



Women and Children Research
and Advocacy Network

A GENERATION DENIED:

Case Studies on
The Consequences of the Education
Ban on School-Girls in Afghanistan

AUGUST 2025

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am honoured to express my sincere gratitude for the successful completion of this case studies report on “*The Consequences of the Education Ban on School Girls in Afghanistan*,” which sheds light on the underlying impacts and prevention strategies related to this critical issue in Afghanistan.

I extend my deepest appreciation to the dedicated staff of the Women and Children Research and Advocacy Network (WCARAN), whose exceptional commitment and perseverance were instrumental in navigating these difficulties. Their unwavering dedication to serving their community and advocating for the rights of women and children is truly commendable.

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insights during the interviews. Their valuable contributions were essential to the depth and quality of this study.

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It is my hope that this study will serve as a useful resource for colleagues, partners, and organizations committed to advancing the rights and protection of children across the country.

Sincerely,
Zarqa Yaftali
Founder of Women and Children Research
and Advocacy Network



DESCRIPTION

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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 addressing gender equality, education, and ending violence against women and children. WCRAN works through partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, academic institutions, and community groups to amplify its impact. Its primary goal is to create a world where women and children are valued, protected, and provided with the resources and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives.

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.

SERVICES AND IMPACT

RESEARCH

- Conducted three studies on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan after the

Taliban's return in 2021.

- Produced a study and consultation on the role of women-led organizations in humanitarian settings.
- Maintains ongoing consultations with women and girls in Afghanistan, as well as with diaspora leaders and activists.

ADVOCACY

- Since its founding in 2023, WCRAN has carried out over 20 strategic advocacy initiatives with international stakeholders.
- Highlights include:
 - *Global Alliance in Support of Afghanistan Women* (Canada).
 - *All Together in Support of Afghanistan Women: Women's Rights Are NOT Negotiable!* (Belgium UN Mission).
 - *The Impact of Taliban's Edicts on Wom-*

en and Girls in Afghanistan (Canadian Parliament).

- Developed a roadmap, *Global Alliance in Support of Afghanistan Women*, as the basis for ongoing advocacy.
- Published seven public statements supporting Afghan women's rights and raising international awareness.

OUR CONSTITUENCIES

WCRAN serves women and children most affected by discrimination and violence, with a strong focus on reaching those most vulnerable and at risk. Through direct interventions and partnerships with local and international organizations, WCRAN stands as a beacon of hope and empowerment for women and children in Afghanistan and beyond.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Afghanistan has become the only country in the world where girls are formally banned from education beyond primary school. More than 1.5 million school-aged girls are denied secondary school, vocational training, and higher education. This is not a temporary restriction, it is a deliberate, systematic effort to erase women and girls from public life. Over the past four years, decrees have dismantled every pathway to learning: banning co-education, prohibiting women from teaching, closing schools, excluding women from universities, restricting professional training, and invalidating academic credentials. Together, these actions amount to **Gender Apartheid**

a systematic violation of human rights that undermines Afghanistan's future.

The Women and Children Research and

Advocacy Network (WCRAN) conducted qualitative case studies across six provinces—Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and Wardak. Twelve in-depth interviews with school-aged girls reveal patterns of deprivation, despair, and resilience.

KEY FINDINGS

- ⦿ **Mental health crisis:** Girls report anxiety, depression, and loss of identity; some turned to self-harm and suicidal thoughts.
- ⦿ **Suicidal ideation**
- ⦿ : One in six participants disclosed suicidal ideation or attempts. Mahdia, from Badakhshan, ended her life after being forced into marriage.
- ⦿ **Dreams extinguished:** Future doctors, teachers, lawyers, and engineers are being

erased from public life, cementing patriarchal norms.

- ⦿ **Poverty cycle:** Families deprived of women's income rely on dowries, perpetuating intergenerational poverty.
- ⦿ **Fear and harassment:** Morality police, forced seclusion, and daily restrictions strip girls of autonomy and dignity.

CONSEQUENCES

- ⦿ Within a decade, Afghanistan will lack female doctors, nurses, teachers, and midwives—collapsing essential services and worsening gender inequality.
- ⦿ National capacity will be crippled, with half the population excluded from law, science, governance, and business.
- ⦿ Economic losses will be staggering; Afghanistan will forfeit a generation of growth and prosperity.
- ⦿ The global precedent is dangerous—normalizing gender persecution risks undermining international human rights protections.

CALL TO ACTION – URGENT ASKS

To address this moral, social, and security crisis, the international community must act decisively:

United Nations: Mandate systematic monitoring and public reporting on the ban through the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, in coordination with other human rights mechanisms.

Member States: Apply sustained diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to rescind the ban; pursue accountability through international justice mechanisms; consider targeted sanctions on perpetrators.

Donors: Fund alternative education models, support women-led grassroots organizations, and expand mental health and protection services.

Regional Actors: Mobilize the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and neighboring states to publicly oppose the ban and support Afghan girls' right to education.

Civil Society: Deliver shadow reports, advocacy, and safe education initiatives; amplify Afghan women's voices globally.

This ban violates the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ICCPR, ICESCR, CRC, CEDAW, the Apartheid Convention**, and the **UN Charter**, as well as binding customary international law. Denying girls education dismantles the social, economic, and political foundations necessary for peace and stability. The world must act, through advocacy, accountability, and investment before an entire generation is lost.

The testimonies in this report are both a warning and a plea. They expose the immense suffering inflicted on Afghan girls but also their extraordinary courage and determination to continue dreaming. Their message is unequivocal: education is not a privilege, but a right. The world must act now—through advocacy, accountability, and concrete action—before an entire generation is lost.

INTRODUCTION

The situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban took power in August 2021 has had alarming effects on the right to education for millions of Afghanistan girls, especially women and girls. The country is currently the only one in the world where girls are formally more than 1.5 million of girls banned from attending school beyond primary education (Grade 6), including secondary schooling, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), higher education and community-based learning initiatives. Economic instability has also led many boys to work instead of going to school. Vulnerable groups, including minorities, persons with disabilities and displaced populations, are among those struggling to access education.

The quality of education has also suffered due to several factors, including inadequate implementation of the curriculum and shortages of qualified teachers. Punitive salary cuts for women, delays or irregular salary payments, and the lack of teaching materials and proper equipment and facilities, have degraded education standards. This has affected teaching and learning motivation, as well as learning outcomes, and has led to a rise in out-of-school children and youth¹

The Taliban's educational policies following their takeover have systematically dismantled girls' and women's access to education in Afghanistan, reflecting a strict interpretation of Sharia law. Beginning with an initial decree on

1. UNESCO Report on "Banned from education A review of the right to education in Afghanistan": <file:///C:/Users/WCLRF/Downloads/393229eng.pdf>

August 30, 2021, which banned co-education and prohibited men from teaching girls, the regime quickly moved to exclude girls from secondary education altogether by September 17, 2021, when schools reopened only for boys from grades 7 to 12.¹

Parallel restrictions targeted higher education: in September 2021, women were banned from attending or teaching at Kabul University, initially framed as a temporary measure pending a “comprehensive plan” for female students’ safety. Ultimately, these measures culminated in a comprehensive ban on women’s enrolment in both public and private universities instituted in December 2022. Subsequent decrees in early 2023 reinforced these prohibitions by barring women from university entrance exams, restricting admissions exclusively to men, and invalidating women’s academic credentials²

Nursing and midwifery were entirely prohibited by December 2024. Collectively, these policies not only obstruct women’s fundamen-

tal right to education but also signify an institutionalized regression that severely curtails their social, economic, and professional opportunities within Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the recent study conducted by WCRAN reveals alarming and multifaceted impacts resulting from the ongoing ban on girls’ education in Afghanistan. The research identifies several interrelated key problems that have dramatically intensified following the prohibition of schooling for girls beyond grade six. Among the respondents, 25.9% of them reported a rise in family violence, indicating growing domestic tensions and harassment as familial and social pressures increase under conditions of educational deprivation, forced and underage marriages have surged, affecting 28.2% of the girls surveyed, psychological distress has affected nearly 29.1% of the girls, manifesting as anxiety, depression, trauma, social isolation, and hopelessness. These mental health challenges are deeply linked to the loss

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1. WCRAN Research report on “The Impacts of Taliban’s Edicts on Women and Girls in Afghanistan” October 2024-March 2025.
 2. WCRAN Research report on “The Impacts of Taliban’s Edicts on Women and Girls in Afghanistan” October 2024-March 2025.

of education, social restrictions, and disrupted life plans, increase in suicide attempts among girls, with 16.8% reportedly affected¹

Considering the restrictions on girls' education, the WCRAN undertook case studies across six provinces in Afghanistan to evaluate the current conditions of school-aged girls. This study focused on the profound impacts of the ongoing ban on education for girls beyond grade six. The study illuminated the urgent and multifaceted challenges faced by these girls and identified twelve individuals experiencing the most severe consequences. Through detailed, in-depth interviews, their personal stories were meticulously documented to provide a vivid and compelling account of the situation on the ground.

Timeline of Taliban Ban on Girls' and Women's Education (2021–2025)

2021

- **Aug 2021 – Secondary schools closed for girls beyond grade six**
→ 1.5M+ school-aged girls immediately barred.
- **Sep 2021 – Ban on co-education**

→ Universities and schools forced to segregate; many shut down.

- **Dec 2021 – Female teachers restricted**
→ Women banned from teaching male students; teachers required male guardians
→ loss of role models for girls.

2022

- **Mar 2022 – Boys' schools reopened; girls remain closed**
→ Institutionalized exclusion of girls.
- **Sep 2022 – Women excluded from vocational training**
→ No access to technical or professional skills.
- **Dec 2022 – Women banned from universities**
→ Tens of thousands expelled overnight.

2023

- **Jan 2023 – Ban on nursing & midwifery programs**
→ Future collapse of maternal and reproductive health workforce.
- **Mid-2023 – Crackdown on informal &**

1. WCRAN Research report on “The Situation of Women in Afghanistan” March 2023.

underground schools

→ Community-based learning circles harassed and dismantled.

2024

● **Nationwide annulment of women's academic credentials**

→ Professional recognition revoked; women excluded from employment.

2021–2025 (Ongoing)

● **Enforcement by Ministry of Vice & Virtue**

→ Women and girls barred from leaving home without male guardians, even for study, constant harassment and surveillance.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology to conduct an in-depth exploration of 12 carefully selected cases from six provinces [Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Nangarhar, Badakhshan and Wardak] in Afghanistan. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, the research aims to gather rich, contextualized data that capture the lived experiences of participants, secondary students directly affected by the education ban.

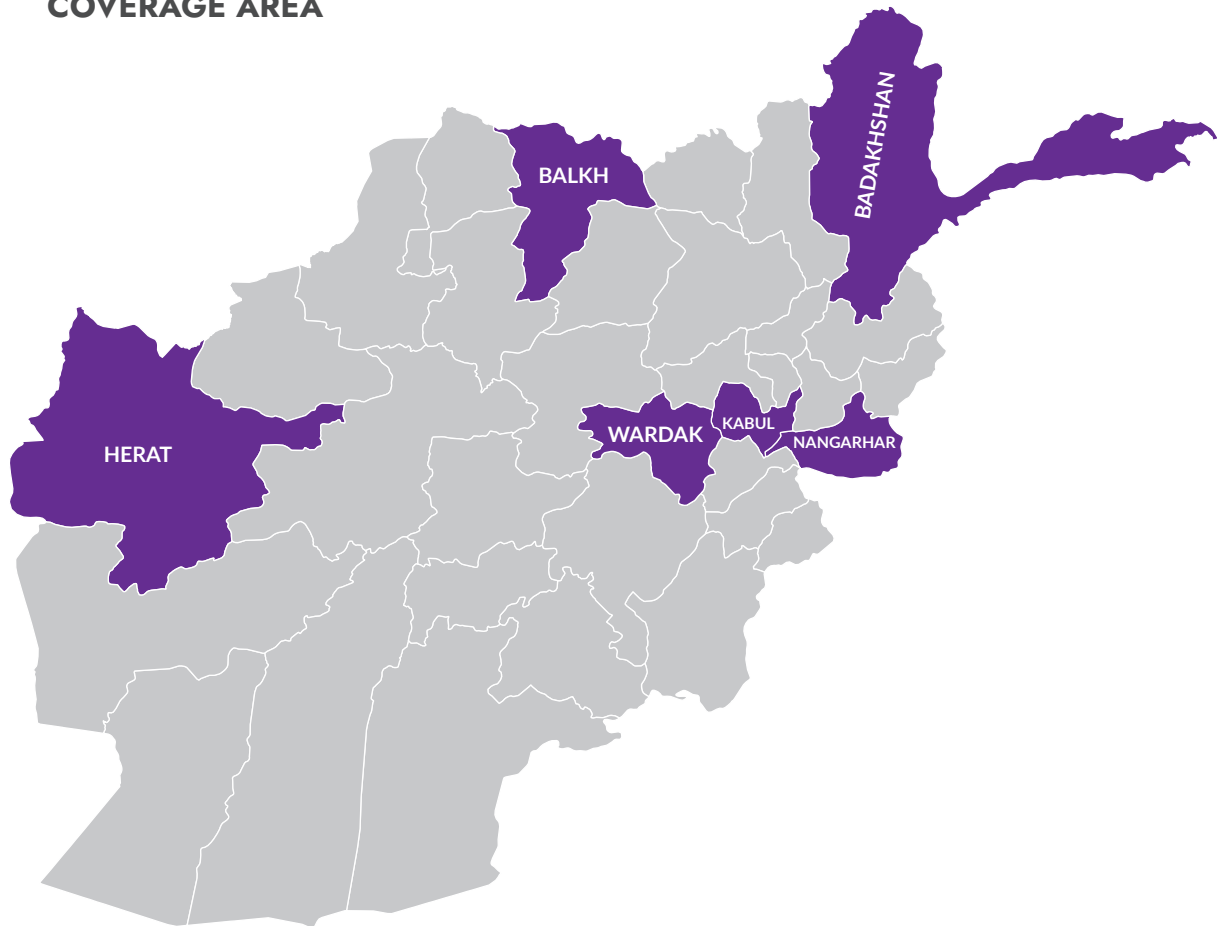
Data collection was conducted through online interviews, facilitated by a set of case study questionnaires developed by the WCRAN research team. Prior to participation, all respondents were thoroughly briefed on the study's objectives and methodology, and their informed verbal consent was obtained to ensure full ethical compliance. Rigorous measures were implemented to guarantee the

confidentiality and anonymity of participants, safeguarding their privacy throughout all stages of the study process.

This methodological approach enables the understanding of the multifaceted social, economic, and psychological impacts of the education ban on individuals and families. The rich qualitative data generated through this process yield valuable insights that can effectively inform policy recommendations and targeted intervention strategies aimed at addressing the consequences of the ban.

The report also uses analysis and discussions among women groups and activists working in Afghanistan on the issue of girls' education to provide context into the case studies.

CASE STUDIES COVERAGE AREA



CASE STUDIES FINDINGS

In Afghanistan, where nearly half of the population is under 18, children face severe risks from conflict, poverty, and harmful social norms. Many Afghanistan girls and boys are forced into early marriage, violence and lack of access to their basic rights especially the right to education¹.

Each case profile has been carefully anonymized to protect the identities of the children and families involved. These profiles, based on firsthand data, highlight typical experiences of girls prohibited from education.

Case profiles: For this study, WCRAN analysed and included 6 cases from 12 inter-

viewed cases in this report. These cases are presented in more detail to present readers with an in-depth understanding of first-hand narratives about the schoolgirls and their families. Behind every statistic lies a life cut short or a dream deferred:

- 🕒 **Mahdia (Badakhshan)**, 17, forced marriage and ends up taking her life.
- 🕒 **Leila (Kabul)**, 15, married off to a man nearly 35 years older, her youth and education stolen.
- 🕒 **Zohra (Wardak)**, 16, dreamed of becoming a doctor; today, she lives under threat of early marriage and constant surveillance.

1. Nearly half of Afghanistan's population is younger than 15 years (about 46%), and 70% of children under 18 live in poverty. Both girls and boys face severe rights violations including early marriage, violence, and exploitation; 28% of Afghan women aged 15–49 were married before age 18. UNICEF. (2021, November 12). Girls increasingly at risk of child marriage in Afghanistan. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/girls-increasingly-risk-child-marriage-afghanistan>

- **Somaia (Nangarhar)**, a top student, fell into depression and self-harm after being barred from school, clinging to fragile underground study circles.
- **Husna (Balkh)** lives in isolation, battling suicidal thoughts, yet still yearns for skills

to gain independence.

- **Gulsom (Herat)** aspired to be a lawyer. Now pressured into early marriage, she remains silenced but continues to dream of justice.

CASE # 1: MAHDIA FROM BADAKHSHAN PROVINCE

My name is Hadia (Pseudonym), I am 20 years old and live in Badakhshan Province. I would like to share the deeply tragic story of my younger sister, Mahdia. She was 17 years old and in the eighth grade at school in a district of our province.

Following the political changes in Afghanistan in 2021, when the Taliban seized control, schools were abruptly closed to girls beyond the sixth grade. The restrictions imposed on girls increased steadily, and simultaneously, living conditions worsened drastically. Many families, including ours, faced severe economic hardships and food insecurity.

Because girls were no longer permitted to leave their homes freely, and combined with our family's financial difficulties, Mahdia was

forcibly engaged to a man who resided outside Afghanistan and who provided financial support to our family. This arrangement was made without her consent, disregarding her feelings and desires.

Despite Mahdia's opposition to the engagement and her love for another person, her family rejected her choice. The engagement endured for two agonizing years during which Mahdia's wishes were systematically ignored. Her family threatened her repeatedly to sever ties with the man she truly loved, prioritizing the financial support they received from her fiancé over her happiness and wellbeing.

In her desperation, Mahdia made several attempts to take her own life by throwing herself into the turbulent Kokcha River, but

these attempts initially failed. Tragically, after enduring two years of relentless emotional and psychological suffering, Mahdia ultimately ended her after drowning in the river. Her body was discovered 21 days later.

Following her death, the government arrested and imprisoned the man Mahdia loved, accusing him of involvement in her killing.

However, the root cause of Mahdia's death was not any individual but the Taliban regime's oppressive policies. By closing schools to girls and imposing severe restrictions on their freedom, the regime created an environment of despair and hopelessness that led to this tragic loss of life.

CASE # 2: LEILA FROM KABUL PROVINCE

Laila (Pseudonym), a 17-year-old from Kabul, once dreamed of becoming a geography teacher. Before the summer of 2021, school was her refuge. “School was my place,” she recalled. “I loved drawing maps and writing poems. At home, I was the little girl who helped with chores, but in school, I felt like someone who could be important one day.”

That dream ended when the Taliban closed secondary schools for girls. Laila was in seventh grade. “I thought it was just for a few days. I told my friends, ‘We will be back soon.’ But days became months. Then I understood: we were not going back.”

For Laila, school had also shielded her from early marriage. Once it was gone, relatives pressured her parents. At 15, she was married to a 35-year-old shopkeeper she had never spoken to. “I wanted to scream that I was still a

child, but I stayed silent.”

Marriage transformed her life. In her father’s house, she still had time to study. In her husband’s, she was expected to wake before dawn, fetch water, cook, clean, and serve ten people. “When I made mistakes, my mother-in-law shouted, ‘What kind of wife are you?’” Her husband treated her as a child who must obey. She was isolated, forbidden to meet friends or study. “It was like a prison.”

Soon came pressure to conceive. Each month without pregnancy brought new blame. “They called me barren. My husband became distant. I thought maybe God hated me.” She was taken to healers, fed herbs, and told to pray harder. After nine months, she conceived, but even pregnancy brought no relief. “I was a child carrying another child. If I rested, they accused me of being lazy.”

Despite everything, Laila clings to memories of school. “If school had remained open, none of this would have happened. Education was my shield. When the Taliban took it away, they took my childhood too.” She still hides a

notebook under her pillow, writing poems in secret. “Maybe one day, I can teach my daughter, so her life will not be like mine.”

Bottom of Form

CASE # 3: ZOHRA FROM WARDAK PROVINCE

My name is Zohra (Pseudonym). I am a 16-year-old Hazara girl and a Shia living in Maidan Wardak province. I was once a lively, hopeful girl with big dreams and ambitions. My dream was to become a female doctor, serving my people—especially hardworking, poor women in need of medical care. I had clear plans for my future and family. But with the country's political changes and the dark shadow of crisis—human rights, economy, and social life all collapsed—my life filled with pain and despair.

The days when girls like me could study, work, and play valued roles in society have gone. Now, everything has changed. Being

denied education, I carry not only the heavy burden of lost dreams but also fear. One of my greatest fears is my family's plan to force me into early marriage. Recently, my father discussed with relatives about marrying me off quickly, believing it's better for the family and for me to get married. Hearing this crushed me, as I do not want this fate, but I am afraid my family will force it upon me regardless of my wishes.

Moreover, the Mohtasibin¹ have made my life even harder. My family tells me not to wear colourful clothes and to strictly adhere to the dress code. Just days ago, a relative criticized me harshly for wearing short clothes at home, say-

1. *Muhtasibin are referred to the inspectors of the Vice & Virtue Ministry – patrolling as moral police on the streets and neighborhoods and spying on communities and households enforcing the Taliban restrictions and policies.*

ing such attire was inappropriate. I live in fear that any move I make could attract punishment or humiliation from the extremists, even inside my own home.

My family insists that I avoid any public participation or even speaking loudly, claiming it is dangerous for girls. A neighbour recently recounted horrific stories of girls being harassed and abused in the marketplace, which terrified me further. These stories, combined with the constant threat of punishment, have trapped me in a stifling and dark space where even the smallest step threatens my safety.

Recently, while walking home, I passed a morality cop patrolling the street. Despite wearing full hijab, I hurried in fear—this fear

has deeply hollowed out my sense of security and hope. My life feels like an endless torture chamber without a future. My family restricts me severely—I cannot attend gatherings, run errands, or walk with friends, as they fear it could disgrace the family.

I am overwhelmed with helplessness and despair. I know drastic change is necessary for survival, but the fear of punishment, violence, and discrimination chains me in this darkness. I am Zohra—a girl from a place where girlhood is a battle. My only wish is to return to school, to freely dream again, to fight for my high goals, to have my voice heard as an equal human being, and to ensure no other girl like me suffers such injustice and cruelty.

CASE # 4: SOMAIA FROM NANGARHAR PROVINCE:

My name is Somaya (Pseudonym), a 20-year-old girl from Nangarhar who always excelled academically. I was a top student in most of my classes especially in 11th class, full of hopes and dreams, until the day the Taliban decree came girls were forbidden from going to school. In that single moment, my dreams shattered and my future darkened. The initial shock overwhelmed me with tears, but grief soon turned to numbness. My body rebelled against my sorrow—I lost my appetite and was haunted by daily pain and despair. The isolation and hopelessness became unbearable. When I saw a classmate migrated to Iran with her family to continue her education, a wave of despair crashed over me so fiercely that I turned to self-harm, hoping physical pain might quiet my tormented mind.

Thankfully, my mother intervened and took me to the psychiatrist who diagnosed me with severe depression and anxiety. Life seemed bleak, and I often wished I had never existed. Yet, a ray of hope came through a small home-based study circle led by a compassionate woman. Twice a week, I join my peers to learn and reclaim a fragment of my stolen childhood. Each algebra problem I solve reminds me that I am not a victim—I am resilient. But when I hear the laughter and footsteps of girls heading to school, the scars on my hands remind me painfully that these wounds symbolize the brutal price I paid for a future taken from me unjustly. My story is a testament to the enduring fight of countless Afghanistan girls robbed of their right to education, yet still daring to dream.

CASE # 5: HUSNA FROM BALKH PROVINCE

My name is Hasna (Pseudonym), a sixteen-year-old girl from Balkh province. Three years ago, when schools and universities were closed to us girls, my life changed completely. It was at that moment I realized how dark my world had become, and how despair and anxiety gradually took root in my heart. Before the closure of schools, I went to school every day with great enthusiasm. I loved studying and had clear plans for my future. However, since then, I have not been able to return to school for nearly the past four years. This deprivation has profoundly affected my life. I constantly feel anxious and worried. My sleep is restless and often interrupted. Many times, I find myself battling depression, overwhelmed by hopelessness that consumes my entire being. When I am alone, feelings of loneliness and isolation intensify, sometimes to the extent that I have

contemplated suicide.

Communicating with my family and friends has become very difficult. Sometimes, speaking feels troublesome, and I often become irritable and sensitive. I have even developed a sense of distrust towards some people, as I can no longer easily place my trust in those around me as I once did.

Moreover, being deprived of education has caused me to feel a deep sense of futility. Every day when I leave the house, I feel the absence of school and my friends as a heavy grief within me. The opportunities I once had for friendship and social interaction have been lost. My future appears bleak and filled with anxiety. This state has disrupted all my daily activities, and often I am unable to perform my routine tasks as I used to.

Occasionally, when I talk with my friends, I

find some relief. Reading books also helps me occupy my mind to some extent. Entertainment activities such as playing games on my mobile phone or using social media sometimes allow me to momentarily forget my troubles and feel a bit happier.

I intensely long to return to my studies or to learn new skills. I feel that if I could acquire a skill that provides an income, I would be able to support myself and my family, easing the worries and anxieties in my heart. This possibility would bring me a sense of calmness and security.

My family, who once held hopeful aspirations for my future, are now deeply concerned about my well-being. They suffer from witnessing my deteriorating mental state, and I sense the weight of psychological pressure upon them as well. My parents treat me with kindness and eyes full of compassion, trying to strength me. However, the behaviour of the Taliban and the so-called Mohtasibin¹ “morality enforcers” towards us girls is extremely insulting and humiliating. Their actions make me feel worthless and like a burden.

1. Muhtasibin is referred to the inspectors and enforcers of the Ministry of Vice and Virtue in Afghanistan who patrol streets and neighborhoods ensuring the restrictions and polices of the Taliban Emirate is enforced on women and communities.

CASE # 6: GULSOM FROM HERAT PROVINCE

My name is Gulsom (Pseudonym), a young girl from Herat Province with grand aspirations and a heart full of hope for a better future. I was a 10th grade student until the political upheavals transformed the country's political system, ushering in profound humanitarian, political, economic, security, and social crises—disproportionately affecting women and girls. I dreamed of becoming a lawyer to advocate for the rights of women and girls in my region and across the country. However, I now face persistent gender-based barriers and discrimination within my own family on a daily basis. I once wished to graduate as a lawyer and fight for justice and the rights of women and girls who are victims of violence. Unluckily, now my life is filled with suffering and pain. Not only I am

unable to help others, but I myself am a victim of various forms of oppression and injustice that render my existence bitter and dark every moment.

For example, earlier this spring, my family decided quickly—without consulting me—that I should marry early. When I opposed this, they coldly and harshly rejected my objections. My heart broke. Now, I not only have no role in society, but even at home, I am relegated to a passive role. Whenever violence or injustice is inflicted upon me, I have no courage to protest or seek redress. Every attempt I make to voice my opinion it is ignored by my father, brother, and even my mother, which ignites a fire inside me. In the depths of my humiliation and despair, I sometimes pray for death.

Last year, when the vaccination campaign began in our area, one of my father's friends contacted him and suggested that I could work as a vaccinator to serve the people. The job, although temporary and modest in pay, would have at least provided some financial relief. But my father's harsh and unexpected response was, *"Am I not alive to send my daughter to work under these conditions? You know how hostile society is; all predators are after girls, how can I willingly hand my daughter over to ruthless, cruel people? No, I will never allow it."* This rejection intensified the pain and pressure in my life beyond endurance.

Especially when I consider that I not only lack any human or Islamic rights and privileges, but as a woman, I face various restrictions, harassment, and violence both in society and

outside the home. I have no institution or refuge to turn to; no one listens to my cries of oppression or my spiritual and physical suffering, not even a small balm for my wounded and tormented heart. The oppressive and restrictive decrees of the ruling regime, the constant surveillance by Mohtasibin 'morality enforcers', the family's insistence on preserving family honour by limiting my personal and social activities—all these make life increasingly unbearable. I feel as if my life has ended, and no path exists to change my situation. My dreams of justice, equality, and serving others are gradually transforming into despair. I am a living example of one who breathes but bears the qualities of the dead."

ANALYSIS OF SIX TESTIMONIES ON THE IMPACT OF THE EDUCATION BAN ON AFGHAN GIRLS

The six testimonies of Afghan girls and young women from Badakhshan, Kabul, Wardak, Nangarhar, Balkh, and Herat collectively illustrate the profound human toll of the Taliban's education ban. They reveal recurring themes of despair, coercion, and isolation, but also resilience and defiance in the face of systemic oppression. Each case is unique in circumstance, yet all share a common thread: the denial of education has become the catalyst for a web of suffering that spans from mental health crises to forced marriages and even death.

1. EDUCATION AS A SHIELD AGAINST DESPAIR AND FORCED MARRIAGE

For **Mahdia (Badakhshan)**, the closure of schools marked the beginning of a chain reaction that ended in tragedy. Deprived of her education and freedom, her family saw her not as a student with potential but as a financial transaction. The forced engagement, made without her consent, exemplifies how education once shielded girls from being commodified. Her eventual suicide is not merely a personal tragedy but a systemic one — the direct outcome of state-imposed restrictions that stripped her of agency and hope.

Similarly, **Laila (Kabul)** underscores how education had served as her “shield” against early marriage. School gave her an identity beyond domestic servitude, nurturing dreams of becoming a teacher. When that was taken, she was married at 15 to a man more than twice her age. Her testimony reveals how quickly girlhood collapses into adulthood when education is removed. The shift from student to child bride, from poet to servant, is both a personal loss and a national one, extinguishing potential that could have strengthened Afghanistan’s future.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES

The stories of **Zohra (Wardak)**, **Somaia (Nangarhar)**, and **Hasna (Balkh)** highlight the mental health consequences of the ban.

- Zohra speaks of her life as a “battle,” suffocated by fear of morality enforcers and family pressure for marriage. Even fully veiled, she feels unsafe, reduced to silence and invisibility. Her testimony illustrates how education is not just about learning

but about dignity, autonomy, and courage. Without it, fear replaces aspiration.

- For Somaia, a top student, the sudden loss of education spiraled into severe depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. Her salvation came only through a grassroots home-schooling circle, which provided a fragile but vital lifeline. Her case exemplifies how small acts of community resistance can preserve hope in an otherwise devastating landscape.
- Hasna’s prolonged exclusion from school has left her in a state of chronic anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Her distrust of others and the disintegration of her daily life mirror the quiet but corrosive impact of systemic oppression: not only are dreams extinguished, but even the ability to function in daily life is eroded.

Together, these cases expose the underacknowledged mental health crisis which Afghanistan girls face. Deprivation of education is not only a denial of knowledge — it is a sustained assault on psychological stability.

3. SILENCING ASPIRATIONS AND REINFORCING GENDER APARTHEID

Gulsom (Herat) represents the silencing of ambition on a structural scale. Once determined to become a lawyer and fight for justice, she now finds herself voiceless in her own family and denied even small opportunities, such as working in a vaccination campaign. Her despair captures the essence of gender apartheid: women reduced to passive beings, stripped of agency, their voices dismissed even within their own homes. Her testimony underscores that the education ban is not only about classrooms — it is a mechanism of erasure, extinguishing women's roles as leaders, professionals, and advocates.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

- Across all six stories, three themes stand out:

- **The Collapse of Childhood** – Each girl describes how education once safeguarded their youth and protected them from premature marriage, domestic exploitation, or despair. Its loss has accelerated their transition into oppressive adult roles, robbing them of innocence.
- **The Mental Health Emergency** – Depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and self-harm recur throughout the testimonies. These are not isolated struggles but widespread consequences of systemic oppression.
- **Resistance and Resilience** – Even in darkness, sparks of defiance remain. Laila hides her poems; Somaia attends secret home classes; Zohra dares to dream of returning to school. These fragments of resistance demonstrate the enduring human will to learn, to dream, and to fight back against erasure.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EDUCATION BAN IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan today is the only country in the world where girls are formally banned from secondary and higher education. This is not simply a denial of rights, but it is the deliberate dismantling of a nation's future. The Taliban's ban on girls' education is not only morally indefensible but also a direct violation of Afghanistan's binding obligations under international law. By excluding half the population from learning, the Taliban are breaching a comprehensive body of human rights instruments and global commitments that enshrine the right to education, equality, and non-discrimination.

KEY INTERNATIONAL LAWS AND FRAMEWORKS VIOLATED INCLUDE:

- ⦿ Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948)

Article 26 affirms the right to education for all, without discrimination.

- ⦿ **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)**

Articles 13 and 14 guarantee the right to free and compulsory primary education, and the progressive realization of secondary and higher education for everyone.

- ⦿ **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)**

Articles 2, 3, and 26 prohibit discrimination and guarantee equality before the law, including in access to education.

- ⦿ **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989)**

Article 28 recognizes the right of the child to education, and Article 29 sets the aims of education, which include developing the child's personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential.

● **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)**

Article 10 obligates states to eliminate discrimination against women in education and ensure equal access to curricula, examinations, teaching staff, scholarships, and continuing education.

● **UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)**

Explicitly prohibits any distinction, exclusion, limitation, or preference that denies equality of treatment in education, including on the basis of sex.

● **Sustainable Development Goals (2015)**

SDG 4 commits states to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all, while SDG 5 requires achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

● **The Apartheid Convention (1973) and**

evolving recognition of **Gender Apartheid** Systematic exclusion of women from education and public life can amount to a form of apartheid under international law, where discrimination is institutionalized and enforced by state or de facto authorities.

SHORT-TERM CONSEQUENCES IN AFGHANISTAN: LIVES ALREADY BROKEN

1. A SHIELD AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE DESTROYED

School once served as the only socially acceptable reason to delay marriage. With classrooms closed, girls as young as 13 or 14 are being forced into unions with much older men. Families, under pressure from poverty and social norms, treat daughters as currency for survival.

2. A MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY

Deprived of learning and confined to their homes, girls describe lives filled with despair. Anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts are

widespread. Some, like 17-year-old Mahdia from Badakhshan, took their own lives after being forced into unwanted engagements. The ban is not just closing schools—it is closing futures.

3. FAMILIES PUSHED DEEPER INTO POVERTY

Girls' education once meant better jobs and income for families. Without it, households lose potential wages and instead rely on dowries through forced marriage. Poverty deepens, opportunities vanish, and the cycle of dependence grows stronger with each passing day.

4. ISOLATION AND FEAR AS DAILY LIFE

Girls are harassed by morality police, barred from movement, and silenced at home. Without education, they are stripped not only of knowledge but of dignity and identity. For many, the world has already become a prison.

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES: A NATION WITHOUT A FUTURE

1. A GENERATION WITHOUT PROFESSIONALS

Ten years from now, Afghanistan will face an empty horizon: no female doctors to deliver babies, no nurses to staff clinics, no teachers to inspire the next generation, no lawyers to defend rights. Entire sectors—health, education, law—will collapse under the absence of women. Studies show that mothers' education is the strongest predictor of whether children—girls and boys—attend school. With Afghanistan girls cut off now, the next generation will inherit illiteracy, poverty, and exclusion.

2. GENDER APARTHEID CEMENTED

This is not a temporary setback. It is the institutionalization of **Gender Apartheid**—a system where women are erased from public life and confined to invisibility. Once normalized, this exclusion will take generations to undo.

3. AN ECONOMIC CATASTROPHE

Educating girls is one of the most powerful drivers of national growth. Each additional year of schooling increases a woman's earning power by up to 20%. By denying education to half its population, Afghanistan is choosing economic ruin. The global community, in turn, will bear the burden of humanitarian crises and lost potential.

4. HUMAN SECURITY AT RISK

The ban on girls' education in Afghanistan undermines every dimension of human security:

Health security collapses without female health workers. The education ban ensures that girls and young women cannot train as doctors, nurses, or midwives, leading to a collapse in health security. In a country where maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world, the absence of female health workers is catastrophic. Many women in Afghanistan, due to cultural restrictions, cannot seek treatment from male doctors. Without female professionals, countless preventable deaths will occur during childbirth, illnesses will go untreated, and entire communities will suffer from a

health crisis rooted in gender exclusion.

Food security weakens as families dependent on dowries slide further into poverty. When girls are barred from education, families often resort to marrying off their daughters for dowries to survive, especially amid economic collapse. This desperate strategy undermines food security in two ways: it deepens intergenerational poverty and removes girls from the possibility of earning future livelihoods. Instead of becoming wage earners, women become economic dependencies, weakening family resilience against hunger. The result is a cycle of poverty in which both families and communities slide further into deprivation.

Political security erodes when half the population is silenced, fueling instability and extremism. Silencing half the population erodes Afghanistan's political security by narrowing participation, weakening institutions, and fueling instability. Women have historically played vital roles as teachers, activists, and professionals advocating for rights and justice. By excluding them from education and civic life, the regime not only strips away individual freedoms but also dismantles inclusive governance. This

vacuum creates fertile ground for authoritarianism, extremism, and unchecked violence destabilizing Afghanistan's political landscape.

Regional security is threatened as Afghanistan becomes a hub of radicalization, with women excluded as stabilizing forces in society. The marginalization of women has implications that ripple far beyond Afghanistan's borders. Excluding women as stabilizing and moderating forces leaves communities

more vulnerable to radicalization. A generation of boys raised without educated mothers or female role models is more susceptible to extremist ideologies. This instability threatens regional security, as Afghanistan risks becoming a breeding ground for cross-border militancy, migration crises, and broader humanitarian emergencies that affect neighbouring states and the international community alike.

CLOSING NOTE

The stories collected in this report demonstrate not only the suffering inflicted on Afghan girls, but also their courage and determination to continue dreaming of education. These recommendations are not optional, they are a roadmap for urgent action. Without sustained pressure, accountability, and investment in alternative pathways, Afghanistan will lose an entire generation of women and girls. The cost will be borne not only by them but by the entire nation, and indeed the world, as the principles of equality, justice, and peace are undermined.

The Taliban's ban on girls' education undermines not only human rights but also the security of Afghanistan and its neighbors. By excluding half the population from schools, universities, and professions, the country is left without female doctors, teachers, nurses, or

midwives, creating a collapse in basic services such as healthcare and education. This weakens trust in institutions and fuels humanitarian crises that destabilize society. At the same time, poverty deepens as families lose the future income educated women could provide. Many resort to harmful coping strategies such as child marriage, trafficking, or sending sons to religious schools (Madrassa) controlled by extremists. These conditions strengthen radical ideologies, making Afghanistan a fertile ground for violent extremism.

The consequences are not confined within Afghanistan's borders. As despair grows, families are forced to flee Afghanistan, leading to refugee flows into Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia, and eventually towards the western countries. Increased refugee influx also risks triggering political tensions with host communities,

further undermining regional stability. Moreover, a weak Afghanistan with hollow institutions and a population deprived of opportunity will remain vulnerable to extremist influence and cross-border militancy, threatening international security.

Excluding women from education removes a critical stabilizing force in society. Around the world, educated women are proven to reduce

poverty, improve health, strengthen communities, and foster peace. By erasing women from public life, the Taliban not only destroy Afghanistan's social fabric but also heighten insecurity for the wider region. In short, an Afghanistan without educated women will not be a stable Afghanistan — and its instability will reverberate across borders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The testimonies in this report reveal the devastating impact of Afghanistan's education ban on girls and women. They also underscore the urgent need for coordinated international action. The ban is not only a human rights violation but also a form of Gender Apartheid, which risks setting a dangerous precedent if left unchallenged. The following recommendations outline concrete steps for the United Nations, Member States, donors, and civil society to uphold international law, protect the rights of Afghanistan girls, and prevent the permanent loss of an entire generation. The following are different categories of recommendations for a wide range of stakeholders engaged in Afghanistan:

1. UNITED NATIONS (UN) BODIES

A. Diplomatic Pressure and Political Engagement

- Elevate the issue of Afghanistan's Gender Apartheid at the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and Human Rights Council, ensuring that the education ban remains at the forefront of international political agendas.

B. International Accountability Mechanisms

- Mobilize relevant UN treaty bodies to review Afghanistan's compliance with its legal obligations:
- The CEDAW Committee to assess violations of women's rights and issue urgent

recommendations that should support the potential CEDAW violation case at the International Court of Justice.

- ④ The CRC Committee to review the systemic denial of children's right to education.
- ④ The Human Rights Committee to consider breaches of the ICCPR, including freedom from discrimination.
- ④ Recognize and denounce Afghanistan's situation as a case of Gender Apartheid, invoking international law frameworks such as the Apartheid Convention and customary international law prohibiting persecution.

C. Independent Monitoring and Reporting

- ④ Mandate regular and public reporting on the education ban by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, with a focus on its long-term generational consequences.
- ④ Ensure coordination between the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women

and Girls to amplify monitoring and advocacy.

- ④ Strengthen the role of the Human Rights Council in renewing and expanding mandates to monitor Afghanistan's compliance with international obligations.

D. Justice and Accountability Pathways

- ④ Call on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to continue documenting evidence of systemic violations for possible future legal proceedings.

2. MEMBER STATES & REGIONAL ACTORS

A. Diplomatic Pressure and Political Engagement

- ④ Apply sustained and coordinated diplomatic pressure on the Taliban to immediately rescind the education ban, making it clear that gender-based exclusion is unacceptable under international law.
- ④ Encourage regional actors — including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

(OIC), neighboring states, and Muslim-majority countries — to take a public stand against the ban and advocate for the restoration of girls' education.

B. Justice and Accountability Pathways

- Support efforts to pursue accountability through the International Criminal Court (ICC), recognizing that gender persecution may constitute a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute.
- Explore avenues for targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for enforcing or benefiting from the education ban, ensuring that punitive measures target perpetrators rather than ordinary Afghan families.

C. Expanding Global Education Opportunities

- Establish and expand scholarships, fellowships, and cross-border learning programs for Afghan girls, both within the region and internationally.
- Simplify visa processes, documentation requirements, and language support to ensure

that Afghan girls are not excluded due to bureaucratic barriers.

- Promote partnerships between Afghan students and global universities to safeguard the country's intellectual and professional future.

3. DONORS & INTERNATIONAL FUNDING AGENCIES

A. Alternative Education Pathways

- Fund and expand alternative education models to mitigate the collapse of girls' education, including:
 - Online and digital platforms accessible via low-bandwidth technology.
 - Community-based and home-based schools, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas.
 - Safe informal learning spaces supported by trusted community networks.
 - Support teacher training programs particularly for women to ensure that alternative systems maintain quality and sustainability.

B. Support for Women-Led Organizations

- ⦿ Provide direct financial support to Afghan women-led grassroots organizations that continue to deliver education, psychosocial care, and advocacy under extremely difficult conditions.
- ⦿ Ensure that international funding mechanisms are flexible, accessible, and protective, enabling these organizations to operate safely despite restrictions and surveillance.
- ⦿ Recognize these organizations as vital lifelines of hope and resilience for Afghan girls and women.

C. Mental Health and Protection Services

- ⦿ Provide trauma-informed mental health support for Afghan girls affected by isolation, forced marriage, and loss of identity.
- ⦿ Develop protection services for those at risk of gender-based violence, including safe houses, helplines, and access to legal aid.
- ⦿ Integrate psychosocial support into all education initiatives, ensuring that learning opportunities also restore hope and dignity.

4. INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THOSE ACTIVE IN AFGHANISTAN

A. International Accountability Mechanisms

- ⦿ Support the submission of shadow reports and urgent appeals by civil society to strengthen accountability and visibility at the international level.

B. Support for Women-Led Organizations

- ⦿ Deliver education, psychosocial care, and advocacy under extremely difficult conditions, often at great personal risk.
- ⦿ Act as frontline responders and community lifelines, maintaining hope and resilience for Afghan girls and women despite Taliban restrictions.

C. Alternative Education Pathways

- ⦿ Implement informal and community-based schools as well as safe informal learning spaces, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

- Develop local, trusted education networks that are responsive to community needs and safety considerations.

D. Mental Health and Protection Services

- Deliver psychosocial and protection ser-

vices directly to communities, including safe spaces, counseling, and legal support.

- Advocate for holistic approaches that address both education and emotional well-being of Afghan girls and women.

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