

Women as Everyday Mediators: Informal Learning and Social Change in Myanmar's Post-2021 Crisis

Wai Ya Mone Phoo

Abstract

The mediation roles performed by Myanmar women in managing social conflicts during periods of crisis remain significant yet underexplored in both academic and policy discussions. While mediation is commonly understood as a formal mechanism for resolving political and armed conflicts, existing approaches often overlook informal, everyday practices embedded within communities. This paper reconceptualizes mediation by examining how women's daily conflict management practices function as forms of informal learning that contribute to social change in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Since the 2021 political crisis, Myanmar women, particularly those in resistance-controlled areas and those living in displacement or exile in Thailand, have faced overlapping challenges arising from insecurity, displacement, and socio-economic instability. While existing literature tends to frame these women primarily as victims or organizational actors, less attention has been paid to their roles as everyday mediators who manage family disputes, community tensions, and social conflicts in rapidly changing environments. This study argues that women's informal mediation practices constitute a form of community-based social governance that challenges formal, neutrality-centered models of mediation.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, combining a review of mediation literature with semi-structured interviews conducted with Myanmar women residing in Thailand and in resistance-controlled areas, supplemented by a small-scale survey to capture broader patterns of everyday mediation practices. The data are analyzed thematically to identify recurring strategies, culturally embedded norms, and gendered dimensions of mediation.

By bridging theoretical perspectives on mediation with lived experiences, the paper highlights the gap between formal mediation frameworks and everyday practices in crisis contexts. It ultimately demonstrates how recognizing women's informal mediation as a form of social learning can contribute to more context-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution and strengthen inclusive pathways for future peacebuilding processes.