

Insurgency and its Effect on Family Life, Mental Health and Education: An Analysis of Mizoram

Lynda Zohmingliani*
Lalmangaihzuali**

Introduction

Mizoram, one of the smallest states of India, situated in the northeastern hills of India, is now awarded the distinction of being the happiest state in India based on a number of factors, amid a raging pandemic. If one takes a look at the history of the state 45 years back, the situation was very much different from the young region fighting insurgency and none of its people at peace. Mizos, a rather naïve tribe located in the far northeast corner of the country had virtually no idea about the other parts of India. They did not know human rights and were not aware of any atrocities committed against them. The insurgency had a detrimental impact on the health and family life of the people and the effects continue even today although the state has now become one of the most peaceful of the northeast states.

In its struggle for independence, Mizoram experienced insurgency for two decades back from 1966 to 1986. Insurgency should not be confused with terrorism but the conditions that prevail are much the same in these two circumstances. Terrorism is the use of violence, especially murder and bombing, to achieve political aims or to force a government to do something¹. On the other hand, an insurgency is a condition of revolt against a government that is less than an organised revolution and that is not recognized as belligerency². However, it is not without violence and the resultant physical and mental pain. When insurgency took place in Mizoram, not only did the people's everyday life suffer, their whole morale was weighed down to such a level that they had no pride left. Young and old, male and female could not be left alone and everyone had to endure the physical and mental torture of the disruption it brought.

* Associate Professor, Department of Education, Mizoram University, Tanhril, Aizawl, Mizoram.

** Senior Research Fellow, Department of Education, Mizoram University, Tanhril, Aizawl, Mizoram.

Rationale

It is important for every society to know about its history and how it has developed to the present status. The development of Mizoram cannot be interpreted without mentioning its struggle for independence. The statehood that the people of Mizoram are enjoying right now has been fought out with a great struggle and torment. The relocation of people and the treatment they received from both sections, i.e., Mizo National Front and Indian army, had a severe impact on the life of Mizo tribes not only physically but also mentally. Family life was extremely tampered with, due to drastic measures taken up by the government at that time. Since family life closely affects the mental state of a person, it can be easily assumed that in this case too, the mental health of several individuals must have been affected deeply. This present study is thus an attempt to find out just how deep Mizoram's struggle for independence affected the family life and mental health of people, their education and their daily lives. The findings of this work are expected to yield much-needed information regarding the impact of insurgency and any form of disturbance of daily living like violation of human rights. It is also expected that such work should also bring out other researchers to work on the same topic in different locations. Most of all, it is envisioned that the results would educate people regarding the protection of human rights in times of difficulty and the value of peace for all humanity.

Review of Related Literature

Vanchiau, (2014) in his work entitled *Rambuai Literature* which contains a detailed account of the insurgency, wrote about the occurrence of village grouping and the appointment of 'Pointers' or 'Kawktu' who did the job of anonymously pointing out the insurgents. The book also contained songs and poems all lamenting the loss of

loved ones, the need for forgiveness and the beauty of Mizo life.

Zoramthanga (2016), in his book entitled *Mizo Hnam Movement History*, gave a detailed account of the nationalism movement of the Mizos. The author wrote about how nationalism arose in the minds of the Mizos, how insurgency started and his life as an insurgent. The book also contained how peace was gained after a long period of insurgency.

R. Vanlawma (1989), in his autobiography titled *Ka Ram Leh Kei*, penned down his experience of the Mizoram Insurgency. He wrote about the Mautam Famine, how the MNF was formed and how insurgency was started. He also wrote about the educational status, society administration and village grouping. The book also contained how Mizoram became a Union Territory.

Lalsawia (1994), in his book *Zoram Hming-Hmel*, discussed how Mizoram was introduced to politics, how Mizoram was once one of the districts of Assam, how it had a District Council when it became a Union Territory and a fully-fledged state. It also contains how Mizoram experienced and suffered twenty years of insurgency, how the Mizos suffered ruthless assault, village grouping and famines.

It is apparent from the reviewed literature that the insurgency affected a wide range of people inside Mizoram. Not only was their livelihood disturbed, but their family itself was also torn apart due to insurgency. It can only be assumed how much all these would have affected the mental status of the people. This makes the present study relevant from a scholarly point of view

Objectives

The present study was conducted with the following objectives in mind:

1. To write a brief history of insurgency in Mizoram.
2. To prepare an age profile of sample individuals who had experienced insurgency in Mizoram.
3. To analyse the effect of the insurgency on the family life of Mizos.
4. To find out the effect of the insurgency on students' attendance of schools.
5. To study the effect of regrouping of families on the educational development of students.
6. To assess the result of going underground on the education of students.
7. To study the effect of the insurgency on the mental health of Mizos.

Methodology

The present study is an attempt to find out Mizoram's struggle for independence and its effect on family life

and mental health. Therefore, it is mainly descriptive in its approach and analytical in nature. It tries to describe the status of insurgency within the state and at the same time, it also tries to analyse the effect of this situation on the educational development of students.

Population and Sample

The population for the present study comprised of all individuals who have firsthand experience of the insurgency in Mizoram. A total of 100 individuals were randomly selected from Aizawl city as samples for the study.

Collection of Data

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources.

For the secondary data, historical accounts written by Mizo historians as well as electronic sources were made use of.

For primary data, the investigators prepared an interview schedule as well as a questionnaire that was administered to the sample individuals after taking their consent.

Analysis of Data

As the present study is mainly descriptive in its approach, descriptive statistics like percentages were mainly used for the analysis of data.

Findings

1. Brief History of Insurgency in Mizoram

Mizoram faced Mautam (Bamboo flowering) in 1956 which led to a massive increase in the rodent population and thus caused a severe famine. Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was formed for the welfare of people suffering famine. After the famine was over in 1961, the non-political organisation MNFF was transformed into Mizo National Front (MNF). Right from the start, the MNF grew gradually and soon covered the whole of Mizoram³. There was no area out of their reach and many young men were recruited as members with a dream of fighting for an independent Mizoram.

Under the command of Pu Laldenga, MNF gained a strong back up from the Mizo people who were influenced by the idea to create a separate Mizo Nation which was the MNF party doctrine. On February 28, 1966, the bottled-up anger against Assam for ignoring their plea during the famines, against India as they believed the country did

them no justice, found its release in the form of Operation Jeriko. In preparation for this unprecedented assault, the Mizo district had been declared a disturbed area under the Assam Disturbed Area Act 1955 and the fate of the people was sealed.

Mizoram faced its Dark Period from that moment. The insurgents based in the forests and attacked the armed forces occasionally. The Indian army through Lt. General Sam Manekshaw proposed a spatialization of villages⁴. The Mizos were subjected to the regrouping. Three or four villages were grouped into one village. Once the villages were emptied, they were burnt out with the plan to leave nothing behind to sustain the insurgents. The sufferings of the people those times were inexplicable because even the MNF armies posed threat to them. Many men suffered assaults from the Indian army, women were raped. Curfews were imposed now and then which causes the people to not be able to look after their cultivation and thus ended in another famine in certain villages. Schools were closed and the children then could not continue their education. If the army suspected anyone, they imprisoned them. Revd Chuauthuama, one of Mizo's spiritual leaders, was also a victim of this. He wrote that he was trying to pursue secondary education at Jowai but the army seized him and imprisoned him though he had no intention of joining the MNF. He was imprisoned in Tezpur jail for almost three years along with 100 Mizo men⁵. The regrouping was completed in 1970. As many as 516 out of a total of 764 villages were regrouped⁶. During 1966 to 1970, the MNF fought with the Indian Army and hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands of them were imprisoned.

To make matters worse for the masses, villages were grouped on February 1967 by the order of Commissioner B. C. Carriapa who used D. I. R. Article 56⁷. People had to leave their beloved homes without any warnings and had to try to acclimatize to a new village, new neighbours and new families. At the same time, people belonging to the grouping centre also suffered a lot too because each family was added with another three to ten families and living condition was hectic and unhygienic. Starvation, for sure, would not be an alien word to the people and to think that hospitals or health centres, or least medicines were hardly available was such a tragedy. The second grouping of villages was ordered under The Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act of 1953⁸ which was worse than the first.

The central government offered the proposal to turn the Mizo Hills into Union Territory in 1971, and this proposal was accepted on the condition that UT will be soon converted into a full-fledged state. Thus in January 1972, the Union Territory of Mizoram came into existence. Several changes took place including education after

this time and Pachhunga University College, Lunglei Government College and the erstwhile Zirtiri Women's college were born during this time. In 1986 the Union of India under Rajiv Gandhi and the MNF signed the Mizoram Peace Accord and Pu Laldenga was made the chief minister.

2. In order to prepare a sample profile of individuals who had faced insurgency at various stages of their lives, the sample individuals were divided according to age groups and findings were as follows:

- Out of 100 respondents 8 were above 80 years old and were 38 years old (\pm) during the insurgency. They might have been parents during the insurgency period who considered their priority to be their family, especially their children. They might have been gravely threatened by the insurgency, feeling the need to protect their family from the Indian army and their responsibility to provide for their family amid famines would have been a heavy weight on their shoulders. They were at the age where they were the right age to be targeted by both the Indian army as well as the rebel army. Not surprisingly, these people, who made up the senior citizens in the present research, had a lot of depressing stories about the insurgency. Even outside the small questionnaire which they had to respond to, they had several accounts of the insurgency which deserve to be taken up in a separate study.
- A total of 25 respondents were between 70-79 years of age who were 28-37 years old(\pm) during insurgency and 28 were between 60 to 69 years of age who were 18-27 years old(\pm) during the insurgency. Respondents both of these age group might have been school-going age during the insurgency period, whose education was curbed by the situation then, and some of them might be of the age to join the underground army leaving their families. Especially in consideration of the fact that the young state was already so backwards. In terms of education and other indices of development, it was tragic that an insurgency took place to further hinder the growth and development of the young people on top of their already disadvantaged situation.
- Another 27 respondents were between 50 to 59 years of age who were 8-17 years old(\pm) during insurgency who might also be students at primary or middle schools. Their primary education would be quite improper due to insurgency. They must have been well acquainted with fear and hunger which was associated with the insurgency. Unlike other states where the late teenage periods were marked by going off for higher education, the young state was in such a condition that these youth were at the primary education stage because of the late

entry of formal education. But they were not given many opportunities to further their studies because of the insurgency that imposed many strictures on them.

- A minor number of 2 respondents were between 40 to 49 years of age who were below 7 years(±) during the insurgency who would need early childhood care then. However, their parents would not be able to pamper them with proper care during desperate times. As obtained from the unstructured interview, parents had to take their children to the forests to hide from the armies. Apparently, children during the insurgency were brought up with fear. These respondents could hardly remember the insurgency and only had vague memories of the insurgency. But modern educational studies support the needs of children to be taken care of by their parents. But as shown by evidence, these children did not have proper care nor were they given a chance to bloom as they deserved. They were taken care of by parents who lived in constant fear and insecurity. It was not surprising that many of them turned into delinquents.

3. To find out the effect of the insurgency on the family life of the Mizo people, a questionnaire comprising 8 items was administered to the individuals who were identified as being a part of the insurgent Mizoram.

It was found that a majority of 93% of the respondents said that the armies came to their houses and 85% of them were mentally affected by their visit. It was shown that 73% of the respondents' education was affected by the army. A noticeable 36% of the respondent themselves or their family members joined the Mizo National Front (MNF) and among those who joined MNF, 83% joined voluntarily which was a clear indicator of the people's sympathy for the cause. But a staggering 96% of the respondents admitted that they could not move freely wherever and whenever they want during the insurgency. Even those who were employed as health care workers had to make arrangements to stay within close distance of hospitals of health centers where they were posted. A majority of 60% claimed that they or their family members were physically hurt by the armies, but did not indicate which army, and 79% of the respondents' family suffered because of the insurgency. An interesting fact of residual fear was evident in that some of the people who were approached for the questionnaire, even after they were assured of confidentiality did not have the courage to respond to the questionnaire.

It is obvious from this questionnaire that the Mizo families suffered to a great extent. The majority were visited by the armies in their houses at any hour for different purposes and as obtained from unstructured

interviews, the army would take their family member away, some of them never returned. They would come at midnight and woke them up ordering them to gather in the street. They lived in constant anticipation of when the army would come and what they would do to them. Among the 36 respondents who joined the underground army, 11% were forced to join which made it clear that even the MNF caused uneasiness in the people although many sympathized with them.

4. To gain knowledge regarding the effect of the insurgency on school attendance, primary data was collected through a questionnaire. As revealed by the data from the questionnaire, 79% of the respondents could not attend school daily. While 54% had been advised by their parents to stop attending school, a total of 54% had been prevented from entering school by the army. Furthermore, it was also clearly seen that 81% of the sample individuals admitted that school itself was not open on all the weekdays. Out of the 100 respondents, 73% of them freely admitted that the insurgency deeply obstructed their education.

From these findings, it is clear that the insurgency had deeply affected the school attendance of students during that time.

5. To study the effect of regrouping of families on the educational development of students: the questionnaire revealed that 77% of the respondents had experienced regrouping, a governmental policy where some hamlets were regrouped to make a larger village to enable development to reach more number of individuals. But 61% of the respondents revealed that this regrouping hugely affected their mental state as well as their education in a detrimental way. A total of 96% openly claimed that insurgency affected not just their studies but their entire lifestyle as well. They lost touch with friends and family and many found it difficult to adapt to new townships just as members of the towns that were regrouped found it difficult to be accepted as members. So the mental torture was deep and lasting.

Thus, it is clear that the regrouping of the villages had a much darker result than the expected development. The people's feelings of displacement could not be erased after years had passed and they were also treated as aliens by the host village in many cases.

6. To assess the result of going underground on the education of students: During this time, several individuals, mostly youth of school-going age were recruited as the MNF army. In response to the questionnaire, 36% stated that they had been recruited as an underground army. Out of these recruits, 81% admitted that they had volunteered.

Since all these recruits had to go underground as the MNF army, it is quite obvious that their studies were terminated. Although they had volunteered, it was obvious that they had done so with high expectations which did not bear fruit. By the time they were called back, they had lost too much time and could not go back for formal education. The result was a poverty of the worst kind coupled with ill health.

7. To study the effect of the insurgency on the mental health of sample individuals: A questionnaire comprising of seven items covering various aspects that would affect the mental state of an individual. The following were the findings:

The study revealed that 76 per cent of the respondents did not feel free to make noises at night during the insurgency. The Mizos have always been a close-knit people and always find an excuse to enjoy and have fun. It must have been shattering to not be able to make noise. A majority of 88 per cent were not happy when they were visited by the armies in their house and a massive 90 per cent were afraid of the Indian army. This meant that they lived in constant fear of being visited, which must have had a very detrimental effect on the mental state. A large percentage, 77 per cent experienced village-grouping and 61 per cent had been mentally affected by the village grouping. It was a horrible time for everybody and this horrible time was compounded by the fact that they had to face a new environment, leaving everything familiar to them. It was also seen that 59% claimed that the Indian army took their families' possession and 96% agreed that the insurgency had completely changed their lifestyle.

It was clear from the responses that the mentality of the Mizo people was completely affected by the insurgency. The Mizos then, who were never exposed to other society were truly intimidated just by the look of a tall dark-skinned Indian army personnel, even if they did not suffer physically in their hands. The village grouping was one of the biggest tragedies that the Mizos experienced during the insurgency when all their houses were burnt down to ashes and they were forced to join a new village. Even those whose houses were not burnt were still forced to migrate to a new village which was located beforehand and not of the individual family's choice. To be robbed of one's possession was bad but in many cases, families were not robbed but were forced to part with their valuables. Such was the show of physical superiority during that time. This alone was enough to have a mental breakdown. However, the people were tortured not only by the Indian army but also mentally and maybe even physically harassed by the Mizo militants.

Conclusion

Any kind of disruption of normal life always has a negative effect. However, if this disruption is too long, even if the person concerned is not physically hurt, the mental disturbance can have lasting effects. In the case of the Mizoram insurgency, school life was disturbed and many students had to terminate their formal education. The importance of school education to social growth is something that cannot be exaggerated. Yet this very important fundamental need was stolen from the students for such a long time that by the time insurgency was over, they considered themselves too old. This may be the reason why many individuals who were at the school going stage could not continue their studies even after Mizoram declared peace. This affected their economic status in a myriad number of ways which needs to be explored in another study. At this stage, the conclusion may be made that the people were all affected in one way or the other. Moreover, the effects lasted for a long time, even during the time the study was done. Education was only one of the elements that suffered. People lost their valuables, their health, their pride, and their homes and many lost their livelihood and lives. Therefore, such a kind of uprising should be avoided at all cost and the State should see to the security of its people regardless of where they are located in this big country where we take pride in our diversity. Ethnicity should not be used as ammunition but rather as armour against foreign threats.

In light of the current pandemic of COVID-19, it should be paramount that the people's safety always comes first despite threats from various sources- economic, political, and even educational. Human rights should always be considered before taking economic measures. Co-operation is the key to success as always and ultimately, citizens should learn to glean at least a small lesson from the disaster. It is not the time to take political attacks but time to forget about politics and think as one country. Learned individuals need to stand up and voice their opinions so that the country may be able to make wise decisions. Insurgency taught Mizos the importance of cooperation. Till today, the young state remains the single state that has no record of COVID-19 death within the country. Maybe the country can learn from this young state about that the power of cooperation in a fight against a much bigger enemy.

Notes

1. Collinsdictionary.com
2. Merriam-Webster
3. Mizo Hnam Movement History, Zoramthanga, 2016, p. 20.

4. Ibid.
5. Chawhchawrawi, Revd. Chuauthuama, 1998, p. 76.
6. Anand Ranganathan, A brief history of Mizoram: From the Aizawl bombing to the Mizo Accord, 2015
7. R. Vanlawma, *Ka Ram Leh Kei*, 3rd Edition, 1989, p. 332.
8. Ibid., p. 340.

References

Chuauthuama, Revd. (1998) Chawhchawrawi. Author, Aizawl
Lalsawia (1994) Zoram Hming-Hmel. Author, Aizawl

- Ranganathan, (2015) A brief history of Mizoram: From the Aizawl bombing to the Mizo Accord. <https://www.newsland.com/2015/08/06/a-brief-history-of-mizoram-from-the-aizawl-bombing-to-the-mizo-accord>
- Vanchiau, C. Lalawmpuia. (2014) Rambuai Literature. Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl.
- Vanlawma, R. (1989) *Ka Ram Leh Kei*. Zalen Publishing House, Aizawl.
- Zoramthanga. (2016) *Mizo Hnam Movement History: A history of Mizo Nationalism Movement*. Author, Aizawl.