes
1. Puberty and adolescence as turning point	Menstruation as threshold; age-based dropout; bodily maturity and status change; anticipatory restriction
2. Safety and mobility	Route safety and distance; escort/accompanied movement; harassment and eve-teasing fear; kidnapping narratives; evening restriction
3. Honor, reputation, and social control	Spoiled-girl narrative; community pressure; purdah and modesty norms; religious justification; intergenerational control; male guardian absence
4. Household labor and time constraints	Cooking and cleaning duties; sibling and caregiving responsibilities; schedule mismatch; domestic labor intensification post-puberty
5. Facilities, privacy, and MHM	Shared toilets; menstrual hygiene support; NGO supply lapse; shame and disclosure barrier; health facility inadequacy
6. Learning center quality and institutional trust	Teacher quality concerns; inconsistent attendance by teachers; private tutor preference; learning outcome assessment; age-limited provision
7. Gender-responsive program features	Female teachers and staff; girls-only sections; flexible timing; parent engagement; safeguarding and reporting pathways; indoor safe spaces
8. Girls' aspirations and agency	Desire to learn; work and financial independence aspirations; negotiating family permission; constrained agency; aspiration suppression in interview setting
9. Marriage and future pathways	Early marriage; marriage as protection; marriage as education endpoint; husband control; anticipatory household repositioning

Code family	Selected codes
10. Poverty and material barriers	School material costs; absence of umbrella or spare clothes; private tutor unaffordability; age ceiling in LC provision
11. Interview context and data production	Setting effect (household vs. learning center); caregiver presence; low voice; shyness; disclosure constraints; presence effect
12. Stakeholder divergence and alignment	Girls' vs. parents' framing; practitioners' vs. families' assessment of barriers; convergence on program preferences
13. Mechanism memos	Puberty-to-restriction; honor/reputation-control; safety-mobility; household-labor; MHM/dignity; institutional-trust; program-buffer; aspirations-under-constraint; interview-setting-as-data

Appendix D: Illustrative Coded-Segment Example

The following example illustrates how a transcript passage was coded using the shared codebook. This excerpt is drawn from the girl interview dataset (G07) and is presented here in anonymized, translated form. It illustrates the coding of the honor/reputation and safety/mobility mechanisms in a single passage.

Transcript ID: G07 (18-year-old married woman)
Excerpt (translated from Burmese): "Girls can't go out after they are grown up. Old women can go. Young girls can't go... It is prohibited in our religion. Does any girl go anywhere alone? Someone must go along with her."
Codes applied: Puberty and adolescence as turning point > age-based dropout; Honor, reputation, and social control > religious justification; Honor, reputation, and social control > purdah and modesty norms; Safety and mobility > escort/accompanied movement.
Mechanism memo link: Honor/reputation-control mechanism; safety-mobility mechanism. The passage illustrates how puberty activates both simultaneously - restriction is justified through religious obligation and operationalized through the escort requirement.
Analytical note: The framing is descriptive rather than critical. G07 presents this as an accurate account of social reality rather than as a grievance. This normalization is treated as analytically significant in the findings chapter (section 4.2).

Appendix E: Ethical Framework and Consent Approach

This appendix provides the ethical documentation supporting the conduct of this study, including the administrative approval obtained for fieldwork and the verbal participant information, consent, and assent scripts used during data collection. In line with ethical practice for qualitative research in humanitarian settings. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all adult participants, and informed verbal assent was obtained from adolescent participants, along with the necessary caregiver permission.

Before each interview, participants received a standardized verbal explanation of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to decline or withdraw at any time without consequence, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality. Interviews with adolescent girls were conducted using age-appropriate language and, where feasible, in settings that allowed participants to express their views independently and without undue influence from accompanying family members. When privacy could not be ensured, interviews were relocated or adapted to safeguard participants' comfort and autonomy.

The following documents are reproduced in this appendix:

- **Administrative approval from the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC)**

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
Cox's Bazar
www.rrrc.gov.bd

No: 51.04.2200.09.16.013.25- 4213

Date: 9 November 2025

Sub: Permission to enter the FDMN Camps.

Ref: Your mail dated 30 October 2025.

In response to your application referenced above, this office is pleased to grant you permission to enter in FDMN Camps- 2E, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 22 in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar for data collection on gender inclusive education for Rohingya girls. This permission will remain valid for the period from 1 December 2025 to 31 January 2026, under the following terms and conditions:

1. You are requested to inform and coordinate with the concerned CiCs (Camp-in-Charge) before commencing the activities;
2. Relevant Govt. Policy, Rules and Laws must be followed;
3. You are not allowed to enter the Camps during Government Holidays;
4. You must leave the Camps before 3.30 pm;
5. The content/report must be submitted to RRRC Office as well as to CiC Office, before publishing.


Fahmi M. Shaief
(Senior Assistant Secretary)
Email: contact@rrrc.gov.bd

Sadia Afrose
Master's Student
Erasmus programme Education Policies for Global
Development (GLOBED), (UAB & University of
Bremen).

Copy for Information and necessary action:

01. Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, Cox's Bazar;
02. Camp-in-Charge; Camp-2E, 11, 12, 13, 15 and 22 in Cox's Bazar;
03. PS to RRRC (For kind information of RRRC);
04. Assistant Programmer (For publishing in website);
05. Office Copy.

• **Informed Consent and Assent Script**

Adult participants

Assalamu Alaikum. I am a student collecting data for my master's thesis, titled "*How do social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?*" I would like to ask you some questions about girls' education in the camp. The interview will take about 30-40 minutes.

Your participation is voluntary. Would you like to participate? If anything is uncomfortable, you can tell me immediately, and we'll move on. You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time. We will not collect your name; your responses will be linked only to a code.

This research is completely for my academic purposes. Hence, there is no payment (or you'll receive a small thank-you, some snacks).

No third party will have access to the personal data. The data will be stored securely at the University of Bremen.

Do you agree to proceed? Yes / No

Do you allow audio recording for accuracy? (Yes/No)

Caregiver permission

Assalamu Alaikum. I am a student collecting data for my master's thesis, titled "*How do social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?*" I'd like to invite your child to take part in a brief study about the learning centres, education and safety. The interview will take about 30-40 minutes. Participation is voluntary. We will not record names; responses are confidential and linked only to a code.

No third party will have access to the personal data. The data will be stored securely at the University of Bremen.

Do you consent to your child participating?

Caregiver consent: Yes / No

Adolescent Assent

Assalamu Alaikum. I am a student collecting data for my master's thesis, which is titled "*How do social norms, household decision-making, and institutional conditions shape educational participation among Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?*" I'd like to ask you some questions about girls' education in the camp. The interview will take about 30-40 minutes.

<i>No third party will have access to the personal data. The data will be stored securely at the University of Bremen.</i>
We are speaking with adolescent girls about the learning centres, education and safety in the camp. Your participation is voluntary. Would you like to participate? If anything is uncomfortable, you can tell me immediately, and we'll move on. You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time. We will not collect your name; your responses will be linked only to a code.
Assent: Yes / No
Do you allow audio recording for accuracy? (Yes/No)
☐ Safeguarding Note
If distress arises, we will pause the interview and offer a referral to existing protection/GBV services.

Appendix F: Fieldwork Observation Notes

The following notes summarize contextual observations recorded during fieldwork. They were documented immediately following interviews and visits to learning centres and surrounding camp areas. These observations were not treated as primary qualitative data or formally coded but were used to provide contextual understanding during interpretation of the interview findings.

F1. Research Environment
Interviews were conducted in a variety of settings, including participants' shelters, outdoor seating areas, community spaces, and Learning Centres. Identifying a quiet, private location was often challenging because shelters were closely spaced and movement within the camps was constant. Household members, neighbours, and children were frequently present nearby, requiring occasional relocation or pauses to maintain participants' privacy.
Several interviews with adolescent girls were temporarily interrupted because participants were asked to assist with household activities, such as cooking, collecting water, or caring for younger siblings, before the discussion could continue.
F2. Community Context

Movement throughout the camps reflected a highly active community environment, with residents regularly travelling between shelters, markets, mosques, and humanitarian service points. Narrow pathways were often congested, particularly during peak hours, slowing movement between Learning Centres and households.

Learning Centres differed noticeably in physical condition. Some appeared well maintained and actively used, while others showed signs of limited activity during field visits. Several centres had limited indoor space, and privacy around classroom entrances was generally low because neighbouring shelters were located nearby.

Participant Engagement

Most participants were willing to discuss educational experiences once rapport had been established. Conversations generally became more detailed after initial questions about daily routines and family life.

Sensitive topics, particularly menstruation, marriage expectations, and restrictions on girls' mobility, required careful introduction. Before discussing these issues, participants were reminded that they could decline to answer any question. Some girls initially responded briefly before providing more detailed explanations after reassurance regarding confidentiality.

Parents frequently looked to other household members before answering questions related to family decision-making, suggesting that educational decisions were often viewed as collective rather than individual matters.

Interview Process

Conducting interviews required considerable flexibility because appointments frequently changed due to household responsibilities, weather conditions, or competing humanitarian activities within the camps.

Translation occasionally required clarification of concepts that lacked direct equivalents in the Rohingya language. In these situations, examples or simplified explanations were used to ensure participants understood the intended meaning without altering the substance of the questions.

Building trust was an important component of the fieldwork process. Participants generally became more comfortable sharing their experiences after informal conversation and explanation of the study's academic purpose.

Reflexive Notes

Throughout fieldwork, it became apparent that educational participation could not be understood in isolation from broader camp life. Discussions about education frequently expanded to include household responsibilities, livelihood challenges, community expectations, access to humanitarian services, and concerns about the future. These recurring connections reinforced the importance of interpreting girls' educational participation within its wider social and humanitarian context.

The field observations also highlighted the importance of maintaining a flexible, participant-centred approach during data collection. Adapting interview timing, ensuring privacy where possible, and responding sensitively to participants' comfort levels were essential for facilitating open discussion