

Immobility, Education Access, and Mental Health Among Lisu Youths in Post-Coup Myanmar: Migration, Survival, and Agency in Kachin Borderland

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Abstract

After the military coup, ethnic minorities have faced severe political instability, armed conflict, and socio-economic collapse. This research examines the multifaceted challenges of Lisu youths as an ethnic minority group predominantly residing in Kachin State, who are navigating restricted mobility, limited education access, and deteriorating mental health beyond the military coup. Moreover, both the Myanmar military and the Lisu militia threaten the survival of Lisu youths, forcing them to displace and migrate to neighboring countries. The combined impact of the coup and the COVID-19 pandemic not only led to educational disruption but also urged Lisu youths to make difficult choices providing income for their families and struggling to continue their education. Lisu youths face a "double-burden" as "double-victims" due to historical ethnic frictions between KIA/KIO and Lisu people, while simultaneously being unable to rely on the junta-aligned Lisu militia. This predicament has severely restricted their physical mobility, limited educational accessibility, and forced displacement. To reflect on the real situation, this research designed ethnographical approaches based on the experiences of existing Lisu youths in Kachin and interviews with other Lisu youths living outside Myanmar. Furthermore, this paper aims to understand ethnic issues, mental health, educational accessibility, and (im)mobility of Lisu in post-coup Myanmar. Then, this paper will discuss migration, and survival mechanisms and their agency in the liminal spaces of borderlands.