Chapter 2

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# Introduction

This literature review will focus on a correlation between immigration trauma [Stress of Immigration Survey (SOIS)] and posttraumatic growth [The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI)] according to biblical and cultural factors in establishing churches and developing leaders such as elders and deacons among diaspora Myanmar churches within the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

The literature in each category is viewed in the effects of immigration trauma or stressors and posttraumatic growth on age, gender, ethnic origin, education, employment status, marital status, immigration status (refugee, asylee, F-1, diversity immigrant visa), years of service, and household income and its implications for the health and wellness of individuals, families, leaders, elders, and deacons among diaspora Myanmar churches within District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

This research will focus on the diaspora Myanmar churches that are active District of Columbia Baptist Convention members. Such diaspora contributes to faith and public life that are identified with limited English proficiency, lack of legal immigrant status, disadvantages in the workplace, yearning for family and home country, and cultural dissonance with the U.S. (Sternberg et al., 2016). Integrating faith and public life might influence personal strength, new possibilities, improved relationships, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life in faith integration and posttraumatic growth toward constructive social change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2018; Berger, 2015).

The lack of integration of faith and public life has been the driving force in inconsistent church attendance, inadequate financial giving, and prone to conflict, indicating a failure of leaders such as elders and deacons of diaspora Myanmar among existing Chin, Karen, Kachin, and other diaspora churches as motivation for change vignettes and core stressors. The leaders, including elders and deacons, and their attitudes towards immigration trauma, beliefs, behaviors, stressors, and post-traumatic spiritual growth significantly influence the Myanmar churches in the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and beyond.

# Literature Search Strategy

The research was collected from the Omega Graduate School Library, the Library of Congress, Journal Storage (JSTOR), the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Online Burma Library, Open Access Digital Theological Library, American Theological Library Association Digital Library, University of Maryland Global Campus Library, The Jerry Falwell Library, Pew Research Center, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, personal collections, and the two dissertation databases on the OGS Library databases webpage.

Most Chin, Kachin, and Karen ethnic origin, the majority of Christians are resettled in the United States of America from India, Thailand, and Malaysia by crossing the borders as asylum seekers and refugees due to religious and ethnic discrimination, persecution and poverty. There have been three waves of immigration from Myanmar as nonimmigrant students and diversity lottery visas, asylum seekers, and refugees since early 2000. According to Refugee Processing Center (2023), more than 188,095 Burmese refugees have been admitted to the U.S. since 2000.

The overall Burmese population in the U.S. is estimated to be around 322,000. As of October 6, 2023, there are 78,304 Christianity out of the total resettlement of 117,557 from Myanmar in the United States (the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, PRM October 6, 2023). Thus, the immigration trauma and posttraumatic growth among leaders’ (deacons and elders) core stressors and attitudes toward spiritual health and wellness to grow in Jesus Christ, make disciples, and transform lives and communities are necessary. Eight ethnic nationalities from Myanmar immigrated to the United States in the early twenty-first century. The eight nationalities, Bahma (aka Burmese), Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni (Kayah), Mon, Rakhine (aka Arakanese), and Shan, have their states and regions.

Kachin (Kachin State: 1,689,441), Kayah (aka Karenni, Kayah State: 286,627), Karen (Kayin State: 1,574,079), Chin (Chin State: 478,801), Mon (Mon State: 2,054,393), Rakhine (aka Arakanese, Rakhine State: 3,188,807), Shan (Shan State: 5,824,432), and Burman or Bamar (aka Burmese) in 7 regions: (1) Sagaing Region: 5,325,347, (2) Tanintharyi Region: 1,408,401, (3) Bago Region: 4,867,373, (4) Magway Region: 3,917,055, (5) Mandalay Region: 6,165,723, (6) Yangon Region: 7,360,703, (7) Ayeyarwady Region: 6,184,829, and the capital Nay Pyi Taw: 1,160,242. According to the latest census, Myanmar has a total population of 51,486,253 (2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Volume 2, May 2015).

# Background of the Problem

First, people from Myanmar are moving to other countries to escape social, religious, and ethnic prejudice as well as economic hardships. They want to settle in developed nations with strong economies, advanced technology, and high living standards, including Western, European, and Asian countries.

Second, the sociopolitical aspect of cross-border migration involves individuals from Myanmar being coerced into human trafficking to escape poverty and discrimination, leading to irregular migration to neighboring countries and resettlement in developed countries.

Myanmar is often used as Burma, which is interchangeably used for the people of Burma, such as the Burmese; however, the researcher will preferably use diaspora Myanmar throughout the study. Both names represent the majority ethnic Burman or Bahma from which the country's name has been historically taken and yet changed to its current name. Myanmar, in 1989, was a country in Southeast Asia that was reinstated from Burma to a roadmap toward democracy, the Province of British India from 1824-1942, 1946-1948, and it was invaded by the Japanese and occupied for a period 1942-1945 (Greenwood, 1995).

Rosalie Hall Hunt, daughter of missionary parents in China, a retired Baptist missionary, has taught in Myanmar, and president of Alabama Women Missionary Union wrote that Adoniram and Anne Judson were the first American Baptist foreign missionaries to arrive in Myanmar in 1813 (Hunt, 2005). On the other note, Roman Catholic missionaries had gone to the land of Pagodas as early as 1554.

Maung Shwe Wa, the author of Burma Baptist Chronicle, which was written in honor of the one hundred fifty years of the arrival of the first Caucasian Protestant missionaries sent from the United States to preach in Myanmar, Adoniram (1788-1850) and Anne Judson (1789-1826), evangelized the Mon-Burman (1819), Karen (Sgaw in 1828, Pwo in 1836, Hill-Karen in 1853), Kachin and Lisu (1877), Plain Chin -Asho (1856), Hill-Chin (1899), Shan (1860), and others including even so not limited to English, Chinese, Indian (1827), Pa-O (1838), Lahu, Wa (1904), Akha (1936), and Naga (1953) (Wa, 1963; Hlei, 2020, p. 146).

Adoniram Judson translated the Holy Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek tongues into Burmese, Myanmar's national language. Judson completed the first translation of the Bible into Burmese on January 31, 1834. The revision of the Old Testament was completed on September 22, 1835, a revision of the New Testament on March 22, 1837, and a revision of the entire Bible, published in quarto format, on October 24, 1840 (Wayland & Francis, 1853, p. 163). Most Protestant Christians in Myanmar are Baptists, the labors of Adoniram Judson, and other Baptist missionaries.

Since gaining independence from British rule in 1948, the country’s politics have been dominated by military coup d'état over and over again. The term coup d’état comes from French, which means a stroke of state or blow of state, which is to unseat an incumbent leadership by force. After a military coup in 1962, the military was nationalized, and all missionaries were forced to leave for good by 1966. National leaders initially led churches with faith but later faced challenges in gaining momentum (Thatun, 2024, p. 19; Hlei, 2020, p. 147). Myanmar was ruled by a military regime, which led to isolation and poverty. The government also persecuted and discriminated against ethnic minorities and Christians until the early twenty-first century. Thus, ethnic minorities and Christians fled as refugees and asylum seekers to countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, and various European nations.

The Myanmar diaspora in the United States has grown due to political, economic, and humanitarian reasons. The diaspora from Myanmar has sought refuge in the United States to escape persecution, violence, poverty, prejudice, and human rights abuses, including forced labor, sexual violence, and torture. This includes refugees from Myanmar (Marshall, 2016, p. 9). The U.S. government has been involved in resettlement programs to provide them with a haven and opportunities for a better life.

Since 2002, the United States has resettled over 146,000 refugees who were originally from Myanmar and were living in Thailand and Malaysia. According to a study on the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program and Secondary Migration and the U.S. Department of State's Refugee Processing Center, currently 322,173 of these refugees reside in the United States. Myanmar is ethnically diverse with various ethnic groups, including Bahma, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine, Shan and others. Ethnic communities settle in various parts of the United States to maintain cultural and religious practices.

The Myanmar diaspora in the United States comprises individuals practicing Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Nat worship. The diaspora from Myanmar has been deeply enriched by the unwavering moral support extended by churches, temples, and mosques. To some individuals from Myanmar have come to the U.S. to pursue educational and economic opportunities, including higher education and better job prospects, contributing to the growth of the diaspora. The diaspora Myanmar communities in the United States are actively engaged in preserving their cultural heritage. They organize cultural events, provide theological education, and offer language classes within the community. These efforts help maintain a sense of identity and connection with relatives and churches in their home country.

Diasporas Myanmar plays a precious role in promoting human rights, democracy, and peace through tireless advocacy and humanitarian efforts. The diaspora of Myanmar shows unwavering dedication, inspiring and serving as a powerful reminder of the immense positive impact of collective action. The United States offers opportunities, but the Myanmar diaspora also faces challenges, including adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, and overcoming legal and socioeconomic barriers. The Myanmar diaspora in the United States is a vibrant and resilient community united by a history of seeking refuge and working towards a brighter future.

The beginning of the diaspora of Myanmar churches in the United States can be traced back to various waves of migration from Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) to the United States. The exact timeline and details may vary, but the first significant wave of migration from Myanmar to the United States occurred in the mid-20th century. Many students, scholars, and professionals from Myanmar have been fortunate enough to receive scholarships to study or a diversity visa to work in the United States. According to the Institute of International Education Open Doors 2021 Report, there has been a 71% increase in Burmese students studying in the US since 2015, with 1,909 enrolled students. The most popular states among Myanmar students are California, with 30%, and New York, with 13% (SEVIS Data, 2020).

This early migration has helped to establish Myanmar communities in the US for future generations. However, political and economic instability in Myanmar, particularly during the late 20th century, led to more people from Myanmar seeking asylum and refugee in the United States. A significant number of refugees who arrived in the United States came from various ethnic backgrounds and religious communities in Myanmar, including Christians. These Christians formed churches and communities upon their arrival to preserve their religious beliefs, faith traditions, and cultural ties. These churches were usually designed to serve particular ethnic groups and languages, such as the Burmese (Bahma) or Myanmar, Karen, Chin, and Kachin.

The Christian diaspora from Myanmar in the US has become stronger since the early 2000s, receiving support from churches and religious organizations. A person initially from Myanmar, now living in the United States, has established multiple faith-based nonprofit organizations. In the last twenty years, approximately four hundred Myanmar diaspora churches have been founded in the United States, showcasing the expansion and impact of the Myanmar diaspora community.

The diverse ethnic and linguistic tapestry of Myanmar is reflected in the vibrant churches and religious communities scattered throughout the United States. The diaspora Myanmar churches in the United States are crucial in helping new immigrants and refugees adjust to their new lives. These churches offer essential services and assistance, and their kind deeds inspire, demonstrating the power of compassion. This support has enabled them to thrive and make a positive impact in their new country.

The diaspora Myanmar churches have formed organizations, including the Burmese Christian Association in North America (1998), Kachin Baptist Churches USA (2000), Chin Baptist Churches in the USA (2004), Full Gospel Assembly International Ministries (2007), Chin Baptist Association in North America (2008), Karen Baptist Churches USA (2009), Zomi Baptist Churches of America (2012), Zomi Baptist Association of North America (2013), Kachin American Baptist Association (2015), Zomi Assemblies of God Fellowship (2016), Myanmar Christian Churches Fellowship of America (2016), Zomi Churches Alliance USA (2017), Myanmar Assemblies of God Fellowship (2019), Zotung Christian Churches of USA (2019), Matu Christian Churches USA (2019), Zotung Chin Baptist Association (2021), Myanmar Baptist Churches USA (2022), Cope Baptist Mission Churches-USA (2024), and other churches were established.

People have left Myanmar for various reasons, including political, economic, ethnic, and religious factors. Myanmar has a history of political repression, military rule, and human rights abuses. Regis Blanc from Helvetas mentioned that Myanmar has been experiencing political unrest, including a military coup, armed conflict, violence, socioeconomic challenges, public health issues, COVID-19-related problems, and inflation since February 2021 (Blanc, 2022). As a result of the military coup and ongoing civil unrest, numerous individuals have been compelled to leave their residences in Myanmar. The diasporas seek sanctuary in nearby nations like India, Malaysia, and Thailand. In recent times, Myanmar has enacted a conscription law mandating that young men and women serve a two-year term in the military if summoned. This legislation has been enforced for the past decade. (Associated Press, 2024). The enforcement of conscription laws and economic challenges have prompted numerous individuals to seek improved prospects abroad. Leaders, including elders and deacons, of Myanmar diaspora churches within the District of Columbia Baptist Convention have voiced apprehensions about the safety of their families, resulting in immigration stress and emotional distress.

According to Pew Research, migration from Myanmar to the United States significantly increased between 2000 and 2019. Some individuals leave Myanmar to practice their religion without fear of persecution freely and to be free from discrimination as ethnic minorities in a new country. Still, diaspora Myanmar churches have experienced similar immigration stress when resettled. Thus, Myanmar has a diverse religious landscape, and individuals may also leave for educational opportunities related to their faith or to engage in religious missions abroad. The factors leading individuals to leave Myanmar are often interconnected, and people may go for various reasons that influence the Myanmar diaspora in multiple parts of the world, including neighboring countries and Western nations.

**An overview of stress, trauma, and posttraumatic growth**

Immigration can have an impact on mental health. The stress and trauma experienced depend on one’s profession and life circumstances. Splitting and projecting emotions can add to this stress (Berger, 2015). The word trauma originates from Greek, meaning wound, hurt, or injury, which is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster (APA, NIH). It is a pervasive problem that affects mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Trauma-Informed et al. Center).

This study will correlate demographic immigration trauma and posttraumatic growth by using the stress of immigration survey and Tesdeshi’s five-factor model on posttraumatic growth among leaders (elders including missionaries, evangelists, pastors, prophets, teachers; lay leaders such as trustees, and deacons including male and female) of diaspora Myanmar churches within the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



**Demographic of Diaspora from Myanmar in the United States**

Tribal ethnicity is the cultural, religious, and linguistic characteristics that define a group of people, including their indigenous heritage and country of origin. Ethnic identity is based on genealogy, ethnolinguistics, tribes, cultural traditions, and practices. The significant events in Myanmar's history include colonization, Christian conversion, Indian immigration, anti-Indian riots in 1938, divide-and-rule administration, racial categorization, the Panglong Conference in 1947, independence, the 1982 Citizenship Law, Ne Win’s rhetoric, and the Rohingya crisis since 1978 (Grosshans et al., 2022, pp. 13-14).

Between 2006 and 2018, approximately 135,000 refugees from Myanmar arrived in the U.S. via Thailand, Malaysia, and India. Ninety-five thousand of them settled in 130 cities across the country. Many established associations and formed relationships with local American Baptist regions (Li, 2021, p.82). In addition, Myanmar has over 140 diaspora churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The American Baptist Mission (ABM since 1813), which was a foreign mission effort in Myanmar, has grown from one convert, Maung Naw (1818-1819), to 5494 local churches, 118 associations, 18 regional conventions, two directly affiliated churches, and 53 theological schools (MBC, Yangon 2024, pamphlet).

**Figure 2**

*Demographic of Diaspora from Myanmar in the United States*



The nation of Myanmar was brought together through the collaboration of diverse ethnic groups, notably the Bamar, Chin, Shan, and Kachin, who converged at the Panglong Conference. The Union of Burma, later known as Myanmar, was established after the conference, marking the first post-colonial government (Walton, 2008). Myanmar has 135 national races, but the exact number is disputed (Clarke et al., 2019). The eight main ethnic groups in Myanmar are Bamar (Burman, 69%), Chin (2.2%), Kachin (1.4%), Karen (Kayin, 6.2%), Karenni (Kayah, 0.4%), Mon (2.4%), Rakhine (Arakanese, 4.5%), and Shan (8.5%). Each has its own state and region within Myanmar (Steinberg, 2010; Mang, 2017).

The bureaucratic ethnic categorization has been instrumental in shaping and delineating ethnopolitical boundaries within societies. This process has provided a platform for different ethnic groups to connect with and articulate their cultural identities about their ethnicity and nationality. Myanmar officially recognizes a diverse range of 135 ethnic groups, classified into eight groups based on their unique languages: Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman, and Tai-Chinese. This rich diversity is an integral part of the country's cultural tapestry.

**Table 1**

*List of the 135 Tribes and Ethnic Groups in Myanmar*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Constituent Ethnic Nationalities/Races | Number of Subgroups | Subgroup/Tribes |
| Bamar (Burman) | 9 | Bamar, Dawei, Beik, Yaw, Yabein, Kadu, Ganan, Salon, Hpon |
| Chin (Asho et al.) | 53 | Chin, Meithei (Kathe), Saline, Ka-Lin-Kaw (Lushay), Khami, Awa Khami, Khawno, Kaungso, Kaung Saing Chin, Kwelshin, Kwangli (Sim), Gunte(Lyente), Gwete, Ngorn, Zizan (Siyin), Sentang, Saing Zan, ZaHow, Zotung, Zo-Pe, Zo, Zah nyet (Zanniet), Tapong, Tiddim ( HaiDim), Tay-Zan, Taishon, Thado, Torr, Dim, Dai (Yindu), Naga, Tangh kul, Malin, Panun, Magun, Matu, Miram (Mara), Mi-er, Mgan, Lushei (Lushay), Laymyo, Lyente, Lawhtu, Lai, Lai zao, Wakim (Mro), Hualngo, Anu, Anu n, Oo-Pu, Lhinbu, Asho (Plain), Rongtu |
| Kachin | 12 | Kachin, Trone, Dalaung, Jinghpaw, Guari, Hkahku, Duleng, Maru (Lawgore), Rawang, Lashi (La Chit), Atsi, Lisu |
| Kayah (Karenni or Red Karen) | 9 | Kayah, Zayein, Ka-Yun (Padaung), Gheko, Kebar, Bre (Ka-Yaw), Manu Manaw, Yin Talai, Yin Baw |
| Kayin (Karen) | 11 | Kayin, Kayinpyu, Pa-Le-Chi, Mon Kayin (Sarpyu), Sgaw, Ta-Lay-Pwa, Paku, Bwe, Monnepwa, Monpwa, Shu (Pwo) |
| Mon | 1 | Mon: Mon Nya, Mon Tang, and Mon The |
| Rakhine (Arakanese) | 7 | Rakhine, Kamein, Kwe Myi, Daingnet, Marama gyi, Mro, Thet |
| Shan | 33 | Shan, Yun (Lao), Kwi, Pyin, Yao, Danaw, Pale, En, Son, Khamu, Kaw (Akha-E-Kaw), Kokang, Khamti Shan, Hkun, Taung yo, Danu, Palaung, Man Zi, Yin Kya, Yin Net, Shan Gale, Shan Gyi, Lahu, Intha, Eik-swair, Pa-O, Tai-Loi, Tai-Lem, Tai-Lon, Tai-Lay, Maingtha, Maw Shan, Wa |

The ethnic groups in Myanmar include Bamar or Burman with nine subgroups, Chin with fifty-three subgroups, Kachin with twelve subgroups, Kayin or Karen with eleven subgroups, Kayah or Karenni with nine subgroups, Mon with three subgroups: Mon Nya, Mon Tang, and Mon The, Rakhine or Arakan with seven subgroups, and Shan with thirty-three subgroups (Grosshans et al., 2022; Eberhard et al., 2019). This study will analyze the experiences of elders and deacons in Myanmar diaspora churches belonging to Christian ethnic groups such as Karen, Kachin, Chin, and other Burmese speakers. The study may not include other groups like Chinese, Indian, and Rohingya.

Thus, Myanmar has diverse ethnic groups besides Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni, such as Bamar, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. The research found that Bamar (Burman) is the largest group that comprises the Bamar, Dawei, Beik, Yaw, Yabein, Kadu, Ganan, Salon, and Hpon, making up the majority of the population (US Institute of Peace). The Mon people can be categorized into three sub-groups: Mon Nya, Mon Tang, and Mon Teh (Stewart, 1937). Rakhine people are known as Arakanese and Mranma and have seven ethnic groups: Rakhine, Kamein, Kwe Myi, Daingnet, Maramagyi, Mro, and Thet (Kyaw Minn Htin, 2005). Shan belongs to the Tai linguistic group: Shan, Yun, Kwi, Pyin, Yao, Danaw, Pale, En, Son, Khamu, Kaw, Kokang, Khamti Shan, Hkun, Taungyo, Danu, Palaung, Man Zi, Yin Kya, Yin Net, Shan Gale, Shan Gyi, Lahu, Intha, Eik-swair, Pa-O, Tai-Loi, Tai-Lem, Tai-Lon, Tai-Lay, Maingtha, Maw Shan and Wa (Asian Tour; Ananda-Tour; Grosshans et al., 2022).

The Karen comprises twelve distinct sub-groups with diverse linguistic, sociocultural, and religious identities. These sub-groups are Sgaw, Pwo, Pa-os, Paku, Maw Nay Pwa, Bwe, White Karens, Padaung (Kayan), Red Karen (Karenni), Keko/Keba, Black Karen, and Striped Karen (Nguyen, 2023, p. 17). The Karen, also known as the Kayin, Kariang, or Kawthoolese, is an ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan-language people who can trace their origins to the Gobi Desert, Mongolia, or Tibet. Nine sub-groups make up the Red Karen, also known as Karenni, including Kayah, Zayein, Ka-Yun (Padaung), Gheko, Kebar, Bre (Ka-Yaw), Manu Manaw, Yin Talai, and Yin Baw (Ananda-Tour; Grosshans et al., 2022).

Li stated that Ko Tha Byu, the first Karen to convert to Christianity by Judson in 1828, became an evangelist to the Karen people, who then spread the gospel to other ethnic groups. Today, there are 1.4 million Christians in Myanmar (Li, 2021, p.81). Muruthi stated that the Karen are an ethnic group from a region on the southern border of Burma, near Thailand. Many Karen practices the Christian faith, making up 7% of those displaced after Burma gained independence from colonial rule in 1948 (Muruthi et al., 2020). The research suggests that religious affiliation is associated with higher well-being and life satisfaction, as well as lower rates of suicide and depression. Refugees often find comfort in their religious beliefs, praying to alleviate their burdens and find meaning in their struggles (Muruthi et al., 2020; Raghallaigh, 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2007).

The Kachin people are not a single tribe but a collection of six groups with varying families and language divisions belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family (Eberhard et al., 2019). Kachin diaspora consists of six ethnic groups and twelve distinct languages, including Jinghpaw, Lawngwaw, Lashi, Zaiwa, Rawang, and Lisu (Szczepanski, August 25, 2020; Ganesan, & Kyaw Yin Hlaing (eds) 2007). The main tribes are the Jinghpaw, Lhaovo (Maru), Lachik (Lashi), Zaiwa (Azi), and Rawang. In Kachin society, there is debate about whether there are six or seven tribes, with some acknowledging the Nung as the seventh tribe. In the 20th century, Christianity played a significant role in shaping the distinct Kachin identity. This was achieved through the utilization of modern print technologies and the organization of Christian churches. Moreover, the Christian elite and educational institutions substantially influenced the unified Kachin identity and the history of Christianity in the Kachin hills (Pelletier, 2021).

Chin refers to names such as Asho, Kuki, Laimi, Mizo, and Zomi, taking pride in their identity as hill people (Son, 1978; Sakhong, 2003; Strait, 2014). The Chin diaspora consists of (53) dialects within the Sino-Tibetan language family, influenced by geography, sociopolitical factors, and religion (Eberhard et al., 2019). The term Zomi refers to the hill people, the people of the central region known as Laimi and Asho in the plains. Kuki means Chin, and Mizo means person or civilian, associated with nationalism, ethnic nationalities, and ethnocentricism. Pum Za Mang, an associate professor at the Myanmar Institute of Theology, stated that Chin and other states in Myanmar are currently facing significant challenges, including religious persecution, political violence, and militarization. These issues have led to a decrease in the population (Mang, 2023).

In addition, CK Hrang Tiam, the former principal of Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, stated that the Chins are known as animists and headhunters. However, presently, the Chin people reside in at least thirty-eight countries, primarily as refugees due to poverty resulting from military actions and a lack of rights in Myanmar (Tiam, 2010, p. 208). Mang confirmed that tens of thousands of Chin had relocated to democratic Western countries, mainly to the United States, ending the plight of many who had lived in India and Malaysia for decades (Mang, 2023).

**Immigration stressors**

The Stress of Immigrants Survey (SOIS) instrument collects, measures, and analyzes data for research in social sciences. It includes surveys and checklists for choosing the instrument for this methodology. The five domains of the Stress of Immigrants Survey (SOIS) include limited English proficiency, lack of legal immigrant status, workplace disadvantages, yearning for family and home country, and cultural dissonance with the U.S. (Sternberg et al., 2016).

The immigration stress and trauma encompass language barriers, family separation, employment uncertainties, poverty, discrimination, societal prejudices, and xenophobia due to national anti-immigrant sentiments. Trauma and stress can result from societal prejudices and unconscious discrimination across five domains, known as moral injury. After experiencing a moral injury, one is expected to feel negative moral emotions, such as guilt and injury. However, it is essential to address these emotions constructively, as allowing them to become chronic and overwhelming can cause further harm (Cohen & Samp, 2024).

The stress of immigration includes acculturation stress, language barriers, discrimination, and feelings of isolation, influenced by navigating two cultures - the one in their home country and the one in their new country. A robust ethnic identity can reduce stress, but Latino and Asian immigrants may experience stress due to the immigration process, leading to mental health issues (Kamimura et al., 2020).

*Limited English Proficiency*

Limited English proficiency (LEP) is a term used in the United States to describe individuals who are not fluent in English, often because it is not their native language. LEP and English Language Learner (ELL) are terms used by the Office for Civil Rights, a sub-agency of the U.S. Department of Education. Stress due to limited English proficiency can adversely affect employment opportunities, the ability to support family, and the enjoyment of life in the United States (Sternberg et al., 2016).

*Lack of Legal Immigrant*

Lack of legal immigrant status means a noncitizen is in unlawful immigration status if they are in the United States without lawful immigration status or if their lawful status has ended (USCIS, Chapter 3 - Unlawful Immigration Status at Time of Filing (INA 245(c)(2)). In other words, an undocumented status can lead to anxiety due to the fear of deportation, restricted job opportunities, inability to obtain a driver’s license and health insurance, as well as challenges in traveling abroad to visit family and meet their material needs (Sternberg et al., 2016).

*Disadvantages in the Workplace*

Disadvantages in the workplace share disadvantages, including discrimination, prejudice, and language and social barriers. The studies show that immigrants are more likely to take on hazardous jobs than native-born individuals. The stress of competing in the workplace and obtaining jobs with essential benefits such as health insurance, paid time off, sick leave, vacation time, and opportunities for career advancement can be significant (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2009; Sternberg et al., 2016).

*Yearning for Family and One's Home Country*

Yearning for family and one's home country, or homesickness, refers to the stress and anxiety caused by being separated from familiar people and places. It is often associated with one's upbringing and connected to culture, language, religion, and history. I felt stressed and sad because I missed family and friends in my home country and could not enjoy its cultural traditions (Smeekes & Jetten, 2016; Sternberg et al., 2016).

*Cultural Dissonance with the U.S.*

Cultural dissonance with the U.S. refers to the discord, confusion, and conflict experienced by individuals amidst cultural change. It describes the difference in acculturation experience between immigrant youth and their parents, leading to stress due to challenges in adapting to life in the United States, encountering discrimination, and feeling a sense of not belonging (Kane et al., 2019; Sternberg et al., 2016).

**Tedeschi’s Five-Factor Model**

Integrating faith and public life might influence personal strength, new possibilities, improved relationships, spiritual growth, and appreciation for life in faith integration and posttraumatic growth toward constructive social change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2018; Berger, 2015). Tedeschi mainly focuses on disruption and event centrality, cognitive processing, and perceptions regarding self-disclosure in posttraumatic growth and development (Kanako et al., 2021). Posttraumatic spiritual growth is based on personal strength, new opportunities, improved relationships, and appreciation of life, contributing to constructive social change.

*Personal Strengths*

Personal strengths define who you are as a person. The concept pertains to heightened self-reliance or strength (Taku et al., 2020, p.2). The idea involves acknowledging that an individual has successfully handled a stressful situation and has shown personal resilience from the experience, captured in the phrase more vulnerable, yet stronger. (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2023, p.797).

*New Opportunities*

New opportunities arise from improved relationships involving more compassion and a sense of connectedness (Taku et al., 2020, p.2). This reflects an awareness that different life paths are available, which may have yet to be clear before the challenges presented by the crisis (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2023, p.797).

*Improved Relationships*

The term improved relationships refers to the experience of overcoming adversity that can lead to better relationships, greater compassion, and finding new paths in life (Taku et al., 2020, p. 2; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2023, p.797).

*Spiritual Growth*

Spiritual growth involves evolving to understand better philosophical questions and personal development (Taku et al., 2020, p. 2). In other words, individuals transform spiritually, embodying Christ-like qualities and fostering positive societal change. Cultural elements may have influenced this aspect (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2023, p.797).

*Appreciation of Life*

Appreciating life involves acknowledging its priceless essence and refraining from wasting it (Taku et al., 2020, p.2; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2023, p.797).

# Sociological Perspectives

# This study investigates why various ethnic groups in Myanmar migrate to neighboring and developed countries. The research will focus on the sociological perspective of immigration trauma and post-traumatic growth, with a particular emphasis on the theories of refugees and trauma, and identify four stages of immigrant trauma: pre-migration trauma, traumatic events during transit, continuing traumatic experiences during resettlement, and post-migration stress.

The term refugees refers to individuals who flee their home countries due to human rights violations and prolonged suffering. This means that refugees leave their country to seek safety in another country due to conflict, violence, or persecution (UNHCR, 2024). The author illustrates the interconnectedness between refugee experiences, associated trauma, and various theories, bridging gaps in the understanding of the relationship between refugee and immigration trauma and posttraumatic growth.

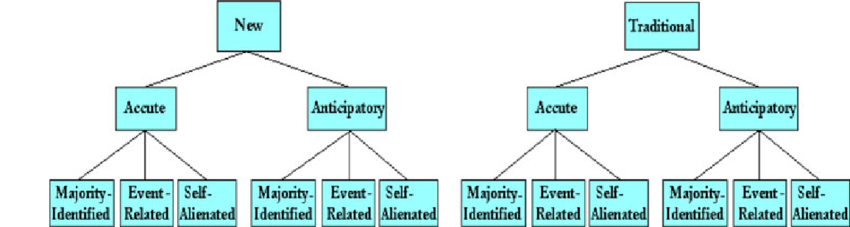
Kunz’s kinetic model of refugee theory and Everett S Lee’s push-pull theory provide valuable insights for sociological research on immigration, especially when considering the experiences of individuals from Myanmar in developed nations.

**Kunz's Kinetic Model of Refugee Theory**

Kunz's Kinetic Model of Refugee Theory (1973, 1981) classifies refugee movement as new or traditional and anticipatory or acute. Kunz proposed two ways in which refugees relocate and resettle: acute refugee movement and anticipatory refugee movement. Kunz categorized refugees into three groups based on their attitudes toward their displacement. The first group is called majority-identified refugees. Kunz also discusses events related to refugees as stemming from significant or hidden injustices against them. The third type is self-alienation (Hossain, 2022; George, 2009; Collins, 1996).

**Figure 3**

*Typology of Refugees’ Theory*



*New and Traditional Refugees*

Newly arrived refugees often come from less developed countries and are culturally, racially, and ethnically different from their host countries (George, 2009). In some cases, newly displaced individuals may need more support to acculturate in their new country. Kunz (1981) argued that refugees are at a higher risk of experiencing or witnessing traumatic events, which can have serious consequences. Therefore, refugees often need support to help them cope with their struggles.

The asylum seekers have three options upon arrival: return home, seek asylum, or accept resettlement in a foreign land, specifically in developed countries (George, 2009; Kunz, 1981). The anticipatory refugees seek asylum in wealthy Western nations, while acute refugees seek refuge in countries similar to their home countries (Paludan, 1974, 1981). The refugees who follow traditional migration patterns share cultural and ethnic similarities with the people of their host country (George, 2009). People from similar developing countries often receive help from their language-speaking family and friends, which makes it easier for them to adapt and settle in their new surroundings.

*Typology of Refugee Trauma*

Kunz's 1981 theory classifies refugees into two main categories: participatory and acute, with three subgroups in each. The majority identified refugees who leave their country of origin due to social and political events, event-related refugees who are forced to leave due to discrimination, and self-alienated refugees who leave for personal reasons (Kunz, 1981; Collins, 1996). The priority of hosting a country for refugees should be to ensure their safety and well-being while encouraging voluntary repatriation. Many individuals who flee their home countries and seek refuge in other nations do so because of socio-political circumstances. These refugees often hold a favorable view of Western developed countries. However, refugee status is only granted when there is a perceived security risk for the refugees and the host nation. The refugees must provide strong evidence of their persecution. To increase their chances of being granted refugee status (Stein, 1981; George, 2009).

**Figure 2**

*Typology of Refugees’ Trauma*

**Moderators:**

Typology of Refugee

Typology of Refugee Settlement

Gender

Host County Status

The refugees flee their homes for political, social, personal, or safety reasons. The host countries categorize their applications and offer them aid to rebuild their lives. It is essential to

consider pre- and post-migration traumatic events that may affect their psychological well-being. To provide support for traumatized refugees, it is crucial to understand how traumatic events related to migration affect their mental and emotional well-being (George, 2009; Collins, 1996).

**Migration Theories: Lee’s Push-Pull Theory**

Lee's (1966, 1996) migration theory identifies four factors that influence the migration population: place of origin, place of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. The reasons for immigration to a destination country can be categorized as pull and push factors. The push factors for emigration include a lack of economic opportunities, persecution, hazards, unemployment, natural disasters, political instability, drought, or famine (Lee, 1996; Gilbert, 2017). The pull factors include leaving a place, while push factors can be forceful, such as job availability, freedom, and safety (Čirjak, 2020).

**Figure 3**

*Everett S. Lee’s Push-Pull Theory on Immigration (1966: 50, 1996)*



Gilbert stated that factors that attract people to new places include poverty, lack of job opportunities, religious and political freedom, and environmental safety (Gilbert, 2017). The migration of refugees to high-income countries is driven by socioeconomic conditions, living standards, and economic integration (Brell et al., 2020, p.95). Marshall discovered that people were forced to leave their homes due to ethnic armed conflict and human rights abuses, such as forced labor, sexual violence, torture, forced relocation, and religiously linked conflict and persecution (Marshall, 2016).

# Faith Perspectives

Christianity came to Myanmar in 1554 with Roman Catholic missionaries. The first Christian mission to arrive in Burma was the Roman Catholic Barnabite Mission in 1722. The first missionary to reside in Burma was an Italian priest named Padre Bartolomeo Peano, who lived in Loikaw, Kayah State (Gheddo, 2007, pp. 207–8; Grosshans et al., 2021, p.150). David Thang Moe, a young theologian of Chin ethnic nationality from Myanmar, who is Henry H. Rice Postdoctoral Associate in Southeast Asian Studies at Yale University, stated that Christianity is the predominant religion among ethnic minorities such as the Kachins, Chins, and Karens (Moe, 2021). Adoniram Judson and Baptist missionaries shared the gospel message with the people of Myanmar, leading to a deep spiritual connection with God rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Rosalie Hall Hunt, daughter of missionary parents in China, a retired Baptist missionary who has taught in Myanmar, and president of Alabama Women Missionary Union, wrote that Adoniram and Anne Judson were the first American Baptist foreign missionaries to arrive in Myanmar on July 14, 1813 (Hunt, 2005). In 1807, the English Baptists opened a mission in Burma unsuccessfully. Thus, Judson translated the Holy Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Burmese, created a Burmese-English dictionary, and spread Christianity to the Burman, Mon, and Karen groups in southern Myanmar (Grosshans et al., 2022). The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (1814) later became International Ministries of American Baptist Churches -USA (1907) and the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (1845).

Maung Shwe Wa, the author of Burma Baptist Chronicle, which was written in honor of the one hundred fifty years of the arrival of the first Caucasian Protestant missionaries sent from the United States to preach in Myanmar, Adoniram (1788-1850) and Anne Judson (1789-1826), evangelized the Mon-Burman (1819), Karen (Sgaw in 1828, Pwo in 1836, Hill-Karen in 1853), Kachin and Lisu (1877), Plain Chin -Asho (1856), Hill-Chin (1899), Shan (1860), and others including even so not limited to English, Chinese, Indian (1827), Pa-O (1838), Lahu, Wa (1904), Akha (1936), and Naga (1953) (Wa, 1963; Hlei, 2020, p. 146). The missionaries targeted the highlanders in border areas populated by ethnic minorities such as Karen, Karenni, Kachin, and Chin for conversion (Grosshans et al., 2022).

The Judsons translated the Holy Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek tongues into

Burmese, Myanmar's national language, compiled the English-Burmese Dictionary (1826). Judson completed the first translation of the Bible into Burmese on 31 January 1834. Revision of the Old Testament was completed on 26 September 1835, a revision of the New Testament on 22 March 1837, and a revision of the entire Bible, published in quarto format, on 24 October 1840 (Wayland & Francis, 1853, p. 163). Most Protestant Christians in Myanmar are Baptists, a testament to the hard work and dedication of Baptist missionaries like the Judsons.

Harvard University reports that the Karen, Kachin, Chin, Karenni, Lahu, and Naga ethnic groups comprise 8.2% of Christianity in Myanmar, with 5.5% Protestant, 1.3% Roman Catholic, and the rest belonging to independent churches, while 2.5% identify as Evangelicals and 2.1% as Pentecostals (Christianity in Myanmar | Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School, 2024).

Joshua's project reports show that Buddhism is the dominant religion in Myanmar, with 77.7% of the population following it. Christianity is 8.3%, and Islam is 5.0%, respectively, the second and third most popular religions. Only 1.6% of the people practice Hinduism, while approximately 0.6% of the population is non-religious (Aung, 2016; Ling, 2021; Joshua Project, 2024).

In 1819, after six years of evangelizing in Myanmar, Maung Naw, a Mon-Burman, was the first person to convert from Buddhism. Judson aimed to convert Burmese Buddhists in Lower Myanmar and establish a strong Burmese Church, but only a few were interested in Christianity. Judson realized that converting the Karen people might be more successful than converting Burmese Buddhists in Lower Myanmar. (Lim & Dengthuama, 2016). The Karen ethnic group has two distinct languages: Sgaw and Pwo. Christian Karen people mainly speak Sgaw, while Buddhist Karen people primarily speak Pwo.

The Karen Christianity began with the Sgaw in 1828, Pwo in 1836, and Hill-Karen in 1853 due to the diligent efforts of Adoniram Judson during British rule in Myanmar. The first Karen convert, Ko Tha Byu, was baptized in 1829. The mission extended to the Karen: SGaw-Karen (1828), Pwo-Karen (1836), Pa-o (1838), and Karen hill tribe (1853). The Baptist mission extended to various regions, including Asho Chin (1856), Shan (1860), Kachin, Lisu (1877), Chin (1899), and Naga (the 1950s) (Lim & Dengthuama, 2016).

A Swedish immigrant, Ola Hanson embraced the Baptist faith and was ordained in 1890. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society appointed him to northern Burma, where the Shan and Kachin people lived, focusing on serving the Kachin people (Grosshans et al., 2022). Ola and Minnie Hanson arrived in December 1890 and found Kachin valuable mythology for evangelism. The Kachin myths can be understood from a Christian perspective, and the lost book myth is particularly valuable. According to this myth, a white man will one day bring back the lost book. Ola Hanson decided to return the lost book to the Kachin people, taking on the role of the white man who created the language based on the Roman alphabet, compiled a dictionary (1906), and translated the Bible of the New Testament in 1911 and Old Testament in 1926 (Grosshans et al., 2022).

The Chin people lived in the highlands and the plains of what is now Myanmar (Burma). They practiced a traditional cosmic religion that involved costly animal sacrifices to appease angry spirits and believed that these spirits resided almost everywhere. In 1886, American Baptist missionaries Arthur and Laura Carson arrived in Burma, began their mission in Asho Chin, and moved to the Chin Hills in 1899. The arrival of the Carsons caused a significant shift to transformations in the social and personal lives of the Chin people (Mang, 2023). Thuam Hang and Pau Suan, along with their wives from the Siyin tribes, were the first converts from Animism to Christianity among the hill Chins in 1904. They were baptized in 1905 after the American Baptist Mission evangelized the Hill Chins in 1899. As of today, about 90% of Chins practice Christianity, with their beliefs, values, and politics more closely aligned with Southern Baptists than American Baptists (Steinberg, 2010; Mang, 2023).

Since the early 2000s, more than four hundred churches have been established in the United States. The Chin, Kachin, and Karen ethnic groups have an active Christian faith despite living far from Myanmar. Christians tell a lighthearted joke that suggests that wherever the Chin people resettle, especially if they have a hollow guitar, they are inclined to start home cell planting and house churches. Christianity is essential to their culture and life, but how their relationship with Christ translates to their faith and public life needs to be clarified. The biblical qualifications of elders and deacons in diaspora Myanmar churches worldwide have not been clearly defined.

# Synthesis of Current Literature

Matthew Vos, a sociology professor at Covenant College and Omega Graduate School, distinguishes between personal troubles and significant societal issues (Vos, 2014). The central issues within diaspora Myanmar churches often arise from power struggles between elders and deacons rather than doctrinal differences, emphasizing the importance of power dynamics. The most challenging conflict within the congregation arises from differences in dialects, ethnicities, and denominations, mainly influenced by tribal affiliations and presumptions of ethnocentricism.

The diasporas Myanmar's cultural, religious, and linguistic traits can help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and Christocentrism to promote positive social change. Li (2021), the former Asian Ministries National Coordinator of the American Baptist Home Mission Societies, emphasized Judson's belief that the future holds as much promise as God’s word. Diaspora Christians steadfastly maintain this conviction despite hardships. Li stresses the entire mission cycle, from Burmese missionaries to diaspora Christians in the US living and testifying faithfully as missionaries (Li, 2021).

**Figure 4**

*Theroertical Framework*



*Tedeschi’s Posttraumatic Spiritual Growth*

The congregation depends on elders and deacons to address immigration challenges and provide spiritual guidance based on the demographic. The criteria for serving as elders in the local church, as outlined in the Bible, is of great importance. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul listed the gifts of ministry as a fivefold ministry of the apostle, evangelist, prophet, pastor, and teacher. Elder and overseer refer to the same office as the pastor in the ministry gifts from our Lord Jesus Christ. Other titles for church leaders include ‘elder’ and ‘pastor.’ The term ‘pastor’ is only used once in the New Testament as a reference for a church leader (Eph. 4:11). The term “elder” in this study refers to the minister and includes apostle (missionary), evangelist, prophet, pastor, and teacher interchangeably (Ephesians 4:11-13).

In a biblical context, elders are considered pastors who serve as overseers, are men in a local church, and are entrusted and ordained by Jesus to tend His flock as undershepherds (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Getz, 2003; Rinne, 2014). The role of a pastor is that of a modern-day minister or clergy in a church, while an elder or overseer typically serves as an unpaid lay elder. Both roles are vital within the local church (Rinne, 2014; Harrison, 2022). The question we should ask is: Who leads the church? There are two groups of leaders: elders or overseers exclusively for men, and deacons include both men and women (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

The verb form, poimaino, “to shepherd/pastor,” is used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2. The term shepherd/pastor, minister is often connected with our Lord’s title, “Chief Shepherd/pastor.” The pastoral office is referred to as that of “under-shepherd.” In 1 Timothy 3, the apostle Paul provides qualifications for overseers, elders (3:1–7), and deacons (3:8–13). Paul and Peter said that Jesus chooses paid elders and pastors to care for his churches as his helpers until he returns (Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Getz affirmed that within the New Testament church, the title of “elder” was used for selected people with the necessary abilities to travel and establish new churches. In the early church, there were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-13). The influential leaders, including Peter, John, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy, and Titus, played a critical role in establishing churches and appointing leaders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 5:17; Getz, 2003).

The scripture in Ephesians 4:11-13 calls upon the saints to serve and empowers them with the gifts of ministry to nurture the body of Christ. The elders play a critical role as mentors, preachers, teachers, administrators, leaders, and counselors, addressing many issues among the diaspora Myanmar churches within the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and beyond. These issues encompass limited English proficiency, undocumented immigrant status, workplace disadvantages, and helping individuals understand cultural differences in the U.S., drawing from Kunz’s refugee theory and Lee’s push-pull theory.

The word “deacon” originates from the Greek noun “diakonos,” which translates to the “servant(s)” or “minister(s).” In the New Testament, deacons are officially ordained to serve in the public life of the congregation alongside elders or pastors within the local church (Smethurst, 2021). In the local church, there are two offices: pastor and deacon. The Bible does not mention a specific office for the trustee. There are two types of incorporation under the Internal Revenue Service: nonprofit and church organization. The individuals elected by congregation members 18 years or older to serve as trustees will establish a religious corporation under the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ in cooperation with elders and deacons. This corporation will comply with state religious laws to maintain tax-exempt status and use tithing and donations to advance God’s kingdom and fulfill the great commission globally.

A deacon's original purpose and qualifications should align with the early church’s practice of selecting seven individuals of good standing, full of Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3; Nichols, 2014). These individuals supported pastors by attending to the practical and physical needs of the church community (Acts 6:1-7; Smethurst, 2021). Nichols pointed out that in Acts 6, the individuals chosen were not explicitly referred to as deacons but rather as engaging in service, with a primary calling to serve rather than assume an official role (Nicols, 2014, pp.1-2). The biblical model for choosing a deacon emphasizes faith in Jesus Christ as a top priority and a requirement for a born-again Christian.

The spiritual bond between the members of the local church and Jesus Christ is essential for established and newly planted churches to receive God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, leading to spiritual resiliency. It is necessary to focus on nurturing the relationship between believers and Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10). The Greek term “koinonia” refers to the participation of people in the life of God and one another, fostering communion, fellowship, and sharing (Douglas, 2022). The term “diakonia” originates from the Greek root and is employed in secular Greek society to signify serving or service. The Church sees it as its mission to carry out the great commission and spread the gospel through both words and actions performed by the church, Christians whom God has called to be mediators (Lee, 2020; Matthew 28:18-20).

The journey to spirituality involves discipleship, spiritual formation, and transformative life and is integral to the human experience (Nelson-Becker & Thomas, 2020). The spiritual aspects of being an elder and a deacon enhance the church’s governance and servant leadership, and their responsibilities within the church community are highly regarded. Jesus Christ has given fivefold ministry gifts to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip His followers for service and to build the body of Christ. The ultimate goal is to attain unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God, leading to spiritual maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). The believers choose the deacons to support the elders in their service while focusing on sharing the gospel and teaching the word of truth as commanded by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 2:4).

*Tedeschi’s Posttraumatic Improve Relationship*

Spirituality goes beyond religion and is rooted in developing meaningful relationships. It is crucial to foster a personal connection with Jesus Christ and live according to His teachings. Posttraumatic growth is the process of spiritual formation and individual growth through faith in Jesus Christ and being filled with the Holy Spirit after accepting Jesus Christ as one’s savior and Lord. There are steps to developing personal relationships with Jesus Christ, including family, marital relationships, and the congregation’s interactions with the public.

Van der Merwe describes Christian spirituality as the conscious relationship with God in Jesus Christ, made possible by the indwelling of the Spirit and within the context of striving to integrate one’s life towards self-transcendence and ultimate values (Van der Merwe, 2020). This concept of spirituality emphasizes experiencing God’s love in daily life and the profound impact of God’s presence on believers and the public. For God so loved the world, he gave his only son, that whoever believes in Jesus Christ shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The word love forms the basis of relationships between men and women, allowing them to build families. It is also crucial for establishing spiritual connections with God and others.

Paul stresses that the old has passed and the new creation has come, representing life transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). The concept of “no longer two, but one flesh” symbolizes the profound unity between a husband and wife. This unity mirrors the relationship between Jesus Christ and the believers of the church, illustrating how they form the body of Christ (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). To create a flourishing family environment, it is important to prioritize open communication, show appreciation and empathy, and actively support each other’s personal growth and well-being.

The church describes the body part of a human being as a body with many parts, but it forms one body, so it is with Christ. Now, you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Paul teaches that the body of Christ is composed of many parts, as we have all been baptized by one Spirit to form one united body, regardless of our background —whether we are Jews or Gentiles, enslaved people, or free individuals. Similarly, the body does not consist of just one part but many (vv. 13-14). The body is subject to the authority of the head. As part of the Godhead Trinity dwelling in every believer, the Holy Spirit represents the body of Christ belonging to the head, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23).

# Variant Perspectives

The immigrants from Myanmar, particularly newcomers, encounter challenges when adapting to a new country, including limited English proficiency, lack of legal immigrant status, workplace disadvantages, homesickness, and cultural differences in the U.S. (Sternberg et al., 2016). Thus, experiencing a distressing event can lead to physical, moral, and emotional injury with short- and long-term impacts on feelings, thinking, behavior, social relationships, and self-perception (Berger, 2015, p. 9). The diaspora in Myanmar has faced various challenges related to immigration, including complex trauma, retraumatization, mass trauma, community disaster, and cultural trauma (Berger, 2015).

The immigration policies resulted in the migration and acceptance of refugees and asylees, notably from Myanmar, into the United States during the George Bush administration. Asylees were initially introduced through Guam in 2000, and later, more refugees and asylees were admitted during the Barack Obama era for democratic interests and humanitarian reasons. The Republican and Democratic parties have their perspectives on immigration, with distinct interests and approaches to raising awareness about immigrant issues. The people of Myanmar aspire to break free from prejudice, military rule, ethnic discrimination, and poverty. They seek the freedom to practice their religion and have formed over four hundred diasporas Myanmar churches.

In many Asian cultures, including Myanmar, there is a tradition of showing respect to elders. This can lead to hesitancy in openly expressing criticism or engaging in confrontation, which may result in loss of face and potential retaliation, causing emotional stress and moral injury. As opposed to embracing the prosperity of cultural traditions and ethnic diversity of honor, the military régime has transformed the honor into a shameful culture that turns guilt and emotional tension into immigration trauma and unknowing moral injury. Hoffman and Nickerson (2022) discussed the psychological impact of moral transgressions on refugees in the context of traumatic events (Hoffman & Nickerson, 2022).

As a result of the sociopolitical prejudice that creates hatred and reinforces persecution of the ethnic minorities who are powerless and voiceless, both sociopolitical, ethnic discrimination and religious prejudices resulted in trauma that created a problem against each other as the civil war. The continuous civil conflicts started after the government nationalized industries, aiming to disrupt equality among the different ethnic groups in the country. This led to widespread forced immigration, with the ethnic nationalities from Myanmar falling prey to human trafficking and illegal immigrants abandoning their belongings and loved ones and seeking refuge and asylum in neighboring and developed nations. Finding a caring and encouraging nation that can provide spiritual support while striving for freedom and happiness is essential to prevent such tragedies.

The American people are inclined to embrace the diaspora of Myanmar, not only due to political interests but also because of the longstanding spiritual bond that has developed over two centuries. This connection traces back to the influential American missionary Adoniram Judson, who devoted his life to the people of Myanmar. The connection between American missionaries and the people of Myanmar has been significant, making accepting refugees and asylum seekers from Myanmar a considerable gesture. The United States and other democratic, Christianity- influenced nations have played an essential role in global evangelical efforts and in promoting human rights, including accepting refugees from Myanmar.

# The missionaries were highly respected for their dedication to the people of Myanmar and their efforts to introduce the gospel message of the transformative redemption and teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Holy Bible was translated into Burmese, an English-Burmese dictionary was created, and missionaries influenced the culture and public life while gaining independence from the British. Christianity in Myanmar has global connections despite opposition from the majority Buddhist-influenced government isolated from the world.

# The people of Myanmar have yet to encounter significant cultural or legal challenges in their new country due to the longstanding presence of Christianity for over two centuries and their lawful resettlement as asylum seekers and refugees. The difficulty of not being fluent in English has caused problems in the workplace. The surge of Burmese nationalism, the socialist education system, and sociopolitical developments in Myanmar from the early 1970s onward have had significant implications.

# Literature Gap

Despite significant research in biblical studies, theology, ministry, applied theology, and anthropology, there remains a noticeable scarcity of social science research focused explicitly on the experiences and effects of immigration trauma within the diaspora Myanmar churches. The lack of understanding of the challenges elders and deacons face in these churches hinders the development of tailored support and intervention strategies.

Further research is needed on the responsibilities of elders and deacons in establishing churches and offering biblical guidance within diaspora Myanmar churches in the United States and other locations. This endeavor seeks to explore the correlation between trauma related to immigration and the resulting personal development among elders and deacons of diaspora Myanmar churches within active members of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. The respondents for this field research consist of diaspora Myanmar churches that are members of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches - USA and the Baptist World Alliance.

The history of the diaspora of Myanmar churches is closely intertwined with Adoniram Judson and the American Baptist Mission to Myanmar since 1813. In 1845, the topic of slavery had escalated into a significant point of conflict. The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society declined to appoint enslavers, while the American Baptist Home Mission Society endorsed the concept of distinct northern and southern conventions. This decision ultimately resulted in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention. The United States is home to more than 400 diaspora Myanmar churches, many of which have affiliations with organizations such as the American Baptist Churches USA, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, and others. There are around 140 churches associated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The current research on stress resilience and spiritual growth needs more depth. This gap is due to church planting primarily emphasizing linguistic and dialectical strategies over genuine conversion. Consequently, new believers often do not prioritize spiritual resilience, discipleship, and spiritual formation in church participation and worship. To be true believers, it is essential to establish a deep personal connection with Jesus Christ and engage in inclusive, spirit-led worship that transcends linguistic, familial, and cultural boundaries.

# Summary and Conclusion

In summary, between 2000 and 2019, there was a significant increase in migration from Myanmar ethnic nationalities, such as Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni, as well as Bamar, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, to the United States. This migration occurred in four waves: nonimmigrant students, diversity lottery visas, asylum seekers, and refugees. The majority of immigrants are mainly Chin, Kachin, Karen, and others. Many people leave Myanmar to practice their religion without fear of persecution freely and to escape discrimination as ethnic minorities in a new country.

The people from Myanmar have encountered significant challenges upon resettlement, leading to the establishment of over 400 diaspora Myanmar churches in the United States. A study is being conducted on the immigration-related stress and post-traumatic growth experienced by elders and deacons in active diaspora Myanmar churches affiliated with the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

The research will primarily adopt a sociological perspective, focusing on immigration trauma and post-traumatic growth, with a specific emphasis on refugee and trauma theories. In addition, the study aims to delineate four stages of immigrant trauma, namely pre-migration trauma, traumatic events during transit, ongoing traumatic experiences during resettlement, and post-migration stress.

Christianity arrived in Myanmar in 1554 through the efforts of Roman Catholic missionaries. The Roman Catholic Barnabite Mission established the first Christian mission in Burma in 1722. The initial missionary to reside in Burma was an Italian priest, Padre Bartolomeo Peano, who lived in Loikaw, Kayah State. Christianity has become dominant among ethnic minorities such as the Kachins, Chins, and Karens. The good news was brought to the people of Myanmar by Adoniram Judson and Baptist missionaries, fostering a strong spiritual bond with God grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Myanmar has 135 national races out of the eight constituent nationalities. The research will focus on three of the eight nationalities, such as the Chin, Kachin, and Karen, and use two assessment instruments to evaluate immigration trauma and experiences of post-traumatic growth among elders and deacons in the diaspora Myanmar churches associated with the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

The main obstacles diaspora Myanmar churches encounter usually result from power struggles between elders and deacons rather than doctrinal differences, underscoring the importance of power dynamics within the congregation. Frequent conflicts often arise due to disparities in dialects, ethnicities, religious convictions, tribal associations, and a limited grasp of biblical leadership and service. When church, politics, and society intermingle, it can lead to discord and division within ethnic groups like the Chin, Karen, and Kachin, especially within diaspora Myanmar churches both locally and globally.

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