

THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICTS ON WOMEN IN MYANMAR

Myanmar has been facing a dreadful political situation including continued and developing armed conflicts and human rights violations since the onset of the coup in 2021. This coup d'etat exacerbated the over seven-decade-long entrenchment of ongoing armed conflicts in the country. Sagaing, Magway, Tanintaryi regions, and Chin States have become new armed-conflict areas, and in these new armed-conflict areas, the battles are happening between the Burmese military forces and the people Defense Forces (PDF). Many civilians have been affected due to the conflict as Burmese military forces have been involved in mass killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual violence, and attacks on civilians in these conflict areas (1). People have had to abandon their homes because military troops raided the villages, burned homes, looted belongings, and destroyed properties (agricultural products, livestock, and storehouses). According to the Human Rights Watch, the conflicts in the country have displaced over one million people internally, and forced 70,000 people to flee into neighboring countries (2). Conflicts affect everyone, but the effects may be different for men and women. Women, elderly people, and children are the most vulnerable groups among the displaced people caused by armed conflicts (3). According to the research findings of the Legal Aspect for Myanmar People (LAMP) on the conflict in the Sagaing region, men are being arrested, killed, and tortured by the military junta.



1. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/12/myanmar-abuses-mount-military-coup>
2. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/myanmar>
3. Gerald Alditya Bunga, *The Protection Of Women In Armed Conflict*, Volume 6, Issue 2, Universitas Negeri Solo



Therefore, men have to abandon and flee from their homes and villages. Women who were left behind had to take care of elderly family members and children and hide in nearby places, but when the villages were raided and burned, they had to take elderly people and children with them and flee their homes. Due to limited healthcare and medical treatment, many elderly people died on the run in the jungle. Likewise, pregnant women faced difficulties getting prenatal healthcare services and post-natal care after childbirth. Mothers and children are suffering adverse consequences due to inadequate healthcare and nutrition⁴ (4). According to the UN Women's Report on women living under the pandemic and military rule, "Nearly seven out of ten women report that household income has fallen since the military takeover (5). Security is a crucial factor for women, especially in unstable situations, such as economic contraction, political crises, and armed conflicts around the country. Violence against women and the impact of poverty are worsened because of the multiple crises happening in the country. For instance, villains in conflict-affected areas are unable to work on their farms as they frequently have to flee from battles. Livelihood issues, such as food shortages, have led to an increase in domestic violence.

Women suffer from violence by their husbands as economic problems multiply. In the report, the Legal Aspect for Myanmar People (LAMP) mentioned that after the coup, drug dealings became more prevalent. Drugs are freely distributed in the market due to a lack of control fueled by the bribery of investigation units (6). Economic Hardships lead to substance abuse, and then as a domino effect, there is an increase in domestic violence against women. The research report about displaced women in Kachin State pointed out that domestic violence can occur in many forms. Particularly between husband and wife, sexual violence including beatings by men, rape incidents by family members, and many other kinds of physical, mental, and sexual violence were noted (7).

The Burmese military is notorious for the use of sexual violence as a weapon against civilians during wars with ethnic armed groups (8). Regarding sexual violence incidents towards women, the report of LAMP states that the perpetrators are not only junta-associated military forces but also some members of the revolutionary forces. Such cases were noted during the revolution periods in sagging regions, Karrenni (Kayah State), and Magway region. National Unity Government (NUG) has issued a policy on the prevention of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (PSHEA) to protect women, youth, children, and gender minorities (9), however, in some places that are under the control of revolutionary forces, the problems are not being addressed and the victims are still not getting justice with no effective punishment given to the perpetrators (10). Burmese Women's Union stated that the victims were even threatened and forced not to disclose such incidents in public. In reality, it is difficult to take action since the accountability mechanism is so weak in the current situation. It remains a challenge for the victims to seek justice due to political instability and a dysfunctional government.

4. <https://lampmm.org/?p=1843&lang=en>

5. UN Women & UNDP, Regressing Gender Equality in Myanmar: Women Living under the pandemic and military rule, Pg.7, 2022. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/regressing-gender-equality-myanmar-women-living-under-pandemic-and-military-rule>

6. Legal Aspect for Myanmar People (LAMP), Exploring the Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Female IDPs from the Conflict in the Sagaing Region, Small Research Paper, Pg.7, 2023. <https://lampmm.org/?p=1843&lang=en>

7. Trocaire and Oxfam, Life on Hold, Experiences of women displaced by conflict in Kachin States, Myanmar, June 2017. <https://www.trocaire.org/documents/life-on-hold-experiences-of-women-displaced-by-conflict-in-kachin-state-myanmar/>

8. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/sexual-violence-in-the-fog-of-war/>

9. <https://mowycanugmyanmar.org/en/mowycapshea-policy/>

10. Burmese Women's Union, Sexual Violence against Women under the Political Instability, Analysis Paper, June 2023.