



Report 1:

Women and Health Problem in Burma¹

I. Tradition, Food insufficiency and effects to Women's Health

There are more health problems for women if compare with the men in Burma. Some diseases make suffering to both of them and some infect only upon the women such as diseases related to menstrual disorder, menstruation problem and pregnancy. Every woman is an expectant mother and they need daily good health condition in order to give milks to their children and take care of them. By according to the traditions of Burma, daily good health directly related with the four main masses: ground, mind, fire and water² - which are the foundation of a human being. If one of these be missing, the health of human may be casualty or detriment.

By traditions and customs of the communities in Burma, women must obey and respect to the superior men. Beside, they are always governed by their husbands and when they have totally depended on only their husbands' income, it is considerable how much they will be suppressed domestically or in their households. Accordingly to the stereotype by their parents and grand-parents, the majority women must be responsible for the household works, respect to their husbands, rule to not enter the beds before their husbands, waking up early and prepare the food (breakfast) for families and even give the priority about daily food for their husbands. The women from Burma, who grown up under this traditions afraid of committing these and have followed by generations.

The women in Burma become insufficient of nutrition because they give the priority even foods to their husbands and sons. Especially, the women have faced more insufficient food ration when labor crisis and every commodity prices have rocketed in poor economy of Burma. Even women who work outside workplaces or markets for income and their husbands could not seek sufficient income to support the whole family.

Many families in both urban and rural areas do not see meat, fish and eggs that create growth of the human body on the dining table in daily basis. They have to work hard, but they still hardly to survive. The women from this family always eat a few of oil and salt with rice and leave out a few cheap dried-fish for her husband and son. The same situation happened in the whole country of Burma.

Majority of women are giving the priority to men and their children not only foods but also health. Most women never pay a visit to the clinic or hospital to check their health or receive treatment and just

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¹ The ruling regime in Burma also re-named 'Burma' as 'Myanmar', and the UN agencies, some governments and international NGOs called Burma, as 'Myanmar'.

² This belief is accordingly to the health perspective in Buddhism.

Message From

Woman And Child Rights Project (Southern Part of Burma)

Woman and Child Right Project (WCRP) is an cooperative activity with Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) and it has main activity in collecting the information related to the human rights violations of women and children in southern part of Burma (Myanmar). It also aims to get world community's awareness for the protection of the rights of women and children.

The Burma's military regime, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 to guarantee the rights to women in Burma. Similarly the regime also ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 to guarantee the rights to children in Burma. However, the regime has failed in their implementation of the conventional rights and the human rights violations against women and children systematically.

WCRP is dedicated to inform the world community what happens to general women and children in Burma and plans to educate them to know about their rights as the following objectives.

1. To monitor and protect the woman and child rights, by collecting information about their real situation by referencing the CEDAW and CRC, and distribute information to world community.
2. To strengthen women and children community, by providing on their rights accordingly to CEDAW and CRC ratified by regime and encourage them to participate in the struggle in the protection of their own rights.

take traditional herbal medicines in their homes, while their husbands and children are always urged to take the treatment in health care services. The belief among the women is that their husbands must be in good health forever because they seek the income for the whole family.

Other problem is the cost of medical treatment in Burma is extremely expensive and the public (or government) clinics and hospitals that provide a low cost health care could not provide proper treatment to the general population. These facts have also supported to women to avoid the treatment in the health care services and they just take the medicines easily from the outside private shops without instruction by doctors. Most of these medicines have less qualified substances making with ineffective chemical compounds not from industries or some are fake medicines that make dangers to the people. By taking these types of medicines, they could not relieve fever or pains, but created more health problems in long-term.

Besides the tradition, the disordered workplaces and worst weather in Burma also affected the health of women. Working under rain during the rainy season or under sun heat in dry season³.

in open ground workplace cause seriously dangers to the health situation of women and children in Burma day by day. Even some of the diseases such as hemorrhage dengue fever and diarrhea are actually not too serious but many children are suffered during the early raining season for above worsen weather condition.

Regarding to above issues, it may not be argued that Burma's military government, State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)⁴, has not allocated sufficient budget for the health programme and the UN Agencies and other International NGOs could not get access to all areas of Burma. Now, the treatment cost even for an ordinary fever must be spent between 2000 - 5000 Kyat (2 - 5 US Dollar) and those who earn 1000 Kyat (1 US Dollar) daily income could not afford to pay any type of treatment cost even they suffer of minor health problem, headache, fever and pains.

During the course under the military rule since 1988, all of the national service sectors such as social, education and health sectors have been extremely worsening and the results directly and mostly effected to the majority women and children. They are always vulnerable not only social issues but also by the economic issues - joblessness, lack of sufficient income and others. This situation also forced thousands of women in Burma to migrate into the neighboring countries and forced some number of women to engage in sex industries both in Burma and in neighboring countries⁵.

II. Health Problems Among Women

A. Malaria

The malaria could cause all walks of people: men, women, and children in any age. Even it is seemed not too serious disease for the rural people in

³ Rainy season in Burma from June to September and dry season is from February to May, every year.

⁴ Burma has been ruled by the military rule since 1988, after the countrywide popular Pro-Democracy Demonstration was crushed by the Burmese Army. First the Burmese Army named it's ruling body as State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and it changed to the new name, SPDC, in late 1997.

⁵ Many women from Burma migrated to Thailand and China, in order to find works. But some of them are forced or lured to engage in sex industries.

Burma, it is a life threatening disease and many people lost their life or became madness after its parasites reaches to the brain cell of the patients⁶.

It is caused by the bite of mosquitoes those carry malaria and both eastern and western border areas of Burma are locating in malaria zones. It occurs mostly and especially to the people who live in rural areas, border areas and mountainous regions - where are the non-Burman inhabitants or ethnic people's native places. Not only among the local inhabitants, the refugees in border camps who fled from war and human rights violations from various parts of Burma has also suffered more.

Even it is caused by the bite of mosquitoes; the people in the countryside of Burma have a very little knowledge or education about it. On the other hand, in order to support themselves or their families for survival, the people are always busy with their daily livelihood under the various weather conditions in the forests such as collecting the vegetables, hunting the animals for food and cutting bamboo and timer for their shelter. But they have no choice to avoid the bites of mosquitoes. The disease symptom will not appear when a man, women or a child has good body resistance and only appear while they are weak or the body resistance decreases. It is sure that the refugee and the internal displaced persons (IDPs)⁷ who live with insufficient living conditions: lack of mosquito nets, blankets and shelters will be suffered greatly or more number by disease than other community people who live in a stable villages or small towns.

There is a question that how the people in the remote rural areas treat the disease while they suffer from it? They do not want to take the treatment from doctors in clinics or hospitals as the treatment cost is too expensive and they just take the medicines buying from the outside shops or provided by herbal medical doctors. Herbal medicines are formulated without proper experiment but it could treat the patients to relieve their pains or fevers for a while. Another problem is the rural people in the countryside or IDPs communities could not get access to the medical care, as the government does not set up facilities in most remote area. A few numbers of IDPs in eastern part of Burma just have relied on the treatment programme of 'Mobile Medical Teams'⁸.



A patient suffers from malaria takes care in a refugee camp's hospital

However, the international health NGOs have set up the health care facilities in the refugee camps along Thailand-Burma border and assisted the refugees with medical care especially in cure of malaria. All medical NGOs agreed that malaria is the major problem among the refugees.

But thousands of people outside of refugee camps and in the IDPs communities still face the program of access to the health care and proper treatments at their home villages or towns. Although some health NGOs have attempted to work in the country (of Burma) with an important programme of providing health care to the marginalized people, but most international NGOs for health face more or less restriction by the military government, SPDC, in various levels - from getting mandates to operating the activities in the fields.

B. Cholera

Cholera diseases mostly occur in early monsoon season and it happen suddenly and seriously. Especially insufficient nutrition children are always suffered seriously from this disease. It is happened by various reasons but the main reason is insufficient nutrition among the children.

⁶ Accordingly to the former Mon medic from NMSP, he said that there are 4 types of parasites in malaria disease, but only two types of parasites: PV and PF are along Thailand-Burma.

⁷ Burma's military regime forced out over 150, 000 ethnic refugees in eastern part of Burma into Thailand's refugee camps and over 600, 000 IDPs are living under the difficult situation in eastern Burma – reported by Thailand Burma Border Consortium (TBBC).

⁸ Mobile Medical Teams are formed by the competent authorities of the ethnic armed revolutionary groups who have fought against the Rangoon's successive rules for greater autonomy in longest civil war in South-East Asia.

**Article 10 of
Convention on the
Elimination of all
Forms of
Discrimination
Against Women**

Access to specific education information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

The best sufficient nutrition is very important as a portion supporting the treatment and prevention against the disease. Although the half population of Burmese people are facing insufficient nutrition because of poverty and working over hours for their survival, many of them are so vulnerable for the suffering of this disease.

The consequences of living standard among the poor families in Town quarters and villages, those have lack of water and sanitation, fresh foods - meats and vegetables - in the community occur the outbreak of the disease and disease epidemic also occurred among them.

According to the Dr. Naing Aung, "The cholera disease starts to outbreak in early May when plenty of flies are appearing in the community and it carry viruses of diseases. Eating the unclean foods, which are touched by flies that carry diseases, causes the disease. These symptoms of diseases are mostly a patient vomits several times and have diarrheas. Then, water from the human body become drought and it posts danger for lives. If a

patient is suffering from many times vomiting and have diarrhea he needs to take mineral salt (or) soup of meat many times in order to replace water and nutrition lost by these. But the people in the rural areas have a very lack of experience in treating the patients; some of them lose their lives suddenly. It is caused by the lack of health education at the rural areas in Burma.

The military government also does not facilitate for the water and sanitation programme in the rural areas of the countryside and the majority ethnic and poor people have just relied on the water from streams, rivers and rainwater. Many of them even do not know to build the proper toilet that stop the epidemic of disease. Government just propagandized in their TVs and radio about the prevention of this disease in the communities, but it is not so effective.

The people are always busy with the struggle of their daily life and most of them could not get access to government's TV program for health education or most of poor families do not belong a TV. For the ethnic people of the countryside, they even do not understand the Burmese language programme and never have electricity to buy a TV in their life.

C. Anemia

The anemia is caused by rapidly reduction or loss of the blood in a human body than the substituted blood within the body. It is occurred mostly among the women. Every woman could suffer more because they lost 200-300 CC blood in every month during the menstrual period. Moreover, during the time while they are in pregnancy and deliver a birth to a baby, they will be insufficient nutrition and that could lead to suffer from this anemia.

According to the traditional customs of Burma, the women always give the priory and respect to men including providing food. Especially, most of the housewives eat a little foods and keep for their beloved husbands and children. So the women suffer from the disease during they are getting insufficient nutrition. The next case of the disease is choosing the food by women.

When the women feel minor head aches or others, they wouldn't like to eat foods and they did not try to get better foods from the markets because they have insufficient money. Most of them just do not take the foods or take foods whatever they get at their homes. This creates mal-nutrition to the women and then later they suffer from anemia.

D. Amenorrhea

The suffering from the amenorrhea is caused by female hormone abnormality and insufficient nutrition. Regularly, most of the women menstruate at an age of 13th year old while some are at 17th and 18th years old. Some women had menstruation and it leads to suffer from amenorrhea, then changing the environment until having the mental pressure (stress).

During the Burmese military rule, most women from the ethnic groups in the rural countryside areas are suffered from stress which is mostly caused due to the oppression and threatened by the soldiers of government troops, *Burmese Army*. Some women suffer from the disease by shifting from their house and are changing to the new environment or displaced. Some families are forced by the SPDC or Burmese Army's troops into their forced 'relocation camps'. After thousands acres of land were confiscated by the Burmese Army in order to deploy their troops, the women in the land loss families have suffered a lot from the stress. The symptoms of suffering from socio-economic problems among the women are body pains, depression and high temper.

Normally, the women always in Burma always started their menstruation time between 13 to 14 years old and if it does not come till that age, they might suffer from insufficient body growth and many of them suffer bad pains in their bladders. Actually, the diseases are caused by decreasing and abnormal condition of the hormone in women. On the other hand, the tradition and custom in Burma restrict the majority community women to not speak out about their pains. Irregular menstruation also creates pains to the majority women and the symptoms of this suffering are unsmooth skin and stresses.

A medic's experience:

A senior former medic from the New Mon State Party (NMSP), Ms. Sxx Kxxxxxx, said her experience that she had founded two ladies who are suffering with similar disease. The first lady is only 24 years old and she has already stopped the menstruation at young age and it could say she is reaching menopause. But it is abnormal and suffers from the menorrhoea.

Naturally, women have both of male and female hormones in their body and she only decreased her female hormone and changed her voice and skin like a man. But she has not suffered any problem and she feels so stress.

The second lady name is Mi Kxxx Nxx and she has suddenly stopped the menstruation from normal (regularly) situation. First she thought it may be reach menopause. But she was suffered from the body pain, depression, feel lonely and sometime was sick. She took various types medicines including traditional medicine but they did not relieve her from ever pain, she also did the meditation and kept the mind happily. Then, she took the treatment from the doctor of gynecology and got the result with any disease.

Also she took the treatment from the astrologists and other but it was only waste the money. Finally, she met and explained her suffering to this Senior medic when the medic asked about her mental feeling, she replied that she has arrived to the refugee camp a few months ago, her father was arrested and tortured by the government soldiers. Her family was threatened to be killed and then they fled to a refugee camp. Her suffering disease occurred by the metal suffering and changing the environment.

Most of the women, who were suffered from the "lady diseases" are always staying and keeping quietly without consulting to other persons. Anyhow, changing the environment and stresses are the main cause to suffer from the Amenorrhoea. There are many women who suffer from diseases in Burma because they have been forced to relocate from their native places and are tortured including violence by the troops of government army.

E. Menopause

It is a naturally transformation period for a woman. It always happens to the women in age range of 40 and 50 years old. During this menopause period the women will suffer from many types of pains and other psychological problems as their anti-body resistance has been reduced.

Most women suffer from the stress and uncomfortable feeling in this period. Some believe that it is a stress and it appears by the pressure to change (or) transform the brain sector. Its symptoms are the least in sleep, hot skin (body), perspiration in night time and feel too tired all the time. Some women suffer from scars in their skin like skin diseases and some suffer from the frightening or fear something.

They feel difficult how to stay and living and do not know how to treat for this psychological transformation problems during menopause time. Most Burmese people have less health education knowledge and it leads them to stay away from the communities. Therefore, many women even worry for the problem before they reach menopause time.

F. Vaginal Discharged

Vaginal Discharged is suffering among the women in both rural and urban areas of Burma while the milky and white liquid dropped out from the vagina of the women. Most women faced this type of disease. But it is not a problem if there is no itching (or) bad smell. During the period of pregnancy, most women suffer from the vaginal itching and discharging.

If it is infected by Triscomonas bacteria, white liquid discharges in the area of vagina with itching and bad smell. The disease could be spread to the husbands during the sexual intercourse.

If it is infected by moniliasis and thrush infection, cheese or butter color liquid from discharged vagina of women with the smell of fungus or bakery of bread. The women also suffer a lot of itching and pains at the lip (vulva) of vagina. Especially the women who take the pregnant prevention medicines could suffer from the thrush infection.

Discharge with bad smell and concentrated milky liquid is caused by the germs enter into the vagina and infected by it. If grey or brown dilute liquids with blood and bad smell discharge, it is serious contagious disease symptom. Cancer again can infect to the women and so that they have to be very careful.

Any vaginal discharge is caused by the fact of germ enter to the vagina. It is the main reason. The disease symptoms seem to be not serious but some symptom change to the cancer infection. Although, most of the women in Burma never discuss about the disease with a doctor (or) medic because they are influenced by traditions and custom of Burma to not speak out openly, the suffering of general women is in hidden situation.

G. The underneath stomach pain

It may be caused by various facts. The causes of (1) the pain from underneath during the menstruation period (2) when infection enters to the bladder (3) when fungus appears in vagina (4) when swollen the organs from inside buttock (5) the gall or knob appear in underneath stomach (6) when germ enter to the underneath of colon or small intestine (7) when suffer from the mental illness.

1. The pain while menstruation

The first menstruation for women is occurred at the age range from 11 years to 16 years old. It is the character of (symptom of) could be taking the pregnancy. The women who come of age always suffer from the pain during in every menstruation time. The long (many) days during menstruation period is normal for some women but it is also caused by chronic illness, low pressure, insufficient nutrition and the symptom of germ enter to vagina and they are likely insulting to the women. The worries and excitements could cause the un-regular menstruation.

2. Infection at the bladder

It is mostly many women suffer from pains at the underneath stomach. It is happened mostly to the women and a few times for the men. It's symptoms are many times pissing with blood and painful in underneath stomach. This is relating urinary problems and women those gave births or elderly women have the disease.

3. Fungus in vagina (Yeast infection)

Yeast infection (or) Trichomonas germ enter into the fallopian tube and reaches to uterus, it could cause the vaginal discharge and suffer from the pain at the underneath stomach.

4. When swollen the organs from inside bladder

It is caused by pelvic inflammatory disease and it is looked like with the peritonitis and the swollen of vermiform appendix. It cause continuously pain from the underneath stomach with fever.

5. The galls (or) knob appear in underneath stomach

It is may be Ovarian Cyst, entopic pregnancy and cancer. All of the events are not pain in early time and become pain in later period seriously. The women who suffer from this pain could not find any types of symptoms in early time and but it will force to have surgery in the later time.

6. Infection in colon or small intestine

It is cased by food and diarrhea. In the areas, where the women could not have any opportunity to get sufficient foods, they tried to get any type of foods whether it is clean or not, they take them. These foods bring fungus and infect them in colon and small intestine. When they suffer, they face a serious pain in their stomachs.

7. Mental illness

Medical expend find out that every women who reach the age for pregnancy suffer the pains from the suprapubic region or underneath stomach. According to the medical experts' assumption, which are described in the articles of medical education, the suffering from the disease is relating with the inflection of contact disease extremely sexual contact, chronic illness of fever and extremely having excitement in teenage period.

Dr Kyaw Thet Naing also describe in hand book for women health produced in Burma like that, "the real source of the pain from underneath stomach without any disease or reason in young women could not be found out the answer till now. So, the doctor could not be able to cure the disease in women ordinarily and they choice the operation way. This way aim to remove the reproductive organs from the body as uterus or womb and then watch the patient women and its

CATWALK TO THE BARRACKS

Conscription of women for sexual slavery and other practices of sexual violence by troops of the Burmese military regime in Mon areas

Report of women and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma) In collaboration with Human Rights Foundation of Monland (Burma), July 2005

Press Release

July 18, 2005

Systemic sexual violence on show in southern Burma

A new report by Mon rights groups exposes official conscription of "comfort women" by Burma Army troops and other evidence of systemic sexual violence in "peaceful" Mon areas of Burma .

The report " *Catwalk to the Barracks*" by the Woman and Child Rights Project (WCRP) – Southern Burma and the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) documents sexual violence by troops of the Burmese military regime against 50 women and girls aged between 14 and 50. Half of the incidents took place recently, since 2002.

Despite the ceasefire between the New Mon State Party and the military regime since 1995, the regime has deployed 20 more battalions in Mon areas, leading to increased incidents of sexual violence.

During 2003-2004, village headmen in southern Ye township were ordered by the Burma Army to provide young women each night to serve as "comfort women" or sex slaves at the local barracks. Schoolgirls were also forced to parade on a catwalk for the entertainment of military officers.

All the rape cases in the report were committed with impunity, attesting to the continuing lack of rule of law in Burma .

The authors of the report urge the international community, especially ASEAN members, to pressure the Burmese regime to end state-sponsored sexual violence and to begin a process of meaningful political reform.

"How is it possible that a regime that openly conscripts "comfort women" is now being considered for the chair of ASEAN?" asked WCRP coordinator.

result is only lost the organs from the patient body. Therefore, it is proved that operation way is not a treatment for the women who suffer the underneath stomach pain" .

The disease seems easy to be treated, but actually it is very difficult health problem for women. According to the research and observation by St. Mary hospital, London, England, it described that the disease is mostly occurred among the persons who suffer from the stress and emotion (excitement).

A patient's story:

Ma Wxx Wxx Lxxx, one of the patients of the disease, said, "I have suffered from the disease since 11 years ago after I gave birth to my baby. I often suffer from the disease but I only took the treatment in hospital after I have the sexual intercourse with my husband. In each time (during sexual intercourse), I felt a lot of pains and finally she avoid not to have sex with him" .

"I took treatments by many O.G specialists and surgeon specialists. I had also already received the medical check up for blood, wine tests and X-ray checks. Even I accepted the operation for some problems in underneath stomach, but they did not see any problem. Sometime, I thought to remove my womb in order to relieve the severe pain, although I did not find out the answer for the disease" .

The doctors are also interested her case and checked details her mental health and her background life. These information are much related each other. Now, she is 28 years old and has a daughter. But her parents divorced each other when she was 8 years old and then she followed to her mother. After one year, her mother married with an elderly rich man who has many children older than her. They disliked her and always said as a stingy person toward her and always gave the complaint whenever she wanted to study at the tuition or higher education. She was often abused by her step-father's children at home and finally she left from the house and moved to her aunt's house when she was 15 years old age.

Her aunt, a relative to her father took care her well. She was a single supporter for everything she needed including her education. She also became a beautiful young teenage girl. First, she decided to choose her couple after she finished the University level education. But unluckily, she got the pregnancy by her classmate boy who was older than her. She married with him unfortunately. Her aunt was very sad because both of them were teenage persons and were during study. She followed to her husband house and passed the Basic High school level when she had a baby.

She was continuing on the study for the Distant University level in her mother life. While her husband was wasting time at tea-shop expecting to become as a tailor in a foreign ship, there was a family problem. So, they disputed each other quietly and later it was exploded and reached ears of her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Finally she returned to her aunt house with her baby after they divorced each other with her husband. Even her aunt forgave for her past mistake and helped her, but she was suffered form the various attack of neighboring as a widow. At that time, she met and married with a man who also loved and understood on her situation.

Accordingly to the Doctor who treated her, Mx Wxx Wxx Lxxx's experience was not a strange story if compare with the other ladies' stories, who often arrived to the clinics with worse experience than her. Bad background of many women and the stresses also related to the long-term suffering of women.

Therefore, all of the women who suffered from the disease AIDS needed to meet with the psychological specialist (psychologist). In the developed country, women always take the treatment from the psychologist to reduce their daily facing stress while the women from Burma who facing a lot of stresses in their daily, which are caused by not only the sons, daughters and husbands but also the various military government authorities who often collect money and forced them to work without payment. In order to relieve the pressures, most women visited to the astrologers. Actually, it is a wrong way for solving the problem.

III. Diseases infected by sexual intercourse

Most diseases spread among the women by sexual contact or sexual intercourses without proper protection also affected the health of embryo or fetus and the women during a period just delivery of baby. Syphilis, Gonorrhea and AIDS diseases are infected to women by sexual contact or during sexual intercourses with men without proper protection - using condoms. The spreading of the diseases mostly affect to the women, especially those who are involving in sex industries. The diseases or infections caused with the so-called STDs (Sexual Transmitted Diseases) of Syphilis and Gonorrhea could be treated in the current day in Burma, but ADIS which is infected from HIV (Human Immune-deficiency Virus) is a serious problem in Burma.

Even the disease caused by Syphilis and Gonorrhea can be treated, If they do not take the under treatment well syphilis cause the heart disease and the brain damage. And Gonorrhea will spread to the new born baby but it does not spread to the embryo.

A. HIV/ AIDS

According to the WHO report, the rate of AIDS disease occurs in Burma has been increasing on a daily basis due to lack of prevention procedure and health education about the disease. A senior medic from Health Department of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) said that, the main reasons of AIDS spreading in Mon areas are because of unprotected sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, using single syringe among drug users and transmit from mothers to the children. He also estimated age range of the patient are between 14 years old to 45 years old.

Unknown or hidden AIDS could be transmitted by sexual contacts among the women and men especially in unsafe sex industries. As hundreds of women (of Burma) are involving (or forced to involve) in sex industries in both Burma and Thailand, no agency can exactly know how many women are carrying this disease and how they are secretly suffering⁹.

⁹ The Plight, No. 4/2004 describes about the details information on the sex industries in Burma and how the women are suffered from HIV/AIDS

Economic deterioration: low income and unemployment in Burma forced hundreds of women in both urban and rural areas of Burma to involve in sex industries. Some women have worked available works initially, and after they lost their works or sufficient income, they have no choice and then they finally end up at brothels to sell sex to the men. But some are forced and sold at the brothel houses by human traffickers.

Health education including HIV/AIDS education is also not properly conducted in Burma. This is also another main reason the spread of HIV/AIDS is enormous. Most people do not understand about using the condoms in order prevent some disease including AIDS and they have no knowledge how HIV and AIDS spreads from sexual intercourse. The women from rural area never seen any condom at their homes and the persons who take the condom are recognized as addicts to have sex with sex workers. Burmese society believes that condoms in bags are a shameful matter and behavior. Additionally, the selling of condoms in the markets is still a shameful manner to the shopkeepers or access to condoms in Burma is problematic.

The AIDS Education conducted by some International NGOs in Burma is not reached the general population as the government has restricted to those NGOs' activities to not work in some ethnic areas and border areas. The military government never released detail information on HIV/AIDS problem in Burma. The government controlled media sometimes, released health education to the people except HIV/AIDS, but a very less number of the people access to the information. The ethnic people in the rural areas do not have radio or TV and even they do not have electricity.



An AIDS patient, who took treatment in a Thai hospital

IV. Women suffer by various cancers

The types of cancer which the women suffer are: uterus cancer, breast cancer, uterus canal cancer, a ovary cancer, cancer of value and cancer of vagina. The various cancers are caused by abnormal cells formation.

A. Cancer of uterus cannal

Among various types of cancers, the women in Burma suffer most from this type of cancer. It can be infected to all women in age range: 20 to 90 years old, but especially infect to the women between 40 to 50 years old, who are still in menstruation period. In the present time, the disease occurrence rate has more increased among younger women. According to the medical experts said that this type of cancer spread from the sexual contact or sexual intercourse. The disease mostly occurred among the sex workers as they have sexual intercourses with men in abnormal rate, those who married several times, and those who married in early young age or over-age, and the women who have to deliver many children.

Sex workers (or) the women who have sexual intercourses with many different men several times more suffer from the disease than the normal women who live in stable and unified family. Although women have no choice to involve in sex industries, but traditions and customs in Burma do not accept these women and generally looked down on them. Similarly, the community people also look down on women who married several times or who ever had many husbands or the girls who have many boyfriends. Simply, while these women who came from brothels or who had many husbands suffer from this disease, they are abandoned by the community people.

Many women from the rural area in Burma have zero percentage of knowledge on sex if they marry in early age. The divorce rate among young boys and girls, who even married under 16 years old, is frequent and more than normal married age couples. After divorces, they do not worry to marry again and some are married several times even during their young ages. The cancer of uterus more occur among the women who have early age marriage or have sexual relations with many men, concluded by health workers or medical experts in Burma. However, the military government's Health Ministry does not have intensive policy to fight against the causes of cancer.

According to the O.G specialist said, the women who have many children are also suffered from this type of cancer because it has similar reason that they have many times sexual intercourses. In Burmese families, there are five children or more and some extra-ordinarily families, the women have over 10 children. Those women are vulnerable to be infected by this type of cancer.

Over amount of menstruation (or) irregular menstruation is a symptom of the disease. When women suffer from this disease or cancer, they do not feel pains in early days and it always pain increasingly in the later days when it is serious. The pains could be separate from vagina and other body parts. Actually they should meet and receive the treatment by the O.G specialist, but most women in Burma do not know to whom they might have to go, worry the looking down stereotype by the community and many of them could not afford to pay expensive treatment cost in hospitals or private clinics.

Many women died from this cancer, but mostly are unknown. Most women have no knowledge or education on this type of disease, and sometimes, they just take herbal medicines at their homes and treated by themselves in order to avoid expensive payment to the hospitals and clinics.

B. Cancer of the ovary

It is very difficult to know about suffering the disease and even the female patients in the community could not notice herself and they could not distinguish the symptoms of the diseases from one to another. When the sizes of the cancer become obvious or spread to reach the internal organs of human body, then they start to acknowledge about it. The O.G specialist admitted that to completely treat this type of cancer is very difficult.

C. Cancer of the uterus

The cancer infection of the uterus is totally different in disease and symptoms with other types of cancers. The diseases sometime occurred in young women but mostly among elderly women who are in menopause period.

The symptom of the type of cancer to appear only after the time reached the menopause among women. Women mostly face only the blood leaking symptom. If the cancer infection enters deeply into the muscle of Uterus, they need to take the surgery operated treatment (or) if it is starting to spread into the Uterus, the women need to take the treatment of X-ray therapy. But the treatment for this type of cancer so expensive especially during the operation and the majority of poor women could not afford to treat this cancer and end up in death. According to a doctor from Mudon Township Public Hospital in Mon State, he said this suffering of cancer among the women have increased than the previous years and he does not have any idea how many women do not come and take treatment in hospitals.

D. Cancer of the Vagina

This cancer infection is rarely appearing among the majority women and it is founded mostly among elderly women over 60 years old. But sometimes it is also founded among teenage girls and women, expressed by an O. G Specialist in Moulmein Public Hospital in the capital of Mon State.

E. Breast cancer

The cancer is the second most infected disease among the women and young girls about 18 years old, according to the Dr. Sxx Dxx Nxx, an O. G specialist from Moulmein said.

It is more vulnerable among the young women who would be irksome to give the milk to their children and who married in old age (over 35 years). The cancer infection also appears a few among the mothers who give the milk to their children.

Especially among the women in the urban areas (towns and cities), most of them are late to get marriage due to economic and livelihood difficulties and other social problems to complete education, seek suitable income. Cancer or O. G. Specialists founded that those women who married late or in old age are so vulnerable to suffer from this breast cancer. But they concluded that the women from the rural areas have less vulnerability to suffer from this cancer as they married in normal age (after 20 years old), and are physically active in workplaces such as farms or others.

They also founded that the rural women have better health condition especially better growth of body, never delay to marry, give milks to the children in sufficient time and spend time in normal life. They also confirmed that early married women have less suffering from this type of cancer.

Although the specialists or doctors give instruction to women to test themselves whether they have breast cancer or not, but the situation does not allow them to do so. They should test both of their breasts with their hands during the shower. Most women in Burma do not belong the closed bath rooms and many of them take baths in public places like as

Article 12 of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

State Parties shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

Invitation for Feedback to Our Publication "The Plight" of Women and Children in Southern Burma

Dear Readers,

With objectives to monitor the situation of women and children in southern part of Burma and to empower them with the rights described in CEDAW and CRC, which are both ratified by the current military regime in Burma, our "Woman and Child Rights Project (Southern Burma)" came into existence since 2000.

Under this project, "The Plight" Newsletter is produced quarterly and this newsletter especially describe the general situation of women and children in Burma and how their human rights are violated by the ruling regime and its army.

In a plan to evaluate our publication, we wish to get the FEEDBACK of our readers. Hence, you can kindly send your feedback. If you know anyone who would like to receive the newsletter or if you wish to send your feedback, please feel free to contact the following mailing and e-mail address.

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P. O. Box 11, Ratchburana Post Office
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With regards,

Project Coordinator
Woman and Child Rights Project - Southern Burma

the river-banks or public wells or pools which everyone could see them directly. Even some women who get the chance to test by themselves also feel ashamed to do so accordingly to customs or traditions. Because of many barriers, many women are died of this cancer infection.

All above symptoms of cancer disease only occur among women and threaten to their life. Always take the under treatment from the hospital when they suffer from the disease seriously as women situation for the expensive cost of care is a habit of Burmese people.

V. The nutrition and the pregnant women

A pregnant woman needs to be health during her career of her baby and it is also needed to be aware for sufficient nutrition in her daily diets. The girls or women who have sufficient nutrition along during their childhood and in period before marriage could not have any problem during the period of their pregnancy.

According to a report from the independent research team for nutrition in Burma, half of population in Burma is facing the insufficient nutrition and many pregnant women have suffered from the Anemia disease due to insufficient nutrition¹⁰.

If a pregnant mother has insufficient nutrition, both of the mother and baby could suffer from various diseases. Because, embryo requires nutrition from the



A displaced pregnant woman, who also had small children, takes treatments in a clinic in border area

¹⁰ The details of report is described in 'Health and Nutrition for the Pregnant Women' book written by Dr. Min Han, Mandalay Medical University.

Acronyms

HURFOM	<i>Human Rights Foundation of Monland</i>
WCRP-	<i>Women and Child Rights Project</i>
SPDC-	<i>State Peace and Development Council</i>
WHO-	<i>World Health Organization</i>
CEDAW-	<i>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>
CRC-	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>
NLD-	<i>National League for Democracy</i>
IDPs	<i>Internal Displaced Persons</i>
NGOs	<i>Non Government Organization</i>
STD	<i>Sexual Transmitted Diseases</i>
HIV	<i>Human Immune Deficiency Virus</i>
AIDS	<i>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</i>
NMSP	<i>New Mon State Party</i>
ASEAN	<i>Association of South East Asia Nations</i>

mother in order to develop during this time. So, the pregnant women should take meat, milk, beans, eggs, cereal crops and dark green color vegetable to provide sufficient nutrition. A mother, who has sufficient nutrition, can also give the milk immediately to her baby after the delivery.

But many women form poor families, who have very less income could not get the sufficient nutrition and both of them, have suffered from the insufficient nutrition problem¹¹.

Besides, many pregnant women in Burma avoid eating good food due to lack of money and lack of education how to take care a pregnant woman. This situation leads to insufficient nutrition among the women. Many women are still strangely believing that the eating prawn/corn may have high blood pressure; taking banana may have difficulties during child delivery; eating meat may increase the worms; and the eating fresh vegetables may suffer from cholera.

This traditional belief deeply took roots among the community women and many of them just take soups during their pregnancy period. Therefore, it created lack of nutrition among women and less growth among children after birth delivery as women could not give sufficient milks to children.

VI. Conclusion

The diseases which make great suffer to the women in Burma are not described all in this report. Only the most frequent diseases are described here. The health and a lot of related information are not received completely because the government's restriction to get access to information in public health sectors and health departments in Townships, States and Divisions of lower Burma.

However, it is founded that many women died in the community or in hospitals on the daily basis because of various types of diseases. A deep

assessment on health of women by WHO and other international NGOs which work in health issue is required in Burma.

The Burmese military government has never supported practically in taking care of women's health and providing popular health education to the general women in Burma. Most of the above-mentioned are received by WCRP's field Human Rights Reporters, but the health workers under the control of the regime are afraid of providing detail information.

Health issue is also always relating to many other issues such as economic and livelihoods of general women; sexual industries; girl and women trafficking; health education; and traditions and customs of the Burmese people. The program covering all of those issues are already understood by the health professionals and the health rights NGOs in Burma, but they have a very limited role to involve or limited budget to spend due to lack of cooperation by the regime.

¹¹ The daily income of a poor family is less than 2000 Kyat (2 US Dollar in estimation), if the husband and one of their family member work for more 8 hours a day.

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