

Possible crimes against humanity by Burmese military in Chin State, Burma

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The health impacts of human rights violations in Chin State, home to the Chin ethnic minority in Burma, are substantial and the indirect health outcomes of human rights violations probably dwarf the mortality from direct killings. These findings from a study by Richard Sollom from Physicians for Human Rights, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, and colleagues will be published in this week's *PLoS Medicine* and should encourage the international community to intensify its efforts to reduce human rights violations in Burma.

The military junta, which seized power in Burma in 1962, frequently confiscates land unlawfully, demands forced labor, and uses violence—actions which have left Burma with some of the poorest health indicators in the world.

The authors carried out a population-based assessment of health and human rights in Chin State, an [ethnic minority](#) area in western Burma where multiple reports of human rights abuses have been documented. The authors used a multi-stage household cluster sampling design to interview heads of household on demographics, access to health care, health status, food insecurity, forced displacement, forced labor, and other human rights violations during the previous 12 months.

The authors found that 91.9% of the 621 households interviewed reported at least one episode of a household member being forced to work in the preceding 12 months. Other human rights violations reported included beatings or torture (14.8 of households), religious or ethnic

persecutions (14.1% of households) and detention or imprisonment of a family member (5.9% of households). 42.6% of the households experienced moderate to severe household hunger and human rights violations related to food insecurity were common. For example, more than half the households were forced to give up food out of fear of [violence](#) and a statistical analysis indicated that the prevalence of household hunger was 3.56 times higher in households that had experienced food-related human rights violations than in households that had not experienced such violations.

The authors conclude: "Widespread reporting of rights abuses in Chin State against a civilian population by government forces may amount to crimes against humanity, though such a determination would have to be made by a U.N. commission of inquiry or the International Criminal Court."

More information: Sollom R, Richards AK, Parmar P, Mullany LC, Lian SB, et al. (2011) Health and Human Rights in Chin State, Western Burma: A Population-Based Assessment Using Multistaged Household Cluster Sampling. PLoS Med 8(2): e1001007.
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