

Medicine, Resistance, and Collective Resilience: CDM Medical Doctors and Ethnic Health Systems in Post-Coup Myanmar

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Abstract

The peaceful strike of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) by doctors, who had been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response, marked one of the earliest forms of resistance against the military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021. Since then, these medical professionals have faced sustained repression, including arrests and attacks on healthcare facilities. In response, many CDM doctors were displaced to areas controlled by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), where they began collaborating with ethnic health organizations. Historically operating in parallel to the central state's Ministry of Health, these systems have become critical sites of refuge, collaboration, and continued care provision during the post-coup crisis.

This study examines the integration of CDM doctors into ethnic health systems, focusing on how they enact and interpret everyday forms of resistance under conditions of political repression and institutional fragmentation. Resistance is not limited to overt protest but is embedded in clinical practice, including refusal to work under military authority, adaptation of care delivery, and participation in alternative, non-state health systems. The study also explores how doctors themselves frame these actions as ethical obligations, professional duties, and survival strategies, rather than always as explicit political resistance.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative design using purposive sampling of CDM doctors and ethnic health workers. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis to examine how narratives of resistance and collaboration emerge from lived experience.

Drawing on James C. Scott's concept of everyday resistance, this research frames healthcare provision as both a moral practice and a form of embedded political action, contributing to scholarship on medicine, resistance, and community formation in contexts of authoritarian violence.