

# THE VOICE 21P

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 12, NO.1, JANUARY 2018

## 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL RAPED TWICE BY HER STEP-FATHER IN YE TOWNSHIP



July 6, 2017

A 14-year-old girl from A Sin village, Ye Township, Mon State, was raped twice by her 48-year-old step-father.

On May 12<sup>th</sup> 2017, the girl's mother, Daw K—, went to the hospital in Ye City to stay the night with her nephew who was ill and receiving treatment at the local hospital. She left her daughter and her 11-year-old niece with her husband at home. That night at around 10 pm, the perpetrator asked Daw K—'s daughter to

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## THATON DISTRICT JAIL CELLS OVERFLOWING WITH YOUNG DRUG USERS



September 8, 2017

**HURFOM:** There are not enough cells in Thaton District's jail to deal with the youth drug problem, according to Nai Nyan Seik, an office administrator for the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in Thaton District, Mon State.

His comments come after the Thaton District NMSP has recently received an overwhelming number of parents asking for help with their children who are abusing amphetamines.

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## Publisher's Message

Physical and sexual violence against women and children remain a pressing issue in Burma. Over the last six months, WCRP has continued to document cases of such violence in Mon State and Mon populated areas of southern Burma. WCRP is gravely concerned about reports of mass sexual violence against women and girls by the Burma Army in northern Rakhine State, as well as violence inflicted in the conflict that continues in northern Kachin and Shan states.

In December 2017, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland released: “‘I Still Remember’: Desires for acknowledgement and justice for past and ongoing human rights violations in Mon areas of southern Burma.” This report analyzed 22 years of documented human rights abuses and gathered testimony of villagers attesting to their inability or unwillingness to forget the violence afflicted upon them and their desires for justice.

The report identified four major categories of human rights violations affecting both women and children, including: arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture; extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances; rape and other forms of sexual violence; and land, property, and housing rights violations.

In particular, the report found that since 1995, HURFOM has documented over 67 separate incidents of sexual violence committed by the Burma Army, affecting over 106 women, children, and men. These incidents ranged from rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, to forced participation in beauty shows and over 27 Burma Army battalions were implicated as participating in some form of sexual violence.

WCRP demands an end to all ongoing human rights violations by the Burma Army. WCRP continues to demand the implementation of nation-wide prevention of violence against women and children policies, including legislation designed to prevent violence toward women and children, and promote their rights. In addition, HURFOM calls on the Burma government to publicly acknowledge and apologize for their role in violating the rights of women and children, and to develop and implement an adequate reparations policy to restore and compensate victims during the national reconciliation process.

News

# 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL RAPED TWICE BY HER STEP-FATHER IN YE TOWNSHIP



that evening. The perpetrator was arrested that night and the police have charged him under Penal Code #376 (punishment for rape).

On June 27<sup>th</sup> 2017, the girl’s mother reported that, “after the incident the girl feels shy and does not want to go to school. Even though I encourage her to go to school, she does not dare to go. Her teacher knows about it because my daughter’s friend told their teacher. I am not sure whether the headmaster knows about it or not. I feel very sad for my daughter. I feel this incident has destroyed my daughter’s life. I want him to be punished for his actions [even though he is my husband].”

fry some beans for him. When she came out from her bedroom, the perpetrator covered her mouth and raped her in front of her room. Daw K—’s 11-year-old niece saw the incident and the perpetrator threatened both of the girls saying he would kill them if they told anyone about the incident. On June 9<sup>th</sup>

2017, the girl’s step-father came to her room and raped her again while her mother was out selling beans.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the victim told her mother that she had been raped by her step-father and her mother reported it to the Ye City Police Station around 8 pm

The girl has suffered from stomach pain since she was raped and received x-ray tests in Ye Hospital on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, however the results have not yet been released. Before the incident, she attended grade eight at high school in A Sin village, Ye Township, Mon State.

# ATTEMPTED RAPE OF 11-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN YE CITY

September 15, 2017

On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2017, a 17-year-old man attempted to rape an 11-year-old school girl in the An Na War Quarter of Ye City, Ye Township, Mon State. The girl’s grandmother reported the case to the Ye City Police the next day.

On the evening of the incident, the girl’s grandparents were sleeping in their bedroom, while their son, their 12-year-old grandson, and the 11-year-old girl were sleeping in the front of the house. The grandmother was awoken when her brother living in the house next to them began shouting her name around 1 am in the morning. Upon rising the grandmother saw the door to the house was open. The grandmother then heard shouting from her granddaughter and exited the house to find the girl outside without any pants.

When asked, the girl told her grandmother that the perpetrator — who had previously lived with them in the house for two weeks — had taken her outside while she was sleeping and attempted to rape her. When the girl awoke, the perpetrator told her not to shout out and threatened her with a knife. Then he grabbed her and took off her pants. However, the girl immediately shouted for help and called for her grandmother and the perpetrator ran away.

The girl’s grandmother said, “She goes to school every day. We encourage her and do not talk about it [the incident] to her anymore because we are worry that she may feel bad. Her health is well and even among her friends we do not allow them to talk about her problem. We want everything to happen in accordance with the law. It has affected

her whole life and I feel unhappy for my granddaughter.”

The perpetrator was arrested by the Ye City Police and charged under Myanmar Penal Code Section #376 (Punishment for rape) and Section #511 (Punishment for attempting to commit offenses punishable with manual labor or imprisonment).

Although the perpetrator has been arrested and charged, the grandmother reported that the police have not yet informed them of the next steps.

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# THATON DISTRICT JAIL CELLS OVERFLOWING WITH YOUNG DRUG USERS



"The parents of youths come to our office every day and ask us to put their sons in our cells due to their addiction to drugs. Our cells are over capacitated as it is. Even though parents request [a spot for their children] we can't accept anymore inmates," he said.

He added that, parents come from as far away as Kyaikmayaw, Mawlamyine District and Kawkareik Township, Karen State to ask for help with their children. This places an extra burden on the Thaton District NMSP who are struggling to control the youth drug problem in their own district, often releasing arrested drug users as there is no space to hold them.

"We have about 70 cases which are related to drugs in our [Thaton] District cells. Only one or two are about other crimes. The drug users [in custody] are between 20 to 30 years old. After using drugs, they have many problems in their life and we can do nothing for that," said to Nai Nyan Seik.

It is believed the current surge in drug use among young people over the last several months is linked to the Burma Army's seizure and closure of several NMSP checkpoints in February 2017, providing drug traffickers safer passage when bringing amphetamines into Mon State.

Amphetamine usage has even infiltrated local schools. According to Mi J—, a student from Thanbyuzayat Township, "the grade nine (standard eight) students and some male students from the school are using a lot in the classroom. I am not sure teachers know about it or not. They bring it with them and they don't even care if the other students see it."

Unfortunately, the abuse of amphetamines by young people in Mon State is not new. "For the last two or three years, parents having been coming and requesting we keep their sons in our NMSP jail due to their worry that Burmese authorities will arrest their children over their drug use.

Parents from Kyaikmayaw, Kawkareik, Bilin, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, and Ye townships have requested the NMSP to hold their sons in custody and educate them about drug use," said to Nai Nyan Seik.

Although the NMSP in Thaton District has been inundated with requests by parents from all over Mon State and Mon areas to hold their children in custody, Burmese authorities have warned the NMSP about arresting drug users who reside outside of NMSP jurisdiction, in addition to pressuring the NMSP to refrain from trespassing into Burmese controlled areas.

Thaton District's jails cells are currently overflowing with young people addicted to drugs. Even though there are rehabilitation camps for drug addicts in Mawlamyine City, families from rural parts of Mon State prefer to avoid the city and bring their children to Thaton District, where they hope their children get the help and education to put their lives back on track.

## News

## PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT HIGH TUITION FEES AND STUDENT SCHEDULES IN MON STATE



July 12, 2017

**HURFOM:** The parents of middle and high school students in Mon State government schools have expressed concerns about costs surrounding extra 'tuition' fees and the lack of downtime in their children's schedules caused by obligations to attend extra study sessions before and after regular classes.

'Tuition' is a common practice throughout Burma in which school teachers or people from outside the school system charge a fee to teach the same lessons taught during class time before or after school. In addition, while not every student attends 'tuition', most students attend 'extra time' classes which teachers conduct for an hour and a half after the regular day has finished.

According to a grade 8 (Standard 7) student in Mudon Township, students get up early in the morning and go to tuition around 5:30 am, then continue to study at their school until 3 pm, after which they attend 'extra time' classes until 4:30 pm with their teachers. Following this, they go directly to tuition until 6 pm, leaving students little time to relax.

The student detailed that many school teachers who teach 'extra time' only lecture on the basics during the day and demand a fee for the added support after regular school hours, asking for 1,500 kyat (US \$1.10) per month for grade 8 (Standard 7) students.

Even though students can study at their school without attending morning or evening tuition, students feel they will not pass exams if they do not attend,

which is why parents allow them to go to tuition even though it is a large financial burden. The school teachers or external educators who teach tuition explain the same lessons from school in more detail during these after school classes and if the students understand they can go back home.

The Mon State Ministry of Education has stated that any form of collecting extra fees by teachers, including tuition, donations or selling school/classroom seals, is prohibited. However, students are required to pay 5,000 kyat (US \$3.67) per month in school fees and 1,500 kyat per month for 'extra time' fees.

Yet, despite the prohibition by the Ministry of Education, teachers still find a way around the ban and conduct tuition classes.

A Mudon Township parent explained that, *"due to my child's school teacher being unable to teach tuition, I allow my children to live in their teacher's house and to study hard to get a high score. We need to spend 2,700,000 kyat (US \$1,983.13) per year for grade 10 (Standard 9) students and 3,400,000 kyat (US \$2,497.28) for grade 11 (Standard 10) students per year. We can break down the fees we pay to the teacher up to three times: first, we have to pay part of the fee at the start of tuition in March; second, in July we pay again while students go back home to take a rest for 10-15 days; and lastly, in October we need to pay all the money that we have yet to pay."*

Similarly, even though school teachers from Kalaw Taw and Nyne Hlone

villages in Mudon Township are not allowed to teach tuition, they ask the students to attend night study classes and sleep at the school, which costs students 200,000 (US \$146.96) or 300,000 kyat (US \$220.43) per year. However, some parents cannot afford to pay for this and their children face difficulties in attaining quality education. In addition, for the grade 10 (Standard 9) students who live at their teacher's house, they need to annually pay 500,000 kyat (US \$367.32) if they do not eat food there and 1,000,000 kyat (US \$734.63) if the students live there, including food costs.

The parents of students who live in Thanbyzayat Township explained that students who study in grade 10 (Standard 9) and 11 (Standard 10) have to pay an annual fee of 1,200,000 kyat (US \$881.67) for them to live at their teacher's house and access regular tuition there. On the other hand, the parents also need to support their child in their daily expenses and monthly 'extra time' fees from the school.

The parents are worried about the high cost of tuition fees and other expenses for their children's education. If school teachers do not teach tuition or open night study class in their house, but rather teach the students in the classroom properly, the students would not need to live in their teacher's home and parents would also not need to worry about the affording their children's education.

According to a grade 7 (Standard 6) student from Wae Ka Lee village, Thanbyzayat Township, *"we need to study at school and also 'extra time'. We are often exhausted by the challenging schedules because, after 4:30 pm when school lets out, we rush to attend tuition. In school there are many students and since teachers cannot give one-on-one instruction, we feel we have to attend tuition after school in order to get more assistance. We have no time to rest and we are always in a hurry."*

News

# YE TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS URGE GOVERNMENT TO ACTION OVER RISING RATES OF DRUG USE BY YOUNG PEOPLE



July 28, 2017

According to Ye Township residents, the use of narcotics amongst local students and young people is on the rise. Some believe this is due to poor anti-drug strategies by local authorities who fail to arrest and punish drug dealers and smugglers in Mon State.

U Aung Naing Win, secretary of the Ye Social Society (YSS), said he has witnessed first hand the dramatic rise in the use of drugs by young people and school students.

*“At the [Mon] state [government] school in Hangan village, the students have been caught with drugs in their hands. There were similar catches in Khaw Zar. Drug paraphernalia was also found at the high schools in Ye City,”* he said.

Police mishandling of drug-related information in communities has discouraged local residents from taking

action and reporting information to authorities.

*“We [used to] inform the police [about the presence of drugs in the community]. But they failed to protect the informers. When police reveal the names of informers, they disappear for a while. They haven’t been arrested by the police, but disappear for a while [for their own safety],”* said a villager who wished to remain anonymous.

According to some, treating visitors to drugs has become commonplace in southern Burma. A young man told a HURFOM reporter that each time he visits his friend in Kaloh village, he is escorted to his friend’s plantation and invited to drink an unknown liquor made from leaves.

*“We boiled the leaves and drank the liquor. I’ve visited him very often. He’s treated me with the liquor every time I’ve visited him. After that I’ve started to use drugs and now I’m addicted to*

*drugs,”* said a young man who also wished to remain anonymous. The young man was most likely drinking kratom liquor, a drink made from locally growing leaves with opiate-like properties, the use of which has been widely reported throughout Mon State and Mon areas of Burma.

Many young drug users soon find themselves addicted and turn to small-time drug dealing or smuggling in order to be able to afford to continue using.

*“If you’re very new to drugs, don’t experiment with them. Even if you’re freely provided with drugs, don’t use them. Your lives will be destroyed. I regret [that I’ve used drugs]. I advise that never dealing with drugs is the best,”* said the young man.

In response to the rise in drug use in Ye Township, local villagers formed a Drug Elimination Team and in June 2017, in tandem with civil society organizations from Ye City, they sent a letter to the Myanmar Police Force and Mon State Minister of Security and Border Affairs Colonel Win Nyne Oo, asking them to take action.

According to official statistics from the Mon State Police Force, there were 125 drug-related cases between January to June 2017, with 210 males and 17 females arrested and charged with drug-related offences.

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## News

# ATTEMPTED RAPE OF 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN THANBYUZAYAT TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

October 24, 2017

**HURFOM:** On October 9<sup>th</sup> 2017, it was reported that a 26-year-old daily worker Maung T— from Htan Pin Gyi Chaung (Wae Ka Poke) village, Paung Township, Mon State, had attempted to rape a 13-year-old named Mi H— who lives in K— Ward, Pa Nga village, Thanbyuzayat Township, Mon State

During the incident, the girl was home alone as her mother was travelling to Ah Nin village to sell fish paste, while her father was fishing in Ye and her brother was working at a rubber plantation. However, her mother asked a 50-year-old neighbor named Daw M— to look after her daughter as she was home alone.

When Daw M— saw that Maung T— was heading towards Mi H—'s house, Daw M— stopped him and told him not to go to the girl's house as her mother was not at home. However, Maung T— ignored Daw M—'s warning and went to the house anyways. As his behavior

was suspicious, Daw M— went to the girl's house later and saw both of them naked in the bedroom.

She said to Maung T—, *"You can't do this."* However, she was afraid to stop him so she went to ask for help from the neighbors. After the incident, Daw M— contacted the girl's mother and she arrived home at 12:00 pm. After that, they reported the incident to the village administrator and the perpetrator was arrested at his mother's house as he had fled from his house.

According to Daw M—, Mi H— said, *"Maung T— arrived home and asked me if my mother was at home. After that, he went into the house, closed the doors and brought me into the bedroom. He took off my pants and I heard Daw M—'s voice when he was taking off his longyi. When I tried to reply to Daw M—, Maung T— covered my mouth."*

The girl's mother wanted Maung T— charged with Myanmar Penal Code

#376 (punishment for rape) and Penal Code #511 (punishment for attempting to commit offences punishable with transportation or imprisonment) at the Thanbyuzayat Police Station. However, the Thanbyuzayat police charged Maung T— with "attempt to rape" as it has been difficult to medically prove whether the girl had been raped by Maung T—.

According to the girl's mother, Maung T— is married and is allegedly notorious for having relationships with many women.

Over the past several years, there has been a marked increase in the number of reported cases of sexual violence against children. In March 2017, HURFOM released 'Cracks in the Silence,' which explores this growing phenomenon, as well as the challenges to accessing justice for families and survivors of sexual violence in Burma's pluralistic legal system.

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# NEW COMMITTEE FORMED TO COMBAT DRUG USE IN YE TOWNSHIP, MON STATE

December 4, 2017

**WCRP:** A new committee to combat drug use among youths in Ye Township, Mon State has been formed. The announcement came after a discussion on the issue of drugs was held on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017 in Ye Township. Around 450 individuals, including New Mon State Party (NMSP) officials, citizens, and monks participated in the discussions.

The aim of the talks was to discuss methods for eliminating drugs and promoting the improvement of skills among youths to foster better outcomes.

The committee is composed of seven members of the NMSP, seven locals

from southern and northern Ye Township, and seven monks. The new anti-drug committee assigned committee members at the village, township, and district levels and they aim to fight against drug use, while also advocating for better drug treatment programs. In addition, they aim to perform drug education services for villagers.

*"We are happy to have a chance to share our knowledge about the impact of drugs, treatment for drug use, and the fight against drugs...If there are drug sellers, users will buy it. As there is a huge profit from selling drugs, the Mon locals make a business out of it. To prohibit the sellers, authorities must effectively handle drug dealers using*

*the law,"* said committee member U Tin Shine.

For more information on the sale and use of drugs in Mon State and Mon areas of southeast Burma, see "Bitter Pills: Breaking the silence surrounding drug problems in the Mon community" by the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM).

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## News

# FAMILY UPSET OVER LIGHT SENTENCE GIVEN TO MAN WHO RAPED 3-YEAR-OLD GRAND-DAUGHTER

November 27, 2017

WCRP: The family of a 3-year-old victim of rape is upset with the Mawlamyine District Court's decision to jointly charge and convict the perpetrator of both rape and attempted rape. The inclusion of Section #511 (Punishment for attempting to commit offenses) under Burma's Penal Code significantly reduced the sentence from 20 to ten years in prison, leading some activists to accuse the District Court of lack of rule of law.

Daw Khin Than Htwe, Chairman of the Mon State Women and Children Upgrade Committee (MWCUC) said, *"due to Section #511(attempting to commit offenses punishable), the perpetrator received a chance to be released on bail. We could say that there is no rule of law since the court set the order without removing code Section #511. According to the child's testimony, she said that the perpetrator took her to bed and injected her vagina and backside with a finger. We should not think that is only attempting to commit [rape]."*

On August 8<sup>th</sup> 2015, the child had come back home from outside at about 2 pm

and was crying. She told her grandmother that her vagina was in pain. Once her grandmother looked she saw that it was red and bleeding, according to a neighbor of the victim.

The perpetrator, a 73-year-old man in the neighborhood, told the young girl that he would buy her a snack if she didn't cry. The girl's grandparents reported the case to the Mu Pon police station in Mawlamyine.

The victim's grandfather is not satisfied with the Mawlamyine District Court's order and had petitioned the court to remove Section #511 from the charges several times.

According to a source from the Mawlamyine District Court, the standard punishment for those charged with both Section #376 (Punishment for Rape) and Section #511 is ten years in prison. This is in contrast to the 20 years imprisonment for the rape of a child.

*"I don't understand about the sentence of ten years [imprisonment]. I only understand that the punishment is 20 years. I thought that the perpetrator was being sentenced to prison for 30 years – 20 years' imprisonment [Section #376]*

*plus another ten years [Section #511]. But once I asked the lawyer, the perpetrator was sentenced to prison for only ten years. It is not fair to us,"* said the victim's grandfather.

In addition, while released on bail the perpetrator sued the victim's family, saying he was wrongly accused by the victim's family.

*"The perpetrator said that the victim's family accused him of raping their granddaughter because the family owed him money and couldn't pay him back. The victim's family had to deal with that problem for about one year. They have had to make about 78 court appearances. However, in this kind of case, if an organization [like us] does not help, the victim's family would not be winning their case,"* said Daw Khin Than Htwe, whose organization supported the family during their ordeal.

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) previously reported on this case in their March 2017 report, "Cracks in the Silence: Sexual violence against children and challenges to accessing justice in Mon State and Mon areas of southeast Burma."



## News

## FAMILY OF RAPE VICTIM TO APPEAL DECISION TO JAIL PERPETRATOR FOR ONLY 3 YEARS

January 16, 2018

WCRP: A sexual assault victim and her family are upset over the decision by the Kyaikmayaw Township Court to sentence her attacker to only three years in jail. The family is planning to appeal the decision at the Mawlamyine District Court.

*"We are not happy with the decision. The victim reported that she was raped by [him]. The perpetrator was sentenced to jail for only three years even though he committed the crime. The victim's family will appeal the case at the district level. We heard that the perpetrator also sued the victim's family [for falsely accusing him],"* said Mi Cherry Soe, Project Director from

Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization (JCSDO), which is supporting the victim.

According to reports, on June 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, Daw T—, a 62-year-old woman from Kyune Kone village, Tarana village tract, Kyaikmayaw Township, Mon State, was raped and strangled almost unconscious by her 45-year-old neighbor. After receiving Daw T—'s medical report from Mawlamyine General Hospital, the Kyaikmayaw Police arrested her neighbor and charged him with Penal Code #376 — punishment for rape.

*"The victim did not have very strong evidence. The medical check did not find sperm in the victim's body and the*

*doctor said that he did not see any signs of injury on her body. Therefore, the court has charged the perpetrator with [Penal Code] #511 — punishment for attempting to commit an offence — and he was sentenced to jail for only three years,"* said Daw T—'s lawyer, Daw Yu Thandar Myint.

Daw T— is also concerned for her safety after reportedly receiving threats from the perpetrator, saying, *"after the perpetrator is released from jail we will need to move from this village. He is not satisfied with his punishment and also threatened that he would do something [to me] after he is released from jail."*

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## SEXUAL VIOLENCE TOWARDS CHILDREN IN MON STATE CONTINUES, AS 11-YEAR-OLD GIRL RAPED

December 26, 2017

WCRP: On October 25<sup>th</sup> 2017, an 11-year-old girl in Kaw Hla village, Mudon Township, Mon State, was raped by a 42-year-old man.

At approximately 1 pm, the perpetrator and the girl left to go fix the child's mobile phone without telling her parents. The girl was taken by the perpetrator to some brush nearby the railway station in Mainka Nain village where she was then raped. The perpetrator threatened that we would kill her if she told her family and that he would buy her a new phone if she remained silent. At around 5 pm, the perpetrator took the girl back to where her parents were working in Min Hla village.

As soon as the girl arrived, her mother noticed that something was wrong and asked her what happened. However, the girl did not disclose her ordeal. After her parents finished working for the day, they came back home and found a leech on her body and asked her to tell

the truth. She told her parents that she was raped by U Win Kyine. The victim's parents reported the incident to the village administrator.

U Win Kyine was arrested and detained at the village administrator's office, after which the Mudon Police were contacted. A female police officer, Khin Maung Tun, was dispatched to investigate the case in accordance with police rules and regulations.

During the investigation, police asked the perpetrator to show them the location of the assault and took the clothes of both the victim and perpetrator into evidence.

The perpetrator was transferred to the Mudon Police Station and was charged under Burma Penal Code Article #376 (Punishment for Rape) on October 26<sup>th</sup>. They perpetrator has yet to appear in court.

The day after the assault, the girl was transported to Mawlamyine Hospital for a medical examination. According to

a person close to the girl, the Women's Association from Kyaikmayaw Township and members from the Mon State Hluttaw Women and Children's Rights Committee are supporting the victim and her family.

Burma has seen a significant rise in the number of reported cases of sexual violence toward children. For more information on this and challenges to accessing justice for survivors of sexual violence in Mon State and Mon areas of Burma, see 'Cracks in the Silence'.

*During the investigation, police asked the perpetrator to show them the location of the assault and took the clothes of both the victim and perpetrator into evidence.*



## News

# TRADITIONAL WEAVING BUSINESSES IN MUDON TOWNSHIP STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE



September 14, 2017

**HURFOM:** Traditional weaving businesses in Mudon Township are struggling to survive due to declining profitability with the influx of modern weaving technology.

*“Nowadays, traditional weaving businesses cannot compete with modern weaving machines, so they will gradually disappear. We are stuck with this job because we can’t do other work and don’t have enough money to invest in another business. Even if it isn’t profitable enough, this is all we can do [for our livelihoods]. After paying wages to workers, only enough for our meals is left for us. It’s impossible to do traditional weaving as a long-term*

*business. The world is changing everyday,”* said a weaver from Kyaik Roi.

Traditional weaving was once a popular profession in Kyaik Roi, Ta Gon Tyle, Nyne Hlone, Kamarwat, and other villages in Mudon Township. However, traditional weavers have faced a huge challenge with the creation of modern weaving machinery.

*“It doesn’t create enough profit. We have to pay nearly 4,000 kyat (US \$2.94) to a single worker per day. A traditional weaving machine leaves only 1,000 kyat (US \$0.75) [profit] to us per day. If you have 10 weaving machines, you can earn 10,000 [kyat] (US \$7.35) and if you have 20 machines, you can have 20,000 [kyat] (US \$14.69). I have only five*

*machines so I can earn between 5,000 (US \$3.67) to 10,000 kyat per day. [Sometimes], I can only earn the same amount as a daily worker. I don’t have another job so I have to continue what I’m doing. But it will be difficult in the future,”* said Mi Cho, an owner of traditional weaving machines.

Most traditional weavers produce ethnic Mon and Karen clothing, bags, and scarfs, and the products are sold in Mudon and Mawlamyine in Mon State, as well as Hpa-an in Karen State.

Demand for traditional Mon and Karen clothing is at its highest prior to Mon and Karen national days, and traditional weaving businesses enjoy higher profits during these periods.

Clothes made by traditional weavers are thicker and more expensive than clothes made by modern weaving machines. However, customers who prefer hand-made clothes have been buying clothes made by traditional weavers.

*“Now traditional weaving can’t compete with modern weaving in the market. The owners of traditional weaving machines have a huge challenge to continue their business in the long-term,”* said a local from Mudon.

## YEBYU TOWNSHIP SEES SHARP INCREASE IN DRUG USE AMONG TEENS AS AUTHORITIES DO LITTLE TO COMBAT USE AND SALE

December 28, 2017

According to locals, drug use in Yebyu Township, Tenasserim Division has increased sharply as more youths are experimenting with drugs.

*“In the past, young adolescents were using drugs, but not as much as they are using today. Now, most of the drug addicts are teenagers. They use both methamphetamines and Kratom leaves. No one can control them and no authority arrests them,”* said Nai Kon Htaw, an activist in Yebyu.

Previously, the use and sale of drugs in Yebyu was done secretly, now, however, the drug trade operates openly. The lack

of arrests has created an environment of impunity for drug dealers and users, leading to an influx of drugs and dealers in Yebyu, according to Nai Kon Htaw.

*“They sell drugs like they sell vegetables in the market. Drugs are available on every street corner. A pill of premium-quality methamphetamine costs 5,000 kyat (US \$3.67) while a mid-range pill costs 3,000 kyat (US \$2.20). The rich users don’t buy a mid-range pill as it is bad quality. The 5,000-kyat pill is good quality.”* said Nai Kon Htaw.

Drug users in Yebyu range in age from 13 to 40 years of age, however, the majority of users are teenagers.

*“If there is a festive event in villages in Yebyu Township, I am 80% sure that there must be drug use at the event. Even though drugs are widely spread in Yebyu, there is no drug control,”* continued Nai Kon Htaw.

According to a central committee member of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), the spread of drugs into Mon State has been huge. Drug use by young people has increased in every township of Mon State, including Thaton, Ye, and Thanbyuzayat.

For more information on the spread and impact of drugs on communities in Mon State and Mon areas of southeast Burma, see HURFOM’s ‘Bitter Pills: Breaking the silence surrounding the drug problem in Mon communities.’

## News

# LACK OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS RAISED AT MON POLITICAL CONFERENCE



January 18, 2018

WCRP: Members of the women's committee at the Mon Political Conference held last weekend in Mawlamyine, Mon State, have voiced their concern over the lack of women's participation in politics. While women's marginalization in the political sphere is slowly decreasing, they argued more needs to be done to encourage and empower women to engage politically.

Photo credit: Mon Young Monk Network

*"Mon women often [think they] lack the experience to participate in politics. [Many] women still think that politics is not a woman's concern. We need to provide a lot of encouragement for them to be involved in politics. It is very important for women to be involved in the political system in order to influence political decisions [that affect them] such as policy and legal reform,"* said

Mi Cherry Soe, member of the steering committee for the conference.

*She added, "currently, CSOs [Civil Society Organizations] are stronger [than in the past, but] ...they are not involved in decision-making or policy reform. If women can be involved more in a decision-making role, it has the potential to find solutions for current problems, such as sexual violence."*

In addition, committee member Mi Ngwe Lay argued that it is not enough that women's groups are increasingly invited to participate in political events, but that capacity must be built and promoted in order for genuine and meaningful participation to occur.

*"It is very important for women to be involved in political issues. It is also important to promote their roles and leadership skills. The situation now is better than before. Mon women were invited to participate in politics less in the past. Nowadays, we don't need to*

*request to participate in this event anymore. They welcome us. [Now], women have a chance to participate as a chairperson or committee member at the Mon Political Conference. We only have a few women who have the experience to participate in political issues well and we must build and promote our skills so that we may be involved in all roles in the political sector."*

*She added, "we must encourage all women to be involved not only in this Mon Political Conference, but to participate in every discussion which is related to political issues and to participate in changing the attitudes of people toward women's involvement."*

The Mon Political Conference was held in Mawlamyine, Mon state from January 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> 2018. The conference was organized by monks and Mon CSOs, including the Mon State Youth Network and the Mon Women's Network.

## CHILDREN FROM POOR FAMILIES MORE LIKELY TO FACE ABUSE: MON HLUTTAW WOMEN AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS COMMITTEE



December 4, 2017

**WCRP:** Children from poor families are more likely to face sexual abuse and labor exploitation, according to Daw Khine Khine Lei, Chair of the Mon State Parliament's Women and Children's Rights Committee (WCRC). Some of the most common reports received by the committee pertain to cases of sexual violence against children and child labor. Her comments came during the ceremony for the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) held on November 19<sup>th</sup> 2017 in Pa Ouk village, Mawlamyine Township, Mon State.

Daw Khin Than Htwe, Chair of the Mon State Women and Children Upgrade Committee (MWCUC) added, "children are being forced to drop out of school and some are going to the [Thai-Burma] border to find jobs. Actually, when we investigated this, some children weren't receiving a proper wage. The children are happy with their wages and do not even know they are being exploited. The children's parents

*also accept the low wages their children receive, even if it is only 2,000 (US \$1.47) or 3,000 kyat (US \$2.20) [per day]. We can see in our community that there are lots of school-age children dropping out and working to fight for their livelihoods."*

According to the data collected by MWCUC, Daw Khin Than Htwe estimates approximately 60% of children in Mon State are forced to drop out of school due to livelihood issues.

She added, "[As parents are often working abroad they] send money to the person who cares for their child's education, health, and daily expenses, but those people do not let the child attend school and send them to work at a tea shop. I helped one case in Chaungzone Township where a child's relative sent the child to work at a tea shop [for approximately a year], taking 700,000 kyat (US \$512.42) for the child's wages from the tea shop owner."

In June 2015, The Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP), a Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)

initiative, published "Inaccessible and Under-resourced: Concerns over education in rural Mon communities." The report draws on interviews with 146 individuals in 17 predominantly Mon villages in Ye, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi, and Yebyu to present an exploration of education challenges in rural Mon areas. The report found that education largely remains inaccessible for children from poor families and that schools are chronically under-resourced.

In addition, the report found that over a third of children were forced to drop out of school as they needed to work in order to supplement their family's income. "There are 280 children who need to attend the school but only 235 join the school and the others have to help their family for their livelihood and can't attend the school," said a teacher from east Wai Thar Lee village, Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township, Karen State.

"For problems happening to children, the children's courts are supported by the Child Law in order to properly solve children's issues. Case Myanmar has already been established to document children's issues," said Daw Khine Khine Lei.

Currently, there are four Case Myanmar staff from the Mon State Social Welfare Office that are active in Mawlamyine and Thanbyuzayat townships. Their goal is to conduct surveys in Mon State's ten townships and report on children's issues.

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

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