



**MYANMAR ILLEGAL
CONSCRIPTION LAW AND ITS
IMPACT ON WOMEN**

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Introduction

On February 10, 2024, the terrorist junta activated the 2010 People's Military Service Law, which was enacted on November 4 by military leader Than Shwe of the State Peace and Development Council. The law requires men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to serve a minimum of two years in the military. For professionals, a broadly defined category that includes medical professionals, engineers, or other professional groups, the age range is higher 45 for men and 35 for women.¹ This report mainly analyzes the impacts of People's Conscription Law on women. In addition to reviewing reliable news sources, in April 2024, Burmese Women's Union (BWU) has conducted interviews with women from Southern Shan State, Mandalay, Yangon, Sagaing, and Ayeyarwady Regions to investigate women's practical challenges and difficulties. BWU selected five women respondents who have already experienced the impacts of conscription law and women working at the community-based organizations. BWU believes those women can share more information because they already suffer the impacts and experience the real ground situation. The findings of this analysis explicitly confirmed the impacts of the Myanmar illegal conscription law, which forced married and domestic violence, economic crisis, dread of becoming the victim of sexual violence, struggling to flee neighboring countries, both legal and illegal. In the context of daunting challenges to access information across the country, the reality of the situation may be worse on the ground.

I. Armed Conflict from the Attempted Military Coup

On February 1, 2021, a terrorist military group attempted a coup in Myanmar. Since then, the people have strongly opposed the illegitimate junta rule, opting for non-violent methods such as participating in peaceful protests, civil disobedience movements (CDM), and other forms of soft resistance. However, the terrorist junta's brutal crackdown on peaceful protestors from March 2021 forced many, particularly young people, to take up arms to resist by any means. These individuals either went to the territories under the control of existing ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) for military training or formed the People's Defense

¹ VOA-Burmese, 10th February 2024.

<https://burmese.voanews.com/a/sac-s-mandatory-military-service-law/7482258.html>



Forces.² Consequently, the coup remains neither legitimized nor successful, with ongoing clashes between EAOs, revolutionary forces, and the terrorist junta forces occurring daily.

On October 23, 2023, Operation 1027, one of the largest and most significant military operations against the junta, was launched in northern Shan State by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Arakan Army, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army). Many cities, including the major commercial hubs, were taken over by resistance forces.³ Following that, the Karenni resistance forces began Operation 1111 on November 11, 2023, near Loikaw.⁴ Furthermore, on November 13, 2023, the intense conflict began with offensive attacks by the Arakan Army (AA), a member of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, at the border police station near the townships of Minbya and Rathetaung, which were initially taken over by border guard forces, working in close collaboration with the terrorist junta.⁵ During these intense battles, the terrorist junta forces became significantly weakened, with thousands of forces surrendering and fleeing to neighboring countries. In addition, the junta has been forced to give up large amounts of territory. Furthermore, the National Unity Government concluded, before Operation 1027 took place, that EAOs and resistance forces control about 60 percent of the country's territory.⁶ According to the Irrawaddy's interview with Khun Bedu, vice chairman of the Interim

² BBC NEWS Burmese 1st February 2022.

<https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-60220620>

³ USIP-English 11th April 2024.

https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/04/myanmars-collapsing-military-creates-crisis-chinas-border?fbclid=IwAR2fRmPlm2VAL91VAMeOUoA5blY0LCRR0iftXGMRnJ0FdZmlTkA9ZyXkY71_aem_Acniij7z0b56LkGioI9d_wllLbyt_43sMTe8YACC3iuIOtP8hbL6U0SsueUW4gZNwZacUkX8dsg1OQL6qwu7ucSbf

⁴ The Irrawaddy- English 28th November 2024.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/operation-1111-close-to-securing-all-of-kayah-state-for-myanmar-resistance.html>

⁵ RFA-Burmese 13th November 2024.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3vA_3HrMGQ

⁶ The Irrawaddy-Burmese 22nd December 2023.

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/putting-the-myanmar-militarys-recent-losses-in-perspective.html>



Executive Council (IEC), in April 2024, the local Karenni resistance forces control over 90 percent of Karenni (Kayah) State.⁷

The territorial defeat in these battles prompted the junta's unlawful activation of the conscription law on February 10, 2024. In one of our interviews, a woman respondent from Southern Shan stated:

Mainly, the junta has faced losses to a great extent due to encountering offensive attacks during this revolution. Especially during Operation 1027, the junta's side has faced many deaths and hundreds of surrenders by showing white flags. From their side, they released a conscription law, and I see the announcement of this law as a formal act to recruit Porter. If we look at the ages of eligible persons, young men are apparently being targeted. Additionally, while the internal unity within the military breaks up, including within its supporters, I feel that they want to target the youth for arbitrary arrest and as hostages. Personally, I oppose this law totally. They aren't our government. The announcement made by terrorist junta troops is not legal.⁸

Women respondents for this analysis explicitly stated their opposition to this conscription law. Still, Major General Zaw Min Tun, the junta's spokesperson, said on February 20, 2024, that women will not be recruited in the upcoming batch. Women, however, face several challenges, as does the rest of the nation. On June 4, 2024, the information came out that women will be conscripted into the 5th batch of military service based on a source who is close to the military recruitment team.⁹ Nevertheless, BWU received the information from the ground that some women are paying money to the recruitment team in order to avoid conscription law.

⁷ The Irrawaddy- English 24th April 2024.

https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/karenni-state-liberated-from-myanmar-junta-control-by-yearend-iec.html?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR31bBcykGcU3n8D76ltasgneXlvoH8Fd48I8prnlx1M23SStkkh-6SSaU_aem_Aadqi5iYO2ILl6FTwIoOV8nsV-nVNqhfyyJbqOUEak4kexURCwHTuNMQ8jLsV0T-88fji7g4tNXqUYK1LRV1Aojn

⁸ A woman participant from Southern Shan State.

⁹ DVB 4th June 2024.

https://burmese.dvb.no/post/654629#google_vignette



II. Conscription Law: Challenges to flee in Neighboring Countries

Since the attempted military coup, women in Myanmar have faced various economic, social, and political challenges. From February 1, 2021, to May 26, 2024, the terrorist junta forces detains 3,979 women, with 1,520 of them being sentenced.¹⁰ Furthermore, as a result of the attempted military coup, the number of internally displaced people (IDP) has risen to around 2,658,400 (more than 2.6 million), with 61,700 refugees in neighboring countries, half of whom are women.¹¹ Furthermore, following the activation of the illegal conscription law, women are being forced to flee to neighboring countries using any means necessary to avoid recruitment. Consequently, thousands of people have eagerly been trying to get passports daily.



Photo Credited: Asharq AI Awsat website¹²

On February 19, 2024, it was reported that two women died by being crushed by a big crowd at the passport office in Aungmyay Tharzan township, Mandalay, and that many people

¹⁰ AAPP 12th June 2024.

<https://airtable.com/appHDJLeiPsMGFJ7s/shriEaQw2eWEEU7zr/tblhdh7ajAunXjn6eP>

¹¹ Myanmar UNHCR 22nd April 2024.

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/108164>

¹² Many in Myanmar Consider Fleeing to Thailand to Escape Conscription into an Army they Despise (Asharq AI Awsat)

<https://english.aawsat.com/world/4874176-many-myanmar-consider-fleeing-thailand-escape-conscription-army-they-despise>



have to pay more than the regular price to obtain a passport.¹³ Middle-class women can afford to travel legally, whereas grassroot level women have been arrested on illegal travel routes. For example, in Thailand, undocumented people reportedly been detained daily by Thai authorities. Hundreds of people including women have reportedly been arrested in Thailand after illegally entering to avoid conscription. On March 13, 2024, 22 Myanmar nationals (17 men and five women) were arrested in a forested area near, Tha Khanum, Thong Pha Phum district, Kanchanaburi. It is estimated that they spent between 13,000 and 15,000 Thai baht crossing the border.¹⁴ Despite the desire to flee to neighboring countries without documents, women faced obstacles throughout the routes. A woman participant from Southern Shan stated:

"The women from the lower socio-economic backgrounds cannot afford to flee in legal or illegal ways."¹⁵

Moreover, a woman participant from Mandalay region with three children expressed her challenges,

"I think of fleeing Thailand, but I cannot speak the Burmese language well. And, without having a national identification card and enough money, it is hard to flee now while my husband is traveling"¹⁶.

In addition, parents are seeking various ways to avoid conscription law. On April 11, 2024, the renewed conflict between terrorist junta forces, the Light Infantry Battalion, '275' in Myawaddy town, and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its allied resistance forces became the most significant situational challenge for youths intending to flee across the border. A woman from the Ayeyarwady Region indicated:

"The girls nearby have asked me what to do. Some have to choose illegal travel due to financial constraints. Others have to borrow the money to flee, and later, they phoned me crying while the conflict is intense in Myawaddy."¹⁷

¹³ Myanmar Now-Burmese 19th February 2024.

<https://myanmar-now.org/mm/news/49376/>

¹⁴ RFA-Burmese 13th March 2024.

<https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/thailand-migrant-worker-border-03132024152811.html>

¹⁵ A woman participant from Southern Shan State.

¹⁶ A woman participant from Mandalay Region.

¹⁷ A woman participant from Ayeyarwady Region.



According to primary interviews, the conscription law has left women with no choice but to live alarmedly among those who are unable to flee, with or without legal documents.

III. Conscription Law: Concerns on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Women

In past decades, the terrorist junta forces employed sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women as a weapon in their battle with EAOs. Based on the junta's brutal reputation, women have become anxious following the activation of the conscription law. Though women are said not to be recruited in the first batch, those eligible under the law have become frightened, and some have been arbitrarily arrested because of the law. Furthermore, a woman from Southern Shan Stat under the age of eligibility shared her thoughts:



“ *If a man is conscripted, he may be subjected to beatings and face other forms. However, it is not similar in the case of women. What I am concerned about most is gangrape if I am conscripted. Especially some women are also worried about sexual gender-based violence. I think there is no way to come back after being conscripted* ¹⁸ ”

One reason for increasing incidents of sexual and gender-based violence against women among terrorist groups is impunity. Until now, for example, there has been no proper justice

¹⁸ A woman from Southern Shan State.



and accountability in the case of two Kachin volunteer teachers who were raped and killed by junta forces on January 19, 2015.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to the BWU's annual report (2023), there were 54 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) resulting from the attempted military coup in 2021.²⁰ A woman from the Ayeyarwady Region stated that families who have been victims of sexual gender-based violence do not report these incidents for fear of their sons being conscripted under the illegal conscription law. The perpetrators have thus escaped punishment several times because they are connected to the junta forces.

Furthermore, a respondent from the Women Alliance Burma from Sagaing Region, described that due to the conscription law, women in Sagaing region experienced insecurity in their daily lives.



*“ In our daily life, we feel insecurity. It impacts us both mentally and physically. We do not dare to go outside. Even seeking medical treatment outside becomes detrimental to our mental well-being.”*²¹

Women are experiencing physical and mental insecurity in addition to difficulty in their daily socio-economic conditions and for survival.

¹⁹ The Irrawaddy-Burmese 19th January 2019. <https://burma.irrawaddy.com/news/2019/01/19/180764.html>

²⁰ Burmese Women's Union 17th June 2023. <https://burmesewomensunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Sexual-Violence-Against-Women-under-the-Political-Instability-MM.pdf>

²¹ A woman participant from Sagaing Region.



VI. Conscription Law: Economic Crisis among Women

Myanmar's economic situation deteriorated day by day following the attempted military coup. According to the World Bank, the economy has not stabilized in the three years after the attempted coup due to rising commodity prices, inflation, product shortages, shortages, business challenges, and a lack of job opportunities. These are the most significant impediment to overcoming the collapse of the economy.²² Under such circumstances, women have faced a double burden, primarily compelled to pay money to avoid being conscripted but also struggling for survival and facing a lack of available job opportunities. A woman from Ayeyarwady responded,

“ *These days, every household has been directed to pay 5000, 10,000, and 15,000 kyat, respectively in our ward. This is said to support those who will serve in the military. Then, other women have talked to me about what they must do. It is mandatory to pay. In fact, we can buy a half gallon of rice with 5,000 kyat. If we don't pay that amount, we are also afraid of getting in trouble. We in our village find ourselves struggling for survival. We have only one and half month's work to collect the beans from our farms in one year. No jobs for other days.*”²³

According to Myanmar Now's information, since March the ward administrators in Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw have been forcibly collecting money from residents to support those who will serve in the military. The illegal conscription law has become an excuse to obtain money among those close to the junta.²⁴ It has been reported that after arresting the youths, their families are forced to pay the money to release them, even if they are not on the list for conscription. A woman from Yangon stated:

²² VOA-Burmese 27th June 2023.

<https://burmese.voanews.com/a/fragile-recovery-world-bank-report-myanmar/7154415.html>

²³ A woman respondent from Ayeyarwady Region.

²⁴ Myanmar Now 22nd March 2024.

<https://myanmar-now.org/mm/news/50390/>



“ My friend's son and daughter were arrested the previous day. Then, their families were asked to pay four lakhs for each of them. How can a daily wage worker afford to pay such an amount? Then, after negotiating, they were released after paying five lakhs or six lakhs. Near my place, young people, regardless of their eligibility for conscription, were arrested in the late evening if they got outside. Due to that law, going outside becomes difficult and insecure for me while struggling to live on one side. If my children are outside, I worry whether they will reach home safely.²⁵”

Furthermore, according to Myanmar society's customs and cultures, only men, as the head of the household, run their family's business for ages. This central fact discourages married women's ability to offer support within families. Since married women have been devoting their time to housework and caring for their children, they become worried about the whole family's survival when their family heads are arrested for conscription and their names are on the list of military service. For example, a mother with three children from Mandalay expressed concern while her husband's name is on the conscription list, revealed:

“ I have three children. I am worried about raising my children on my own, especially considering their young ages. There is no way to return if he is recruited for military service. Given the ongoing conflict and the fact that my husband's name is on the recruitment list, I've been feeling down. At times, I even find myself forgetting to eat. I feel completely lost when it comes to raising my three kids alone. If I look at my children's faces, they are innocent and unaware of what's happening around them.²⁶”

Thus, the illegal activation of the conscription law has had a severe impact on women's daily lives during the period of Myanmar's economic crisis.

²⁵ A woman from Yangon Region.

²⁶ A woman from Mandalay Region.



V. Forced Marriage, and Domestic Violence against Women

According to the Conscription Law, women between 18 and 27 are required to serve in the military, while professional and skilled workers are eligible for service between the ages of 18 and 35. However, married women have been exempted from the law.²⁷ This pushed young women to consider marriage to a large extent, while young men used drugs at higher rates. A young woman from Southern Shan State who is under the age of military service stated:

“Although I don’t find myself forced into marriage by my family, I would consider it as well. Should I marry if I am not able to flee abroad? My friends also think about it. However, even though I can be exempt from conscription after marriage, my husband may get conscripted, so I would have to worry about him again. We are dealing with such a double burden of worry.”²⁸

Furthermore, it has been reported that as a result of this law, women are being forced to marry by their parents, which increases the risk of domestic violence. A woman from Yangon responded:

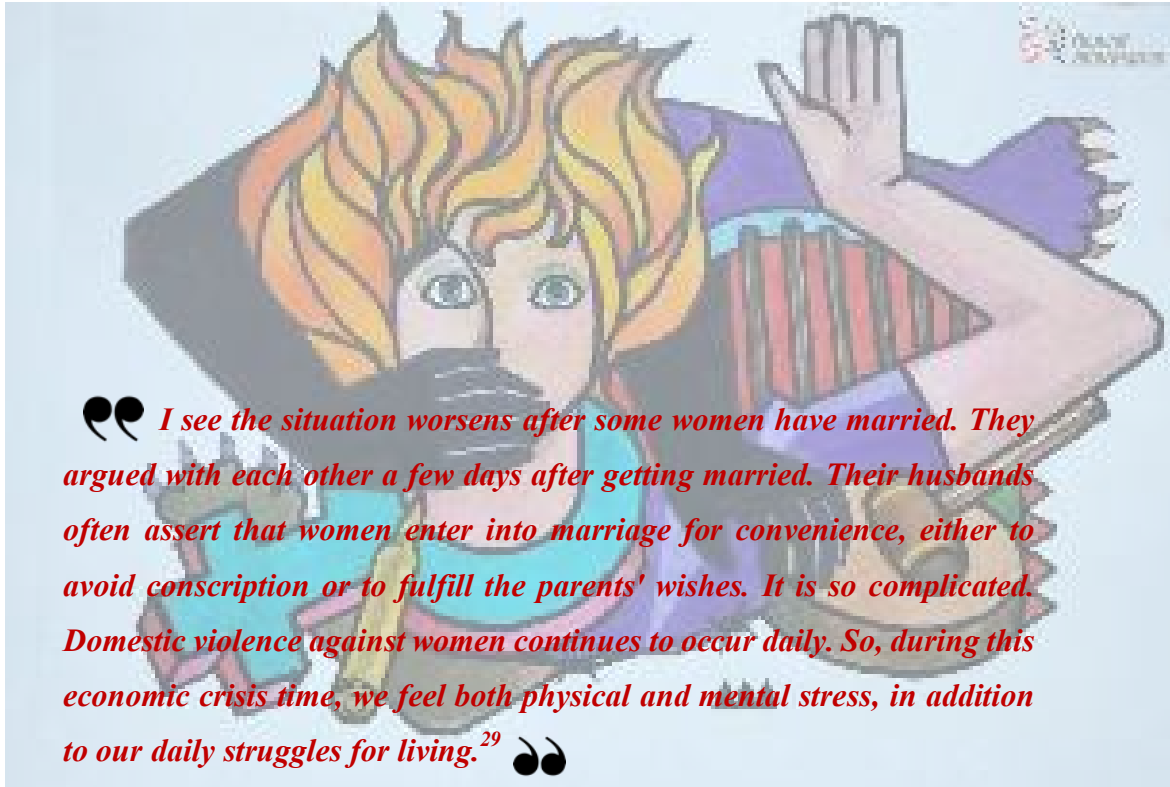
²⁷ RFA-Burmese 10th February 2024.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=799693065525431&id=100064542350311&set=a.583637430464330>

²⁸ A woman from Southern Shan State.

²⁹ A woman from Yangon.

³⁰ A woman from Southern Shan State.



Sadly, women are the victims of domestic violence despite their getting married to avoid conscription. Thus, this conscription law brought about an increase in domestic violence against women. A young woman from Southern Shan State, also described:

“These days, I keep solving several issues, including cases of domestic violence. It includes women facing beating while their partners are turning to alcohol addiction to cope with depression because their names are on the military service list. We women have faced numerous challenges and burdens. Some women are verbally abused by their husbands. I often heard that you (a wife) may be able to avoid conscription, but I (the husband) cannot. As a result, we are facing such physical and mental suffering.”³⁰



Summary Analysis

The BWU has analyzed that the terrorist junta force activated the illegal conscription law as they have been struggling with internal defections and territorial loss owing to increasing offensive attacks by resistance forces nationwide since the attempted military coup three-years ago. It has been assessed that this law makes women, mainly from low socioeconomic backgrounds, suffer more. Although middle-class women can flee to neighboring countries with or without proper documentation, the others remain in their homes and spend their days alarmed. Young women have expressed their concern about the sexual and gender-based violence associated with conscription, as well as the numerous barriers to fleeing abroad. Furthermore, in the context of economic collapse, women's daily survival has been put at risk by junta forces' extortion, mainly through coercive demand for money and arbitrary arrests. Last but not least, the conscription law has undoubtedly caused both mental and physical hardship among women, as well as a situation in which women are targeted to be victims of domestic violence because of forced marriage.