



“I followed him and
I could not go back”

[IDI, 26 year old woman,
Yangon]

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

Stephanie Miedema, San Shwe, Aye Thiri Kyaw



Objectives



BACKGROUND

What do we know about women's status & IPV in Myanmar?

STUDY

What did we measure, how & where?

RESULTS

How do social inequalities influence women's trajectories into marriage in Myanmar ?

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

DISCUSSION

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



Uzbekistan

Mongolia

North Korea

Turkmenistan

Kyrgyzstan

South Korea

Tajikistan

Afghanistan

Pakistan

C h i n a

East China Sea

Nepal

Bhutan

Taiwan

India

Bangladesh

Myanmar

South China Sea

Laos

Bay of Bengal

Thailand

Cambodia

Vietnam

Andaman Sea

Sri Lanka

Brunei

Narratives of gender equality & high status of women in Myanmar

Hpon: Men's innate glory and holiness in Burmese Buddhism

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

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

+ BACKGROUND | STUDY | RESULTS | DISCUSSION

38 in-depth interviews with survivors of IPV (psychological and physical abuse)

Purposive sampling with community advocates in Yangon Mawlamyine

Participatory data analysis adapting grounded theory approaches

Non-generalizable but provides insight into patterns of IPV among women in Myanmar

Women's narratives of IPV in Myanmar resonate with global patterns of abuse within intimate relationships

Gendered power dynamics

Men's experiences of trauma

Alcohol & drug abuse

Women's childhood adversity

Community silence

Gender & sexual norms

Stigma around divorce

Psychological
Physical &
Sexual
IPV

Emotional,
physical, sexual
& social
consequences

Coping
strategies &
help-seeking

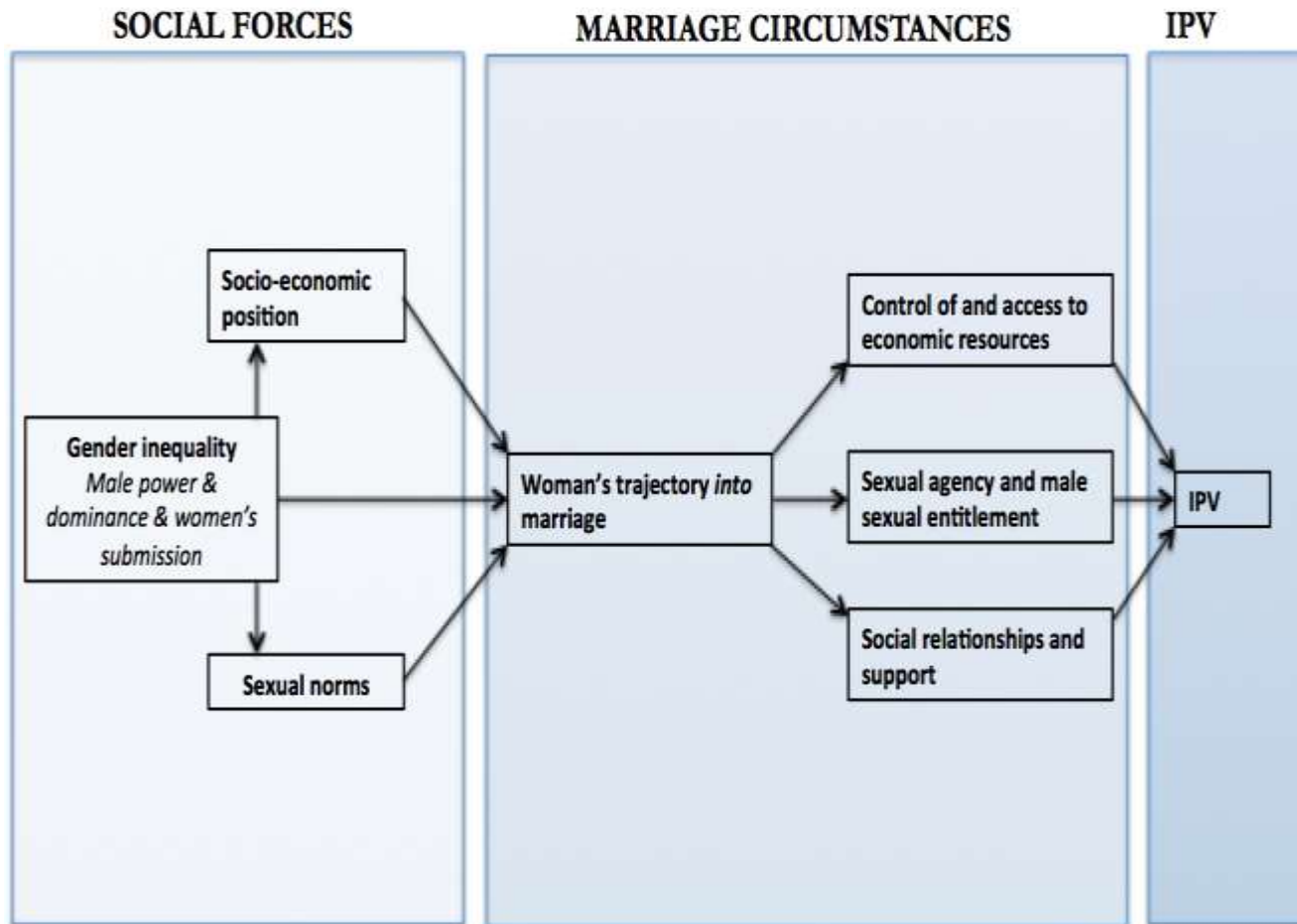
Women's transitions into marriage

How do social inequalities influence women's trajectories into marriage in Myanmar ?

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



How do social forces influence women's trajectories into marriage with implications for IPV risk in Myanmar?



Elopement was a common trajectory into marriage.

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

- In-depth interview with 54 year old woman from Mawlamyine

Norms around women's sexuality & the conflation of sex and marriage constrained women's ability to control the elopement process.

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

- In-depth interview with a 43-year old woman from Mawlamyine

Women's trajectories into marriage characterized by social insecurity & isolation **due to socio-economic position**

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

- In-depth interview with a 28-year old woman from Mawlamyine

Women's socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect with **gender inequitable systems of the family**

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

- In-depth interview with a 28-year old woman from Mawlamyine

Trajectories *into* marriage, shaped by social inequalities, pre-coded power distribution in future marriages.

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

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

Social isolation and little natal kin support curtailed women's social capital and left women vulnerable to abuse

Women's level of power within marriage may be predicted by the conditions around women's entry into marriage

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

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

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



Thank You & Questions

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

Special appreciation to the women who willingly shared their stories

Contact information: stephanie.miedema@emory.edu