**INTRODUCTION**

The project started with a thick description observation at the Karen Student Association (KSA) gathering for my Medical Anthropology course to better understand unspoken gender roles between men and women and the impacts of having a space for Karen students, especially at a predominantly White Institution. The project explores the journey of Knyaw women who immigrated from Kawthoolei or refugee camps between the Thai-Burma border, their generational trauma, the invisible parameters that confine them to act a specific role as a Knyaw-American woman in higher education, traditional healing methods versus Western healthcare and how that overall impacts how they navigate and approach their health diagnosis through the concepts of agency and social suffering as a common theme.

**METHOD**

Qualitative Assessment

- Recruitment survey sent to KSA group chat and outreach to recommended individuals
- Interview topics: Navigating health, higher education experiences as an immigrant, gendered experiences among Knyaw/Karen Women, expectations within household vs. western society, manifestation of generational trauma into health
- Four Knyaw/Karen Women (ages 23 – 27 years old)
- All names used are pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality
- Semi-structured, open-ended interviews on zoom (November 30th – December 5th 2023)

**THEMES & EXPERIENCES**

- **Theme 1: Social suffering and agency are intertwined.** Participants had complex relationships with their mothers as mothers tended to perpetuate stereotypes and place limitations on them based on traditional cultural values and the idea of pleasing the Kaw Law Wah [white people]. Participants attempted to regain agency by 1) going through their health-journey alone or in secrecy; 2) Deciding what form of care is best for them; 3) Learning to heal generational trauma by pursuing higher education and a career.
- **Theme 2: Faith, Loss, and Healing.** Many healing methods in the Karen community are based on animism. Traditions are harder to let go when grieving natural land loss in the genocide. Moreover, school is more challenging as Knyaw – immigrant women have to worry about family and friends back in the refugee camps and the brigades.

**CONCLUSION**

Analysis:

- **Theme 1:** Social suffering and agency are intertwined. Participants had complex relationships with their mothers as mothers tended to perpetuate stereotypes and place limitations on them based on traditional cultural values and the idea of pleasing the Kaw Law Wah [white people]. Participants attempted to regain agency by 1) going through their health-journey alone or in secrecy; 2) Deciding what form of care is best for them; 3) Learning to heal generational trauma by pursuing higher education and a career.
- **Theme 2:** Faith, Loss, and Healing. Many healing methods in the Karen community are based on animism. Traditions are harder to let go when grieving natural land loss in the genocide. Moreover, school is more challenging as Knyaw – immigrant women have to worry about family and friends back in the refugee camps and the brigades.

**Bibliography:**


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