

Gendered Pathways to Care: Psychosocial Healing and Exclusion in the Burmese Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper examines how gender-specific healing spaces shape psychosocial well-being, identity reconstruction, and collective resilience among displaced Burmese communities in Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, while also addressing the absence of dedicated LGBTQ+ healing spaces within community-based wellness initiatives. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and facilitated group sessions conducted between 2024 and 2025, the study explores how women-only and men-only healing groups respond to distinct yet interconnected experiences of trauma, caregiving, displacement, and social responsibility within the Burmese diaspora.

Women's healing spaces illuminate how emotional labor, caregiving roles, and collective responsibility—often intensified by class precarity and migration status—shape both resilience and exhaustion. Through shared storytelling, mindfulness, and somatic practices, women collectively process grief and restore relational and cultural continuity. Men's healing spaces, by contrast, reveal how displacement destabilizes masculine identity, particularly expectations surrounding provision, emotional restraint, and endurance. Men-only groups create rare environments in which vulnerability, emotional expression, and mutual witnessing become possible without fear of stigma or role failure.

An intersectional analysis further reveals a critical structural gap: LGBTQ+ individuals are frequently excluded from both men's and women's healing spaces, navigating cultural norms, safety concerns, and institutional silences that limit access to care. While informal peer networks offer partial support, the absence of structured, affirming LGBTQ+ healing spaces reinforces psychosocial marginalization and uneven access to community resources.

Community wellness centers emerge as vital sites of social healing, yet their gendered configurations expose both the strengths and limitations of current care models. Methodologically, the paper reflects on the ethical dimensions of engaged research, where the researcher operates simultaneously as facilitator, interviewer, and witness. By foregrounding gender-specific and absent spaces of care, this study contributes to Burma Studies by demonstrating how inclusive, intersectional approaches to healing are essential for sustaining dignity, belonging, and collective well-being within displaced Burmese communities.