2020
OVER THE EDGE

Countering Violent Extremism
Among Vulnerable Refugee
Communities in Malaysia

IMAN RESEARCH

SOCIETY • BELIEFS • PERCEPTION

Based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, IMAN Research (legally registered as PanjiAlam Centre Sdn Bhd) is a think tank which focuses on security and socio-political matters. We concentrate in the domains of peace and security, ethnic relations and religious harmony. We aim to deliver sound policy solutions along with implementable action plans with measurable outcomes. To date, we have worked with Malaysian and foreign governments as well as the private sectors and international bodies, such as Google, UNICEF, UNDP and USAID, on issues ranging from security, elections to civil society empowerment.

IMAN Research is spearheaded by experts with extensive local and international experience in the areas of management consultancy, social policy development, community resilience and engagement, particularly in the area of security, electoral reform, participatory urban redevelopment and psycho-social intervention within communities in conflict.

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FOREWORD

2020 has been a year of unwelcome surprises for Malaysia, her citizens and of course, IMAN Research. Who knew that we would have a government change again, so soon? And that a virus — the COVID-19 — could collapse the whole world within weeks? Businesses close up, and governments work around the clock with medical frontliners to stave the pandemic and treat affected patients.

In these times, we find heroes in the ordinary man and woman but we also see the uglier side of mankind. Racist rhetoric and abuse are being flung on minority communities and the marginalised. In Malaysia, migrant workers who have been coming to this country since the 1980s, are being scapegoated for the most minute reasons, as Malaysians worry and fight for their 'rice bowls.' We also saw vitriol hurled at Rohingya refugees, especially when a ship full of them attempted to land on our shores.

This report is timely: IMAN Research has been working on the matter of refugees and radicalisation for over a year, a project supported by the Canadian Government. The **OVER THE EDGE: COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AMONG VULNERABLE REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA** Report is a landscape review that investigates the push and pull factors influencing the Rohingya community in Malaysia towards violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State (IS). The findings of this report have been shocking, to say the least.
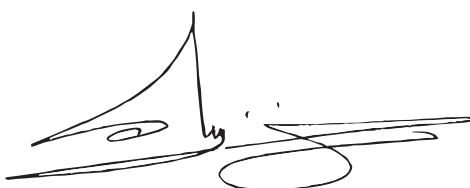
Some of the push and pull factors for refugees to embark on extreme actions are anger and frustration towards the Myanmar government, and the countries they have taken refuge in. Either way, none have proven to be the safe haven they expected. The experiences they endured — rape, theft, murder, physical abuse and trafficking — cannot be erased from their memories, and will be with them for the rest of their lives. They also feel alienated from society at large. These are enough to push the average person over the edge.

One of the refugees interviewed spoke, "My family was forced to migrate to Bangladesh and all our villages have been burnt and massacred. That's why my family was forced to migrate and find a place to save our lives and cross the border to Bangladesh." Yet in Malaysia, he and his friends face discrimination regularly.

The report is an in-depth query on their lives and what they think of their situation. It may be true that these refugees lack education, but they do not lack insight, wisdom and emotions. The findings in this report further compound the humanitarian crisis the world currently faces, and solidifies the need for urgent action.

I hope that upon reading this report, the reader will reflect on his or her privilege, and use it to help people in need. The events of 2020 thus far have proven that we need more compassion and understanding, and the wisdom and drive to ensure that we leave the world in a much better state than the one all of us inherited.

YBhg Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi Razak
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RINGKASAN EKSEKUTIF

Sehingga bulan Mac 2020, terdapat 179,520 pelarian berdaftar di UNHCR Malaysia, dengan kumpulan Rohingya merupakan kelompok terbesar dengan jumlah melebihi 100,000 orang (UNHCR, 2020). Krisis yang berterusan ini menyebabkan Myanmar berisiko menjadi pusat keganasan di Asia Tenggara. Kumpulan pengganas IS telah membuat seruan jihad di Myanmar, manakala kumpulan Al-Qaeda telah menggesa orang Islam untuk bangkit melawan golongan "kafir" yang menyerang agama Islam (Bashar 2019). Mantan Ketua Penolong Pengarah Cawangan Khas Bahagian Anti Pengganas (E8), Datuk Ayob Khan juga mengesahkan penggunaan naratif penganiayaan ke atas warga Rohingya oleh kumpulan IS untuk merekrut ahli baru (Channel News Asia 2018). Walaupun sasaran mereka adalah warga Malaysia, namun warga Rohingya juga terdedah kepada ancaman ini (Kumar 2018).

Oleh hal yang demikian, IMAN Research menjalankan satu usaha untuk meneliti risiko kelompok rentan, khususnya kumpulan pelarian Rohingya di Malaysia, untuk diradikalisasi ke arah kegiatan keganasan melampau. Kutipan data kajian telah dilakukan bermula awal tahun 2019, melibatkan komuniti Rohingya di Semenanjung Malaysia yang terbahagi kepada empat zon: Utara, Tengah, Selatan dan Pantai Timur. Kutipan data dijalankan melalui pendekatan kualitatif, iaitu melalui shadowing, perbincangan kelompok sasaran dan temu bual mendalam. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan empat tema utama dalam penelitian berkenaan proses radikalisasi ke atas warga pelarian Rohingya: (1) kerentanan pelarian, (2) sentimen terhadap keganasan, (3) perasaan dan (4) rangkaian Rohingya.

Kerentanan pelarian: Pelarian Rohingya di Malaysia bukan sahaja ditindas dan didiskriminasi di negara asal. Malah, kumpulan pelarian ini juga menghadapi halangan dalam mencapai keadaan mampu diri di Malaysia.

Sentimen terhadap keganasan: Hampir semua pelarian Rohingya di Malaysia menerima diskriminasi, layanan tidak adil serta ditindas di Myanmar, sama ada oleh pihak berkuasa atau kerjasama antara pihak berkuasa dan masyarakat tempatan. Akibatnya, sebahagian kecil pelarian Rohingya menganggap adalah wajar kekerasan digunakan bagi mempertahankan diri dan mengembalikan hak mereka.

Perasaan: Pelarian Rohingya di Malaysia menunjukkan perasaan hampa, kecewa, marah, curiga dan terasing. Kebiasaannya, perasaan ini ditujukan kepada kerajaan dan tentera Myanmar kerana menjadi punca kepada krisis yang dihadapi mereka.

Rangkaian Rohingya: Hubungan dan interaksi sesama pelarian Rohingya lebih rapat, sama ada sesama komuniti Rohingya dalam negara mahupun luar negara. Interaksi dan hubungan yang berlaku di luar kelompok mereka berlaku sesama warga migran dan penduduk tempatan.

CADANGAN:

Dasar khusus berkenaan hak-hak pelarian

Pembentukan dasar khusus untuk pelarian dapat membantu kerajaan membina pengkalan data berkenaan pelarian merangkumi maklumat peribadi, kesihatan dan pekerjaan. Ia juga diperlukan bagi menjamin hak pelarian untuk bekerja dan mendapatkan perkhidmatan kesihatan serta kewangan.

Program Pendidikan

Akses kepada pendidikan berkualiti adalah penting dalam membendung penyebaran keganasan melampau. Sebahagian pelarian Rohingya di Malaysia telah menubuhkan sekolah komuniti untuk pendidikan anak-anak mereka. Kerjasama antara komuniti Rohingya, kerajaan pusat dan badan Zakat diperlukan untuk mengukuhkan sekolah komuniti Rohingya. Pengukuhan ini dapat dilakukan melalui pengenalan sistem peperiksaan berpusat yang diiktiraf untuk sekolah komuniti Rohingya, serta penambahbaikan infrastruktur sekolah.

Inisiatif pembinaan kedamaian

Program dialog antara komuniti Rohingya, kerajaan Myanmar dan badan antarabangsa perlu diadakan bagi menyelesaikan konflik yang dihadapi. Program ini memberi mesej kepada pelarian Rohingya bahawa usaha masih diteruskan bagi merungkaikan konflik. Malah, ia juga dapat mengimbangi naratif kekerasan dan memupuk nilai damai.

KESIMPULAN:

Warga pelarian Rohingya adalah salah satu daripada kelompok rentan dalam masyarakat Malaysia. Pengalaman mereka menerima kekerasan, ditambah dengan keadaan mereka di Malaysia menyebabkan mereka lebih terdedah kepada naratif keganasan melampau. Maka, amatlah penting bagi kerajaan Malaysia untuk mengambil langkah proaktif dalam pengurusan pelarian di negara ini. Keupayaan pelarian untuk menjalani kehidupan mereka sendiri tanpa bantuan mana-mana pihak dapat memberi manfaat kepada banyak pihak terutamanya kerajaan Malaysia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As of March 2020, there are some 179,520 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia, with Rohingyas comprising the largest group at more than 100,000 people (UNHCR, 2020). As the crisis persists, Myanmar is at risk of becoming a terrorism flashpoint in Southeast Asia. The Islamic State's publications and media productions had called for jihad in Myanmar, while Al-Qaeda's media urged Muslims to rise against "apostate" forces that are against Islam in the regions under attack (Bashar 2019). The former head of Malaysia's Counter-terrorism Division (E8), Datuk Ayob Khan had also confirmed the use of the Rohingya narratives for ISIS recruitment (Channel News Asia 2018). Although the targets are primarily Malaysians sympathetic to the Rohingyas' cause, displaced Rohingya refugees could be vulnerable to recruitment (Kumar 2018).

Observing this situation, IMAN Research embarked on a project to examine the risk of vulnerable communities, particularly Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, of getting radicalised and recruited into violent extremism. The project involves Rohingya refugee communities in Peninsular Malaysia, divided into four regions: Northern, Central, Southern and East Coast. Data was collected through a mix of qualitative approaches, namely in the form of shadowing observations, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The findings revealed four themes in the discourse of radicalisation among Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, which are: (1) refugee vulnerability, (2) sentiments towards violence, (3) feelings and (4) Rohingya networks. Four central conclusions can be made from these four themes.

Refugee vulnerability: Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are vulnerable due to their prolonged experience with persecution and violence, on top of the restraints they face in being self-sufficient in Malaysia.

Sentiments towards violence: Most Rohingya experience discrimination, injustice and persecution back in Myanmar. Although they renounce the use of violence, some Rohingya individuals justify violent recourse against the Myanmar government to protect themselves and reclaim their rights.

Feelings: Rohingya refugees in Malaysia often demonstrate feelings of distrust, frustration, anger, disappointment and alienation. These feelings are usually directed towards the Myanmar government, military and their overall plight.

Rohingya networks: Rohingya refugee communities have close-knit relationships with members of their own community, either internationally or in the country they are living in. In some cases, they interact and connect outside their community, especially with migrants and locals in Malaysia.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

National Policy on Refugee Rights

A national policy on refugees would help the government to establish their own database on refugees in Malaysia, encompassing personal information, healthcare and workplace records. For the refugees, a national policy on refugees should be established to guarantee their right to work in Malaysia, access to financial and healthcare services.

Education program

Access to quality education is an important step in P/CVE. Some Rohingya refugee communities establish their own community schools to educate their children. We proposed a collaboration between the Rohingya community, federal government and Zakat body to strengthen the establishment of their community schools. This collaboration will be able to introduce a federal examination scheme to these community schools with the state Zakat body coming in to improve the infrastructure of the school.

Peace building initiative

Peace dialogue between the Rohingya community, Myanmar government and international agencies should be held. This is to ensure the community that international bodies and the Malaysian government are doing their best to alleviate the crisis. At the same time, this will counter the sentiments of violence as an option to return their rights that is embedded in certain Rohingya individuals. Therefore, educational programs to promote peace among the Rohingya refugee community can also be held for the same purpose as above.

CONCLUSION

Rohingya refugee groups are one of the vulnerable groups out there in the community. Their past experiences on violence and their current situation made them even more susceptible towards violent extremism. As such, it is important for the Malaysian government to take a more proactive approach in managing refugees in the country. It is within our self-interest to ensure the self-sufficiency of refugees in our country while they reside amongst us.

INTRODUCTION

IMAN Research, in collaboration with the Canadian government, has embarked on a landscape review and capacity building project that investigates the push and pull factors influencing the Rohingya community in Malaysia towards violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State (IS). The data generated from this research, gathered through an intensive ethnographic fieldwork process, will be used to develop and promote policies and initiatives to counter violent extremism within the Rohingya community. The project will contribute to broader and better informed efforts on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) among vulnerable communities in Malaysia, and hopefully one day serve as a blueprint when dealing with various migrant communities in the country.

BACKGROUND

In November 2019, Republic of The Gambia filed a case with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Myanmar, alleging that their treatment of the Rohingya community violated provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[1] This latest development bears great significance as it is the first legal act in an effort to curb the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis. On January 23rd, 2020, the ICJ ruled that the Myanmar government was to cease all alleged genocidal acts against the Rohingya and to preserve any evidence (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

The Rohingyas are an ethnic group from Myanmar's Rakhine state (formerly, Arakan). Under the 1948 Union Citizenship Act, citizenship was granted onto eight ethnic groups along with others who had been living in Myanmar prior to 1823 (Haque, 2017). As such, Rohingyas are granted citizenship following the 1948 Union Citizenship Act. However, the situation changed with the coup d'etat in 1962 led by General Ne Win. Under the rule of General Ne Win, operation Nagamin (Dragon King) was launched for the purpose of registering citizens and screening out foreigners prior to national consensus in 1978. The nationalisation of the economy and the campaign against "outsiders" that were launched under his rule prompted the first wave of Rohingya refugees in 1978. The Rohingya are perceived as outsiders due to cultural, religious and linguistic differences.

Rohingya community leaders maintain that they are a distinct ethnic group going back as far as the seventh century. However, there are no historical records to support this claim. Muslim presence in the region dates back to the 12th century with the arrival of Muslims in Arakan. In 1784, Arakan was annexed and incorporated into the Burmese kingdom, later forming part of the Union of Burma. During the 19th century, there was a mass migration of Bengali Muslims into the region which was perceived as a demographic threat by the majority Buddhists, who feared for their homeland and livelihoods.

The Rohingya lost their legal status when the Myanmar junta passed a new law in 1982

emphasizing taingyintha (national race) as a basis for citizenship, omitting them from the list of 135 national races of Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017). This led to severe implications for the Rohingya – limitations to their freedom of movement, access to education and basic human rights, thus rendering them vulnerable. A second operation in 1992 called Operation Pyi Thaya (Clean and Beautiful Nation) triggered another wave of Rohingya exodus as the operation was launched with the same purpose as the previous operation. It was estimated that around 200,000 Rohingya refugees moved to Bangladesh as a result of the operation.

In 2014, Myanmar released a UN-backed census that refused to acknowledge the Rohingya identity. Instead, the term "Bengali" was used to identify them (Associated Press 2014). According to the Myanmar government, the Rohingyas are descendants of Bengali immigrants who had migrated during British rule. Desperately seeking recognition and identity, the persecuted Rohingya are susceptible to radicalization into violent extremism (Habulan et. al, 2018). This explains the rise of Arakanese rebel groups fighting back against the Myanmar government, invoking self-defence as justification for their actions.

Myanmar's security forces have responded through "clearance operations" designed to instil immediate terror within the community. The operations were typically conducted in the early hours, with people being awakened by the firing of weapons, explosions and screams of terror as soldiers targeted villagers and set fire to their homes. The death toll from these operations are estimated at 10,000 lives, with reports of mass graves unearthed (UN Human Rights Council, 2018).

In addition to that, tensions between the Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya community reached new heights following the alleged rape of a Buddhist woman, followed by the retaliatory killing of 10 Muslim pilgrims in 2012. These incidents have sparked massive ethno-religious violence in that region. The UN also reported cases of Buddhist men and members of other ethnic groups participating in the military violence (UN Human Rights Council

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1	Human rights treaty adopted by General Assembly of the United Nations on 9th of December 1948 which put in details on action that qualifies as genocide and punishable according to law.

2018).

The UN Human Rights Council's independent fact-finding mission also reported restrictions on religious practices, forced labour, sexual violence on women, arson and killings (UN Human Rights Council, 2019). Moreover, Rohingya villages were vacated and flattened for Buddhist resettlement though the government claimed that it was preparation for repatriating the Rohingya. Despite mounting evidence, Aung San Suu Kyi has consistently denied accusations of the government's actions.

Implications for Malaysia and the region

By the end of 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2019) reported that 1.1 million refugees had fled the country to the neighbouring states including Bangladesh, Thailand and Malaysia. In Malaysia, the Rohingya constitute 55.6% of the country's refugee population (UNHCR, 2019).

Despite this, Malaysia is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and thus lacks a legal framework to guarantee the rights of refugees. This results in challenges to obtain legal work, access to affordable healthcare and education among others. As the refugees do not receive financial support from UNHCR and have no legal right to work, they usually perform 3D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs to earn a livelihood. The younger generations are also affected as they lack access to education, specifically education that can offer academic credentials. Due to their status as refugees, the cost of medical health services at local government hospitals or clinics for a refugee is the same rate as other foreigners. Even with UNHCR bearing 50% of the treatment cost, it is still relatively high. All things considered, Rohingya refugees in Malaysia are vulnerable, alienated and unable to integrate with Malaysian society and are at-risk of getting radicalised into violent extremist movements.

As the crisis persists, Myanmar is in danger of becoming a terrorism flashpoint in Southeast Asia. The Islamic State has many wilayats (territories), and has urged its followers to travel there if Syria is not possible. In 2014, IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi alluded that the Rohingyas were among the oppressed Muslim communities in the world; IS publications and media productions also called for jihad in Myanmar. Similarly, Al-Qaeda's media urged Muslims to rise against "apostate" forces against Islam in the regions under attack (Bashar 2019). The former head of Malaysia's Counter-terrorism Division (E8), Datuk Ayob Khan had confirmed the use of the Rohingya narrative for IS recruitment (Channel News Asia 2018). Although the targets are primarily Malaysians sympathetic to the Rohingyas' cause, displaced Rohingya refugees could also be vulnerable to recruitment (Kumar 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Simply put, radicalization denotes the process by which an individual becomes an extremist. However, there is ongoing debate on its end point, whether it involves the adoption of extreme political, social or religious beliefs and not necessarily engagement in violence, or adoption of "beliefs that not only justify violence but compel it, and how they progress – or not – from thinking to action" (Borum 2011, 8). Borum argues that radicalization into violent extremism (RVE) does not require an ideological component as a prerequisite for involvement in VE.

5	The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms
4	Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization
3	Moral Engagement
2	Displacement of Aggression
1	Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment
G	Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions

Figure 1 Moghaddam's Staircase of Terrorism

Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism (Figure 1) proposes a model for understanding the radicalization process, where people ascend the floors as their commitment to VE increases. According to this, most people are on the ground floor as they experience relative deprivation and perceive some form of injustice. They may climb to the first floor for solutions, but those who do not find any continue to climb higher; with each floor, their perceived options decrease until there is only one solution left. From Moghaddam's model, the population shrinks with increased commitment to VE.

Efforts to identify individuals susceptible to RVE should rely on risk factors rather than profiles,

as it accounts for the intersection of individual and environmental factors. Individuals engaged in terrorism or VE have been found to share commonalities and these risk factors present a useful framework for understanding how an individual can be socialized into terrorism or VE (Horgan 2008; Silke 2003). Grievance-based issues such as social identification, marginalization and perceived injustice serve as push factors, whereas pull factors are incentives or rewards from involvement in VE.

SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

Individuals tend to be connected to the situation either through direct exposure by personally experiencing it, or indirect means such as sharing the sentiments or empathizing with the victims (Horgan 2008; Silke 2003). The connection to the group or cause can serve as a driving factor to right the wrong, by giving individuals an identity through their identification with a cause or group. Identity is suggested to be at the core of radicalisation, with the success of a deradicalization programme being highly dependent on its ability to provide a distinctive identity to a radical-to-be (Al Raffie, 2013).

MARGINALIZATION AND ALIENATION

Marginalization can occur due to multiple reasons such as discrimination or systemic barriers. Depending on the severity, it can also push individuals outside of mainstream society and towards the fringes, rendering them vulnerable to VE groups. Marginalisation encompasses social, political and economic treatment that affected the livelihood of groups that experience marginalisation. As such, groups that are marginalised may have the risk of being alienated from the rest of society.

PERCEIVED INJUSTICE

Perceived injustice or humiliation can cause anger and resentment to accumulate, and victims may assign blame to the party they perceive as responsible for inflicting the situation upon them. In line with this, a desire for vengeance or "the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult" (Silke 2003, 40) can lead to the justification of extreme violence as a viable or necessary response.

Argomaniz and Lynch (2018) posit that a moral justification for aggression is needed to overcome the moral impediments to violence, reflected in the concept of self-help or taking the law into one's hands. Violent radicals tend to see the use of violence as necessary, as well as a provoked reaction - thus implying it is a last resort (Taylor and Quayle, 2004; Horgan, 2008).

The presence of these factors does not mean the individuals are terrorists. In fact, they may require additional support or stimulus to be radicalized into violent extremism, which is usually provided by VE groups. For example, VE groups provide their own narratives which entail a specific interpretation of the situation, the problems and methods to remedy it (Silke 2003). Thus, VE groups capitalize on grievances and frustrations of at-risk individuals, channelling it towards their cause.

REFUGEES AS A SECURITY CONCERN

The Syrian crisis saw a mass influx of refugees into Europe, raising security concerns particularly the risk of militants posing as refugees. Two attackers of the 2015 Paris terror attacks had arrived on Leros, Greece among Syrian refugees (BBC 2016). Aside from that, there have been numerous reports of refugees being arrested for or in attempts at conducting violent extremist or terrorist acts. In January 2019, three Iraqis in Germany were arrested on suspicion of committing such an act (Harris 2019); a similar case was reported in the United States involving a 21-year-old Syrian refugee leading an IS-inspired plot.

In addition to that, refugee communities, particularly the youth, are ideal recruits due to their situation (Rafiq, Haras; Malik 2017). In Bangladesh, there are concerns that pro-ISIS groups would attempt to recruit refugees within camps (Batabyal 2017). The International Crisis Group's report discovered no evidence of madrasahs (Islamic schools) promoting violence or intolerance, nor recruitment attempts by jihadi groups. However, it was found that Hefazat-e-Islam, a group which has called for jihad against the Myanmar government for their treatment of the Rohingyas, does have influence over the mosques and madrasahs within the camps, through the provision of financial and technical assistance (International Crisis Group 2019; Solomon 2019).

It is difficult to ascertain the correlation between refugee flows and increased terrorist attacks within the host country as most studies are not empirical. Moreover, Eleftheriadou (2018) argues that long-term radicalization due to an accumulation of experiences from their country of origin and treatment within the host country, poses a greater security threat to host countries. Sarah Lischer suggested three groups to categorise refugees potential of using humanitarian assistance for militarisation, which are situational refugees, persecuted refugees and state-in-exile refugees. Situational refugees are a group of refugees who lack political cohesion and motivation to divert refugee relief in support of militarization.

Photo credit: Mahi Ramakrishnan

The Rohingya are considered persecuted refugees, having fled their country due to being targeted for their identity which is considered as group-based persecution with a weak political organisation. Categories of persecuted refugees are somewhat likely to divert humanitarian relief to support for militarization (Lischer, 2003)

In a way, refugees are more vulnerable compared to other groups due to their experiences and it can lead to a feeling of hopelessness (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013). This additional burden can make

them susceptible to radicalization. For example, violent extremist groups may offer basic needs that host countries fail to provide (Mohamed 2016). As such, refugee populations are often highlighted as a potential recruitment pool for violent extremist groups.

CVE APPROACHES

Most steps undertaken by states' have been focused on hard approaches through the military and legal systems. However, it is also important to apply soft approaches in formulating P/CVE strategies which address the push and pull factors. These strategies tend to engage various stakeholders, adopting a collaborative, community-oriented approach; in doing so, it contributes to increasing community resilience. CVE strategies should be designed with the situation's context in mind as it varies from conflict to conflict. CVE approaches towards refugee groups should take into account refugee experiences, taking into account each refugee crisis, their age group and their vulnerability.

Although refugee experiences vary greatly depending on their age, experiences and country of origin, there is a pervasive hopelessness shared (Milton, Spencer, and Findley 2013). As seen in previous sections, it is vital to address the refugees' situation within the host countries as it can contribute towards long-term radicalization. Most crises are considered Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS), where 25,000 people are in exile for five consecutive years in the host country; the UN has classified the Rohingya refugee in Malaysia as PRS (UNHCR 2019). According to the UNHCR (2016), the average duration of refugee crises is 26 years with most lasting more than 20 years.

Echoing this, Sude, Stebbins and Weilant (2015) argue that humanitarian assistance is insufficient to address the problems and challenges faced by refugee communities. As the crisis continues to unfold, their needs will change. Initially, refugees will be concerned with survival and meeting their basic needs of food, water, shelter and security. However, if the conflict persists, additional needs such as healthcare, education and employment should be considered by host countries when formulating policies. In line with Eleftheriadou (2018), the authors stress the importance of sustainability, particularly with regard to the host country's commitment and availability of resources.

A possible CVE approach is to utilize the public health model, by utilizing pre-existing programs that are aimed at other social ills for VE due to similar risk factors (Challgren et al. 2016). Generally, it involves primary levels of prevention which include non-discriminatory policies as it allows for a holistic approach to address the factors of violent radicalization. It can target the root causes of VE by addressing the basic needs such as education, access to health services, social engagement and personal development. In addition to that, it provides an opportunity to engage with the at-risk community by building partnerships and establishing trust. An important part of this is to engage with the community to find out what they need, and bringing them into the process can also ensure they are committed to it (Challgren et al. 2016).

Education and opportunities for the youth

Prolonged crisis can lead to lost generations, denying youths the opportunity for education and a future. Due to the situations faced by refugee children, education can provide a sense of normalcy for them and it is found that their schools see full attendance (Sude, Stebbins, and Weilant 2015). Education also plays a role in creating conditions that allow for defences against violent extremism, whilst emphasizing non-violence and peace (UNESCO, 2017).

Weine and Ahmed (2012) found that idle time and unobserved spaces are potential risk factors for radicalization, as the youth are left to their own devices. The lack of a future contributes to hopelessness and may stoke anger. Martin-Rayo's (2011) study found that youths in Dabaab, Kenya who had received some form of education did not join Al-Shabaab, a militant group based in East Africa. As such, UNHCR's Refugee Education Strategy (UNHCR 2019) emphasizes both access and quality of education to ensure that youth can

achieve their maximum potential, regardless of their circumstances.

In addition to that, training or vocational programs can be provided for adolescents. Programs that take into account the local context and needs of the people on the ground can provide meaningful opportunities; it also serves as a viable outlet to spend their time.

Individual and community resilience

Resilience sees the ability to "adapt to and overcome adversity in the face of challenging circumstances and trauma." It involves the balancing of protective and risk factors. Protective factors can be increased by introducing measures that target all levels: individual, family and the community. Support systems are crucial for building resilience and families are usually the main entity responsible (Weine and Ahmed 2012).

Ahmad and Masinda (2018) suggest that support be provided to refugees upon their arrival in the host country to help them settle in. There are different types of support that should be provided for refugees upon arrival to the host country. Basic needs such as shelter, food and healthcare are necessary to ensure refugees are able to sustain themselves in a new environment. Besides support given by the government from the host country, there is also humanitarian assistance given to refugees by NGOs.

Aside from that, communities need to be empowered, enabling them to take control of their lives – or achieve self-sufficiency. With the increased lengths of crises, self-sufficiency rather than reliance on humanitarian assistance from NGOs is preferable as it can reduce the host country's burden. Policies which can lead to societal marginalization and discrimination should be eliminated. As such, aside from basic needs support given by the host country, policies that led to refugees self-efficacy in a prolonged crisis is important to reduce the burden of the host country in receiving and managing refugees.

METHODOLOGY

DESIGNING OUR RESEARCH

When we decided to conduct our research on Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia, we realised there were a few challenges ahead of us. As the largest population among all refugee groups in Malaysia, they speak and write in a completely different language than Malaysians, and live in pockets of the cities with low literacy levels. Thus, different languages, low literacy level and lack of education access restricted the methodological approach we could use to conduct this research.

As such, we took on a qualitative approach in collecting our research data. Our data collection is divided into two phases with the first phase encompassing in-depth interviews and shadowing, while the second phase involved focus-group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews and shadowing.

Through collaboration with local contacts in selected locations throughout Peninsular Malaysia, access to the community was obtained by field researchers who were situated in each location. Each phase focused on different aspects to enable our research team to gain a deep understanding of the Rohingya refugee groups' livelihoods.

The first phase of data collection looked into Rohingya's living situation, from their access to basic needs like education, healthcare and food while the second phase studied their sentiments on violent extremism as well as their in-group and out-group networks. The locations for this research were divided into four regions; Northern region (Penang, Perlis, Kedah), Southern Region (Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka), Central Region (Klang Valley) and East Coast Region (Pahang).
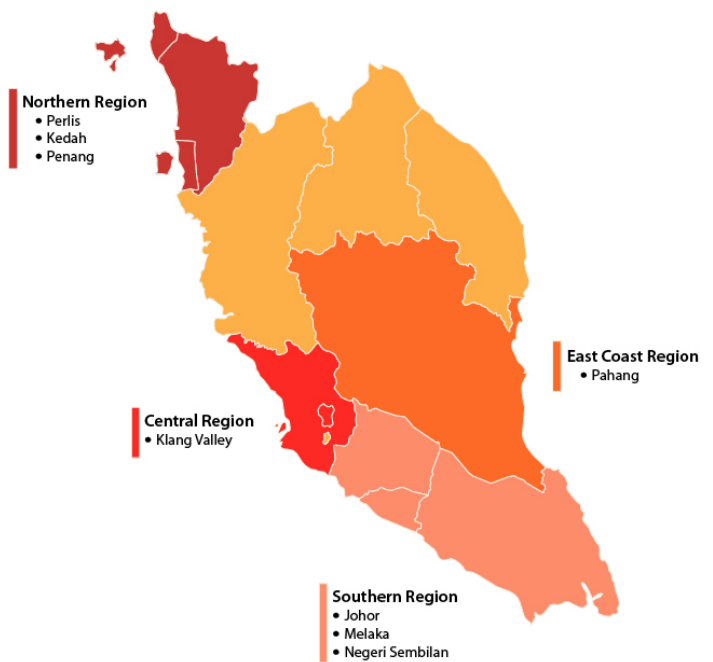

Figure 2 Research Locations

Population and sampling method

Data collection took place across the four aforementioned regions, with the data for focus group discussions involving local interpreters based in each location. Meanwhile, for in-depth interviews and shadowing, data collection only involved Northern and Southern regions due to the availability of our field researchers in those two areas.

As such, the sampling method used in this research project is purposive sampling. There were a few criteria for choosing a population to be involved as a sample. The first criteria was that participants would be Rohingya refugees of 18 until 80 years old. The reason for choosing Rohingya refugees of age 18 years and above is

to avoid involving underage participants that required parental consent. The second criteria of choosing Rohingya refugees were participants of both men and women. Access to Rohingya women was important to obtain gendered perspectives and experiences.

Constructing our instruments

Our instruments here refer to our in-depth interview questions and FGD questions that we had prepared beforehand. In-depth interview questions are divided into two sets: the first set of questions were asked on the first half of the research project, which was more focused on the aspect of livelihood - encompassing education, religion, social media and their sentiments as a refugee in Malaysia. The reason for such a question to be constructed was to develop a

better understanding of the Rohingya refugees' experience in Malaysia as their host country. This would also help in studying potential feelings of marginalisation due to their status as refugees.

The second half of the research was more focused on their network, either through their interaction with local communities in Malaysia or internationally which is done through aspects of neighbourhood, Rohingya community network overseas and locally, their experience undergoing violence, and financial network. All these elements went into separate sets of questions for Rohingya men and women. The reason we tailored questions for men and women is because both sexes live very different lifestyles within the same community. For instance, it is rare to find Rohingya women working and becoming breadwinners for their family, hence the question on financial information may not apply to them. However, they would possess more information about the neighbourhood. As such, different sets of questions allowed us to gain a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of Rohingya men and women.

In terms of FGDs, the questions that had been composed looked into the sentiments of Rohingya refugees on violent extremism and their experiences. The same set of questions were prepared for both men and women as the focus group discussion's theme was commonly experienced between the two genders. A total of 14 questions were listed in the focus group discussion which also included visual cues that portrayed incidents related to the Rohingya crisis. As such, some of the questions constructed in the focus group discussion were stimulus-based, and related to three pictures that were selected beforehand to study the FGD theme.

All instruments that have been constructed for the second half of the research project were based on the VERA-2 indicator which was adapted as a qualitative tool for our research. VERA-2 was an instrument developed by Pressman in 2009 for risk assessment related to terrorism and violent extremism. This tool was then revised by Pressman and Flockton in 2012 and 2013 by Beardsley and Beech. There are five domains included in VERA-2 accounting with 31 indicators overall. Our research

purposely focused only two domains out of the five domains in VERA-2. The first domain is beliefs, attitudes and ideology while the second domain is social context and intention. These two domains account for 14 out of 31 indicators in VERA-2. Table 1 listed 14 indicators in VERA-2 that became the basis for our research instruments.

These fourteen indicators are evaluated to ensure each indicator is possible to be adapted to Rohingya refugees as a vulnerable community. Possible questions are then listed and discussed before being inserted into the FGD questions list. Certain indicators listed under these two domains have been deemed unapplicable for the context of the Rohingya crisis during our process of instrument construction. Those indicators are (1) rejection of democratic society values and (2) hostility to national collective identity. As such, there are no questions that have been constructed based on these two indicators.

For the purpose of this report, interviews and FGD transcripts were translated from Malay into English. In-depth interviews and FGDs held in areas like the Northern and Southern region used Bahasa Melayu as the medium of conversation. This is also because interpreters who accompanied our field researcher could only converse in Malay and the Rohingya language. As such, it was easier for our field researchers to transcribe into Malay language and preserve the meaning in the transcription.

Data Analysis

Data that has been collected through shadowing observations, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis approach. In thematic analysis approach, themes were identified based on data that has been collected. Our analysis was done by using NVivo applications. Codes and themes in our findings are based on repeated feedback by respondents in combination with VERA-2 indicators. This is to ensure that we successfully documented Rohingya refugee communities' social condition and relaying violent extremism sentiments among them without bias.

DOMAIN	INDICATORS
Beliefs, attitude and ideology	Commitment to ideology justifying violence
	Victim of injustice and grievances
	Dehumanisation/demonisation of identified targets of injustice
	Rejection of democratic society and values
	Feelings of hate, frustration, persecution, alienation
	Hostility to national collective identity
	Lack of empathy, understanding outside own group
Social context and intention	Seeker, developer, consumer of violent extremist materials
	Identification of target (person, place, group) in response to perceived injustice
	Personal contact with violent extremists
	Anger and expressed intent to react violently
	Expressed desire to die for cause or martyrdom
	Expressed intent to plan, prepare violent action
	Susceptible to influence, authority and indoctrination

Table 1 VERA-2 Domains and Indicators
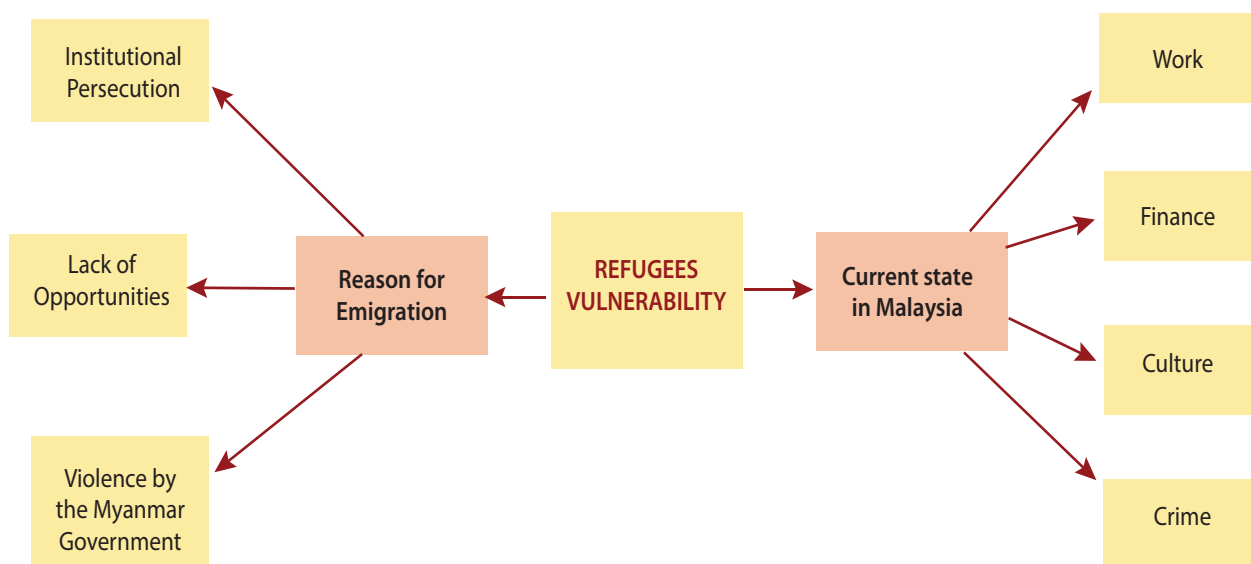
FINDINGS

Figure 3 Sub-theme map of Refugee Vulnerability

Our findings have been organised into several themes. Overall, there are four themes that have been identified: (1) Refugees vulnerability, (2) Sentiments towards violence, (3) Feelings and (4) Rohingya networks. In terms of refugee vulnerability, our findings discussed their reason for emigration, which encompassed the refugees' personal experience back in Myanmar and the difficulties they faced, and also their current state in Malaysia, covering the topics of finance, work and culture of their communities in Malaysia. The second theme is sentiments towards violence, discussing Rohingya refugee perspectives on violent acts and their own experiences with violence. The third theme delved into Rohingya refugee emotions towards their past and current predicament while the final theme on networks looked into Rohingya refugee relationships within their own community (either in Malaysia or overseas) and with other communities.

REFUGEES VULNERABILITY

There are two sub-themes when it comes to the discourse of Rohingya refugees' vulnerability. These sub-themes are derived from the data that we had collected and analysed through a thematic analysis method. These two are (1) reason for emigration, and; (2) current state in Malaysia.

Reason for Emigration

There are three reasons that underpin the Rohingya's migration to other countries. The first reason is institutional persecution. The persecution they faced back in their own country was usually from the Myanmar army. Some of their resources were used by the army for their military camps and the refugees also became forced labor to build these camps. This was mentioned by one of our respondents,

"I left because I was afraid of forced labor. One day every week we have to do this duty. Military comes to our house and forcibly takes us to carry their belongings and build their camp. They also order us to collect bamboo to make their camp. If we do not have bamboo in our house, we have to buy from a neighbor and follow them." (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

Besides institutional persecution, Rohingya refugees also migrated due to lack of opportunities for them back in Myanmar. Constant discrimination leaves them unable work and earn a living, while obtaining food supplies is also a challenge as their movement is restricted. This was mentioned by our respondents;

"Yes, they are not able to buy living food and whatever they needed at home for my family and they are not able to work and go anywhere from the village that's why I have to send money, all time they have to stay at home" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

With movement restrictions, lack of opportunities and ongoing persecution, the Rohingyas living in Myanmar have a hard time sustaining themselves. They also experience violence inflicted by the Myanmar government on them. The violence is instigated not only by the military but also by other government agencies. This was mentioned by our respondent in the in-depth interview:

"My family was forced to migrate to Bangladesh and all our villages have been burnt and massacred. That's why my family was forced to migrate finding a place to saves our lives and cross the border to Bangladesh" (Male, Northern Region)

Leaving the country by crossing the border to Bangladesh has been their only option to protect themselves from the violence inflicted by the Burmese government.

Current state in Malaysia

Besides Bangladesh, their predicament has forced them to seek refuge in other neighboring countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. The Rohingyas' vulnerability in Malaysia is also one of the aspects that needs to be looked into. Shadowing observations conducted by our field researcher in Penang and Johor showed that most Rohingyas in Malaysia work in blue-collar jobs. Rohingya men usually work outside as office helpers, scrap collectors and drivers to sustain their family. Meanwhile, Rohingya women usually work from home as tailors. Some Rohingya who are more skilled are sometimes employed by organisations at a higher salary rate. For example, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Medicins Sans Frontier (MSF) and UNHCR employ Rohingya individuals with a monthly salary of RM2500.

Therefore, a lot of Rohingya in Malaysia have difficulties in sustaining themselves financially. Besides the need to work for their livelihood in Malaysia, they also need to send money to their families abroad. Although it depends on their financial means every month, this transaction is crucial because of the dire living conditions of their families overseas.

"RM800 to RM1000 is for their monthly needs which is for medical cost and food for one family which is not enough in the refugee camp. For your information, the food supplies in Bangladesh refugee camp is not enough and the refugees themselves have to work on that." (Male, Northern Region)

In terms of the frequency of the transaction, some refugees send it on a monthly basis or sporadically, solely depending on what they can afford, and when. For example:

"Yes, I monthly send 150,000 kyats for my family" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

Meanwhile, some respondents said they had no fixed schedule for sending financial support to their families overseas.

"Yes I sent. To my parents. Who are living in Bangladesh. But I cannot, I couldn't, I am not able to pay every month. Because, I have to do home work, the entire way here. And then, if sometime if I had extra money, then I can pay" (Male, 31-60, Klang Valley)

The process of sending financial support to their families overseas is also not as simple as it seems to be. As refugees in Malaysia have limited rights, often they do not have bank accounts that can facilitate overseas transactions. As such, they rely on their friends or agents to send the money to their family members or to neighbours of their family, depending on the available option.

In terms of culture, Rohingya communities in Malaysia differ greatly from each other depending on the state they live in. For instance, the Rohingya community in Perlis is pretty much assimilated into Malay culture through their clothing, names and the language they converse in. Our field researcher found out that some Rohingya in Perlis have even been identified as Malay by public servants and are married to local women.

Meanwhile, the Rohingya in Penang are distinct: they speak in their own language and have a

community structure, with their own leaders and activities. The reason for the vast difference between the Rohingya communities in both states appears to stem from the economic activities practiced in each community and the rural-urban dynamics. Rohingya in rural areas like Perlis tend to work as fishermen and peasants while the Rohingya in Penang work as helpers in markets, offices and shops, or as cleaners and scrap collectors.

As Rohingya in Malaysia are financially stretched, it is a norm for them to share a house while disregarding the gender factor. As such, there are cases of rape that happen among Rohingya women and also Indonesian women by Rohingya men. This happens as the men and women share the same house or even sometimes the same room, with no marriage ties or relationship between them. Besides rape, the absence of proper rules and guidelines in the issues of marriage also affect some of the communities as there are Rohingya women who have been abandoned by husbands who have gone on to marry other women, and vice versa.
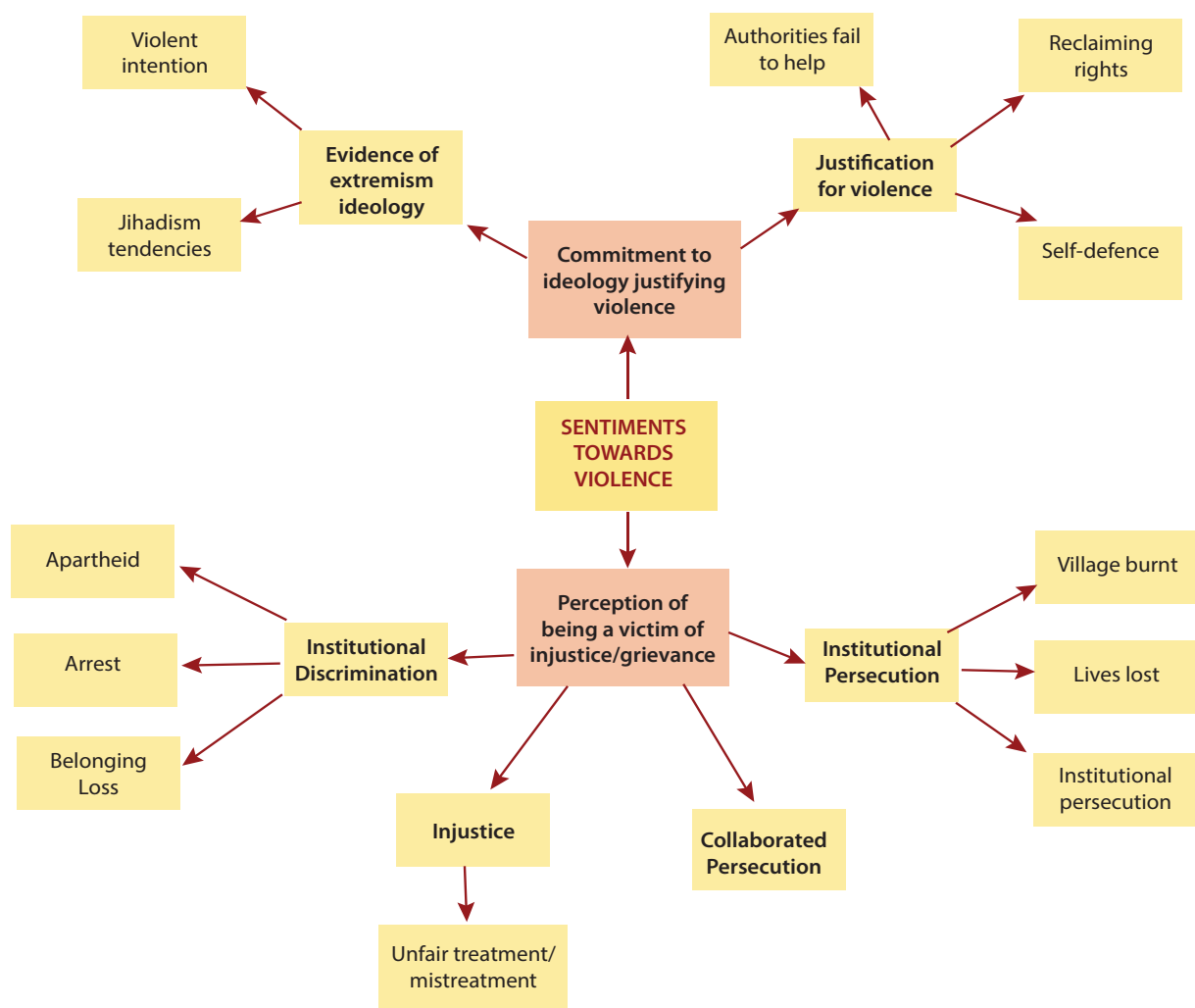
Figure 4 Sub-theme map of Sentiments of Violence

SENTIMENTS OF VIOLENCE

As such, discourse on violence among Rohingya communities in Malaysia can be divided into two sub-themes: (1) their commitment to ideology justifying violence, (2) perception of being victim of injustice/grievances.

Commitment to Ideology justifying violence

Topics of violence were discussed by our field researchers with the Rohingya communities to gauge reasons that might justify violent acts. The first reason would be the failure of governments and authorities in easing their situation. This was mentioned by one of our respondents in a focus group discussion.

> *"Even if I am old, if I can go back and join ARSA to fight for the return of my homeland and justice there, because the world is unable to give justice."* (Female, Northern region)

The respondents noted that international groups and fellow Muslims had been silent, and were doing nothing to resolve their crisis. They were not hopeful that the world would come to their rescue.

> *"I do not hope that the world will help, especially the problem of Muslims, the world will not care to solve the problem. That's why we understand that there will be no other people that will help us. We and our own generation would be trained to fight for our own destinies and rights there."* (Female, Northern region)

The failure of authorities in helping them does not only refer to solving their crisis. It also refers to the failure of international bodies to support them as refugees in host countries. This was mentioned by a refugee respondent in one FGD:

"As we migrated here, we are under UNHCR and UN although we do not get any aid when we are in need. Even as we work everyday by using UNHCR status documents, it is hard for us to apply work anywhere." (Female, Northern region)

Another reason Rohingya communities justify the act of violence is for self-defence purposes. They may resort to violence if they are being abused, because:

"Actually there is no violence in Islam and violence is not allowed, whether or not the issues that have no relevance or usefulness, troublesome or being extreme or teaching something violent. But when your ruler is a tyrant, injustice and doing violent acts to certain minorities regardless of religion and people. So it is compulsory and their rights for the people from minorities or who are being abused to fight for the return of their respective rights and returning their religious rights and human rights. As such, if the ruler/ government is tyrant and people are being abused, it is their right to fight for their rights. If it is a just ruler like in Malaysia, then there is no need for a movement to fight Malaysia." (Male, Northern region)

Some respondents justified violence as necessary and not a bad thing. To them, it is just one of the ways to avoid being abused. Another narrative that justified violence was in terms of reclaiming their rights. This was mentioned by one Rohingya respondent:

"A lot of our assets and rights have been taken away. When Myanmar returns our rights, we will not fight anymore. But if Myanmar continues to torture us, we will continue fighting for our own rights" (Female, Northern region)

While these are the narratives that are currently present among Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia, justifications for violent acts are not the only visible codes under the sub-themes of commitment to ideology justifying violence.

Justification for violence is just one out of the two codes under this sub-theme.

Another code classified under sub-themes of commitment to ideology justifying violence is evidence of extremist ideology. Based on the FGDs and in-depth interviews, there were some Rohingya respondents who actually displayed obvious violent intent. One respondent reflected this intent when speaking during the FGD:

"If I get them, I will kill the same as they are killing our people"
(Female, 18-30, Klang Valley)

The reason for them to speak about their violent intention is due to feelings of anger and revenge. These vengeful feelings were directed towards the perpetrators who committed violence against the Rohingya communities back in Myanmar (Central region focus group discussion). Another FGD participant from the northern region also spoke up on their violent intention.

"I can feel like eating when I see the army… I am angry, I am furious. I can eat the army. My heart feels disturbed" (Female, Northern region)

The FGDs utilized a stimulus-based approach whereby pictures of the Myanmar army were shown to Rohingya participants and were met with a host of angry responses showing their intention to seek revenge towards those who engineered violence against their communities.

Besides the intention to commit violent acts, the existence of Jihadist tendencies are also, to a certain degree, present among Rohingya communities in Malaysia. This can be seen from in-depth interviews that had been conducted with the Rohingya communities, especially in the Northern region.

"If I can, I am willing to go back and fight. If I have the passport and I am able to go back home safely, I will go back to Arakan to joining forces with the fight movement for a holy war to rescue our brothers and religion that have been seized" (Female, Northern region)

The intention to perform jihad is viewed as an option to regain their rights and defend themselves from the violence that has been consistently inflicted on them. The reason for their incapability to commit jihad right now is due to their vulnerability as refugees and lack of access to VE groups. These tendencies can only get stronger as other (peaceful) routes seem to have been exhausted.

Perception of being victim of injustice/grievances

The second sub-theme is the perception of being a victim of injustice/grievances and this is the most apparent among the Rohingya communities in Malaysia. Their first perception of being a victim is the injustice that the community had faced throughout the years. The unfair treatment by the Myanmar government is the number one source of injustice that they felt.

"Burmese government rebuilds Buddhist house if affected, why not a Muslim house? Is it because we are Muslim?" (Female, 18-30, Klang Valley)

The injustice they feel is mainly because of the different treatment they faced as Muslim citizens in Myanmar, compared to the treatment faced by fellow non-Muslim citizens. Another respondent offered the following example:

"Why because we are Muslim, we need to be killed. They don't want Muslims to reside there. They don't want to hear that there are Muslims who reside there. They don't want to hear any Muslim. They don't want to. They don't do any crime like robberies or kill other people. They don't. But why when they were called as Rohingya Muslim, they get killed. If it is other groups, they will care for them. Non-muslim, they will care for them. Muslim, they will not. If it is Muslim, they will kill them" (Female, Southern Region)

The feeling of injustice - apart from revolving around the treatment inflicted by their own Myanmar government - also manifests through the treatment by fellow citizens who seem unable to accept their identities as Rohingya Muslims.

Instutional discrimination is also another reason for the Rohingya community's perception of being victims of injustice/grievances. The types of institutional discrimination that Rohingya communities face come in the form of apartheid, arrests, and loss of belongings. The act of apartheid against the Rohingya communities were inflicted in the form of confiscating citizenship documents. This was mentioned by a few of our respondents in the in-depth interviews.

"Yes, they took the old one, giving the new one but the first Burmese Government gave a document that was like citizenship, it was powerful. We used it for abroad travel too. Later on they changed to new cards and took back our rights slowly. Now they issues a NVC card which is for foreigners" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

"After that the Buddhist government took our identification card, they said that they need to change the identification card. They confiscated it from us. After they took our IC, they declared that we are not Burmese. They said we are not from Myanmar, we came from Bangladesh. They confiscated all our belongings" (Male, Southern Region)

The act of seizing their citizenship documents is a form of apartheid. The act of taking their belongings by force is not only being done by the government, particularly the army, but also by the local community, especially the Rakhine people. This was mentioned by one of our respondents:

"If anyone went to the market, Rakhine people snatched money and other valuable things from us." (Female, East Coast Region)

The Rohingya Muslims also often experienced getting their livestocks and crops snatched away by the military.

"Burmese military often comes to take our livestock, crops from the land. We do not have any freedom…" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

The loss of their belongings and the hardships in getting their food resources due to discrimination. The discrimination has been consistently inflicted by the army and the local community which is only one part of the discrimination that they faced in daily lives.

Rohingya communities, whether in Myanmar or other countries, are at risk of getting arrested by the local authorities in their current locations. One of our respondents reported his experience in getting arrested by Bangladesh police as he was in a humanitarian mission to deliver supply funded by a Malaysian NGO to Rohingya in Bangladesh.

> *"Ever since then, I never went out of Malaysia as I experienced a lot of threats. I was once detained in Bangladesh in 2003. I was detained in Bangladesh as I was accused of smuggling as I was bringing supply from MAPIM. I was actually bringing food supply that had been donated from all over the world to Cikgu Azmi to be brought to Bangladesh. I was their representative in relaying the supply but then the Bangladesh government mistook me and arrested me." (Male, Northern region)*

Arrests by local authorities in a different country can also be due to the fact that some of the Rohingya communities do not have proper travel documents and are reliant on their UNHCR documents. Back in Arakan, getting yourself arrested without any reason seems to be a normal sight for the Rohingyas.

> *"...without any reason the authorities went and checked the house in my village and arrested the Rohingya people then put them in jail.." (Male, East Coast Region)*

The refugees have also reported on cases of persecution that they experienced back in Myanmar. Institutional persecution is persecution mainly acted on by the military and government of Myanmar, while collaborated persecution is done by the military, government and local communities. Our respondents described their experience of institutional persecution back in Myanmar.

> *"One Friday during Jumma prayer the Military*

> *come and shoot randomly at Jamatees. About 500 people died in that time. All Rohingya man, after dead military took the dead bodies by their big truck" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)*

> *"Then start violence, they burn Rohingyas house. It stopped after a few months, again started in 2017." (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)*

Excerpts above gave examples of institutional persecution in the form of massacre and village burnt incidents. These examples were often mentioned by Rohingya communities that we had met throughout our in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Another example of institutional persecution that have been mentioned is on sexual violence inflicted on Rohingya women.

> *"Military will come directly Rohingya house and take the lady forcedly to rape in the school or Madrassa. After a rape the Rohingya lady, either they will be killed or take somewhere else." (Female, 18-30, Klang Valley)*

The above excerpts are only a few out of a number of transcripts that we have from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

There have also been reports of coordinated persecution between military, police and local communities in Arakan, Myanmar. These three groups collaborated together to orchestrate the burning of Rohingya community villages, as per mentioned by our respondents:

> *"The Rakhine people and Lon Hteing (Riot Security Police) and military came together in our village and burnt down the houses." (Female, 31-60, East Coast Region)*

These constant experiences with violence, either by the military, government or locals were clearly one of the biggest reasons for them to seek refuge somewhere safer.

FEELINGS

Due to sustained persecution and injustice, our in-depth interviews and FGD sessions with the Rohingyas managed to elicit their true feelings and raw emotions, especially about their current condition and experience with violence.

Anger

The first feeling gleaned from the Rohingya community was one of anger - towards their plight, coupled with years of being victimized. This anger also translated into the desire for revenge. One of our respondents made his feelings known during an in-depth interview:

> *"How could I not be feeling angry? My wife and younger siblings were left behind. And the army who rounds the area will rape the woman once they saw woman which will be raped brutally until she's dead. Livestocks such as cows and chicken will be shot and eaten by them." (Male, Northern Region)*

One of the respondents from the FGD also expressed anger when shown an image related to the Rohingya crisis:

> *"When I see this picture, I feel angry. Because, if the public does it, we ourselves can settle it. The problem now is the government and the army is the one who made this plan. They burn people's houses without any reason, just like that." (Female, Northern Region)*

The desire for revenge often cropped up, though there was no clear mention of the target of such revenge. This was closely associated with the community's desire to reclaim their rights. As one respondent said during the FGD:

> *"After I saw this picture, I feel like I want to go back and protect my village through revenge. Even though I am not capable due to my physical condition due to my age." (Male, Northern Region)*

Another respondent also expressed vengeful feelings in an in-depth interview:
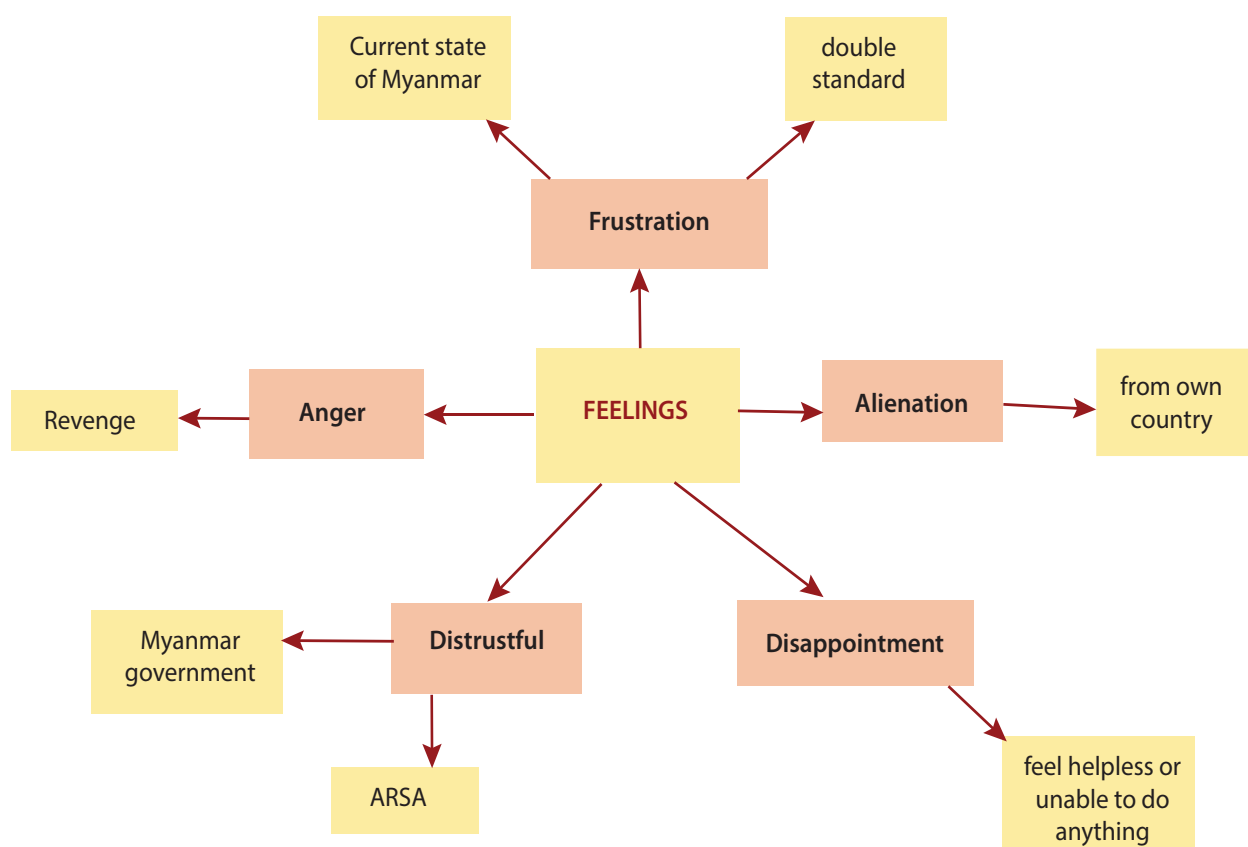

Figure 5 Sub-theme map of Feelings

"Yes, when me and my friends gather, we will discuss the killings. When we hear about the tyrannical acts, the rape and harrasment, we feel angry. We always discuss ways to protect and revenge but we do not have a system or step to do it." (Female, Northern Region)

The presence of anger and desire for revenge was prevalent throughout all our interactions with the Rohingya community, except that most of them did not feel empowered or able to act on these desires.

Frustration

Another feeling that has been very obvious within the Rohingya community is frustration. Most of the frustration stems from their current state in Malaysia and the double standards in treatment from the Burmese government. In Malaysia, their frustration stems from being unable to provide education for their children - given that Rohingyas are not citizens and hence, do not have access to formal education.

"I have no problem in having a child nor raising one. It's just that, when I think about it, it's very hard. How do I raise my children with the violence that is happening in Myanmar. And in Malaysia, as I think about it, I am not Malaysian citizen. How do I raise my children? How do I give the best education? I have to make sure he/she gets a good job. That's all. However, we are not citizens of this country. If I am there, how do I raise my children? If my own situation is not safe, what more for my own children." (Female, Southern Region)

Next, they expressed frustration at the problems they experienced back in Myanmar. One respondent said:

"Malaysia government gave us CRD, we can move everywhere in Malaysia even though sometimes the police ask. In our country we cannot go from one village to another village, they take our card and always say you are Bengali, go back to Bangladesh. How many times you can hear it. We are Rohingya, our grandparent, and great grandparent was Rohingya, why do they call us Bengali. It was frustrating for us" (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

The community also accused the Burmese government of practicing double standards in the treatment of Buddhists and Muslims back home. As described by one respondent:

"I would tell you about this picture of the Buddhist samis, who made a protest and demonstration, but have not been shot by the army. But if its a Muslim scholar who wear a white shirt, did the same thing as the Buddhist, they will be hit, shot and detained by the government. Why the treatment of the government to Buddhist and Muslim is too unjust? Whereas Myanmar uphold the world democracy principle and democracy of the law with impartial rights, we too are Burmese. When we the Muslim citizens wearing white shirt were quickly shot, but if its the Buddhist, they were only warned and detained. The difference of treatment between Buddhist and Muslim by the government (double standard)." (Male, Northern Region)

There were also those who expressed frustration at their treatment by the Malaysians authorities.

"There are people of Rohingya who have been here since 1992 and only here for transit. For 28 years, including myself, there has been injustice and negligence by the Malaysian government. They do not care for our religion in the context of our divorce issues. They deliberately ignore us although we are also Muslims. I beg the government and Pulau Pinang department and all the muftis to defend our religion although we are people without a country." (Male, Northern Region)

All in all, the difficulties they faced in Myanmar and their current situation in Malaysia left members of the Rohingya community feeling deeply isolated and frustrated.

Distrust

From interactions with the community, there is a strong distrust of the Myanmar government and also ARSA. This is due to the fact that the Myanmar government was the one who engineered the

persecution and discrimination against them.

"Over there many people are ion difficult situations. We have no more trust in the Myanmar government. The Myanmar government must restore everything." (Female, Southern Region)

Other respondents also mentioned that they would not trust any information relayed by the government.

"Whatever they tell us, we will not trust them. We don't want to go. Because the one who made it is the government." (Female, Southern Region)

A small group of respondents mentioned their distrust towards ARSA. They speculated that ARSA was actually created by the government and had collaborated with the army to kill the Rohingya.

"ARSA is not...Actually ARSA is, she said ARSA is, ARSA is created by the government. So they are the number one bad people. And then, ah… they also killed our people with the military." (Female, 31-60, Klang Valley)

Another respondent also argued the fact that Rohingya were being chased out of their own hometown because of ARSA.

"About ARSA, we too heard various news from inside. They are for their own state, just like I am from Arakan. They wanted those who are refugees. They said they are doing it for Rohingya. Why is that Rohingya are being chased out, killed, burned, their houses burned because of them? However, I have never seen it. I have never been there. I have only heard about it." (Male, Southern Region)

Though ARSA had branded themselves as a Rohingya armed movement, the majority of refugees did not trust them because they have never seen ARSA or met anyone from ARSA. The only information they have about ARSA came from the Myanmar government, and as such there is apprehension towards the ARSA movement and its objectives as a whole.

Alienation

Another feeling relayed by the Rohingya community is the feeling of being alienated from their own country. This was clearly mentioned by a lot of our respondents as they were telling us about Myanmar, especially the Arakan state.

"It is we are hearing from our parents, grandparents that they were also learning it from Burmese Buddhist. Saying the same thing. I do not see there will be peace in the country for us. They do not accept us as citizens, we cannot go to buy food from the market. If they see us, they will give punishment. We cannot leave from house even cannot sleep at home for their torture. Very sad condition always." (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

Besides feeling alienated by the local community and government in Myanmar, the feeling of alienation also comes from the difference in treatment that they faced, which has been mentioned above.

"The government of our country is not good. There is more 130 ethnicities in Burma, why only the Muslim Rohingya have so much trouble. There are Hindu, Buddhist, Mug living in good condition. We did not ask to separate our state from Burma. We just wanted to get our civil rights. The Burma Government has taken away everything we have, we don't even want it, we just want to have our rights." (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

In short, feelings of alienation among Rohingya refugee communities are based on their experiences back in Myanmar.

Disappointment

The last feeling that has been present throughout the data that we collected is the disappointment they experience due to their current situation. One example of this is in the context of Rohingya women's role in Jihad.

"There is, but because of Rohingya women do not have the spirit to do Jihad. They

only wanted to make children and be a housewife only, no fighting back." (Female, Northern Region)

Their disappointment is also because both men and women do not have any chances to fight back.

"Yes, both men and women should have been fighting alongside each other. But we don't have an opportunity to do it." (Female, Northern Region)

The disappointment they felt was rather implicit in nature. It was not stated expressly, but was conveyed through non-verbal cues and body language as they narrated their experiences.
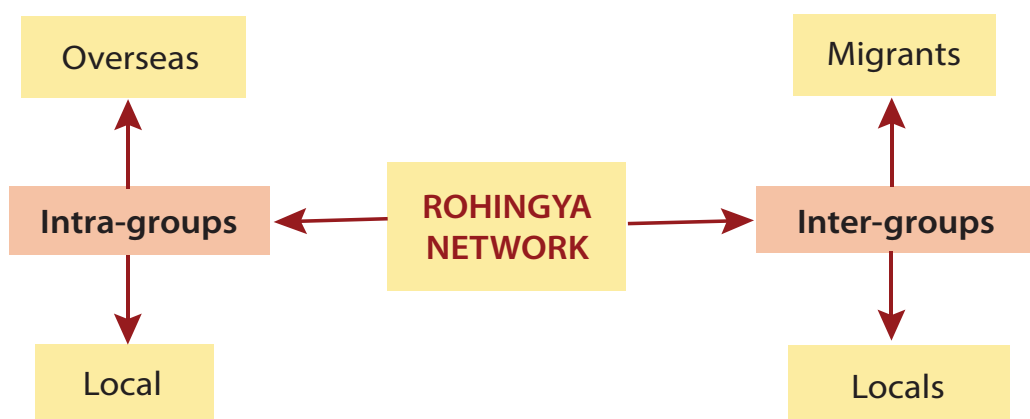
Figure 6 Sub-theme map of Rohingya Networks

ROHINGYA NETWORKS

In terms of Rohingya networks in Malaysia, the discourse can be divided into two sub-themes, which are: (1) Rohingya network and interaction among themselves (intra-group), and (2) Rohingya network and interaction with people outside of their own groups (inter-groups).

Intra-group

In the case of Rohingya community connection and interaction within their own community, the connection and interaction pattern can be divided into two groups: Rohingya communities in Malaysia and overseas. Often when it comes to Rohingya community interaction overseas, the Rohingya community that they often know who live outside of Malaysia is in Bangladesh. An example was given by one of our respondents in his in-depth interview.

"My family was forced to move to Bangladesh and all of our villages have been burned down and a lot of our villagers have been murdered in massacre. Hence, my family has been forced to flee to another place to save their lives by crossing the border to Bangladesh." (Male, Northern Region)

There are also Rohingya communities that live in other countries besides Myanmar and Bangladesh.

"My older brother in Saudi Arabia. Second one in Malaysia. The rest are in Bangladesh refugee camp" (Male, 31-60, Klang Valley)

The connection to Rohingya who live in other countries are usually maintained through communication technology such as the internet and phone calls. In terms of their connection to the Rohingya community in Bangladesh, sometimes they channel some funds to their families in Bangladesh as those living in the refugee camps there face severe limitations, especially in obtaining food. Meanwhile, the connection between Rohingya communities who live in Malaysia are often housing based, which means that they look after those who live around them. This was described to us by one of our respondents.

"Yes, I know every single Rohingyan who lives here." (Male, 31-60, Klang Valley)

Besides getting to know each Rohingya who lives around in their neighbourhood, they also sometimes help each other when there are people amongst them who are in need.

"Many Rohingya people help. We can't continue doing this and that. The reason is because we don't have an IC, our children also don't have an IC. If it is my own state, if they are kind, if there is a third country who calls, I think 90% of us don't want to go. Because it is a different country. Then we need to become a different person, a new person. When I think about it, if I can go back to my own country, if the situation becomes better." (Male, Southern Region)

The connection and solidarity among members of the same Rohingya neighbourhood appears tight-knit, as they extend help to one another in times of need.

Inter-group

Based on our observations, the Rohingyas living in Malaysia are not wholly detached from the Malaysian community. Some of their local connections are among migrants who lived in here, especially around their neighbourhood.

"Rohingya, Bangla, Indonesian, Chinese, and Malay Muslim are living here." (Male, 18-30, Klang Valley)

One of our respondents also knows certain locations with a high concentration of Burmese residents. However, both communities rarely interact.

"This 2019. I just found it. Before that, there's none. We have never met. In the Ampang area, there's a lot of Burmese there. But here, he (pointed to Mr AH), he's there." (Male, Southern Region)

Rohingya connections to the locals were visible in various settings. For instance, some of the locals they know are their neighbours.

"My neighbours are very good with us. They don't disturb us at all." (Female, 18-30, Klang Valley)

The locals they know also belong to various ethnicities, such as Indians, Malays, Punjabis, and Chinese. Some of them even know a little bit of history regarding their local neighbourhood.

"In Taman Ciku, Bukit Mertajam, the majority are Chinese. Based on my understanding, this place is formerly one of the strongholds for the communist. Berapit, in Malay history, is formerly a stronghold of communist and the Chinese here are very much violent. However, they knew my activity and respected me. Often there are NGO and government agencies who oversee me and from there they respect me." (Male, Northern Region)

Besides having locals as their neighbours, the Rohingyas also interacted with locals when it came to work and paying rent as they were often employed by Malaysians to do odd jobs and being given a place to stay. This network and interaction between the Rohingya community and the locals demonstrates that they feel quite at home in this society. However, they continue to feel alienated by their own country and its people.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

As our first research objective was to develop a better understanding of violent extremist sentiments among Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, analysis on the findings that had already been collected should be done based on VERA-2R, particularly based on two out of the five domains in the instruments. These two out the five domains in VERA-2R instruments became the basis for our development of qualitative instruments which are (1) beliefs, attitudes and ideology and (2) social context and intention. As such, the analysis and discussion of our findings will be divided into three sections; (1) beliefs, attitudes and ideology, (2) social context and intention; and finally move onto (3) discussing our findings as a whole. The analysis and discussion will be based on themes and sub-themes listed in the findings section which are tied to elements in VERA-2R instruments.

BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND IDEOLOGY

Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia have clearly shown the elements of victim of injustice and grievances. This can be seen from the two themes: (1) sentiments of violence under the sub-themes of perception of being victim of injustice/grievance, (2) feelings, and (3) refugees' vulnerability. The reason for their victimisation mainly stems from long-standing persecution and discrimination back in Arakan. This sentiment has been clearly expressed and repeatedly highlighted in our data.

Some Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia have also shown commitment towards ideology justifying violence. This can be seen from our theme on sentiments of violence, whereby they justify violence to reclaim their rights, self-defence, and the failure of authorities in resolving their crisis. Meanwhile, the justification for violent acts were highlighted through the FGDs and in-depth interviews, but rarely during shadowing observations. The exception to this is our interviews with Rohingyas in the central region (Klang Valley) were unanimous in rejecting the use of violence under any circumstances.

In terms of upholding societal and democratic values, Rohingya refugees in Malaysia do believe in the idea of rights in a democratic society as well as the need to be fair to all groups in society. This is visible from their justification of violence - in self-defence and to regain their rights - suggesting that they strongly believe in the right to defend themselves from persecution and discrimination. Though the idea of rights in a democratic society have turned into justifications for violent acts, it still proves that they believe in democratic ideals. Furthermore, their acceptance of societal and democratic values can also be seen in the earlier theme of refugee vulnerability - especially within the aspects of cultural practices in Malaysia.

The 'feelings' element - namely anger, frustration, distrust, alienation, and disappointment - were prevalent throughout the course of this study. While there is no mention specifically on the feeling of hate, it does manifest through the anger and desire for revenge that the community harbours towards the Myanmar military. Elements of alienation were present among Rohingya refugees in Malaysia in the context of being alienated from their own country - both community wise and location wise. This is because acts of persecution towards Rohingya refugees back in Myanmar were not solely the act of the Myanmar government and army alone, but also with the collaboration of Rakhine Buddhists. There is no evidence to suggest that the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia feel alienated, as our findings indicate that they have a social network and bond - albeit on a needs basis - among their own people in Malaysia or overseas, with migrants in Malaysia, and also with the locals through their neighbourhood or workplaces.

Meanwhile, the study found that Rohingyas lack empathy towards those outside their core groups. Rohingya refugees in Malaysia very much concentrate on their own community issues and have shown difficulties in empathising with fellow Buddhist communities back in their country Myanmar. This can be seen from the sub-theme of injustice under the perception of being victims of injustice/grievance. The reason for their inability to empathise with Buddhist monks being detained back in Myanmar is because Rakhine Buddhists in Myanmar have also been involved in perpetrating injustice against them. That said, there is a certain

adaptability among the community that allows them to embrace local cultural practices and to actively interact with others inside or outside their community.

Two elements under the domain of beliefs, attitudes and ideology are not present throughout our findings which are (1) dehumanisation/demonisation of identified targets of injustice and (2) hostility to national collective identity. While hostility to national collective identity is expected due to elimination of this element during instrument development, the other elements were not present as there have been no significant findings related to dehumanisation/demonisation of identified targets of injustice. Although they are consumed by anger, hatred and frustration towards the Myanmar government and military, Rohingya refugees have never explicitly or implicitly dehumanised their persecutors, or indicated that they lack humanity.

Photo credit: Mahi Ramakrishnan

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND INTENTION

Based on our interactions with the Rohingya refugees, we are unable to confirm whether they seek, consume or develop VE materials. There has been no solid proof, or confession from any Rohingya refugees vis-à-vis their connection to VE propaganda. Most of the Rohingya refugees that we have met were either illiterate or only able to read and write in Burmese. In addition, their poor condition suggests that they are unlikely to possess

computers or any sorts of technology that may help to produce such materials. The only materials that have been widely mentioned throughout our findings are news reports of violence in Myanmar, which some of them receive through social media.

Identification of target (person, place, group) in response to perceived injustice among Rohingya refugees seems to be focused on the Myanmar government and military. This is because a lot of the sub-themes in feelings were targeted towards Myanmar government and military. Besides the themes' feelings, identification of targets in response to perceived injustice can also be seen in the theme sentiments of violence under the sub-theme evidence of extremism ideology and the theme refugees vulnerability. This is because there has been explicit intention mentioned by some of our respondents on carrying out violent acts due to anger/revenge, especially towards the army who mainly instigated the oppression, persecution and discrimination against them. They had also cited the Myanmar government and army as one of the reasons for their emigration to other countries.

The explicit intention to carry out violent acts by some Rohingya refugees under the theme of sentiments of violence can be classified under the elements of anger and expressed intent to commit violence. The anger demonstrated by some of the Rohingyas is very detailed in terms of what kind of retaliatory action they would be willing to take. There has also been an explicit mention of a desire for martyrdom by some Rohingya refugees, given the perception that their plight is not being taken seriously by related authorities and organisations.

However, even in their anger and intention of acting violently to a specific group, there have been no elements of intention to plan or prepare for violent action. This is because the location of their targeted group and their understanding that they must abide and follow the rules of their current host country. They were also unable to return to Myanmar to exact vengeance. In terms of susceptibility to influence, authority and indoctrination, there has been no significant findings related to this among Rohingya

refugees in Malaysia. Most of the Rohingya refugees we encountered had no personal contact with violent extremist groups, except for one person who knew someone related to ARSA.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Our analysis of the themes based on the indicators in VERA-2 has its limitations. While we analysed and discussed our themes and findings based on the VERA-2 indicator, we have no concrete evidence that there is indeed a significant relationship between the themes we had built and VERA-2 indicators. Our themes had been based on the findings we compiled from in-depth interviews, FGDs and shadowing observations. Additionally, the need to interpret our findings from the Rohingya language to Malay or English came with challenges of their own as actual meanings could be lost in translation. Although the necessary measures were taken to ensure our interpreters on the ground were skilled and knowledgeable, we still needed to account for the possibility of misinterpretation. Similarly, the presence of gatekeepers or facilitators to gain access to the Rohingya community also presented the risk of biases in the selection of respondents for the research. To mitigate this problem, multiple gatekeepers were appointed in each location.

A SUMMARY

Our first research purpose is to investigate the push and pull factors influencing the Rohingya community in Malaysia towards violent extremist groups. Our analysis and discussion suggested that pull factors towards violent extremist groups among Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia may be present in terms of violent intention, Jihadism intention and justification for violent action, as well as feelings of frustration, distrust, anger and alienation. All of these elements which were present under beliefs, attitudes and ideology may be considered as the pull factors that drew Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia towards violent extremist groups.

In terms of push factors, Rohingya refugee communities are denied opportunities to work in Malaysia while the financial system is also disadvantageous to them. These then provide the motivations for them to seek assistance from violent extremist groups. There is also a lack of access to formal education for Rohingya children, although non-governmental organizations have attempted to fill that gap by setting up refugee schools. The challenge henceforth is for the community to be given opportunities that come with recognised credentials, so as to help them improve their social mobility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address the Rohingya refugee crisis and alleviate their suffering in Malaysia, a few steps need to be considered:

NATIONAL POLICY ON REFUGEE RIGHTS

The most important steps to be taken is to establish a national policy on refugees to ensure their rights are upheld. Due to the absence of legal measures to protect the rights of refugees in Malaysia, they are vulnerable to exploitation, especially when it comes to wages. As such, the national policy should include personal data collection to establish a refugee database by the Malaysian government, which encompasses healthcare services record, workplace, housing locations and financial information. Data for refugees financial information would ease the process of channeling funds to refugee families. There should be mention on children's education, protection for women against violence and sexual harassment, and on top of that, refugees' employment and financial rights. All of this is important to both the Malaysian government and the refugee community. For example, a personal database that records refugee details will be useful during crises to trace refugee

Healthcare Services

Although current healthcare costs for refugees are 50% supported by UNHCR, the remaining 50% they need to fork out is still too high an amount. Often they rely on help from their own community when they need to pay for healthcare treatment, either in private or government hospitals. As such, we recommend that 15% of healthcare costs will be funded by the Malaysian government, 10% by the States' Zakat fund, while the remaining 25% will be borne by the Rohingya refugees. Family planning programs should also be conducted in refugee communities, especially in raising awareness on the use of contraceptives and birth control.

Mental Health Support

Counseling services should be provided to Rohingya refugees as most of them experienced violence in their home country before migration. Psychological support and counseling services should be constantly provided for all Rohingya refugees. Our experiences on the ground revealed that Rohingya refugees still experienced emotional trauma, from the violence back in Myanmar. Either group or personal counselling/psychological sessions should be offered on a needs basis, especially in areas with larger Rohingya populations. At the same time, counseling/psychological support should also be given to refugees who have previously experienced sexual violence.

Employment

Malaysia has been relying on migrants to fill in vacancies in certain sectors. Granting employment opportunities to refugees will decrease the need for importing foreign labour in certain industries. The inclusion of employment rights in the proposed national refugee policy will also ensure that refugee communities will not be exploited as cheap labour. As such, refugees' working conditions, minimum wages, annual and sick leave should be included in the clause for refugees' employment.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Access to quality education programs is one of the most important steps that should be taken to counter and prevent violent extremism in the community. Education for refugee communities should be catered to both children and adult refugee groups.

Education for children

Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia have been having difficulties in obtaining quality education for their children, with some members of their communities establishing their own schools, supported by funds from their own communities. Following this situation, we suggest a collaboration between the states' Zakat funds, Rohingya refugee communities and federal government education departments. The Zakat will fund the community school while the federal government will provide syllabus and training for teachers and administrators of the community schools. This collaboration will also build the base for the introduction of a federal examination scheme to Rohingya community schools. This will at least help ensure a brighter and secure future for Rohingya children.

Skills Training

It is also suggested that skills training is provided to refugees, especially the Rohingya. Depending on the skills in demand in host countries, training programs and educational schemes should be provided to upskill refugees, ensuring that they don't fall into the same 3D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs. Other details to be taken into account is the importance of increasing literacy and numeracy in adult refugees plus familiarising themselves with the work culture in third countries. Increasing financial literacy among refugees and offering employment opportunities also increases their chance of adapting to new environments.

PEACE BUILDING INITIATIVE

Peace dialogue between Rohingya refugees, Myanmar embassy/government, international agencies and third countries for resettlement must take place to ensure a multi-stakeholder response to this crisis. Sustained dialogue will drive home the message that violence is not a solution and thereby contribute to P/CVE efforts in the country. Similarly, community programs should be ramped up to promote peace and unity among Rohingya refugee communities in Malaysia.

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