

Covid-19 Pandemic in Rohingya Camps: Issues and Implications

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Introduction

The Rohingya are an ethnic Muslim minority group who are denied basic human rights and citizenship by the Myanmar government. Since the 1970s, the Rohingya have been forced to flee across the border to Bangladesh in significant numbers from northern Rakhine State due to religious, cultural and political persecution. Bangladesh has faced an ongoing refugee crisis ever since. The Rohingya are a distinct ethnic, linguistic and religious community from the north-western Rakhine region of Myanmar.

Covid-19 pandemic in the refugee camps

Recently Covid-19 pandemic had taken thousands of life lives across the world. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 found its way to Bangladesh. At the time this commentary is being written, there is no effective vaccine for this virus. The spread of Covid-19 has already proven deadly as it claimed lives. Population density is a decisive factor for understanding the spread of this pandemic. Bangladesh is a country with a huge population and Rohingya refugees. The recent pandemic had already claimed many lives and sent a shockwave throughout the society. Like the rest of the world, Bangladesh is trying her best to contain the spread of this deadly disease.

Bangladesh is currently hosting one of the biggest refugees of the world. Rohingya are residing in 27 different camps in Bangladesh, concentrating Teknaf and Ukhiya region. Different reports suggest that more than 200,000 Rohingya living outside the camps while many others living with their extended families in Bangladesh. The Rohingya concentration are in about 13 camps already been established around Kutupalong and Bahukhali areas. In terms of demography, 55% children, 42% adult and 5% elderly.

The Rohingya and Covid-19 Issue

Bangladesh is a country with a huge population with a limited landmass. The Rohingya population settled in the camps in Bangladesh by thousands. The poor and destitute Rohingya population is residing in the camps. The government of Bangladesh provided the necessary shelters and ensures supplies to all the camps. However, the population density is an ideal birthplace for contagious disease. Many of the Rohingya population cannot have access to safe water and there were incident of a Cholera outbreak in the camps. The Covid-19 poses a different challenge. The virus thrives on the human host and this kind virus spread on the community level infection. The Rohingya community thrives on the community gathering, as times their very survival depends on the unity of the community.

The pandemic and Population Density

The recent pandemic is a problem that the world has never witness before. Bangladesh is a country with limited resources and a huge population. A country with population density, it is harder for the public in general to maintain the proper social distance. Due to the sheer number of people residing in the refugee camps, social distancing is virtually impossible. The access to credit and healthcare facility for the Rohingya population in order to protect themselves from Covid-19 pandemic is an uphill struggle. Although actions have been taken towards flattening the curve, the deadly virus had managed to hope from host to host in a rapid succession. The mutating nature of the virus makes it even more elusive when comes to implementing preventive measure such as application of a vaccine in the general population.

Circumstances and infection

One of the prime reasons for containing Rohingya population in the camps was to camp vicinity was to control the population. Due to rapid pace of infection capacity of the Coronavirus, the virus on thrive densely populated areas where the chances and probabilities of infection is relatively high. The health condition of the Rohingya population was in severe stress and to some extent, came to Bangladesh to Myanmar with poor health issues. The women and children are especially vulnerable to the virus infection. Density of population does not of itself determine the ease with which infection spreads through a population. When comes to viral infection, problems tend to arise primarily when populations become as dense as to cause overcrowding.

Overcrowding is often associated with decreases in quality of living conditions and sanitation; hence the rate of agent transmission is typically very high in such areas. Thus, overcrowded households or densely populated encampments would serve as breeding grounds for infectious agents, at times facilitate evolution of pathogens, particularly in the case of viruses and bacteria. Rapid cycling between humans and other hosts, such as rats or mice, can result in the emergence of new strains capable of causing serious disease. This make the Rohingya camps the ideal ground for the virus such as Covid-19 spread in the form of community level infection.

The Risk of Community Infection

The Covid-19 has proven to be deadly when comes to community level infection. Examples can be drawn from other countries where infection at the community level had proven to be fatal. This pandemic had already proven deadly regardless of the cast, creed or gender. The women and young girls living in the camps were proven to be more vulnerable comparing to the male counterparts. Covid-19 pandemic triggered nationwide lockdown throughout the country coupled with a large number of unemployment and loss of livelihood. It is especially difficult for the Rohingya women to find work or provide for their families during the ongoing outbreak of Covid-19. The pandemic could be devastating for the Rohingya and people living on the fringes of the society. Because of the loss both in the demand and the supply-chain, most of the economies are experiencing a downturn. This problem will reflect in a developing country like Bangladesh. The gap between the rich and poor is likely to grow and Rohingya population will be bearing the brunt. The poor and the destitute Rohingya had gone through trauma and pain when they left the Rakhine state in Myanmar. It is evident that the international funds are drying up as the time goes by and Covid-19 pandemic might have triggered one of the prolonged global recession in recent history.

Conclusion

There is no vaccine available at the moment; the authorities are left with a few choice. Because of the population density in the refugee camps, some precautionary measures could be under taken. The movement of Rohingya population within the camps and camp vicinity must be controlled and contained within a particular geographical area. A proper monitoring of people with infected disease should be implemented. There should also be testing facilities available for

the camps along with proper medical facilities. At the policy level, focus on the healthcare services should be prioritized when comes to tackling with a pandemic such as Covid-19.

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