

Patriarchal Confinement in Displacement: Gender-Based Violence Among Myanmar Women in Thailand

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Abstract

In this presentation, we provide an overview of preliminary findings from an ongoing study examining how women displaced from Myanmar experience and navigate gender-based violence (GBV) across three interconnected settings: during migration to Thailand and in everyday life in refugee camps and workers' compounds. We are particularly concerned about how GBV confines women's lives, while also seeking to understand the central role of grassroots organisations and community-based support networks in creating spaces of care, protection, and relative safety. This analysis draws on the first stage of qualitative fieldwork, comprising in-depth interviews with 27 practitioners from 12 community-based organisations in Thailand that support Myanmar women living with GBV. We found that GBV is widespread across the three sites and perpetrated by diverse actors, including military personnel in Myanmar, Thai authorities, members of Myanmar's People's Defence Forces, brokers, employers, male co-residents in camps and workers' compounds, and intimate partners and family members, who are most frequently responsible for sustained violence. Women's undocumented status and mobility restrictions heighten their exposure to patriarchal abuse and limit their options for escape. For example, fear of deportation, limited access to protection from the masculinist Thai state, and migration-related geographic controls restrict women's freedom and access to safety. GBV, therefore, operates not only as interpersonal harm but also as a force that confines women within already bounded settings. At the same time, grassroots organisations are playing a vital role in sustaining informal systems of care, protection, and support. The presentation concludes by drawing on the situated knowledge of these organisations to consider strategies for change.