“I followed him and I could not go back”
[IDI, 26 year old woman, Yangon]

Gendered social inequalities and women’s trajectories into abusive partnerships in Myanmar

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Objectives

**BACKGROUND**
What do we know about women’s status & IPV in Myanmar?

**STUDY**
What did we measure, how & where?

**RESULTS**
How do social inequalities influence women’s trajectories into marriage in Myanmar?

What are the results on women’s exposure to and perception of IPV?

**DISCUSSION**
What are the implications for how we think about and address IPV risk in Myanmar and globally?
**BACKGROUND**

Narratives of gender equality & high status of women in Myanmar

*Hpon*: Men’s innate glory and holiness in Burmese Buddhism

**STUDY**

Bulk of extant research focuses on sexual violence against ethnic women, little on IPV in general population

**RESULTS**

Most robust statistics:
- 27% physical IPV
- 69% psychological IPV*

*Past year, women 15 – 49 in Mandalay (Kyu and Kanai 2005)*
38 in-depth interviews with survivors of IPV (psychological and physical abuse)

Purposive sampling with community advocates in Yangon Mawlamyine

Participatory data analysis adapting grounded theory approaches

Non-generalizable but provides insight into patterns of IPV among women in Myanmar
Women’s narratives of IPV in Myanmar resonate with global patterns of abuse within intimate relationships.

- Gendered power dynamics
- Men’s experiences of trauma
- Alcohol & drug abuse
- Women’s childhood adversity
- Community silence
- Gender & sexual norms
- Stigma around divorce

Psychological, Physical, Sexual & Social Consequences

Coping Strategies & Help-Seeking
How do social inequalities influence women’s trajectories into marriage in Myanmar?

What are the results on women’s exposure to and perception of IPV?
How do social forces influence women’s trajectories into marriage with implications for IPV risk in Myanmar?
Elopement was a common trajectory into marriage.

My husband was my only boyfriend. When he asked me to run away from our parents, I followed him to his village. We stayed there for a month. When we came back to my parents, we had a wedding reception and treated the guests with tea and bread.

- In-depth interview with 54 year old woman from Mawlamyine
Norms around women’s sexuality & the conflation of sex and marriage constrained women’s ability to control the elopement process.

My (future) husband proposed to me and we eloped. He took me to a house [to consummate the relationship]. But people from that house told me that he had affairs with women. It was too late. He had already told my mother about our elopement. I could not correct my fault as I had already eloped with him. I followed him and I could not go back. If I went back, my reputation would be damaged.

- In-depth interview with a 43-year old woman from Mawlamyine
Women’s trajectories into marriage characterized by social insecurity & isolation due to socio-economic position

My mother couldn't find work [in Myanmar] anymore, so she went abroad. There was no one to feed or provide for me. All my brothers and sisters were divided and spread out. So I ended up getting married.

- In-depth interview with a 28-year old woman from Mawlamyine
Women’s socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect with gender inequitable systems of the family

My father couldn't make ends meet. I quit school because we had no money. So my sister and I got married due to economic necessity. I wanted to get married so that my husband would support me.’

- In-depth interview with a 28-year old woman from Mawlamyine
Trajectories into marriage, shaped by social inequalities, pre-coded power distribution in future marriages.

Little control over and access to economic resources, despite women’s actual engagement in wage labour, often as sole breadwinner for the family.

Particularly among women who eloped, encoding of male sexual entitlement into relationships from the beginning.

Social isolation and little natal kin support curtailed women’s social capital and left women vulnerable to abuse.
Women’s level of power within marriage may be predicted by the conditions around women’s entry into marriage.

Theorizing around women’s power in relationships [e.g. resources, agency, achievements] to include pre-marital stage.

Measurement of indicators of women’s empowerment to capture social conditions and environment in which decisions to marry are made.

Future research on the social determinants of IPV – in the South-east Asia region and elsewhere – should include specific inquiry into women’s life conditions in the period immediate prior to marriage.
Thank You & Questions

Grateful acknowledgement goes to the funder, USAID, and the Gender Equality Networks’ core donors, Trocaire, Pyoe Pin, Oxfam, the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund, Irish Aid, CARE International, NORAD and ActionAid. Thanks to our partners at the Department of Social Welfare.

Special appreciation to the women who willingly shared their stories.

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