

Displaced Women's Lived Experience in Kachin Women's Movement in Myanmar

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of displaced women within the Kachin women's movement in Myanmar, examining how conflict, displacement, and gendered inequalities shape their activism for women's rights and gender equality within patrilineal and patrilocal social structures. The Kachin have suffered for decades from political marginalisation and ongoing armed conflict, experiencing multiple waves of displacement since 1961, when the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) launched armed resistance against the Tatmadaw. Since then, thousands of civilians have been displaced across Kachin State and northern Shan State, as well as in neighbouring countries. Women have borne compounded burdens of insecurity, economic hardship, and intensified care responsibilities. Amid militarisation, heightened risks of sexual violence, human trafficking, and exploitative labour conditions, some displaced Kachin women have become actively involved in grassroots women's organisations to defend women's rights and promote gender equality.

This study concentrates on the Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT) as a case study, emphasising its role in promoting women's rights, gender equality, and women's leadership in both personal and societal contexts. KWAT was established in 1999 by Kachin women in Thailand to support and initiate women's movement activities in Kachin and northern Shan States through the provision of healthcare services and the implementation of programmes aimed at preventing gender-based violence, including initiatives addressing women and human trafficking. KWAT documents human rights violations and advocates for women's rights at the local, national, and international levels, amplifying Kachin women's situation.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with displaced Kachin women activists, this research pursues two main objectives: first, to explore how intersecting identities (ethnicity, gender, displacement status, and class) shape women's lived experiences and influence the strategies of the Kachin women's movement; and second, to analyse how the movement engages in transnational activism while addressing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination through an intersectional framework.