



Women and Children Research
and Advocacy Network

THE IMPACT OF Taliban's Edicts on Women and Girls in Afghanistan



RESEARCH REPORT

October 2024 - March 2025

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am honoured to express my sincere gratitude for the successful completion of this research report on “The Impacts of Taliban’s Edicts on Women and Girls in Afghanistan.” This report documents the devastating impact of the Taliban’s restrictions on women’s and girls’ rights, highlighting not only the denial of their fundamental rights but also the broader social and psychological consequences faced by them.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the international experts, women leaders and politicians, civil society activists, journalists, educators, and students whose invaluable contributions have been pivotal in making this research a reality. Furthermore, I

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I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the WCRAN research team, as well as Akila Radhakrishnan, Legal Advisor of the End Gender Apartheid Campaign, for her valuable assistance in the development and finalization of this research report.

Together, let us strive toward the realization of an Afghanistan free from discrimination and gender inequality.

Zarqa Yaftali,
CEO of WCRAN



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ABOUT WCRAN

The Women and Children Research and Advocacy Network – WCRAN is a non-profit organization founded by passionate individuals dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of women and children. WCRAN conducts research, advocates for policy change, and supports grassroots organizations working on the ground to address critical issues such as gender equality, education, and ending violence against women and children.

WCRAN strongly focuses on advocating for the rights and well-being of women and children. The organization takes a comprehensive approach to achieving its goals by collaborating with government agencies, non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and community groups to amplify its impact and reach.

WCRAN's primary goal is to create a world where women and children are valued, protect-

ed, and provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives. The organization pursues this through innovative research and advocacy initiatives designed to influence policymakers. Key activities include conducting research and studies on relevant issues, raising public awareness, supporting humanitarian actions, networking, and forming strategic partnerships for mobilization and empowering communities through a gender, cultural, social, and economic lens.

WCRAN's primary constituencies comprise the affected population, especially women and children, and is committed to reaching the most vulnerable and at-risk women and children through direct interventions or partnerships with local and international organizations. With a multi-faceted approach and a strong commitment to its mission, WCRAN stands as

a beacon of hope and empowerment for those in need.

Vision: A world where women and children are free from discrimination, violence, and oppression, and have equal rights and opportunities.

Mission: To advocate for the rights of

women and children, and empower them through capacity-building, education, and advocacy with policymakers. WCRAN works to create a society where women and children are valued, respected, protected, and have equal access to their rights, opportunities, and resources.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	II
About WCRAN	IV
Executive Summary	1
Introduction	4
Methodology	7
Importance of the Research	10
Challenges and Limitations	12
Literature Review	14
Overview of the Taliban’s decrees and restrictions	14
Findings & Patterns	23
Avenues for Justice & Accountability for Women’s Rights Violations	50
Conclusion	58
Recommendations	60

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview: Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, human rights violations against women and girls have escalated significantly, with the Taliban systematically erasing them from public life by imposing policies that severely restrict their rights. They have issued more than 150 edicts since their return to power, with over 100 directly targeting women's rights. Continuously finding new ways to impose restrictions, in August 2024, they enacted the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice laws, further limiting and codifying women's freedoms.

This report, based on extensive research- including a survey of 600 women in Afghanistan and in-depth interviews reveals the devastating impact of the Taliban's policies on women's rights in the country, affecting their lives, livelihoods, and physical and mental

health. The research also highlights the systemic and widespread nature of these violations, with individual rights violations compounding upon one another. The report looks at 4 major areas of the impacts on women and girls lives, which demonstrate the totalizing impact of the Taliban's policies.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- 🕯 **Education** – Education has been one of the most significantly impacted areas of life for women and girls in Afghanistan under Taliban rule. The research findings collectively emphasize the extent of the education bans and their profound negative effects on the mental health, emotional well-being, and overall life satisfaction of women and girls, illustrating the far-reach-

ing consequences of these restrictions.

- ◎ **Employment** - The Taliban's policies have resulted in significant job losses for women in Afghanistan, both in the public and private sectors. After the Taliban's takeover, many women were compelled to leave their jobs, especially in sectors like education, healthcare, and government, where they had once played vital roles. The lack of economic opportunities has exacerbated financial and social stress, leading to a loss of independence and an increased vulnerability to violence.
- ◎ **Public, political, and social life** – Since the Taliban takeover, the lives of women and girls have been entirely confined to their homes and immediate family environments, with significant consequences for their agency and ability to participate in public and political life. These restrictions encompass their mobility, social interactions, as well as political and public participation, leaving women and girls isolated, controlled, and without opportunities to engage in broader society. Women and girls are isolated not only physically but also

socially, as the Taliban enforces a system of gender segregation that limits their opportunities for personal growth, social engagement, and professional achievement.

- ◎ **Gender-based violence** - Gender-based violence has significantly increased under the Taliban, exacerbated by the absence of legal recourse. Most respondents have either experienced or witnessed violence against women, including verbal, psychological, and financial abuse. Violence serves as both a consequence and a catalyst of the dire state of women's rights in Afghanistan, creating an inescapable cycle of harm.

The report emphasizes that these findings underscore the urgent need for immediate and sustained international action to address the women's rights crisis in Afghanistan. It calls for robust measures to hold the Taliban accountable for their actions and to support Afghanistan women and girls in reclaiming their rights and freedoms.

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

Support the codification of gender apartheid

as a crime against humanity in the international law and in the draft treaties on crimes against humanity.

Support initiatives like the CEDAW accountability mechanism and cooperate with the International Criminal Court to investigate violations in Afghanistan.

Prioritize women's participation, agency, and leadership in international decision-making processes regarding Afghanistan.

Intensify diplomatic efforts and apply targeted pressure on the Taliban to rescind all the imposed restrictions on women particularly the PVPV Law.

Adopt principles ensuring aid delivery considers barriers faced by women and girls,

prioritizing their access.

Provide the opportunity of online and in-person scholarship and fellowship for women and girls inside and outside Afghanistan.

Hold the Taliban accountable for violations of women's rights and for the misuse of Islamic principles to justify repression, while promoting dialogue that underscores the protection of human rights and the preservation of Islamic values.

Foster engagement with Afghanistan women's activists and leaders by providing diplomatic support and platforms for their voices, thereby strengthening their global advocacy efforts for justice, equality, and human dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021, human rights violations against women and girls have increased steadily. Despite initial promises that women would be allowed to exercise their rights within Sharia law, including the rights to work and education, the Taliban have systematically excluded women and girls from public life. Under the Taliban's severe interpretation of Islamic law, they have imposed policies that have systematically curtailed women's rights, creating insurmountable barriers to women's and girls' health and education, freedom of movement, expression, and association.

This systematic denial of opportunities restricts their financial independence and undermines their ability to make choices about their own lives and futures.

The progress made in Afghanistan over the

past twenty years—driven by the determination and resilience of the Afghanistan people, especially women, and supported by the international community—has largely been reversed and destroyed overnight. This troubling regression threatens the autonomy, independence, and fundamental human rights of Afghanistan women. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, they have issued over 150 edicts, including over 100 that directly curtail women's rights.

The Taliban seemingly discovers new ways each day to tighten restrictions on women and girls. In August 2024, they enacted the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (“PVPV”) laws, imposing further limitations on women and girls in Afghanistan. By December 2024, the Taliban had eliminated one of the few remaining opportunities for women's edu-

cation—medical education. Then, in December 2024, they banned windows in private homes in areas where women are commonly found, such as kitchens, effectively shutting them out from even minimal public view.

To understand the real-life effects of these repressive policies on women and girls across the country, WCRAN conducted a comprehensive research study titled “*The Impact of the Taliban’s Edicts on Women and Girls in Afghanistan*.” This report details the findings from that research.

This report builds on the extensive literature documenting the Taliban’s decrees, policies, and practices by examining their impacts through quantitative data that illustrate the scale of the crisis and through in-depth interviews that reveal the human cost of these policies. Together, they paint a stark picture of the plight of Afghanistan women and emphasize the need for immediate and sustained international action that directly addresses the women’s rights crisis in the country.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this research is to docu-

ment and analyze the systemic human rights violations faced by women and girls in Afghanistan to strengthen calls for accountability. Additionally, the research has two major objectives:

To examine the overall impacts and key patterns of the Taliban’s restrictions on women’s rights, with a focus on various aspects such as education, political participation, employment, and social mobility.

To highlight the need for the codification of gender apartheid under international law.

The research findings reveal a dramatic shift in the circumstances of women and girls following the Taliban takeover. The findings are organized into five key areas that illustrate the primary restrictions and challenges faced by women and girls: employment, social activities, education, political participation, and gender-based violence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- ◎ What are the key restrictions imposed on women in Afghanistan since the Taliban regained control in August 2021, particularly concerning education, employment, and freedom of movement, and how have

these limitations affected their psychological, social, and economic well-being?

- ④ How have the restrictions on education and employment influenced women's roles and opportunities in the society, including their ability to support themselves and their families, and what challenges do they face in navigating the labor market under these circumstances?
- ④ What types of social restrictions have Afghanistan's women encountered since the Taliban's takeover, and how have these limitations impacted their participation in public life and community dynamics, including any observed changes in social support

systems and expressions of resilience?

- ④ In light of the increasing instances of gender-based violence since the Taliban's resurgence, what types of violence have been most prevalent, what factors contribute to this rise, and how effective are the current legal and support mechanisms for addressing these issues?
- ④ Looking towards the future, what are your hopes for the rights and status of women in Afghanistan, and what specific changes or forms of support do you believe are necessary to empower women to reclaim their rights and improve their living conditions?

METHODOLOGY

The research used a mixed-method approach for data collection to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the Taliban's laws, policies, and practices on women and girls in Afghanistan. This approach, which enabled WCRAN to gather information about both the breadth and depth of the restrictions' impact from diverse individuals, facilitates an understanding of individual consequences and the ability to extrapolate patterns, identify commonalities, and build a comprehension of how the Taliban's restrictions have affected women and girls across the country.

Quantitative research was conducted by surveying 600 women across ten provinces of Afghanistan (see demographic information *below*). The questionnaire included questions focusing on five key areas: employment, social activities, education, political participation, and

gender-based violence. Additionally, women were asked to share their recommendations for the future of Afghanistan. The research targeted girls affected by the education ban, women human rights defenders, women-led organizations addressing gender issues, and former female professionals.

This research was supplemented by in-depth interviews with 20 women leaders and politicians from Afghanistan (10 from inside the country and 10 from outside) and five interviews with international experts on gender issues. These interviews fostered a deeper understanding of the research data, clarified the trends identified in the quantitative analysis, and offered narrative context and insights into the key research questions. Due to the current security situation and the restrictions on women's freedom of movement, online interviews

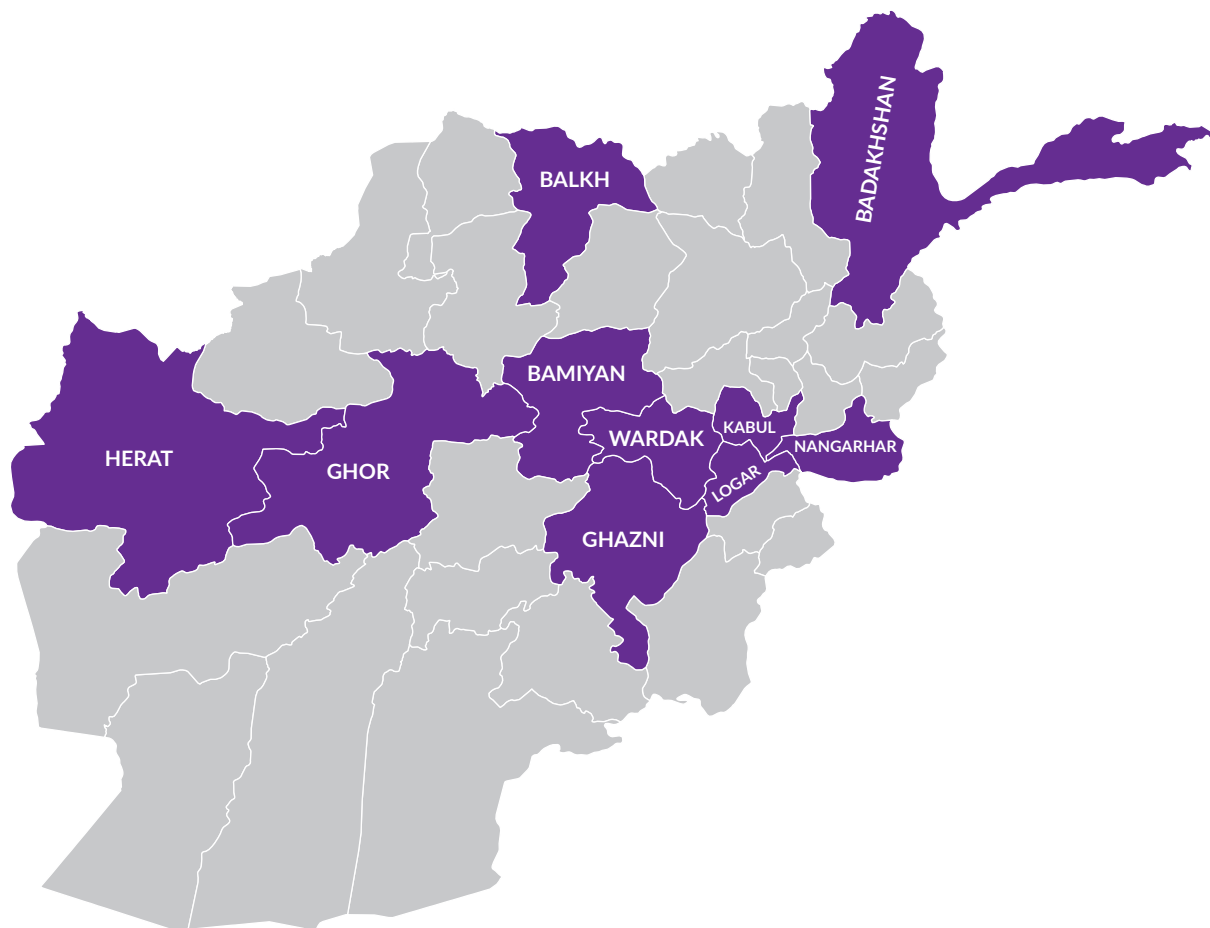
were conducted to gather data, allowing for a larger sample size. This report directly utilizes the research findings and in-depth interviews to highlight critical patterns and impacts across research areas as well as any overarching trends.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The study included respondents from ten provinces of Afghanistan: Kabul, Balkh, Badakhshan, Herat, Nangarhar, Wardak, Ghazni, Ghor, Logar, and Bamiyan. The demographic characteristics of the participants revealed the

following age distribution: 54.18% were aged 18-25 years, 30% were aged 26-35 years, 9.4% were aged 36-45 years, and 6.3% were over 45 years. Regarding marital status, 51.8% of respondents reported being single, 41.1% were married, 2% were divorced, 4% identified as widowed, and 1.1% did not provide an answer. In terms of educational attainment, 32.5% of participants were high school graduates (12th grade), 24.1% held a diploma, 38.8% possessed a bachelor's degree, and 4.6% had obtained master's or doctoral degrees.

RESEARCH COVERAGE AREA



IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The research undertaken by the Women and Children Research and Advocacy Network (WCRAN) regarding the implications of the Taliban's systemic violence against women and girls in Afghanistan is critical for several reasons:

- ① **Documenting Gender-Based Oppression:** The research serves to meticulously document and analyze the ways in which new Taliban laws and policies perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence. This detailed examination is essential for establishing a historical record that can be used for advocacy, policy-making, and legal accountability.
- ② **Amplifying Voices of Affected Populations:** By focusing on the lived experiences of women and girls, the research empowers those directly affected by the Taliban's pol-

icies. Amplifying their voices contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in gender issues and helps ensure that their experiences are not overlooked in broader discussions about Afghanistan.

- ③ **Informing Humanitarian Responses:** The findings from this research can inform international humanitarian organizations and aid agencies about the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in Afghanistan. This can guide the design and implementation of targeted interventions that prioritize their rights and well-being.
- ④ **Guiding Policy and Advocacy Efforts:** As the report provides updated data and insights, it can serve as a vital resource for policymakers, advocacy groups, and international organizations seeking to formulate

effective strategies to combat gender-based violence and support women's rights in Afghanistan. The research underscores the necessity of a rights-based approach in any potential diplomatic or humanitarian engagements.

- **Raising Global Awareness:** By bringing attention back to the deteriorating situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, the research challenges the global community to reassess its priorities. The report acts as a pivotal resource to rally support, urging international stakeholders not to normalize the Taliban regime's oppressive policies without addressing the humanitarian crises surrounding women's rights.

- **Encouraging Ongoing Scholarship:** The research contributes to an expanding body of literature on gender and conflict, providing valuable empirical data that can drive future academic inquiry. It can encourage scholars to explore other nuanced aspects of gender in contexts of political upheaval, thereby enriching discourse in gender studies, international relations, and human rights.

- **Highlighting Intersectional Effects:** By examining multiple areas of life—education, employment, social and political participation, and experiences of violence—the research captures the multifaceted impact of the Taliban's policies on different dimensions of women's lives. This intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how various forms of discrimination can compound each other.

- **Setting the Stage for Future Accountability:** The documented experiences and patterns within this research can lead to potential legal frameworks and human rights accountability mechanisms in the future. By providing a basis for evidence, the findings can be instrumental in litigation or international accountability efforts against human rights violations.

In summary, this research goes beyond mere documentation; it plays a crucial role in advocating for the rights, safety, and dignity of women and girls in Afghanistan while holding both local and international actors accountable for their roles in the ongoing crisis.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The WCRAN team encountered several significant challenges while conducting research in Afghanistan. These challenges are detailed below:

1. **Limited Internet Access:** Afghanistan has one of the lowest internet penetration rates in the world, which hinders the ability to reach a substantial portion of the population. This limited connectivity restricts access to potential respondents and valuable data sources from rural areas.
2. **Security Concerns:** Afghanistan's enduring conflict and instability pose considerable risks to everyone, especially researchers. Apprehensions regarding the safety of individuals involved may arise, as they may become targets for extremist groups or other hostile entities. Additionally, concerns about data privacy can lead to reluctance

among participants, especially women, who fear prosecution or investigation by authorities such as the De-facto Authorities (DfA).

3. **Limited Data Availability:** The lack of reliable data on various aspects of life in Afghanistan, including social, economic, and political issues, further hinders research. This gap complicates the literature review process and limits the feasibility of comprehensive analyses. Moreover, interest in and the culture of research were already low prior to the Taliban's takeover, a situation that has only deteriorated post-transition.
4. **Cultural Barriers:** In some parts of Afghanistan, cultural norms and societal expectations can create obstacles for researchers, especially when engaging with

women participants. The dominant gender dynamics can result in a reluctance to communicate and participate, restricting the diversity of perspectives and experiences included in the research.

5. **Technological Literacy:** Potential respondents possess different levels of technological literacy, complicating online research efforts. Some participants might not have

the essential skills to navigate digital platforms effectively, leading to significant gaps in data collection.

These challenges require innovative approaches and adaptations to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of research conducted in such a complex environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW OF THE TALIBAN'S DECREES AND RESTRICTIONS

At the core of the Taliban's system of gender apartheid is a series of decrees and policies. Since the takeover, a continuous onslaught of these decrees, which build upon one another, has systematically decimated women's rights in Afghanistan. These decrees have been thoroughly documented elsewhere. This section briefly reviews the key decrees issued by the Taliban that are relevant to the four areas analysed in this report: education, employment, public, political, and social life, and gender-based violence.

EDUCATION

One of the Taliban's earliest decrees, issued on August 30, 2021, was a ban on co-education and a prohibition against men teaching girls, stating that education must comply with Sharia law.¹ Shortly thereafter, on September 17, 2021, the Taliban released a statement calling for schools to open for boys and male teachers for grades 7 to 12, effectively excluding girls from secondary education.² This ban was reaffirmed

1. Republic, *Taliban declare ban on co-education in Afghanistan, prohibit men from teaching girls*, Aug. 30, 2021, <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/taliban-declare-ban-on-co-education-in-afghanistan-prohibit-men-from-teaching-girls>.
2. The Guardian, *Taliban ban girls from secondary education in Afghanistan*, Sept. 12, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/17/taliban-ban-girls-from-secondary-education-in-afghanistan>.

in March 2022,¹ and schooling for girls beyond the 6th grade has remained closed since then. Where girls are allowed to attend school, they must adhere to strict dress codes.² Successive decrees have targeted both regionally and nationally any loopholes in the system, including educational courses provided by NGOs and INGOs and limiting the scope of religious education available at madrassas.³

In addition to the ban on secondary education, the Taliban have also enacted a series of restrictions on public and private university education, culminating in a total ban. On Sep-

tember 29, 2021, a decree was issued banning women from attending or teaching at Kabul University.⁴ Like the initial ban on secondary education, this was positioned as an interim step until there was a “comprehensive plan to ensure a peaceful environment for female students.”⁵ In February 2022, universities were ordered to ensure gender-segregated classes, with classes for women occurring at a different time than that for men,⁶ and called for teaching to be in line with an Islamic curriculum,⁷ and then shortly thereafter, told to hold separate days for school for women and men, with fe-

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1. CNN, *Taliban postpones return to school for Afghan girls above 6th grade*, Mar. 24, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/23/asia/taliban-girls-school-delay-afghanistan-intl/index.html>.
 2. United States Institute of Peace, *Tackling the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women*, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>.
 3. *Id.*
 4. Washington Post, *Kabul University shuts down as Taliban government bans women from campus, for now*, Sept. 29, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/kabul-university-taliban-women-students/2021/09/29/1d34873c-20b4-11ec-a8d9-0827a2a4b915_story.html.
 5. *Id.*
 6. Al Jazeera, *Afghan public universities reopen with gender segregated classes*, Feb. 20, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/26/afghan-main-universities-reopen-but-few-women-return>.
 7. Al Jazeera, *Afghan public universities reopen with gender-segregated classes*, Feb. 26, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/26/afghan-main-universities-reopen-but-few-women-return>.

male professors prohibited from teaching male students.¹ Other restrictions mandated religious education,² restrictions on dress codes requiring women to cover their faces in the classroom,³ and limited the subjects they could study.⁴ In December 2022, these restrictions led to a ban on women attending public and private universities,⁵ the permanence of which was reinforced by subsequent decrees in January 2023 that

barred women from taking university entrance exams,⁶ March 2023 that instructed universities to admit only men,⁷ and that prohibited the issuance of transcripts and certificates to women graduates.⁸ Medical training, including to be nurses and midwives, remained one of few areas of education left open for women, but over time, that too was curtailed until, in December 2024, it too was fully banned.⁹

1. University World News, *Taliban splits university week for gender separation*, Apr. 29, 2022, <https://www.universityworld-news.com/post.php?story=20220429090043804>.
2. Arab News, *Taliban add more compulsory religion classes to Afghan universities*, Aug. 16, 2022, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2143951/world>.
3. Rukshana Media, *Jawzjan University officials: Female students must cover their faces on campus*, Aug. 29, 2022, <https://rukshana.com/en/jawzjan-university-officials-female-students-must-cover-their-faces-on-campus>.
4. CBS News, *Taliban blocks women from college entrance exams in subjects deemed "too difficult"*, Oct. 14, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/taliban-blocks-women-college-entrance-exams-subjects-too-difficult/>.
5. The Guardian, *Taliban ban Afghan women from university education*, Dec. 20, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/20/taliban-ban-afghan-women-university-education>.
6. Associated Press, *Taliban warn women can't take entry exams at universities*, Jan. 29, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-colleges-and-universities-taliban-education-religion-66a66b52706e8190332625c8a42e51e3>.
7. Voice of America, *Taliban Announce Reopening of Universities, but Only for Male Students*, Mar. 1, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-announce-reopening-of-universities-but-only-for-male-students/6985700.html>.
8. United States Institute of Peace, *Tackling the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women*, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>.
9. Amu, *Taliban close medical institutes to women in latest restriction*, Dec. 2, 2024, <https://amu.tv/141078/>.

EMPLOYMENT

The Taliban have targeted women's employment from the earliest days of the take-over. On the same day that girls were told to stay home from school, women were effectively banned from the workplace.¹ This early step was accompanied by other acts such as removing female journalists from state-owned media,² banning women in Kabul municipality from work,³ and limitations on female humanitari-

an aid workers.⁴ In March 2022, The Taliban issued an order calling for the separation of women employees' offices in the Ministry of Public Health from that of male employees,⁵ shortly followed by an order forbidding women from working in offices and that they cannot leave the home.⁶

Subsequent restrictions systematically imposed barriers to employment and economic independence. These measures included a July 2022 order for women with government jobs

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1. Atlantic Council, *Inside the Taliban's gender apartheid*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/inside-afghanistans-gender-apartheid-listen-as-women-reveal-the-impact-of-the-talibans-oppressive-decrees/#database>.
 2. Committee to Protect Journalists, *Taliban take 2 female state TV anchors off-air in Afghanistan, beat at least 2 journalists*, Aug. 19, 2021, <https://cpj.org/2021/08/taliban-take-2-female-state-tv-anchors-off-air-in-afghanistan-beat-at-least-2-journalists/>.
 3. The Guardian, *Kabul government's female workers told to stay at home by Taliban*, Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/19/kabul-governments-female-workers-told-to-stay-at-home-by-taliban>.
 4. Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Taliban Blocking Female Aid Workers*, Nov. 4, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/04/afghanistan-taliban-blocking-female-aid-workers>.
 5. Azadi Radio, *Letter from the Ministry of Good Conduct to the Taliban Ministry of Health: Separate women's offices from mens'*, Mar. 13, 2022, <https://da.azadiradio.com/a/31750810.html>.
 6. United States Institute of Peace, *Tackling the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women*, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>.

to have male relatives replace them,¹ female flight attendants at state-owned airlines being told to stay home,² the requirement of religious tests for job retention,³ limitations on dress,⁴ and severe restrictions on women's salaries.⁵ Importantly, in December 2022, the Taliban issued a decree prohibiting Afghanistan women

from working for national and international NGOs,⁶ and in April 2023, banned them from employment with the UN.⁷ This restriction was reinforced in December 2024 when the Taliban threatened to strip NGOs of their licenses to operate if they didn't comply with the ban.⁸ The limited opportunities that remain for wom-

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1. The Guardian, *Send us a man to do your job so we can sack you, Taliban tell female officials*, Jul. 19, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jul/18/send-us-a-man-to-do-your-job-so-we-can-sack-you-taliban-tell-female-officials>.
 2. Afghanistan International, *Female Flight Attendants of State-run Ariana Airlines Told to Stay at Home*, Aug. 10, 2022, <https://www.afintl.com/en/202208106424>.
 3. RadioFreeEurope, *Under the Taliban, Public Employees Must Pass Test of Faith*, Sept. 8, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-taliban-ministries-tests-islam/32024524.html>.
 4. Rukshana Media, *Taliban to female hospital staff in Kabul: Wear full black hijab*, Feb. 1, 2023, <https://rukshana.com/taliban-to-female-employees-in-kabul-city-hospitals-wear-full-black-hijab>.
 5. Afghanistan Analysts Network, *A Pay Cut for Afghan Women Working in the Public Sector: "What can you do with 5,000 afghanis?"*, Jul. 29, 2024, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/a-pay-cut-for-afghan-women-working-in-the-public-sector-what-can-you-do-with-5000-afghanis/>.
 6. Reuters, *Taliban bans female NGO staff, jeopardizing aid efforts*, Dec. 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-orders-ngos-ban-female-employees-coming-work-2022-12-24/>.
 7. United Nations News, *Taliban order bars Afghan women from working with UN*, Apr. 3, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/04/1135357>.
 8. Associated Press, *The Taliban say they will close all NGOs employing Afghan women*, Dec. 31, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-ngo-women-closure-1fde989369785f8df0e83c81d48626f1>.

en have also not escaped the Taliban's notice, such as female-run bakeries¹ and beauty salons.²

PUBLIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL LIFE

Since returning to power, the Taliban have issued numerous decrees and restrictions on women's participation in public, political, and social life, to the point that today, women are largely confined to the home and erased from

public visibility. Days after the Taliban took over, women and girls were instructed to stay home for their safety,³ with movement restrictions, especially without a mahram, which only deepened since then. Additional decrees have been issued, prohibiting women from traveling long distances,⁴ banning tourism companies from selling flight tickets to women,⁵ using public transportation⁶ and visiting health-care facilities,⁷ all without a mahram. Women have also been prohibited from parks and

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1. United States Institute of Peace, *Tackling the Taliban's (Mis)Treatment of Women*, <https://www.usip.org/tracking-talibans-mistreatment-women>.
 2. CNN, *Taliban compounds misery for women in Afghanistan with order to close all beauty salons*, Jul. 5, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/05/asia/afghanistan-taliban-beauty-salon-ban-intl-hnk/index.html>.
 3. CNN, *Taliban tell Afghan women to stay home from work because soldiers are 'not trained' to respect them*, Aug. 25, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/25/asia/taliban-women-workplaces-afghanistan-intl/index.html>.
 4. Al Jazeera, *No long-distance travel for women without male relative: Taliban*, Dec. 26, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/26/afghanistan-long-distance-travel-women-without-male-escort-taliban>.
 5. Afghanistan International, *Taliban orders tour companies in Herat: Do not sell tickets to women without mahram*, Jan. 26, 2022.
 6. Jurist News, *Afghanistan dispatch: unaccompanied women now banned from public transport*, May 29, 2022, <https://www.jurist.org/news/2022/05/afghanistan-dispatch-unaccompanied-women-now-banned-from-public-transport/>.
 7. Foreign Policy, *The Taliban Are Harming Afghan Women's Health*, Mar. 2, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/02/the-taliban-are-harming-afghan-womens-health/>.

gyms,¹ bathhouses,² restaurants,³ from playing sports,⁴ and have been banned from obtaining driving licenses.⁵ Restrictions are not limited to social activities; for example, one decree that has been used to crack down on dissent is the banning of protesters and slogans that don't have the Taliban's approval.⁶

The August 2024 Law on the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV Law) outlined a range of prohibited and acceptable behaviours for women in public,

including appropriate dress and conduct, such as not looking at “strange” men, to not leave the home unless except for situations of “urgent need” and perhaps most egregiously, a ban on their voices in public.⁷ Most recently, in December 2024, the Taliban ordered that windows in homes be blocked or not built in places typically used by women, such as the kitchen, courtyards, or wells, removing them from public view and erasing the world from women's view.⁸

1. NBC News, *Taliban ban women from parks and gyms in Afghanistan*, Nov. 10, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/taliban-ban-women-parks-gyms-afghanistan-rcna56539>.
2. Hasht-E Subh, *Taliban closes public baths for women in Badghis Province*, Nov. 6, 2022, <https://8am.media/eng/taliban-closes-public-baths-for-women-in-badghis-province/>.
3. Radio Free Europe, *Taliban bans restaurant gardens for families, women in Herat*, Apr. 10, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/taliban-afghanistan-women-families-banned-gardens/32357294.html>.
4. France24, *Sports ban, segregated education: Afghanistan women worried by first Taliban measures*, Nov. 9, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210911-sports-ban-segregated-education-afghanistan-women-worried-by-first-taliban-measures>.
5. The Independent, *Taliban regime stops issuing driving licenses to women, reports say*, May 5, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/taliban-driving-licence-afghan-women-b2072058.html>.
6. The Guardian, *Taliban ban protests and slogans that don't have their approval*, Sept. 8, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/08/taliban-ban-protests-and-slogans-that-dont-have-their-approval>.
7. Afghanistan Analysts Network, *The Propagation of Virtue and Vice Law (Unofficial AAN translation)*, Aug. 2024, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf>.
8. France24, *Taliban leader bans windows overlooking places “usually used by women,”* Dec. 29, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241229-taliban-leader-bans-windows-overlooking-women-s-areas>.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The root causes of increased rates of gender-based violence are complex and widespread. For example, as this report shows, violence in both public and private settings stems from decrees and restrictions impacting various aspects of life. One significant example is the financial strain associated with limitations on education and employment, which has been identified as a crucial driver of rising gender-based violence. Consequently, this section highlights the direct drivers of gender-based violence and the steps taken to dismantle the structures of governance and justice that inhibit pathways to accountability for such acts.

Regarding direct drivers, these include the Taliban's decision to invalidate divorces granted during the Republic, forcing many women back into the hands of their abusers,¹ the closure of shelters for GBV victims and the release of prisoners convicted of GBV are significant factors.² Perhaps the most consequential development is the establishment of the morality police by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice,³ who are given the authority to determine violations of Taliban decrees and policies, as well as to decide appropriate punishments. These can include whipping, arrest, and other acts of violence, such as torture and cruel treatment while in detention.⁴ This broad grant of authority was formalized

1. NDTV World, *In Afghanistan, Taliban Force Divorced Women Back to Abusive Husbands*, Mar. 6, 2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/the-devil-has-retained-taliban-force-divorced-afghan-women-back-to-husbands-3837537>.
2. Amnesty International, *Afghanistan: Survivors of gender-based violence abandoned following Taliban takeover*, Dec. 6, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/afghanistan-survivors-of-gender-based-violence-abandoned-following-taliban-takeover-new-research/>.
3. BBC, *Afghanistan: Taliban morality police replace women's ministry*, Sept. 18, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58600231>.
4. Nimrokh Media, *The Taliban Establishes Female Moral Police Department*, Aug. 23, 2022, <https://nimrokhmedia.com/en/2022/08/23/the-taliban-establishes-female-moral-police-department/>.

in the August 2024 PVPV Law.¹ In addition, it should be noted that the rules that allow male family members to be punished for violations² are strongly correlated with increased violence in the home, where they become the enforcers of the Taliban's policies and rules.

Compounding the direct and indirect drivers of violence is the total dismantling of any pathways to justice and accountability for gender-based violence (GBV). This includes the early dissolution of the Ministry of Wom-

en's Affairs in September 2021, its replacement with the Ministry of the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice,³ the renunciation of Afghanistan's constitution in Favor of the country's 1964 constitution,⁴ and the invalidation of already resolved criminal and civil cases to ensure they comply with Sharia.⁵ The Taliban's court system fails to offer a viable pathway to justice, as cases of gender-based violence are largely ignored or left unprosecuted.⁶

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1. Afghanistan Analysts Network, *The Propagation of Virtue and Vice Law (Unofficial AAN translation)*, Aug. 2024, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/08/Law-on-Virtue-and-Vice-Basic.pdf>.
 2. See e.g. Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2023: Afghanistan*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/afghanistan#:~:text=Authorities%20also%20announced%20rules%20requiring,rules%20regarding%20movement%20and%20dress>.
 3. Reuters, *Taliban replaces women's ministry with ministry of virtue and vice*, Sept. 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taliban-replaces-womens-ministry-with-ministry-virtue-vice-2021-09-17/>.
 4. Voice of America, *Taliban Say They Will Use Parts of Monarchy Constitution to Run Afghanistan for Now*, Sept. 28, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-say-they-will-use-parts-of-monarchy-constitution-to-run-afghanistan-for-now/6248880.html>.
 5. Hasht-E Subh, *Taliban Leaders Orders Re-evaluation of Court Cases Under New Regulations*, Mar. 30, 2023, <https://8am.media/eng/taliban-leader-orders-re-evaluation-of-court-cases-under-new-regulations/>.
 6. United States Institute for Peace, *How the Taliban Enables Violence Against Women*, Dec. 7, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/12/how-taliban-enables-violence-against-women>.

FINDINGS & PATTERNS

The extensive restrictions imposed on women and girls by the Taliban since August 2021 have had a devastating impact on women's freedoms and opportunities and have further entrenched gender inequality in Afghanistan society. While this report focuses on the effects of the Taliban's restrictions in five areas of life (education, employment, participation in public and social life, political participation, and gender-based violence), the findings make clear that no aspect of the lives of women and girls remains untouched or unchanged.

Furthermore, in addition to the specific findings on the impacts in each area, an overarching analysis makes clear that no one restriction or right can be looked at or understood in a vacuum. Instead, the findings demonstrate that the intersecting and totalizing impact of these restrictions is responsible for the dire

state of women's rights, lives, and well-being in Afghanistan.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION: A GENERATION LOST

Education has been one of the most significantly impacted sectors for women under Taliban rule. Responses collectively emphasize the reach of the education bans, as well as the profound negative effects on women and girls' mental health, emotional well-being, and overall life satisfaction, illustrating the far-reaching consequences of the education ban in the community.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Educational deprivation:** The research questioned whether any family members of the respondents had been denied access to

education since August 2021. A significant majority, 94.1%, reported that one or more family members had indeed experienced educational deprivation. In contrast, 5.9% noted no instances as they did not have school-aged girls affected by the situation after August 2021.

- ◎ **Pursuing alternative education:** Participants were asked if the girls in their families were pursuing alternative forms of education. The results revealed that 80.8% of respondents confirmed their school-aged girls sought alternative educational opportunities, while 19.2% indicated they did not.
- ◎ **Respondents' support for girls' education:** Participants were also asked about their views on the education of girls and women. A striking 98.5% expressed support for girls' education, contrasting sharply with the 1.5% who opposed it. This finding significantly challenges the Taliban's assertion that the current ban on female education is culturally justified in Afghanistan.
- ◎ **Respondents' views on girls' education:**

The views on girls' education were further examined. Among the respondents, 30.4% believed that girls should have equal educational opportunities to boys. Additionally, 29.1% stated that they did not see any religious restrictions hindering girls' right to education. Notably, 40.3% emphasized the significance of girls' education for societal development. Importantly, none of the respondents supported the notion that girls should stay home, highlighting a shared commitment to educational equity.

PATTERNS & ANALYSIS

An Education System Destroyed

"After August, women were no longer able to continue their education; their educational opportunities were taken away, and universities for women were closed. Of course, this was meant to be a temporary situation, and for a year or two, I remained hopeful that things would indeed resume, and that we would continue our studies again. However, since last year, I have completely lost my hope, as nothing has commenced over these three years, and I fear that after this period, there will be no revival. This situation is leading to a generation of uneducated women." – Anonymous Women's Rights

Defender from Afghanistan

The Taliban's ban on girls' education has been one of their most devastating policies, with unknown intergenerational impacts. 94.1% of research respondents reported being unable to continue their education or that family members were unable to do so due to the Taliban's restrictions. A recurring theme in the responses is the loss of opportunities for women and girls. Many women expressed that the Taliban's education restrictions have effectively destroyed the future aspirations of countless young girls. This loss of education deprives women and girls of the tools needed to contribute meaningfully to society, leading to long-term socio-economic consequences for both individuals and the country.

While the application of restrictions isn't uniform across the country, respondents expressed concerns that even in regions where schools could remain open for a brief period, there has been a significant rise in dropout rates among girls, as families often fear repercussions for allowing their daughters to attend school. This issue may be further worsened by the economic pressure on families to prioritize boys'

education over girls.

Additionally, respondents focused on the fact that many women cannot pursue careers or contribute to the workforce in meaningful ways without access to education. This creates economic dependence on male family members and reduces the country's overall economic potential. As one women's rights activist noted, *"It is important to note that many female teachers and other employed women were the breadwinners for their families. Their deprivation of education not only leads to increasing poverty among women themselves but also thrusts the country's economy into stagnation. The ejection of a large segment of the population and workforce from the economic cycle slows economic growth and exacerbates poverty levels."* Echoing these concerns, multiple responses mentioned the long-term developmental impact on Afghanistan, noting that educated women are crucial to national development, especially in areas such as healthcare, education, and governance. The widespread lack of education for women means that a large part of the population is being excluded from contributing to critical areas of society, further hindering the country's overall growth.

“It is important to note that many female teachers and other employed women were the breadwinners for their families. Their deprivation of education not only leads to increasing poverty among women themselves but also thrusts the country's economy into stagnation. The ejection of a large segment of the population and workforce from the economic cycle slows economic growth and exacerbates poverty levels.”

Finally, some respondents also highlighted the impact of the ban on education on female educators who have been unable to continue their work due to the Taliban's restrictions. This will further destabilize the education system, create a long-term gap in qualified female educators even if restrictions were to be eased, and deprive younger girls of female role models. As one former professor said: *“teachers who instructed students beyond the sixth grade have been rendered jobless. University professors, especially those at public institutions, are unable to access their workplaces; in fact, professors from Kabul University go to a mental health hospital merely to sign attendance sheets in order to receive a meager salary of 5,000 Afghani, which is insufficient to meet their basic living needs.”*

Psychological Consequences

“The effects it had on me is immeasurable, it has affected my psyche, it has caused my height to be short, it has caused my feet to become infected, which was even close to death. In the past, I used to study, I learned quickly, but now, when I read a thousand times, I do not learn, and sometimes I even commit suicide [sic]. I am begging you, if you have the ability, please take me out of this country. The beatings of my parents have increased. In short, I am tired. If this continues, there is a 100% possibility of suicide.” - Anonymous

The most common concerns about the education ban relate to its psychological consequences and impact on mental health. Many respondents expressed the emotional toll the ban has taken on them and their family members. For numerous individuals, education was their escape, their hope for a better future, and a path to independence. Now, they find themselves trapped in a reality where those dreams are shattered, and their futures seem bleak.

As one Afghanistan expert working for a human rights organization noted, *“Based on the statistics we have gathered regarding the narratives shared by women, it is evident that the Taliban's decrees have had significant negative and psychological impacts*

on women in Afghanistan. We frequently hear reports of girls who have been deprived of education deliberately resorting to suicide. According to a report provided by UN-Women, about 90 percent of girls in Afghanistan are facing psychological issues.” Similarly, another expert who formerly served as a Deputy Minister in the government noted that *“Over the past three years, the restrictions imposed have had significant psychological effects on women. The number of suicides and suicide attempts among women has increased, which is a prominent indicator of the adverse psychological impacts caused by these restrictions. Socially, girls have been forced into arranged marriages and marriages below the legal age, and those who protested against these limitations have been imprisoned, tortured, and compelled to flee the country. In prison, they have faced various forms of sexual violence, which has dealt a substantial social blow to each of them.”*

Among the research respondents, nearly all of them—when asked how education affects girls in their family or community—mentioned negative mental health or psychological effects, such as feelings of helplessness, depression, and anxiety as direct consequences of being unable to pursue formal education. Participants provided open-ended responses, using terms

and phrases like “self-loathing,” “misery and an unclear future,” “despair,” “feeling useless,” and “loneliness.” Twenty-two of the responses expressed concerns about suicide.

The assessments from the in-depth interviews also revealed significant concerns regarding the mental health impact of the ban. For instance, one women’s rights activist who remains in the country noted, *“The psychological and emotional effects have been significant. When I say that we have lost our belief, I mean we have lost our energy. When a person loses their energy, it becomes very challenging to start again. People, especially in Afghanistan, who are attuned to culture often believe that their children are a burden on their shoulders. Girls think they cannot move forward any longer. On one hand, their emotional state is poor, and they believe that they are unable to progress. On the other hand, they feel a sense of alienation, questioning why boys can advance while they cannot.”*

One university student powerfully captured her experience and the broader impact on mental health, stating: *“After the Taliban seized control in Afghanistan, I was inevitably driven towards despair regarding my dreams. Unfortunately, all the unconditional limitations were imposed not only on me,*

but on all Afghanistan women by the Taliban. For the past three years, I have been deprived of the goals that once illuminated my vision for a brighter future.”

Increases in Early and Forced Marriage

With education out of reach, many respondents noted a significant rise in early and forced marriages of young girls, creating a cycle of poverty and dependency, along with increased risks of domestic violence. For some research participants, this issue was linked to the education ban, which exacerbates the existing gender inequality in Afghanistan society. With limited opportunities to study and work, women are restricted to traditional roles within their homes, curtailing their freedom and undermining their rights. This results in a cyclical issue of persistent gender discrimination, where girls and women are increasingly unlikely to break free from the social and economic limitations imposed on them, and are perceived as financial burdens on their families.

Forty-one research responses specifically expressed concerns about the occurrences or rates of forced marriage resulting from the education ban. A women's rights expert within the country remarked that, *“the majority of girls,*

whether below or above the legal marriage age, are married off. Ultimately, families believe that their daughters as burdens or lack hope for the future; they believe that Afghanistan will never stabilize, that schools and universities will not reopen, and they do not want to lose their daughters or have them flee.”

The Urgent Need and Limitations of Alternatives

Respondents reflected on the importance and necessity of alternatives to traditional education, along with the challenges and limitations tied to underground or online education opportunities. Research responses showed that around 81% of those who stated they or their family members had been deprived of education were seeking alternative learning options.

Some respondents highlighted the opportunities online education offers, noting that it serves as a viable alternative for women and girls who are denied access to traditional schools and universities. They expressed hope that online education could help restore women's access to education in Afghanistan, easing some of the psychological and mental health impacts of the ban, and acting as a bridge for women to acquire knowledge and skills, even if

it cannot fully replace the breadth of traditional education. One women's rights activist stated that online courses *“may reduce the percentage of depression among women and girls; it can represent a source of hope for them.”* In contrast, another emphasized that it could *“enable them to be better prepared for their studies should schools and universities reopen for them in the future.”*

However, all interviewees, whether inside or outside the country, highlighted significant concerns regarding the limitations and challenges of online education. Many pointed out the inadequate infrastructure in the country to support consistent online learning, including reliable internet, electricity, and access to technology, especially for those in rural areas. One women's rights activist within the country summarized the challenges: *“[I]n provinces and remote villages where girls lack access to computers and smartphones, the number of participants in online education is exceedingly low. When I occasionally inquire with educators about the state of online education and student attendance, they regretfully indicate that while initial enrollment numbers are often high, they gradually dwindle to around 20 students by the end of the term. This decline is primarily due to students' inability to*

sustain their participation because they lack reliable internet access. Moreover, many girls who own smartphones still do not have internet connectivity, rendering online education far less effective.”

Others noted that most online or alternative education options do not provide formal certifications and are not accredited, which limits ongoing opportunities for women and girls, including employment or further studies abroad. Many pointed out that while online education serves as a stop-gap, it lacks the soft skills and comprehensive learning that comes from in-person education, with some referencing experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic. One young woman who was forced to abandon her university education stated: *“In comparison to in-person education, it cannot be equated at all; being at home diminishes motivation, and the motivation that can be nurtured through in-person learning is unattainable in an online setting.”*

Some respondents also expressed concerns about social, cultural, and other barriers that may hinder access to online education. For instance, a university student remarked, *“Currently, the majority of girls lack access to mobile devices and the internet. This is largely due to cultural norms in*

“the majority of girls, whether below or above the legal marriage age, are married off. Ultimately, families believe that their daughters as burdens or lack hope for the future; they believe that Afghanistan will never stabilize, that schools and universities will not reopen, and they do not want to lose their daughters or have them flee.”

families, where girls are not allowed to use mobile phones before engagement.” In addition, the difficult choices facing families and communities as a result of the humanitarian crisis in the country were also raised by one human rights expert working for an international organization, who stated, “*We are discussing a country...where 23.7 million people are facing the threat of hunger. Over the past three years, we have realized that internet access is considered a very urgent and yet a luxury need. When talking about a village in Urozgan Province, for example, people do not have access to internet services because when a family is hungry, the first priority for them is food, and the first thing they cut back on is the internet.*”

Finally, interviewees were asked to assess the impact of madrassas on women's lives. Many respondents voiced concerns that madrassas could function as instruments for

political or ideological radicalization and indoctrination, promoting the Taliban's specific and regressive interpretation of Islam. They also pointed out that educational institutions might not only provide limited knowledge but could also further propagate extreme ideologies, potentially restricting women's autonomy and reinforcing gender inequality. A human rights lawyer from Afghanistan succinctly captured the risks as follows: “*Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, schools have been replaced by new institutions that pose a serious danger. The curricula currently being taught in these institutions propagate the Taliban's objectives, characterized by misogyny and extremist interpretations of Islam. Furthermore, the educational programs lack the viewpoints of informed religious scholars.*”

A few respondents view madrassas as a potential alternative for education, particularly since they remain accessible under the Taliban's rule. However, many recognize that madrassas mainly concentrate on religious education and do not offer the broader, more comprehensive learning that formal schools would provide, including subjects like science, mathematics, history, and language. One university lecturer in

the country remarked, “Schools do not adequately respond to all contemporary sciences. While it is indeed important to learn religious sciences, these alone are insufficient for managing the world. The world has advanced significantly with technology; however, with the dominance of the Taliban, four or three schools have been established on every street. Consequently, many families believe that these religious sciences are sufficient. However, I oppose today’s schools because rather than focusing on education, they increasingly emphasize unethical and inhumane aspects.”

EMPLOYMENT: AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS

“After the Taliban’s takeover, the first action taken was to confine women who were working in domestic civil structures to their homes. Subsequently, we witnessed restrictions on women’s employment in personal sectors and later in NGOs and non-profit organizations. This culminated in the imposition of limitations on women’s participation in United Nations organizations, even in humanitarian aid projects, including those under the UN’s auspices. The UN Secretary-General described this situation as an unprecedented event in the history of the UN. Clear written decrees have been issued by the Taliban regarding all these prohibitions, which are

! “We are discussing a country...where 23.7 million people are facing the threat of hunger. Over the past three years, we have realized that internet access is considered a very urgent and yet a luxury need. When talking about a village in Urozgan Province, for example, people do not have access to internet services because when a family is hungry, the first priority for them is food, and the first thing they cut back on is the internet.”

enforced with significant physical and military power. Individuals who disregard these laws face severe penalties, and any organization that fails to comply with these regulations risks losing its operating license.” — Metra Mebran

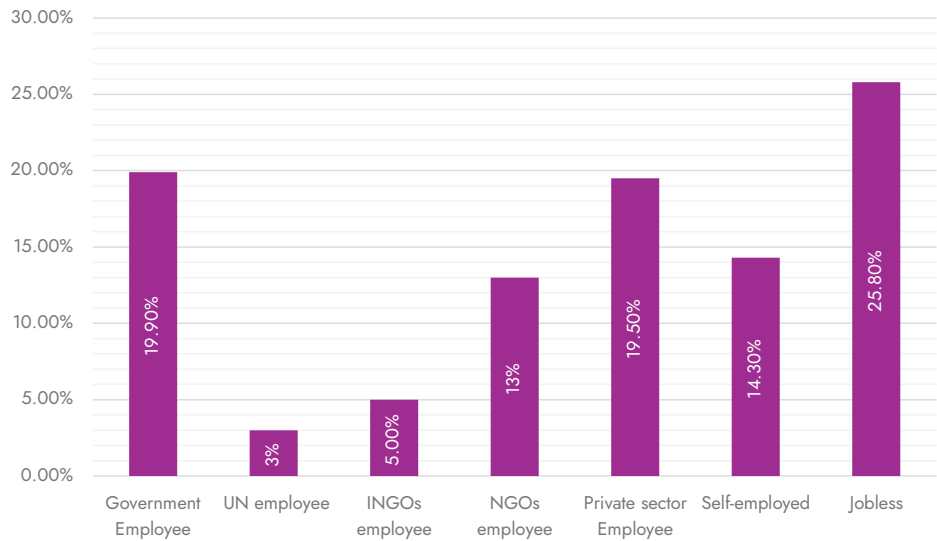
The Taliban’s policies have led to significant job losses for women, especially in both the public and private sectors, further worsening financial and social stress. Following the Taliban’s takeover, many women were forced to leave their jobs, particularly in fields such as education, healthcare, and government, where they once played important roles.

KEY FINDINGS

🕒 **Employment status prior to August 2021:** Approximately 75% of respondents were employed before that date. The findings showed that 19.9% of respondents identified as government employees, 19.5% worked in the private sector, 14.3%

considered themselves self-employed, 13% reported working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 5% were associated with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and 3% of respondents indicated involvement with United Nations agencies in Afghanistan. Additionally, 25.8% of participants were

Figure 1: Respondants’ occupation before August 2021



unemployed before August 2021. Compared to the post-August 2021 data, these findings illustrate the significant change in employment status following the Taliban takeover.

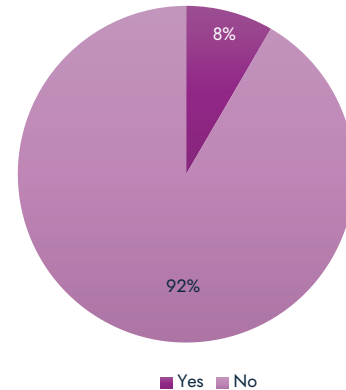
● **Employment status after August 2021:**

Participants were asked about their employment status after the political changes in August 2021. The findings reveal that only 9.8% of respondents reported being able to keep their jobs, while a significant majority, 90.2%, indicated that they could not. This data suggests that a large portion of the workforce experienced job loss due to the Taliban takeover.

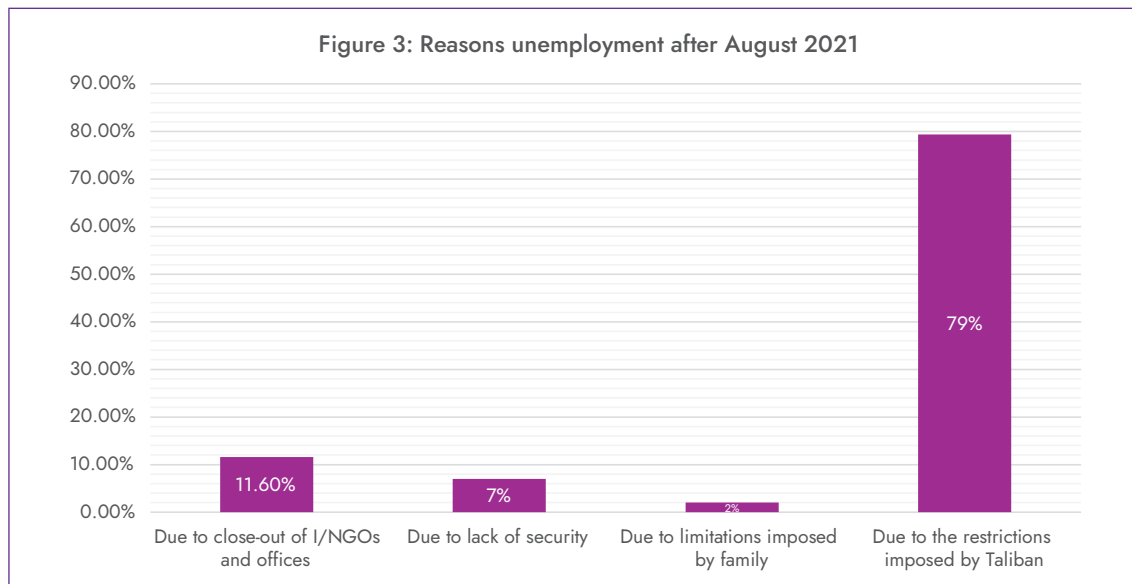
● **Job opportunities after August 2021:**

When participants were asked whether they currently have job opportunities, a significant majority, 91.6%, indicated that they do not have access to employment, while 8.4% confirmed that they do. This, combined with the data on the number of respondents who lost their jobs following the Taliban takeover, paints a bleak picture of the future for Afghanistan women and girls.

Figure 2: Job opportunities under Taliban Regime



- **Reasons for unemployment:** The majority of responses regarding the causes of their unemployment since August 2021, 79.4%, attributed their inability to work to restrictions imposed on women's work by the Taliban, confirming this as the primary reason. Additionally, 11.6% identified the closure of organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a contributing factor. Furthermore, 7% cited security-related concerns, while 2% indi-



cated that familial restrictions played a role in their decision to stop working. These findings highlight the widespread impact of the Taliban's restrictions on employment opportunities for women in Afghanistan.

- Reasons for the lack of job opportunities:** When asked about the reasons for their unemployment, a significant 90.9% attributed it to work restrictions imposed by the Taliban. Moreover, 7% pointed to familial constraints against working, while 2.1% mentioned other unspecified reasons.

- Impacts of Job Loss:** When participants were asked about the effects of job loss on their lives, a significant majority, 74.4%, identified negative economic consequences as a primary impact. Additionally, 35.4% reported facing negative social repercussions, while 57.4% recognized the harmful psychological effects of unemployment. Moreover, 27.7% of respondents noted a loss of decision-making authority within their family structures due to job loss.

- Approaches to managing daily expenses:**

es: Participants were also asked about their methods for managing daily expenses after job loss. The results showed that participants drew on multiple sources, with 19.3% of respondents indicating they relied on humanitarian aid from international organizations. Additionally, 31.5% reported selling household items, while 57.6% stated they depended on financial support from family members. The remaining 15% of respondents mentioned utilizing alternative means to cover their daily expenses.

PATTERNS & ANALYSIS

Job Loss and Economic Strain

The Taliban's ban on women's employment has resulted in widespread economic hardship and forced financial dependency on male relatives, which for some has also trapped them in cycles of violence. Research data indicates that 90.2% of women have lost their jobs since the Taliban takeover, with 91.6% reporting that there are no current job opportunities available to them. A significant majority (79.4%) attribute these job losses to the Taliban's restrictions, while others mention, among various factors, the

closure of international and domestic non-governmental organizations (11.6%), the lack of security (7%), and family-imposed limitations (2%). Likewise, most link the current absence of job opportunities to the Taliban's restrictions (90.9%), with a small minority citing family restrictions (7%) and other reasons (2.1%).

Women have been excluded from crucial sectors, particularly those that involve interaction with men. Professions such as teaching, healthcare, and law, which were once open to women, have faced significant restrictions. This exclusion stems from the Taliban's interpretation of gender roles and their belief that women should not work outside the home or in public life. As one former professor noted, *“Apart from the health and education sectors, where women are allowed to work under stipulated conditions set by the Taliban, opportunities for women to seek employment are virtually nonexistent in other areas. Both national and international organizations face considerable limitations in the private sector due to these restrictions. One of the main issues is that women are not permitted to travel without a male guardian (mahram), which exacerbates costs for donors and organizations. Consequently, the severe challenges arising from*

these limitations lead organizations to prefer hiring men. Overall, under the current circumstances, opportunities for women are extremely limited, and one could even argue that there is a lack of viable options for women to seek employment, as they have been largely marginalized from society and civic life.”

The loss of employment has imposed a significant financial burden on women. Nearly 75% of women reported experiencing a negative economic impact due to job loss, with most relying on a combination of financial assistance from friends and family (57.6%), selling household items (30.3%), and humanitarian aid (19.3%) to meet their financial needs. Others noted that women have turned to limited forms of work, primarily done at home, to try to make ends meet. One women's rights expert noted, “*Considering the work-related restrictions imposed on women and their lack of presence in government and private institutions, most women have turned to occupations such as sewing, carpet weaving, and similar crafts to address their economic difficulties. However, in light of the dire economic conditions faced by the populace and the stagnation of markets in Afghanistan, these women find themselves unable to sell their produced goods or are forced to sell them for*

very low prices. This situation constitutes the greatest challenge for women in Afghanistan.”

Social and Psychological Damage

Job loss has led to a diminished sense of self-worth and identity. Many women expressed the intense shame of being unable to support themselves or their families, which contributes to a deep feeling of worthlessness. Fifty-eight percent of research respondents reported that their job loss negatively impacted their psychological well-being. They also described how the loss of employment resulted in financial hardship and social exclusion. “*In the past, working women could be beneficial and contribute alongside their male family members in various roles. However, today, due to these limitations, we are unable to engage in service or support the economic well-being of our family members. This situation has increasingly led to feelings of depression among women, as they are deprived of all the freedoms and rights that are fundamentally theirs.”*

Economic Dependency & Increased Domestic Violence

One significant impact highlighted by interviews regarding the restrictions on employment and work is that they create economic dependency on men within their families. Ms. Roshan

! “Job limitations have had very detrimental effects on women. Women have currently lost the appropriate income that they previously earned through their ideal employment, which has initially confronted them with poverty and, secondly, reduced their financial independence, rendering them dependent on male relatives. On the other hand, these restrictions have forced those women who were the breadwinners of their families into complete poverty and have created psychological and health issues for them.”

Mashal noted, “*Job limitations have had very detrimental effects on women. Women have currently lost the appropriate income that they previously earned through their ideal employment, which has initially confronted them with poverty and, secondly, reduced their financial independence, rendering them dependent on male relatives. On the other hand, these restrictions have forced those women who were the breadwinners of their families into complete poverty and have created psychological and health issues for them.*”

Many responses also highlight that the

economic dependency resulting from a lack of employment opportunities has undermined women’s agency and restricted their ability to assert themselves as independent individuals. As a result, they are marginalized not only in society but also within their own homes. As one women’s rights activist stated, “*Financial dependency ensues, as women, lacking access to independent jobs, become reliant on their husbands or other family members. This dependency can diminish their decision-making power.*”

Finally, the stressors of financial strain within the family and the power imbalances resulting from economic dependency have also contributed to an increase in domestic violence. With fewer opportunities to leave abusive relationships or support themselves, their children, or their families financially, women find themselves trapped in dangerous cycles of violence. *An activist pointed out that they have observed multiple instances where the loss of authority within the household led to domestic violence, citing an example where one husband resorted to violence after claiming that his wife is a “burden and that he is forced to bear her expenses.”*

RESTRICTIONS ON PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL LIFE: THE LOSS OF FREEDOM & AGENCY

“When women are not allowed to participate, a void is created in society, as women and men are in fact complementary to one another. When a segment of society is excluded, a social gap emerges that, in truth, requires a long period and significant effort to address. What is very important is the political participation of women and their involvement in decision-making processes, ensuring that women have direct participation. — Shinkay Karokhil

The restrictions on women in Afghanistan under the Taliban have led to the complete confinement of women's lives within their homes and immediate family environments and stripped them of their agency and ability to participate in public and political life. These restrictions encompass various aspects of mobility, social interactions, as well as political and public participation, leaving women isolated, controlled, and without opportunities to engage in the broader society. The constant surveillance, combined with severe limitations

on movement, socializing, and participation in public life, has significantly reduced women's autonomy and ability to live freely. Women are isolated not only physically but also socially, as the Taliban enforces a system of gender segregation that limits their opportunities for personal growth, social engagement, and professional achievement.

KEY FINDINGS

🕯 **Public and social restrictions on women's movement:** Research results on the impact of social restrictions showed the widespread influence of such limitations on women's lives. 73% reported they could not attend university, 61.2% said they were barred from visiting parks, 60.4% indicated that traveling without a male guardian was prohibited, another 60.4% acknowledged facing limitations on going to the office, 53.5% noted they were not allowed to go to the club, 34.8% reported being unable to use public transportation, 33.5% stated they could not access hotels, 31.2% mentioned they were unable to visit a doctor without a male guardian, and 19.5% were hindered from shopping. Additionally,

3.1% of respondents reported other unspecified restrictions.

- **Negative effects of social restrictions on women:** Participants were asked which restrictions had the most detrimental impact on their lives. The inability to attend university emerged as the most significant effect, reported by 72.3% of respondents, closely followed by the inability to go to the office, cited by 58.3% of individuals, and the inability to travel without a male guardian, noted by 48.4%. Additional impacts include the inability to visit parks (40.5%), restrictions on going to clubs (34.2%), the inability to use public transportation (23.9%), the inability to go to the doctor without a male escort (22.9%), restrictions on hotel access (18.5%), and the inability to go shopping (15.3%).

- **Impacts of public and social restrictions on women:** Participants were also asked about the broader effects of social restrictions on their lives. 65.8% reported experiencing negative psychological effects, 63.1% recognized an increase in poverty, 57% indicated that life had become more

difficult or hopeless, 47.8% shared a loss of hope, 43% felt marginalized, and 33.8% noted a rise in domestic violence.

- **Definition of political participation:** Participants were researched regarding their perceptions and understanding of women's political participation. The results showed that 68.1% recognized the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes, 46.7% acknowledged their role in peace processes and negotiations, 49.7% supported the idea of women in leadership positions within the country, 40.9% highlighted the significance of women's contributions to dispute resolution, and 11.5% had no opinion on the subject.
- **The impacts of prohibition on women's political participation:** In response to inquiries about the effects of banning women's participation in politics, 66% reported an increase in violence, 53.3% noted a lack of representation in decision-making roles, 41.5% emphasized the absence of women in leadership positions within political parties, 49.5% mentioned the loss of voting rights and eligibility for office,

38.8% cited a decline in rights regarding family decision-making processes, while 0.6% chose “other” as a consequence.

PATTERNS & ANALYSIS

A Life Restricted

The vast majority of women reported being severely restricted in their movements, with many unable to leave their homes without male guardians and, under more recent imposed by the Taliban, even speaking in public or with each other. Women are also excluded from public spaces such as parks, markets, and public transportation—areas that were once accessible for relaxation, socializing, and physical activity. They are largely confined to the private sphere, stripped of their autonomy and agency. One activist described the restrictions and their impact: *“The various restrictions imposed on women’s social activities, which encompass civil, political, and professional movements, have deprived them of their rights and freedoms. Consequently, women have lost opportunities for both social and individual advancement.”*

When asked about the restrictions faced by research respondents, the most frequently mentioned limitation was the inability to attend

university (73%); other common restrictions include limitations on visiting parks (61.2%), going to clubs (52%), traveling without a male guardian (60.4%), even for accessing healthcare (31.2%), and the inability to go to the office (60.4%). One activist explained that these restrictions arise from the fact that “The Taliban primarily fear the gathering of people, particularly women. She explained, “When women are not permitted to assemble for political, social, economic, and cultural matters, it signifies a prohibition on women’s social activities. In reality, women are broadly restricted from social engagement, encompassing everything from education and university to visiting parks and recreational activities. All these matters are curtailed, and women are not allowed to partake in social activities.”

Of the restrictions discussed above from the research results, the restrictions that are perceived to have the most severe impact on women’s lives include limits on attending university (72.3%), going to work (58.3%), traveling without a male guardian (48.4%), and restrictions on visiting parks (40.5%). *“As a result, women lose access to all services, including health-*

care, and even when faced with domestic violence, they are unable to seek help from individuals or institutions for their defense. Thus, by imposing skillful restrictions on movement and establishing penalties for male family members if they do not accept this decree from the women, the Taliban systematically controls the personal lives and domestic spaces of women. In the long term, this also aligns the mindset of men in society with their extremist ideologies.” – Metra Mehran.

Furthermore, as shown by the research results above regarding the most harmful impacts, restrictions on education and employment contribute to broader social control over women’s mobility. Women are generally prohibited from pursuing higher education or working in most professional fields, which limits their ability to travel for work or study. The ban on education for girls and women has significantly affected their capacity to participate in society actively. Denied opportunities for higher education and professional growth, women are increasingly confined to domestic roles.

Restrictions on Political and Public Life

A central theme across the responses is the systematic exclusion of women from political participation and public decision-making.

Women are denied agency, leadership roles, and the right to shape policy or contribute to governance. When asked how respondents viewed political participation, the most common answers indicated that it necessitated involvement in decision-making and leadership roles, which they see as essential for gender equality. One woman remarked that: *“at this time, women’s ability to engage politically, including organizing with one another, has been drastically curtailed: “women and girls, under the current circumstances, are unable to even raise their voices or speak out, and in meetings they previously participated in, they cannot sit together, even in small groups.”*

Some respondents expressed specific concerns about the suppression of political dissent and protest, highlighting the long-term negative effects on the potential for change in the country. For instance, one activist remarked that *“women’s protest movements have become one of the significant levers of pressure against the Taliban ... Initially, women undertook great risks to raise their voices from within Afghanistan and engaged in social and civil activities to counteract the imposed restrictions. However, over time, the situation became more constrained. The use of torture, imprisonment, forced*

confessions...have led to the silencing of these voices. Even individuals residing abroad, who have relatives in the country, are unable to raise their voices for fear of reprisals.”

Another interviewee similarly noted that *“the participation of women has been affected by limitations, as women who previously attended various meetings together now experience fear in the sessions they participate in. They are concerned that someone might disclose information about these gatherings, leading to the possibility that everyone could be imprisoned or subjected to torture.”*

The Taliban's restrictions have also reified the Taliban's gender-specific social expecta-

tions, with women expected to adhere to strict gender roles that dictate their behavior and interactions, both in public and professional life. This encompasses limits on how they can engage with men in public, often necessitating that they either remain out of sight or stay with a male relative in any public setting. As one expert outlined the difference in engagement before and after the Taliban's rise, *“the social participation of women in our past included various meetings, mixed training sessions, and conferences with men. Currently, such activities are less prevalent; if they do exist, they are less prominent and not mixed-gender. At present, there are not many such activities observable.”*



“As a result, women lose access to all services, including healthcare, and even when faced with domestic violence, they are unable to seek help from individuals or institutions for their defense. Thus, by imposing skillful restrictions on movement and establishing penalties for male family members if they do not accept this decree from the women, the Taliban systematically controls the personal lives and domestic spaces of women. In the long term, this also aligns the mindset of men in society with their extremist ideologies.”

Consequences of Exclusion

Banning women from politics has resulted in increased violence and a lack of representation in decision-making, which respondents view as detrimental to societal progress. The emotional and psychological impact of being excluded from public life is profound. Many women express feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and anxiety. Denied opportunities for personal growth, engagement, and professional success, women sense that their potential is squandered.

One interviewee still within the country noted, *“Once, we used to advocate for justice, and women always emphasized that their participation in politics and decision-making should increase. After much advocacy, they were able to raise women’s participation to 30%. However, now, despite all that effort and activism, women are not participating in society at all and are not involved in decision-making. In fact, women are not valued as human beings at all.”*

Others highlighted the impact on global representation and advocacy, noting that the exclusion of women from Afghanistan in global forums and international advocacy efforts diminishes the representation of their issues on the world stage. They pointed out that women, particularly those involved in human rights and activism, play a crucial role in bringing Afghanistan’s challenges to the international community’s attention. Their silencing has resulted in a lack of meaningful international pressure and action to address the situation in the country. As one activist stated, *“It is evident that the exclusion of women and the imposition of restrictions on them will have negative impacts on society. The absence of women in international and national organizations is indicative of gender discrimination on the part of the*

Taliban. This should be a condition for international organizations in terms of monitoring and controlling the implementation of projects, to ensure both the non-execution of such projects and the lack of access for this group.” – Salamat Azimi

The Taliban’s social restrictions have led to acute isolation and a sense of disconnection from society. Women are prohibited from attending social gatherings, participating in community activities, or even visiting friends and extended family. This situation creates a feeling of being “invisible” and powerless. Furthermore, women’s ability to socialize with other women is heavily regulated, and many places where women typically gather—such as cafes, restaurants, or public events—are no longer accessible to them. This reinforces gender segregation, expecting women to remain at home or interact only with their immediate family members. As one human rights lawyer stated, *“These limitations have weakened women in terms of psychological, economic, and familial practices, resulting in a surge of violence. They have completely eradicated the space for free social participation, leading to stagnation within the community.”* – Najila Rahil

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV): A SYSTEMIC EPIDEMIC

Because women in the current situation do not have the right to live, study, and go to work, when a woman does not have the right in society, the greatest violence is committed against her. – Anon

Gender-based violence has risen significantly under the Taliban, worsened by the lack of legal recourse. Most respondents have either experienced or witnessed violence against women, including verbal, psychological, and financial abuse.

KEY FINDINGS

🕒 **Experiencing gender-based violence:**

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced or witnessed violence against women in the past year. 36.7% reported having experienced violence themselves, while 56.4% indicated that they had witnessed such violence, with 6.9% stating they neither experienced nor witnessed any incidents. When asked about the types of violence experienced or witnessed, 68% reported psychological violence, 61.4% economic violence, 47.9% verbal abuse,

47.1% physical violence, and 17.1% sexual harassment.

🕒 **Attribution of reasons for GBV:** Respondents were asked to identify the reasons behind the violence they experienced or witnessed. Edicts issued by the Taliban were clearly the primary reason, cited by 77.8% of respondents. Other reasons included lack of income or unemployment (50%), poverty (49%), family issues (34.3%), and harmful practices and customs (32.2%).

🕒 **Reporting GBV:** Respondents were asked about barriers to reporting GBV with responses highlighting multiple and intersecting challenges. Key factors identified included a lack of legal mechanisms for victim protection (63.9%), absence of institutions to address GBV (49.3%), fear of escalating violence (44.7%), concerns about preserving family dignity and privacy (41.3%), and insufficient support from family and community (35.9%).

🕒 **Pursuing GBV Cases:** When asked about their awareness of formal and informal channels for pursuing GBV cases, only 8.6% of respondents indicated that they

were aware of such resources, while a significant 91.4% reported having no knowledge of any appropriate options.

- **Increase in violence since last year:** The research also asked respondents for their views on whether incidents of violence against women had increased compared to the prior year. An overwhelming majority (90.2%) confirmed that such violence had indeed risen, while only 9.8% disagreed.

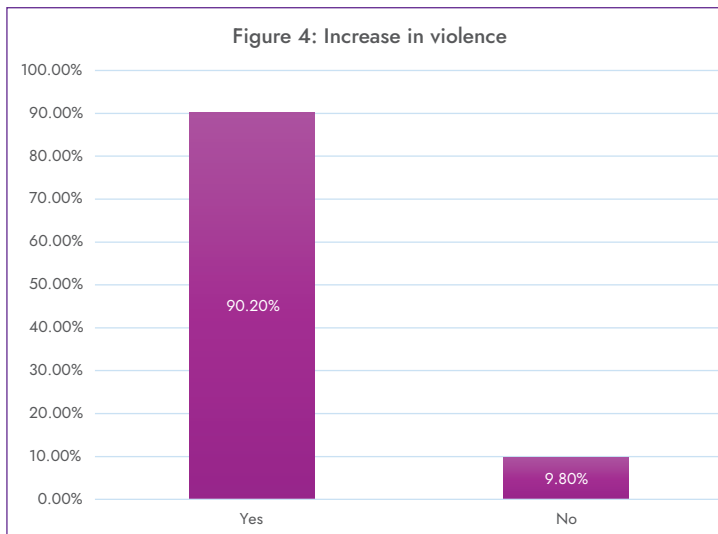
PATTERNS & ANALYSIS

A Surge in Violence

Since the Taliban's return, violence against women has escalated. A staggering 93.1% of women have witnessed or experienced an increase in this violence, while 90.2% of research respondents believe that gender-based violence has risen since the takeover. This encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, all worsened by the Taliban's policies and the lack of any legal recourse. Although some respon-

dents indicate that they may not have been directly targeted, they have observed violence against other women or heard about such incidents from others. As one respondent noted, *"I have personally not experienced physical violence, but I have witnessed emotional and psychological violence. For me, Afghanistan is like a prison."*

Research and interview responses identified various reasons that respondents believed drove violence. While it was evident that the vast majority



(77.8%) considered the Taliban's edicts to be the primary cause, one research participant remarked, *"With each passing day, the Taliban leadership issues new orders that cause more and more violence and have even taken away the right to breathe from women and girls and even men."* However, respondents also pointed out other intersecting and overlapping causes, many of which have been caused or worsened by the Taliban's rule, including joblessness (50%), poverty (49%), family issues (34.3%), and harmful customs and traditions (32.2%). As another research participant expressed, *"Yes, there is nothing worse than verbal and psychological violence that we hear, especially from the family, because of being a girl, and the reason is poverty and joblessness."*

Interview respondents provided additional insights on the factors driving violence. Several responses emphasized that the collapse of the legitimate government and the Taliban's takeover have resulted in a lack of law and order. Without a functioning government, state mechanisms intended to protect citizens, including women, have been either dismantled or significantly weakened, allowing violence to escalate unchecked. As one women's rights

activist stated, *"all factors contributing to violence are linked to the policies and actions of [the Taliban]... the enactment of discriminatory laws and the removal of women's rights...the imposition of occupational and economic restrictions...[and] the dismantling of supportive institutions that previously monitored issues related to violence, has exacerbated domestic violence."* – Roshan Mashal.

Violence in All Shapes

Research respondents reported experiencing or witnessing multiple forms of violence, including psychological (68%), economic (61.4%), verbal (47.9%), physical (47.1%), and sexual harassment (17.1%). Many responses indicate that violence frequently appears as harassment, encompassing physical and emotional abuse, particularly for those who challenge the Taliban's laws concerning dress codes, mobility, and public behavior. Several responses mention violence against women who have sought to protest or advocate for their rights. Harassment and violence against activists demonstrate that resistance faces severe repression, including beatings, arrests, and disappearances. Additional responses highlighted the psychological burden of living in such circumstances. The

ongoing threat of violence, coupled with isolation, has contributed to mental health issues for many women, such as anxiety, depression, and trauma.

As one activist stated, *“with the developments that have unfolded in Afghanistan, gender-based violence has unfortunately become ingrained in our existence, leaving profound impacts on our lives. All Afghanistan women are facing challenges related to mental, emotional, psychological, and cultural issues, as well as economic difficulties, which contribute to a decline in self-confidence.”*

Domestic violence is also a recurring theme, with women facing violence at home due to economic dependence, lack of legal recourse, social norms, or being forced to marry at a young age (see also the discussion of the connections between gender-based violence and the denial of access to education and employment). As one activist noted, *“The prohibition of women from attending schools and universities, along with job restrictions for women, directly leads to an increase in domestic violence. This occurs because when women are unable to access their fundamental human rights and are confined to their homes, it naturally results in a rise in the rate of domestic violence. Women*

who previously had professional freedoms, contributed to family expenses, and worked outside the home are now left powerless. This disempowerment distances them from decision-making processes within their families. Additionally, girls who are not allowed to attend schools and universities not only suffer psychological distress but are also at heightened risk of early and underage marriages, which further aggravates domestic violence.” – Shinkai Karokhil

Research and interview responses also made clear that respondents define violence broadly to encompass a wide range of acts from physical and sexual violence, arbitrary arrest, and torture to discriminatory behavior in workplaces and psychological and emotional violence caused by the Taliban’s acts and edicts. For example, one expert noted that *“The fact that I am in exile and have lost my legal identity constitutes a form of violence in itself.”* At the same time, another highlighted that *“the prohibition of girls above the sixth grade attending schools is also a form of violence.”*

One expert interviewed summed up the totalizing nature of experiences of violence in every aspect of life, describing the toll that shifts in the workplace—such as the replacement of female staff with men, women’s exclusion

from certain roles or business ownership, arbitrary enforcement of restrictions, summary detention and punishment, physical harm in these settings, and restrictions on education and freedom of movement- are all forms of violence. She succinctly summarized the situation by stating: “*Afghanistan is like a prison.*”

The Silencing of Victims & Denial of Justice

Women are not only experiencing an increase in violence, but they are also facing a legal and societal system that hinders their reporting, denies justice, and grants impunity to perpetrators. Several responses highlighted the fear of speaking out about violence, with many women concerned about the repercussions of reporting incidents, whether it be from the Taliban or within their families. Research respondents identified multiple reasons why victims do not report acts of violence, including the lack of a legal mechanism to protect victims (63.9%), the absence of an institution to follow up on gender-based violence cases (49.3%), fear of heightened violence (44.7%), the desire to protect family privacy (41.3%), and lack of family support (35.9%). These reasons reflect the in-

terconnected nature of the silence surrounding gender-based violence in Afghanistan. Furthermore, while some violence is inflicted directly by the Taliban, in other cases, the Taliban and gender-based discrimination have fostered an environment that enables violence by various actors, including those within their families and communities.

In addition, the lack of a functioning legal system and the normalization of violence against women have resulted in widespread impunity for abusers. Many respondents pointed out that the legal frameworks and institutions that previously addressed violence have been dismantled. The Taliban's regime has abolished laws that could protect women or handle cases of violence, leaving victims without support and without hope for justice. An overwhelming 91.4% of research respondents indicated they were unaware of any pathways for reporting gender-based violence.

As one women's rights activist stated: “*Following the rise to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, legal mechanisms that supported women's rights have been significantly undermined. During the previous administration, certain laws and institutions were estab-*

lished to protect women's rights and combat gender-based violence; however, with the shift in power, many of these protections have been revoked or disregarded. Currently, it appears that all supportive mechanisms have been abolished by the Taliban. The repeal of protective laws means that many of these regulations were annulled, and support institutions have been completely shuttered. Women are now facing severe restrictions in accessing legal and supportive services. Thus, it can be stated that there are currently no effective legal and support mechanisms in place to protect women in Afghanistan."

Respondents also noted that the collapse of

family courts, which were previously responsible for handling issues like domestic violence and marital disputes, along with the Taliban's edict to overturn past divorce cases, has left women unable to seek justice within their families or marriages. As one women's rights expert stated, *"Unfortunately, all family courts that existed prior to the arrival of the Taliban have been abolished...The presence of women has been completely erased from the judicial system of Afghanistan, and there is no established system or process in place for addressing cases of violence."* – Atefa Tayeb

AVENUES FOR JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The systematic erosion of women's rights in Afghanistan has devastating and far-reaching impacts, necessitating concerted action to ensure justice and accountability for these violations. With no viable opportunities for domestic accountability currently available, the emphasis is on the steps that can be taken at the international level, focusing on three major pathways forward: recognition and codification of gender apartheid, state responsibility through the International Court of Justice, and individual criminal responsibility through the International Criminal Court and universal jurisdiction cases. These responses can be bol-

stered by creating an UN-mandated mechanism to investigate and document violations.¹

GENDER APARTHEID

The recognition and codification of the concept of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, which the women of Afghanistan have consistently described as the term that best captures their experience, is a key international priority. As one international expert noted, *“this campaign has really helped to bring together a lot of Afghanistan women’s rights defenders...created a central focus for the campaigns of a lot of them...built a lot*

1. Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organization et. al., *Questions and Answers on the Establishment of an Independent International Accountability Mechanism for Afghanistan*, Nov. 2024, <https://ishr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Afghanistan-Accountability-Mechanism-QA-November-2024.pdf>.

of consensuses across a community of activists, which, of course, is diverse in lots of ways. It's diverse in terms of ethnicity, in terms of age and generation, you know, in terms of some people who are inside the country, some people who are part of the diaspora, including people who, you know, are being exiled in an ongoing way because of their human rights activism. And so I think that...there's been such a lot of consensus around this campaign that I think it's already been a powerful organizing tool, and it will continue to be a powerful organizing tool."

Defined as an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one gender group over another or others, this concept encapsulates the totalizing nature of gender-based oppression in Afghanistan.¹ As this report demonstrates, the Taliban's decrees, policies, and practices have had extensive negative consequences for women and girls across all aspects of their lives, meeting this definition.

Furthermore, one can look to the typology

of acts defined in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (Apartheid Convention) alongside the findings in this report to understand the types of acts that may constitute gender apartheid. For instance, the Convention prohibits any actions aimed at preventing a (racial) group from "participating in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the country," as well as "the deliberate creation of conditions preventing the full development of such group...in particular by denying to members...basic human rights and freedoms," including the right to work, the right to education, the right to freedom of movement and residence, and the right to freedom of opinion and expression.² The findings of this report offer critical evidence that each of these rights is being systematically and pervasively denied to women and girls in Afghanistan. Likewise, the Convention prohibits the infliction

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1. Atlantic Council and Global Justice Center, *Amending the Crime Against Humanity of Apartheid to Recognize and Encompass Gender Apartheid*, Oct. 2023, <https://endgenderapartheid.today/download/brief/Gender-Apartheid-Expert-Legal-Brief-CAH-Treaty.pdf?v=20241122>.
 2. United Nations, International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, U.N. Doc. A/9030 (1974) at art. II (c).

of “serious bodily and mental harm, by the infringement of their freedom or dignity, or by subjecting them to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”¹ The extensive psychological effects documented in this report, along with the significant increase in gender-based violence, can be linked to these actions. These examples are merely indicative of the numerous ways in which the evidence of gender-based oppression in Afghanistan aligns with the acts of apartheid outlined in the Apartheid Convention.

These findings also highlight the urgent need to recognize and codify gender apartheid. So far, efforts have predominantly focused on codifying gender apartheid in the Draft Crimes

Against Humanity Treaty, which officially entered negotiations in November 2024.² To date, 11 countries have formally backed the consideration of codification in either the UN Sixth (Legal) Committee or the Human Rights Council (HRC).³ Numerous others, including states, experts, and UN officials, have employed the term and acknowledged the concept. Most recently, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, expressed his support for efforts to codify gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.⁴ As the treaty negotiations move forward, including with a discussion of potential amendments in January 2026,⁵ states should come together to propose the inclusion of gender apartheid in the draft treaty.

1. Id. at art. II(a)(ii).

2. United Nations, *Sixth Committee, Upholding Tradition of Consensus in Historic Meeting, Approves Text to Begin Elaborating International Convention on Crimes against Humanity*, Nov. 22, 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/gal3738.doc.htm>.

3. Just Security, Akila Radhakrishnan and Alyssa Yamamoto, *More States Open to Considering Gender Apartheid for Draft Crimes Against Humanity Treaty*, May 24, 2024, <https://www.justsecurity.org/96096/gender-apartheid-crimes-against-humanity-treaty/>.

4. OHCHR, *Gender parity is a human right*, Oct. 25, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/10/gender-parity-human-right>.

5. Just Security, Akila Radhakrishnan and Leila Nadya Sadat, *Key UN Committee Clears Path for Crimes Against Humanity Treaty Negotiations*, Dec. 2, 2024, <https://www.justsecurity.org/105305/cah-treaty-negotiations-passes-sixth-committee/>.

In addition, as one international expert interviewed for this report noted, two parallel tracks can be followed to achieve this goal. First, the pursuit of formal codification as discussed above. Second, there is a need to interpret existing laws on apartheid with a forward-looking, inclusive approach, which is a process that can happen now and does not rely on codification.¹

When asked about the importance of codifying gender apartheid, experts identified several factors, including the framework's potential to create accountability for the entire international community—whether states, policymakers, or private sector actors—in their engagement with the Taliban, the ability to leverage the concept and framework in ongoing political processes on Afghanistan, including the Doha process, as well as the necessity of naming a crime or violation accurately, including for deterrence purposes. Perhaps most importantly, experts emphasized that the primary driver for the recognition and codification of

gender apartheid is a call that comes directly from victims themselves; it is the women of Afghanistan who are leading this campaign, and addressing their demands bolsters their agency and ensures a survivor-centric approach to the situation in Afghanistan. As one expert articulated, *“Afghanistan women should lead and are leading it and are doing exceptionally well. They are agents of change. They are justice agents. They’re human rights agents. They have a wide continuum of agency and experience. And it’s their country and their lives that have been completely upended by a gender apartheid regime for which the international community bears some responsibility for allowing the Taliban to re-entrench itself. And they have the right to be angry about it, and they have the right to speak out about it. And that’s what they’re doing, and they’re doing it really, really well.”*

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

Afghanistan is a party to most major international treaties, including the Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil

1. For more on this approach, see Karima Bennouna, *The International Obligation to Counter Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan*, Columbia Human Rights Law Review (2022), <https://hrlr.law.columbia.edu/hrlr/the-international-obligation-to-counter-gender-apartheid-in-afghanistan/>.

and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some of these treaties, including CEDAW, have a clause allowing disputes about the interpretation or application of that treaty to be brought to the International Court of Justice (ICJ); a provision that Afghanistan has accepted.¹

In September 2024, four states, Australia, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands, announced that they were taking some preliminary steps that could result in a case under CEDAW at the ICJ.² This initiative is supported by a cross-regional group of 25 states, including Albania, Chile, Iceland, the Republic of Korea, Malawi, and Morocco.³

CEDAW, often called the international bill of rights for women, is a comprehensive treaty

that protects all aspects of women's rights, ranging from general prohibitions against discrimination, to specific provisions addressing various issues, to a positive obligation to realize both *de facto* and *de jure* equality.⁴ These include participation in political, public, and cultural life, education, employment, access to health care—including reproductive health care—and tackling violence against women. At present, a case can be made that all or nearly all rights guarantees are being violated by the Taliban in Afghanistan, making such a case an ideal vehicle for vindicating women's rights in the country.

This report illustrates that rights violations do not occur in isolation in Afghanistan. Instead, these violations build upon one another, with violations of certain rights acting as catalysts for others (for instance, the link between

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1. Open Society Justice Initiative, *Bringing a Case Before the International Court of Justice for the Rights of Afghan Women and Girls*, Nov. 2024, <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/56046440-580b-4c0f-ac14-7f503331427c/afghan-women-cedaw-icj-briefing-20241118.pdf>.
 2. German Federal Foreign Office, *Initiative on accountability for Afghanistan's violations of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, Jan. 13, 2025, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/cedaw-2694096>.
 3. *Id.*
 4. United Nations, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, Dec. 18, 1979.

lack of employment opportunities and violence against women). If states advance a case to the ICJ, they must ensure that the case is not limited to individual rights but adopts a nuanced approach that allows for the adjudication of the full range of women's rights violations in Afghanistan.

Although gender apartheid is not recognized as a concept under CEDAW, such a case could help establish a factual record of the rights violations and systemic discrimination in Afghanistan,¹ supporting codification efforts. Notably, in its General Recommendation 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, the CEDAW Committee acknowledged that gender apartheid is the most severe form of gender-based discrimination and called for its codification.² Experts interviewed for this report highlighted the complementary nature of such a case to the

codification of gender apartheid, as well as how the case offers an opportunity to act as negotiations on the draft crimes against humanity treaty proceed.

Individual Criminal Responsibility: The International Criminal Court & Universal Jurisdiction

Currently, there are two viable pathways for prosecuting members of the Taliban for violations of women's rights in Afghanistan: the International Criminal Court (ICC) and cases based on the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Afghanistan is a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, granting the court jurisdiction over crimes committed in Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan has been under investigation since 2017, but there have been no concrete steps forward.³ In November 2024, six ICC states parties, Chile, Costa Rica, Spain, France, Luxembourg, and Mexico—expressed concern

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1. Open Society Justice Initiative, *Bringing a Case Before the International Court of Justice for the Rights of Afghan Women and Girls*, Nov. 2024, <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/uploads/56046440-580b-4c0f-ac14-7f503331427c/afghan-women-cedaw-icj-briefing-20241118.pdf>.
 2. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, *General recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/40, Oct. 23, 2024.
 3. International Criminal Court, *Afghanistan*, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/afghanistan>.

regarding the lack of progress in the case, especially considering the deteriorating conditions for women in the country, and sent a referral to the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) urging action.¹ In January 2025, the OTP announced that they had filed applications for arrest warrants for two individuals: the Supreme Leader of the Taliban, Haibatullah Akhundzada, and their Chief Justice, Abdul Hakim Haqqani.²

The applications for arrest warrants focus on the crime against humanity of gender persecution,³ the definition of which requires severe deprivation of fundamental rights—specifically, the types of rights violations documented in this report. In addition, while not currently reflected in the applications for arrest warrants, it is also hoped that although gender apartheid

isn't codified as a crime in the Rome Statute, the OTP may consider taking a progressive interpretation of the law and bring charges of gender apartheid as an “other inhuman act” or, at a minimum, ensure that the systematic oppression and domination that underlies all gender-based crimes in Afghanistan is brought in contextually.

In addition to the ICC, prosecutions may be feasible under the theory of universal jurisdiction,⁴ which enables states to prosecute individuals for serious international crimes, regardless of where the crime occurred or the nationality of the perpetrators. Therefore, under universal jurisdiction, if certain preliminary requirements are met (which vary from state to state), it could be possible to prosecute

1. Chile et, al., *Referral of the Situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Nov. 28, 2024, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-11/Referral_Afghanistan_Embassy-of-Chile_28-November-2024.pdf.
2. International Criminal Court, *Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in Afghanistan*, Jan. 23, 2025, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-afghanistan>.
3. International Criminal Court, *Policy on the Crime of Gender Persecution*, Dec. 7, 2022, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-12-07-Policy-on-the-Crime-of-Gender-Persecution.pdf>.
4. Ham Diley Campaign, *Handbook on Universal Jurisdiction: Holding the Taliban Accountable for International Crimes*, Sept. 2024, https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/3800859/Handbook-on-Universal-Jurisdiction-Ham-Diley-Campaign.pdf.

Taliban members in domestic courts of other countries. It is crucial that if such prosecutions proceed, the cases adopt a gender-competent approach. A review of universal jurisdiction

cases and opportunities revealed that such cases often neglect sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), noting that only 17 out of 125 charges addressed in a 2021 review included SGBV.¹

1. Trial International, *Universal Jurisdiction Annual Review 2022: Universal jurisdiction, an overlooked tool to fight conflict-related sexual violence*, Apr. 2022, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/trial_ujar_25_03_2022_digital.pdf.

CONCLUSION

The research findings illustrate a stark and troubling reality for women and girls in Afghanistan since the Taliban's resurgence to power in August 2021. The systematic restrictions imposed by the regime have triggered a deepening crisis of women's rights and gender-based oppression, affecting every facet of women's lives. This report draws attention to the pervasive and intersecting impacts of these restrictions across key dimensions such as education, employment, participation in public life, and experiences of gender-based violence.

In the educational sector, the Taliban's bans have resulted in widespread deprivation, with an alarming 94.1% of respondents indicating that family members were denied access to education. This educational crisis has profound

implications, portrayed by the reported negative psychological and emotional consequences on women and girls, signalling a generational loss of potential. Despite these challenges, a remarkable 98.5% of respondents expressed support for girls' education, highlighting the community's collective commitment to educational equity, in contradiction to the Taliban's claims of cultural justification for these prohibitions.

The economic repercussions of the Taliban's restrictions are equally distressing. Prior to the regime's takeover, around 75% of respondents were employed; however, only 9.8% managed to retain their jobs afterward. The overwhelming majority have faced job losses, pushing them into severe financial instability

and increased family dependency. The psychological fallout from job loss is significant, with many reporting detrimental impacts on their mental health and social status, contributing to a pervasive atmosphere of despair and helplessness.

Further compounding these issues are the restrictions on women's participation in public, political, and social life. The comprehensive enforcement of these limitations has led to a near-total erasure of women's agency, with surveillance measures restricting mobility and social interactions. An alarming 73% reported being barred from university attendance, and a significant number faced constraints in accessing essential services without male guardians. The repercussions of such exclusions extend beyond individual rights, creating societal fractures that demand long-term reconstruction efforts.

In addressing the epidemic of gender-based violence, the situation is equally grim. A staggering majority of respondents have either experienced or witnessed violence against women, with 90.2% affirming an increase in violence since the previous year. The dire absence of legal protections, coupled with

societal stigma and fear, has led to a silencing of victims and a pervasive culture of impunity for perpetrators. The intersection of economic distress and societal oppression exacerbates this violence, as many cite Taliban edicts and financial despair as contributing factors to their suffering.

In conclusion, the research findings underscore a comprehensive crisis of women's rights in Afghanistan, characterized by a systematic dismantling of opportunities and freedoms. The interconnectedness of these issues illustrates that the challenges faced by women and girls cannot be addressed in isolation; rather, they require concerted efforts from local and international stakeholders to advocate for human rights and gender equity. As Afghanistan stands at this critical juncture, the urgent need for global attention and action has never been more pronounced. Without a collective response aimed at restoring rights and fostering an environment conducive to the empowerment of women, the legacy of oppression will continue to unfold, placing future generations at risk of compounded injustices and systemic inequalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this report closely align with the findings and analyses discussed throughout. They aim to address the challenges faced by women and facilitate the development of strategies that respond to the actual contexts of women's and girls' lives. By implementing these comprehensive recommendations, the situation facing women in Afghanistan can be addressed effectively, ensuring their rights, access to education, and opportunities for empowerment are not overlooked in a rapidly changing political landscape.

Four key themes for recommendations emerged from the research findings and interviews, which should be central to international, regional, and domestic actions on Afghanistan.

🕉 Recommendations to UN Member

States:

1. Support the codification of gender

- apartheid as a crime against humanity in the international law and in the draft treaties on crimes against humanity.
2. Support initiatives like the CEDAW accountability mechanism and cooperate with the International Criminal Court to investigate violations in Afghanistan.
3. Prioritize women's participation, agency, and leadership in international decision-making processes regarding Afghanistan.
4. Intensify diplomatic efforts and apply targeted pressure on the Taliban to rescind all the imposed restrictions on women particularly the PVPV Law.
5. Consider the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan in their policies.

● **Recommendations to the broader International Community:**

1. Support international legal efforts and campaigns that aim to hold perpetrators accountable.
2. Support a clear and safe processes for Afghanistan's at risk WHRDs to seek asylum or migrate to countries.
3. Adopt principles ensuring aid delivery considers barriers faced by women and girls, prioritizing their access.
4. Provide funding and resources to women's organizations working and delivering essential services for women and girls in Afghanistan.
5. Support the localization mechanism and leadership of women-led organizations in women focused initiatives for Afghanistan.
6. Provide the opportunity of online and in-person scholarship and fellowship for women and girls inside and outside

Afghanistan.

7. Provide mental health support for at-risk women and girls who are suffering from any type of mental health conditions.

● **Recommendations to Islamic Countries:**

1. Hold the Taliban accountable for violations of women's rights and for the misuse of Islamic principles to justify repression, while promoting dialogue that underscores the protection of human rights and the preservation of Islamic values.
2. Foster engagement with Afghanistan women's activists and leaders by providing diplomatic support and platforms for their voices, thereby strengthening their global advocacy efforts for justice, equality, and human dignity.



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