

Documentation

Dataset M4. Key informant interviews in Shan state, 2019

Data collection resulting from 57 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with interviewees in Shan State, eastern Myanmar. Interviews explore narratives around drugs across and within different communities, and a focus on history, political economy, health and livelihoods, and ethnography with respect to local drug problems in Shan state.

Interviews have been carried out in Shan or Burmese and were audio-recorded when interviewees allowed this. Else notes were taken. All interviews have been transcribed translated to English.

The dataset consists of 131 Word files (transcripts and translations) and a data list providing demographic characteristics and context information for the interviews.

Dataset location: [10.5255/UKDA-SN-855564](#)

Dataset owner: Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN) 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.

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 Shan State.

Methodology

The aim of the Year 2 research was to conduct in-depth fieldwork on a selected number of key research themes. These themes were selected based on emerging findings from the Year 1 interviews:

- Drugs and systems of borderland rule: Living with militias
- Impacts of drug use: Young people's lives amidst drugs and disorder
- Drugs and development: Changing levels of drug cultivation in Shan State, exploring areas of rising and falling opium production in southern Shan State
- Drugs and development: The dynamics of the drug economy in Shan State's border towns Muse and Tachilek.

A set of questions in Shan to guide interviews was developed by SHAN in collaboration with KRC 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 recruited by Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN). They were selected because they are active members of their community and engaged in addressing social issues, have prior experience of conducting research and are enthused by the project. Many are active within the Tai Youth Network.

Alongside the interviews also photographs were taken during fieldwork.

Location

Shan State, Myanmar.

Since the 1990s, northern Shan State has become Myanmar's most important overland trade corridor, linking Mandalay to the China border. Vast revenues have been generated through logging, mining, agribusiness, hydropower dams and other infrastructural projects, such as the oil and gas pipelines linking Yunnan in China with deep-sea ports on Myanmar's western seaboard. Vast revenues also continue to be generated from the drug trade. Shan State produces more than 90% of Myanmar's opium, which has provided an important livelihood for an estimated 200,000–300,000 households. Much of this opium is converted to morphine base or heroin within Myanmar's borders and then sent to China. Shan State has also become one of the world's largest producers of methamphetamine pills, known colloquially as 'yama' or 'yaba', and more recently crystal meth or 'ice'. This is closely linked to a rise in production and consumption of the drug in neighbouring Thailand.

Interviews were conducted by teams of three field researchers each, based in northern, southern and eastern Shan state.

The townships and villages where interviews took place were selected as areas where the field researchers were most familiar and have existing networks.

Southern Shan State: Taunggyi, Karli

Eastern Shan State: Chiang Mai, Tachilek, Measai, Keng Tung, Loi Kaw Wan

Northern Shan State: Lashio, Muse, Mong Khon (Mang Shi), Hsenwi, Nam Kham

Time period

Interviews were carried out during May – June 2019.

Sample selection

The field research has primarily focused on interviewing youth leaders, community leaders, civilians (including women, youth, elders), Shan Nationalities League for Democracy members, organisations working on drug issues and (ex) drug users and their family.

Interviewees were mostly selected by snowballing, starting from connections SHAN already had with local media networks and youth groups. In addition, they 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 and by further removing detailed information on a person's location, organisation, employment and family circumstances.