

## Gender Inequalities in Access to the Right to Education: The Consequences of the Taliban's Gender-based Educational Policy on Women in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

Since the Taliban's second takeover, Afghan women have faced significant threats to access to the right to education. The Taliban's gender-based policies hinder their right to equal and quality educational opportunities. This research article critically examines the existence of gender inequalities in women's access to the right to education, with a specific focus on the consequences of the Taliban's gender-based educational policies. The study employs a phenomenological approach, combining qualitative and desk methods, to comprehensively analyze the situation. Drawing on primary data collected through a questionnaire, this research presents an understanding of the factors affecting women due to the exclusion of women from access to education. It was found that the Taliban policies on education are based on gender. Gender inequality is the key to educational policies. The gender-based policy of the Taliban made women inferior to men and excluded them from the right to education. The study identifies that the policy of women's exclusion from the right to access education had major harmful consequences for Afghan women. The major consequences are the exclusion of women from society, increased unemployment among women, increased poverty among women who were the breadwinners of their houses, increased use of violence by men, forced marriages, psychological distress and depression, increased illiteracy rate among women, and masculinization of the policies and norms in the society.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality; Access to Education; Exclusion; Taliban; Gender-based Policy; Women; Afghanistan.

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## 1. Conceptual Framework

The origin of the concept of gender inequality lies within social justice theories. At the same time, it originates from the phenomenon of inequality. Generally, inequality is described as an imbalance in status, rights, and opportunities.<sup>1</sup> While the concept of inequalities has been seen from different perspectives, there are generally two types—income-based and rights-based inequalities. Income-based are “economic inequalities,” and rights-based are “inequalities in opportunities.”<sup>2</sup> Economic inequalities and inequalities in opportunities can be state-affected by gender. Therefore, the discussion of gender inequality arises. Gender inequality is the differences between men and women in endowments, constraints, or preferences.<sup>3</sup> Based on this definition, there are inequalities between the sexes in wealth or income, life expectancy, access to healthcare, quality education, or public services.<sup>4</sup> Since this article focuses on Gender inequalities in education, two things must be studied. First, a multi-dimensional approach to address the gender inequality in education; second, identifying enabling conditions, including equality of treatment and opportunity through equal policies.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Background and Reviewed Literature

Emma Watson says: “It is time that we all see gender as a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals.”<sup>6</sup>

Gender inequality has been an issue for years and has had an endless story of struggles toward a shift from inequality to equality. The inequality literature reveals that women witnessed many struggles. This caused feminist activism

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1. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, s.v. “Inequality,” accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/inequality?q=inequality>.
  2. “OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming - Concepts and Definitions,” United Nations, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>.
  3. Manuel Santos Silva and Stephan Klasen, “Gender inequality as a barrier to economic growth: a review of the theoretical literature,” *Review of Economics of Household* 19 (January 2021): 582, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09535-6>.
  4. Isis Gutierrez Martinex, Samina Saifuddin, and Rana Haq, “The United Nations’ Gender Inequality Index,” in *Handbook on Diversity and Inclusion Indices: A Research Compendium*, eds. Eddy S. Ng et al. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021), 83-84.
  5. Ramya Subrahmanian, “Gender Equality in Education: Definition and Measurements,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 25, no. 9 (July 2005): 406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2005.04.003>.
  6. Corinne Heller, “Emma Watson Gives Emotional, Powerful Speech at U.N. About Gender Inequality—Check out a Transcript and a Video,” E! Online, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.eonline.com/news/581276/emma-watson-gives-emotional-powerful-speech-at-u-n-about-gender-inequality-check-out-a-transcript-and-a-video>.

to fight for women's equality and rights.<sup>7</sup> These activists predominated in the 1970s. Feminism activism identifies that gender inequality rises from the structure of the gendered social orders.<sup>8</sup> These orders influenced women's rights in all eras, including unequal access to education.<sup>9</sup>

Although international human rights documents have emphasized equality between men and women, Afghan women are denied equal access to the right to education. The first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states: All human beings are born free and are equal in dignity and rights... Similarly, the second article of this declaration warns that all human beings without any distinction, including Race, color, gender, language, religion, or political opinions... deserve all the rights and freedoms mentioned in this declaration.<sup>10</sup> Article 26 of UDHR is about the right to education and states that education is everyone's right.<sup>11</sup> The third article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Afghanistan is also a member, states: The governments that are parties to this covenant undertake to ensure the equal rights of men and women in the use of the civil and political rights provided for in this covenant.<sup>12</sup> In the same way, the third article of the International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) states that the countries that are parties to this covenant undertake to ensure the equal rights of women and men in the use of all economic, social, and cultural rights stipulated in this covenant.<sup>13</sup> Article 13 of ICESCR emphasizes the recognition of the right to education by the member countries of the Covenant and states that the goal of education should be the full development of human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>14</sup>

The mentioned international documents state the human rights of women and men as a whole. However, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

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7. Arash Nekoie and Fabin Sinn, "A 5000-year-old history of the gender gap," World Economic Forum, accessed May 13, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/the-origin-of-the-gender-gap>.

8. Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist theories and politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

9. Lorber, *Gender Inequality*, 10.

10. UNGA, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, A/RES/217 A (III), 1948, Art. 1.

11. UNGA, UDHR, Art. 26.

12. Connie De La Vega, "Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966," in *International Human Rights Law Documents*, ed. Urfan Khaliq (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 86-88. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316677117.013>.

13. UNGA, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, A/RES/2200A (XXI), 1966, Art. 3.

14. UNGA, ICESCR, Art.13.

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the most important United Nations treaty on gender discrimination and defines gender discrimination as: “Any discrimination, exclusion or limitation based on gender in political, economic, social, cultural, civil fields. or any other field”<sup>15</sup> and prohibits all forms of discrimination against women. Afghanistan is also a member of this convention. According to the 10th article, the member states must provide the necessary measures to eliminate any discrimination against women and guarantee their equal rights with men in education.<sup>16</sup>

Providing equal access to education is one of the goals of the United Nations. As the fourth sustainable development goal of the United Nations states: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”<sup>17</sup> Because Afghanistan is a member of the United Nations, it has signed and ratified most human rights conventions. The Afghan government should strive to provide equal access to the right to education for women and men.

Gender inequality in access to education is that girls get less education than boys of the same social class.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the countries with greater gender inequality have lesser educational attainment.<sup>19</sup> There are several studies and reports addressing gender inequality in Afghanistan since Afghanistan's independence in 1919 and studies that focused on gender inequality in access to education in Afghanistan, specifically before the Taliban's second takeover and after.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Education Inequality in Afghanistan from 1919 to 2001

Inequality in education has been an issue for years. In 1919, while King Amanullah sat on the king's throne, the women's right to education changed to an active policy of the king to provide women access to education.<sup>21</sup> Therefore,

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15. UNGA, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, A/RES/34/180, 1979, Art. 1.

16. UNGA, CEDAW, Art. 10.

17. Ravi Kanbur, Ebrahim Patel, and Joseph E. Stiglitz, “Sustainable Development Goals and the Measurement of Economic and Social progress,” in *For Good Measure: Advancing Research on Well-Being Metrics Beyond GDP*, eds. Joseph E. Stiglitz et al. (OECD, 2018), 33.

18. Lorber, *Gender Inequality*, 1.

19. Laura E. Hirshfield and Emilie Glass, “Scientific and Medical Careers: Gender and Diversity,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, ed. B. Risman et al. (Cham: Springer, 2018): 479. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0>.

20. Zafar Shayan, “Gender Inequality in Education in Afghanistan: Access and Barriers,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 5 (2015): 278-279, [dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.55035](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.55035).

21. Sayed Mobin Hashimi, “The Educational, Social, and Political Status of Women in the Period of King Amanullah Khan,” *Academic Research in Educational Science* 4, no.10 (2023): 9.

primary school became compulsory for women. Besides compulsory schooling for girls, women also gained access to universities in and outside the country. For instance, many female students have been sent to Turkey to continue their studies.<sup>22</sup> Stepping toward gender equality in education in the time of Amanullah suffered a setback after Amanullah was toppled due to the usurpation by Amir Habibullah Kalakani. However, only nine months of Habibullah Kalakani's kingdom managed to repeal the women's access to education.<sup>23</sup> When King Nadir took power, the girl's schools reopened moderately. While Zahir Shah sat on the throne, he stepped toward gender equality in access to education by establishing elementary schools for girls. The first women's college in Kabul on the premises of Malalai School and expanding high schools in other provinces. For instance, the first girls' high school was established in Herat in 1957.<sup>24</sup>

Also, during King Zaher, in the sixties and the seventies of the 20th century, the Afghanistan education system reached its first peak in enrollment rates.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, general education was not introduced until 1975. When Daud Khan staged a coup against the king and declared himself president, he started his fundamental reforms by enacting a new constitution 1975 stipulating gender equality.<sup>26</sup> Based on Article 21 of this constitution, both women and men were equal. When Taraki, a socialist "Democratic People's Party of Afghanistan" got power in April 1978, radical reforms were decreed in education focusing on equal rights for men and women. More importantly, at least in the urban areas, both schools and universities were opened.<sup>27</sup> After the collapse of the communist regime in August 1992, Burhanuddin Muhammad Rabbani gained control of the Mujahedin- coalition government in Kabul and began conservative reforms.<sup>28</sup> During the Mujaheddin internal war, the school

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22. Kaan Diyarbakirlioglu and Sureya Yigit, "The Women of Afghanistan: Past and Present Challenges," *Journal of Social Science Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 209, <https://doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v4i2.11349>.

23. Khwajamir Mehtarkhan and Konya Meram, "History and Problems of Education in Afghanistan" *SHS Web of Conferences* 26 (2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20162601124>.

24. Hafizullah Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002), 69.

25. Hafiza Yazdani, "History of Formal Education and Influence of Politics in Afghanistan" *Journal of Peace Education and Social Justice* 14, no. 2 (2020): 129.

26. Martin Ewans "The Return of Daoud and the Saur Revolution," in *Afghanistan: A New History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 128– 137.

27. Uwe H. Bittlingmayer et al., *Education and Development in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019), 31.

28. Shireen Burki, "The politics of Zan from Amanullah to Karzai," in *Land of the Unconquerable*, ed. Jennifer Heath and Ashraf Zahedi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 45-59.

and university infrastructures were seriously affected and were frequently closed.<sup>29</sup>

After the Taliban took power for the first time in 1994, women were deprived of all their political, social, cultural, and economic rights.<sup>30</sup> Public education was at the top of their anti-woman policy based on The Deobandi Tariqat (school) and suffered a complete collapse.<sup>31</sup> This anti-women policy arose from the Deobandi Tariqat (school), a revivalist Sunni Islamic movement formed in the late 19th century in Deoband, India. The “Deobandi” is the most fundamentalist and aggressive interpretation of Islam. According to their traditionalistic view, they reformed Islamic education methodologically.<sup>32</sup> Since 1979, this school, which Salafism has influenced, has become particularly widespread in Pakistan and in the Pakistani refugee camps where groups of Afghans, who later formed the Taliban, could extensively study it. The Deobandi school had a strong influence, in particular on Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founding ‘father’ of the Taliban. He believed that, due to Afghanistan’s occupation by the Soviets (mainly Kufars or non-Muslims), the lack of Islamic rules had weakened the country and brought suffering among the Afghan population.<sup>33</sup> Such belief persuaded Mullah Mohammad Omar to gather a small group of madrasa students to overthrow the communist regime in Afghanistan and replace it with an Islamic government.<sup>34</sup> Upon his return to Afghanistan, in September 1994, Mullah Mohammad Omar gathered around him only 50 students, but soon around 15000 students from Pakistani madrassas joined his group of fighters. As a result, by February 1995 they took control over 12 Afghani provinces and grew to 25000 fighters. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan under the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” until 2001 and introduced the Deobandi Tariqat in Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> This Islamic Tariqat restricted human rights and, in particular, was not open to gender-based issues.

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29. Bittlingmayer et al., *Education and Development in Afghanistan*, 31.

30. “The Afghan Taliban,” Center for International Security and Cooperation, accessed 4 October 2023, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/afghan-taliban>.

31. Bittlingmayer et al., *Education and Development in Afghanistan*, 32.

32. Waqar Ali, Arshad Khan Bangash, and Muhammad Kaleem, “The Perspective of Deobandi Ulama Regarding the Economic Empowerment of Women” *Journal of Religious Studies of the University of Chitral* 1, no.1 (2017): 33.

33. Michael Rubin, “Who is Responsible for the Taliban?” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 6, no.1 (March 2002): 10.

34. Center for International Security and Cooperation, “The Afghan Taliban.”

35. Nur Azizah and Fahriyya Noor Ahsana, “The Role of UN Women in Addressing Women’s Rights in Afghanistan under Taliban,” *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 2 (December 2023): 141. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i2.57>.

The Taliban, through its second, also adheres to Deobandi Islam, a “pure” adherence to and implementation of Sharia law.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. Education Inequality in the Republic Era (2001-2021)

In the years since the first Taliban government was defeated in late 2001, despite the challenges, there has been a measurable improvement in Afghan women's right accessing to education. Between 2001 to 2018, the student enrollment increased from 1 million to 10 million in 2018. The number of girls in primary school increased from almost zero in 2001 to 2.5 million in 2018. Before the Taliban's second takeover, 4 out of 10 students in primary education were girls. Women's presence in Afghan higher education increased almost 20 times, from 5,000 female students in 2001 to over 100,000 in 2021. Literacy rates for women doubled during the period, from 17 percent of women being able to read and write in 2001 to nearly 30 percent for all age groups combined.<sup>37</sup> The adult Literacy rate between age 15 and older were 43 percent in total the share of male were 55.5 percent, and female were 29.8 percent.<sup>38</sup> The increase in female school enrollment is insufficient to address systemic inequities in women's education. While major challenges have existed in both school enrolment and higher education in Afghanistan. Therefore, despite improvement in the era of women's access to education, especially in higher education since 2001, the family and community attitudes towards women's education, financial barriers, security, and personal safety concerns were the major issues toward women in higher education.<sup>39</sup> It also stresses the very poor state of female education and identifies the socio-cultural norms, low economy, conflict, Radical religious beliefs, absurd misogynistic traditions, and physical and mental harms in educational environments as major challenges toward women's inequality in access to education in the republic era.<sup>40</sup>

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36. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan,” *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2006.10.006>.

37. “Let Girls and Women in Afghanistan Learn!” UNESCO, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/let-girls-and-women-afghanistan-learn>.

38. “International Literacy Day, Fact Sheet on Literacy in Afghanistan,” UNESCO, accessed April 21, 2023. <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/literacy-afghanistan-fact-sheet-2021.pdf>.

39. Hazrat Usman Mashwani, “Female Education in Afghanistan: Opportunities and Challenges,” *Social Science Research Network* 3, no. 11 (November 2017): 46-47.

40. Zafer Shayan, “Gender Inequality in Education in Afghanistan: Access and Barriers,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 5 (May 2015): 283. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.55035>.

## 5. Education Inequality in Afghanistan Since August 2021

Since August 2021, the Taliban's second take-over, inequality has reached its peak in Afghanistan. Education inequality has become the center of the Taliban policies. Schooling is limited to girls in primary school (1-6 classes) while secondary school (6-9) and high school (9-12) remain closed.<sup>41</sup> Of 1.1 million female students, 850 thousand of them are excluded from schools. This number represents almost 80 percent of the population of female students.<sup>42</sup> In December 2021 UN Women issued a “gender alert” on Afghanistan to analyze the impact of the Taliban takeover on gender equality and women’s right, the brief finds a concerning and rapid shift to normalizing discriminatory gender norms and minimizing Afghan women and girls’ access to education right<sup>43</sup> the recent ICCT research paper indicates based on the restriction on female education, the closer of schools and universities to female students, the Taliban is the most extreme approach to female education, and it is the return of the Taliban 1.0 “gender apartheid”.<sup>44</sup> A policy brief by Afghanistan Policy Lab analyzed the barriers to education for girls in Afghanistan and assessed its impacts on Afghan society of Taliban restrictions and this brief indicates that depriving women of has negative effects on the mental health and well-being of girls and harms Afghan society overall.<sup>45</sup> The UN Women, in its second gender alert, documents how the changing dynamics of Taliban policies impact women’s rights and gender equality.<sup>46</sup> This documentation shows that the education inequality and deprivation of female students from school increased the risk of

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41. Heather Barr, “Taliban Close Girls’ Secondary Schools in Afghanistan, Again,” Human Rights Watch, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/23/taliban-close-girls-secondary-schools-afghanistan-again>.

42. “80% of Secondary School Girls in Afghanistan Missing Out on Education,” Save The Children, accessed May 12, 2023, <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/majority-of-school-girls-in-afghanistan-missing-education#:~:text=KABUL%2C%20April%202022%20%E2%80%93%20Almost,girls%2C%20Save%20the%20Children%20said>.

43. “Gender alert I: Women’s rights in Afghanistan: Where are we now?” UN Women, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/gender-alert-womens-rights-in-afghanistan>.

44. Gina Vale, Devorah Margolin, and Farkhondeh Akbari, “Repeating the Past or Following Precedent? Contextualizing the Taliban 2.0’s Governance of Women,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, accessed May 23, 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/publication/repeating-past-or-following-precedent-contextualising-taliban-20s-governance-women>.

45. Muqadasa Ahmadzai, *The War on Schoolgirls: Responding to the Education Crisis in Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2023). <https://spia.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/Girls%20Education%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>.

46. “Gender Alert II: Women’s Rights in Afghanistan: One Year after the Taliban Take Over,” UN Women, accessed June 5, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/08/gender-alert-no-2-womens-rights-in-afghanistan-one-year-after-the-taliban-take-over>.

exploitation and abuse, including child and forced marriage.<sup>47</sup> Recently, the UNESCO report revealed that “Afghanistan is the only country in the world today to suspend girls’ and women’s access to education.”<sup>48</sup>

The report titled *The Taliban’s War on Women* by International Amnesty studied the women’s situation in Afghanistan from August 2021 to the end of January 2023. This report based on the available evidence found that girls have been targeted based on their gender.<sup>49</sup> Restricting Girls’ and women’s access to education beyond primary schools is a crime against humanity.<sup>50</sup> Under the relevant case law of the ICC and other international tribunals, similar violations of access to education right of access to education have been qualified as acts of persecution based on gender.<sup>51</sup> and the ban on women attending university and working for NGOs also provides evidence of gender discrimination.<sup>52</sup>

## 6. Methods

This study aims to understand the consequences of the gender-based educational policy of the Taliban on women deprived of education. To accomplish this, the research is designed as primarily qualitative, employing a semi-structured questionnaire with Afghan women students and men educational professionals. The questionnaire includes both guiding questions and open-ended questions in Persian language. The guiding questions were designed based on the theoretical understanding of the inequalities in education. The questionnaire focused on the perspective and recommendations of women affected by the policies as well as the perception of educated men on the Taliban education policies toward women. The questionnaire was shared with 500 women and 100 men with the cooperation of the WERA association through an online Google form, to which 378 women and 78 men responded accordingly. As well as the primary research, secondary data from

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47. Kater Clark, “Who Gets to Go to School? (1): What people told us about education since the Taliban took over,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, accessed 15 May 2023, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/rights-freedom/who-gets-to-go-to-school-1-what-people-told-us-about-education-since-the-taliban-took-over>.

48. UNESCO, “Let Girls and Women in Afghanistan Learn!”

49. “The Taliban’s War on Women: The Crime against Humanity of Gender Persecution in Afghanistan,” Amnesty International, accessed April 15, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/6789/2023/en>.

50. Amnesty International, “The Taliban’s War on Women.”

51. Amnesty International, “The Taliban’s War on Women.”

52. Belquis Ahmadi, “How the Taliban Enables Violence Against Women,” United States Institute of Peace, accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/12/how-taliban-enables-violence-against-women>.

reputable sources like the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations were used to supplement the primary findings. The desk research reviewed the related literature on the historical background of education inequality in Afghanistan to add to the reliability of the research findings.

**Table 1. Participant Detail**

|                               | <b>Background</b>   | <b>Number</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                 | Male                | 78            |
|                               | Female              | 378           |
| <b>Age</b>                    | 15-25               | 395           |
|                               | 26-35               | 59            |
|                               | 36-45               | 1             |
|                               | 46-65               | 1             |
| <b>Education</b>              | High School Student | 179           |
|                               | School Graduate     | 80            |
|                               | University Student  | 128           |
|                               | BA or BS Degree     | 51            |
|                               | Master              | 18            |
|                               | Ph.D.               | 0             |
| <b>Number of Participants</b> |                     | <b>456</b>    |

Most respondents are female high school, university, BA or BS Degree students, school graduates, and master's degree in the following order: 179, 80, 128, 51, and 18 women. No respondent holds a PhD degree. The largest number of respondents, 395 out of 456 who declared their age in the questionnaire, is in the age group 15-25, and 59 are in the age range 26-35.

**Table 2. Respondents' Provinces**

| <b>Province</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Female</b> |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------|
| Badakhshan      | 0           | 28            |
| Badghes         | 0           | 2             |
| Baghlan         | 0           | 8             |
| Balkh           | 32          | 58            |
| Bamiyan         | 0           | 10            |
| Daikundi        | 0           | 2             |
| Farah           | 0           | 2             |

|              |           |            |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Faryab       | 0         | 17         |
| Ghazni       | 0         | 1          |
| Herat        | 10        | 62         |
| Kabul        | 28        | 91         |
| Kandahar     | 4         | 33         |
| Kapisa       | 0         | 2          |
| Kunduz       | 0         | 8          |
| Nangarhar    | 4         | 29         |
| Nuristan     | 0         | 1          |
| Panjshir     | 0         | 3          |
| Parwan       | 0         | 3          |
| Samangan     | 0         | 11         |
| Sar e pol    | 0         | 3          |
| Takhar       | 0         | 4          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>78</b> | <b>378</b> |

The respondents were chosen “purposefully” through snowball sampling<sup>53</sup> based on the respondent's determination of their provinces in the questionnaire, respondents participated from 21 provinces of Afghanistan. Most of both female and male respondents are from Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Badakhshan. Through this questionnaire, women and men respondents were asked to identify the consequences of the Taliban takeover on women's right to education and suggest possible recommendations that could assist in persisting against the gender-based educational policy of the Taliban against Afghan women. Women's perception of the policies and recommendations are vital for assuring women's right to education and putting pressure on the Taliban by the international community. Perspectives of men respondents could help to understand the cultural aspects of women's right to education and gender balance in the educational policies. Table 2 shows the provinces of the participants.

## 7. Data analysis

The collected data from the questionnaire is analyzed through a phenomenological research approach.

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53. John. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, 2007), 126.

Through this method, authors focused on the commonality of the first-hand experience and knowledge of women deprived of education under the Taliban regime to know how the policies affected women's access to education (inequality in education) and the consequences on women.<sup>54</sup> The authors tried to interpret the meaning of “gender-based educational policies” through women's experience under the Taliban regime.

## **8. Results**

This section describes the respondents' perception of the Taliban gender-based implemented educational policy and its consequence on women's situation. The data analysis focuses on two themes. The first theme reviews the roots and causes of the Taliban educational policy. The second theme reveals how the Taliban's gender-based educational policies affect women's situation in society. The concept of gender-based policy reveals gender inequality in education meaning lesser educational attainment under the Taliban regime.

### **8.1. Review of the Taliban Education Policy: The Roots and Causes**

The review of the Taliban educational policies toward women has identified the origin of the policies and why they are positioned against women. The respondents shared a common perception of the causes and roots of the Taliban gender-based educational policy. Most of them believed that the origin of the Taliban's opposition to women's education is extremism, Islamic studies (Quran and Hadith), diversity of opinions among the Taliban leaders, external factors and the Taliban cultural beliefs. More than half of the respondents believed that being religiously extremist caused to opposition toward women's education. Of the total respondents, 58 respondents believe that the absence of ideological coordination among leaders of the Taliban is the reason for women's exclusion from education. Thirty-two respondents believe that the limitation of women's education to Islamic studies (Quran and Hadith) is the cause of their opposition and the rest 30 other respondents believe that external and cultural factors caused the opposition of the Taliban to women's education.

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54. Creswell, *Qualitative Choosing*, 126.

**Table 3. Respondent's Perception of the Origin of the Opposition**

| <b>Origin of Opposition</b>                     | <b>Number of Respondents</b> |
|---|------------------------------|
| Religious Extremism                             | 101                          |
| Diversity of opinions among the Taliban leaders | 58                           |
| Islamic studies (Quran and Hadith)              | 32                           |
| External and cultural factors                   | 30                           |
| All above                                       | 235                          |

## 8.2. The Goal of the Opposition

The respondents also identified what are the goals of the Taliban by excluding women's right to education. Most of the respondents (201 respondents) believe that their goal is to form an extremist government. Establishing a patriarchal is one of the options that 81 respondents believe to be the goal of the Taliban for excluding women from access to right to education. Sixty-nine respondents believe that their goal is to exclude women from academia. Fifty-five respondents believe that the Taliban wants to promote a misogynist culture in Afghanistan. Fifty respondents identified that the Taliban wants to implement Islamic rules by excluding women from the right to education.

**Table 4. Respondents' Perception of the Taliban Opposition's Goal for Women's Education**

| <b>The Goal of the Opposition</b> | <b>Number of Respondents</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Forming an extremist government   | 201                          |
| Establishment of patriarchy       | 81                           |
| Exclusion of women from academia  | 69                           |
| Promoting misogynist culture      | 55                           |
| Implementation of Islamic rules   | 50                           |

## 8.3. The Consequences of the Exclusion

In this section, we focused on the respondent's perception of the consequences of women's exclusion from the right to education. Respondents identified many consequences which are discussed below.

### 8.3.1. Women's Elimination from Society and Masculinization of Society

Most of the respondents, 449 out of 456 identified the exclusion of women from access to education as the main obstacle to women's progress in society.

Only 7 of them said that the development of women is not dependent on Taliban educational policies. The majority of the respondents stated that the continuation of the Taliban gender-based policy toward women's education will cause the gradual elimination of women from society, which will lead to a completely masculine society. A female respondent stated, "Taliban, with their misogynist and masculine policies toward women's education, want to eliminate women from society."<sup>55</sup>

### **8.3.2. Gender Inequality and Promoting Violence**

The respondents also identified that these policies not only led to the backwardness of women and gender inequality but also caused violations against women. A female respondent stated, "For the moment, the Taliban policy against women's education created an inconvenient situation for women's progress. Many women commit suicide, and most of them suffer from depression." Another female respondent stated, "By this policy, the women's achievements were destroyed, and their future changed to fear and terror."

Forced marriage is one of the consequences that respondents identified. A female respondent said, "As a result every year that girls fall behind in education, will go back several years. Child marriage and violence against women will increase."

### **8.3.3. Unemployment and Poverty**

It was identified that unemployment and poverty are two major consequences of women's exclusion from the right to education. Respondents explained that excluding women from the education section caused poverty since illiteracy causes unemployment in the formal sector, and it brings poverty. One of the female respondents stated, "We are also human and put years of effort into being accepted as men in society and hoping to be part of society. but the Taliban destroyed everything." Another female respondent stated, "Exclusion of women from education increased the risk of poverty among women. After the Taliban takeover, most women employed in the education sector left in poverty."

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55. Due to security threats and the commitment given to the research participants, more information about them will not be shared. Only the gender of the participant will be stated as male or female.

#### **8.3.4. An Increase in the Literacy Rate**

Most of the respondents showed their concern about the future of literacy in the country. They focused on women's exclusion from the right to education causing to huge increase in the illiteracy rate in the. They pointed out two things. First, the number of illiterate women. Second, the impact of women's illiteracy on the education of their children. A female respondent stated, "Educated women raise educated children. Uneducated women raise uneducated children."

Another female respondent stated, "In my opinion, since women create half of society their exclusion from education keeps half of the society in darkness." Consistently, another female respondent stated, "As the first period of the Taliban half of the society is kept in illiteracy and set in their houses as housewives."

#### **8.4. The Theoretical Concept of Gender-based Educational Policies**

The discussion identified gender inequality in education imposed on women by the Taliban in the form of their gender-based policies. The respondents identified that gender inequality in education had led to the elimination of women from the public sphere and masculinizing society. It also caused an increase in violence against women. Despite all other consequences, it brought poverty to the houses of women employed in the education sector. Despite the facts revealed from the perception of the respondents, the term "gender-based policies" is interpreted as preferring men to women while making policies. This concept arises from a masculine and unequal gender perception. Based on this term, women are inferior to men and excluded from their fundamental rights, such as inclusion in society and the right to access education and opportunities.

### **9. Discussion**

The concept of gender-based policy co-defined in this study as a result of gender inequality in access to education originates from policies where women's identity is considered inferior to men due to gender. The differentiation between genders in policies causes women to be victims of the policies. Therefore, considering gender-based policies, women are vulnerable in access to education and all other fundamental rights. In access to education, gender inequality is when girls get less education in comparison to boys of the

same social class.<sup>56</sup> This study which focused on the consequences of the education gender-based policies finds out the major consequences of this exclusion of women. This study found that the exclusion of women from the right to education ended in the elimination of women from society. This analysis supports the finding of the UN claiming the Taliban banned women's participation in public by imposing restrictions.<sup>57</sup> One of these restrictions is access to schools and universities. This study has also found that excluding women from education led to women's psychological distress. According to the findings of the study, many women tried and committed suicide and many other women experienced depression. This finding fits with the earlier research that claims after women's deprivation of education by the Taliban, many Afghan women have suffered from depression, which in some cases has led to suicide.<sup>58</sup> According to the findings of this study women's exclusion from education caused poverty among women. This finding confirms the UN report's finding. According to the UN report, by excluding women from education, the Taliban reduced their opportunity to make a living pushing them into poverty.<sup>59</sup> This study has found that since closing education doors to women, forced marriage among women has increased. This finding complies with the findings of International Amnesty that "the lack of educational and professional prospects for women and girls; families' perceived need to protect their daughters from marriage with a Taliban member; Taliban members forcing women and girls to marry them."<sup>60</sup>

More importantly, this study found that the exclusion of women from educational eras has led to violence against women. Depriving women from being in society has turned them into housewives. Based on the earlier research, the continuation of women's deprivation from education opportunities effectively contributes to entrenching patriarchal norms and

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56. Creswell, *Qualitative Choosing*, 1.

57. "Afghanistan: Taliban Attempting to Steadily Erase Women and Girls from Public Life- UN Experts," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/01/afghanistan-taliban-attempting-steadily-erase-women-and-girls-public-life-un#:~:text=%E2%80%9CToday%2C%20we%20are%20witnessing%20the,of%20the%20Ministry%20of%20Women's>.

58. "SPIA Reacts: Implications of the Taliban's Decision to Ban Women and Girls from Attending School in Afghanistan," Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, accessed April 10, 2023, <https://spia.princeton.edu/news/spia-reacts-implications-talibans-decision-ban-women-and-girls-attending-school-afghanistan>.

59. "UN: Taliban attempting to exclude women, girls from public life," *Aljazeera*, accessed April 18, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/17/un-taliban-attempting-to-exclude-women-girls-from-public-life>.

60. "Death in Slow Motion: Women and Girls Under Taliban Rule," Amnesty International, accessed April 22, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa11/5685/2022/en>.

practices.<sup>61</sup> As the result of patriarchal norms and practices men become controlling, aggressive, and dominant over women.<sup>62</sup> Dominating women by men causes violence against women. The study also identified that gender inequality in education caused an increase in the overall illiteracy rate in the country. Despite this, the UN report confirms that excluding women from education destroyed the two decades of progress during which literacy rates among women almost doubled.<sup>63</sup>

This study has also found that paralyzing the education system by the Taliban has caused the unemployment of a large number of women employees in the education sector since women constitute the majority of employees in the education sector. Based on the findings of the ILO, restrictions imposed by the Taliban on women have contributed to the sharp drop in women's employment; therefore, since the Taliban takeover, Afghan women's employment has fallen by 25 percent.<sup>64</sup>

## 10. Limitations and Strengths of the Study

There are limitations to this study. The first and the major limitation of this study is that the data was collected through Google form and it made it difficult for the researcher to investigate any doubt seen in the answers. The second limitation is that, due to the small number of respondents findings from this study cannot be generalized. Because due to the security problems, the respondents were only limited to 456 respondents. However, the claimed consequences of Taliban educational gender-based policies which have been identified from the experience and perception of the respondents are reliable through reports and findings of earlier contributions.

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61. Azza Karam, "Education as the Pathway towards Gender Equality," United Nations, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/education-pathway-towards-gender-equality>.

62. U. Niaz, "Violence against Women in South Asian Countries," *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 6, no. 3 (2003):173–84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-003-0171-9>.

63. "Afghanistan School Year Starts without Millions of Teenage Girls," *Aljazeera*, accessed May 20, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/23/afghanistan-school-year-starts-without-teenage-girls>.

64. "Female Employment Falls Sharply in Afghanistan After Taliban Takeover," accessed April 10, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-women-employment-falls-taliban/32306584.html#:~:text=Since%20seizing%20power%20in%20August,the%20home%2C%20and%20public%20life>.

### **11. Study Implications**

The study identifies the consequences of gender-based policies on women under the Taliban regime since Afghanistan fell into the hands of the Taliban for the second time. The study helps to reveal how gender inequality in education affected women under the Taliban regime. Future studies can explore the consequences of gender inequalities in other eras where there is a linkage between education and other eras. The study gives a glance at how policies are defined gender-based and how women can become the victims of the policy through their identity and gender. The study can be helpful for international and national human rights NGOs, activists, and researchers to consider the suffering of women in their future projects to consider women issues accordingly as it identifies the consequences of the Taliban gender-based educational policies on women under their regime.

### **12. Conclusion**

This study aimed to study the consequences of the Taliban educational policy on women. It was found that the Taliban policies on education are based on gender. Gender inequality is the key to the Taliban's educational policies. Therefore, the policies impacted women's access to the right to education. The gender-based policy of the Taliban made women inferior to men and excluded them from the right to education. The study identifies that the policy of women's exclusion from the right to access education had major harmful consequences for Afghan women. The ban of education doors to women has led to the exclusion of women from society, increased unemployment among women, increased poverty among women who are the breadwinners of their houses, the inequality of women in society by eliminating them from the education sector increased the use of violence by men against them. Therefore, the level of violence against women has increased, girls are forced to marry, the image of an unknown future through banning from access to education caused psychological distress and depression, the illiteracy rate among women has increased, and the policies and norms have gotten the masculine form in the society.

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