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Women's Access to Education in a Patriarchal Society

Zulaikha Delju[1,], Nasima puya Habibi[2,3]*

[1]Universitas Islam International Indonesia (UIII), Indonesia
[2]American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan
[3]Otto von Guericke University, Magdeburg, Germany
*Correspondence: E-mail: zulaikha.delju@uiii.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research study examines women's access to education in Afghanistan, focusing on the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. The study aimed to investigate how a male-controlled Afghan society hinders women's access to education and what can be learned from the experiences of women forced to give up on education. A qualitative case study approach is employed, using historical analysis and semi-structured interviews as the main data collection methods. Purposeful sampling is utilized to select participants, specifically older women who have firsthand experience of limited or no access to education. The key findings reveal that factors such as family restrictions, gender-based inequality, poverty, long distances, and societal/cultural norms contribute to women leaving school or never attending. Four provinces in Afghanistan (Kabul, Parwan, Baghlan, and Badakhshan) are represented, with four respondents from each province. The choice of older women is based on their knowledge and insights into the research questions, while the inclusion of participants from remote areas adds to the vulnerability factor. By examining historical evidence and gathering narratives from women who have faced educational barriers, this research seeks to shed light on the extent and impact of women's limited access to education in a patriarchal Afghan society. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of the factors perpetuating gender inequality in education and inform efforts to promote women's educational empowerment in similar contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has always been centered on international pressure to give women the right to education, while the country has struggled a lot to bring women and girls to educational spaces through various initiatives. However, governments have failed to give full coverage to women's education due to several reasons such as cultural, political, and security-related issues. Forbidding women of education is not a new menace; in fact, it has been seeded since the previous decades as per the older generation's experiences. It is to say that access to education for women has been in change with each political change and changes in government and bureaucracy, sometimes women's access to education has increased and other times it has decreased, but it has never been eradicated since Afghanistan is a patriarchal society. Through a historical lens, Afghanistan lacked formal schools before 1902. The first school, named Lisa Habibia, was established in 1903 with only 10 educators, the majority of whom were Indians. The second school, named Harbiya, was founded in 1909, and until 1919, these were the only two schools. Regarding higher education, Afghanistan established its first university in 1946 (Khwajamir, 2016). The country faced a dual challenge: a limited number of formal schools and a predominantly male presence among students. This resulted in restricted access to education for females due to the prevailing male dominance within the bureaucracy.

From the outset to the present, the trajectory of education in Afghanistan has experienced various fluctuations. Significant developments began in 1919, particularly during Amaullah Khan's monarchy. Mandatory primary schools were introduced, and the Ministry of Education was established. Notably, schools for females were opened, and even girls were permitted to pursue education in Turkey. This progressive step faced opposition from Islamic scholars (Ulama), triggering the closure of girls' schools. While Islam did not prohibit girls' education, the scholars opposed sending girls abroad for education. This disagreement led King Sha Asmatullah Khan to leave the country and live in exile. Subsequently, during Mohammad Zahir Shah's reign and in succeeding periods, schools for girls were reopened, and new educational institutions, including Kabul University in 1946, were established. This marked a resurgence in the progression of education (Khwajamir & Konya, 2016).

In 1996, when the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, Afghan women faced a significant setback in their pursuit of education. The Taliban implemented strict measures, denying women the right to education and prioritizing Islamic studies exclusively for males in schools and madrasas. This period marked the darkest chapter in Afghan women's history. However, after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, a new era of hope emerged for Afghan women, ending the ban on women's education. The new democratic government allowed women to once again pursue education and employment (Sherzad, 2017).

Historically, women in Afghanistan have been marginalized with limited access to education, even in some regions. Unfortunately, the recent resurgence of the Taliban has resulted in a permanent ban on women's education, eliminating even the limited access they previously had. Despite this crisis, there is a notable absence of male voices advocating for women. Since 2021, women have been protesting across Afghanistan, but men have not joined their cause. News sources, including CNN, report on women protesting at Kabul University when men return to their studies, highlighting the absence of male support (see https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/06/asia/afghanistan-university-women-protest-intl-hnk/index.html). Additionally, protests against the Taliban's prevention of women enrolling in institutions have been documented by BBC (see https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64048082). VOA News reports Taliban attacks on women protesting the education ban,

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emphasizing the challenges faced by women advocating for their rights (see https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-disrupt-women-s-protest-of-education-ban-/7022631.html). In light of these events, it is evident that in the patriarchal society of Afghanistan, where the value of education is acknowledged, men are not actively supporting women's right to education.

The prohibition of women from education in Afghanistan extends beyond political issues involving groups like the Taliban or Mujahedeen. Historically, the educational system in Afghanistan has been predominantly male-oriented, with men consistently afforded more educational opportunities than women (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). Men hold the primary decision-making roles for women in various aspects of life in Afghanistan, including education, marriage, and even clothing choices, particularly in rural areas. Coming from a rural background, we experienced the need for men's approval for even minor civic activities, such as attending neighborhood weddings. Throughout the modern history of Afghanistan, women have faced significant challenges in accessing education, leading to a high rate of unsuccessful educational attainment. It is crucial to explore the underlying reasons for this lack of access throughout history and identify the primary causes. On the other hand, women's access to education in Afghanistan has only been explored through the lens of gender equality, while the main reasons which have caused gender inequality in terms of access to education in Afghanistan have not received empirical attention. Therefore, the primary focus of this study is to comprehend the various ways in which women's access to education is restricted in Afghanistan, a society dominated by males. By delving into the stories of women and examining the limitations experienced by the older generation, the study aims to uncover more sustainable approaches to enhance women's access to education in Afghanistan.

The present study focuses on finding historical evidence of women's limited or barred access to education in Afghanistan where the community is dominated by the males or they are the sole decision-makers. The primary aim of this study centers on answering the following questions.

(i) In what ways did male-controlled Afghan society hinder women's access to education?
(ii) What can be learned from the stories of women forced to give up on education?.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's education in Afghanistan remains a persistent challenge due to traditional cultural norms, where male dominance hinders progress. Despite government efforts, limited access to education persists, demanding further actions to enhance women's educational opportunities in the country. Afghanistan, people didn't like the idea of girls going to school even before the Taliban took control. In the past, girls mostly went to school in cities, not so much in rural areas. When King Amanullah returned in 1919, he tried to make a more modern education system and give more girls the chance to go to school. This was different from the usual religious education in madrassas, which mostly served men. The religious leaders didn't like what King Amanullah was doing, like making marriage costs and having many wives illegal. Because of these changes and education programs, the religious leaders eventually agreed to remove the king from power. King Amanullah worked hard to improve women's education in Afghanistan. However, the old groups who didn't like his ideas created big problems. Unfortunately, after he gave up his position, many of the laws he made to help women were canceled. The new kings didn't focus much on women's progress in different areas like society, politics, economy, and culture. They were more influenced by opposition and dislike. While they built boys' schools in 1930, girls' schools were closed, though they reopened in 1932.

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In the 1960s and 1970s, Afghanistan's economy grew, and women had equal legal rights, including the right to education, voting, and holding public office. The government prioritized education, leading to increased enrollment at all levels. However, things changed in 1978 when Communists took control. Mujahideen rebels, aided by the United States, fought against the communists, causing the government to fall and many schools to be damaged. By 1983, attacks on schools supporting communists had destroyed half of Afghanistan's schools. The United States, satisfied with its proxy war against the Soviet Union, didn't consider the negative impact on Afghanistan's public-school system (Adkins, 2016).

After the Afghan War, when the government couldn't bring peace to cities outside Kabul, the Taliban emerged. Local militias and warlords caused trouble and bloodshed in many parts of the country. During the war, the religious teachings of Mujahideen fighters provided comfort to the Afghan people, who also attended religious schools known as madrasahs. In 1994, a group from a madrasah in Kandahar province overcame a warlord, promising safety and holding strong religious beliefs. This group evolved into the Taliban, taking control of Kabul and a large part of Afghanistan by 1996. The Taliban imposed rules restricting women from public life, work, and education. They intentionally destroyed cultural artifacts, as seen in Bamiyan, that didn't align with their Islamic views. The Taliban enforced harsh punishments for those breaking the law. Many ethnic groups, including Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara, opposed the Pashtun-led Taliban, viewing it as a continuation of historical Pashtun power in Afghanistan (see https://www.britannica.com/topic/Taliban).

After September 11, 2001, there was a notable increase in efforts to rebuild the Afghan state, particularly in education. The Afghan Provisional Administration, in collaboration with foreign groups and the general population, worked extensively to enhance the quantity and quality of schools. As part of educational reforms, there was a shift away from aggressive programs towards more peaceful initiatives. For instance, UNICEF's "Back-to-School Campaign" in 2001 resulted in a fivefold increase in teacher recruitment and double the number of school constructions compared to the two years prior. During the Taliban rule, registration rates had dropped significantly, but in 2004, there was a substantial increase. However, certain areas still required additional attention and support to complete the education reform. Women's education is highlighted as a success by the Afghan government and international funding agencies. Over a million girls, previously unable to attend school during the Taliban's first administration, are now enrolled across the country. However, the goal of educating all females is still far from being achieved, and in some parts of Afghanistan, the percentage of female students is decreasing compared to previous years. Afghan official figures indicate that approximately 3.5 million children in Afghanistan are not attending school, with 85 percent of them being female students (Bamik, 2018).

The issue of women's education in Afghanistan has been a prolonged debate marked by controversies over providing fair and equal access. Various studies (Shayan, 2015; Kayen, 2022; Mashwani, 2017) have highlighted problems such as limited access or complete prohibition of women's education in the country. While there have been some hopeful signs for women, particularly in terms of challenges and opportunities, with a focus on the roles of the Afghan government and international aid organizations in supporting girls' education, these positive developments have been limited in duration.

A World Bank report (see https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/brief/afghanistan-education-for-all) outlines the advancements in expanding education access in Afghanistan, particularly for girls. The report notes the rise in girls' school enrollment and the growth of community-based education programs. It also addresses challenges such as poverty, cultural norms, and security

DOI:
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concerns affecting girls' education. The report emphasizes the ongoing necessity for investment in education to foster social and economic development.

In Afghanistan, families often favor male children over females, despite equal opportunities in social, economic, and political spheres (Bamik, 2008). Many communities still prioritize opportunities for boys over girls (Mashwani, 2017). Due to entrenched patriarchal ideologies, discrimination against women in Afghanistan starts early, even before birth, and persists throughout their lives. Cultural practices play a significant role in perpetuating gender discrimination. Afghan girls face discrimination due to factors such as the absence of supportive laws, incorrect traditions, low literacy rates, poverty, and a lack of human rights standards. These factors contribute to the denial of women's freedoms and rights (Wimpelmann, 2015). Education, being a powerful tool, holds the potential to shape gender dynamics, often serving as a foundation for gender inequality in traditional societies, particularly impacting women. In Afghanistan, where patriotism significantly influences politics, business, and society, certain individuals and communities' hinder girls from exercising their fundamental right to education through cultural practices or patriarchal ideas. The dominance of patriarchal culture in education also results in women not being seen as full members of society, akin to their male counterparts.

Substantial strides were made in Afghan education during the early 2000s. Primary school enrollment skyrocketed from 1 million to nearly 7 million students, with girls comprising 37%. Teacher numbers increased sevenfold, yet their qualifications remained low. While school infrastructure improvements were attempted, only about half of the schools had usable buildings. Persistent challenges included low enrollment, a lack of qualified faculty, corruption, and insufficient resources. To address these issues, the United States established Lincoln Learning Centers in 2010. Despite progress, Afghanistan ranked as the 15th least developed country globally in the 2011 Human Development Index. Efforts to enhance education included financial support expansion and the Baghch-e-Simsim children's TV series for preschool education, funded by the U.S. Department of State. By 2013, Afghanistan had 16,000 schools with 10.5 million students, but 3 million children lacked access. Plans were made to build 8,000 additional schools. In 2015, Kabul University introduced the country's first master's degree in gender and women's studies to address gender-related issues in education (see https://www.k12academics.com/Education%20Worldwide/Education%20in%20Afghanistan/history-education-afghanistan).

Upon assuming control in October 2021, the Taliban restricted mid-September of that same year, barring girls from pursuing education beyond the sixth grade. This restriction has jeopardized the education of girls, as only male students are currently permitted to attend classes (Naqawi and Rajath, 2022). Moreover, Afghan girls older than 12 are not allowed to attend school as of September 2021. 1.1 million Girls and young women have been affected by this indefinite ban, which has prevented them from pursuing an education. Presently, 2.5 million school-age Afghan girls and women, or 80% of the population, are not enrolled in education. Furthermore, in Afghanistan, around thirty percent of females have never had the chance to start elementary school (see https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn).

The Taliban have banned women's education based on Islamic principles. However, Muslim scholars and activists have revealed that refusing education based on gender has no valid religious justification. Moreover, Sheikh Faqirullah Faiq, one of the leading Islamic scholars in Afghanistan, stated in an audio message, "*There is not a single problem with*

DOI:
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females' education." He emphasized that he was expressing his views and those of some other Muslim scholars.

3. METHOD

This qualitative case study investigates women's access to education in Afghanistan, with a focus on historical perspectives, particularly women's limited or no access to a male-dominated society. Data is collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with women who have experienced educational barriers, specifically targeting those aged 45 and older. Purposeful sampling is employed, with participants from Kabul, Parwan, Baghlan, and Badakhshan provinces, chosen for their relevance to the research questions. The selection prioritizes old-age women who have lost educational opportunities, dropped out, or faced restrictions. Data collection is conducted through online interviews, utilizing semi-structured questioning. Given the linguistic diversity in remote areas, questions and responses are translated between English and local languages. Each interview lasts 30 minutes and involves research assistants in each province for arrangement. Thematic analysis framework is employed for data analysis. The iterative process includes data translation, color coding for cleaning, chart creation, and analysis of main arguments, facilitated by Microsoft Excel. This approach enhances understanding of challenges faced by women in accessing education, contributing valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education is widely viewed as a fundamental right and a crucial pathway for individual and societal progress. However, in Afghanistan, access to education, especially for women, faces numerous challenges, impeding their academic advancement. This research aims to delve into the specific obstacle's women confront in pursuing education. The primary focus is understanding the limitations on women's access to education in the male-dominated context of Afghanistan. The study also examines the percentage and educational level of women who attended or never attended school in the past. By employing semi-structured interviews and tracing the stories of women, particularly the constraints faced by the older generation throughout history, this study identifies the main challenges (refer to **Figures 1** and **2**).

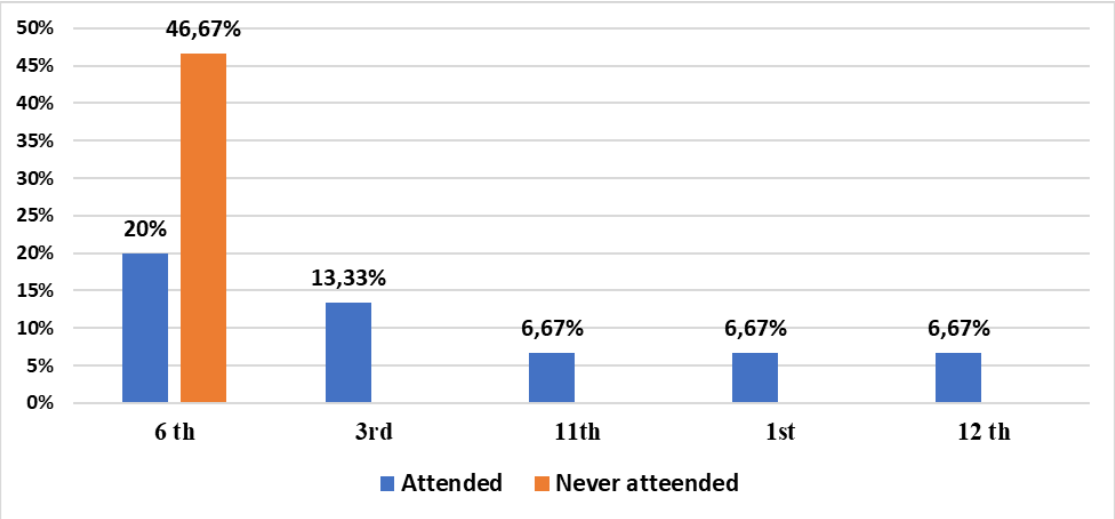

Figure 1. Percentage and grade of old age women (up to 45) who previously attended or did not attend school.

DOI:
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Based on **Figure 1**, previously 45.67% of women did not attend school, while some others continued up to 1st, 3rd, 6th, 11th, and 12th grade, both in cities and remote areas. After the thematic analysis of the data, the study yielded the following themes. These themes have been regarded as the common or main reasons in Afghan society that somehow prohibit female access to education. They are part and parcel of Afghan society from long ago.

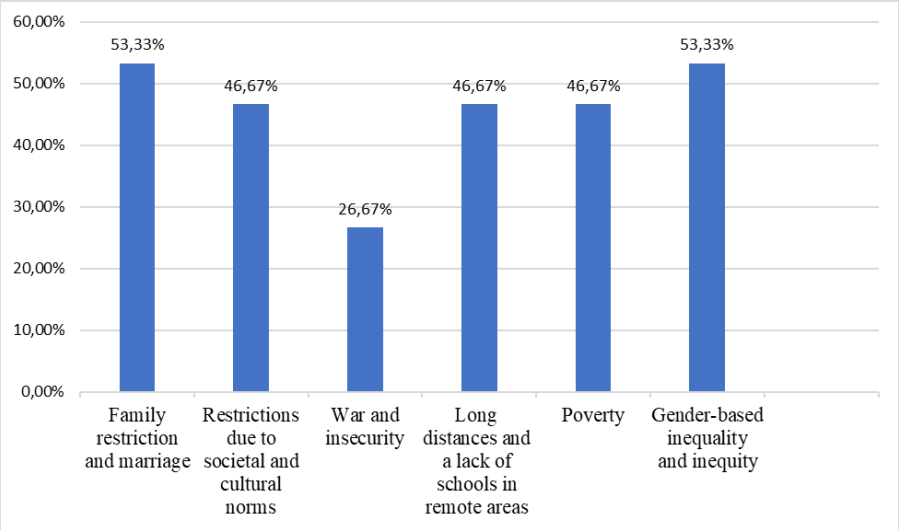

Figure 2. Key challenges that led women to leave school or never attend in Afghanistan.

4.1. Family Restriction and Marriage

Families did not value girls' education, especially in remote areas in different provinces of Afghanistan. Based on the above results from four provenances of Afghanistan, 53.33% of families did not allow girls to attend school over the different courses of history. The majority of the participants narrated that their family, either their father or husband, did not allow them because of housework, taking care of livestock, and working in fields. Moreover, according to the respondents, girls who attended from grade 1 up to grade 6 during schooling or after graduation based on family decisions got married, and a few of the participants were into early and polygamous marriages. Further, after marriage, women were restricted by marital responsibility, which stopped them from accessing education. However, a minority of the families in the center of the provinces encourage girls' education and let them even get higher education.

"*I have lost my mother; my father went for a second marriage, and because of the housework, I did not go to school*"(participant).

"*Before the Taliban regime, all girls attended primary schools. However, when the Taliban took over, even primary schools were closed for girls, and underage and forced marriages were prevalent*" (participant).

4.2. Gender-Based Inequality and Inequity

Equality means equal privileges, chances, and resources for everyone. Equity, on the other hand, recognizes that people from diverse backgrounds may need different resources to be fair (Bronfenbrenner, 1973). In this study, based on the received explanation, it can be elaborated that, in terms of girls' education in different periods through various administration changes, gender-based inequality and inequity always exist either in family, society, or government. According to the respondents from provinces, families prioritized boys' education; they were proud of male education while dragging out girls from school to

do housework. The Taliban closed girl's schools. While boys went to school, even for higher education in Kabul and Mzaar cities. On the other hand, education for girls in the capital was open, but unfortunately, in the provinces, the rate of female access to education is quite low. Further, limited government initiatives specifically targeting girls' education in provinces.

According to UNICCO, since 2016, things have gotten better. The number of people who can read and write has gone up from 34.8% to 43%, which is an 8% increase. Up to 65% of young people ages 15 to 24 can now read and write. Despite the progress made in increasing literacy rates in Afghanistan, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed. Additionally, there is a noticeable disparity between genders when it comes to literacy rates. The literacy rate for men is 55%, which is significantly higher than the literacy rate for women, which stands at only 29.8%.

"*My family aimed at boys' education a lot, even though there were no limitations.*" (Participant).

"*The family sold their livestock and sent the boys to cities for education*". (Participant).

"*In terms of girls' education in our era, there was forced and underage marriage, and both families and society have limited girls from going outside for education*" (Participant).

4.3. Long Distances and a Lack of Schools in Remote Areas

In the present study, 46.67% of older women did not go to school or leave school due to a lack of school and long distances on the way from home to school. In the majority of provinces except for Kabul province and the centers of provinces, in the other regions and rural areas, both boys and girls lacked school; however, in some areas, the school was up to 3 grades, and in other areas, the school was up to 6 grades. Elementary schools and junior high schools were located in the centers of districts, where girls were not allowed to go. Moreover, from 6th grade up to 12th grade, boys and girls studied in the same classes. Although in some parts of the country, especially in developed provinces like Kabul and Mazar, primary, elementary, and higher education were prosperous, in the study, according to some participants, they experienced their schooling under different administrations, but neither of the governments cooperated in remote areas according to girls' access to school. Since Afghanistan is a patriarchal country, women's access to education has fluctuated with political shifts and shifts in government and bureaucracy.

"*In that time school in our society was up to 6th grade but later on upgraded to 8th grade. Further, the quality of education was so good, but I lived in a remote area thus family did not allow me to go and attend school in the city*" (respondent).

4.4. Poverty

In this study, as earlier mentioned in the above chart, 46.67% of women did not attend or continue school for lack of financial circumstances. As reported by the participants, in some provinces, especially in remote regions, most of the families struggled with poverty. In remote areas, poverty deeply affected women's education. On the one hand, there was a lack of schools, and on the other hand, families did not support girls by sending them to nearby districts to seek knowledge. However, in terms of boys' education, likewise, girls' poverty was an obstacle, but as families prioritized boys' education, this phenomenon did not cause any absence for boy's education. Moreover, during the changes up and down in government, in some eras, particularly in the first period in which the Taliban took over Afghanistan, poverty massively increased. There were no job opportunities for people, beyond the fact that in remote areas it took days and weeks for people to come to cities due to a lack of roads and transportation. On the other hand, female participants reflected that

DOI:
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"*The situation for boys was also not good, but school was open for them, and they had family support to attend school in cities*". (Participant).
"*Despite the poverty, families supported boys' education and sent them to cities for education*". (Participant".
"*Boys had the full rights of the family; there was no limitation; all my brothers have attended university; they are doctors, engineers, or whatever fields they liked to become*". (Participant).
"*In that time, neither boys nor girls had access to education, and even boys after Madrasa did not go for higher education because of the poverty of roads and transportation*". (Participant).

4.5. Restriction Due to Societal and Cultural Norms

In this study, 46.67% of women were restricted from attending school or studying due to societal and cultural norms. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country where each group has its own rules of treatment according to women's education. As this research was conducted in four different provinces of Afghanistan, the respondents were from different ethnic backgrounds. This study found that in some provinces, especially in remote areas, societal and cultural norms deeply and massively covered women as a domain, not only in terms of education but also entirely, from women's dress codes up to attending ceremonies. All women's activities should be guided by societal and cultural norms. On the contrary, in some other provinces of Afghanistan, including remote areas, societal and cultural norms on behalf of women's education are slight but have survived for decades. They were never eliminated, but they are getting faded. In this study, women were mentioned.
"*Attending school for girls was not common in my village,"* (participant).
"In my community, hardly any girls succeeded in studying up to 6th grade. Those who were in near-bay villages where schools exist or where there is less family and cultural restriction; otherwise, all girls do housework" (participant).
"*There were no schools; all girls were out of school. The family did not value girl's education, and due to cultural limitations, the family did not allow girls to at least attend madrasa*" (participant).

4.6. Ware and Insecurity

The above chart shows that 26.67% of women in Afghanistan leave school or never attend school due to war and insecurity. In this study, the investigation is through a historical lens and is literature-based. Interviewing old-age women from 45 years old who lived in different periods and experienced the political volatility movement from one government party to another, this present study found that there was a deep link between the literature-based investigation and the present finding through interviews. Each of the participants, either from cities or remote areas, aside from the pre-interview questions, narrated different periodical histories. In some provinces, because of the conflict between two political parties, their followers started internal battles, which caused families to not allow girls to attend school. Moreover, few respondents were aware of theft and banditry. Accordingly, teasing girls on the way from home to school further, in the Taliban era, schools for girls were officially closed, even though the principal and teachers were killed. Thus, based on different levels of insecurity, women were the victims who had lost their chance to attend school.
"*In my village, girls were not allowed to attend school; even the heads of teachers and the principal were killed*" (respondent).
"*The presence of war and insecurity prevented me from attending school*" (respondent).
"*School was far away, and in my province, insecurity and brigandage culminated, and my family did not allow me to go*".(respondent).

DOI:
p- ISSN: 2828-4887 e- ISSN: 2828-4860

4.7. Elderly Women's Messages to Contemporary Families According to Female Education

"*Enabling girls to go to school is very important for Afghanistan's progress. The war in Afghanistan happened because girls were not allowed to go to school in the past, and this has had a long-lasting effect on the current generation. The Taliban, the current ruling group, came about because of mothers who were not educated*" (participant).

"*By supporting girls' education, families can ensure that their daughters have the same opportunities. In Afghanistan, where opportunities are limited, families should aim for fairness and give their daughters the chance to learn. This will lead to a better future, different from the difficult past experienced by earlier generations*" (participant).

"*Families need to support girls' education to prevent the same problems faced by today's young women from happening again. Girls should actively take part in society and contribute to its progress. When girls are educated, they become leaders and challenge any attempts to limit their rights. The current situation in Afghanistan is a result of low levels of literacy*" (participant).

"*Education is the key to Afghanistan's future. Throughout history, not being able to read and write has caused ignorance for half of the population, especially women. When mothers couldn't educate and care for their children, the rate of illiteracy grew in families. These children are now known as the Taliban. Girls' education directly affects Afghanistan's future because if girls can go to school, a new educated generation will emerge*" (participant).

"*Based on my own experiences as an illiterate woman who couldn't support my children, I urge families today to let their girls learn. Our country needs female doctors and midwives, especially during these challenging times. By embracing girls' education, we can create a better future for Afghanistan*" (participant).

The goal of this discussion section is to examine the research on women's access to education in Afghanistan, where men are in positions of authority and are the real decision-makers for women. This study looked into two research questions: how does Afghan society's predominance of men affect women's access to education? And what can we learn from the stories of women who had to abandon their education? This research answered these questions and found that banning women from education is not a new challenge; it has existed for decades. Moreover, this is not only a political issue that women lack education, but also after exploring women's access to education in Afghanistan through a historical lens and interviewing old age women, it is to say that besides political issues, there are other challenges such as Family restriction and Marriage, Gender-based inequality and inequity, Long distances and a lack of schools in remote areas, Poverty, Restriction due to societal and cultural norms, war, and insecurity are the key obstacles that led women to leave, give up going to school, or never attend school in Afghanistan.

However, in the current situation in Afghanistan and the dogmatic ideas of the Taliban, women are banned from education, but for the future generation, it should be a lesson learned that acceptance plays a crucial role. Men should give preference to women's education and forget about masculine pride. Moreover, to bring about a change in terms of women's education, men should support women's education by sending their sisters or wives to school without considering cultural norms. On the other hand, the government is responsible for the rights of both men and women.

Despite obstacles and resistance from traditionalists, King Amanullah's administration successfully implemented reforms that significantly impacted women's rights in Afghanistan. He established legislation that forbade forced marriages and weddings of children and adults. He also imposed restrictions on adultery. Men had to be 22 years old to get married, and women had to be 18 years old. At the time, these initiatives aimed to improve the lives of

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Afghan women. Considering this approach, it is safe to say that in each governance system, such renovation is needed.

Furthermore, in 1919, when King Amanullah came to power, he implemented a modern education system and prioritized girls' education, providing them with increased opportunities to attend school. The new system, differing from the Madrasa system of that time, led religious leaders and scholars to oppose the king's rule, resulting in his removal from power. Previous studies indicate that even before the Taliban's initial takeover of Afghanistan, religious scholars played a significant role. They were particularly opposed to girls' education, especially within the modern system, contributing to the king's downfall. Therefore, in the current situation, religious scholars (Ulama) continue to play a vital role in Afghanistan. According to the literature on the present circumstances in Afghanistan, the Taliban prohibits women's education citing Islamic principles. However, Muslim scholars criticize the Taliban for this ban, asserting that "refusing education based on gender has no valid religious justification." They emphasize that there is no inherent problem with female education (see see https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-disrupt-women-s-protest-of-education-ban-/7022631.html). Considering the literature, it is evident that Ulama should speak out against the ban on women's education in Afghanistan. Religious scholars possess extensive knowledge of Islam, and their insights can be beneficial for both the Taliban and the general population in addressing the issue of women's education.

In addition, for national harmony, which is a united and peaceful Afghanistan, all ethnicities should come together and work for a bright Afghanistan. Additionally, to prompt women's education in rural areas, more collective action between the government, foreign organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is needed to construct the required schools. Alternatively, there are diverse provinces in Afghanistan with a complex ethnic makeup, and this research studied only four of them. As a result, in each province, further research is needed.

5. CONCLUSION

In Afghanistan, women have had a hard time getting an education because of things like family rules, gender inequality, poverty, long journeys to schools, and social and cultural norms. These things have made it more likely for women to drop out of school or never go in the first place. Also, the patriarchal nature of Afghan culture is a major factor in keeping women from going to school. Men make decisions for their families and care more about their sons' schooling than their daughters'. Social and cultural norms also limit women's chances and make the difference between men and women even bigger. In addition, Changes in Afghanistan's history and politics have affected women's ability to go to school. There have been times when women had more chances to go to school and times when they had less. This is because different administrations and ways of running the government have caused these changes.

Also, family rules and early or forced marriages have made it harder for women to get an education. Many families put more importance on housework and traditional gender roles for girls than on sending them to school. Families often cannot afford to send their girls to school because they are poor. So, poor infrastructure, like the lack of schools in remote places, has made it hard for women to get an education. Girls in rural places find it hard to go to school because they have to walk a long way to get there. This problem is made worse by the fact that violence and instability are common, which makes it harder for women to go to school. The results show how important education is for empowering women and moving Afghanistan forward. Education for women is important for social growth, economic growth,

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and reducing differences between men and women. It is very important to challenge traditional norms and give girls and women the same educational chances as men.

The study shows that the government, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all need to work together to help Afghan women get an education. To help women get a good education, policy changes, tailored programs, and investments in education infrastructure are needed. The study also talks about how men can help women get an education and challenge patriarchal rules. Men should take an active role in fighting for women's rights and making sure their children and sisters get an education. Lastly, the study results give us important information and stories from older women who have had limited or no access to education. These stories show how and why women do not have as much access to education as men, which can help with attempts to help women get an education in Afghanistan and similar places.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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