

THE VOICE ZIP

THE NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON CURRENT ISSUES OF EMPOWERMENT, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, AND ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM SOUTHERN MYANMAR.

PUBLISHED BY THE WOMAN AND CHILD RIGHTS PROJECT, HUMAN RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF MONLAND.

VOLUME 14, NO.2, DECEMBER 2019

MON LANGUAGE LEARNING UNDER THREAT AS GOVERNMENT FAILS TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH TEXTBOOKS



August 14, 2019

Government schools throughout Mudon Township, Mon State, have been permitted to conduct Mon language lessons for 45 minutes per day throughout the 2019–2020 academic year. However, teachers tasked to deliver such lessons report that the Mon State government has been unable to provide each student with the accompanying Mon language textbook. As a result, teachers have resorted to writing the lessons on blackboards, thereby wasting the majority of the allotted 45 minutes.

“From grades one to three, there are hundreds of students learning Mon language, but not every student has their own textbook. In fact, less than half of all students have their own book... Two or three students have to share one book.

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CHILD RAPED 3 TIMES WITHIN TWO MONTHS

October 30, 2019

According to the organization Mitta Zone Zee, a 13-year-old girl from Htan Pin Chaung village, Paung Township in Mon State was raped in three separate incidents within two months.

The child was raped by a 31-year-old man while she tended to grazing cattle in Tha Pyay Gone village in September of this year. She was raped again by a 51-year-old man from

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Publisher's Message

DON'T RE-VICTIMIZE THE VICTIMS

On December 19th, the Myanmar Police Force held a press conference regarding a widely known Naypyidaw child rape case, where senior officials from the Police Force revealed the names and detailed information about the rape victim and family. The media were shocked by this action and stopped the live broadcast of the press conference. They also removed all video content of the event from their websites and social media pages.

However the “Ye Zar Ni” Facebook page — the official social media page of the Myanmar Police Force continued to post detailed information related to the rape victim and family along with information about criminal procedures. Revealing information of sexual assault victims, particularly in cases involving children is a breach of “Child Rights Convention” and is also a criminal act, commented human rights activists and lawyers.

“If there is a sexual abuse and the perpetrator is a family member or a neighbor and where there hasn’t been an arrest by the police, we bring the victim to our safe house in order to protect [the individual]. ... Sometimes, if the sexual abuse is reported to the police, the perpetrator tries to harm the victim. In this kind of case, our safe house can’t accept the victim so we bring them to the Department of Social Welfare,” said Mi Cherry Soe, the Program Director of Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO).

It is the expectation that the Myanmar Police Force must protect sexual assault victims and must pursue justice for these individuals. More importantly, the Police Force must not re-victimize sexual assault victims who have already been hurt and traumatized.

In 2019, Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) collected 111 news articles related to human rights violations within Mon State. More than 10% of those articles involved sexual assault of women and children.

In Burma, sexual assault cases targeting women and children is increasingly being reported but the State has no concrete policy and procedures to protect the victims.





We have to write each lesson on the board. It takes up a lot of time, and we only have 45 minutes to deliver the lesson,” said Mi Ru Par, a teacher from Nyne Prine village.

Currently, there are 50 government schools that conduct Mon language lessons in Mudon Township, with 499 teachers delivering the curriculum.

“Because Mon language learning is a minor subject and students don’t need to sit for an exam, students are uninterested. Some students don’t even partake in the [Mon] language class. I think language textbooks should be provided to every single student, and that students should sit for a language exam. If they [students] had to sit for an exam, I believe interest would increase. Right now, we have very

limited time to deliver each lesson, and the class is optional. This approach to language teaching and learning simply isn’t effective,” said Mi Wood Mon, teacher from Set The village.

The Mon State Parliament permitted government schools in Mon State to conduct Mon language courses beginning in the 2014–2015 academic year. Teachers who opt to teach the language course receive 30,000 kyat (US \$19.88) in addition to their monthly salary. Though the teaching of Mon language courses is permitted, the priorities of individual school administrations means that some schools only provide such lessons once the school day has officially ended.

“I am aware that there is a shortage of Mon language textbooks, and I realize

that the government cannot afford to provide the number of books needed because printing these books is so costly. As well, there are no funds allocated to Mon language teaching in the [Mon State] budget. I think the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs should meet with the Ministry of Education to determine how the needed funds can be procured. Next year, we must request more funds to ensure that each student receives a textbook, but we can’t say if the government will choose to lend its support,” said Nai Tun Shein, and member of Mon State’s Ethnic Affairs Committee.

As of 2019, there are 1,265 teachers in government schools conducting mother-tongue language courses in Mon, Pa’O, and Karen languages throughout Mon State.

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Htan Pin Chaung in the last week of September while she slept in a hut on the farm. She was raped a third time by her 42-year-old stepfather in the second week of October while they were fishing on the farm.

“The neighbors were suspicious about the relationship between the girl and her stepfather so they asked the girl. As the girl revealed the truth, they contacted our organization and reported the incidents to the Ward Administrator and the Police. After

that, the girl had a medical check-up at the Mawlamyine General Hospital,” said Daw Thi Thi Nwe, the Chair of the Mitta Zone Zee, a Mawlamyine based organization that supports vulnerable women and children.

The child has been removed from the home.

On October 27, three men were arrested and each was charged with the criminal act #376 – punishment for rape. Separate charges specifically #363 – punishment for kidnapping were also applied by the Paung Police Station.

“The victims of current child rape cases range in age from 2 to 13 years old. 80% of child rapists are persons familiar with their victims,” said Lawmaker Daw Khine Khine Lei, Chair of the Mon State Parliament Woman and Child Rights Committee.

According to the Mon State Police Force, there were 61 reported rape cases in 2017 and 80 cases in 2018. Between January to June, 2019, there have been approximately 21 reported child rape cases in Mon State.

News

DRUG USE ON THE RISE: UNSUPPORTED BELIEF IN HEALTH BENEFITS OF KRATOM LEAF RISKING MON YOUTH'S FUTURE



September 3, 2019

According to a 2017 report by the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), drug use in some ethnic areas, throughout Burma is on the rise. MYPO interviewed 500 people from 10 townships in Mon State. Those interviewed were between 12 to 60 years of age, and had experience with drug use.

The report reveals that the number of drug users has been increasing year after year and drug use has become the norm among some Mon communities. Local groups trying to build anti-drug education programs have noted the spike in drug use is leading to increased violence, crime and poverty.

Drug use particularly methamphetamines is being replaced by users taking Kratom-leaf liquor.

The shift in preference is because the liquor is cheaper than methamphetamine pills and can be drunk in public. According to community groups concerned about increasing drug use and its impacts on Mon youth, some homes are organizing religious events and wedding ceremonies that treat their visitors with drugs and Kratom-leaf liquor instead of offering food and soft drinks. This is making drug use more socially acceptable.

Nai Tin Shein a leading member of a 45-person committee that spearheaded the building of a rehabilitation center for drug addicted youth in Ye Township, told the Irawaddy news outlet in January of this year, that *“Projects like this are really the responsibility of the government, but they don’t do it. So we have to help our (young) ethnic people, ... they are the future Mon leadership.”*

According to the Mon State Police Office, from January to July, 2019, 20 cases of kratom leaves were caught in Mon State.

There is the belief among Mon rural communities that kratom leaves, also

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known by the names, thang, kakuam, thom, katum, or biak can be used to treat, diarrhea, pain, coughs, and fatigue.

However, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) has listed kratom as a 'drug of concern' due to potential health and safety issues and because it leaves users with a psychotropic and opioid-like pain relieving effects. According to the DEA, in small doses (1-5grams) users experience more alertness, physical energy and are more talkative. Higher doses (5-15grams) act as a sedative to point of losing consciousness. Other effects can include nausea, itching, sweating, dry mouth, constipation, increased urination, and loss of appetite. Long-term use can cause anorexia, weight loss, and insomnia.

Observations offered by Dr Win Kyaw Thu a chief official with the department of psycho-therapeutic treatment and drug rehabilitation at Mawlamyine General Hospital support the DEA's finding. He said, "(A) little amount of kratom has (an) energetic effect. You feel fresh. But if you use many, kratom leaves (that) brings a narcotic effect. The leaf has two effects. Long term use has a negative impact on both physical and mental health."

Kratom leaf has a bitter taste and users tend to dilute the liquor with Coca Cola

or liquid cough suppressant. Dr Win Kyaw Thu added, this latter combination can lead to serious side effects. "...the combination makes the users feel anxiety, mental disorder and experience mistrust and suspicion of others (suffer from paranoia)."

Min Htaw Kwee, the vice chairperson of the MYPO said, "Parents have accepted (that their children are) using kratom leaves. The parents themselves, dry the leaves and use them in tea. As the parents have accepted kratom leaves, their children shift (from using methamphetamine pills) to drinking kratom-leaf liquor."

Some people believe the leaf liquor can cure diabetes. "So, they don't take (other) medicines given by doctors. When drinking the liquor in the long term, their health situation is getting worse" said a Kalogtaw resident.

There is no credible scientific or medical research to support this belief. While there may be some medicinal properties when taken in small doses, a 2019 study of data analyzed from the US National Poison Data system found 11 deaths associated with kratom exposure. Although the majority of these deaths (9) involved exposure to kratom plus other drugs and medicine, two deaths were attributed solely to the exposure to kratom.

Drug users who find the costs and dangers of using methamphetamines pills are swayed by reports of "some villagers (who returned from Thailand) telling local villagers that kratom leaves are used in the production of painkillers (there) so the locals didn't listen to us," added Min Htwa Kwee.

Dealing in kratom has other risks. According to Myanmar law, a person in possession of more than 6 kilograms of kratom leaves can be punished with a 10-year prison sentence. For those in possession of less than 6 kilograms, they can face imprisonment sentences of under 10 years, according to a police official.

Kratom leaves can be found in Mawlamyine, Kyaukmayaw, Chaung Zone, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat and Ye Townships of Mon State. According to a local villager, due to ease of availability the number of users increases daily.

"Kratom plants have been planted in (remote) plantations and areas where there is a weak rule of law. The leaves are (harvested) from these areas and sold in the villages. Some leaves have been imported from Thailand," said a Ye resident.

News

WOMEN, PEACE AND POLITICS IN MYANMAR



September 19, 2019

Since 2016, there has been an increase of women’s participation in Burma’s peace process, however, there is evidence that this progress has not been sufficient.

The first Union Peace Conference – the 21st Century Panlong held in August 2016 had just 13 percent women attendees. The second conference held in May 2017 saw a marginal increase with 17 percent women attendees. The July 2018 Union Peace Conference increased women’s representation to just 22 percent.

This is well below the 30% benchmark recommended by the United Nations and the percentage agreed to by the parties to the peace accord.

Like many countries around the world that have conflict zones, women in Myanmar are largely excluded from peace talks. One women’s activist attending the 3rd Union Peace Conference noted that *“More than half of the country population are women ... if their voices and decisions have been excluded from the dialogue, [the] peace process can’t go forward smoothly and successfully.”*

Women are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts at the sub-national level, this is particularly true for ethnic minority women. The consequences include being forcible removed from

their homes, loss of access to livelihood, and sexual violence.

A four month study titled *“Broadening Participation of Ethnic Women in the Peace Process”* found that gender imbalance, discrimination and a lack of public support is contributing to the lack of adequate inclusion in Myanmar’s peace process.

The Women’s League of Burma and the US based Carter Center conducted the study earlier this year. They interviewed leaders of 52 ethnic political parties (EPPs) and 49 representatives, to increase stakeholder awareness of the main constraints and opportunities for women’s inclusion and EPPs’ involvement in the peace process, as perceived by women members and the leadership of Myanmar’s EPPs.

Gender equality has been a long-standing challenge within Myanmar. Although State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi can be cited as an example of women in leadership within government, she is the only woman among the 25 ministries and cabinet members. Representation of women in legislatures across the country remains low, and the same applies to the peace process.

The Carter Center/Women’s League of Burma study made a number of recommendations for change. This included, the call for information about the peace talks to be made available in

local languages and to be easily accessible for communities. The peace process also needs to develop an inclusive channel for women to bring their unrepresented voices to the negotiation tables and ensure their inclusion.

Greg Kehailia, The Carter Center’s country director in Myanmar noted, *“There is a largely untapped reserve of civilian stakeholders ready and able to contribute to the peace process; they need training, technical assistance, and opportunities for dialogue and networking.”*

Referring to shortcomings of the peace process conferences Mi Cherry Soe, Program Director of the Civil Society Development Organization based in Mawlaymine, told the Mon News Agency (MNA), *“Women are able to hold discussion in detail and it’s beneficial to the conference but women’s participation [rate] isn’t enough, so there is a defect in every session.”*

Despite the establishment of a 30% benchmark for women’s participation rate, there is a lack of community support for women to engage in the peace process meetings. Stereotypes persist that wrongly assume women are not qualified to be involved in politics or the peace process.

Mi Cherry Soe said, *“[The community] has been brainwashed that women*

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should do only housework. This tradition has taught [women to behave] like that [because] women have to do housework everyday, they [have no time] to participate in peace."

Gender imbalances and discrimination women face in political structures and institutions is another impediment that needs to be addressed as part of Myanmar's development path.

The total proportion of women in the House of Representatives (Pyithu Hluttaw), House of Nationalities (Amyotha Hluttaw) and Union Parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) is only 13%. Moreover, and only 3% of women participate in Union government.

"[Although], there are lots of women in the party, men dominate the leadership roles. Women are qualified (to be a leader) but we've found only men in leadership roles. That's a challenge (for women)," said Mi Sar Dar, a Central Executive Committee Member of New Mon State Party (NMSP) and Senior Official of the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC), to the Gender Equality Network (GEN).

Efforts to pursue gender equality extend to the international level. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in September 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. The Burmese government signed the treaty in July 22, 1997 and is one of 187 out of

194 UN member countries that have ratified the Convention.

CEDAW is considered the only international instrument that comprehensively addresses women's rights within political, civil, cultural, economic, and social life.

While the Convention is legally binding, it is not self-executing, meaning that any legal obligations stemming from the Convention must be brought before the signatory countries parliamentary process before implementation. In addition, countries can express "reservations, understandings and declarations" in cases where discrepancies between the international convention and domestic law may exist.

There are numerous Articles to the Convention obligating countries to undertake special measures to ensure equality of opportunity for women, as well as taking appropriate measures to eliminate prejudices and customary practices based on the erroneous idea of inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

Women's groups and human rights allies in many countries have found CEDAW to be an invaluable tool to confront institutional discrimination and develop meaningful equality of opportunity for women.

Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO) has also studied the issue of gender equality in politics

and Myanmar's peace process. A JCSDO report pointed out the proportion of women in politics and in the official peace conferences are not representative of the percentage of women in the country's population.

"If there is no chance to have a proper and fair proportion of women in [the] peace process, Burma can not find the best solutions [for] peace and development," said Mi Kon Chan Non, the Chair of Mon Women Organization (MWO).

Mi Cherry Soe added the problem has inter-generational implications, *"the lack of women's voices in the peace process, [means not only are] women losing their rights but also their children suffer the same [fate]."*

JCSDO's report demanded greater promotion and enabling support for women's participation in the peace process. Also that traditionally sexist notions of gender roles in society, leadership, politics and in the division of labour must be challenged. In order to assist Myanmar's path to greater democracy and development, there must be corresponding, and meaningful actions upholding women's rights. The report also pointed out that Parliament must become a welcoming place for women by enabling child care services and rooms for breast-feeding.

"To promote women's participation in politics and peace, those who are already in positions must create special spaces [and have] concrete plans for women," said Mi Cherry Soe.



News

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN KYAIKMAYAW TOWNSHIP CONFESS TO DRUG USE

September 23, 2019

According to the Principal of a High School in Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, two students confessed to using illicit drugs.

On September 17, 2019, six Grade-9 students were asked if they had ever used betel nut or drank alcohol. Two students confessed they had used drugs.

“One of the classroom teachers reported that a student was sleeping during [lessons] last week. I called [the student] and asked (what was happening) but got no response. So I brought the parents [to the school] and this [led to a confession that the student and] 5 friends had smoked and drank alcohol. I summoned all of these students’ parents to the school and then two students admitted they had used illicit drugs three or four times [in

the past.] We, teachers, did not know what kind of drugs they used,” stated the Principal of the school.

The Principal continued that if the two students wanted to overcome drug use, the school would provide them with a long leave and re-accept them when they recovered from drug addiction.

“Children may make mistakes. There will be no student in this school if we dismiss all of them when they [do] something wrong. If they want to quit drugs, I will contact the Mawlamyine hospital and send them. That’s all we can do. As we [don’t have the medical means], we can’t stop [drug abuse],” said the Principal.

The Criminal Investigation Department organized an anti-drug talk and drug education showroom. The school has also organized a monthly essay writing contest relating to drug education and

notifies parents when their children are absent from school.

“There has been a lot of students who are using drugs in my village. One of the students was sued for rape and drug use last year,” cited a local resident of Mudon Township.

According to the report published in 2017 by the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), 70% of youth in Mon State have experience with drug use.

There has been a lot of students who are using drugs in my village. One of the students was sued for rape and drug use last year



News

47 YEAR OLD MALE CHARGED WITH BUYING A MINOR FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROSTITUTION

November 29, 2019

Local people in Myay Nee Kone Ward, Mawlaymine, Mon State, noticed a young girl crying in front of a guest house near the train station. They contacted the police in Dye Wun Kwin.

It was soon discovered the 17-year old had been reported missing from her home in Yangon, for the last two months. Police learned that she had

been brought to Mawlamyine by a 47-year old man who drove a taxi. The man gave the young girl alcohol at the guest house.

The man has been charged under article No.373 *Buying minor for purposes of prostitution*, by the police after Tauk Pa Kyal (Bright Star) a human rights group reported the incident and noted the man had seduced an underage person.

The charges if proven upheld can result in up to a 10 year prison sentence and/or a fine.

The victim is from, Yangon, and lived together with her mother, but currently is being cared for by the Mon State Women and Children Upgrade Committee.

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News

PARENTS CONCERNED FOLLOWING ACCIDENT INJURING 3 STUDENTS FROM CEILING COLLAPSE

September 30, 2019

On 22 September 2019, 3 students attending their high school were injured when the interior ceiling, in their class fell on them. The incident took place at the Basic Education High School (Sub) of Kyar Bo village, Ah Hlat village tract, Paung Township, in Mon State.

Parents are worried that other incidents may put their children in jeopardy.

Rain water had infiltrated into the classroom ceiling via roof hole during the recent heavy rains. The interior suspended ceiling became soaked with rain water and could not bear the weight, collapsing onto the students during class time. According to the school, 3 Grade 6 students – 2 boys and 1 girl, suffered minor injuries.

“I was angry with the company that built the school when hearing the ceiling fell down. Parents asked the principal, ‘how many years [has this school] been built. [The principal] replied that it has been one year and few months. It was just over a year but

it caused an accident so it is not good for [the] long term” said U Hla Win, one of the parents.

The government provided 43.2 millions kyat to construct the school and the Win Tha Pyay company was granted permission to build the school in August 2015. The school has been operating since June 2016, according to Paung Township Department of Basic Education.

“State Minister will fix this (school) for us but we do not expect much. We would like to fix it with our own money if possible. We want to improve this school condition. Even though it is high school, it has no fence,” continued U Hla Win.

Estimates to repair the damaged roof will be covered in the upcoming budget year. The students are continuing their studies in the same room after the fallen debris was removed.

The local people want the government to supervise the construction company to make sure their buildings are strong,

qualified and durable. Parents indicated they are willing to donate money to fix the ceiling and U Htun Min Aung, the Minister of the Mon State Ministry of Immigration and Human Resources, will ensure the necessary repairs take place.

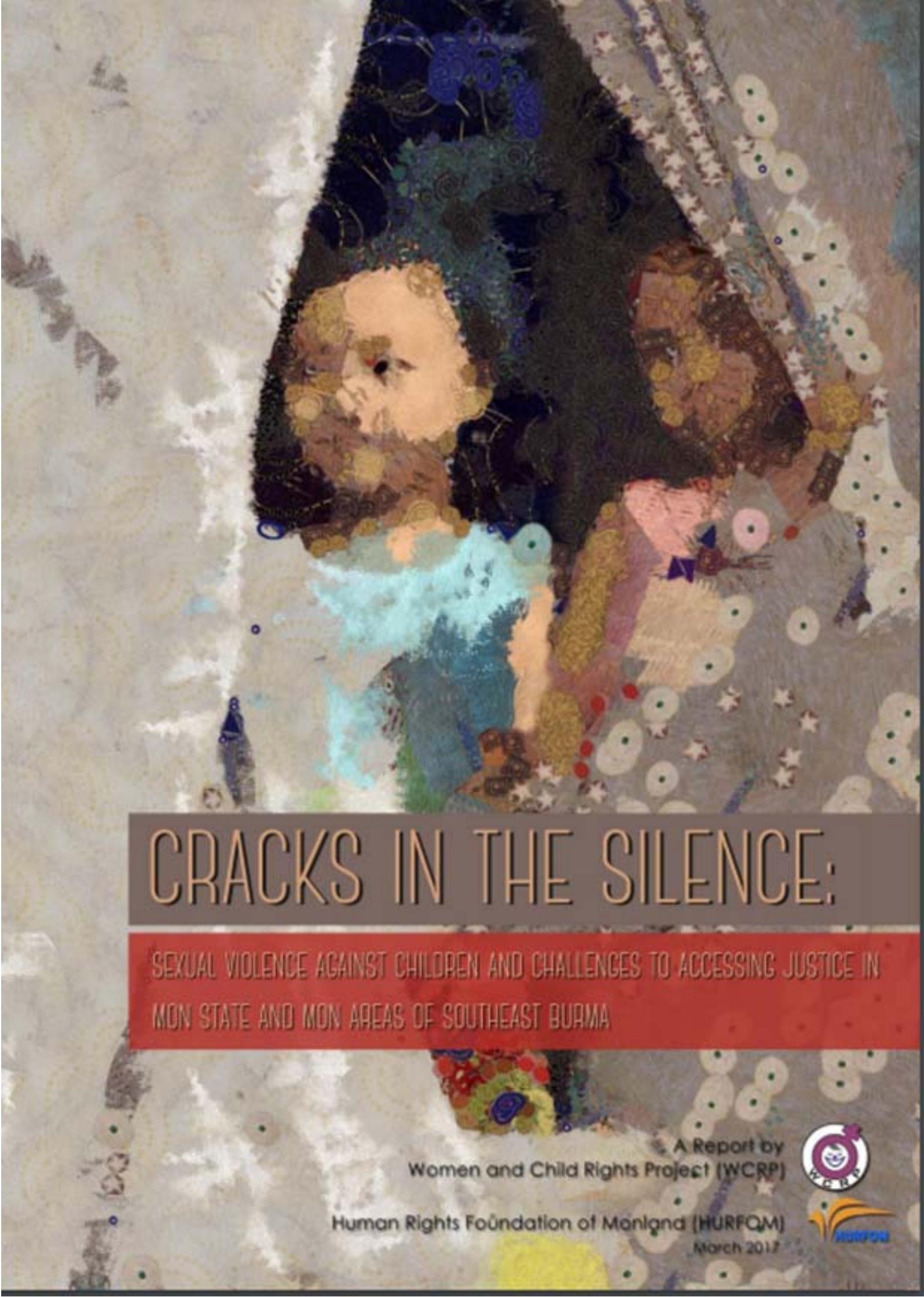
“Most of locals here are farmers. They just know having a school is good but they do not know about the quality of the school building. However, the government has a supervision team and they should check the quality of the construction. We want the school [to be] strong” stated U Min Thu, Village Administrator.

According to the Administrator, the school filed a written report with photos illustrating the damage with the Township General Administration Department.

There are 500 students attending the Basic Education High School (Sub) of Kyar Bo village.

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CRACKS IN THE SILENCE:

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING JUSTICE IN
MON STATE AND MON AREAS OF SOUTHEAST BURMA

A Report by
Women and Child Rights Project (WCRP)

Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)
March 2017



KIDNAPPING AND EXTORTION CRIME ENDS IN DEATH OF YOUNG CHILD IN YE TOWNSHIP



November 26, 2019

A child, just under two years of age, was abducted and killed on 18 November 2019 according to sources within the police department in Ye. The incident took place in the Old City Quarter, Ah Sin village tract, Ye Township, Mon state.

Mg Ye Yint Thu, 20, and Mg Ye Yint Myo, 16, from Sai Pyin village, Bu Talin Township, Oak Chin Twin District, Sagaing Division, kidnapped (abducted) the child to extort money from the parents. Both culprits worked at a fishery owned by the child's parents, U Phoe Sal and Daw Thin Thin Aye.

"The mother of the (culprits) is a friend with the child's father and they had been there only one month working for him. The child was abducted while the mother was taking a nap at noon and a phone was also stolen", said the police chief of Ye police station.

When the mother awoke, she looked for her baby. A taxi driver told her that two brothers were seen with the child headed towards the railway station, but could not be found there.

The culprits phoned the father at 6:00 pm and said *"to bring 500,000 kyat to exchange for the child and [that they would] do something bad if [the parents did not pay] because they're impatient"*. The parents contacted the police station after receiving the phone call.

The culprits were caught at the bus station at midnight after attempting to obtain a Wave money transfer of 300,000 kyat sent from the parents. At the arrest, there was no sign of the child.

The culprits admitted that, Mg Ye Yint Thu, had closed the child's mouth as she was crying loudly. The child died of suffocation. At approximately 4pm on the 19th, the body of the child was found in a canal near a field behind the railway road in Chaung Taung village, according to the police.

The police in Ye Town are trying the two brothers in court for child abduction, intimidation, murder and theft.

"We always appreciate feedback from our readers. Please feel free to contact our mailing or email address."

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