



INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH

Peer-reviewed, open-access, refereed journal

IJLAR

+91 70421 48991
editor@ijlar.com
www.ijlar.com

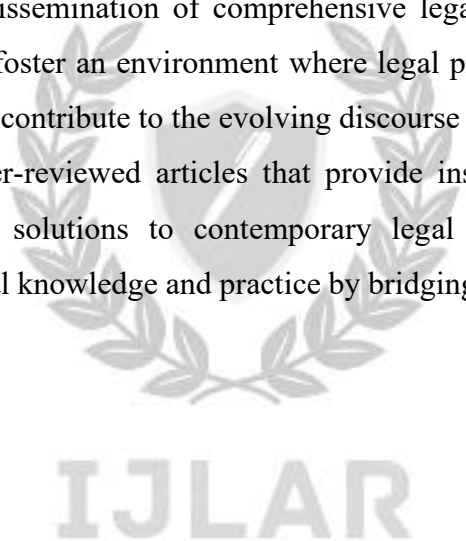
DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in the articles published in the Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the IJLAR, its editorial board, or its affiliated institutions. The IJLAR assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions in the content of the journal. The information provided in this journal is for general informational purposes only and should not be construed as legal advice. Readers are encouraged to seek professional legal counsel for specific legal issues. The IJLAR and its affiliates shall not be liable for any loss or damage arising from the use of the information contained in this journal.

IJLAR

Introduction

Welcome to the Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research (IJLAR), a distinguished platform dedicated to the dissemination of comprehensive legal scholarship and academic research. Our mission is to foster an environment where legal professionals, academics, and students can collaborate and contribute to the evolving discourse in the field of law. We strive to publish high-quality, peer-reviewed articles that provide insightful analysis, innovative perspectives, and practical solutions to contemporary legal challenges. The IJAR is committed to advancing legal knowledge and practice by bridging the gap between theory and practice.



Preface

The Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research is a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence in legal scholarship. This volume presents a curated selection of articles that reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of legal studies today. Our contributors, ranging from esteemed legal scholars to emerging academics, bring forward a rich tapestry of insights that address critical legal issues and offer novel contributions to the field. We are grateful to our editorial board, reviewers, and authors for their dedication and hard work, which have made this publication possible. It is our hope that this journal will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, and will inspire further inquiry and debate within the legal community.

IJLAR

Description

The Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research is an academic journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles on a wide range of legal topics. Each issue is designed to provide a platform for legal scholars, practitioners, and students to share their research findings, theoretical explorations, and practical insights. Our journal covers various branches of law, including but not limited to constitutional law, international law, criminal law, commercial law, human rights, and environmental law. We are dedicated to ensuring that the articles published in our journal adhere to the highest standards of academic rigor and contribute meaningfully to the understanding and development of legal theories and practices.

IJLAR

BEYOND CHOICE AND COERCION: RETHINKING CHILD RECRUITMENT IN MYANMAR'S ARMED CONFLICT AS A CONTINUUM OF CONSTRAINED AGENCY

AUTHORED BY - KMS RAJISHKHA

LLM Candidate (International Law and Organisation)

School of Excellence in Law, Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University

Abstract

Scholarship and policy on child soldiering in Myanmar remain organised around a binary distinction between "voluntary" enlistment and "forced" conscription that carries real legal weight but describes the evidence poorly. Drawing on narrative testimony, humanitarian documentation, and thematic synthesis of secondary sources from United Nations bodies, Human Rights Watch, and Myanmar-focused civil society organisations, this article constructs a continuum model of recruitment, in which enlistment is a spectrum of constrained agency rather than a choice between freedom and force. Six recurring patterns emerge, rooted respectively in ethnic identity and inherited belonging, protection from violence, trauma and loss, economic deprivation, and direct coercion, together with the continuum connecting all five. These patterns are read through structural violence theory, agency-constraint theory, and the militarised-childhood framework, and set against Myanmar's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocol, and customary international humanitarian law. Protection strategies built around the voluntary/forced binary will under-serve children whose enlistment sits at the continuum's midpoint; policy should instead address the structural conditions, educational collapse, economic deprivation, and erosion of state protection since the 2021 coup that populate that midpoint. Its central claim is that the continuum, rather than the binary, should be the primary analytic unit for future scholarship and policy on Myanmar's child recruitment crisis.

Keywords: child soldiers; Myanmar; structural violence; voluntariness-coercion continuum; international humanitarian law; militarised childhood.

1. Introduction

International child-protection law draws its authority from a clear line: a child is either taken into an armed force against her will, or joins it of her own accord.¹ The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) fixes that line in binding terms, prohibiting compulsory recruitment below eighteen while treating non-compulsory enlistment as a less severely regulated category.² The distinction is not merely conceptual: it determines state responsibility, war-crimes liability under the Rome Statute, and which children the monitoring architecture built around U.N. Security Council Resolution 1612 captures.³ Applied to Myanmar's conflict-affected regions, this line performs badly as a description of how children actually come to bear arms.

Myanmar's civil conflict, already one of the longest-running in the contemporary world, intensified sharply after the military seized power on 1 February 2021.⁴ Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), newly formed People's Defence Forces (PDFs) aligned with the ousted civilian government, and the Tatmadaw itself have all drawn children into their structures as porters, informants, lookouts, and combatants.⁵ Mass displacement, the collapse of schooling, and the erosion of household livelihoods have left many children with few institutions besides an armed group to turn to. In that setting, asking whether a given child "chose" to join rarely yields a clean answer.

This article treats that difficulty as its subject rather than an obstacle to be cleared before analysis begins. It argues that child recruitment in Myanmar cannot be adequately understood through the conventional binary of voluntary versus forced recruitment, and instead occurs along a continuum of constrained agency shaped by identity, protection-seeking, trauma, economic deprivation, and direct coercion, operating singly or in combination. Children retain a measure of agency even in highly coercive environments; children who appear to volunteer are frequently responding to conditions that have foreclosed every other alternative. This article's contribution is integrating them into a single analytical framework calibrated to

¹Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 2173 U.N.T.S. 222 (2000), art. 4.

²Optional Protocol, art. 4, *supra* note 1.

³U.N. Security Council, Res. 1612, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1612 (2005); *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90 (1998).

⁴International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts*, Asia Report No. 319 (Jan. 12, 2022).

⁵United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Annual Reports of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, Myanmar country sections (2010-2025) (documentary dataset, not a single publication).

Myanmar's post-2021 conflict, built from evidence extending through 2025.

The discussion proceeds in seven further parts. Section 2 situates the argument in existing scholarship and identifies the gap addressed here. Section 3 sets out the qualitative socio-legal method. Section 4 supplies historical, economic, and legal context. Section 5 presents six evidentiary themes, each assessed for its position on the continuum. Section 6 connects the findings to theory and international humanitarian law, explaining why the voluntary/forced binary is conceptually inadequate to Myanmar's case. Section 7 sets out policy implications, and Section 8 concludes.

The stakes are practical as well as conceptual. A protection architecture organised around a binary distinction risks channelling resources toward the most visible form of coercion, outright abduction, while leaving a much larger population of children, whose enlistment sits nearer the continuum's midpoint, under-recognised and under-served.

Myanmar is an unusually clear setting for such a model, because both poles of the conventional binary are visible at scale simultaneously. The Tatmadaw's reliance on abduction, checkpoint detention, and quota-driven conscription is extensively documented and satisfies almost any legal definition of forced recruitment.⁶ At the same time, EAOs in Kachin, Karen, Shan, and Rakhine States, together with the PDFs that emerged after the coup, draw substantial numbers of children who approach these groups without any threat of violence compelling them in the moment. A country where both forms coexist at scale, rather than one dominating almost to the exclusion of the other, is where the limits of binary classification are most visible.

The tendency in global advocacy to treat child soldiers uniformly as victims of a single act of abduction is understandable as a mobilising strategy, but risks oversimplifying the experience of children who navigate structural violence, loss, and community militarisation over years rather than at a single moment of capture.⁷ The classification a child's recruitment receives determines which legal instruments apply, which monitoring mechanisms register the case, and which children receive priority attention from reintegration programmes operating under

⁶Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma* (2007); Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Myanmar Chapters* (2010–2024).

⁷Jo Boyden & Jason Hart, *The Statelessness of the World's Children*, 21 *Children & Society* 237 (2007).

severe resource constraint. A framework that cannot correctly locate most recruits along that spectrum will, whatever its drafters intend, misallocate scarce protective resources.

It is worth being precise about what this article does not claim: not that the distinction between abduction and identity-driven enlistment is meaningless, nor that all recruitment should be treated as equally coercive for legal or accountability purposes; direct coercion, examined in Section 5.5, remains a distinct and especially severe category throughout. The claim is narrower: the space between the binary's two poles is not a residual grey zone of ambiguous hard cases, but the setting in which most of Myanmar's child recruitment actually occurs, so that any adequate framework must treat the continuum, not the binary, as its primary unit of analysis.

2. Existing Scholarship and the Gap This Article Addresses

Early work on child soldiering framed children's involvement almost exclusively through abduction and forced conscription, treating children as objects of adult violence rather than as actors within their own constrained decisions.⁸ That framing captured a real dimension of the phenomenon but left substantial gaps: it could not account for children who sought out armed groups, stayed after opportunities to leave arose, or described their enlistment in the language of duty, pride, or survival rather than victimhood. A second body of scholarship, associated with Boyden and Hart, pushed back against a framework built solely on coercion at recruitment, insisting that children's decisions must be read against broader systems of socialisation, displacement, and institutional absence.⁹ This literature opened space for a "grey zone," in which voluntary and forced recruitment cannot be cleanly separated because motivations such as security, subsistence, and belonging are themselves shaped by conditions the child did not choose.¹⁰

A separate, more developed body of legal and humanitarian literature has documented the mechanics of forced recruitment in Myanmar with considerable precision. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, OPAC, and customary international humanitarian law codified by the ICRC together establish a well-developed normative architecture prohibiting the recruitment

⁸David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (Rutgers Univ. Press 2005).

⁹Boyden & Hart, *supra* note 7; David M. Rosen, *Child Soldiers: A Reference Handbook* (ABC-CLIO 2012).

¹⁰Boyden & Hart, *supra* note 7; Rosen, *Child Soldiers: A Reference Handbook*, *supra* note 9.

and use of children in hostilities.¹¹ Human Rights Watch's early investigations, notably "My Gun Was as Tall as Me" and "Sold to Be Soldiers," documented abduction, forced portering, and quota-driven conscription inside the Tatmadaw in detail, and the organisation has continued updating that record through successive World Report chapters and, most recently, direct reporting on the post-2024 recruitment surge.¹² This body of work is indispensable for establishing the factual record and anchoring accountability claims, but is oriented toward demonstrating breach rather than explaining recruitment's interior logic as children experience it.

A third strand addresses Myanmar's political and ethnic conflict landscape, tracing the civil war to colonial-era administration, the unfulfilled 1947 Panglong Agreement promise of federal autonomy, and the entrenchment of military rule after Ne Win's 1962 coup.¹³ The work of Ashley South and Martin Smith, together with International Crisis Group reporting on the post-coup trajectory, situates recruitment within Myanmar's territorial and historical dynamics, particularly the role EAOs play as de facto governing authorities in the borderlands.¹⁴ This scholarship, however, focuses primarily on conflict dynamics and territorial control, engaging only incidentally with the psychological and narrative experience of recruited children.

Read together, these three strands leave a persistent gap. Forced recruitment has been documented far more thoroughly than voluntary or identity-driven enlistment, in part because it fits more comfortably within existing legal categories and advocacy priorities.¹⁵ Where voluntary recruitment is addressed, it is rarely theorised alongside forced recruitment within a single model calibrated to Myanmar; the broader insight that voluntariness exists only within the constraints of structural violence has not been systematically applied post-2021.¹⁶ Structural violence theory, agency-constraint theory, the militarised-childhood framework, and trauma theory each supply tools suited to part of this task, yet the literature has not integrated

¹¹Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 38, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3 (1989); Optional Protocol, *supra* note 1; ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rr. 136–137.

¹²Human Rights Watch, *"My Gun Was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (2002); Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6; Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Myanmar Chapters*, *supra* note 6; Human Rights Watch, *Myanmar: Stop Recruitment, Use of Child Soldiers* (20 June 2025).

¹³Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict* (Routledge 2008); Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Zed Books 1999).

¹⁴Ashley South, *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict* (Transnational Institute/Burma Center Netherlands 2011); International Crisis Group, *supra* note 4.

¹⁵Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

¹⁶Boyden & Hart, *supra* note 7; Rosen, *Child Soldiers: A Reference Handbook*, *supra* note 9.

them into a single continuum model explaining how one child's pathway can combine identity, survival, trauma, and coercion at once.¹⁷

Galtung's account of structural violence explains how deprivation and marginalisation shape decisions without any single identifiable act of force.¹⁸ Agency-constraint theory addresses the tension between individual choice and oppressive circumstance, insisting that constrained choice remains choice.¹⁹ The militarised-childhood framework, developed most influentially by Wessells, explains how children internalise conflict identities within heavily militarised communities, long before any individual recruitment decision is made.²⁰ Applied together, and mapped onto the themes developed here, these frameworks support a single, multi-layered account of recruitment as a socio-psychological process rather than a binary classification, an integration this article undertakes for Myanmar's post-2021 conflict.

The critique offered here extends to method as well as substance. Much of the Myanmar-specific literature remains heavily doctrinal, engaging the Convention on the Rights of the Child, OPAC, and customary international humanitarian law without engaging children's own narratives or the socio-cultural conditions shaping their decisions.²¹ Where narrative material appears, it is used illustratively, to humanise a legal argument, rather than analytically, as evidentiary base for a theoretical model. This article inverts that relationship, treating narrative and documentary evidence as primary data and introducing legal frameworks in Section 6 to interpret, rather than generate, the findings.

The post-coup period itself remains under-synthesised. The 2021 coup transformed recruitment dynamics without precedent in the conflict's modern history, simultaneously intensifying Tatmadaw conscription and drawing an unprecedented number of politically motivated, Bamar-majority urban youth into the PDFs, a demographic shift with little counterpart in Myanmar's ethnic-conflict-dominated recruitment history.²² Existing scholarship, much of it written before or only briefly addressing this period, has not fully absorbed its implications for the voluntary/forced distinction. Drawing on evidence extending through 2025, including the

¹⁷Johan Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, 6 *Journal of Peace Research* 167 (1969).

¹⁸Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, *supra* note 17.

¹⁹Boyden & Hart, *supra* note 7.

²⁰Michael Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Harvard Univ. Press 2006).

²¹South, *Burma's Longest War*, *supra* note 14; International Crisis Group, *supra* note 4.

²²International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 319*, *supra* note 4.

Myanmar military's activation of compulsory conscription under the 2010 People's Military Service Law in February 2024, this article addresses that gap directly.²³

This article does not seek to displace the legal literature's careful documentation of forced recruitment, nor the conflict literature's account of Myanmar's political architecture. It seeks instead to integrate narrative and documentary evidence within a continuum framework, grounded in established theory but calibrated to the post-2021 Myanmar context, capable of explaining why the voluntary/forced binary, however useful for legal classification, systematically understates the complexity of how Myanmar's children actually arrive at armed groups.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative socio-legal design, combining narrative analysis with thematic synthesis of documentary evidence. The design follows from the nature of the subject: child recruitment in conflict settings concerns identity, fear, and survival in ways doctrinal legal analysis alone cannot capture and that cannot be meaningfully reduced to quantitative indicators. The study is exploratory and interpretivist rather than hypothesis-testing; the analytical framework is developed inductively from patterns in the evidentiary record, while remaining anchored to established theory in conflict studies and child-protection scholarship. Direct interviews with child recruits inside Myanmar are neither ethically permissible nor practically feasible. The research therefore draws on secondary sources that function as primary-equivalent evidence: narrative testimonies documented by investigative and humanitarian organisations, and first-hand accounts collected by researchers and journalists working in or near displacement zones.²⁴ These are supplemented by documentary material from United Nations bodies, principally the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, together with human rights reporting from Human Rights Watch, and Myanmar-specific field research from the Karen Human Rights Group.²⁵

²³Human Rights Watch, Stop Recruitment, *supra* note 12.

²⁴Human Rights Watch, "My Gun Was as Tall as Me", *supra* note 12; Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6.

²⁵Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation: Abuse and Agency of Children in Karen State* (2008).

Analysis proceeded through narrative analysis combined with thematic coding. Narrative analysis read testimonies not merely as factual reports but as accounts shaped by trauma, displacement, and socio-political circumstance, examining how children articulate agency within constraint. Thematic coding identified recurring categories across the evidentiary base, including identity and belonging, protection, revenge, economic deprivation, community pressure, and direct coercion; these categories form the basis of the six themes in Section 5. Content analysis was applied to legal and humanitarian reports to trace recruitment mechanisms, geographic distribution, and change over time, with attention to the discontinuity introduced by the 2021 coup. Where accounts diverged, triangulation tested reliability and avoided over-reliance on any single source.

Ethical considerations shaped the study throughout. The research relies exclusively on material already in the public domain, to avoid exposing vulnerable individuals to further harm through re-identification. Testimony is handled with deliberate caution against sensationalism or re-traumatisation, and the analysis avoids language that could be read as assigning responsibility to child recruits, who are treated throughout as subjects of structural and systemic violence rather than as agents to be judged.

The study's principal limitation is its reliance on secondary and documentary sources rather than direct field research, which is not feasible given Myanmar's restricted access and volatile security conditions. This carries two risks: humanitarian organisations may, for advocacy reasons, foreground certain narratives over others, and reporting gaps may be uneven across regions, with denser documentation where international humanitarian presence is longstanding. These risks are mitigated, though not eliminated, through triangulation across independent sources, selection criteria prioritising reliability over sensational content, and exclusion of unverifiable accounts.

A further limitation concerns the direction of interpretation: because the study relies on documentary sources rather than direct testimony collection, the analytical categories in Section 5 were derived through coding of existing material rather than validated directly with the children whose experiences they describe. This is a structural constraint common to non-doctrinal research under restricted field access, and it is disclosed rather than minimised here. The study does not extend to military strategy, weapons procurement, or internal command

structures, confining itself to children's entry into and retention within armed groups between 2010 and 2025.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the triangulated documentary record for Myanmar is unusually dense by the standards of contemporary conflict research, owing to sustained monitoring under Resolution 1612 together with long-standing work by international human rights organisations and Myanmar-specific civil society groups with direct community access. This density of corroborating sources provides a defensible evidentiary foundation for the analysis that follows.

4. Historical, Economic, and Legal Context

Myanmar's conflict is not a recent eruption but one of the world's longest-running civil wars, continuous since independence in 1948.²⁶ Colonial administration governed the Bamar-majority lowlands directly while governing highland ethnic-minority regions indirectly, drawing the Karen, Kachin, Shan, and Chin disproportionately into colonial military structures and setting the conditions for post-independence tension.²⁷ The unfulfilled promise of federal autonomy under the 1947 Panglong Agreement, Ne Win's 1962 coup, and decades of counter-insurgency campaigns entrenched militarisation as a structural feature of daily life in ethnic borderland regions, where EAOs such as the Kachin Independence Army, Karen National Liberation Army, and Arakan Army now function as de facto governing authorities.²⁸

The coup of 1 February 2021 transformed this landscape sharply. Civilian governance collapsed, displacement rose above two million people, and newly formed PDFs, aligned with the National Unity Government (NUG), drew large numbers of previously unarmed youth, particularly from Bamar-majority regions with no prior armed-struggle history, into resistance structures.²⁹ Simultaneously, the Tatmadaw intensified forced conscription to offset mass desertions, producing a dual expansion: rising voluntary enlistment among politicised youth alongside rising forced recruitment by the state military.³⁰ That dual expansion reached a

²⁶South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, *supra* note 13; Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, *supra* note 13.

²⁷South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma*, *supra* note 13; Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, *supra* note 13.

²⁸South, *Burma's Longest War*, *supra* note 14; International Crisis Group, *supra* note 4.

²⁹International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 319*, *supra* note 4.

³⁰International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 319*, *supra* note 4.

further inflection point in February 2024, when the junta activated the 2010 People's Military Service Law, enabling conscription of men aged eighteen to thirty-five and women aged eighteen to twenty-seven; although children are formally excluded, Human Rights Watch has documented that they have increasingly been swept up in the conscription drives that followed, alongside evidence that families are pushing children into child labour to keep them out of conscription's reach.³¹ The U.N. Secretary-General reported in June 2025 that the U.N. had verified 2,138 grave violations against children in Myanmar's conflict in 2024, including recruitment, with roughly 1,200 further violations pending verification, and noted that verified cases likely undercount the true total given monitoring difficulties and fear of retaliation among potential reporters.³²

These conditions are compounded by acute socioeconomic deprivation. Conflict-affected regions register among the highest poverty rates in Southeast Asia, and displacement, destroyed schooling infrastructure, and collapsed household livelihoods leave children with markedly reduced alternatives to armed groups, which often offer food, shelter, and structure that state and civil institutions no longer provide.³³ Cultural and religious institutions further shape the environment in which recruitment decisions are made. Karen Human Rights Group's field research documents how, in Karen communities, decades of militarisation are woven into songs, ceremonies, and community memory predating any child's birth, and how the everyday presence of soldiers, checkpoints, and displacement has normalised militarised life across generations.³⁴ Recruitment in these settings is rarely a discrete event; it is frequently the culmination of a socialisation process beginning long before a child has any independent capacity to evaluate the decision.

Legally, Myanmar remains bound by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1991, and acceded to OPAC in 2019, together with customary international humanitarian law.³⁵ Weak birth registration, restricted humanitarian monitoring, and the near-total collapse of accountability mechanisms after the coup have left these commitments largely unenforced.

³¹Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

³²U.N. Secretary-General, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, U.N. Doc. A/79/878-S/2025/247 (17 June 2025), Myanmar country section; see also Human Rights Watch, *supra* note 12.

³³Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

³⁴Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

³⁵*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art. 38; Optional Protocol, *supra* note 1; ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rr. 136–137, *supra* note 11.

Human Rights Watch's cumulative reporting records that no Tatmadaw commander has been successfully prosecuted domestically for recruiting children, notwithstanding extensive documentation.³⁶ This is the structural terrain, historical, economic, cultural, and legal, within which the findings presented below must be read.

5. Findings

5.1 Identity, Ethnicity, and Inherited Belonging

Evidence. Field research and testimony from ethnic borderland communities, particularly in Kachin and Karen States, consistently describe recruitment as embedded in inherited narratives of resistance. Children in these regions grow up among soldiers who are familiar community figures, checkpoints that structure daily movement, and commemorative practices that frame fallen fighters as figures of communal honour.³⁷ Karen Human Rights Group's research on children growing up under sustained militarisation describes a social environment in which the ordinary abuses of conflict, forced labour, displacement, extortion, and family separation are so pervasive that resistance becomes a normalised feature of childhood rather than an exceptional choice.³⁸ Enlistment into groups such as the Kachin Independence Army or the Karen National Liberation Army is frequently described by young recruits not as a rupture with ordinary life but as an extension of collective memory and communal duty.

Analysis. These accounts recur across independent sources and multiple regions, suggesting a durable pattern rather than an isolated cultural phenomenon. Peer regard for armed youth, participation in community ceremonies, and inherited narratives that frame resistance as an honour rather than a burden normalise enlistment well before any individual recruitment decision is made.

Interpretation. Identity-based recruitment illustrates how a long socialisation process can generate what looks, from the outside, like a straightforward voluntary choice, while in fact operating as a slow-accumulating form of structural pressure. A child raised within a resistance narrative does not choose that narrative; at most, the child chooses whether, and how, to act within it.

Position on the continuum. Identity-based recruitment sits toward the continuum's relative-agency pole, since children typically face no proximate threat of violence at the point of

³⁶Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6; Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Myanmar Chapters*, *supra* note 6.

³⁷Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

³⁸Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

enlistment. It nonetheless remains constrained agency, because the surrounding narrative environment was constructed over generations by conditions the child did not create.

The recruitment pathways associated with this theme are notably relational rather than institutional. In EAO-controlled regions, enlistment frequently occurs through community gatherings, youth structures, and family influence, with elders encouraging younger community members to support local defence structures.³⁹ This relational character distinguishes identity-based recruitment from the institutional, quota-driven mechanisms documented under direct coercion in Section 5.5, and helps explain why these children so rarely describe their enlistment using the language of victimhood, even where the underlying choice remains constrained.

5.2 Protection and Survival

Evidence. In regions subject to Tatmadaw raids, arrests, and village burning, and within internally displaced persons (IDP) camps marked by chronic insecurity, children and their families describe armed groups, whether established EAOs or newer PDFs, as among the only institutions capable of offering physical safety.⁴⁰ Enlistment in these accounts is framed as a means of staying near protection rather than as an expression of ideological commitment.

Analysis. Protection-driven enlistment is concentrated in areas where state or armed-actor violence has already displaced or threatened the child's household, suggesting that the decision to enlist follows, rather than precedes, exposure to insecurity.

Interpretation. Framing this pattern as "voluntary" recruitment obscures the fact that the relevant choice is not between joining and not joining an armed group, but between proximity to an armed actor and continued exposure to violence without protection. The absence of a genuine third option defines this theme.

Position on the continuum. Protection and survival motivations occupy the continuum's constrained-choice segment. Children retain some latitude in deciding which group to approach or when to do so, but the underlying necessity driving the decision is imposed externally.

This theme also exhibits a distinctive institutional dimension after 2021. Newly formed PDFs increasingly presented themselves, alongside longer-established EAOs, as protectors of communities subjected to post-coup military crackdowns, extending the protection pathway into demographic groups, particularly Bamar-majority urban youth, with little prior history of

³⁹Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

⁴⁰Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

engagement with armed actors.⁴¹ Within IDP camps, insecurity is compounded by constant exposure: armed raids, forced labour demands on adult household members, and generalised violence against civilians make remaining close to an armed protective unit a continuously renewed decision rather than a single, one-off choice.

5.3 Trauma, Loss, and Emotional Motivation

Evidence. Testimonies compiled in Human Rights Watch's investigations describe former child recruits joining armed groups after witnessing the killing, arrest, or torture of family members, framing enlistment as a means of restoring dignity or exacting retribution.⁴² Children's incomplete cognitive and emotional development at the time is a recurring feature of the documented accounts, complicating any straightforward reading of enlistment as a fully considered choice.

Analysis. This theme differs from the identity and protection themes in its emotional and psychological register: the proximate trigger is a specific traumatic event rather than a diffuse cultural or security condition.

Interpretation. Trauma-driven enlistment demonstrates how psychological injury can function as a form of coercion even absent any direct threat compelling the child to join. The child is not threatened into joining; the child is shaped, by an antecedent act of violence against family or community, into a state in which joining becomes emotionally compelling.

Position on the continuum. This theme occupies a position adjacent to protection and survival on the continuum, best described as constrained choice operating through psychological rather than material necessity.

The evidence base also documents a related but distinct phenomenon: children exposed to chronic, rather than singular, violence may come to interpret enlistment as a logical or inevitable step in their life trajectory, independent of any specific retaliatory motive. Adolescents in particular are documented as susceptible, after traumatic loss, to needs for acceptance, belonging, and restored agency that armed groups are frequently positioned to satisfy, precisely where prior sources of stability, family structure, schooling, community routine, have been disrupted by the same violence.

⁴¹International Crisis Group, *Asia Report No. 319*, *supra* note 4.

⁴²Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

5.4 Economic Deprivation and Structural Violence

Evidence. Documentation from humanitarian organisations working in Myanmar records that armed groups frequently provide regular meals, clothing, small stipends, and a stable daily routine in regions where household livelihoods have collapsed under conflict-related displacement and destroyed agricultural land.⁴³ For children in these conditions, enlistment functions as one of the few reliable means of securing basic subsistence.

Analysis. The consistency of this pattern across both EAO-controlled and PDF-affiliated regions indicates that economic deprivation operates as a general structural driver of recruitment rather than a phenomenon specific to any single armed actor or ethnic context.

Interpretation. Galtung's concept of structural violence, in which deprivation and marginalisation function as forms of harm without any single act of direct physical force, describes this theme with particular precision.⁴⁴ A child who enlists because an armed group is the only reliable source of food is exercising a choice in the narrowest technical sense, while being coerced in every substantive sense by the economic conditions surrounding it.

Position on the continuum. Economic deprivation sits at the continuum's structural-coercion position: the absence of a direct threat distinguishes it from forced recruitment, while near-total foreclosure of alternatives distinguishes it from genuinely free choice.

The mechanism operates at the household level as well as the individual level. Where a household cannot provide for its children, families themselves are documented, particularly in reporting on conscription-driven child labour following the 2024 law, as directing children toward income-generating or protective strategies under economic pressure, a pattern that appears an individual decision while representing, in substance, a household-level survival strategy imposed on a child with no independent capacity to refuse.⁴⁵ School closures compound this: where education becomes inconsistent or disappears, through attack, teacher shortages, or displacement, armed groups can offer the structure and stability schooling would otherwise have provided.

5.5 Direct Coercion

Evidence. Human Rights Watch's documentation, corroborated across successive reporting cycles, records the systematic abduction of children, checkpoint arrests in which recruiters

⁴³Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

⁴⁴Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, *supra* note 17.

⁴⁵Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

falsify ages to overcome legal minimums, and battalion-level recruitment quotas that incentivise commanders to coerce enlistment.⁴⁶ Forced portering, in which recruits are compelled to carry ammunition and supplies, and in documented cases walk ahead of troops through areas suspected of mining, is an especially severe subcategory of this theme.⁴⁷ Reporting since the 2021 coup, intensifying further after the February 2024 activation of compulsory conscription, documents an escalation in the scale of these practices and the reach of underage recruitment into urban centres and demographic groups with little prior history of forced conscription.⁴⁸

Analysis. Unlike the preceding four themes, direct coercion involves an identifiable coercive actor exercising force, or the imminent threat of force, at the point of recruitment, rather than a diffuse structural condition. The mechanism is institutionalised rather than incidental: Human Rights Watch's investigations describe battalion-level troop-strength quotas that incentivise commanders to pursue forcible recruitment through brokers, bribery of local officials, and outright abduction, exploiting weak rural birth-registration systems to enrol children whose true age cannot readily be verified.⁴⁹

The coercive dimensions of this theme are also analytically distinguishable: physical coercion, including beatings, detention, and restraint; threat-based coercion directed at a child's family, home, or property; psychological coercion through surveillance, intimidation, and humiliation; economic coercion, in which extreme poverty compels even absent an explicit threat; and, in some EAO-controlled localities, community pressure to contribute a household member to local defence, which Karen Human Rights Group's research suggests can blur coercion and community obligation even absent a formal recruitment policy.⁵⁰ Not all EAOs employ coercive mechanisms: several have adopted internal prohibitions on child recruitment formalised through Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment, with the Karen National Union, Chin National Front, and Restoration Council of Shan State among its Myanmar-based signatories between 2013 and 2019.⁵¹

Interpretation. Direct coercion corresponds most closely to the recruitment practices

⁴⁶Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6.

⁴⁷Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6; Human Rights Watch, *"My Gun Was as Tall as Me"*, *supra* note 12.

⁴⁸Human Rights Watch, *Stop Recruitment*, *supra* note 12.

⁴⁹Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6.

⁵⁰Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation*, *supra* note 25.

⁵¹Geneva Call, *Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict*; Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (2013); Chin National Front/Chin National Army (2014); Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (2019).

international humanitarian law was designed to prohibit, and it remains the clearest and least contestable form of the violations documented in this study. It is also the theme in which the post-coup discontinuity is most visible: prior to 2021, forced recruitment, while persistent, was comparatively concentrated in specific ethnic regions; since the coup, and especially since the 2024 conscription law, round-ups and detentions have reached demographic groups and urban centres previously largely unaffected, reflecting the Tatmadaw's acute manpower pressure following widespread desertion and battlefield losses.⁵²

Position on the continuum. Direct coercion occupies the continuum's terminal position: the one category in which no meaningful residual agency can be attributed to the child, and the category around which existing international legal instruments, discussed further in Section 6, are most precisely calibrated.

5.6 The Voluntariness-Coercion Continuum

Evidence. Read together, the preceding five themes do not describe five discrete populations of children but overlapping, frequently co-occurring pressures acting on the same children simultaneously. A child recruited into an EAO through inherited identity narratives (5.1) may also be responding to a household's economic collapse (5.4) and the trauma of a prior military raid (5.3); a child recruited under direct institutional pressure (5.5) may nonetheless articulate participation using the language of protection (5.2).

Analysis. This pattern is inconsistent with a model in which children sort cleanly into "voluntary" and "forced" categories, and consistent instead with recruitment outcomes produced by the cumulative weight of overlapping pressures along a single spectrum, running from relative agency through constrained choice and structural coercion to direct coercion.

Interpretation. This is the article's principal theoretical contribution. The voluntariness-coercion continuum reframes recruitment not as a binary classification exercise but as a diagnostic tool: the analytical task, for any given child, is to locate the combination and intensity of pressures operating on that child, rather than to assign a single categorical label to the outcome.

Position on the continuum. This theme is, definitionally, the entire spectrum. Its significance lies in showing that the other five themes are not independent categories but positions, and combinations of positions, along one underlying axis.

The distribution of cases documented in this study is skewed heavily away from the free-choice

⁵²Human Rights Watch, Stop Recruitment, *supra* note 12.

pole. Most of what existing literature and reporting label "voluntary" recruitment in Myanmar, on this evidence, falls between constrained choice and structural coercion, while genuinely unconstrained enlistment, if it exists at all in a conflict-saturated environment, appears to be rare among documented cases. This pattern is itself significant: it suggests the term "voluntary," as conventionally used in legal and humanitarian reporting, is doing less analytical work than its prevalence in the literature implies, and that a continuum-based coding scheme better describes the population of children entering Myanmar's armed groups than a binary classification does.

Two further observations follow. First, the six themes are not evenly distributed across Myanmar's armed actors. Identity-based and protection-driven recruitment (5.1, 5.2) predominate in EAO-controlled ethnic borderland regions with long conflict histories; economic and trauma-driven recruitment (5.3, 5.4) appear across both EAO and PDF contexts; and direct coercion (5.5) is disproportionately associated with Tatmadaw practice, consistent with the institutional analysis in Section 6. Second, the themes are temporally sensitive: the 2021 coup altered their composition, expanding political and identity-based enlistment among Bamar-majority urban youth with little prior recruitment history, while intensifying the Tatmadaw's reliance on direct coercion to offset desertion, a dynamic the 2024 law formalised. A continuum model accommodating this dual expansion explains the post-coup period better than a binary framework in which rising "voluntary" and "forced" recruitment would otherwise appear as unrelated trends.

6. Discussion: Theory, Law, and the Limits of the Binary

The findings in Section 5 support a central claim: the voluntary/forced binary, while indispensable for certain legal purposes, is conceptually inadequate as an explanatory account of how children come to join armed groups in Myanmar. Three theoretical frameworks help explain why.

Galtung's theory of structural violence supplies the clearest account of the economic-deprivation theme (5.4) and, more broadly, of why "choice" in conflict-affected Myanmar cannot be read as evidence of freedom.⁵³ Structural violence operates without any single identifiable perpetrator delivering a threat; it operates through the accumulated effect of

⁵³Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, *supra* note 17.

destroyed livelihoods, collapsed schooling, and displaced households, producing conditions in which enlistment becomes a rational survival strategy rather than an expression of autonomy. Agency-constraint theory refines this picture, insisting that children exercise genuine agency, motivation, and even political conviction, particularly visible in the identity theme (5.1) and in post-coup political enlistment, while operating within boundaries set by forces the child does not control. The two frameworks are complementary rather than competing: structural violence explains the boundaries; agency-constraint theory explains what happens within them.

The militarised-childhood framework accounts for a dimension the preceding two frameworks do not fully capture: how armed identity becomes intertwined with ethnic and communal identity long before any individual recruitment decision occurs.⁵⁴ In Kachin and Karen communities, this process operates through commemorative practice, peer socialisation, and ceremonial participation, transforming enlistment from a discrete decision into something closer to a life-course expectation. This framework explains why identity-based recruitment (5.1) can coexist with genuine subjective pride on the part of the recruit while remaining, from a structural standpoint, a constrained outcome.

These frameworks converge on a conclusion relevant to international humanitarian law: legal categories built around the presence or absence of direct force capture direct coercion (5.5) with real precision. OPAC's prohibition on compulsory recruitment, and the Rome Statute's war-crimes threshold for the use of children in hostilities, are calibrated to detect and penalise exactly this category.⁵⁵ They are considerably less well calibrated to themes 5.1 through 5.4, in which no single compulsory act can be identified, yet the child's range of genuine alternatives has been foreclosed by conditions attributable to state and non-state armed actors. Myanmar's continued presence among states cited for grave violations against children reflects the state's failure even within the narrower category of direct coercion; formal compliance with OPAC, even if achieved, would leave children affected by themes 5.1 through 5.4 substantially unprotected.⁵⁶

This has a further implication for existing scholarship. The "grey zone" concept in earlier

⁵⁴Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*, *supra* note 20.

⁵⁵*Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art. 38; Optional Protocol, *supra* note 1; ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rr. 136–137, *supra* note 11; Rome Statute, *supra* note 3.

⁵⁶U.N. Security Council, Res. 1612, *supra* note 3.

literature correctly recognised that voluntary and forced recruitment cannot be neatly separated, but treated it as a residual category between two otherwise stable poles.⁵⁷ The findings here suggest instead that the continuum, not the binary, is the primary phenomenon, and that "pure" voluntary or "pure" forced cases, while real and documented, are themselves points at the extremes of a single distribution. This reframing matters: research and policy should begin from the continuum and treat the binary as a legal simplification, not the reverse.

The discussion also bears on the two principal recruiting actors. The Tatmadaw's practices, examined in Section 5.5, reflect organised, quota-driven institutional design rather than isolated misconduct, and the absence of any successful domestic prosecution of a commander, despite extensive documentation, indicates that institutional impunity, not an evidentiary gap, is the primary obstacle.⁵⁸ EAOs present a more heterogeneous picture: some, including signatories to Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment, have adopted internal prohibitions on child recruitment and engage with child-protection norms; others, where command structures are fragmented or territorial control is contested, reproduce coercive patterns, including community-pressure conscription, that blur community defence and exploitation.⁵⁹ This heterogeneity counsels against treating EAOs as a uniform category, with implications for Section 7's recommendations.

A final implication concerns the relationship between the continuum model and existing accountability architecture. Because international legal instruments are calibrated primarily to detect direct coercion, their successful enforcement, difficult given Myanmar's severe accountability deficits, would address only the continuum's terminal position. The larger population of children at the continuum's structural-coercion and constrained-choice positions would remain outside the reach of an accountability framework built around individual culpable acts. This is not an argument against pursuing accountability for direct coercion; rather, accountability alone cannot constitute a complete protection strategy, a conclusion motivating the structural recommendations that follow.

⁵⁷Boyden & Hart, *supra* note 7; Rosen, *Child Soldiers: A Reference Handbook*, *supra* note 9.

⁵⁸Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers*, *supra* note 6; Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Myanmar Chapters*, *supra* note 6.

⁵⁹Geneva Call, *Deed of Commitment*, *supra* note 51.

7. Policy Recommendations

The continuum model developed in this article carries direct implications for protection strategy. First, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, including the Resolution 1612 Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, should be resourced to capture indicators across the full continuum rather than direct coercion alone, incorporating displacement status, school closure, and household food insecurity alongside evidence of abduction or threat.⁶⁰ Second, given severe restrictions on humanitarian access inside Myanmar since the coup, cross-border protection systems operating from Thailand and neighbouring states should become a primary, rather than supplementary, channel for identifying at-risk children and sustaining access to education.

Third, structural interventions addressing the economic-deprivation and protection themes (5.2 and 5.4) are likely to yield greater protective returns than interventions targeting recruitment events alone. Restoring access to schooling and providing direct household-level economic support in displacement-affected regions addresses the conditions that make enlistment appear, in the evidence base's own terms, a rational survival strategy. Fourth, engagement with EAOs should be differentiated rather than uniform: signatories to Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment with demonstrated enforcement capacity should be supported in strengthening age-verification and command oversight, while documentation should target factions where community-pressure recruitment persists.⁶¹

Fifth, accountability mechanisms should continue through available international pathways, including the National Unity Government's Article 12(3) declaration accepting International Criminal Court jurisdiction over crimes committed in Myanmar since 2002, universal jurisdiction proceedings in third states, and targeted sanctions against commanders implicated in direct coercion.⁶² Sixth, reintegration programming should be resourced for sustained, trauma-informed psychological care rather than brief counselling, recognising that the psychological consequences documented here, including chronic anxiety, emotional numbing, and identity disruption, persist well beyond physical demobilisation; community reconciliation

⁶⁰U.N. Security Council, Res. 1612, *supra* note 3.

⁶¹Geneva Call, *Deed of Commitment*, *supra* note 51.

⁶²*Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, art. 12(3), *supra* note 3; National Unity Government of Myanmar, *Declaration Accepting the Jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court* (lodged July 17, 2021, acknowledged by the Court Feb. 9, 2022).

mechanisms should be strengthened in parallel to reduce the stigma that obstructs successful return.

Finally, any future peace process or federal settlement should treat child protection as a non-negotiable element of ceasefire and constitutional design, with disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration protocols reflecting the continuum model rather than a strict voluntary/forced classification of the children being reintegrated. Taken together, these recommendations reflect the article's central claim: protection strategy must operate at multiple points along the continuum simultaneously, addressing structural drivers, institutional accountability, and reintegration capacity as complementary priorities.

8. Conclusion

This article has argued that child recruitment in Myanmar is best understood not as a choice between voluntary enlistment and forced conscription, but as an outcome produced along a continuum of constrained agency. The evidence, spanning identity, protection, trauma, economic deprivation, and direct coercion, converges on a single pattern: children retain agency even under severe constraint, and those who appear to volunteer are frequently responding to conditions, displacement, poverty, trauma, and the collapse of state protection, that have foreclosed every genuine alternative. The 2021 coup did not create this pattern, but intensified every driver feeding it, and the 2024 activation of compulsory conscription intensified it further still, producing an unprecedented and continuing dual expansion of both voluntary and forced recruitment.

The continuum framework developed here does not dissolve the legal and moral distinction between abduction and identity-driven enlistment; direct coercion remains a distinct and especially severe category, treated as such throughout. Its purpose instead is to ensure protection frameworks, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability efforts do not stop at that category's boundary, but extend to the structural and psychological pressures shaping the far larger population of children at the continuum's midpoint, as Section 7 proposes.

A durable response to Myanmar's child recruitment crisis will therefore require sustained attention to the structural conditions, poverty, displacement, educational collapse, erosion of state protection, that populate the continuum's midpoint, alongside continued efforts to

document and prosecute its most severe extreme. Future research would benefit from extending the continuum model beyond Myanmar to other protracted conflicts in which voluntary and forced recruitment coexist, testing whether the distributional skew identified here holds more generally. Ending child recruitment in Myanmar is, in this sense, inseparable from the broader project of rebuilding the institutions, educational, economic, and legal, whose absence has made enlistment appear, to so many children, like the only available choice.

Bibliography

Treaties and International Instruments

1. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3 (1989).
2. *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, 2173 U.N.T.S. 222 (2000).
3. *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90 (1998).

United Nations Documents

1. United Nations Security Council, Res. 1612, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1612 (2005).
2. United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Annual Reports of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, Myanmar country sections (2010-2025) (documentary dataset).
3. U.N. Secretary-General, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, U.N. Doc. A/79/878-S/2025/247 (17 June 2025).

Reports and Organisational Sources

1. Human Rights Watch, *"My Gun Was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (2002).
2. Human Rights Watch, *Sold to Be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma* (2007).
3. Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Myanmar Chapters* (2010–2024).
4. Human Rights Watch, *Myanmar: Stop Recruitment, Use of Child Soldiers* (20 June 2025).
5. International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*.
6. International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Coup Shakes Up Its Ethnic Conflicts*, Asia Report No. 319 (Jan. 12, 2022).

7. Geneva Call, *Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict* (signatory records, Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army 2013, Chin National Front/Chin National Army 2014, Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army 2019).
8. Karen Human Rights Group, *Growing Up Under Militarisation: Abuse and Agency of Children in Karen State* (2008).
9. National Unity Government of Myanmar, *Declaration Accepting the Jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute* (2021).

Academic Literature

10. Boyden, Jo & Jason Hart. *The Statelessness of the World's Children*. 21 Children & Society 237 (2007).
11. Galtung, Johan. *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*. 6 Journal of Peace Research 167 (1969).
12. Rosen, David M. *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism*. Rutgers University Press (2005).
13. Rosen, David M. *Child Soldiers: A Reference Handbook*. ABC-CLIO (2012).
14. Smith, Martin. *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. Zed Books (1999).
15. South, Ashley. *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*. Routledge (2008).
16. South, Ashley. *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict*. Transnational Institute/Burma Center Netherlands (2011).
17. Wessells, Michael. *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection*. Harvard University Press (2006).