HEALING FROM SOCIAL SUFFERING:
WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE
IN A DRUG ABUSE AFFLICTED, JINGPO COMMUNITY
IN YUNNAN, CHINA

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M.A. (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)

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ABSTRACT

In one of the most drug abuse afflicted regions, the border area between Myanmar and Yunnan, women in the community search for a way to break away from the pervasive harm of heroin drug abuse using all possible means available to them. This thesis reports an ethnographic narrative case study of eleven married Jingpo women living with drug abusing husbands in a rural Jingpo hilltribe community.

Revealed through women’s personal accounts, this thesis demonstrates how married Jingpo women made sense of their ‘suffering’ experiences of living with their drug abusing husbands, how they chose to survive and resume normality of everyday life. This research examines women’s experiences by associating them with gender power relations, with its social, cultural, political or historical contexts and it shows how these wider contexts may sustain drug abuse or fuel the spread of HIV. Throughout the lengthy years of everyday life devastated by drug abuse, the Jingpo community underwent a gender transformation – women went beyond their victimhood, exercised their autonomy and established a collective voice of alliance to struggle as ‘warriors’ against their subordination to men. Jingpo women’s collective response indicates that a community-based drug abuse rehabilitation approach should be a drug user-friendly alternative to the government-operated drug detoxification, that is, to quit drug by being with supportive family members and friends in the community. The findings also suggest that a holistic, culturally specific drug abuse/AIDS resilience approach should be developed to mobilize community resources and rebuild the community’s hope for change.

KEY WORDS:   DRUG ABUSE / MARRIED WOMEN / JINGPO HILLTRIBE/ GENDER / SOCIAL SUFFERING/

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