

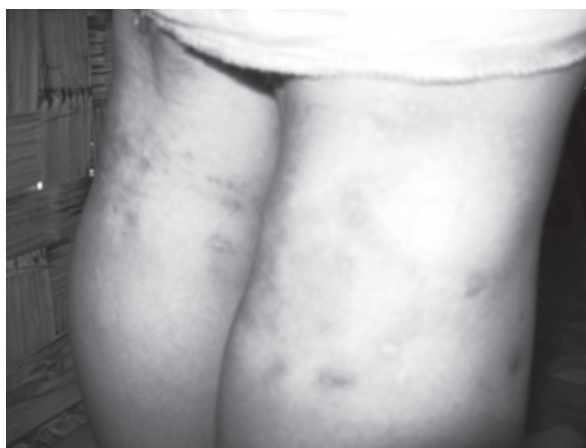
Many interviewees complained that when they have sexual intercourse their husbands treat them badly. Their husbands force them to have sex. This sometime occurs in front of their children, under their house and in the toilets without consent. Some husbands show their wives sex movies and orders her to do the same as the 'actors'; although she refuses she must. After they gave birth, when the husband requests to have sex they are not interested and also their bodies are weak.

There are many different types of sexual abuse including, behavior involving penetration, fondling, violations of privacy, exposing children to adult sexuality and exploitation.<sup>185</sup> There are cases involving children in which the stepfather got drunk and abused them, sometimes swearing and beating them. He often showed them his penis - three or four times - and sometimes touched their body, they said. (The two daughters are from a mother and one of her friends).<sup>186</sup>

## Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse includes physical force or violence that results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment.<sup>187</sup> According to the interviewees, their husbands hurt their bodies in different ways:

One woman said that when her husband was angry with her he broke one of her teeth and loosened another. She couldn't eat for a month; until now she can't eat hard food. At that time, she didn't know what happened to her - she suffered memory loss for a few hours. When she remembered she could not speak about it, it hurt her too much, so her daughter came to explain for her. Her mouth became swollen. Later camp security come to arrest him and sent him to the jail. That was not the first time for her; he has done it many times to her and to his children.<sup>188</sup>



*Abuse scars. (Photo by TD).*

---

<sup>185</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/child\\_abuse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/child_abuse)

<sup>186</sup> Three young girls.

<sup>187</sup> <http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/physical.htm>

<sup>188</sup> Interview 4.

Another victim said her husband also treated her similarly, punching her in her eyes and swelling them for three days.<sup>189</sup>

Another victim said her husband punched her head and pulled her hair. The first time she forgave him. But, the next time, “he did it to me again and shamed me in front of many people. I went with my children to a relatives house and he suddenly appeared and pulled me under the house and punched me repeatedly. I don’t know myself. The whole of my head and face were bloodied and my memory was lost for one day and one night. I remember arriving at Mae Hong Son hospital with my face swelled so much that I could not eat. I felt bitter towards him and divorced him but he blamed me for this. The effects of this abuse still linger: my mind is changed and I am always nervous. The Doctor said he caused permanent damage behind my eyes by punching me in the temple.”<sup>190</sup> Another victim said she her husband ripped out her hair and always beat her.<sup>191</sup> A typical response was as follows:

***“My husband said I own you so whatever I want you to do you have to do for me. He said that’s our culture: I bought you when you married me. Therefore, he is always angry and aggressive to me. When he is drunk he beats me. He punched my face so hard I could not eat and broke one of my fingers and now I can’t wash very well clothing and do other work. He always punches my head and including my neck. When I got pregnant he kicked my pregnant belly, and I couldn’t remember myself for a while. At that time my pregnancy was big.”***<sup>192</sup>

- Victim of violence against women in the camp.

That is the situation of physical violation of the women in the Karenni Refugee Camps. Sometimes their children become victims because their father becomes angry and starts beating, pulling, and throwing them and knocking their heads together. It hurts their head, hand, arm, ear and other parts of their body. According to Interviewees 2, 4 and 5, the violence caused external bleeding.

Domestic violence is contrary to Thai law and international standards. For example, under Thai law, Penal Code: Article 295 explains that “Whoever has caused serious harm or torture to the body or mind of the others shall be punished with

---

<sup>189</sup> Interview 16.

<sup>190</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>191</sup> Interview 15.

<sup>192</sup> Interview 1.

imprisonment of 2 years or fine of 4000 baht.”<sup>193</sup> Moreover, people should be allowed to get divorced. Thai law allows for divorce with the consent of both parties. If mutual agreement cannot be reached, the case must be taken to court. Violence is one of the grounds for divorce.

According to Thai law, Article 295 is applicable to everyone who lives in Thailand, but this does not work in our Karenni society. We do not have laws for domestic violence, but have some articles such as, if someone hurts someone, they should give a penalty or get a punishment; something like this. It is very weak and not binding.

## **Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse is the willful infliction of mental or emotional anguish by threat, humiliation, or other verbal or nonverbal conduct.<sup>194</sup> The victims of women who I interviewed were menaced by different kinds of action from their husbands. Their husbands threatened them with guns and knives, and took other action like making them afraid, acting like tigers or using necromancy. They made threats against their relatives, like “I will give one bullet to your father.” Their husbands stayed with other women and provided things to those women. Their husbands made mortal threats like “I will kill you and go to the jail.” Some husbands accuse them of being with other men, and said things like “You are a prostitute, you are selling yourself.” Some husbands compared their wives with dogs, or said they were stupid or naughty. A further example of psychological abuse is as follows:

***“I am deaf so he can’t tell me what he wants but my daughter told me again. He didn’t consider me his wife and stayed with other women in front of me. When the children are sick and have to sleep in the clinic women come to sleep with him. This hurt me so much but he doesn’t care. I told to him not to do this and informed the camp leaders. He denied this behavior but was punished and sent to the jail. He was angry with me and swore that I was now his enemy. He threatened revenge saying, ‘If you cut the tree it will be scarred forever.’ He will never forget.”***<sup>195</sup>

- Refugee Victim of Psychological Abuse.

---

<sup>193</sup> ‘Summary of Thai laws and international laws relating to violence against women’; ‘Summary of Thai laws on violence against women’, Handout 6, ‘Domestic Violence’, Migrant Assistance Programme, Chiang Mai, Thailand, page 14.

<sup>194</sup> <http://www.preventelderabuse.org/elderabuse/physical.htm>

<sup>195</sup> Interview 4.

This also happens to children. Many child interviewees said they hated and feared their fathers due to domestic violence in the family. Some of them feel ashamed and depressed. They do not want to go out with their friends. Some of them are feeling upset with their mother for not stopping the violence. If the violence is inflicted in front of their friends, some friends make 'jokes' to them.

***"When I went to watch a movie, the actor pretended to be a drinker, so some of my friends jested with and reproached me, they said he looks like your father. So I was angry with my friend and quarreled with him."***<sup>196</sup>

In these situations, parents also neglect to fulfill the needs and wishes of their children; for example, not providing them with clothes, enough food, hygiene, or love.

Men also suffer from psychological abuse. Two male interviewees wives left them. Although there was no sexual abuse or physical abuse, there were signs of psychological abuse. Neither of their wives discussed with them what they wanted to buy or to do. Every month they incurred debt and the husbands had to pay. Both of them faced requests from their wives for divorce. So although they did not want to divorce they had to, because they did not want to upset their wife and children.<sup>197</sup>

One man said his wife always had much debt. At first she did not understand so he tolerated her but she never finished. At the end of the month people came to request her payment; he did not know what she had bought. She never explained to him. He told her not to do that, but she did not listen to him. She shamed him because of so much debt. She finally understood and apologized but felt unable to change her behavior. So she felt ashamed of herself and requested of him that she stay alone. She said the main thing was her happiness, so allow her a divorce. She swore at him badly and compared him with a dog. This couple were from different ethnic groups.

## **Policy in Other Countries**

Other Countries have formulated policies to deal with domestic violence. Special policies are necessary because domestic violence is a crime that takes place within the family, between people who are emotionally and financially involved with each other. First, policies must reflect the singular nature of domestic crime and

---

<sup>196</sup> Interview 5, a young girl.

<sup>197</sup> Interview 21, male victims.

must provide support for the victim and help the abuser. Secondly, policies must take into account the cultural, economic and political realities.<sup>198</sup> But little has been done by the Thai authorities or camp leaders to address this problem.

## Family Consequences

Families that suffer domestic violence are looked down upon by the rest of society. Children become victims and are reproached by their friends. These families do not provide a nurturing environment for children and are unkind. The children's lives are affected; their work, health, and education suffer.

They cannot get divorced so they have to tolerate their partner. One of the victims said the court did not allow for her to divorce so she has to suffer from her husband's treatment forever. She requested a divorce and went to court but failed. She cannot tolerate her husband anymore.<sup>199</sup> This typical case is a huge problem because although she lives with him she is not going to be happy in her family, so it is causing social problems.

Some families are going to divorce but this is confusing for their children who must then choose between their father and mother. The camp justice system shares custody but some still feel it is unfair and become angry. Then, the custodian must struggle alone to raise the children and often cannot fulfill children's needs. The result is distressed hopelessness.



*Struggling alone in poverty with two little children. (Photo by Tyardu).*

---

<sup>198</sup> 'Violence Against Women: Thailand Country Report 2000', Jackie Pollock for Friends of Women, Cambodia, page 15.

<sup>199</sup> Interview 16, women victims.



## Consequences For Women

Some of the victims of domestic violence have divorced their husbands and are restarting their life again. Some are lonely and have to take care of their children alone. Some are having mental problems like always feeling afraid in their mind. Some of them become unhealthy and cannot work very well because they are concerned about their children's future. Some of interviewees said they lost weight because they have to think a lot and are struggling for their children alone. Some of them are ignored or reproached by their community.<sup>200</sup> The neighbor's wives see mistakes or blame and accuse them with their husband and fight with them.

One victim explained how it is dangerous for divorced woman to stay alone. After her divorce she lived with her child in a different section of the camp. The traditional culture looks down on divorced women. Some believe that a divorced woman is nothing so they can do what they want to. A man came to her house at 1:34 am and threatened her with a knife, telling her, "You must marry me. If you don't I will kill you." Although she went to inform the community leaders, they did not want to further damage the man's already fractured family.

The combination of violence by her husband and a stranger caused her to suffer Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It created deep psychological trauma for her; she had never feel like this before, she said.<sup>201</sup> This is a consequence of domestic violence that women face in the camp: it makes them vulnerable to further abuses.

## Consequences For Children

The consequences of domestic violence can span generations. The effects of violent behavior tend to stay with children long after they leave the childhood home. Boys exposed to their parents' domestic violence are twice as likely



*Study time with mother in WCC. (Photo by Tyardu).*

---

<sup>200</sup> Interview 15.

<sup>201</sup> Interview 20.

to become abusive men as are sons of non-violent parents. Furthermore, girls who witness their mothers being abused are more likely to accept violence in a marriage than girls from non-violent homes.<sup>202</sup>



*Safe house (WCC).*

Consequences for children include dropping out of school, some are married early, and some do not want to work on their studies. They also have mental problems, do not want to talk to their father and are bitter about them. Some feel upset with their mother and get depressed. Most children who are treated badly themselves start to treat others badly. Some are ashamed with their friends and do not want to go to school. They become aggressive with their friends. Some delay their education because they feel they must stay with their mother to protect her in case the father returns. For some it is difficult to stay with their stepfather, especially for the girls. It can be dangerous for them to live freely in their home. Some children are going to be very cruel adults: they are anti-social because their parents set a bad example.

Women who are battered often go to extreme and courageous lengths to protect their children from an abusive partner. Children growing up in a violent home can suffer a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of their life, growth and development.<sup>203</sup>

## Community Response

Community organization leaders such as section leader, camp security, camp justice, camp administration, women activist group and legal assistance centers take responsibility for victims of domestic violence. It depends on the situation: they have different levels of responsibility for victims. Most cooperate with each other. They inform on a step by step basis if the case is not satisfied at the lower level. First the case goes to the section leader, and if not resolved, goes to the camp

---

<sup>202</sup> [www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07\\_pane1\\_2\\_1.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07_pane1_2_1.pdf)

<sup>203</sup> [www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/](http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/)



*WCC new building. (Photos by TD).*

security or committee and then to the camp justice. But if the case is big, they send it to the legal assistance center. By Thai law, the procedure depends on what the victim wants to do. NGOs such as the IRC-GBV program also provide awareness about how to reduce domestic violence in the camp, and offer trainings.

According to Camp Security, they punish the perpetrator depending on the case. They arrest the perpetrator within 24 hours and examine the problem; if they need to take more time to check they can. Before releasing him he is warned and commits not to repeat such behavior as drinking, swearing, keeping money from the family, and disturbing the neighbors.

The provision of the women's safe house is problematic to the male leadership. Most of the men leaders and perpetrators believe it encourages more problems. They blame the women's groups that provide these services. The WCC managers said they have expanded the new building but are concerned for women's safety. Men who commit domestic violence are upset because women run to the WCC. They argue that before the WCC building the problem was private and settled at home. Instead now they must face justice, meet with the section leader and write recommendations in order for them to be allowed to call back their wife from the WCC. Some even must go to criminal court.<sup>204</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Interview 22, section leader.



The educators said they go around every section encourage and educated to them to be exemplary in the society. The problem of domestic violence is happen all over the world, not only in the camp so we want to improve like the other society and provide awareness training for them. Although we have the camp justice the people are don't understand law. When justice is done many are not satisfied with the result. They have a plan to provide awareness training for the people but they don't have the resources according to the leader of camp justice.<sup>205</sup>

The root causes of domestic violence in the camp are alcohol, joblessness, gambling, ignorance, and infidelity. Most people are concerned about their future life - they feel hopeless, have no guarantee of a good, long life, and worry about basic subsistence. There are many different ethnicities in the camp, with various festivals and cultural practices and behaviors.

## Dispute Over the Definition of 'Violence'

The word 'violence' is controversial amongst the camp leadership and CBO leaders. They have different views and different opinions about relations between men and women. Most of the men CBO leaders don't like this word and want to change this word. They argued with the Karenni National Women Organization who works with women on domestic violence issues in the camp. Instead of using the term 'violence' they prefer to use a term like 'family problems' because violence is a strong word when translated into Burmese. They don't want to use it in the context of Karenni refugee society. Although most understand this term, the male leadership doesn't use it officially. The KNWO called a meeting to discuss with them.



*KNWO held a meeting with CBO leaders about the word 'violence'.*

---

<sup>205</sup> Interview 10, Camp Justice.

KNWO is working closely with women who are suffering from domestic violence. They support them by giving counseling, accompanying them to the clinic or to the judicial office.<sup>206</sup> They provide a temporary safe house for the victims of women and their children. According to the WCC staff said that in 2006 the reported domestic violence cases totaled 60 and in 2007 the total was 54 with 10 of them repeat offenders. In total in 2007, 19 children stayed with the WCC. During this year January to April the total of reported domestic violence cases were 11, some of them were repetitive. 30 children are now with them.<sup>207</sup>

## Conclusion

Domestic violence is one kind of human rights violation but many people in the world see it as being 'only' a family problem so they do not want to interfere. People who live in the Karenni refugee camp also think like this so when one of the families has this problem they don't want to interfere and come to help. Most victims said that no body came to help them when their husband mistreated which increased their suffering. The women are with husbands who treat them badly. They have tolerated it for a long time but cannot continue to do so forever.<sup>208</sup>

This research proved highly controversial in the camp and provoked resentment from many quarters. Many disagreed with the project and the use of the correct terminology – domestic violence – because it is taboo. The purpose of this report is for more people to know about and find solutions for the crisis situation in the camp; to weaken the taboo; and to raise the voices of the victims.

Domestic violence has various ramifications.<sup>209</sup> The victims of violence and their children are affected by the actions of the perpetrator. Living in the camp is very difficult situation with few ways out. The result is domestic violence. Activists must stand with the people who are weak or oppressed, in this case by their closest partner. If not, the cycle of violence can continue for many generations. Domestic violence can affect the whole society, destroying human dignity. Indeed, human dignity plays an important role here. Long-term life in the Karenni refugee camps is a major cause of domestic violence as it erodes the dignity of those forced to live there.

---

<sup>206</sup> <http://karennihomeland.com/OtherOrgs.php>

<sup>207</sup> Women's Community Center staff.

<sup>208</sup> Interviews 1,4. and 6.

<sup>209</sup> [www.lawrf.com/Domestic.shtml](http://www.lawrf.com/Domestic.shtml)

## **Recommendations**

### **To the camp committee:**

- To reduce making homemade alcohol inform by camp committee
- To create job for the people in camp which relevant for them to do
- To arrange for the people can stay in their country as soon as possible
- To distribute camp rule and law and let the camp people know
- To make stricter rules and give punishments to the offender

### **To Royal Thai Government:**

- To allow the camp people to go in and out in suitable way
- To allow the outsider people enter to visit in the camp like foreigner people
- To let the local people rule and control their people
- To allow the camp people living as applicable to refugee right under the refugee law
- To protect and promote human rights for the refugee camp
- To allow the refugee people access to movement

### **To NGOs:**

- To provide awareness training about basic law to the people
- To create job like income generation for the people and reduce jobless problem
- To let the international people know the real situation in the camp

### **To the abusers:**

- To look inside themselves and try to understand the causes of their behavior so it is not repeated.

### **To the parents:**

- To understand that their treatment of their children will affect those children in every way, in the present and the future, and will affect future generations of their families.

# Impact of Drugs on Palaung Children in Namkham Township, Northern Shan State

By Lway Poe Taung



## Introduction

This report is based on the SPDC (State Peace Development Council) policy of allowing local people to cultivate opium from 1997 to 2001 in Northern Shan State, Burma following the SPDC's ceasefire agreement signed with the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) in 1991<sup>210</sup>. Many Palaung people in Shan State grow opium and as a result many have become addicted to the drug. The use of opium by men has had a particularly negative impact on Palaung children and women, including in the Nakham area. Despite the fact that the Myanmar strategic programme framework claimed that heroin production could be reduced 50% in the Northern Shan State, including Muse, Lashio and Kutkai by 2005,<sup>211</sup> the number of Palaung people who use heroin is still increasing in Palaung areas causing great suffering for women and children and entire communities.

This report puts forward the argument that the SPDC is using drugs as a weapon of war to control Palaung people and that it is having a negative impact on Palaung children. The SPDC allows the ethnic Chinese in Burma and ceasefire groups to cultivate opium and takes taxes from drug traffickers and opium farm owners in Palaung land. The police come to destroy the opium every year but they just collect bribes from farm owners and destroy a field of rather of poor yield that can't give taxation. Most Palaung people are poor in Northern Shan State because tea prices dropped in 1962 when the SPDC started its war on the ethnic people and then took control of the tea economy – and because after the ceasefire 1991, the SPDC continued to exert control though building a tea factory and therefore dominating private industry. Poor people can grow poppy fields, however if they do not have money to pay taxes to the police, their fields will be destroyed and they will have to go work in the Chinese poppy fields in the Palaung areas in Northern Shan State. When working people become tired, field owners give them opium and therefore many Palaung people have become addicted. Palaung drug addicts are not interested in politics or fighting and therefore it is easy for the SPDC to control the Palaung lands by allowing and even promoting drug use. This report will examine the effect of this SPDC policy on local Palaung communities in Northern Shan State.

Most of the information in this report comes from two Palaung villages in the areas of Namkham Township in Palaung land that is also called Special Region 7,

---

<sup>210</sup> <http://palaungland.org/archives/category/opinion>

<sup>211</sup> [www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar\\_strategic\\_programme\\_framework.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_strategic_programme_framework.pdf)



Northern Shan State and May 2008. Twenty-five people were interviewed of which 18 were from the two Palaung villages and seven were from the Palaung Women's Organization (PWO) office based in Mea Sot, Thailand. The subjects of the interviews were interns at the PWO, women who are the wives of drug addicts, children, headmen, nursery teachers, youth, field owners, drug addicts and drug dealers.

This report is laid out as follows; it begins with a background of the Palaung people and then the history of drugs in Northern Shan State. Part one explains that the reason people become drug addicts in Palaung areas is because of depression, work in poppy fields, and peer pressure. Part two examines the impacts of addiction on families including domestic violence; the death of parents; divorce and the abandonment of children. Part three shows the impact on women such as disease, struggle in the family and depression because of their husbands' drug use. Part four looks at the effect of an addicted father on children and how a father's addiction often means that his children must work the fields, do domestic work or become migrant workers. Children are even sold by their parents. Part five examines the economic and social impacts of addiction on local people. It explores issues of children's health, the lack of medical care and the lack of food for children. It also looks at education; Addicts' children often cannot go to school as there is no money for school fees, and addicted parents do not encourage education. Part six looks at the social impact of addiction on the community. It finds that people are hopeless, get married early, feel isolated, have anti-social behavior and go to marry in other places. Part seven concludes the study of the impact of opium addiction on the Palaung in Northern Shan State and proposes some recommendations.

## History of Drugs in Palaung Areas

Before the ceasefire and the civil war in Burma, the Palaung people lived peacefully and they didn't grow opium in Northern Shan State. According to the Poisoned Flowers Report<sup>212</sup>, there was no tradition of opium cultivation amongst the Palaung. Rather, the villagers grew good quality tea and used their income from tea cultivation to support their families. At that time the tea price was good and the people were able to earn enough income to survive. There were few people who used opium; the ones who did were mainly older people who came from opium farm areas on the China-Burma border.

---

<sup>212</sup> 'Poisoned Flowers, Opium Growing in Palaung Areas' (2006) Palaung Women's Organization (PWO), page 24.

Since the ceasefire was put in place, opium cultivation, drug trafficking and drug addiction has increased in Northern Shan State. Authorities allow ceasefire groups and militia groups to grow opium in their areas. The authorities appoint militia groups called *Tha Ka Sa Pha* that are led by Pan Say Kyaw Myint, who is an ethnic Chinese man and who stays in the Palaung lands, controlling the southeastern Namkham area. Kyaw Myint has 300-400 armed men to promote opium growing in ethnic Chinese areas of Shan State. According to Shan Drug Watch,<sup>213</sup> militia groups give protection to local opium growers and traders and in return they tax the growers and give the profits to the SPDC. In other areas also controlled by the militias there is little or no opium cultivation because the villagers are poor and cannot afford to pay taxes to the militia groups. The local people also grow other crops but it is not easy for them to get the amount of money that they can with opium cultivation.

Shan State's ethnic Chinese people's traditional livelihood is poppy farming because they don't have tea farms like the Palaung people do. The SPDC gets large taxes and bribes from militia groups controlling poppy cultivation. Palaung people also grow opium but not much like Chinese people in Palaung land. They began to grow opium because of the drop in the tea price once the Burmese military took control. The Palaung people are in the situation of not being able to earn enough income for their families to survive as they could before SPDC control.

Drug addiction is increasing in Palaung areas because of poverty and because of the low tea prices. Palaung people are now becoming migrant workers and they have to grow opium in ethnic Chinese villages to earn enough income to support their families. While they are growing opium their bosses will sometimes provide them with it for personal use, saying that they don't have money to give to the workers and paying them with drugs instead.

The PSLA took action on the Palaung drug problem and worked to reduce addiction but after the PSLA surrendered to the SPDC in 2005, addiction has grown because the Burmese military does not do rehabilitation for addiction as the PSLA did. Even if the PSLA tried to do rehabilitation now, the local drug addicts would no longer have reason to respect their power and would be unwilling to rehabilitate because they know that the PSLA has no weapons. Although the PSLA had weapons to collect some addicts to come to rehabilitation camps in the past, some of the local addicts didn't come and ran away. The PSLA didn't allow people

---

<sup>213</sup> <http://shanland.org/resources/bookspub/ShanDrugWatch%28Eng%29.pdf>, page 16.

to grow opium but now that the SPDC is in control, they allow local people and ceasefire groups to grow opium. This is part of their strategy for total control.

## **Current Opium Situation**

In the current situation local people grow opium because local authorities encourage them to grow poppies and then collect taxes. According to reports from Southern Shan State, Infantry Battalion 245 based in Mongani went to ask for a bribe of 150,000 kyat (\$120) from the an opium fields owner on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 2008 in Loi Pang Hawk Mountain in Wan Yart village. Wan Pa village and Nam Hu village were forced to pay on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2008.<sup>214</sup>

One of villagers said, “They told us to plant and collected taxes from us” in a Shan Agency for News report. The report further claimed that every District Peace and Development Council (DPDC) and Infantry Battalion went to look for opium fields and collected taxes from local people in every township in Shan State in early 2008. The authorities will sometimes destroy the least desirable crops so that they are able to show foreign countries that they are doing something.<sup>215</sup>

Most local people currently grow poppy under military control in Northern Shan State. According to SHAN, a trader in the northern Shan State, Infantry Battalion 23 allowed villagers in Namkham Township to grow poppies, about 690 acres, so that they could collect taxes.<sup>216</sup> In December and January 2008, 10 people from the local government including police, immigration, the fire brigade, and the forest ministry combined forces to destroy the opium in Palaung areas. However, there is still poppy cultivation because the government was ignoring the opium growing in October and November in 2007 by taking bribes from villagers, said the Palaung government of Special Region 7.<sup>217</sup>

## **Background of the Palaung people and Namkham Township**

Palaung (Ta’ang) people are one of the indigenous nationalities in Burma. The Palaung people live in the rural mountains of Palaung land, northern Shan State. Some of them also live in urban areas in towns in southern and eastern Shan State.

---

<sup>214</sup> [http://www.shanland.org/drugs/2008/junta\\_demands\\_paid\\_poppy\\_tax](http://www.shanland.org/drugs/2008/junta_demands_paid_poppy_tax), 21 February 2008.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.shanland.org/Poppy+Fields+Flourish+Under+Junta+Grace%3A+Shan+trader>

<sup>217</sup> <http://palaungland.org/archives/185>

The population of Palaung people is over one million and over 90% are Buddhists; less than ten percent are Christian and animist.

Palaung (Ta'ang) originate from Mon-Khmer stock. The Palaung have a long history and a strong sense of unique identity. They have their own language and literature and a distinctive traditional culture such as food, dress, and



*Poppy field in Palaung area. (Photo by PWO-Palaung Women's Organization).*

festivals. In the past they also enjoyed their own territory and a self-sufficient economy. They have an army called the Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA) formed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1976. The PSLA fought against the Burmese military to get autonomy and many Palaung people have become internally displaced. The PSLA took a ceasefire with the Burmese military in 1991. However, The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) forced the PSLA to fully surrender on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, 2005, and took all of their weapons at this time.<sup>218</sup>

The lands of the Palaung people have many ruby and sapphire mines and are rich in minerals such as silver, zinc, gold and aluminum. The Palaung have a long tradition of tea-growing in upland areas. Their tea is very famous in Burma for its high quality. While the main export is tea, the Palaung also grow a variety of temperate climate fruit crops such as apples, plums, avocados and pears, which are highly valued in the lowland areas.

Research for this report was conducted in Namkhan Township, located in Northern Shan State. The area is bordered by China and by Kachin State. There are 20 villages in Namkham Township. The population is 30,000 and other ethnic groups include the Chinese, Kachin, Burman, Palaung, Chinese, Shan and Muslim. The main export is tea and rice. The main profession in Namkhan Township is agriculture and specifically tea and rice crops. Some people collect food and other things from the forest.

---

<sup>218</sup> 43<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the (Ta ang) Palaung National revolution Day, PSLF, pages 50 53.

Before PSLA took the ceasefire the local people grew tea and farmed rice every year for their income. They had enough income to survive and support their families. After the ceasefire some villages started to grow opium because the Burmese military controlled the tea industry so the tea prices had become lower and people could not get enough income as they had before. Under Burmese military control the people are allowed to grow opium because they get bribes from opium field owners. A lot of human rights violations such as forced labor, Portering, forced relocation, corruption and drug problems have increased.

## **Motivation for Drug Use**

A lot of people were poor after the civil war in northern Shan State. The Burmese military allowed people to do poppy cultivation in Northern Shan State from 1997 to 2001 and many people started to grow poppy fields. Many people became drug users during this time. Many people tried opium and then they grew it so that they wouldn't need to buy it from other people. Some Palaung said 'we are growing opium if we don't smoke it who will smoke it for us, it is for our happiness.' Palaung people grow poppies themselves and pay taxes to the SPDC, they also work in other people's poppy fields. Poppies are available and people have become addicted to them. People also use drugs as medicine as the people are depressed for many reasons.

## **Taxation**

Taxation is one reason that people are becoming drug addicts in Palaung areas. People can grow poppies because the SPDC accepts their bribes in Burma. Some opium growers give taxes to the authorities so that they will stop destroying their poppy fields.

***"The police came in the village three times to collect money from us. We have to pay 20,000 [kyat] per time. One headman said, "I have to collect money from the village and give it to them." <sup>219</sup>***

- Two field owners

---

<sup>219</sup> Interview 14.



Some people report that they had to pay 100,000 kyat when the police came in to their village to destroy their poppy plantation this year. According to SHAN, the junta demands payment for poppy tax. The SPDC declared that Burma will be free of opium cultivation in 2014, but they still collect taxes from opium growers. Drug entrepreneurs report that “Opium cultivation is back to the level of the 2001-2002 seasons in Shan State when the military authorities launched an all-out war on drugs in Northern Shan State.”<sup>220</sup> Opium cultivation requires that people pay taxes to the SPDC and it also creates many drug addicts in the community. Under this system, no one can be free.

## **Working for Family Income**

Most Palaung people are facing problems with their livelihoods after the tea price became low and they had to go to work in other places. Many Palaung people go to work on poppy fields in Chinese villages in the Palaung areas of Shan State controlled by Kyaw Myint's Militia groups. When they come back they are drug addicts because often their bosses would give them drugs instead of a salary. Sometimes ethnic Chinese in Burma use drugs for forming relationships with their friends. When their friends come to visit their homes they smoke opium. One of the drugs users reported that he started to use drugs and then there were problems between him and his wife.

***“I started to use drugs when my wife left me at the time I went to farm in a Chinese village. One day I got stomachache and the farm owner gave me opium to take as a medicine. After that I tried opium again and when my wife heard she left me. I came home and I tried to find her but she didn't come back. So I went and I have been staying with the farm owner for a long time, I started using heroin there. I have only come back to the village because my mother died.”<sup>221</sup>***

Another Palaung man went to a Chinese village with his family to be a teacher in Kon Kang, Palaung area. The Chinese villagers allowed and helped him to grow poppy in their village now, consequently, he is a big drug addict. Later his family came to stay with his mother in the village but he didn't support his family and he went to the logging area in Kachin State. After that his wife took their youngest child and went to China to marry a Chinese man there. Two of the children were left with the man's mother and she sent them to different orphanages to study. One of his daughters is in Mogok and one of his sons is in Maline.

---

<sup>220</sup> [www.shanland.org/drugs/2008/junta demands paid poppy tax](http://www.shanland.org/drugs/2008/junta_demands_paid_poppy_tax), 21 February 2008.

<sup>221</sup> Interview 14.

## Using Drugs for Medicine

People use drugs as a medicine when they feel tired or sick from working very hard and it leads them to become a drug addict. According to a UNODC report on life in the Wa hills in September, 2006. "One of the villagers who stay in Yong Ran village, in Wein Kao district got wounded when he was 17 years old it was so painful that he uses opium to feel better and now he has become an opium addict."<sup>222</sup>

## Depression

Some drug users were depressed because of fights with their family or their friends. Some people become depressed when their dreams do not come true and so they try opium and later they become drug users.

***"One of my friends wants to marry his lover but their parents will not allow it. He feels depressed and tried drugs so now he is a drug addict."*** <sup>223</sup>

- Palaung drug addict

## Peer Pressure

Men also feel peer pressure to use drugs from each other. Men will tell their friends 'you are not men if you don't use drugs and after you use drugs we will feel happy'. If someone is married and they don't use drugs their friends will say that the man is afraid of their wife. Men do not want their friends to look down on them and that why they try to use drugs. They convince each and become the drug addicts. According to SHAN's annual report in 2007, a villager in Yong Moot said, "I started to use opium when my friends told me about the "heavenly pleasure" they left me when they use smoke opium so I started use too during a week I become drug user I couldn't stop using opium"<sup>224</sup>

## Impacts of Addiction on Families

Many Palaung people report that families have faced domestic violence because of drugs and that it has a negative impact on children. The members of the family become depressed when they have a problem in their family. Sometimes the children may lose their parents and will become orphans. Sometimes the children

---

<sup>222</sup> [www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/reducing the demand for drugs.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/reducing_the_demand_for_drugs.pdf), page 4.

<sup>223</sup> Interview 10.

<sup>224</sup> [www.unodc.org/pdf/annual report 2007/southeastasia.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/annual_report_2007/southeastasia.pdf), page 63.

will be forced to drop out of school and start working to support the family when the family is getting poor and does not have enough food. Some children have to stay in other houses to look after babies and become housekeepers.

## **Domestic Violence**

Many villagers said that domestic violence increases in local areas because the husbands are involved in drugs. Most wives and children have to work hard to support their family without help from husbands. Not only wives and children have to support themselves but also they have to pay money to the father for his drugs. When wives and children have no money to give their husband or father they are beaten. Many parents are often fighting and getting divorced so children face social problems because their parents cannot support them to attend school.

“When we have no money to pay him he close the door and beat my mother at the same time we can not shout if we shout he will beat more because he afraid our neighbor to help us, That why nobody can help us when he beat my us. We go to work in the farm everyday we afraid to be getting dark because when we go back home the problems are waiting us.”<sup>225</sup>

Children have no chance to stop their father’s drug use. Even if they can stop their father from using drugs their father will become an alcoholic.

***“Before he drank alcohol he used drugs for 3 or 4 years. After he stopped using drugs he started to drink alcohol and sometimes there is not enough food for the family to share. Their father is drunk all the time and sometimes he beats them when he is drunk.”<sup>226</sup>***

## **Divorce**

Domestic violence in broken families has a negative impact on children because wives are beaten by their husbands all the time. They get divorced when the mother becomes depressed and she cannot continue in the situation. Divorce has a negative impact on both the wife and the children because they will all be looked down upon by the community. It’s difficult for the children because they still have both parents, but their parents are divorced. Their mother may marry someone

---

<sup>225</sup> Interview 25.

<sup>226</sup> Interview 21.

else in a different community. If they stay with their father he will not care them well and will force them to find money for him to buy drugs. If they stay with their mother they may be beaten by their stepfather. The children cannot stay with their parents, either their mother or their father, and they have to stay with their grandparents. If they don't have grandparents they have to stay with their relative.

**"My father and my mother divorce when I was 4 years old, I get new father but we don't stay with them we just stay with my grandparents."**<sup>227</sup>

-Palaung child

## **Orphans**

Many Palaung families are broken apart and children become orphans and single parent's children because of drugs. The money that father makes goes to buying drugs but it is not enough because drugs are expensive. Fathers sell their property and family possessions to get drug. If they have no property and family possessions to sell, they steal cattle, wood and other things to sell and get drugs. If the villagers report the stolen things to the militia of village, the militia group will arrest the father and their wives become depressed and sometimes die. If the wives die the children are left only with their fathers.

Although these children still have a father they look like a child who doesn't have parents because their father doesn't look after them because fathers are busy working and getting drugs. If their father cannot find money he will force children to find money for him to buy drugs. Some Palaung children become orphans but they cannot stay in orphanages and they just stay with other people to be house keepers and baby-sitters in their communities. Although they want to stay in orphanages they need to go other places and they need money for their trip to go to stay in the orphanages, in bigger towns and in other districts.

**"My mother got a heart attack and died when I was in 5 standard in 2004. She died because of my father, because he sold our farm and our things now I am working to support my father because if I don't give money to him, he will steal from the village. One of my brothers is in the orphanages"**<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>227</sup> Interview 1.

<sup>228</sup> Interviews 4, 6, 9, 18 and 21.

## Abandonment

Some parents give their own children to other people because the father is a drug user and the mother is either divorced or dead. One of the villagers said that her brother, who is a drug user, didn't look after his children at the time his wife went to China to marry with a Chinese man. He gave his children to his mother. His mother also could not support his children so she sent his son to Maline and his daughter to an orphanage in Mogok to study.

***"After my mother died, my father give my sister to my aunt. She has stayed with my aunt until now and has become my aunt's daughter. but my father often comes and asks money from my aunt."***<sup>229</sup>

## Selling Property & Family Possessions

In many cases interviewees reported that drugs addicts not only demanded money from their wives and children but also sold their property and took any of their family possession that they could sell to buy drugs. This causes greater stress and poverty for the family and make its very difficult to send the children to school. Rather, children have to work hard to survive.

***"He pawned their tea farm, land and rice farm then he took everything. If the prices he gets is 100 kyat he gets drugs. When he doesn't have alcohol to drink he also steals their possessions."***<sup>230</sup>

## Impact on Women

Many people said women suffer most from their husbands' drug abuse. Wives have to work hard to support the family and to look after the children. The women are also beat by the men when they have no money and they feel depressed and have diseases.

***"My father never supports us because he uses drugs. He also works but the money he earns is not enough for his drugs. He takes something from my family and he exchanges it and sells it to buy drugs. He often beats my mother because of drugs because when he doesn't have drugs to use he gets angry at us."***<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> Interview 18.

<sup>230</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>231</sup> Interview 18.



## Disease

Wives get many kind of diseases from their husbands who use drugs and suffer from things such as cancer and heart attacks. If their husbands are drug addicts wives get depressed and get diseases because when drug users want to use drugs they care about nothing they will do anything to get drugs. They sell their families properties or steal and blame it on the drugs. Their wives become depressed get diseases and die. Some wives face HIV/AIDS because when their husbands become big drug addicts and inject drugs they will get HIV/AIDS and can spread the infection to their wives and children. According to the Poison Flower Report one Shan man had HIV/AIDS and married a Palaung woman. One month after they married he was sick and died; nobody knew he had HIV/AIDS and after his death his wife married his younger brother. Later they also died.<sup>232</sup>

## Struggling for the Family

Most villagers report that women have to take responsibly to support the family, they have work hard to feed their children and husband because their husbands are drug addicts, they ignore their families. Everything they earn is for their drugs. Their wives have to carry teak, firewood, charcoal, and wood to keep the family surviving.

***“My mother carries charcoal to support us; sometimes she picks tea when they don’t have charcoal to carry.”<sup>233</sup>***

Some women have to carry their children to pick tea when their children are young. Some give their children to stay with their parents when they go to work in another place.

***“My mother cannot do hard work she had stomachache but when my sisters and brothers were young she had to carry them and pick tea.”<sup>234</sup>***

Their husbands not only stop supporting the family but also sell their property and take things from their houses in exchange for drugs.

---

<sup>232</sup> ‘Poisoned Flowers’, page 44.

<sup>233</sup> Interview 3.

<sup>234</sup> Interview 6.

***“Yesterday I went to my tea farm and my father stole my dry tea and my rice that why I have no rice to eat today.”<sup>235</sup>***

Not only does the husband sell the family’s possessions and steal, but he also demands money from the family and threatens to beat them.

***“He never support us sine he became a drug addict until now and although he doesn’t support us he asks for money”<sup>236</sup>***

## **Women’s Depression**

Women become depressed by their husbands’ drug use. Women are left to solve the problem when their husbands borrow money from other people and they don’t pay back, and then lender comes to ask for money in their house and their wives have to pay it back. Women are ashamed when they have no money to pay back because the lender will say something to them. When the husbands sell their property wives feel sad and become depressed.

*“My mother died because of my father because he sells our farm and our goods. After he stole other goods to buy drugs, when he does like that the militia often come in our house find him and then the lenders also demanded their money which my father borrowed so my mother got a heart attack and died.”<sup>237</sup>*

## **Affects of Drug Use on Children**

Most children of drug users become either farmers, domestic workers or migrant workers.

## **Farming**

Many Palaung children have to work to help provide for their family. Some children have to work in other places and some have to carry charcoal and firewood with their mother. Some have to support all of their family members’ needs when their mother cannot work.

---

<sup>235</sup> Interview 20.

<sup>236</sup> Interview 5.

<sup>237</sup> Interview 18.