

Documentation

Dataset M1. Key informant interviews in Kachin state, 2018

Data collection resulting from face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 261 interviewees in Kachin State, northern Myanmar. Interviews have been carried out in Jinghpaw or Burmese and were audio-recorded when interviewees allowed this; else notes were taken. Summaries in the interview language and in English have been written out for 246 interviews. A selection of 44 key interviews have been transcribed and 22 translated to English (19 written out and 3 as recorded audio).

The dataset consists of summaries, transcripts and translations, a data list providing demographic characteristics for interviewees and context information for the interviews.

Dataset owner: Kachinland Research Centre (KRC) and SOAS

Context

The upland areas of Kachin and Shan are perfectly suited to the cultivation of opium poppy, which has provided livelihood security in impoverished rural areas but also became a financial pillar to sustain armed conflict. In recent decades, the relationship between drugs and conflict has become more complex. The issue has extended beyond opium cultivation to the manufacture and supply of other drugs, such as methamphetamines. Local communities are some of those most vulnerable to the harms related to changing patterns of drug use, including increasing levels of heroin-injecting and methamphetamine use.

Both Shan State and Kachin State are regions of significant ethnic and linguistic diversity. The majority of research conducted has been with Shan-identifying and Kachin-identifying populations. A large social movement called Pat Jasan emerged in 2014 in northern Myanmar, determined to eradicate illicit drug production and consumption Kachinland. Pat Jasan is a local Jinghpaw language term for 'eradication'. Its constituent parts include the Kachin Independence Organisation and the main Kachin churches, principally the Kachin Baptist Convention, the Roman Catholic churches and the Anglican churches. Framed as a religiously inspired Christian evangelical movement, Pat Jasan has been considered mainly a disruptive force in the national drugs policy landscape because of its use of forced incarceration and enforced detoxification method without medical support or supervision.

The interviews were framed to enable better understanding of the key meta-narratives that have developed around drugs across and within different communities; and focus on history, political economy, health and livelihoods, and ethnography with respect to local drug problems in Kachin State.

Methodology

During the first year of research, the focus of the research has been to understand the wider political and economic context of the areas, including issues around conflict and violence, as well as conducting research on drug issues specifically. The aim was to generate evidence through semi-structured interviews and observational photography around five broad themes, and how they relate to drugs:

- People: exploring how people interact with drugs (and which drugs) and the drug economy
- Places: understanding the relationships between people, places and drugs
- Organisations: investigating organisations that shape people's lives across Kachin State, including those that are related to drugs
- Culture: cultural engagement with drugs for example through portrayal in literature, songs, art and media; and the insights this can offer into broader processes of social, political and economic change
- Economies: economic dynamics of the Kachin borderland regions and how they operate around drugs.

Across those themes is also a cross-cutting focus on histories and gender.

A set of questions in Burmese to guide interviews was developed by KRC in collaboration with SHAN and SOAS researchers, starting from a concept note. The questions focus on drug production, consumption and drug-related interventions and the themes above. The question list was used to guide the interviews, rather than as a strict interview structure. Interviews usually lasted at least one hour.

Interviews were carried out by researchers of Kachinland Research Centre (KRC) in Myitkyina, Kachin State.

Location

Kachin State, Myanmar.

The townships and villages where interviews took place were selected for their significance in relation to Pat Jasan activities. Most of these sites were in politically ambiguous areas, where political and administrative power is not controlled by a single authority. These sites included border 'boom' towns and other Myanmar-China border spaces where drug-related concerns have been heightened in recent years.

Interviews were conducted during a series of fieldwork trips with teams of researchers to:

- Chihpwi and Pangwa Townships
- Laiza Town
- Mai Ja Yang Town
- Putao and Nogmung Townships
- Phakant Township
- Bhamo and Momauk Townships
- Mungmyit Kodawng
- Myitkyina and Waingmaw Townships
- Mogaung and Monyin Townships

Time period

Interviews were carried out during April – June 2018.

Sample selection

The field research has primarily focused on interviewing church leaders, youth leaders, government officials, civilians (including women, youth, shopkeepers, farmers, and those working in and around mining areas), internally displaced people, organisations working on drug issues, and people who use(d) drugs?

Interviewees were mostly selected by snowballing, starting from connections KRC already had with church networks and CSOs. In addition, KRC also reached out to people and organisations such as school teachers, government administrators and local harm reduction organisations.

Anonymisation steps

The dataset has been anonymised by leaving out names and direct identifiers for all interviewees.