

How has radio drama helped to tackle mental health among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar?

An evaluation of the drama
series (Our Story)

RESEARCH BRIEFING

MEDIA ACTION





This research was carried out by the Research and Learning Team, BBC Media Action, Bangladesh under the project “Delivering health, nutrition, livelihood, and protection services for Rohingya refugees and vulnerable host communities in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh”. The work was delivered in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with funding from the United States Government.

The authors would like to thank the members of the Rohingya community who participated in this study, IRC and BBC Media Action’s local partner organisations – Aid Comilla and Prottiyashi.



Above and cover image: Women participate in a therapy session at the RW Welfare Society healing centre in the Rohingya refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. (Photos by Allison Joyce/Getty Images)



"I didn't used to discuss my stress with others. I would just lie about my stress with others."

Introduction

Introduction to the project and the role of radio drama in addressing mental health among Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.

- 1 BBC Media Action (2021) Available at: [https://www.bbc.com/news/health-563132](#) [Accessed 11 January 2024].
- 2 UNHCR (2018) Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/culture-context-and-mental-health-rohingya-refugees> [Accessed 11 January 2024].
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Seasons three and four were delivered under the project Delivering health, nutrition, and livelihood and protection services to Rohingya refugees and to vulnerable host communities.

Research Methodology

In 2023 BBC Media Action conducted a longitudinal qualitative study with members of the Rohingya community to observe changes in knowledge and attitude during seasons three and four of

Research participants consisted of two male and two female listening groups, with a total of 70 listeners, aged 18 years and above. BBC Media Action local partner organisations, Aid Comilla and Prottyashi ran these listening groups in camps 13 and 15 from February to June 2023. Over the course of the study, nearly 20 participants had dropped out. This dropout rate is relatively low, especially in Rohingya camps

others listened to both seasons three and four.

Research stages:

- ▶ 1. A **pre-assessment** of the study participants to understand their knowledge, attitudes and levels of discussion around mental health issues before listening to the drama.
- ▶ 2. **Observation and feedback monitoring sessions:** In episodes 1, 4, 8 and 10 of seasons three and four, participants took part in a short discussion with the researchers. This covered:
 - How participants felt about the drama's storylines and characters in the latest episode and previous ones
 - Whether they shared the drama's storylines and their learning with anyone
- ▶ 3. A **post-assessment** participants responded to the same questions as in the pre-assessment to evaluate changes in their knowledge and attitudes.

This longitudinal approach enabled the research team to observe changes in the participants' engagement with , and their knowledge and attitudes over

helped to build a rapport between them and the researchers, which made the discussions rich and engaging.

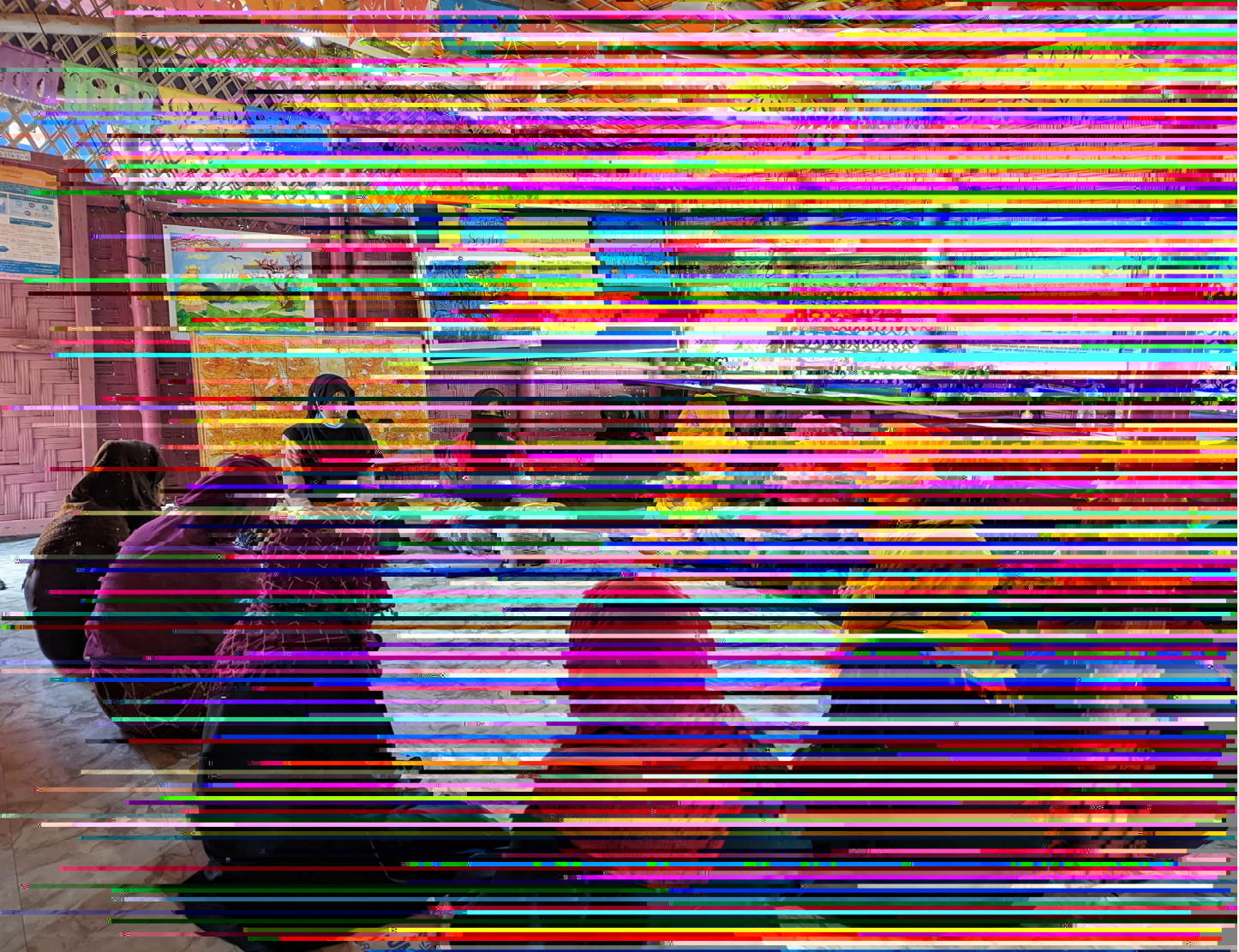
Key Findings

Relatable characters and storylines mirrored the participants' culture and camp life
Research participants discussed Aa'rar Kissa's characters at length with the researchers during the evaluation. They felt that the characters were familiar to them.

Participants said they found joy in various storyline elements, and that they internalised the characters' dreams as their own. For example, the character Abdullah and his wife shared a desire for their son, Ataullah, to become a successful scholar. Their pride when he spoke English well, resonated with the participants, who said prompted conversations about helping their children to improve their English, and the possibility of accessing private tutoring.

The research participants also appreciated when the drama portrayed genuine chemistry between characters playing husband and wife, such as Kamal and Noorie. According to participants, this added a compelling layer of authenticity to the storyline and warmed their hearts.

Participants appreciated the drama's portrayal of the Rohingya community's cultural richness and deep-rooted values. For example, the characters were hospitable to guests and cared for elderly relatives, friends and family, just as listeners would. Participants liked the use of proverbs and familiar song lyrics that they use themselves in their daily life. And many appreciated the drama showing male characters gathering at a tea stall to discuss everyday matters and make decisions and establishing a



They also shared these perspectives with their wives, friends and small groups of the drama during the listening groups and play it back later in their homes to their relatives or at a tea stall to their friends.

In contrast, female participants reported having few opportunities to share their learning as they spend most of their time at home and they hardly leave their camp with their family members and neighbours and explained that they use these services if they need help with their mental health.



“We discuss mental health issues with our neighbours. Previously, we used to rely on traditional healers but now we tell our neighbours that there is no need to go to them. We tell them that we attend listening groups to learn about mental unrest, how to behave with the children, and how to maintain relationships with husbands. [My neighbour] said, ‘You are

7...y ... A ... management for survivors of gender-based violence, access to specialised he0000300FC342sWe m0300F6m t0Ct m0300FmidwifsWe m030en,fsV4milorise ser

How to improve mental health and well-being

Participants said they understood that talking with someone close to them would help them feel better. They now understand that talking to family members, friends and close neighbours. As the drama progressed, participants increasingly suggested that characters such as Abdullah or Anowara should receive support as they realised that mental health issues were interfering with the characters' lives, making it harder for them to think clearly, relax, sleep or deal with other people.

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For example, participants mentioned that Ayesha hid the autorickshaw's batteries

Participants appreciated hearing the couple talking and apologising to each other. They also praised the example of Noorie and Kamal deciding together to delay having a baby, and said they intend to apply this in their own lives.

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Recommendations

The research found that [redacted]’s characters and storylines emotionally engaged the research participants by mirroring their lives and experiences. This was a key factor in participants sharing issues raised by the drama with the people around them.

[redacted] participants’ knowledge increased around several areas relating to mental health1issues raised b

- **Continue using the characters' journey to communicate information:** participants easily followed Abdullah's and Anowara's mental health journey as it was portrayed in detail, covering their symptoms, where and how they sought support and how they recovered. However, the journey of some other characters such as Noorie

