

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: PRE TALIBAN  
AND TALIBAN ERA 2001-2021**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Safiya HASHIMI**

**Political Science and International Relations Department  
Political Science and International Relations Program**

**FEBRUARY, 2024**



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**FEBRUARY, 2024**

**APPROVAL PAGE**

## **DECLARATION**

With uttermost respect, I affirm that the study entitled “Women Empowerment In Afghanistan: Pre Taliban And Taliban Era 2001-2021”, which I have presented as the research for my Master's thesis, has been conducted in compliance with scientific ethics and conventions. The study was carried out, from the initial phase of the project to the finalization of the thesis. The sources utilized in this research are acknowledged and cited in the Bibliography section. (Feb/2024)

Safiya HASHIMI

## **FOREWORD**

Initially, All my appreciation and gratitude refers to the creator of knowledge. This journey taught me how to have patience, the value of regular progress, and keeping the hope furthermore, helped me to complete this thesis.

It's worth mentioning my family's encouragement throughout my postgraduate journey overseas, taught me persistence through challenges.

I consider myself fortunate for having Dr. Murat Jane as my supervisor, and I express my gratitude for his unwavering guidance throughout the entire research process with patience and efficacy.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of Istanbul Aydin University to my life, not only from an academic standpoint but also for introducing me to remarkable individuals who have been a source of inspiration, support, motivation and challenge to me.

February, 2024

Safiya HASHIMI

# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AFGHANISTAN: PRE TALIBAN AND TALIBAN ERA 2001-2021**

## **ABSTRACT**

Afghanistan has changed dramatically over the previous four decades as a result of several invasions, conflicts, and acts of terrorism. The democratic government in Afghanistan fell apart after the Taliban took control of Kabul on August 15th, 2021, marking a momentous transformation in the Afghan social and political environment. The Taliban's first statements in public after capturing power were pledges that they ensure the protection and recognition of women's rights in consideration to the law of Shari'a . The research will utilize a literature review and data collection from previous researches, news, reports, and books. In this sense, the objective of this study was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan specially women's legal and educational rights as well as the numerous sides and shifting dynamics of the Taliban in 2021, which could be elaborated upon for future research on both the Taliban and Afghanistan. The findings of this study show that, despite significant advancements in women's empowerment throughout the democratic government from 2001 to 2021, problems persisted. In addition, after 2021, recent legal changes have regrettably led to a decline in women's participation in politics, business, and education. Afghan women and girls should be able to learn in safe places, dream of a bright future, gain employment, and have control over their lives. The right to education for all should be swiftly reinstated. Additionally, the international community must closely monitor the situation in Afghanistan and take necessary measures to hold the Taliban accountable for their commitments. Support from the international community is crucial for the protection and promotion of women's rights. International organizations, governments, and civil society groups should collaborate to improve the situation in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Women Education Empowerment, Women Economic Empowerment, Women Socio-Cultural Empowerment, Women Legal Empowerment, Women Political Empowerment, and Women Psychological Empowerment



# **AFGANİSTAN’DA KADINLARIN GÜÇLENDİRİLMESİ: TALİBAN ÖNCESİ VE TALİBAN DÖNEMİ 2001-2021**

## **ÖZET**

Son kırk yıl boyunca Afganistan'ın durumu birkaç istila, çatışma ve terör eylemi nedeniyle dramatik bir şekilde değişmiştir. 15 Ağustos 2021'de Taliban'ın Afganistan'ın başkenti Kabil'i ele geçirmesiyle Afgan hükümeti çökmüş ve bu durum, Afgan sosyal ve siyasi çevresinde tarihi bir dönüşümü işaret etmiştir. Taliban'ın iktidarı ele geçirdikten sonra ilk açıklamaları, kadın haklarının Şeriat Hukuku çerçevesinde saygı göreceği yönünde olmuştur.

Bu araştırma, daha önceki araştırmalardan, haberlerden, raporlardan ve kitaplardan yapılan literatür taraması ve veri toplama yöntemlerini kullanacaktır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, özellikle 2021 yılında Taliban ve Afganistan hakkında gelecekteki araştırmalara açık olan kadınların yasal ve eğitim hakları ile Taliban'ın çeşitli yönlerinin ve değişen dinamiklerinin temel bir analizini sunmaktır. Taliban'ın kadınların yasal ve eğitim hakları konusundaki mevcut durumu, Taliban'ın değişen ve çeşitli yönleri ile gelecekteki Taliban ve Afganistan araştırmaları için ayrıntılı olarak incelenebilecek temel bir analiz sunulabilir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, 2001'den 2021'e kadar demokratik rejim altında kadınların güçlenmesinde önemli ilerlemeler kaydedilmesine rağmen, maalesef 2021'den sonra gelen yasal gelişmelerin kadınların siyasi, ekonomik ve eğitimsel katılımında gerileme olduğunu göstermektedir.

Afgan kadınları ve kızları güvenli yerlerde öğrenebilmeli, parlak bir gelecek hayal edebilmeli, iş sahibi olabilmeli ve hayatları üzerinde kontrol sahibi olabilmelidir. Tüm insanların eğitim hakkı hızlı bir şekilde geri yüklenmelidir. Ayrıca, uluslararası toplum, Afganistan'daki durumu yakından takip etmeli ve Taliban'ın taahhütlerini takip etmek için gerekli önlemleri almalıdır. Kadın haklarının korunması ve teşvik edilmesi için uluslararası toplumun desteği hayati öneme sahiptir. Afganistan'daki durumu iyileştirmek için uluslararası kuruluşlar, hükümetler ve sivil toplum örgütleri birlikte çalışmalıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kadın Eğitimi Güçlendirme, Kadın Ekonomik Güçlendirme, Kadın Sosyo-Kültürel Güçlendirme, Kadın Hukuki Güçlendirme, Kadın Siyasi Güçlendirme ve Kadın Psikolojik Güçlendirme

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CLEP</b>	: College-Level Examination Program
<b>CSO</b>	: Civil Society Organization
<b>GDI</b>	: Gender Development Index
<b>GII</b>	: Gender Inequality Index
<b>NATO</b>	: North Atlantic Trade Organization
<b>NGO</b>	: Non-Governmental Organization
<b>OHCHR</b>	: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OLC</b>	: Organizational Learning Culture
<b>PE</b>	: Psychological Empowerment
<b>RAWA</b>	: Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan
<b>SHG</b>	: Self-Help Group
<b>UDHR</b>	: Universal Declaration on Human Rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAMA</b>	: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
<b>UNDP</b>	: United Nations Development Program
<b>UNESCO</b>	: United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	: United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>WB</b>	: World Bank
<b>WHRD</b>	: Women Human Rights Defender
<b>WRA</b>	: Women's Rights Activists

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. Background of Study**

The Taliban's recent acquisition of Afghanistan on 15th of August 2021, has generated political, economic, and humanitarian predicaments, primarily exerting widespread influence with far-reaching consequences on women's rights and lifestyles. In August 2021, numerous Afghan women, comprising women's rights activists (WRAs), women/human rights defenders (WHRDs), and various other individuals, departed the nation due to apprehensions about their personal safety and security within the context of the newly established government.

Afghanistan has consistently gained international recognition as a highly perilous environment for women, earning it a reputation as one of the most hazardous locations globally in terms of gender-related safety concerns, where they have been subjected to cruel treatments as a result of Taliban's first rule, from 1996 to 2001. Afghanistan has made strides toward gender equality since 2001, but significant gaps remain. Despite witnessing a gradual rise in women's engagement in the labor force in recent times, Afghanistan still lingers at the bottom of global rankings with regard to women's participation. Prior to the assumption of power by the Taliban, women made significant advances in education, social culture, politics, economics, etc. For example,

- (1) Over the last 20 years, girls have achieved significant in educational advances. However, these advances are now jeopardized. Afghan girls were nearly totally removed from the school system under the first Taliban reign, which lasted until 2001. By 2018, the proportion of females enrolled in school had risen to 83 percent (World Bank 2021).
- (2) In the health system, one out of every ten newborns received medical treatment from qualified health workers in 2000, while more than six out of ten did in 2019 (World Bank 2021).
- (3) In 2000, one in every three girls was forcefully married; while this is a drop

from ten years before (2021), when four out of every ten girls were married as children, the percentage remains high in comparison to other nations (World Bank 2021).

(4) Prior to 2000, during the Taliban's first reign, there were no women in official positions; however, in 2019, 25% of government personnel in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Nangarhar, and Badakhshan were women (World Bank 2021).

Presently, Afghanistan poses one of the most challenging contexts worldwide concerning the recognition and advancement of women's rights. Afghan women and children are continually subjected to multifarious forms of social, political, economic, and health-related disparities, including but not limited to sexual violations. Nevertheless, it has been proven that equipped with improved economic and professional tools, women can effect considerable changes regardless of the circumstances.

Notwithstanding the initial assurances provided by the Taliban, stating that women would have the opportunity to exercise their rights under Sharia law, including access to education and participation in the labor force, Afghan women and girls have been consistently excluded from the public sphere. Human rights violations against women and girls have steadily increased since that time. They prohibited girls from obtaining secondary and higher education (attending classes from 6th to 12th grade, undergraduate programs), prohibited women from working in most occupations outside their home. Moreover, the action undertaken by the Taliban to dismantle the Ministry of Women's Affairs and their failure to assign cabinet positions to women in the de-facto administrations, ministries, or political parties has resulted in a significant hindrance to the political engagement and empowerment of Afghan women. (UNESCO, 2023)

The constraints imposed by the Taliban on women's mobility and participation rights in protests have made it harder for people to speak their opinions and make their voices heard. In May 2022, Afghan women were prohibited from traveling long distances without a male escort, and were advised to keep their faces hidden in public. Furthermore, stay at home unless it is absolutely essential. Additionally, unaccompanied women are being refused access to crucial services. There are various statistics concerning women's rights following the Taliban's



reacquisition of power on August 15, 2021, for the second time in Afghanistan.

Between 1996 and 2001, women in Afghanistan were deprived of their basic rights. However, following the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghan women gained considerable freedoms, such as the right to education, social and cultural participation, political representation, business ownership, solo travel rights within and out of the country and so on. Despite these advancements, there remain significant disparities in women's rights. On August 15, 2021, the two-decade-long conflict culminated, marked by the Taliban's recapture of Kabul, signifying the conclusion of the war amidst uncertain circumstances surrounding the withdrawal of foreign troops under US command. As a result, Afghan women encounter several limitations, including restrictions on education and travel, a prohibition on employment in government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or private firms, and the mandatory use of burqas in all public settings, including on television. Furthermore, they are prevented from smiling or joking with men on television and are prohibited from visiting parks or gyms. (Abdelrazek, 2022: 4).

Numerous scholarly works exist that examine the barriers to women's empowerment and their right to education in Afghanistan. Alamyar and Boz (Alamyar and Boz, 2022) researched about reasons for afghan immigrants to come to Türkiye and the problems they experience and state that with the exception of female workers of the Ministry of Public Health, many women who support their families and work in government offices are now unemployed since the Taliban prevented other women from attending. Hatice Şehime Özütler and M. Moneer Shaghasy (Shaghasy and Özütler, 2022) researched about The Impact of Organizational Learning Culture on Organizational Performance: Case Study for Afghanistan and empirical findings demonstrated an important relationship between Organizational Learning Culture (OLC) and organizational performance across all seven categories of OLC. With the exception of system connections and embedded systems, which have an inverse association with various performance outcomes, all OLC factors have a significant positive link with performance outcomes. Soylu, Yağcan, and Bilgiç (Soylu, Yağcan, and Bilgiç, 2022: 235) Extensive research has been conducted on childbirth education courses tailored for migrant women both globally and in Türkiye. Notably, since 2017, specific public hospitals in Türkiye have introduced delivery instruction programs for immigrant women, with midwives

providing support and facilitating consecutive translation in Arabic. However, these beneficial initiatives were regrettably interrupted due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Addressing the lack of immigrant-friendly services necessitates a comprehensive approach that involves enhancing available social assistance and allowances for immigrants. Furthermore, providing health literacy training to immigrant populations can play a vital role in improving their access to appropriate maternity care services. Ensuring equitable access to maternity care services for immigrant women is of utmost importance in creating an inclusive and supportive healthcare environment for this vulnerable population.

According to Soylu, Yağcan, Bilgiç (Soylu, Yağcan, and Bilgiç, 2022: 231) Healthcare recommendations in several languages were developed for migrants in European countries' hospitals. These instructions concisely outline in-hospital referrals and vital information, and they lead migrants to the correct places. It has been determined that cultural identities and mother tongues of immigrant women are less of a barrier in America and European countries such as Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, and they contribute to their use of reproductive and preventive health services. They also offer specific birthing education classes, counseling services, and information pamphlets to immigrants. They were provided information ranging from pre-pregnancy care through postpartum depression in counseling programs. During delivery and pregnancy, refugee women in Türkiye face several challenges, including language issues, which decreases the quality of prenatal and postnatal treatment. It was revealed that immigrant women had breastfeeding and milking issues, had a terrible delivery experience and trauma, were unable to interact with health workers during birth, and endured physical and verbal assault from health personnel, patients, and their family. Furthermore, it is alleged that these ladies are victims of malpractice as a result of incorrect translations caused by the inability to obtain interpretation help in hospitals and the usage of other patients and their family for translation. Korkut, Sevinc, Adahan (Korkut, Sevinc, and Adahan, 2022: 4) researched and the result shows that afghans “A” Women received the least amount of family planning assistance among refugee women in Türkiye.

Kayen (Kayen, 2022) researched Improvements and setbacks in women’s access to education: A case study of Afghanistan and stated that Afghan women now face enormous uncertainty about their future education, despite the fact that the new

Taliban administration guaranteed equal access to school.

The study addresses a variety of issues, including Women Education Empowerment, Women Economic Empowerment, Women Socio-Cultural Empowerment, Women Legal Empowerment, Women Political Empowerment, and Women Psychological Empowerment in Afghanistan. My goal is to contribute to literature by introducing the previously unstudied topic of women's lived experiences of becoming educated, empowered, and active for social reform and gender equality in Afghanistan.

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

Gender inequality has been a major international concern for decades, and many efforts have been made to develop a global gender equality strategy. Consequently, gender equality and gender mainstreaming have been transformed in various processes regarding the recognition and achievement of women's empowerment should be contextually tailored and diversified to accommodate the unique characteristics of different settings. To achieve gender equality an effective governance is needed the most, which necessitates a global consensus to support these efforts.

In Afghanistan, women represent the most marginalized yet industrious demographic. Consequently, their integration into the country's mainstream and development endeavors is imperative, the Afghan government must implement significant strategies to ensure quality education and women empowerment. In terms of economic empowerment, Afghan women continue to face significant disparities, as evidenced by multiple reports indicating that Afghanistan ranks at the lowest position, 146th out of 146 countries, in the index measuring economic empowerment and opportunities for women (World Economic Forum, 2022 :15). After the Taliban gained power in 15-Aug-2021 During their second tenure in power, the group made assurances to enhance the freedoms of Afghans, particularly women, surpassing the level of freedoms they experienced under their initial rule from 1996 to 2001, and to uphold human rights obligations, including those of women. Each day, we observe an increase in negative developments, particularly in respect to women's rights, within Afghanistan, for instance:

Despite an absence from formal education for a year, Afghan girls took the university entrance exam showing their demonstrated resilience and determination for education.

Facing Taliban regime Afghan women, secretly organize for change and to obtain their rights.

On September 12, 2021, The Taliban's pronouncement entailed allowing women to access universities, albeit with segregated entrances and classrooms based on gender. Furthermore, the teaching staff will be restricted to professors of the same gender or elder men. Additional limitations include the imposition of a mandatory dress code, necessitating the wearing of hijabs. (BBC, 2021).

Although the Afghan government aimed to recommence female secondary schools on March 23, 2022, the directive was revoked by the Taliban, preventing tens of thousands of adolescents from attending school. (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

On 7 May 2022, Under the directive of Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhunzada, women were mandated to adhere to strict dress codes, covering themselves entirely in public, including their faces. Moreover, they are constrained to remain confined within their homes. Furthermore, the Taliban has imposed restrictions on women's mobility, forbidding them from traveling between cities without the accompaniment of a male escort. (CNN, 2022).

On 13 August 2022, Women demonstrators were subjected to severe physical assault by Taliban insurgents demanding "bread, work, and freedom" and dispersed a protest outside Kabul's ministry of education by discharging firearm rounds into the air. Journalists covering the demonstration were similarly tracked down and subjected to violent abuse (Aljazeera, 2022).

As of November 2022, women were restricted from entering amusement fairs, recreational parks, communal bath facilities and fitness centers. (Euronews, 2022)

According to the United States Institute of Peace, on January 21, 2023, the Taliban Ministry of Higher Education, in a letter to higher education institutions, ordered the removal of females from university entrance exams. On March 6, 2023, instructed higher education institutions to enroll only male students for the next

academic year (which began on March 22). On March 12, 2023, it is prohibited to provide transcripts and certificates to female university graduates (USIP, 2023).

Therefore, scholarly investigations have focused on determining the extent to which women are empowered. Nonetheless, those inquiries have not entirely examined the outcomes of distinct levels of women's empowerment and alternative modalities; instead, they have focused only on a handful of factors. Hence, the current research intends to narrow this gap by studying women's empowerment in Afghanistan from a multitude of viewpoints, such as Women Education Empowerment, Women Economic Empowerment, Women Socio-Cultural Empowerment, Women Legal Empowerment, Women Political Empowerment, and Women Psychological Empowerment in Afghanistan.

### **C. The Objective of Study**

Afghanistan has long struggled with severe inequality, abuses of human rights, gender discrimination, and internal conflicts, all of which prevented its development and advancement. In particular, the issue of reducing gender inequality and promoting gender development has been hampered by these challenges. The stance of the Taliban on the rights of women has been a key factor in shaping its ideology and vision for society, both during its previous period of rule from 1996-2001 and in its current practices and outlook for Afghanistan. Various studies conducted between 2018 and 2022 indicate the attitude of them towards women's rights have not undergone significant transformation. According to Mukhopadhyay (Mukhopadhyay, 2022) women's right to be employed has been badly harmed both past (during 1996) and present under the Taliban administration. As stated by Pradnyawan et.al (Pradnyawan, Budiono, and Sybelle, 2022) the reestablishment of the Taliban's authority does not constitute a breach of international law. Nevertheless, from a human rights perspective, their resurgence is expected to result in a decline in the overall human rights index for the Afghan population residing in the region. Such circumstances commonly arise in authoritarian states, attributable to the Taliban's prevailing political ideologies, which do not recognize women's rights in the contemporary day. According to Marie (Marie, 2022) Afghanistan has been in a welfare-oriented, economic-related, along with the development catastrophe following the Taliban's assumption of power in August 2021, the nation has

witnessed increased economic uncertainty, a surge in poverty rates, disruptions in trade activities, a decrease in foreign financial assistance, furthermore, domestic unrest have all hampered the gender balance also women's rights have been significantly constraints. There has been a notable rise in restrictions pertaining to women's education, employment opportunities, freedom of movement, and the right to express themselves freely. As a result, women have been excluded from various economic spheres, political areas, as well as social life, exacerbating the challenges faced in achieving gender equality, impeding gender development, and negatively impacting Afghan society as a whole, ever since 2021. As stated by Sumitra et.al (Sumitra, Hakimy, and Rokba, 2023) If the Taliban does not retake power of Afghanistan, Afghan women's advancement might be accelerated. Afghan women made significant progress between 2001 and 2021, But the resurgence of the Taliban in power has led to swift and substantial setbacks in women's rights and essential liberties, severely impacting their access to basic healthcare services, employment, educational opportunities, as well as their involvement in public affairs and decision-making processes. The imposition of stringent gender discriminatory norms through both explicit and implicit proclamations by the de facto authorities has further exacerbated the situation, leading to a significant reduction in women's civic space.

Consequently, this study will primarily focus on the rights of women, and their empowerment in Afghanistan during the pre-Taliban and Taliban eras. As well as the ignoring and lack of progress in women's rights, researchers are exploring ways in which Afghanistan could best improve women empowerment. The question of whether women empowerment strategies such as women education empowerment, women economic empowerment, women socio-cultural empowerment, women legal empowerment, women political empowerment, and women psychological empowerment are appropriate strategies for significantly addressing gender inequality and promoting gender development in Afghanistan is being debated.

#### **D. Research Questions**

This study proposes the following research question:

1. What were the discourses and implementations during pre-Taliban and Taliban era 2001 - 2023?

2. What are the effects of the new law established by Taliban on women empowerment?

3. How does the level of education impact women's socio-economic empowerment and opportunities for employment?

4. What role does family support, including parental attitudes and socio-economic status, play in shaping women's educational outcomes?

Afghanistan ranks among the most challenging environments for women globally, educational disparities, confronting political and economic instability, inadequate healthcare, and sexual violence. Nonetheless, equipped with potent vocational and economic resources, women have the potential to transform their lives irrespective of the prevailing circumstances.

H1. Is women empowerment being important for Afghan women's development in society. But especially women empowerment in education is vital because women empowerment in education can reflect on other empowerments. So women empowerment in education has spillover effect on other women empowerment types.

## **E. Conceptual Framework**

With a deep concentration on the literature review, key factors are picked up for assessing Women Education Empowerment and Women Economic Empowerment and other factors are also assessing such as Women Socio-Cultural Empowerment, Women Legal Empowerment, Women Political Empowerment, and Women Psychological Empowerment in Afghanistan as well as how these theories can be applied.

The study employs a process-tracing method and secondary data, successfully identifying key factors that significantly impact women's empowerment. Furthermore, with an examination of international legal framework the actual analysis will commence, precedents, measures and mechanisms promoting women's rights in Afghanistan. Subsequently, it will delve into a national legal assessment, including Afghanistan's Constitutional Law, the Law of Sharia, furthermore, additional jurisprudence from 2001 to 2021. The selected time frame facilitates a thorough examination of three separate periods of political leadership and legal

precedents, offering crucial legal and political context regarding the status of gender balance and women's rights in Afghanistan.



## **II. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

### **A. Empowerment**

According to (Nicola, Cheryl, Peter, and Adrain, 2002: 272) The French and Latin language are the origins of the preposition 'em' and the noun 'power'. According to a UNDAW report the concept of "empowerment" has been utilized to signify a broad range of ideas and results. As evidenced by a number of United Nations documents, A higher frequency of use has been witnessed by the term in advocating for particular policy approaches and intervention strategies rather than being subjected to thorough analysis. (UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), 2001).

Nicola et al defined empowerment as the transformative process of attaining increased strength and self-assurance, particularly in the context of asserting control over one's life and asserting one's rights. (Rowlands, 1995: 87).

Czuba and Page described empowerment as if someone ever felt on the top of the world, ready to take on any challenge and feelings of self-assurance, assurance, and self-determination indicate that feeling empowered. It is described as "a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, communities, and society by acting on issues they identify as important". People feel "in power" when they feel empowered. Empowerment allows one to believe that someone has the power to create the life they want and they are capable of accomplishing anything set on their mind to (Czuba and Page, 1999: 2).

As stated by Rowlands, empowerment is extended beyond mere access to decision-making; it must also incorporate the mechanisms that prompt individuals to be viewed as capable and authorized to occupy that decision-making sphere. Consequently, it is intersected with the other categories of 'power to' and 'power from within.' These interpretations of empowerment are fundamental in comprehending its all-encompassing essence imply that the complete range of human abilities and potential is given full scope. Feminists and other social theorists have shown that the

capabilities attributed to a particular group of individuals are largely socially constructed. Empowerment requires dismantling negative social constructs, allowing those affected to view themselves as competent and entitled to take action and exert influence. (Rowlands, 1995: 87).

According to Rowlands the concept of empowerment is progressively being employed as a means of comprehending the necessities to enhance the well-being of underprivileged and marginalized individuals. There is widespread consensus in this sphere that empowerment is a process; that it encompasses some level of individual growth, but that it is inadequate; and that it entails transitioning from understanding to implementation. the method whereby powerless individuals, in their life context, organizations or groups undergo a process of becoming aware of the power dynamics (a), developing the skills and capacity to attain some reasonable control over their lives (b), exercising this control without infringing on the rights of others (c), and contributing to the empowerment of others within the community (d). Furthermore, broader picture of empowerment can be divided into three dimensions:

Personal: Empowerment revolves around the cultivation of self-awareness, individual confidence, and capacity, while simultaneously addressing the impacts of internalized oppression.

Close relationships: Empowerment is exemplified by the development of skills to negotiate and influence the dynamics of the relationship and the decisions taken within it.

Collective: When individuals collaborate to have a more significant influence than they could have obtained individually. It consists of participation within the framework of the governance however, besides it includes cooperative rather than competitive collective action. Collective action can be localized, as in a village or neighborhood, or institutionalized, as in international agencies such as the United Nations or regional networks. As stated by Dondona (Dandona, 2015: 35), Through the acquisition of knowledge, authority, and experience, empowerment defines the process of creating a social environment that enables individuals to make decisions and choices for social transformation, whether on an individual or collective basis. Also Batliwala (Batliwala, 1994: 128) mentioned that empowerment involves granting individuals the authority and authorization to critical thinking, taking action, and exercise control over their activities autonomously. It is the process of dominion

over one's fate and the conditions of one's existence. Command over resources (material, human, cognitive, and financial) and ideology are examples of empowerment (beliefs, values and attitudes)

## **B. Feminism**

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of all genders, with a particular focus on addressing and rectifying historical and current inequalities between men and women. It seeks to challenge and dismantle discriminatory practices, societal norms, and structures that contribute to gender-based oppression (Fiss, 1994 :413 - 427).

Key goals of feminism include promoting gender equality in various domains such as education, employment, and representation in decision-making roles. Feminists often work to raise awareness about issues like reproductive rights, domestic violence, and workplace discrimination. The movement recognizes that gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression, such as those related to race, class, sexual orientation, and more, and seeks an inclusive and intersectional approach to address these complexities. Feminism is not a monolithic ideology, and different feminists may have varied perspectives and priorities. Over time, the feminist movement has evolved through different waves, each responding to the specific challenges and goals of its time. Despite these differences, the core objective remains the pursuit of equality and the empowerment of all individuals, regardless of gender (Zaretsky, 1988: 261).

Betty Friedan, author of "The Feminine Mystique" in 1963, declared feminism dead. However, those who engaged with her exploration of the 'problem that has no name,' undertaking the task of identifying and defining women's oppression, found the relationship between the emerging 'new feminism of women's liberation' and the 'old feminism of equal rights' to be intricate. Initially, many preferred to draw a distinction between the two, asserting, like Sheila Rowbotham, that while 'women's liberation incorporates aspects of the older equal-rights feminism,' it transcends this foundation. They argued that it is a product of shifting social and political contexts, embodying a more acute and profoundly radical feminist consciousness, as outlined in Sheila Rowbotham's "Woman's Consciousness, Man's World" (1973). The proponents of this perspective suggested

that while 'old feminism' was characterized as individualist and reformist, 'women's liberation' was collective and revolutionary. Conversely, some individuals opted to merge the two, reclaiming earlier feminist writings and activism as the initial wave of 'the most important revolution in history.' Despite a temporary setback from a fifty-year counter-offensive, the feminist 'onslaught' was now experiencing a resurgence. According to Kate Millett, it could finally achieve its goal of liberating half the human race from ingrained subordination (Sue, 2004).

## **1. First Wave Feminism**

During the First Wave of feminism, which unfolded in the late 19th to early 20th century, the movement was characterized by a concentrated emphasis on legal issues, notably the pursuit of women's suffrage—the right to vote. Activists and suffragists of this era passionately advocated for the fundamental rights of women, extending beyond the ballot box. Their endeavors encompassed a broader spectrum, encompassing essential rights such as property ownership and access to education. In their pursuit of equality, these early feminists challenged societal norms and discriminatory practices, striving to secure not only the political agency afforded by voting rights but also fundamental aspects of personal autonomy and education that were crucial for women's overall empowerment and participation in public life. The First Wave, with its legal focus, laid the groundwork for subsequent waves of feminism, contributing significantly to the advancements in women's rights that followed (Richlin, 1984).

Plato, often cited as an early pioneer of systematic feminism, emerges prominently for his critical scrutiny of conventional ideals surrounding marriage and the nuclear family in his work, Republic V. Within this philosophical discourse, he challenges traditional societal structures, shedding light on the limitations and inequities inherent in prevailing notions of familial arrangements. Moreover, Plato's noteworthy contribution extends to his advocacy for the integration of female guardians who would play a crucial role in state-funded child care and education. By envisioning a society where women are actively involved in the nurturing and educational aspects, Plato challenges gender norms and paves the way for discussions on gender equality and the broader role of women in societal development. In exploring these dimensions, Plato's philosophical insights have left a lasting imprint on the discourse surrounding early feminist thought (Cornford, 1965).

Examined within the framework of the status of women in ancient Athens and the prevailing misogynistic undertones in classical literature, Plato's proposed reforms may be perceived as revolutionary. Nevertheless, contemporary interpretations of Plato's works challenge the notion that he was an outright feminist, offering a more nuanced understanding of his views (Richlin, 1984).

## **2. Second Wave Feminism**

The emergence of Second Wave Feminism during the period spanning the 1960s to the 1980s marked a pivotal moment in the history of the feminist movement. This wave unfolded against the backdrop of significant socio-cultural shifts, including the fervor of the civil rights movement and the transformative impact of the sexual revolution. Unlike its predecessor, Second Wave Feminism extended its focus beyond the realm of legal rights, delving into a more comprehensive exploration of social and cultural inequalities faced by women. Within its expansive agenda, the movement addressed critical issues such as reproductive rights, tackling the discriminatory practices prevalent in the workplace, and challenging ingrained gender roles. Furthermore, the Second Wave emphasized the significance of consciousness-raising a process wherein women collectively examined and discussed their shared experiences to foster awareness and solidarity. The overarching goal of this wave was to propel women's liberation, not just in legal terms but also in societal and cultural contexts, advocating for profound and lasting changes that would redefine the roles and expectations imposed on women. In doing so, Second Wave Feminism played a crucial role in reshaping societal perceptions and advancing the broader struggle for gender equality (Baxandall and Gordon, 2002).

The historiography of second-wave feminism has flourished as a dynamic field since its inception, aligning with the diverse social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Initial scholarly focus on white women's rights struggles and the historical connections between abolitionist and suffrage/temperance movements in the nineteenth century, as well as between civil rights and women's liberation movements in the twentieth century (commonly referred to as the first and second waves of feminism, respectively), has been expanded upon and challenged. Early narratives primarily centered on the contributions of white women were subsequently supplemented by accounts acknowledging the vital roles played by working-class

women, women of color, and lesbian women, illustrating diverse paths taken towards feminism by different groups of women (Newman, 2011: 221).

The anthology "Feminist Coalitions," edited by Gilmore, significantly contributes to this feminist historiography strand. The collection sheds light on how women from various racial, class, and sexual orientation/gender expression backgrounds collaborated to challenge inequalities and injustice. It emphasizes the collective and revolutionary nature of 'women's liberation' compared to the individualist and reformist aspects attributed to 'old feminism.' Another significant work in this context is Enke's monograph, "Finding the Movement," which encourages scholars to expand their understanding of identity beyond the conventional intersectional framework. Enke's approach considers the situatedness of women quite literally, viewing identities as "an effect of spatial practices." Enke argues that feminism, as a popular movement in the 1960s and 1970s, took shape around the limitations and possibilities of local geographics, as women confronted exclusions and hierarchies deeply embedded in public spaces (Newman, 2011: 222).

In the last two decades, scholars have also explored how conservative and antifeminist women have utilized woman-centered rhetoric to advance their interests. Works by Catherine Rymph and Ronnee Schreiber contribute to this analysis by examining women's contributions to right-wing politics. Rymph provides a comprehensive account of antifeminist and feminist women within the Republican Party, showcasing the impact of women's engagement with these ideologies on the party itself. Schreiber's examination of contemporary conservative organizations, Concerned Women for America (CWA) and the Independent Women's Forum (IWF), reveals divisions among women on the right and offers insights into the apparent paradox of opposition to organized feminism coming from women themselves. Schreiber's careful analysis highlights the distinct policies of CWA and IWF, illustrating how their differences emerge, particularly concerning identity politics and their positions on various issues, such as affirmative action and gender-integrated basic training in the military (Newman, 2011: 223).

### **3. Gender-sex differences**

Using the term "sex" when discussing the biology of both human and animal subjects, and reserving the term "gender" for matters related to an individual's self-

identity or social representation is considered appropriate. While some individuals may not find this level of term specificity necessary within the field of physiology, overall, adopting such an approach can contribute to the reduction of wordiness in publications and facilitate a more straightforward integration of discussions on human biology. Beyond the realm of physiology, numerous social scientists leverage biological and psychological data to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the human condition and explain human behavior (Torgrimson and Christopher, 2005, :787)

"Sex" pertains to the biological traits of an organism, whereas "gender" refers to the social context of that phenotype, indicating whether an individual is perceived as male or female by themselves and others. Gender operates across various levels, encompassing the personal, social, and institutional aspects of an individual's identity. It is conceivable for someone to possess the biological characteristics of a male (XY) but desire to be part of the gendered world associated with females (XX). The experience of being treated as male or female influences one's biology, contributing to a closer alignment with societal expectations of masculinity or femininity. These experiences contribute to the formation of neural circuits that subsequently influence an individual's actions and perceptions of the world. "Gender-sex differences" refer to distinctions between individuals based on both their biological sex and the social and cultural aspects associated with gender. This term acknowledges that differences can arise from both the physiological characteristics typically associated with male or female biological sexes and the social constructions, roles, expectations, and behaviors linked to gender identity. Recognizing gender-sex differences involves understanding the interplay between biological and sociocultural factors in shaping the experiences and identities of individuals (Elinstein, Downar, and Kennedy, 2013 :271)

### **C. The Empowerment of Women**

A change in perspective has occurred, and empowerment is now often associated with many different fields of the social sciences. In terms of women's advancement, it is believed that the concept of enablement refers to promoting their growth and advancement in many areas of life by discovering, conquering, and confronting life difficulties, ultimately leading to a greater ability to define one's own

life. This process not only enhances women's overall well-being, but it also improves their competencies and availability of productive assets. sense of dignity, and societal contributions. Significantly, women's empowerment exerts a transformative impact on the customs, principles, and regulations that regulates the communities. to which they belong. Psychological and cognitive components of empowerment are fundamental towards comprehension related to women's subordinated positions as well as influencing elements responsible for such conditions. One of the most potent instruments for achieving this understanding is education, which can facilitate self-awareness while also promoting a greater understanding of cultural and social expectations (Dandona, 2015: 35).

According to Sundaram, Sekar, and Subburaj, every society, state, and nation encompasses marginalized segments who are deprived of their fundamental rights, often unaware of their entitlements. Notably, women emerge as a prominent group among such marginalized components and hold paramount importance within any given society. Despite the widespread recognition of this fact, societal acceptance remains elusive, resulting in a declining recognition of women's significance in contemporary society. (Sundaram, Sekar, and Subburaj, 2014: 77)

Women's empowerment epitomizes a transformative course directed at elevating the socioeconomic and political status of traditionally disadvantaged women within the societal fabric. It aims to shield them from an array of abusive conduct and prejudice. This multifaceted notion encompasses the establishment of an inclusive society and a politically progressive climate that ensures women can lead a life emancipated from oppression, exploitation, and apprehensions prevalent within the historically male-dominated structure. In her edited volume "Measuring Empowerment," Deepa Narayan expounds empowerment as the expansion of impoverished individuals' resources and capacities, enabling their active participation, negotiation, and impact over institutions that profoundly influence their existence. By empowering women, societies endeavor to foster a more egalitarian and just environment, fostering individual growth and collective advancement (Deepa, 2005).

Kadam (Kadam, 2012: 1) disrobed that Empowerment is a tool that can assist individuals in achieving gender equality or reaching a state of equitability with the opposite gender. In the overall societal and economic progress, women play a pivotal



and strategic role. As the head and coordinator of the family, the primary educator, and a vital workforce contributor, women significantly contribute to the advancement of agriculture, industry, service sectors, socio-cultural domains, and other spheres, ultimately leading to the creation of a civilized and progressive society. Women actively participate in the advancement to economic development, either directly or indirectly. Although women possess the biological capacity for reproduction, their socioeconomic status remains considerably disadvantaged, with a disproportionate prevalence of poverty among females. The only solution to all problems is to empower women.

Women's empowerment, From a normative perspective, "women's empowerment" is defined as the pursuit of gender equality and the eradication of discrimination. It holds significant instrumental value by fostering economic development through the realization of women's full potential as skilled and industrious laborers, caregivers, mothers, and, in numerous countries, more adept household managers compared to the men. (King and Mason, 2001). According to Sridevi (Sridevi, 2005: 1) the contemporary concern revolves around the empowerment of women. any country where a social planner is attempting to bring about balanced sustainability. Though alone is not the sufficient condition, it is required in order to stabilize and, thus, sustain the development process.

According to Mujahid et al. gender equality and empowerment debates have dominated over the last three decades. It has been discovered that policies and projects that do not consider women's societal position have a negative influence on development. The significance of reducing gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment was highlighted during the United Nations International Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Gender equality and women's empowerment constitute the core of the third Millennium Development Goal. Various countries, regions, and International Development Organizations have committed to fostering gender equality to foster sustainable economic development. Economic empowerment, a vital aspect of women's empowerment, encompasses poverty reduction, enhanced credit access, remunerative employment, and long-term development opportunities (Mujahid, Ali, Noman, and Begum, 2015: 38).

Sarah and Bodner (Sarah and Bodner, 2003) Eight dimensions were proposed as the most appropriate for measuring empowerment (leadership, culture, trust,

accountability, capability, dedication, obligation, and interaction).

As defined by Shetty and Hans (Shetty and Hans, 2015) The empowerment of women involves enabling their active participation and meaningful contributions to attain economic self-sufficiency, engage in political affairs, and advance socially. Empowered individuals experience a profound sense of self-awareness and agency in all spheres of life. It encompasses improved access to knowledge and resources, heightened decision-making autonomy, and liberation from the constraints imposed by prevailing social norms, traditions, customs, beliefs, and practices.

There are different dimensions of women empowerment such as in Soharwardi and Ahmad (Soharwardi and Ahmad, 2020: 957) study, inclusive five dimensions are highlighted. These dimensions are: (i) women's occupational condition, (ii) consciousness, (iii) engagement in decision-making, (iv) self-respect, and (v) self-assurance. In the study of Mujahid et al. (Mujahid, Ali, Noman, and Begum, 2015: 41) the following dimensions are studied: (i) Social Dimension, (ii) Economic Dimension, (iii) Political Dimension. The research strongly corroborates the impact of financial, societal, and governmental aspects in fostering women's empowerment.

The specified dimensions will be reviewed as part of this research: (1) Education Empowerment (2) Economic Empowerment (3) Socio-Cultural Empowerment (4) Legal Empowerment (5) Political Empowerment and (6) Psychological Empowerment

## **1. Education Empowerment**

“Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said: “If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family.” (Shetty and Hans, 2015)

The attainment of knowledge is widely acknowledged as a critical gauge of women's standing and, more importantly, as a mechanism for empowering them (Jayaweera, 1997: 411). In all countries, the enhancement of access to education has significantly improved the standard of living and the standing of women. However, education has been insufficient in overcoming the economic and social constraints that perpetuate poverty and social stratification, as well as the societal norms that reinforce gender disparities within families, the labor market, and society. The link

between education and empowerment is intricate, as demonstrated by discrepancies in macro-level data and more comprehensive investigations of gender inequality in qualitative studies.

Education empowers women by increasing information access, assortative matching, and improving labor market outcomes. Several findings emphasize the crucial role of women's education in accomplishing sustainable development cannot be overstated. Broadening women's entry to education not only fosters gender parity but also propels advancement towards diverse other objectives (Le and Nguyen, 2021: 533). According to (Shetty and Hans, 2015) Empowering women involves equipping them with knowledge, expertise, and techniques to facilitate their personal and societal advancement, while also fostering an awareness of social challenges. Ensuring progress in women's education, healthcare, and employment requires dedicated efforts. Economic independence is vital for promoting gender equity, and it hinges on women's access to education.

(Shetty and Hans, 2015) The fundamental reason for women's exploitation and neglect lies in their lack of education. Only literacy and learning can enable women to comprehend the constitutional and legislative provisions devised to empower them. Educated women have the potential to actively participate in nation-building efforts.

Understanding their rights can be challenging, incomprehensible also their value and significance unless they are educated. Women's empowerment aims to achieve increased levels of education and literacy, improved healthcare provisions for women and their children, equitable possession of productive assets, greater involvement in economic and business domains, consciousness of their rights, upgraded living conditions, and elevated self-reliance, confidence, and self-worth among women.

## **2. Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment is referred to as the capacity of both women and men to engage in, add to, and reap advantages from developmental activities in manners that acknowledge the significance of their contributions, honor their integrity, and allow a more equitable distribution of the benefits of growth to be negotiated. (Tull, 2019).

According to Sarania, the country's development is critically influenced by the economic empowerment of women. Evidence from around the world suggests that providing microcredit to Self-Help Group (SHG) members can help empower rural women. (The Self-Help Group is enhancing livelihoods and providing basic services, working to provide aid and assistance in Afghanistan). Moreover, for a country's economic development, the empowerment of women plays an essential part and for laying the groundwork to promote social change and enhance the socioeconomic circumstances of a country's population, ensuring women's active involvement and valuable contributions has become a crucial necessity for empowerment. Disregarding the importance of women's participation and their role in society renders the goals of development approaches unattainable. A country's overall development and harmonious growth can be realized only when women are considered equal partners in progress alongside men. Therefore, the nation's economic advancement and improvement in societal conditions hinge on the prerequisite of women's emancipation, which, in turn, relies on providing them with equitable economic and societal opportunities (Sarania, 2015).

Sarania stated that women's economic empowerment holds utmost significance, among the diverse dimensions of overall empowerment, encompassing social, emotional, and political. Enhancing women's economic empowerment through augmented earnings, self-employment, and savings establishment could lead to heightened influence or decision-making authority for women, amplified self-assurance, an improved standing and position within the household, and other related benefits. Prioritizes on ending the insufficiency chain, reducing weakening, increasing usable materials, also diversifying into anticipations are that microfinance extended to women self-help groups (SHGs) to foster profitable endeavors or entrepreneurship will yield positive outcomes concerning women's wealth, monthly earnings, savings, capacity for enterprise decision-making, lowered vulnerability during emergencies, and enhancement in both monthly consumption and family well-being. (Sarania, 2015).

In this particular setting, it appears that Kabeer has articulated the idea, although access to financial services can indeed make a substantial contribution to economic productivity, it does not necessarily guarantee comprehensive economic empowerment for impoverished women, even with improvements in income-

generating activities. As a result, women must have complete control over resources like finances, mortgages, and savings, as well as the capability and authority to use them in a way that serves what is best for them. Therefore, it is likewise essential to make sure that increases in revenue-generating capacities are in accordance with significant objectives, such as authority over revenue and earnings and their use for comfort of the individual and the family (Kabeer, 1999: 151).

According to Blumberg (Blumberg, 2005) Improving the financial independence of women serves as a "magic potion" which advocates equal rights for men and women along with "wealth and well-being of nations." As women's financial influence improves, consequently increases their household authority to make choices and their propensity to prioritize and set aside their own income for the social security, welfare, and educational institutions for both their children. They also have more influence over decisions regarding reproduction, which they usually use to manage family planning. There is an inverse correlation between national income development and birth rates, whereas professionally trained girls tend to have lower birth rates. Furthermore, economic empowerment for women is associated with a lesser degree of bribery along armed conflict, as well as, in the long run, less violence against women.

### **3. Socio-Cultural Empowerment**

Education is a vital concern throughout an individual's life. An effective preschool remains important during the childhood phase because subsequently develops circumstances. The following years determine reduced or zero poverty, postponed weddings moreover, guaranteed entry of employment. However, gender-based educational inequalities are frequently the result of prejudiced social views; examples include early wedlock and giving girls domestic responsibilities. Girls are married off in their teenage years in families where education is not as valued as it should be. According to reports and other studies, 16% of girls who get married before turning 18 drop out of school, while the corresponding figure for unmarried girls at that age is 36%. (Choudhry, Abdul Mutalib, and Ismail, 2019: 96).

When considering gender alongside other disparities, it becomes evident that girls from low-income regions are significantly underrepresented in educational enrollment. For instance, in Niger and Guinea in the year 2000, close to 70% of girls

belonging to impoverished communities had never experienced formal schooling (UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2015). Educational attainment has a significant correlation with monetary earnings. Girls' school attendance is hampered by structural norms equally on massive and small scales. In the grand scheme of things, the accessibility of jobs has an impact on participation of women within the workforce and education of girls and women. Low domicile finances (deprivation), faith, availability, encouragement of customary gender stereotypes (traditional standards), a shortage of female instructor, and institutional ignorance are some of the smaller-scale obstacles to girls' education. External shocks and economic crises can severely limit girls' educational opportunities. Such impediments have the ramifications of neglecting girls' education can profoundly impact their future empowerment. The potential expenditure remains substantial, particularly in developing nations where women typically produce greater incomes per year of education compared to men. The most effective way to improve chances for the future of economic growth is to concentrate on educating girls. It's crucial to remember the value of grownup learning and development of skills initiatives in promoting women's economic empowerment, nevertheless. (Jamal, 2016).

#### **4. Legal Empowerment**

According to Golub legislative empowerment advocates a collaborative development strategy that acknowledges the vital role of engaging social driven as well as non-governmental associations in securing recognition and representation for the underprivileged and oppressed. By strengthening legitimate democracy through transparency, thus aiding in the realization of internationally agreed-upon developmental objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals (Golub, 2010).

‘The use of law’ According to Golub and University of Lincoln the use of law encompasses beyond legislation as well as the judicial system judgements, however it includes the numerous rules, norms, protocols, deals, and typical legal structures that shape up the legal system for the impoverished. For example, how difficulties raised through the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) (The College Board designed and administers a series of standardized examinations known as the College Level Examination Program) are resolved more frequently across numerous nations, the means of enforcing laws and regulations predominantly occur through

governmental agencies and official procedures rather than relying solely on legal courts and legislative measures. For the rural impoverished population, village-based customary systems play a significant role in embodying the law, striking a balance between not excessively praising or condemning these systems. These local customs serve as the primary sources of legal authority, particularly in comparison to distant courts with complex and costly processes that may be incomprehensible to the local population (Golub, 2010) (University of Lincoln, 2022).

‘Specifically’ conveys the acknowledgement that statutory authority includes duties, tactics also target underprivileged. These initiatives consider law improvements that are solely or mostly aimed at benefiting underprivileged people. More importantly, they support legal aid and other initiatives aimed at ensuring that good laws are effectively put into action for the benefit of the underprivileged (Golub, 2010).

‘Strengthen’ highlights the enablement concept component; legal empowerment involves the conceptualization of augmenting individuals' self-control, self-governance and agency over their lives. It encompasses both a dynamic procedural aspect and a desired objective. As a procedural dimension, legal empowerment entails the execution of legal reforms and services that aim to fortify the negotiating capacity of diverse groups. These groups encompass farmers endeavoring to secure land tenure, indigent criminal defendants seeking just treatment, women striving against domestic violence, and communities advocating for the delivery of entitled government services, such as medical and educational provisions. The ultimate aspiration of legal empowerment is to bestow these marginalized populations with enhanced control over their economic status, assets, wellbeing, physical safety, and overall freedom. Since legal empowerment is primarily bottom-up, it tries to enhance such people' capacity to act on their own, while acknowledging that outside actors frequently interact and immediately give assistance. It should also be noted that "strengthen" is a relative phrase; considering how long the process of transformation may be, the underprivileged or disadvantaged may only get stronger slowly and incrementally, with setbacks along the way (Golub, 2010).

‘The disadvantaged’ include not just the poor, but also women, minorities, certain castes, impoverished criminal defendants, victims of human rights violations,

and other groups subjected to discrimination or other injustices (Golub, 2010) (Maru, 2010).

Legal empowerment is vast and multifaceted in nature; it is neither a single technique or a remedy to address destitution alleviation. Yet, general acceptance suggests an important thought: The employment of legislation to explicitly enhance the underprivileged is known as legal empowerment.

According to Khan (Khan A. T., 2023) Access to justice is a basic human right, yet many women throughout the world continue to be denied it. One of the most obvious instances is gender-based violence. Women are still frightened to speak out against such abuse because our culture has restrictive expectations, supporting laws and practices that are founded on outdated and patriarchal norms that attempt to limit their power to seek justice. This feeds the cycle of inequity and prejudice that limits women's full participation in society. Furthermore, women are disproportionately harmed by weak governance, corruption, and the lingering patriarchal order in society. They frequently lack the authority and resources to hold leaders responsible and effectively engage in decision-making processes. This, in turn, fuels the cycle of inequality, resulting in the formation of policies and legislation that fail to represent women's interests and goals.

Prioritizing and access to justice and equitable access to economic resources in order to achieve gender equity is important. This includes tackling all forms of discrimination and providing assistance to women who experience such injustices and societal prejudice. This can be accomplished by promoting transparency, accountability, and the development of a social framework that ensures women receive such government support, i.e. by creating a space where they can be heard, take refuge, and participate in decision-making processes to improve their quality of life. Legal empowerment is a strong instrument for improving and transforming lives because it equips women with the information and resources they need to take control of their lives and fight unfair practices and regulations. Legal empowerment may assist women in securing property rights, gaining access to education and healthcare, and defending themselves against abuse and exploitation. It can also give a forum for women to express their opinions and participate in decision-making. Women may become change agents in their own lives and communities by gaining legal empowerment, resulting in a more equal and just society for all (Khan A. T.,



2023).

## **5. Political Empowerment**

As considered by Sundstrom et al. women's political empowerment is characterized as the systematic progression aimed to improve their capabilities, resulting in increased choice, agency, and involvement in making choices regarding the society. Equal rights for women is a diverse thought with different parts, for instance "rights, resources, and voice" "resources, perceptions, connections, and power" alongside "resources, agency, and achievements". Economic influence followed by utilization of supplies have been investigated in relation to the empowerment of women. Power inside the home, acquiring control, and political engagement (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang, and Lindberg, 2017: 4).

Politics is the arena through which social decisions are made. People in government who have professional and governmental positions handle limited supplies that involve fiscal revenue thus transfer benefits towards particular individuals while detriment to rivals. Politicians' decisions, through promotion of certain actions while forbidding some, influences people's personal decisions. Being a governmental official entails having authority. Yet, not all decisions are made in the top societal areas. Individuals possessing either official or personal legislative power have influence upon other societal structures, including familial bonds or schooling, and legislate certain practices. Political elites have the ability to impose their judgments, sometimes violently (Goltz, Buche, and Pathak, 2015: 3-6).

For several decades, throughout Asia, women have not only possessed the right to exercise their civic rights but have also played an active role in shaping regimes through their involvement in the overall voting process. During periods of national upheaval and crisis, women tend to be effectively mobilized to take part in large-scale political movements, as evidenced by instances in the Philippines, India, and Nepal. (Jayaweera, 1997: 421).

Sundstrom et al. capture the three most significant threads in empowerment thinking: choice, agency, and involvement

One viewpoint on empowerment stresses the individual decision making capacity in many components of their everyday existence. The importance of deciding is essential to amazing thoughts of Naila Kabeer's (Kabeer, 1999: 426)

"One way to think about power is as the ability to make choices: being disempowered entails being denied a choice." The emphasis on choice emphasizes how important it is for women to be equipped to reach effective conclusions in important fields and significant elements of their daily existence. These pertain to a slew of fundamental rights that have historically been denied to women. The recognition of women's rights as human rights is now well-established. As a result, the idea of choice is intricately tied to the debate on rights for humanity in the context of women's advancement in politics, highlighting women's capacity with liberty. Liberty of speech, organization, and assemblage, the right to mobility, religious practice, and political involvement, as well as protection from physical abuses of one's physical health are all aspects of human rights. So, in order to have choice, women need to exercise autonomy in critical aspects of their lives, they must possess essential liberties, including the right to move freely, secure property rights, be exempt from coerced labor, and be acknowledged as equals within the judicial system. These foundational freedoms are imperative in enabling women to make significant decisions in their daily lives (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang, and Lindberg, 2017: 4).

A second point of view on empowerment is concerned with agency. "The second aspect of empowerment that separates it from other concepts is agency, in other words, women themselves must be key participants in the process of change that is being defined or quantified". The capacity to identify one's goals allows one to be an active agent of change. For women's political emancipation, agency is inextricably linked to voice. Gender power dynamics can make it difficult for women to speak openly, debate politics with their peers, or participate in public debate. In order to be politically influential, women, like men, must have the right to express any political opinions in any media and to join any political party (Bollen, 1986: 468). The ability to affect the political agenda is implied by agency. If women are unable to openly express their policy views, they cannot exercise "civic agency" or make requests for assistance from the state or change from society. Activism, via collective organizations and "the establishment of civil society and participatory development approaches at both the macro- and meso-levels of society," creates "mechanisms for empowerment" (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang, and Lindberg, 2017: 4). In essence, women must have the freedom to debate, engage in civil society

organizations (CSO), and be represented in the ranks of journalists in order to exercise agency and articulate their aims (Van Zoonen, 2002).

A third point of view on empowerment highlights the significance of engagement. Women's candidacy and election to political seats is an important component of political empowerment. Feminist theorists have presented arguments for descriptive representation, or the notion that there must be descriptive resemblance between representatives and constituents because racial, ethnic, and gender groups have a special capacity to represent themselves in democracies. In the case of women, the idea is that women vary from males owing to distinct socialization and life experiences. As a result, "women bring to politics a particular set of beliefs, experiences, and knowledge" and must be present in the political arena. Arguments for descriptive representation suggest that formal political equality and civil rights are insufficient for preserving freedom. Women must instead be numerically and legislatively represented in politics (Young, 1997) (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang, and Lindberg, 2017: 4).

The participation aspect of women's political empowerment is related to the ability to succeed in a struggle over overt political choices. Women must be present in sufficient numbers to engage in open conflicts or influence decisions. Prior empirical research on women's empowerment usually employs operational concepts that include political involvement. Campaigning for a political party or demonstrating were included in their composite indicator of women's empowerment. Others regard women's participation in politics at both the village and national levels as a symbol of empowerment. According to this commonly used operational definition of women's empowerment, an increasing percentage of women in legislatures is one of three indicators towards the Millennium Development Goals goal of "enhancing gender equality and empowering women (Dormekpor, 2015, : 93).

To summarize, involvement in politics necessitates a descriptive presence in formal political positions, and women have an equal distribution of power (Sundstrom, Paxton, Wang, and Lindberg, 2017: 4).

## **6. Psychological Empowerment**

According to Zimmerman (Zimmerman, 1995) Individual empowerment is

referred to as psychological empowerment (PE). Personal control views, a proactive approach to life, and a critical grasp of the sociopolitical context are all incorporated into the construct.

According to Zimmerman, organizational empowerment consists of procedures and structures that improve members' abilities and provide them with the mutual support needed to accomplish community-level change (i.e., empowering the organization). He also emphasizes that it relates to increased organizational effectiveness through successful resource competition, networking with other organizations, or growing its influence (Zimmerman, 1995).

Psychological empowerment is more than just an intrapersonal concept; it necessitates an examination of behavioral and interactional aspects in order to fully assess this open-ended construct. A universal and worldwide PE measure may not be desired since it is logically incompatible with the construct given the varied needs and peculiarities of various locations and life circumstances. A universal and global measure of empowerment may also confound comprehension since the construct may be incorrectly viewed as a static personality attribute rather than a more dynamic contextually driven construct. PE may be measured in a specific location for a specific sample of people, but it must be linked to the study participants' stated experiences and contextually grounded in their actual experiences (Spretizer, 1995).

PE differs from organizational or community empowerment, but it impacts and is impacted by empowerment at other levels of study. The provided conception of PE is strongly founded in a social action paradigm that incorporates community transformation, capacity building, and collectivity. Yet, social change may take numerous forms and does not always culminate in a power struggle.

An emphasis on empowerment at the individual level of analysis should not be interpreted as ignoring sociopolitical or contextual variables. PE is more than just self-perceptions of ability, it also entails active participation in one's community and knowledge of one's sociopolitical surroundings. Learning about controlling agents and acting to impact those agents are also part of PE. As a result, PE should not be regarded as individualism, ideology propagation, or just an intrapsychic phenomenon. Rather, PE encompasses beliefs that objectives are attainable, understanding of resources and variables that impede or improve one's attempts to accomplish those goals, and actions to achieve those goals (Zimmerman, Israel,

Schulz, and Checkoway, 1992).

As described by Gupta (Gupta, 2018: 375) There are several psychological barriers that are impeding women's empowerment. Such barriers have both internal and exterior control points. Fear, insecurity, danger, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, fear of failure, and other psychological obstacles are examples. Lack of knowledge, lack of autonomy in decision making, and lack of autonomy in work performance are the most significant barriers to women's psychological empowerment in some workplaces. The most significant impediment to psychological empowerment is role uncertainty and job-related stress. Psychological empowerment is a combination of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination, self-confidence, self-awareness, and positive thinking that eventually leads to women's well-being and happiness. A psychologically empowered woman can improve her self-image and overcome stigma. Empowering women includes allowing them to get access to skills and information, as well as cope with stress and trauma in the present and future. Women's psychological empowerment is important for their overall growth and development (Gupta, 2018: 375).

### **III. WOMEN CHALLENGES IN AFGHANISTAN**

#### **A. Condition of Afghan women from 1995-2001**

Afghan women prior to 2001, or when the Taliban held power in Afghanistan from 1995 to 2000 movement began over 100 years ago and has seen numerous ups and downs throughout its history. Under the Taliban regime during 1995 to 2001 one system allowed women to be very harsh, while another prevented them from advancing Afghan women's growth. Afghanistan has been governed by a despotic leader for the last three decades (Fatima, 2014).

Women participated up the workforce in Afghanistan in the 1950s, and they were authorized to work in the service industry as secretaries, nurses, and air attendants. Several well-educated women followed careers in medicine, law, engineering, and journalism. Prior to 1995, Afghan women were politically involved in the government system, and women's rights and freedoms were established in the 1964 and 1977 constitutions. According to Kandiyoti in 1964, a new secular constitution was enacted, which incorporated principles of free speech, civil rights, and, for the first time, universal suffrage. The first Afghan elections were held under this constitution in 1965. Although the total participation of women remained extremely low, it is believed that 15- 20% of urban women participated in the election, and a few women were even elected. (Kandiyoti, 2005 : 5). Their described in his researched that the era known as the "new democracy" period began in 1964, when the constitution was passed by a loya Jirga in Afghanistan. Two parliamentary elections were held, and the country had just begun to experience democratic administration; also women participated in elections and were elected to posts in government (Thier, 2006: 560).

During the reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah, for example, there were three female cabinet ministers, and by the early 1990s, most teachers, half of government employees, and 40% of the country's medical professionals were female (Sumitra, Hakimy, and Rokba, 2023: 231).

Following the Taliban's takeover, the proportionate participation of women in political and social concerns was also neglected and aggressively rejected by the ruling Islamic forces. The treatment of women in the government demonstrates the Taliban's alleged mentality. In their first instruction, they instruct women to avoid public appearances as much as possible. Women have been denied employment as well as access to education. The Taliban's egregious actions against Afghan women included preventing women from driving, purchasing and selling items, using public baths, and wearing Afghan Islamic women's full-length Chaduri, among other things. Afghan residents, notably women, endured severe restrictions in Taliban-controlled areas. The Taliban prohibited women's social and economic activities, and they were only allowed to leave their homes for funerals, visiting patients, or emergency shopping. After 1997, the Taliban announced that women might leave the house with the company of one of her family members or a Muharram man. Respect for women's and girls' rights, according to Mullah Mohammad Omar, one of the Taliban's leaders, is contradictory to Islam, and social participation of this group in society will lead to moral deterioration. However, the Taliban regime drastically worsened the situation of women, owing to the Taliban's feminist doctrine. The Taliban's vision of women's sociopolitical rights includes excluding them from political or social participation. According to his backward attitude, the Taliban leader robbed them of all socio-political rights and proclaimed that women's only role is to care for their children and husband's family (Sumitra, Hakimy, and Rokba, 2023: 231).

## **B. Afghan women from 2001-2021**

Following the events of 9/11, the world's attention was drawn to Islamic extremism and its epicenters, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Al-Qaeda's abrupt and lethal attack on the US Global Trade Towers on September 11 sparked a US-led offensive with Western countries to the Turabura Mountains, Jalalabad, and the Khyber Valley to destroy terrorism in its stronghold (Sumitra, Hakimy, and Rokba, 2023: 231).

The events of September 11 and the Bonn Agreement summed up the development of a new administration in Afghanistan. The Bonn Agreement was designed to further democracy through procedures like as constitutional ratification, presidential and parliamentary elections, and so on (Oomens, 2010). According to

the United Nations, during the Bonn conference it was agreed that the Interim Authority and the Special Independent Commission for the Convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga shall ensure women's involvement in the Interim Administration and the Emergency Loya Jirga, as well as the fair representation of all ethnic and religious groupings (United Nations, 2001).

The right of women and girls to an education was recognized in the new Constitution law passed in 2003. The government is expected to implement effective programs to promote gender equality and women's education, as well as to boost tribal education and eradicate illiteracy in the country. In the area of women, the concept of equality between men and women in Afghanistan's new constitution played a vital part in improving the country's women's position after 2001. Furthermore, the government provided \$10 million to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in order to boost women's status in society. Women were in a better position than they had been under the Taliban administration from 1995 to 2001. Article 52 of the Afghan Constitution states that one of the new government's health aims is to provide health care to the broader public. This Act mandates the government to provide free health-care facilities to all inhabitants. As a result, the gender perspective on health care has been removed from the constitution, and there is no indication of law preventing women from accessing hospitals and medical centers. Furthermore, the presence of women in society, as well as the abolition of the necessary burqa (Chaduri), has significantly improved their mental health in compared to the Taliban era (Sumitra, Hakimy, and Rokba, 2023: 232). In addition, a law outlawing violence against women was passed in 2009. It is stated in Afghan Constitution Articles 24 and 54. The act defines violence against women and provides various instances, as well as declaring that "violence is a crime; no one has the right to commit it in a place of residence, government or non-government office, institution, public place, vehicle, or other places." You will be punished if you breach the conditions of this Act.

### **C. Women Education in Afghanistan**

Prior to the start of the twentieth century, education in Afghanistan was delivered by special instructors at home, in mosques, in informal schools adjacent to mosques, in madrassas, and through informal apprenticeships and on-the-job training



(Samady, 2001).

In Kabul province, Amir Habbibullah (1901 - 1919) created the first really modern secondary school, the Habibia School, in 1903. At the same time, the first teacher's college (Dar- al- Malimin) was established. King Amanullah also erected eight modern foreign-language schools, five of which were for boys and three of which were for girls. In the 1920s, nations such as Germany, France, and Egypt helped to create primary schools in large cities. Masturat, the first girls' high school, was founded in 1921. Teachers were invited to teach in these boys' and girls' schools from Germany, France, England, Türkiye, and India. Education was still a relatively new phenomenon in the country, with no higher education system in place. As a result, the best graduates traveled overseas to study in Germany, France, and Egypt. In Türkiye just a small proportion of female students sought further education (Sadat, 2004).

After the overthrow of Amanullah Khan, Nadir Khan (1929-1933), who came to power with the support of religious authorities, abandoned many of Amanullah's ideas, although he expanded schools for females across the country as autonomous institutions (Sadat, 2004).

The civil war started wreaking damage on schools and educational institutions in 1978. However, schools remained open whenever possible, and girls may continue to attend classes. This altered in the 1990s, when girls' and women's education became more restricted. Between 1995 and 2001, the Taliban closed girls' schools and barred females from attending college, with the exception of medical universities, because the Taliban need female physicians as well (Samady, 2001).

Education reform is often prompted by a government's desire to address social and economic issues (Allmnakrah and Evers, 2020: 28). In other cases, such as when the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was toppled, education reform is aimed at "reducing radical and militant extremism. This includes policy, practice, and organizational changes aimed at improving Afghanistan's education system. Following the events of September 11, 2001, there was a significant injection of financial and strategic assistance targeted at rebuilding and reconstructing the Afghan state, particularly in the sphere of education (Davis, 2002: 95). The Afghan Transitional Administration (interim administration following the Bonn Agreement) and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan made major advancements in education,

both in terms of quantity and quality, with the aid of the international community and international organizations. Afghanistan's post-Bonn administration considered taking the necessary steps to convert the violent curriculum to a peaceful one as part of education reform. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) "Back-to-School Campaign" in 2001, for example, was a significant boost to Afghanistan's education system, resulting in 200% more schools being built and 500% more teachers being employed than two years before. Enrollment rates rose dramatically in 2004, after decreasing from 32% to 6.4% during the Taliban's initial takeover of Afghanistan (Acks, Baughman, and Diabo, 2015).

According to Ministry of Education report, Acks et al., and Farhat, et al., 2023 significant progress was made in the education system between 2002 and 2015 in seven key areas.

1. There were seven million students, with girls accounting for 37% of the total.
2. There were 170,000 instructors, with girls accounting for 30% of the workforce.
3. The number of training centers had increased from 4 to 42.
4. There were 60 technical and vocational institutions with a total enrollment of 200,000 students, 30% of whom were female.
5. There were almost 480 madrasas registered.
6. Six hundred formerly shut-down schools had reopened.

According to Afghanistan's Ministry of Education's 2020 Annual Progress Report, approximately 10 million children will be enrolled in school in 2020, representing a tenfold increase since 2001. Around 40% of these pupils were female. Primary education has seen the biggest advancement. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the number of schools has risen from 6,000 in 2001 to almost 18,000 in 2018, and the number of teachers has risen from 27,000 in 2003 to nearly 226,000 in 2020 (Wang, 2021).

As of 2020, Afghanistan has 167 universities and higher education facilities, 39 of which were public and 128 of which were private, according to (Akhtar and Ranjan, 2021). In the same year, the student population was 429,790, with a male

plurality (71.01%) and a female minority (28.99%). In 2020, there were 205,480 students enrolled in public institutions, with Kabul University enrolling the most, with 23,722 students. The Ministry of Higher Education will register one additional institute in 2021, increasing the total number of private educational establishments in Afghanistan to 129. According to Akhtar and Ranjan (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies) (Akhtar and Ranjan, 2021) As a result, between 2001 and 2021, Afghanistan's higher education system expanded dramatically, including the following developments:

1. The development of a number of co-educational public and private universities and colleges of higher learning.
2. An increase in the number of students seeking postsecondary education.
3. University professors can receive training and scholarships.
4. Kankor test reform, commonly known as university entrance examination reform.
5. Selected Afghan institutions' physical infrastructure has been renovated.
6. An growth in faculty personnel at both public and private colleges.

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban retook control. With the following fall of other provinces and, eventually, Kabul, the prospects for Afghan women's and girls' educational rights were bleak. Despite the Taliban's claims about female education during the Doha accord discussions, their practices against women and girls signal a return to their 1990s ideology, when they won power for the first time in Afghanistan (Akeel, 2023).

Due to the unrest, the education sector was shuttered for over a month after the Taliban gained control of Kabul. The Taliban then stated that schools will reopen, but only for girls in grade six. In a statement, the Taliban's Ministry of Education declared that restrictions on girls are tied to culture, social customs, and security throughout the country, and that parents do not want schools for their female offspring (Aljazeera, 2022).

Universities reopened in their second month of power, but only if they followed the gender segregation policy. In the absence of adequate infrastructure to separate classes for male and female students, public and private schools resorted to

using a curtain as a barrier. When it came to attending lessons, female university students faced insurmountable obstacles. They were compelled to conceal their face not just in university public spaces, but also in class. It was also banned for male instructors to educate female students. Regardless all the limits, possibilities for girls to attend college and seek higher education remained limited. Following conversations among Taliban top officials over females' education, the Ministry of Higher Education closed female-only universities, alleging that the educational atmosphere was incompatible with Sharia law and Afghan customs (BBC, 2022).



Figure 1 Women Education in Afghanistan

Source (Shine, News, 2022)

Women's rights organizations have denounced the decision as well as the Taliban's discriminatory position, but they have been silenced. The protests were not accompanied by anti-Taliban chanting, but rather demanded their rights to work, education, freedom of travel without a Mahram (male family member acting as a chaperone), and the ability to dress whatever they chose rather than according to the Taliban's views. Every demonstration was met with violence. The Taliban violated their rights to free expression, association, and assembly. They have used strong hate speech at female protestors, whipped them, and assaulted a small number of them with batons. The Taliban particularly targeted demonstration organizers and

photographers, insisting that they not broadcast footage of protestor abuse on social media. Protestors and organizers who were women were harassed, abused, beaten, jailed, forcefully disappeared, tortured, and ill-treated (Amiri, 2023).



Figure 2 Women Education in Afghanistan

Source (Amiri, 2023)

Following the fall of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Taliban's maltreatment of women has worsened. The ban on females attending colleges and secondary schools, as well as being prevented from taking the Kankor university admission test, has garnered international attention and fostered hopelessness among the young Afghan girl population. The Taliban confined women and girls to their homes, permitting only necessary visits and prohibiting them from attending secondary schools or universities (BBC, 2022).

According to Graph 1, the number of females restricted from attending schools for 12th graders in 2022 and all secondary education in 2023 in Afghanistan's capital, northeastern, northern, western, eastern, central, southeastern, and southern regions totals approximately 2.6 million.

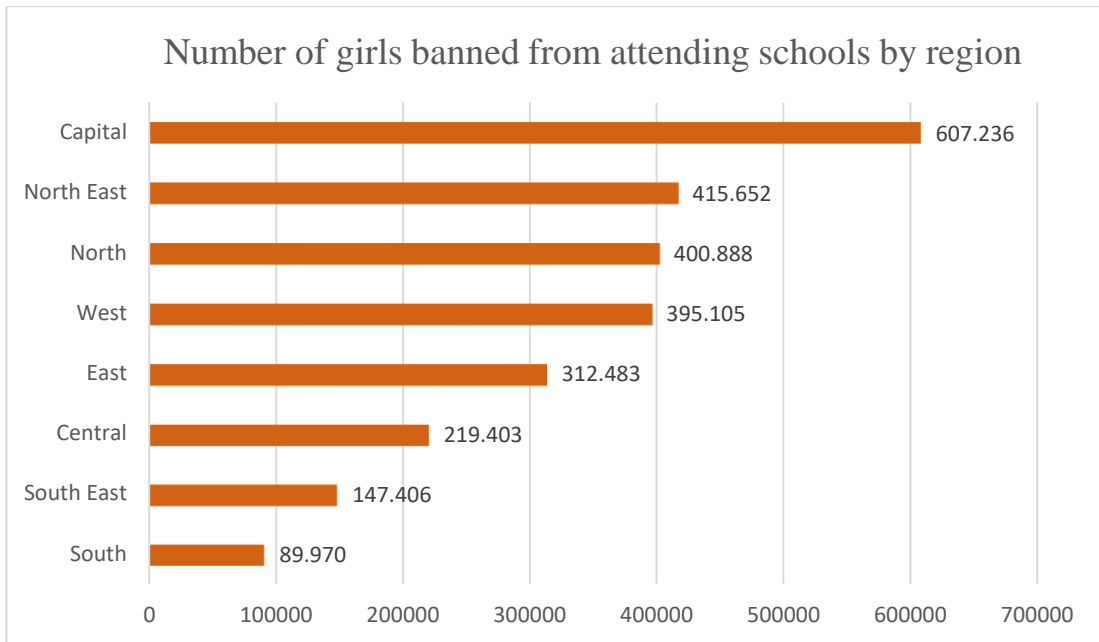


Figure 3 Number of girls banned from attending schools by region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

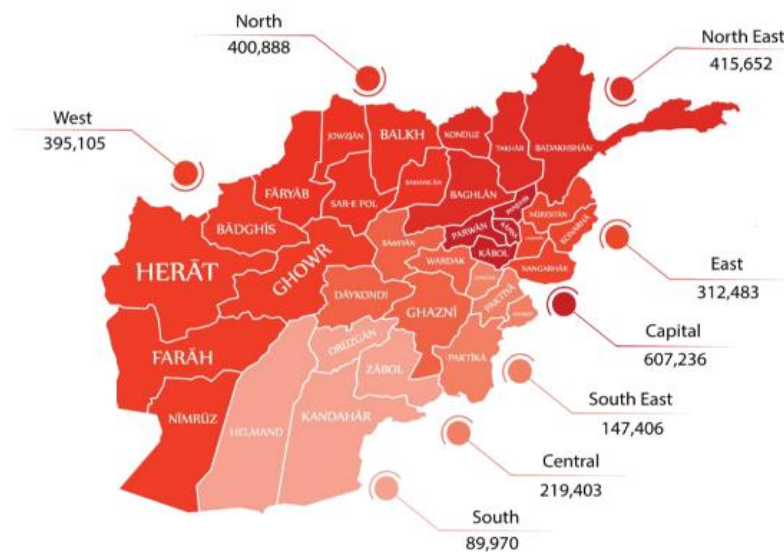


Figure 4 Number of girls banned from attending schools by region map

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

Women's intra-household decision-making authority in both financial and non-financial areas is positively related with education. Furthermore, education minimizes relationship friction, particularly among women who are sensitive to psychological abuse (Le and Nguyen, 2021: 512).

Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, and Panjshir provinces comprise the capital area. Kabul, Afghanistan's capital city, has the highest percentage of female enrollment in the country, attracting students from other provinces who reside in Kabul and attend schools there. Kabul province, which comprises both Kabul city and its surrounding rural regions, has the highest number of out-of-school female pupils, with approximately 500,000.

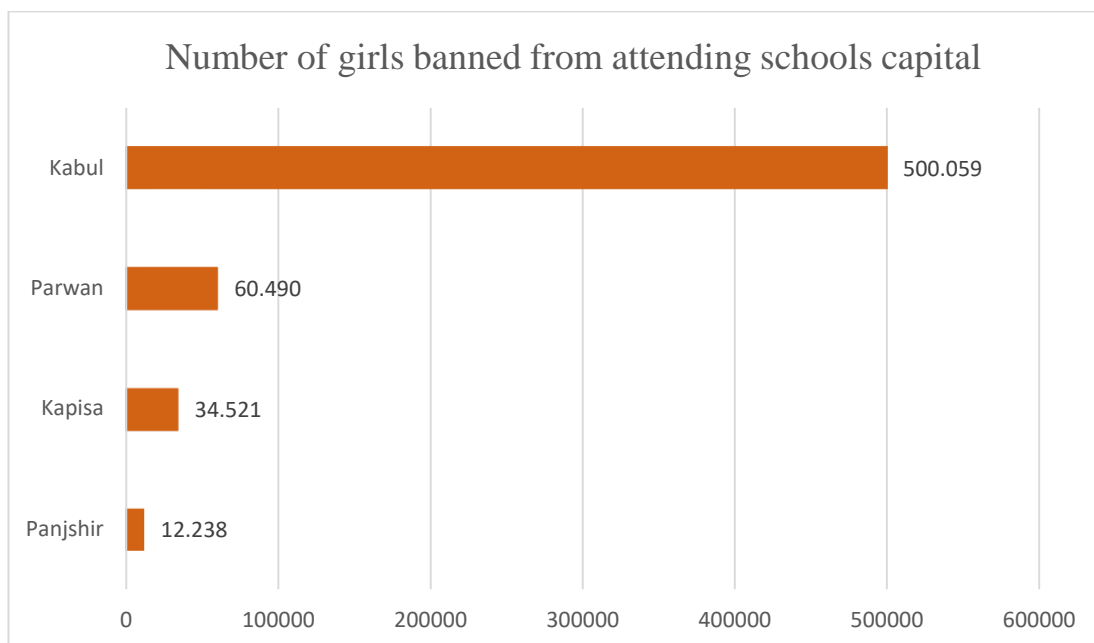


Figure 5 Number of girls banned from attending schools capital region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

The Northeastern region is the second most hit after the Capital region, with 415,652 girls unable to attend school. The following table shows the number of pupils who are unable to attend school in Takhar, Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Baghlan provinces.

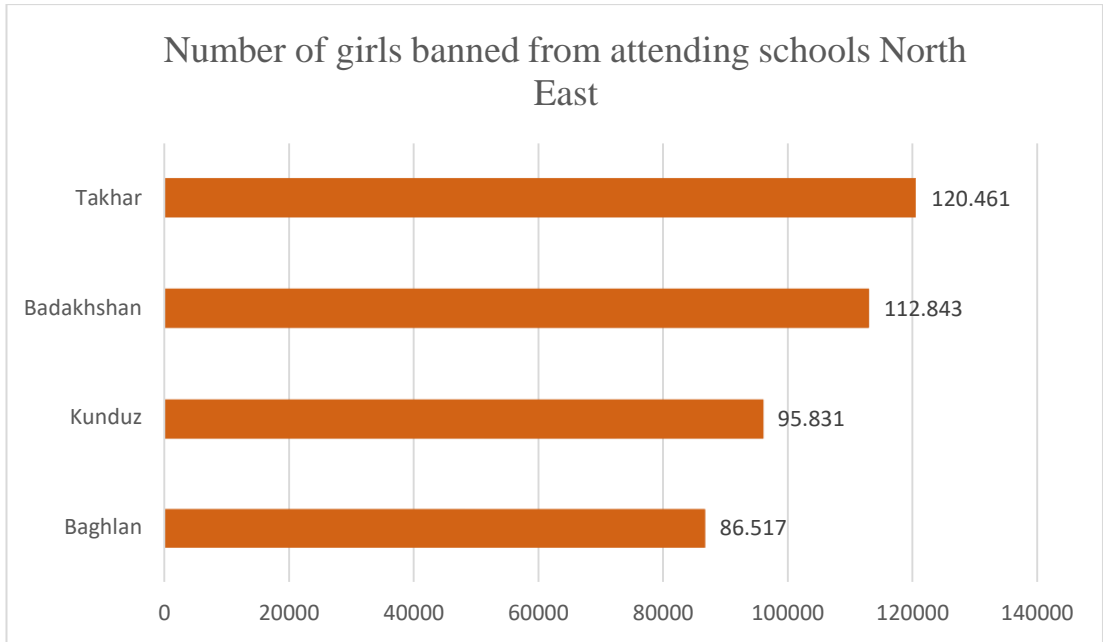


Figure 6 Number of girls banned from attending schools north east region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

With 400,888 students, the Northern region has the third greatest number of female students who are unable to attend school. With 170,636 female students, Balkh province has the highest number of females prevented from attending school in the region. The most female students are unable to attend school in Balkh, Faryab, and Jowzjan. With 49,065 and 34,657 affected female students, respectively, the provinces of Sarepul and Samangan had the fewest impacted female students. The graph below depicts the number of banned students in the Northern regions in further detail.



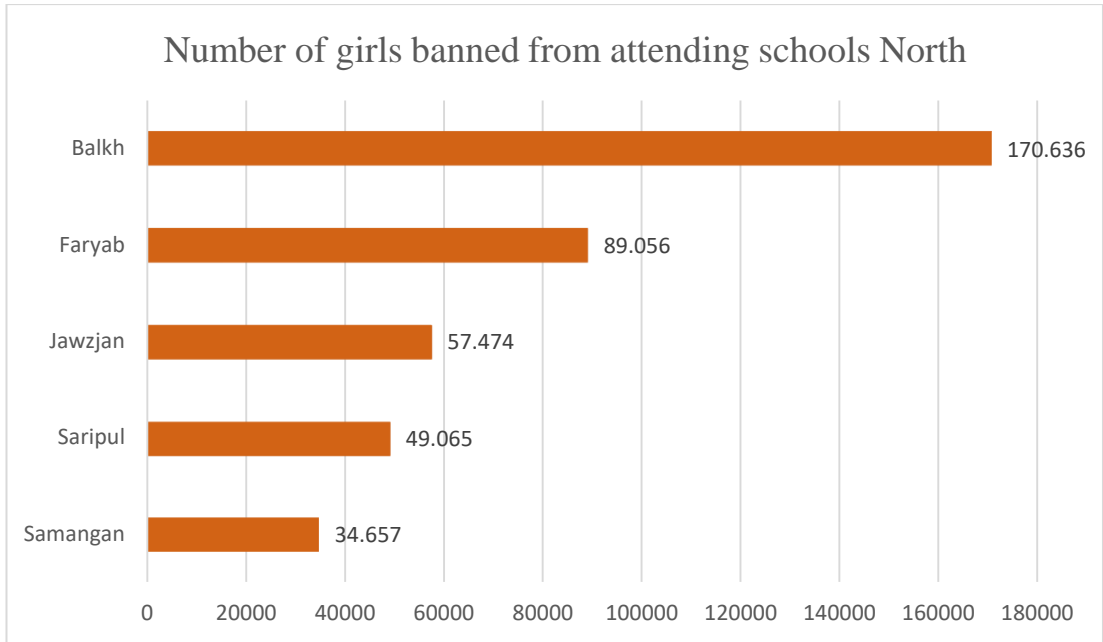


Figure 7 Number of girls banned from attending schools north region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

With 264,750 female students unable to attend school, the province of Herat in western Afghanistan has the highest number of females affected by the education restriction. In the provinces of Ghor, Badghis, and Farah, the restriction affects 54,355, 29,004, and 28,236 girls, respectively. With 18,760 students, Nimruz is the province with the fewest. The graph below displays the total number of female students impacted in the Western region.

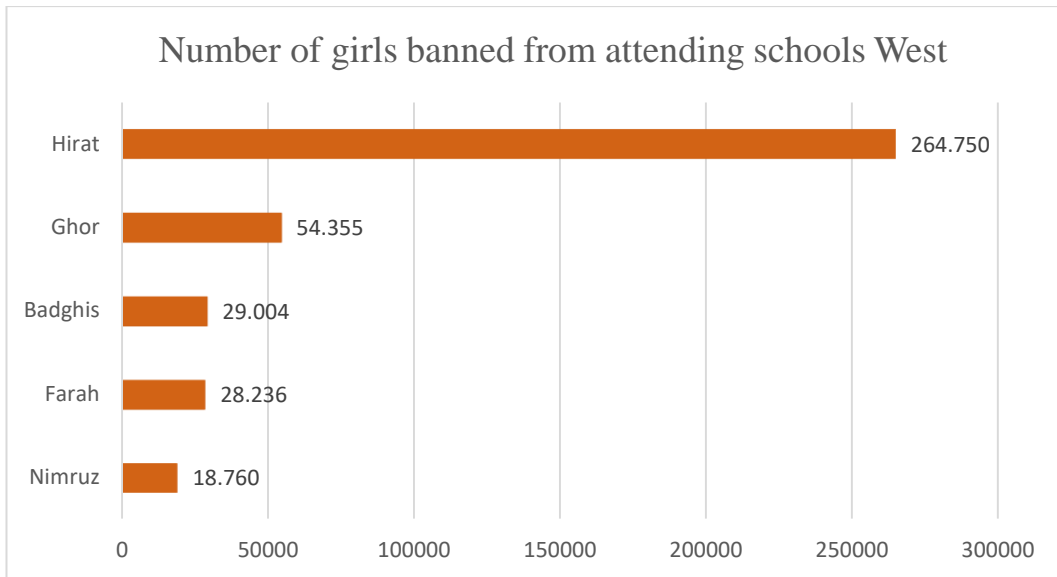


Figure 8 Number of girls banned from attending schools west region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

The restriction has had the biggest impact on female students in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangarhar. Nooristan has the fewest female students that have been affected. In this region, around 312,483 female students were barred from attending school. The graph below depicts the number of students impacted in the eastern region.

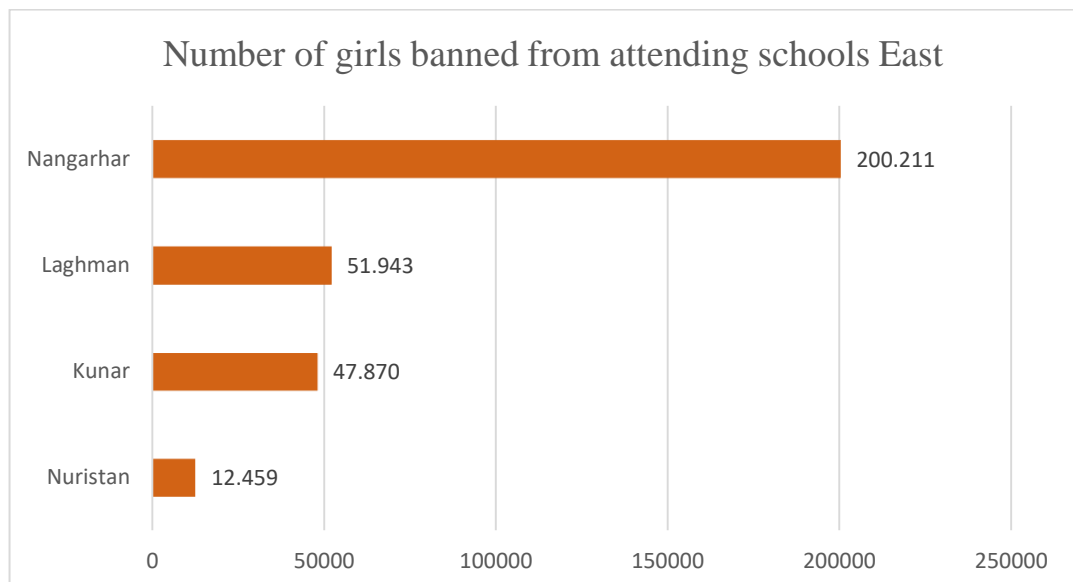


Figure 9 Number of girls banned from attending schools east region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

In Afghanistan's Central Region, Ghazni and Daikundi have the largest number of girls barred from attending school. In Bamyan and Wardak, the proportion of female students who are unable to attend school is lowest. There are 219,403 girls in the central region who are unable to attend school due to the restriction.

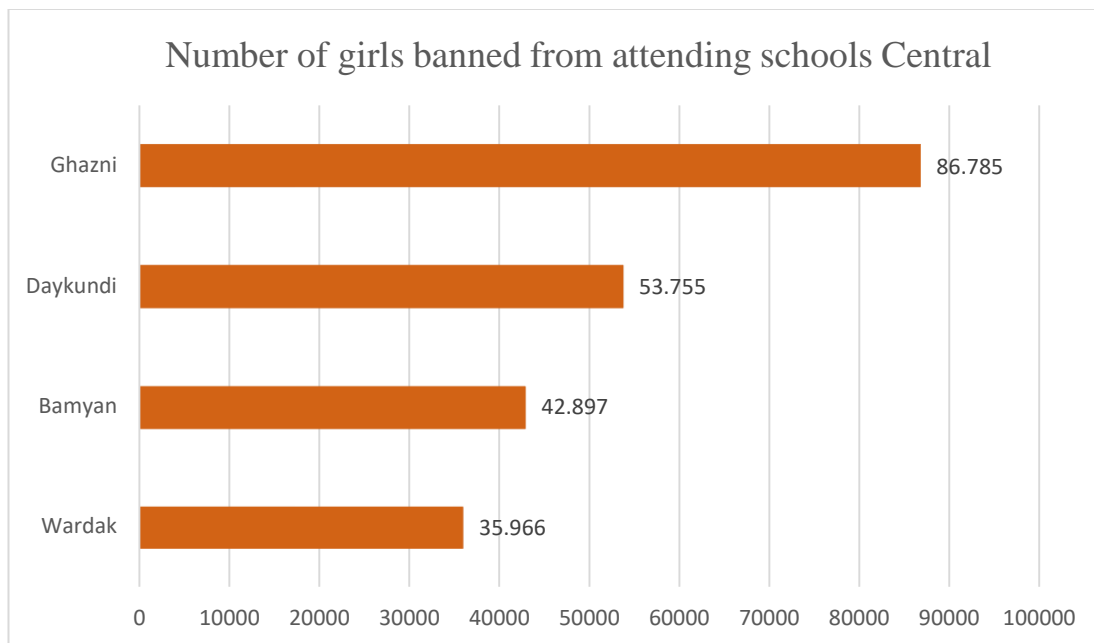


Figure 10 Number of girls banned from attending schools central region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

The southeastern regions in Afghanistan have the fewest females affected by the school ban. Enrollment in these areas has historically been low, owing mostly to conflict and cultural challenges. Khost has the most in the Southeastern region, with almost 63,600 students. Paktika has the fewest affected students, at 14,200. As seen in the graph, there are 147,406 females in the Southeastern region who are unable to attend school.

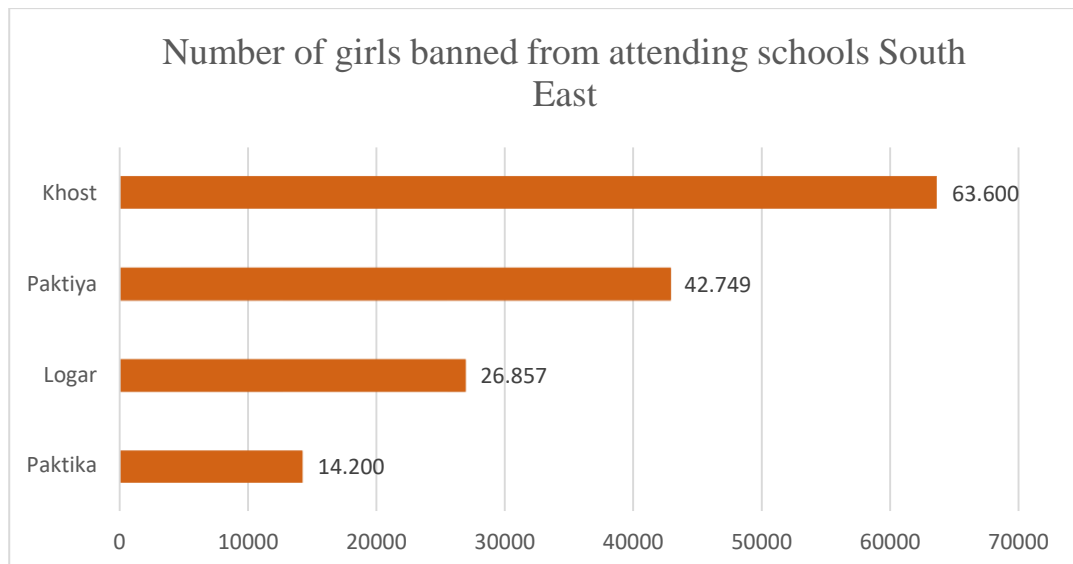


Figure 11 Number of girls banned from attending schools south east region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

When compared to other regions in Afghanistan, the Southern area has the lowest overall number of female students affected by the restriction. Approximately 50,861 female children in Kandahar province are unable to attend school. Similarly, the restriction affects 24,796 female students in Helmand, 9,372 in Zabul, and 4,941 in Urozgan, the lowest number among all provinces. In all, 89,970 girls are unable to attend school in the Southern region. The graph below depicts the impact of the prohibition in this region.

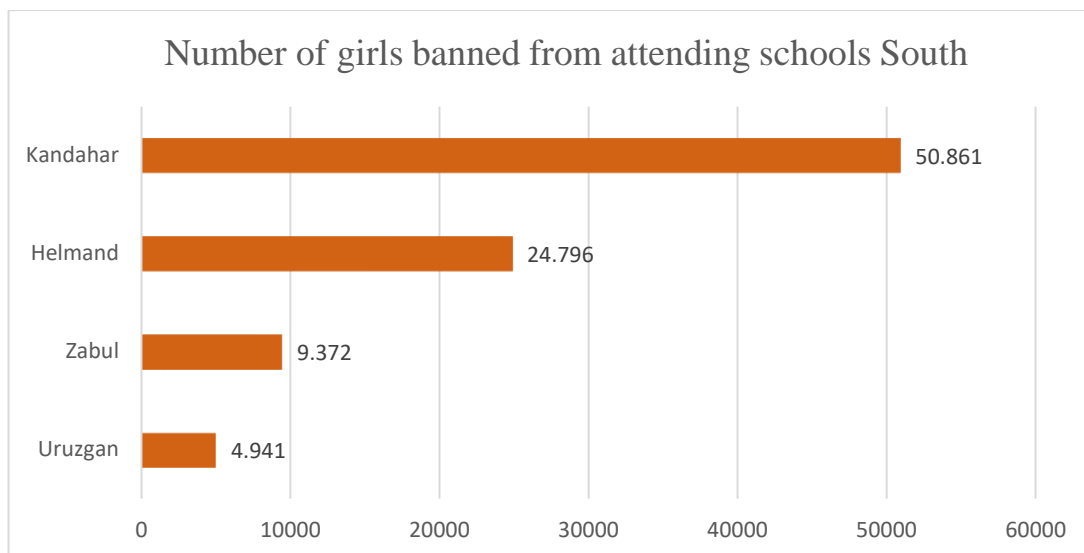


Figure 12 Number of girls banned from attending schools south region

Source (Co-authors' analysis from Ministry of Education Provincial Report of 2019)

According to the graphs above, about 2.6 million females are barred from attending schools in Afghanistan's capital, northeastern, northern, western, eastern, central, southeastern, and southern provinces. Education has a favorable relationship with women's intra-household decision-making capacity in both financial and non-financial sectors. Furthermore, knowledge reduces interpersonal tension, which is especially important for women who are vulnerable to psychological abuse.

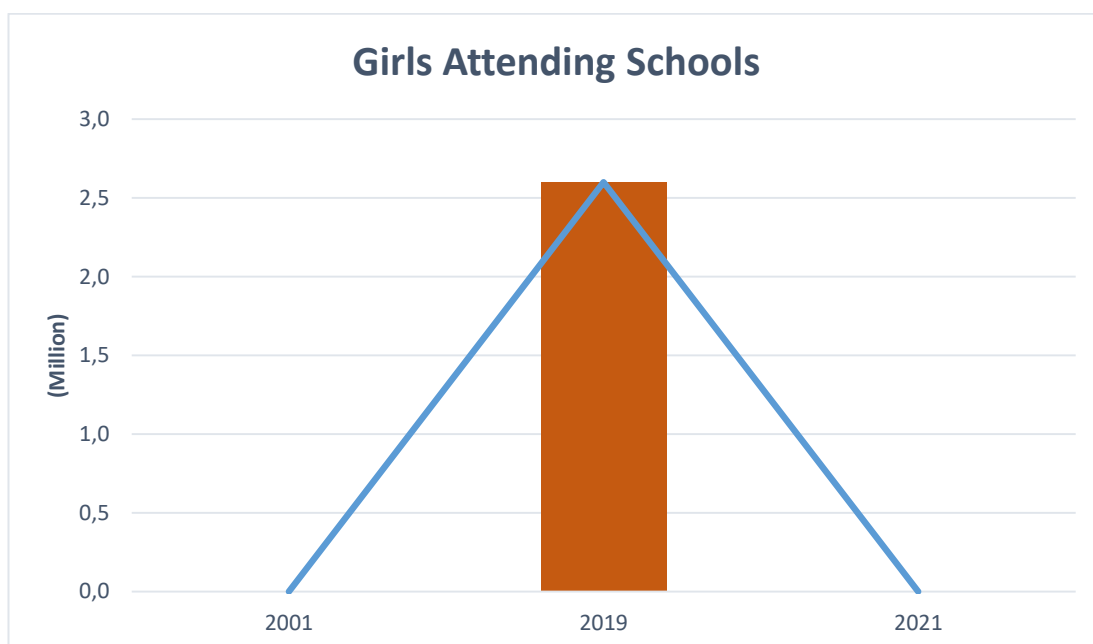


Figure 13 Number of girls banned from attending schools in 2001 compare to 2019 and 2021

According to the graphs above, no girls were attending schools prior to 2001 during the Taliban's first regime, but after the Transitional Government took place and during the Islamic Republic regime, girls attending schools increased year by year, with nearly 2.6 million girls attending schools across Afghanistan in 2019. After the Taliban administration gained power for the second time on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan moved back 20 years, and those 2.6 million girls who were in school in 2019 are no longer in school in 2021.

#### **D. The effect of closing education system**

The Taliban's return to power has wreaked havoc on education and society. Data and studies reveal that the restricts education, particularly for females, and that it also has an influence on girls from a variety of perspectives. The following appear to be the most serious consequences of the Taliban's return to power in terms of education.

- Since the Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan, the educational system has suffered greatly, particularly among female students enrolled in private universities. Due to the Taliban's strong limitations on women's and girls' education, the student population has dropped significantly to nil (Ali, 2023).
- The restriction on female students pursuing education beyond the sixth grade and higher education has resulted in substantial mental suffering, including increased degrees of despair, desperation, and anxiety (Neyazi et al., 2022).
- According to numerous reports such as UNICEF (UNICEF, 2022), Reuters (REUTERS, 2022), BBC, (BBC, 2022) CNN (CNN, 2022), TOLO (TOLO NEWS, 2022) Around 2.6 million females were left in tears after the Taliban's early efforts to close schools for female students beyond the sixth grade, and openly requested that the institutions be reopened. Numerous studies such as Neyazi et.al (Neyazi, Padhi, and Sah, 2023), Akbari and True (Akbari and True, 2022) Tharwani, et. al. (Tharwani, Essar, Farahat, and Shah, 2023) on the subject demonstrate that the restriction on female education has not only impeded their cognitive development but has also

resulted in severe psychological anguish in Afghanistan. It is a sad and tough reality to live in a country where girls are not legally permitted to obtain any type of offline education after the sixth grade, making Afghanistan the only country in the world with such restrictions.

- Since the evacuation flights began on August 15, 2021, a huge number of academics and scholars who studied abroad during the Republic have fled Afghanistan, causing in a significant brain drain. This has been worsened by the departures of both male and female professionals who studied abroad on scholarships or other educational opportunities, or who worked on initiatives backed by Western-funded organizations. The departure of these professionals at a time when Taliban-oriented individuals are prioritized above Western-educated individuals has created a hole that cannot be filled by those who have decided to stay or have no choice but to migrate abroad. As a result, the country's educational quality has decreased since teaching is no longer viewed as a desirable job, and people with inadequate levels of education and training are being hired for teaching positions. This professional shortfall, along with a lack of female teachers in rural areas, jeopardizes the Republic's educational progress. Furthermore, persons who are studying or desire to study abroad are less likely to return to Afghanistan, exacerbating the problem (Akbari and True, 2022: 625).
- The closure of educational institutions is associated with an increase in suicides, particularly among females. Given that females aged 14 to 19 account for 80% of all suicide attempts and 95% of self-immolation casualties (Tharwani, Essar, Farahat, and Shah: 2023). Girls are deprived of a critical source of support and opportunities for personal and social growth when schools and universities close for that age category, at a critical age when they need to learn about life management and problem solving through examples in textbooks, debates and discussions in the classroom, or on the way home with friends. Young girls would feel sad and alone if they did not have access to education and social services. Suicide risk may increase in such conditions, particularly in countries where women face additional challenges and limits, such as Afghanistan. The government's

decision to close schools and colleges as part of an education embargo violates the government's commitment to address the issue of rising female suicide rates. This ban hinders access to crucial tools and services that may aid in suicide prevention, such as community-based mental health initiatives and online psychosocial therapy. In rural places, where women already have limited access to formal education, the restriction on schooling makes obtaining the support they seek even more difficult. The Taliban's harsh impositions aggravate the situation, making it more difficult to accomplish the aims of delivering online education and reducing suicides (Tharwani, Essar, Farahat, and Shah, 2023).

- The Taliban intends to gradually move from formal to informal institutions, not by a formal policy or statement, but at a localized and implicit level. This is demonstrated by the conversion of schools and learning centers into madrasas in a number of Afghan provinces, resulting in a transition from a formal to an informal education and learning framework. Madrasas are central to Taliban doctrine (Radio Azadi, 2022).
- A restriction on female education contradicts fundamental human rights principles. Education is recognized as a core human right under international law, as stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights also underlines the importance of education in realizing other human rights and fostering peace, well-being, and sustainable development (Bogaert, 2022).
- The Taliban's restriction on female education in Afghanistan has the potential to have major economic ramifications in the coming years. According to a recent UNICEF study, the cost of this limitation is 5.4 billion US dollars, implying a large economic contribution that Afghan women could have earned if they had access to education (UNICEF, 2022). By denying females the opportunity to obtain knowledge and develop skills, the limitation limits their economic potential and their ability to contribute to their country's prosperity and stability. This highlights the need of promoting universal access to education, especially for females, in order to establish a more prosperous and sustainable future for Afghanistan and maintain the country's economic stability (Barlas, Sadiq, and Haidari,



2022).

Such a discriminating decision regarding Afghan women's and girls' education will be damaging to the success of the environment. It has the potential to be disastrous for Afghanistan. The education level of the population has a significant influence on the country's future prosperity. The next Afghan generation will be unable to contribute to the country's prosperity if education for half of the population, women, is forbidden. The Taliban not only violated the fundamental rights of Afghan women and girls, but their decision would also encourage hatred, harassment, and violence against women. Furthermore, the restriction on female education has a significant influence on brain drain.

#### **E. Socio-Cultural and its Effects on Women in Afghanistan**

Women have traditionally played the most important role in the overall structure of society and the sociopolitical fabric of the state. A country can perform well if women are given their appropriate rights and the opportunity to work side by side with men (Tariq, et al., 2021: 812).

Women's social and economic status in Afghanistan has deteriorated in several ways under the Taliban regime during 1995 to 2001. They were not allowed to leave the house without her family members, they were not allowed to attend school, and their political engagement was nearly non-existent.

As stated by Tariq et al. (Tariq, et al., 2021: 812). the international community was the catalyst for women's participation in social and political activities. They have been able to get seats in the Afghan parliament and actively engage in daily life during 2001 - 2021. They were allowed to vote in large numbers during national elections and took an active role in lobbying for women's safety both individually and collectively. Despite the international community's efforts to increase women's political participation, women politicians and civil society members continue to have little influence on policy while facing disproportionate intimidation and violence on a daily basis. During the creation of the constitution, women activists and government employees had to struggle against two main forces: the warlords who were opposed to women's active engagement in numerous sectors, and the warlords who were opposed to women's participation in general. Second,

they had to struggle against conservative forces that have been highly constrained and restricted in providing women their rightful role in the country's politics. The triumph of women against warlordism and conservatism was the consequence of efforts undertaken by the government and social activists. This initiative resulted in Afghanistan being an enlightened society in which women gained active participation in government politics and other social activities. For the first time in the country's history, women received the majority of seats in the legislature and executive branches.

Graphic Representation of Male/Female in the Afghan Parliament in 2004

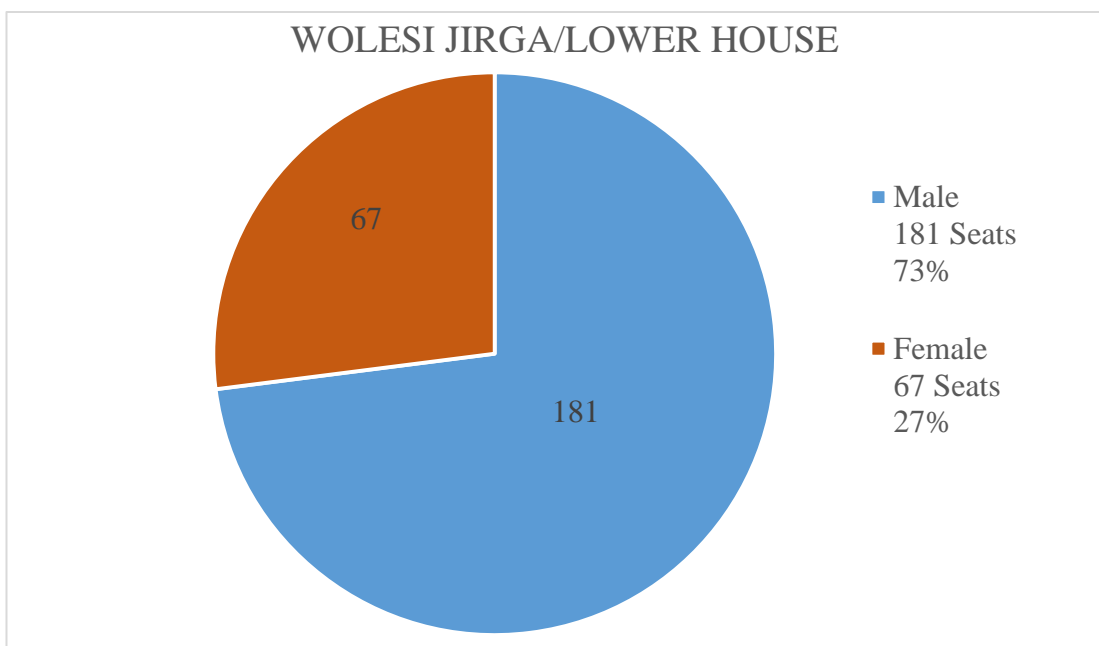


Figure 14 Male and female in Afghanistan Lower House (2004)

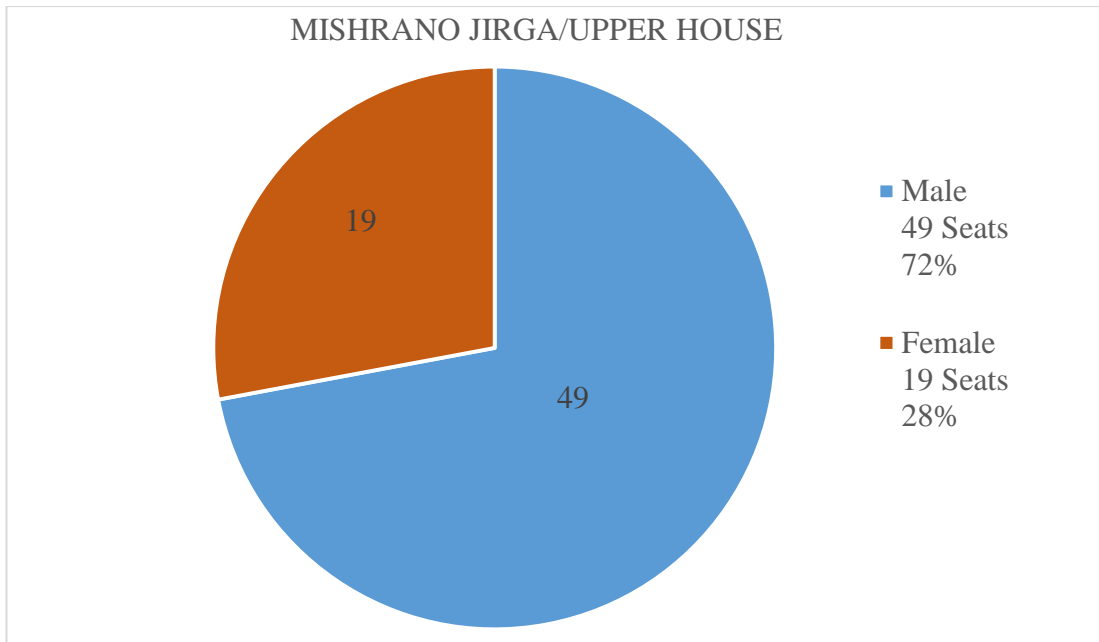
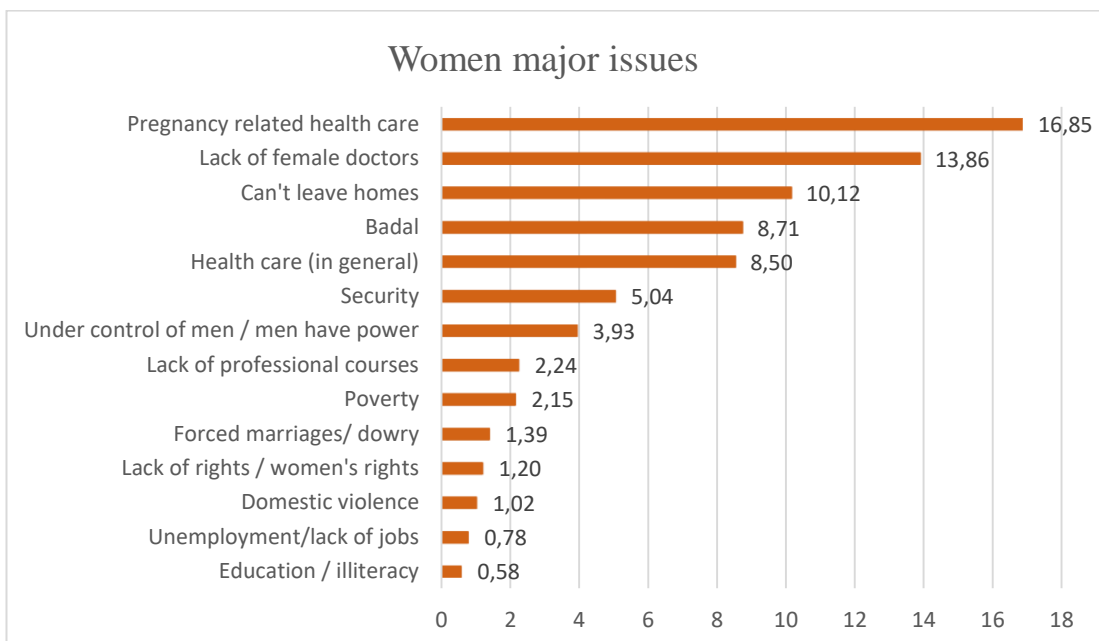


Figure 15 Male and female in Afghanistan Upper House (2004)

Source (Tariq, et al., 2021)

Following the invasion by the US-led international coalition, international and local communities worked to empower women from 2001 till 2021, but women continue to face significant challenges in political, economic, and social life. Below graph depicts the key issues raised by Afghan women, based on data from Asia Foundation's A Survey of Afghan People (2019) (Çevik, Kartal, and Khatir, 2021: 803).



## Figure 16 Women major issues

Source: Authors' calculation from (The Asian Foundation, 2019)

According to the graph above, the major issues that Afghan women complained about during the 2019 survey before Taliban regime were inadequate education and illiteracy, domestic violence (violence by family members), a lack of rights (such as rights in inheritances), forced marriages, poverty, a lack of professional courses for capacity building, being unable to leave home without the permission of their head family member, a security problem, no access to clinics, pregnancy-related health care, a lack of access to healthcare facilities. While illiteracy affects more than 16.85% of Afghan women, unemployment looks to be the second-worst issue, affecting more than 13.5%. Domestic abuse and a lack of rights accounted for more than 10 and 8% of all problems, respectively. As 8.5% of women complain about forced marriage and dowry, more than 5.04% comply owing to poverty. More than 3.9% of respondents stated that one of the most difficult issues they confront is a lack of access to professional training. According to the report, 2.73% of women cannot leave the house without the consent of their head of the house. More than 1% of women complain about security, lack of access to health care, and *Badal and Baad*. *Baad* is unlawful under Afghan law but a popular practice in which a girl gets wedded at the price of murder committed by one of her family members (The Asian Foundation, 2019).

As can be observed, unemployment is one of the most common complaints among women. Other difficulties with women's employment positions, on the other hand, may be identified. Societies with higher gender equality not only provide better socioeconomic prospects for women, but they also tend to expand faster and more equitably, resulting in poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, consumer choice, inventiveness, and decision-making on a wider range of issues.

Women were at least permitted to study, communicate, work, leave the country without *Mahram* from 2001 to 2021, but after the Taliban's takeover on 15-Aug-2021, 20 years of progress for women's and girls' rights have been lost (United Nations, 2023).

According to a United Nations report from 2002, Afghan women celebrated International Women's Day with excitement after years of being denied their rights

under the previous Taliban regime. Realities and possibilities were discussed, and pledges were made to assist our Afghan sisters in rebuilding their lives and becoming full participants in the country's post-conflict reconstruction. On that day, the international community said that Afghan women's situation was "an affront to all standards of dignity, equality, and humanity." It highlighted that worldwide support for regaining their rights should go beyond sympathy protests. Girls are still excluded from secondary school and women from higher education in Afghanistan more than two decades later. Women and girls have been forbidden from visiting amusement parks, public baths, gyms, and sports clubs for the past four months. Women are not authorized to work in non-governmental organization offices. Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, women have been forbidden from holding public office or serving on the court. Women and girls in Afghanistan are now required to wear a strict dress code and are not permitted to travel more than 75 kilometers without the presence of a mahram. They feel compelled to stay at home. Women around the country describe feeling invisible, isolated, suffocated, and imprisoned. Many people are unable to satisfy their basic needs if they do not have access to job or help, such as medical care and psychological support, especially victims of abuse, particularly sexual assault. It is a sobering reminder of how swiftly and passionately women's and girls' rights may be undermined (United Nations, 2002).

#### **F. Uncertainty about women's rights in Afghanistan**

The situation for women's rights in Afghanistan changed radically when the Taliban took authority in August 2021 (Yousaf and Jabarkhail, 2022). Following the arrival of NATO troops in 2001, female activists fought for and obtained significant legislative victories. Unfortunately, many of these state-sanctioned rights had never been implemented even before the Taliban assumed control in August 2021. Patriarchal structures, religious fundamentalism, and corruption all worked together to ensure that the laws were not implemented. This absence of women's rights became official policy under the Taliban, and women were once again prohibited from public life. Their civil and political rights and liberties were severely curtailed. Prior to 2021, it was difficult for a woman to openly pursue an alternate life aim, such as independence or homosexuality, but it is now impossible (Medicamondiale,

2022). Afghanistan is currently one of the most difficult locations in the world to identify as a woman. Political and economic instability, educational disparity, sexual assault, and poor health are all common among Afghan women and children (Women for Women, 2023).

### **1. Restriction of movement and restricted dress codes**

According to Human Rights Watch (Fetrat and Barr, 2022), the Taliban enacted a variety of decrees and ordinances that violate the human rights of women and girls, including the right to mobility. Women are not permitted to use public transit unless they are accompanied by a male relative known as a mahram. In general, they are only permitted to leave the house in an emergency and must do so while wearing full veils. Women who violate the dress rule throw their male relatives in prison. Presenters on TV news broadcasts must wear a full veil during the transmission.

### **2. Women and girls who are at risk of violence**

There are very no resources for survivors of sexualized violence. The nationwide network of help developed by women's rights activists over the last 20 years is on the verge of collapsing: safe homes have been closed, and threats have been made against workers of organizations offering shelter and guidance. Since 2009, 22 complaints of maltreatment of women have been brought under the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law), which is no longer in effect. As the Taliban took control of the country in 2021, they carefully released prisoners, many of whom had been imprisoned for offenses against women (Medicamondiale, 2022).

### **3. Forced and child marriage**

Even before the Taliban took control, one out of every three females was forced to marry before the age of 18. This high figure has climbed even further after 2021. The country's humanitarian disaster is having an especially severe impact on families with multiple children. To avoid starvation, a growing number of parents are resorting to the patriarchal practice of marrying off their young daughters in return for dowry. Furthermore, some families are pushing their daughters to marry early in order to protect them from being forced to marry a Taliban soldier. Islamists

regularly compel families to give them their unmarried daughters as spouses. Other families choose to marry off their daughter to a Talib in order to obtain familial protection. Although the Taliban issued an order in December 2021 outlawing forced marriages, this does not safeguard the females (Najibullah, 2008) (Joya and Rukhshana, 2023). According to Afghan women's rights campaigner Soraya Sobhran (Medicamondiale, 2022), "many young girls are at risk of forced marriage as the famine raging in Afghanistan drives people to desperation - they sell their daughters in the hope of at least saving the rest of their family from starvation."

#### **4. Losing Education Right**

According to UNESCO (UNESCO, 2023), everyone has the right to an education. Everybody. However, in Afghanistan, girls and women are denied this essential freedom. They are no longer authorized to attend high school or further education. Despite numerous obstacles, this unfortunate decision threatens to undermine major educational achievements made over the previous 20 years. It also makes Afghanistan the only country in the world that today restricts girls' and women's access to education. Because educated women are vital to the country's success, the country risks losing a generation. Afghanistan, like any other country, cannot advance if half of its citizens are denied the right to an education and participation in public life.

According to a UNESCO evaluation, between 2001 and 2018, the country's enrollment at all levels of education increased tenfold, from over 1 million in 2001 to about 10 million in 2018. The number of girls enrolled in primary school increased from practically nil in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2018. Four out of every ten primary school students will be female by August 2021. Women's involvement in higher education in Afghanistan has nearly quadrupled, from 5,000 in 2001 to more than 100,000 by 2021. Over time, women's literacy rates than doubled, climbing from 17% in 2001 to over 30% for all age groups combined.

Since September 2021, all Afghan females over the age of 12 have been forbidden from returning to school, leaving 1.1 million girls and young women without access to formal education. Currently, 80% of Afghan school-aged girls and young women (2.5 million people) are not enrolled. In Afghanistan, over 30% of girls have never attended elementary school. University education for women was

prohibited in December 2022 until further notice, affecting over 100,000 female students at government and private higher education institutions. Between 2001 and 2018, the number of women enrolled in higher education nearly doubled, and before the current suspension, one out of every three young women was enrolled. At the moment, there are no girls enrolled in secondary school, high school, or university (UNESCO, 2023),

## **5. Opportunities to Work**

Since the Taliban took over the nation, the majority of women who worked have stayed at home, others are allowed to work but only in the company of a male relative (mahram), and some have been fired. Fear of intimidation has led to the resignation of 84% of female journalists by August 2022. Female attorneys and judges have been usually forbidden from working and are suffering immensely as a result (The World, 2022).

According to recent numbers issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (ILO, 2023), female employment in Afghanistan has dropped dramatically since the Taliban leadership took power in 2021. Female employment in the fourth quarter of 2022 is expected to be 25% lower than in the second quarter of 2021, before the crisis. Male employment is down 7% during the same time period. Restrictions on women's labor-force participation have contributed to the fall. Home-based self-employment has become the major mode of women's labor-force involvement, preventing the figure from decreasing further. Restrictions on girls and women have serious consequences for their education and employment chances. Equal access for all young women and men to quality education and training, as well as good and productive work prospects, is a critical problem and priority for the Afghan economy and society's future. Youth employment has fallen by 25% in the fourth quarter of 2022 as compared to the second quarter of 2021 (ILO, 2023).

According to IUF (IUF, 2023) The Taliban has consistently ostracized women and girls, attempting to eliminate them from public life. They put in place school prohibitions, limited access to jobs, and severely limited women's freedom and movement. The Taliban's first measure was to prohibit women and children from attending high school beginning in September 2021. They then expanded the restriction to colleges, making it impossible for women to pursue higher education



options. This has severely impeded Afghan women's educational opportunities and intellectual growth. The Taliban issued a rule in December 2022 prohibiting Afghan women from working for non-governmental organizations. This impeded humanitarian operation even further and made it difficult for aid personnel to deliver critical assistance to families in need (IUF, 2023).

The existing scenario for female employees in Afghanistan is fraught with difficulties and constraints. The Taliban's regulations have limited women's access to job opportunities, prohibiting them from contributing to the labor force. Women are totally prohibited from working in some areas, denying them the opportunity to pursue their chosen professions or make a livelihood. Even in locations where women are permitted to work, they confront various challenges and restrictions. Gender segregation and restrictions on women's freedom of movement are imposed by the Taliban's radical and erroneous interpretation of Islamic law. These constraints make it difficult for women to travel to work or to pursue particular vocations.

These restrictions have a significant economic impact. Many women who formerly worked in fields like as education, healthcare, and government administration have been compelled to resign. This loss of income as well as professional fulfillment has harmed their economic empowerment and independence severely. Furthermore, societal stigma and conventional gender standards continue, impeding women's labor-force participation. Cultural prejudices and discriminatory behaviors jeopardize women's rights and capacity to seek work. Despite these obstacles, Afghan women laborers have shown great fortitude and tenacity. Many individuals (Women) have looked for new methods to help their families and communities, such as launching small enterprises from home or engaging in informal employment arrangements. Their unrelenting dedication demonstrates their fortitude in the face of hardship.

Finally, the contemporary position of female employees in Afghanistan is plagued with difficulties imposed by Taliban rules. However, Afghan women's tenacity and drive give optimism for a future in which they may fully engage in the labor sector and contribute to the development of their country (IUF, 2023).

## **6. Political Participation by Women**

Before the Taliban took power, women made about 27% of Afghanistan's legislators. Women accounted for 21% of all defense attorneys in the country, while 265 of the country's 1,951 judges were female. There is not a single woman serving as a minister, deputy minister, or in a decision-making role in the new Afghan administration under the Taliban dictatorship. The Ministry of Women's Affairs no longer exists. In its place, the Taliban has reintroduced the infamous Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which is responsible for carrying out the regime's sexist policies (Medicamondiale, 2022).

According to January 2021 statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a Geneva-based international network of national parliaments, women held just 6.5% of cabinet seats in Afghanistan before the Taliban took over the country. Now, the country enters the ranks of only a dozen other countries in which no women hold high-level positions in government. According to the most recent IPU statistics, these include Azerbaijan, Armenia, Brunei, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Vietnam, and Yemen (CNN, 2021)

The absence of women in Afghanistan's administration deviates from the worldwide trend. According to the IPU and UN Women, most countries have women in prominent government posts, and the number of countries with women as heads of state or in government is at an all-time high (UN Women, 2021)

Since 2005, when the first session of the elected assembly convened in three decades, Afghanistan's percentage of female parliamentary members has stayed around 27%. According to the 2004 Constitution, at least 68 of the 250 total seats in the lower house of parliament are designated for women, with two seats reserved for women in each of the country's 34 provinces. According to the IPU, Afghanistan might now join Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Yemen in having no women members of parliament (in lower or single parliamentary chambers). However, none of those countries prohibit women from holding public office, as the Taliban did in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Gender quotas for parliamentary seats do not exist in any of these countries (CNN, 2021) and (UN Women, 2021).

Rwanda has long held the greatest record for female representation in

parliament, with women presently holding 56% of seats across two houses. Women have 50% or more of the seats in parliament in Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates. However, despite an increase in the number of women in positions of political power, the data show that broad gender inequities exist.

Only 22 countries have a female head of state or government. The bulk of the countries headed by women are in Europe, including Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Germany, Iceland, and Norway. Meanwhile, Nepal and Bangladesh are the only two Asian countries with female leaders (CNN, 2021).

Women progressively emerged as a social, political, and economic force during the last two decades, and women served in the federal cabinet, but their voices for gender equality were rarely heard. More over a quarter of Afghanistan's parliamentarians were women in 2017, yet their requests for women's rights were dismissed. As the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated in the previous two decades, the falling representation of women in local government, as well as a lack of safety and protection for working women, were some of the difficulties that plagued women's political engagement in Afghanistan (Hashemy, et al., 2023). Unquestionably, a colorful presence of men and women at all levels is required to build a wealthy and stable Afghanistan. Participation of all strata, socioeconomic, and political groups is one of the criteria for the accomplishment of peace. As a result, as one of the groups most affected by conflict and violence, women's participation must be prioritized. It thinks that putting more women in positions of leadership will make the world a more peaceful place (Rivas and Safi, 2022).

## **G. Donor support to gender equality and women rights**

### **1. Donors from 1996 – 2001**

Between 1992 and 1996, the civil war years were marked by increased warfare in cities as rival Mujahideen parties fought for power, resulting in the displacement of many urban Afghans as internally displaced people inside the country or as refugees outside the country. Many Afghans welcomed the Taliban's arrival in Kabul in 1996, after they had brought relative peace and stability to the country's south and east. While many Kabulis had left the capital in the four years leading up to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in 1996, many public servants

remained and continued to work in different government offices under the Taliban, just as they had done under the Mujahideen. Sharia law was strictly enforced; penalties included hanging and amputation, and women were forbidden from working or accessing public areas unless they had a Maharam. The Taliban's main focus was the country's continuous struggle in the north, and several decisions, such as whether females should go to school, were reportedly postponed owing to security concerns. Despite this, women continued to work in the health sector in numerous locations, and limited schooling for younger girls, as well as home-based education for older girls, remained in diverse localities (Gall and Khuram, 2022).

Former UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) in Afghanistan director Antonio Donini observed that prior to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in 1996, the Mujahideen parties accepted humanitarian actors as "relatively neutral and impartial players... [while] for the Taliban, the targeting of civilians and the denial of access and humanitarian assistance became integral parts of their war strategy." This was notably evident during the embargo of supplies for civilians in the central highlands (Hazarajat) and the deaths of civilians during military actions in the north and in Hazarajat between 1997 and 2001 (Gall and Khuram, 2022: 6).

According to Donini, the aid community and donors identified three approaches to engaging with the Taliban regime: 1) principled; 2) accommodation; and 3) "duck-and-weave". Donini highlights that the third group using the "duck-and-weave" strategy were organizations that avoided connecting directly with Taliban "by working as far as possible with communities and counting on their support," and that the majority of NGOs were largely in the third category. Indeed, deep connections with local residents and commanders have been NGO practice for the past two decades, when they were depending on them for safety. Local elders were typically willing to advocate for NGOs' initiatives and negotiate with local commanders for permission to provide services (Minear and Smith, 2007).

Life in Kabul remained difficult throughout the Taliban's initial reign in the 1990s. The Taliban ordered all non-governmental organizations to transfer their Kabul offices to the Polytechnic University campus, which was in severe need of renovations, in the summer of 1998. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that refused to leave Kabul were told they had to leave, and 35 NGOs were evicted in July 1998. As a result, in protest of this decision, the European Commission stopped

all funding to Kabul, and NGOs projects providing health care, water and sanitation, feeding and vocational programs for about 400,000 people, as well as hospital staff salaries, were suspended. Eventually, other non-governmental organizations chose to undertake restorations in the compound, and the bulk of them returned to their old locations before the end of the year (Reuters, 1998).

From 1997 to 1999, 14 UN agencies received around 361 million USD through the UN Consolidated Appeal, accounting for 22% of NGO donations in 1998 and 33% of NGO money in 1999. During the same time period, 364 million USD were awarded to 160 ACBAR, NGO members. During this time period, the top four NGO expenditure sectors were health, demining, education, and agriculture. In Afghanistan, the resources managed by NGOs were similar to those managed by the UN (Atmar and Goodhand, 2002). By the summer of 2000, Donini stated, "a process of slow and incremental progress in engagement with the Taliban came to an abrupt halt when Mullah Omar issued Edict No. 8 prohibiting aid agencies from employing Afghan women except in the health sector." Political ties worsened from then on as the country faced a deepening humanitarian disaster as a result of drought and conflict. Despite evidence of a catastrophic drought, rated by the World Food Programme as the worst in 30 years, the UN Security Council continued sanctions in December 2000. Drought affected 12 million Afghans at the end of 2000, with 3-4 million suffering badly, causing many to relocate to urban areas (Minear and Smith, 2007). In June 2000, the Taliban also issued the Regulation on Domestic and International Non-Governmental Organization Activities in Afghanistan, with the purpose of strengthening control over NGOs. As there had previously been minimal duties, discussions on the different provisions of the regulation began between NGOs and the Ministry of Planning. According to the new legislation, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must re-register and deposit a quantity of money as a guarantee in a bank account, submit a work plan for approval to the Ministry of Planning, and submit "draft project documents for assessment and verification" to "the respective sectoral administrations." These restrictions were eventually incorporated into the NGO Law of 2005, but there was concern at the time that this was just another sign of the Taliban's increased interference in NGO activity." Tensions over non-governmental organization (NGO) activities had escalated again in the summer of 2001, when three faith-based NGOs' national and international

workers were imprisoned (accused of proselytization) and their offices were closed (Minear and Smith, 2007).

These difficulties were rapidly overshadowed by the events of September 11th, 2001 in New York, which resulted in the October 2001 invasion of Afghanistan by US-led coalition troops. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had already begun to evacuate international and national personnel from Afghanistan, and had relocated local national staff to regions outside of cities, away from Taliban military positions that were being attacked. The Taliban had been vanquished by the end of the year, and as a result of the Bonn conference in December 2001, the international community chose a new leader, Hamid Karzai, to lead Afghanistan through the next phase of transition to an Islamic Republic.

According to Atmar and Goodhand, the international community failed to "get to grips with the political dynamic of a complex, multi-layered conflict system" through sanctions, missile diplomacy, and assistance conditionality's during this era. NGOs and UN agencies carried out operations mostly based on humanitarian pragmatism, much of it in the form of short-term and emergency help, with some continuity in rural areas where NGOs had long worked. In their book, Atmar and Goodhand propose that rather than a radical shift in technique, aid organizations should focus on incremental reform and ongoing progress. Other recommendations for moving forward included utilizing more flexible and conflict-sensitive approaches in humanitarian assistance, as restoring peace to a country that had been divided by civil war for (then) over 20 years would be tough. Furthermore, donors and the UN were advised to focus long-term programming and provide systematic capacity building to local Afghan governments and institutions (Atmar and Goodhand, 2002).

During 1996 till 2011 donor supports were important in furthering women's empowerment in numerous ways and their support were indirectly in different fields such as: Education: Donations are frequently used to fund educational programs for girls and women. Supported healthcare initiatives that benefit women, such as maternity health, reproductive health services, and access to critical healthcare facilities. Economic Empowerment: Initiatives or microfinance programs aimed at assisting women in starting enterprises, gaining financial independence, and

supporting their families. Legal and social support organizations: Organizations that focus on legal assistance and advocacy for women's rights and have brought about systemic change by tackling gender-based discrimination, violence, and uneven legal rights. Technological and skill development: Provided women with access to technology and skill training, bridging the digital gender gap and empowered women to use technology for education, entrepreneurship, and networking. Overall, donors played an important role in tearing down obstacles and establishing chances for women to succeed by addressing the many facets of empowerment, such as education, healthcare, economic stability, legal rights, and cultural perspectives (Minear and Smith, 2007).

## **2. Donors from 2001 – 2021**

Despite the city's dire state, with no power, bombed-out buildings and roads, and filthy water, major donors, non-governmental organizations, and United Nations agencies relocated their headquarters from Pakistan to Kabul in 2002. They were outnumbered by Afghans coming home to various parts of Afghanistan. More than 1.2 million refugees returned from Pakistan in the first six months of 2002, more than three times the amount expected by UNHCR for that year. Returnees' determination to rebuild their homes and businesses was inspirational. For the next two years, aid actors were kept occupied by the immense rehabilitation and state-building demands. As embassies, multilateral funders, UN offices, and commercial businesses established themselves in Kabul, competition for skilled native personnel and lodging became fierce. President Hamid Karzai's new transitional authority required professional personnel as well, and several notable Afghans from non-governmental organizations were recruited for posts in the government, UN, and embassies. Afghanistan was one of the single largest recipients of bilateral and multilateral international Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the next 11 years (Jackson and Giustozzi, 2012).

Development projects such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) were pushed out across the country by the government in the early years of the Hamid Karzai regime, financed and monitored by the World Bank, and carried out by NGO partners. These projects were endeavors to provide local communities with services and decision-making capacity, with the government acting as a technical steward. As a result, these projects

generally avoided province and district-level authorities and did not provide them with a significant role of accountability or stewardship in development. National and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were seen as the faces of development in local communities, rather than the distant and distrusted central authority. Beginning in 2014, as the security situation deteriorated, development initiatives became more difficult to implement. Both sides in the fight occupied and assaulted health facilities and personnel, while the Citizens' Charter program, which followed the NSP, was first implemented only in one-third of the country's regions, which were thought to be the safest. NGO partners had to contend with Taliban activity in numerous locations even back then. Meanwhile, with donor assistance, Afghan civil society has expanded considerably, particularly in rapidly growing urban areas. "USAID said that it will "work with Afghan NGOs to assist in the establishment of a dynamic Afghan civil society capable of holding policymakers responsible, promoting democratic ideals, and engaging as full partners with the government and business sector in Afghanistan's economic and political growth." In December 2020, the Ministry of Economy listed 2,012 NGOs, including 1,764 national and 248 international NGOs, while the Ministry of Justice registered 3,935 Associations (MoEC, 2021).

Between 2015 and 2020, NGOs faced increased insecurity in the country, which meant that all NGOs, notably humanitarian actors, had to deal with collateral damage caused by fighting, as well as get access to and negotiate with the Taliban in various locations of the country. There was an upsurge in the killings and kidnappings of NGO staff in major cities, as well as greater government intervention in programs and pervasive corruption. President Ghani put pressure on international donors to commit 'on-budget' money (through the government) at successive donor conferences in order to have greater control over expected expenditure. While some funders agreed, others were cautious, and NGOs were concerned that their funding might be curtailed. This was notably true for national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups, which saw a decline in donor financing.

As a result of the Doha agreement between the US and the Taliban, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to collaborate more closely with the Taliban, not only on a local level, but also on a provincial and global level, through



the Doha political office and the Taliban's Military Council (Shura) in Quetta. Health NGOs encountered challenges such as health professionals being required to provide medical assistance on the front lines, increased pressure to recruit Taliban candidates at health facilities, and requests to charge a price for health contracts. Prior to 15 August 2021, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator met with the Taliban on a regular basis in Doha on behalf of the humanitarian community, where issues such as Taliban taxation and humanitarian access were discussed. NGOs faced a difficult environment during President Ghani's final year in office, including significant violence, massive numbers of displaced people owing to fighting and drought, hostility from parts of the administration, donor fatigue, and a rising robust Taliban opposition (Khan, 2020).

From 2001 to 2021, Afghan women received assistance from a variety of donors and organizations with the goal of improving their lives and empowering them in various ways According to World Bank (World Bank, 2021). Afghan women got assistance in the following areas:

**Education:** Donors funded projects to promote Afghan girls' and women's access to education. UNICEF, UNESCO, the Malala Fund, and other non-governmental organizations collaborated to build schools, provide scholarships, and promote women's literacy. **Healthcare:** Several foreign donors, notably the World Health Organization (WHO) and non-profit organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, financed healthcare programs in Afghanistan aimed at women. This included maternal health initiatives, access to reproductive healthcare, and women's health awareness campaigns. **Economic Empowerment:** Donors financed economic empowerment initiatives for Afghan women, such as microfinance projects, vocational training, and business chances. These initiatives were supported by organizations such as the World Bank, USAID, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). **Legal and human rights:** Several funders financed efforts promoting women's rights, legal protection, and access to justice. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and local Afghan non-governmental organizations campaigned to increase awareness and give legal aid to women. **Women's Empowerment and Leadership:** Efforts were made to support Afghan women's leadership training programs, mentorship efforts, and empowerment seminars. Women for Women International and the Afghan Women's Network engaged on capacity-building

initiatives. Donors gave help and support to Afghan women who were refugees or internally displaced as a result of violence and instability. Shelter, food, healthcare, and educational opportunities were among the services provided. These initiatives were part of a larger international effort to promote Afghan women's status and rights, acknowledging the substantial problems they faced as a result of cultural norms, violence, and political instability in the region (World Bank, 2021)

### **3. Donors post 15 August 2021**

Before August 2021, the Afghan economy was 75 percent dependant on foreign handouts. Following the Taliban's takeover of the country on August 15, 2021, donor governments, led by the United States, directed the World Bank to cut off approximately \$2 billion in outside international assistance that the bank had previously been disbursing through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) to pay the salaries of millions of teachers, health workers, and other essential workers, as well as through projects funded by the International Development Association. These massive financing sources provided purchasing power to millions of Afghan people, including many very poor households who benefited from pay-for-work, cash distribution, and livelihood aid programs. Additional fiscal assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), USAID, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was also curtailed. As a result, a huge number of Afghan households instantly lost their primary sources of income. According to a World Food Program study conducted in February, four out of every five households reported no or significantly reduced income in January 2022 (HRW, 2022).

The World Bank board presumably decided in early 2022 to resume distribution of some of these frozen payments, but the technical details of which funds would be released and how they would be paid remain uncertain. The abrupt cancellation of World Bank programs resulted in a considerable loss of purchasing power across the country, having a severe impact on both household and macroeconomic levels. Even if humanitarian groups are able to increase food and cash distributions in the future, it will not be enough to compensate for the impact of these cuts (WB, 2022). The US government used its veto authority at the World Bank to withdraw the Central Bank's credentials, barring it from accessing World Bank assets, grants, or assistance. In any case, the central bank would be unable to send these funds due to its lack of access to the international financial system (WB,

2022).

The US and other governments stopped recognizing the Central Bank's credentials, effectively blocking the bank's access to its foreign currency reserves on deposit at their central banks, including the New York Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, and other European central banks, which together held approximately \$9 billion of Afghanistan's foreign currency reserves, the majority of which - \$7 billion - was held at the New York Federal Reserve. Afghanistan's entire sovereign wealth is \$9 billion. Notably, approximately \$1 billion in assets have been deposited in Afghanistan by private participants, including companies (HRW, 2022).

According to the UNICEF Following the Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan in 2021, various international donors and organizations provided assistance to Afghan women in the areas of empowerment, safety, and education. During this vital moment, numerous NGOs, governments, and international entities launched different programs and gave financial assistance to Afghan women. Donors provided assistance to Afghan women in the following areas in since Aug 2021:

**Humanitarian Aid:** Donors and humanitarian groups gave emergency relief to Afghan women and their families affected by the fighting and displacement, including food, housing, healthcare, and hygiene kits. **Education and Vocational Training:** Efforts were made to support educational programs for girls and women, ensuring that they continue to have access to schooling and vocational training possibilities. Donors financed projects to create temporary learning centers and grant scholarships to Afghan women so that they might further their education. Donors funded healthcare facilities and activities that explicitly targeted women's health needs, such as reproductive health services, access to necessary pharmaceuticals, and medical treatment. **Protection and Advocacy:** Several groups and donors worked to defend Afghan women's rights by providing legal aid, campaigning for their rights, and providing shelters or safe spaces for those suffering threats or violence. **Financial and Livelihood Support:** Efforts were made to give financial aid, microloans, and livelihood support to Afghan women in order to help them support their families and establish economic independence. Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, and private contributors all contributed to these efforts. These projects were funded by countries such as the United States, European states, Canada, Australia, the United states, the World Bank, and a number of

international NGOs and philanthropic organizations (UNICEF, 2022).

## **H. Analysis/inference**

The secondary data collected in addition to the charts and figure's data, it can be inferred that the situation in Afghanistan is critical and distressing for Afghan woman's empowerment by the Taliban. Despite the countless efforts, development and achievements made by afghan women in the last two decades (2001-2021) besides before 1994, the limitations put the Taliban indicates consistent denial to woman's basic rights. Based on the analysis Taliban not only restricted Afghan women's right to have access to secondary education, economical contribution, own businesses, free movement, political participation, join sports, but also showed brutal violence and suppression to women's peaceful demonstration advocating for their fundamental human right such as the right to work, education and freedom of movement.

Furthermore, in the light of these findings, the Taliban's strict bans on female education have led to a significant drop with their academic enrollment, notably at private universities, consequently removing potential chances for girls to continue their education past the sixth grade. In addition to affecting cognitive growth, this restriction has made female students feel more hopeless, desperate, and anxious. According to information from several organizations, such as UNICEF, Reuters, the BBC, and CNN, the Taliban's efforts to shut down schools for girls over the sixth grade have left millions of Afghan women in tears. Additional studies show that denying Afghan women access to school has made their psychological suffering worse and increased their feelings of helplessness and loneliness.

Throughout Taliban's rule for the second time in Afghanistan, the evacuation of specialists that labored upon projects funded by the West or went overseas to study started generating a major brain drain and a decrease in educational standard. The lack of qualified experts and afghans unwillingness to return to Afghanistan are major threats to the stability and advancement educational institutions in the nation. Following the shutdown of educational establishments has been associated with an increase in self-harm, especially among girls between the ages of Fourteen and nineteen who make up an excessive amount of victims of self-immolation and attempts to commit suicide. Denying girls access to education increases their

vulnerability to mental health problems and suicide by robbing them of vital support networks and chances for social and psychological development.

Activities for public awareness are essential in questioning social norms and exposing myths about girls' education. These campaigns strive to generate support for educational initiatives and build an inclusive and empowering environment by highlighting the crucial role of girls' education for the development of communities and the country. Giving women the chance to pursue higher education and vocational training enables them to gain vital knowledge and skills that will improve their personal development and ability to contribute financially to their communities. Research has indicated that allocating resources towards the education of women results in noteworthy advantages, such as enhanced overall economic and social well-being.

Therefore, in order to defend Afghan women's rights and put pressure on the Taliban to keep their promises to gender equality and women's empowerment, the international community plays a crucial role. The international community may offer vital assistance and resources to protect the liberties and opportunities of Afghan women by utilizing diplomatic routes and global alliances.

The United Nations and its agencies could advocate for the reopening of schools for girls and confront the sexist practices of the Taliban administration by using their resources and influence. The UN can support Afghan women's voices being heard and the realization of their rights to education and public participation by means of diplomatic initiatives and international involvement.

Last but not the least, implementing comprehensive plans and tactics to restore Afghan women's freedom requires concerted efforts and tangible commitments from the Taliban administration. Afghan women can feel secure in their freedoms and their security by obtaining written assurances and agreements from the Taliban, which would create an atmosphere that will allow them to fully engage in society. Establishing optimism and confidence in girls' access to education requires parental assured safety and protection in both educational and professional settings of their daughters. Parents might be persuaded to prioritize their daughters' education and assist them in their academic endeavors by addressing security and safety-related concerns.

The analysis essentially highlights the diverse and extensive effects of the Taliban's restriction policy on Afghan society. It highlights how urgent it is to take coordinated effort to protect the rights and welfare of Afghan women and girls. It also highlights how crucial it is to promote cooperation with foreign partners, encourage community involvement, and advance gender equality in education.

## **i. Conclusion**

The feminist movement underwent a turning point when Second Wave Feminism emerged during the chaotic period 1960s–1980s. Feminist arguments have expanded significantly in this century, going beyond constitutional entitlements to explore the complex web of social as well as cultural injustices that women struggle with. Second Wave Feminism opened the way for revolutionary reform in society by challenging deeply embedded gender standards through promoting awareness and collaborative resistance. Furthermore, academic research on second-wave feminism's historical record has developed, recognizing the complexity of the independence of women's movements. Its historiography has been enhanced by narratives that acknowledge the achievements of working-class women, women of color, and lesbian women. Originally, these histories mostly focused on the experiences of white women. This comprehensive strategy highlights the various paths that women have explored in their quest for equality, underscoring the collaborative and groundbreaking characteristics of feminism.

Feminist activity is still vital today in 2024, as seen by the connection made between this historical evaluation and the current situation of Afghan women. The Taliban's resurgence to power brings serious threats to the advancements made in the last two decades regarding women's empowerment in Afghanistan, where these rights are essential for national development. The analyses made are meant to protect Afghan women's empowerment and provide them more authority when confronted with challenges. In order to secure and protect women's empowerment, upholding these primary actions is necessary, having the right to education, encouraging gender equality in the formulation of public policy, and encouraging community involvement, by employing international pressure.

As we illustrate how historical and contemporary feminist movements are intertwined by placing the quest for women's empowerment within the larger context

of second-wave feminism. The global movement for women's rights and gender equality is supported and encouraged by the lasting influence of Second Wave Feminism. To create a society that is more just and equitable for everyone, we must not hesitate as we negotiate the complexity of today's feminist environment in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's education system has been separated into 'formal' and 'informal' education categories during its contemporary nation-statehood. Both systems have had vicissitudes as a result of state- or ruler-led policies on the Islamization or de-Islamization of education, or as a result of certain political agendas/doctrine. Non-state and traditional institutions such as madrasas, mosques, and households are examples of 'informal' institutions. Modern or state-run schools and universities are examples of 'formal' institutions. With the United States and its allies' invasion in Afghanistan in 2001, which resulted in the Taliban's fall in late 2001, a new chapter in Afghanistan's educational category fluctuation was launched. Because of the years of civil conflict that blocked the road to education for both men and women, as well as the country's vast population of illiterates, this intervention paved the way for a regime that prioritized education. Following the Taliban's exit from power, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was created as a democratic administration, although it was short-lived, lasting just twenty years until being overthrown by the Taliban. Due to a paucity of studies on the fluctuation of education throughout the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the pressing need to examine the current state of education under the Taliban's second rule, this research was done utilizing a mixed-method approach.

According to the study's findings, the Taliban's reemergence to power through the Doha deal with the US and the installation of restrictive restrictions on education mostly harm girls and women, but the whole Afghan population suffers as well. It is unknown and might be investigated if the US had no cause to believe that the Taliban would not keep its pledges and obligations and would breach the agreement's implementation, including the right to education. Furthermore, the study revealed that the total number of female students who are unable to attend school, which includes all 12th-grade students in 2022 and all secondary school females in 2023, is anticipated to be about 2.6 million.

The international community must continue to give strong assistance to

Afghan women and reaffirm their commitment by taking meaningful steps to assist and realize the rights of Afghan women and girls, particularly their right to an education and work.

Priorities women's and girls' rights in all interactions with de facto authorities, and call for the urgent repeal of edicts and policies that violate women's and girls' rights. Take aggressive steps to assist Afghan women in participating in decision-making processes in and concerning Afghanistan. Increase support for Afghan women so that they may return to work, get aid and healthcare (especially reproductive healthcare), and live comfortably.

If the previous democratic regime in Afghanistan continued to work, Afghan women's advancement might be accelerated. As previously stated, Afghan women made significant progress between 2001 and 2021, but there have been rapid and significant reversals in women's rights and fundamental freedoms, affecting their right to work, access to education, basic health and protection services, and women's and girls' participation in the public sphere and decision-making procedures. The extra constraints imposed by the de-facto authorities (Taliban) through public and informal pronouncements normalizing gender discriminatory practices have resulted in women's civic space diminishing. Despite the Taliban's pledges that women's and girls' rights will be maintained under Islamic law, their rights are quickly eroding in all sectors of life. Because of the Taliban's policy towards women and girls in society. Fear and uncertainty among Afghan women have created a difficult and uncertain scenario for Afghan women, who are unsure what will happen to them. Furthermore, the extremely difficult situation has resulted in the exodus of millions of women to foreign lands with no economic or social guarantees in order to escape the Taliban extremist rule. In these circumstances, women's lives in Afghanistan are not only tense but also unpredictable.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the positive impact of education on women's empowerment in Afghanistan. It has also revealed the beneficial effects of women's empowerment on the country's economy, as well as the resolution of important issues through women's involvement in political groups. However, it is important to note that the situation of Afghan women has not always been favorable. From 1996 to 2001, they were completely marginalized and denied access to education. The establishment of a democratic regime in 2001 brought about



significant improvements in their status, with increased educational opportunities and achievements in various fields. Women actively participated in creating small businesses and also held important positions in government, including Ministerial and presidential advisory roles. Unfortunately, women's political involvement declined sharply after 2021, coinciding with the implementation of new laws that forbade their education beyond the secondary level and imposed severe restrictions on their lives and public appearances. Consequently, the opportunity for political activism became virtually non-existent for Afghan women. These new laws have had a negative impact on women and their empowerment.

By drawing parallels to the principles of Second Wave Feminism, which sought to challenge ingrained gender norms and advocate for comprehensive societal change, we can contextualize the struggles of Afghan women within a broader historical framework. Just as Second Wave Feminism addressed multifaceted inequalities faced by women, the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan encompasses challenges related to education, economic participation, and political representation. Through continued advocacy and the application of lessons learned from Second Wave Feminism, we can work towards a future where Afghan women are afforded the rights, opportunities, and freedoms they rightfully deserve.

As a result, the functions of international organizations and the international community are required and unavoidable. On the other side, the Taliban are in desperate need of international backing and recognition. Taking advantage of the Taliban's forced predicament, the international world must bind the Taliban to restore and safeguard the freedom and rights of women, children, and people in all areas of life. As a result, the study was created to provide a path forward to the international community for the restoration of women's rights in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated the positive impact of education on women's empowerment in Afghanistan. Women's intra-household decision-making authority in both financial and non-financial areas is positively related to education. Furthermore, education minimizes marital friction, particularly among women who are vulnerable to psychological abuse. Women's education also helps to the empowerment of other women. It has also revealed the beneficial effects of women's empowerment on the country's economy, as well as the resolution of important issues through women's involvement in political groups. However, it is important to note

that the situation of Afghan women has not always been favorable. From 1996 to 2001, they were completely marginalized and denied access to education. The establishment of a democratic regime in 2001 brought about significant improvements in their status, with increased educational opportunities and achievements in various fields. Women actively participated in creating small businesses and also held important positions in government, including Ministerial and presidential advisory roles. Unfortunately, women's political involvement declined sharply after 2021, coinciding with the implementation of new laws that forbade their education beyond the secondary level and imposed severe restrictions on their lives and public appearances. Consequently, the opportunity for political activism became virtually non-existent for Afghan women. These new laws have had a negative impact on women and their empowerment.

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