

Rohingya Crises: Mapping the Peer-reviewed Literature

Saghir Munir Mehar^a, Emna Chikhaoui^b, Yasir Javed^c, Shakil Ahmad^d,
^aSenior Lecturer, College of Law, Prince Sultan University, ^bVice Dean
College of Law, Prince Sultan University, ^cLecturer, College of Computer and
Information Sciences, Prince Sultan University, ^dResearch Services Librarian,
Prince Sultan University, Email: smehar@psu.edu.sa,
echikhaoui@psu.edu.sa, yjaved@psu.edu.sa, shakil@psu.edu.sa

The research uses the bibliometric method and approach to investigate the literature written by researchers on the Rohingya crises. Rohingyas are a Muslim minority in Burma who have been subjected to persecution for a long time. The results of the study showed a clear lack of publications on Rohingya related problems. It also showed that the researchers are geographically confined to some locations and institutions. The research on Rohingya related issues is trivial compared to other related issues such as Syria. This research was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and the research concludes with indications of need for further qualitative study that may unearth much deeper reasons for this shortfall of literature on Rohingya related issues.

Key words: *Rohingya; forced migration; bibliometrics; international law; human rights.*

Introduction

The Rohingya are a Muslim majority living in the Arakan region of Burma and are no strangers to human rights violation. Rohingya is an issue that has seen some exposure at the international level. Burma has been ruled by a military regime since 1962, the regime has called itself State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The regime has practiced vast controls on all aspects of life in Burma, including that of the religious freedom and practices. The US state department produced an annual report on the international religious freedom in 1999 that highlights the unfair advantage given to the Theravada Buddhist community which is the religious majority of Burma (1999). This unfair advantage according to the report adversely affects the lives of many other minorities such as Muslims and Christians.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, from out 68.8 million forcibly displaced persons, 671,000 were recorded as Rohingya alone, in 2017 (UNHCR 2018); an issue that UNHCR believes to be growing. The displacement, whether internal or external, is creating a sense of deprivation for the displaced, this is further fuelled by Buddhist nationalism, causing many human rights abuses and a humanitarian crisis (Abdelkader 2014, 515).

A lot is continuously being written in the academic spheres about the issues of the Rohingya that examines a plethora of issues being faced by Rohingya. Issues such as human rights violations (Baig 2013, HRW 2013, 2012, 2002, Bauer 2015); violations ranging from abduction, rapes, child mortality, murders to forced displacement have been reported. Some writings have also managed to examine the identity crises being faced by a Rohingya minority. Brinham for example examines the citizenship act of 1982 (Brinham 2012). The author explains that the law only identifies those Rohingya as citizens who can trace their lineage back before 1823. The year that the Burmese note as important for identification of citizenship was a turning point for Burman itself as the British were moving in towards Burma while ruling India. This dilemma deliberately excludes many Rohingya living in Rakhine from citizenship blatantly because of the design of the citizenship Act (Palmer 2011, 105). While some statistics find Muslims to be about 4% of the whole population (Singh 2014), this fact can easily be disputed due to the citizenship act excluding many from citizenship. In fact Chan finds that Muslims can be tracked back to the Mrauk-U dynasty from a period of 1430 to 1784 (Chan 2005, 397). Chan believes that Muslims were being persecuted even before 1823; the date that holds an important place in the Citizenship act of Burma. The Rohingya claim that they are indigenous to the land is not completely unfounded and has been supported by many researchers (Chan 2005, Farzana 2015, Lee 2014).

Considerable research has also been done on persecution of Rohingya. Burke explains that in Burma people of dark skins and of South Asian origins are largely all looked at the same way and are identified as Kalar (dark skinned people) (Burke 2016). The Burmese generally do not identify themselves with dark skin and is one of many causes of persecution; it is a skin trait that makes the Burmese feel higher in class. Human rights watch observed a large-scale persecution of Rohingya Muslims in many of its reports (HRW 2013, 2012, 2002). UNHCR in many of its observation also came to a conclusion that Muslim Rohingya are undergoing extreme tortures such as physical assault including cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, beatings and death threats, stress positions, psychological torture, arbitrary detention, inhumane conditions and ill-treatment in detention (UNHCR 2007). The matters were then further picked up by researcher (Ullah 2011, Ullah 2016). In fact the researcher came to the conclusion that these were government backed atrocities. Some researchers have also observed a possible genocide (Mahmood et al. 2016, Southwick 2015, 138). Considerable

research is being done right now regarding the Rohingya issue in different fields such as medical sciences, social sciences, political sciences and law. A bibliometric approach would help us examine the different domains in which research is being done. It would also help us understand the gaps in research activities on this topic.

Related Works

To evaluate scientific activities, the techniques of publications and citation counting have been used (Narin 1976). Publications are the basis of bibliometric studies. They are not the only type, but certainly very significant in the knowledge exchange process (Raan 1999, 2003). Bibliometric methods help in the process of discovering and analysing published data. Using bibliometric techniques, researchers identify hidden patterns that help them in decision making (Daim et al. 2006). A bibliometric approach calculates statistics of quantitative aspects derived from scholarly publications (Moed, Luwel, and Nederhof 2002). It offers a powerful set of techniques to study the structure of scholarly communication (Borgman and Furner 2005).

Bibliometric studies have been conducted in various fields to map the research progress (Tarkowski 2007, Brown, Ho, and Gutman 2018, Dong et al. 2012, Nane, Larivière, and Costas 2017). Bibliometric assessments of peer reviewed literature on worldwide refugees and IDPs are also carried out covering their health, human rights, educational and financial problems (Sweileh 2018b, a, 2017, Trost et al. 2018).

Research activities are carried out on various aspects of the Rohingya crises (Hossain et al. 2018, Huenekes 2018, Fair 2018, Swannell 2018) but no bibliometric study is prepared to assess the published peer reviewed literature on the Rohingya, despite the global attention to the crises, therefore we prepared this study to quantify publications, measure the publications growth, evaluate the authorship patterns, assess the international collaborations, and to measure the impact through citation analysis.

Methodology

Rohingya as an issue is a complex matter and has several variables that require different classes of methods for investigation. This research focuses on the bibliometric methods in ascertaining the extent of published work. The research focuses only on the publications that are indexed in the Scopus database. The published work used for this research takes into consideration all articles published up to 2018. Certain search parameters and criteria were used to extract data and published work. The main criteria used for searching is outlined below.

The search terms were used applying title, abstract and keyword option in the Scopus database. The search was done excluding the publication year of 2019. Terms used were Rohingya, Rohingyas and other combinations like Rohingya and people, Rohingya and refugees, Rohingya and crises, Rohingya and problem, Rohingya and Muslims, Rohingya and genocide, Rohingya and history, Rohingya and conflict, Rohingya and migration, Rohingya and refugee, Rohingya and displaced people, Rohingya and tragedy, Rohingya and conflict.

Results

The search applied yielded 182 Scopus indexed publications from different countries. Table one shows the top ten active countries and territories producing peer reviewed literature on the Rohingya community's migration, health, and other issues.

Table 1: shows top 10 contributing countries

Countries	Number of Publications	% of Total Publications
United States	35	19.2%
Bangladesh	27	14.8%
Australia	23	12.6%
Malaysia	15	8.2%
United Kingdom	15	8.2%
India	11	6.0%
Indonesia	9	4.9%
Singapore	6	3.3%
Switzerland	6	3.3%
Thailand	5	2.7%

The majority of the researchers preferred to publish their research in the form of journal articles followed by editorials and book chapters. Out of the 182 published research works the number of articles was 109 which accounts for 59.56% of the whole published work.

Table 2: Document Type

Document Type	Quantity	% of Total Publications
Article	109	59.56
Editorial	13	7.1
Book Chapter	12	6.5
Article in Press	11	6.01
Review	10	5.46
Letter	8	4.37
Note	8	4.37

Erratum	4		2.18
Short Survey	4		2.18
Book	2		1.09
Conference Paper	2		1.09

In the course of this research a linking map was generated from the key words of the all selected researchers to understand the impact and intensity of the topics covered. Fig.1 shows the results achieved.

Fig.1. Showing the linking map between different topics and their intensity.

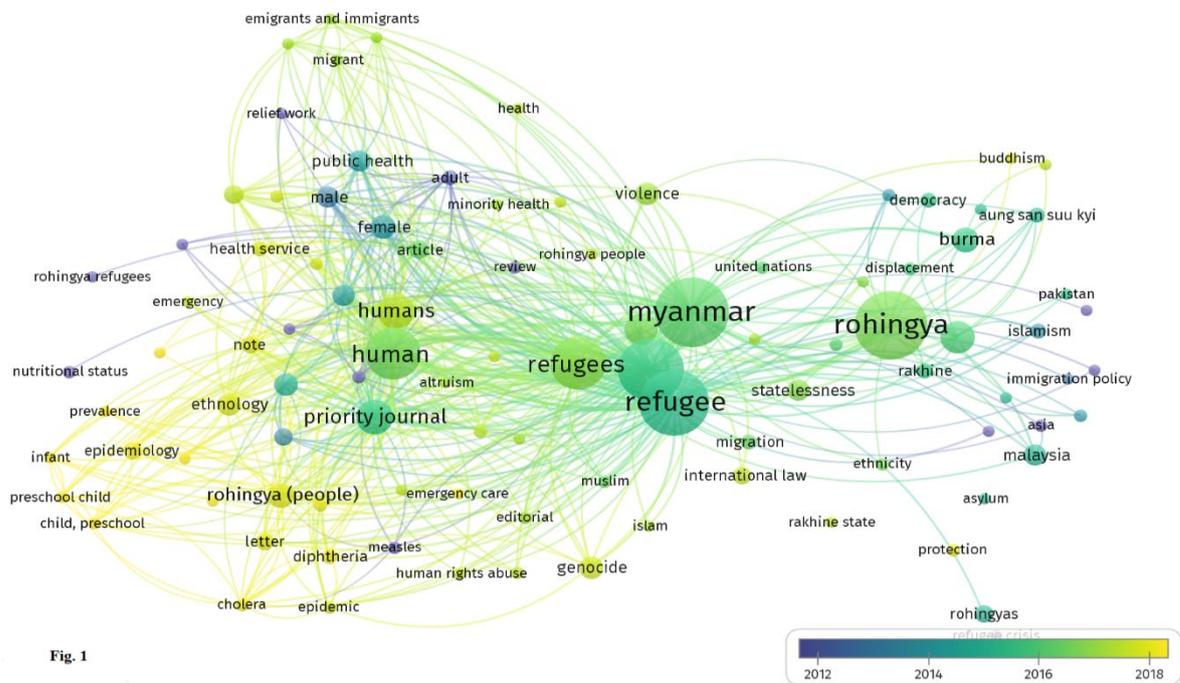


Fig. 1

Figure 2. shows authors collaborations

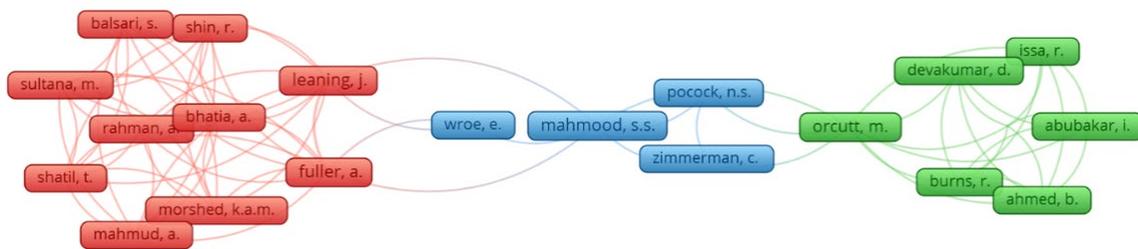
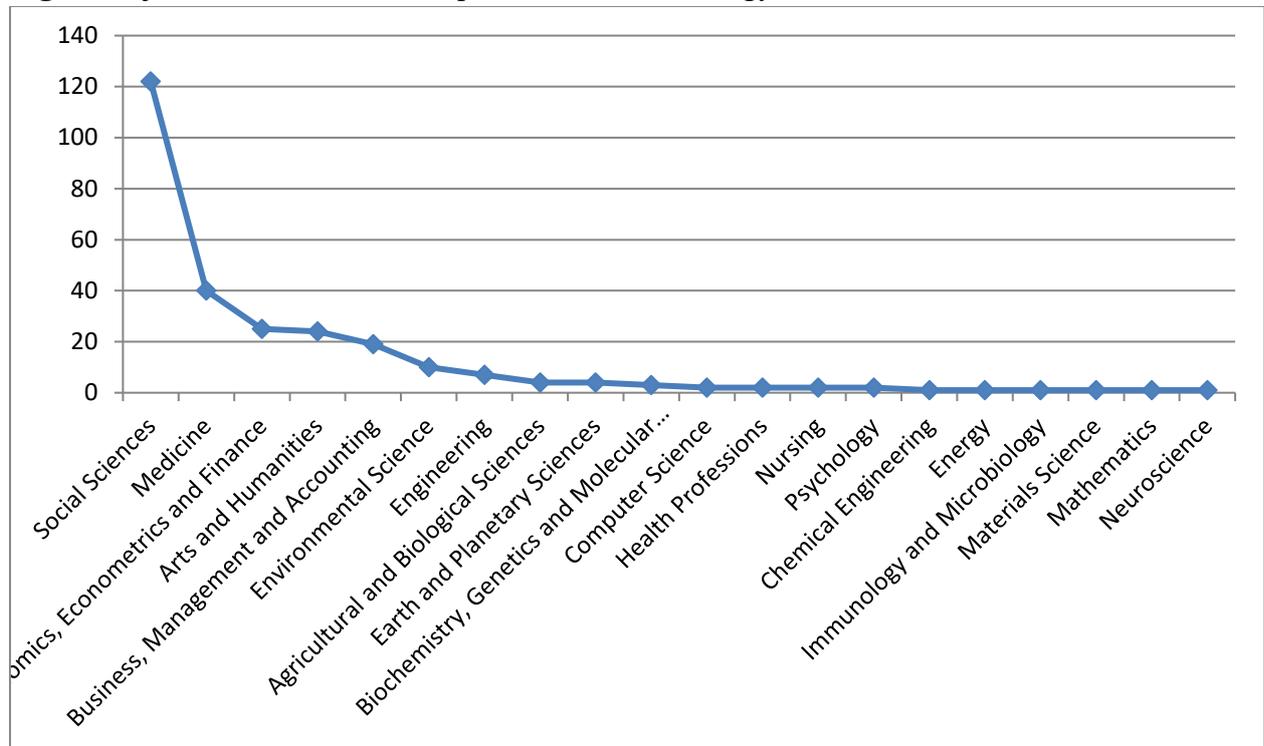


Fig.2 Author Collaborations

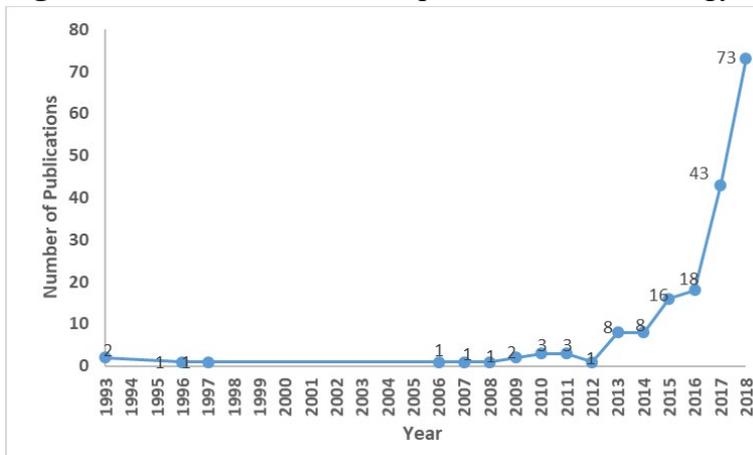
Fig.3. Subject wise distribution of publications on Rohingya



The research also exposed the subject areas within which the work was being published. Researchers in social sciences area published the highest number of publications followed by medicine.

The research also exposed the yearly growth trend in publications. There has been a sturdy growth in academic research as seen in Fig.4. It must be noted that while the Rohingya issue is not new, the sporadic growth in publication happened somewhere around 2013. There could be several reasons for this. One of the major reasons is mass migration of refugees in 2013 and the international exposure of the matter. A considerable exposure of the matter was also seen in news and other media.

Fig.4. Year wise distribution of publications on Rohingya.



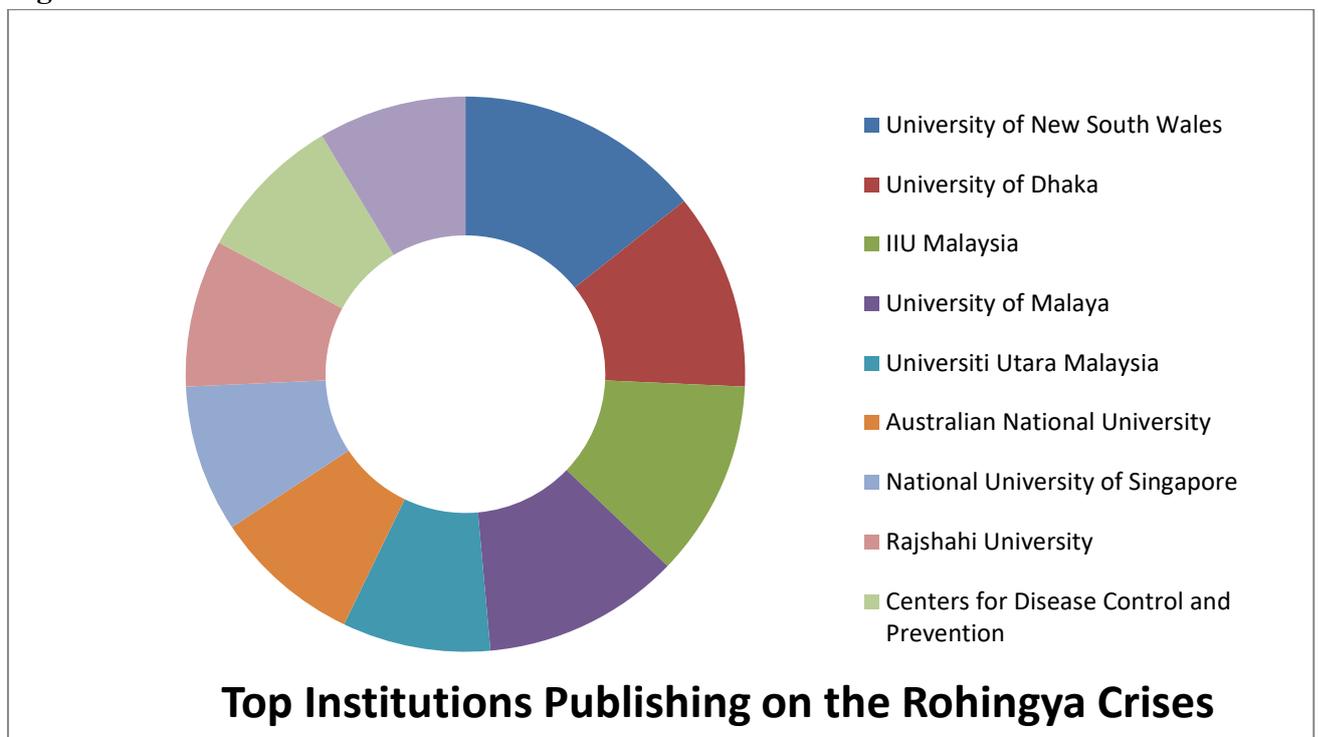
While there is growth in publication of Rohingya related issues, it is certainly not exponential as seen in the fig.4. The total number of Scopus indexed publications seen after 1993 was only 182.

Table 3: preferred journals

Preferred Journal	No of Papers	CiteScore	SJR	SNIP	Quartiles	H-index	Publisher
Current Research in Nutrition and Food Science	15	0.28	0.139	0.187	Q4	4	Enviro Research Publishers
Asian Survey	5	0.66	0.414	0.642	Q2	37	University of California Press
Economic and Political Weekly	4	0.22	0.308	0.765	Q2	39	Sameeksha Trust
Development in Practice	4	0.52	0.306	0.431	Q2	34	Carfax Publishing Ltd.
Disasters	4	1.93	0.824	1.31	Q1	56	Blackwell Publishing Inc.
Economist	7	0	0.1	0	Q4	8	Economist Newspaper Ltd.
Al-Shajarah	3	0.08	0.103	0.087	Q3	2	International Islamic University Malaysia
Anthropology Today	3	0.54	0.361	0.814	Q2	18	Wiley-Blackwell
Asia-Pacific Social Science Review	3	0.26	0.169	0.368	Q3	4	De la Salle University
Emergency Medicine Journal	3	1.33	0.912	1.022	Q1	67	BMJ Publishing Group

A preferred journal publication search was also done, and the criteria were to choose only those journals which had published three or more papers on Rohingya related issues. Scopus journal metrics are provided against each of the preferred journals. Metrics are taken for the latest year available at the time of study, hence the metrics are considered for the year 2017. When observing results obtained from search using this criterion only two Q1 journals appeared. The journal named *Disaster* published four papers and the Emergency Medicine Journal published only three papers. *Current Research in Nutrition and Food Science* published the highest (15 nos.) articles. The book titled *Deforestation in the Teknaf Peninsula of Bangladesh: A Study of Political Ecology*, had thirteen papers regarding the Rohingya in it.

Figure 4. shows the most active institutions and universities



Discussion:

The idea behind a bibliometric study of an isolated issue is to understand the concentration of published work from several aspects. It helps us understand trends, from where the published work is coming and the gaps in which the work is lacking in concentration. From fig. 1 a link map visually shows the concentration of written work regarding the Rohingya issue. Three of the major clusters that appear, which are quite distinct, are *Myanmar*, *Rohingya* and *Refugee*. Since *Refugees* also appear alongside *Refugee* it can be bundled together with *Refugees* for the sake of this research. This would make the 'Refugee' a major cluster and a visible question of research for the researchers involved in the research of Rohingya related issues.

While there are many other issues quite prevalent from the figure, such as human, statelessness, Muslims, ethnicity, violence and epidemiology etc. more work appeared to address Refugee related issues. Keeping in mind that all the work selected for this research is coming from Scopus indexed journals, which limits a lot of work that may have addressed numerous other issues but not at a Scopus standard. An example of this could be Genocide, a word that appears relatively smaller in the fig. 1 than many other words; while genocide has been highlighted many times at the United Nations forum and in many news reporting (Hookway 2013) (2018, Abdelkader 2014, Anwar 2013, UNHCR 2007, 2017, 2018). The image also shows how the researchers may have approached the issue of Rohingya by linking one issue to another. Figure 1 for example shows the link between refugees, emergency care, measles, diphtheria and epidemic. Similarly, a link between refugee, migration and international law; and, a link between refugee, statelessness and displacement. While there are several links in the researches produced, there are several strong and visible areas within which the links are moving. There are certain areas which are softer or did not see much concentration from the researchers for example nutritional issues, infants and many other related issues. While these were important issues they were not addressed by the researchers in the same way as many issues were.

Analysis of retrieved publications revealed that medicine and health related issues got the prominent attention of researchers. It was the second top priority of researchers to write on the Rohingya crises. Around 42 % of total publications are published on medicine, health and related subject areas.

The retrieved publications received 504 citations up until the time of study. 72 (40%) of these documents are cited once or more times. On average document received 2.8 citations per publication. The highest number of citations (n=158) was received on an article titled “Refugees and Displaced Persons: War, Hunger, and Public Health” published in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Another aspect of this research is shown in fig.2 where we can see collaborations between authors. Some of the published work is geographically close to Burma in locations like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The authors also tend to collaborate close to the affected zone; most of these coming from Bangladesh. The reasons could be the movement pattern of refugees who end up mostly in Bangladesh, prompting researcher and other organizations to understand this issue. Fig.2 also shows the concentrations of work mostly coming from the USA, Australia, the UK and Malaysia. The overall positive research environment may be a strong contributor to the publication performance of the USA, the UK and Australia in this area. This same fact can be seen in the table 1 where the total number of publications in the USA alone are 35, followed by Bangladesh which is 27. We can assume that Bangladesh is the first possible option for the Rohingya people when they are fleeing Burma.

A considerable number of refugees are residing in Bangladesh (UNHCR 2018) and they are an issue for the government of Bangladesh. It is understandable that the academics of Bangladesh would show a reasonable interest in writing about Rohingya for many reasons. This can be seen in Fig. 3 where social sciences was the prevailing area of research publications followed by medicine and economics. This pattern shows that Bangladeshi researchers have an issue in hand that they are dealing with it; they are apparently trying to investigate issue that are more social and economic. This may be because of the economic and social burden Bangladesh is facing due to large influx of Rohingya refugees (Moses and Kengatharan 2018, 42). As for the USA, the research activities have always been quite active. The interest in international human rights issues is generally linked with US government policies, thereby creating an environment for research publications to address issue such as the Rohingya crisis.

While observing results obtained from Table 3, the preferred journals, the results produced indicate a trend of publishing in comparatively low-ranking journals. It indicates that most of the work done is published in medium or low impact journals. This raises some assumptions, it is either that journals with good impact are not getting good papers on the topic or eminent researchers are not interested in writing about the Rohingya issues at an academic level. Both the assumptions require a qualitative study.

Conclusion:

Observing the results obtained through a search using different criteria and looking at all the figures and tables derived from the data, we can make some assumptions. One assumption is that while there is a lot of research going on in the field of Human rights, the Rohingya as an issue has not really gotten the attention of academic researchers. This issue may be quite prevalent in the popular news and media; however, the researchers have not picked it up to that level. There could be several reasons for this which would require a separate qualitative study.

Another assumption is that the research surrounding Rohingya issues is geographically limited to some areas. There are many reasons for that, one major amongst many is the countries who are affected by migration and refugees. They tend to write and research more because the matter interest and impacts them directly. Some other countries where Rohingya related issue have seen some light are famous for human rights as a matter of public policy. The USA is an example of this case which stood highest in research publication relating to the Rohingya issue. Despite being geographically far away from Burma, most of the publications on this issue happened in the USA.



It is also observed that most of the publications relating to the Rohingya issue were in low impact journals. Looking at this fact, keeping in mind the low number of publications as mentioned above, the geography publication trends indicate that the Rohingya issue needs considerably more academic research. It is also concluded that a further qualitative study is required to understand the downward trends in academic research relating to Rohingya issues.

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