

**STUDYING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE
BANNING OF THE UNIVERSITY AND HIGH SCHOOL FOR AFGHAN'S GIRLS**
*ANÁLISE DA PERCEPÇÃO PÚBLICA E DAS ATITUDES SOBRE A PROIBIÇÃO
DO ACESSO À UNIVERSIDADE E AO ENSINO MÉDIO PARA MENINAS NO
AFEGANISTÃO*

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ABSTRACT

The issue of educational opportunities for Afghan girls has garnered global concern, particularly amidst political upheavals and social unrest in Afghanistan. This study explored the public perceptions and attitudes surrounding the contentious decision by the Taliban to ban universities and high schools for Afghan girls. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including online surveys and social media content analysis, this research aims to provide insights into the multifaceted perspectives on this issue. The sample comprising 651 (58% male, 42% female) people from diverse demographic backgrounds provides broad-spectrum perceptions and attitudes on the ban's societal impacts and women's empowerment. Preliminary findings indicate that 480 (73.70 %) of respondents experienced disruptions in their studies. However, public sentiments are shaped by the complex interplay of cultural, religious, political, and socio-economic variables towards the ban on girls' education. While certain segments of society express support for the ban, citing cultural traditions or religious beliefs, they don't acknowledge the pivotal role of education in advancing gender equality and societal progress. The study investigates the potential impact of the restriction on Afghan girls' aspirations, psychological well-being, and future opportunities. Results highlighted the significant challenges and resilience of those directly affected, including imprisonment, emotional and psychological violence, physical and sexual harassment, and so forth. The ban has far-reaching consequences, impacting not only their immediate access to schooling but also their long-term prospects. The ban's consequences are severe, perpetuating gender inequality, hindering societal development, and exacerbating socio-economic disparities. It undermines efforts toward gender empowerment and stability, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion. In conclusion, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives concerning the ban on education for Afghan girls. By elucidating the underlying factors shaping public attitudes, policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders need to develop new strategies to address this critical issue and promote equal and fair access to education for all.

Keywords: Education ban, Restrictions, Attitudes, Women empowerment, and Taliban.

RESUMO

A questão das oportunidades educacionais para meninas afegãs tem despertado preocupação global, especialmente em meio às turbulências políticas e à instabilidade social no Afeganistão. Este estudo explorou as percepções e atitudes do público em relação à polêmica decisão do Talibã de proibir o acesso de garotas afegãs às universidades e ao ensino médio. Utilizando uma abordagem de métodos mistos, incluindo pesquisas online e análise de conteúdo em redes sociais, a pesquisa busca oferecer insights sobre as diversas perspectivas em relação a essa questão. A amostra, composta por 651 pessoas (58% homens, 42% mulheres) de diferentes origens demográficas, revela percepções e atitudes abrangentes sobre os impactos sociais da proibição e o empoderamento feminino. Os

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resultados preliminares indicam que 480 (73,70%) dos entrevistados tiveram seus estudos interrompidos. No entanto, o sentimento público é moldado por uma complexa interação de variáveis culturais, religiosas, políticas e socioeconômicas em relação à proibição da educação feminina. Embora alguns segmentos da sociedade apoiem a medida, citando tradições culturais ou crenças religiosas, eles não reconhecem o papel crucial da educação no avanço da igualdade de gênero e no progresso social. O estudo investiga os possíveis impactos da restrição nas aspirações, no bem-estar psicológico e nas oportunidades futuras das jovens afegãs. Os resultados destacam os desafios significativos e a resiliência daqueles diretamente afetados, incluindo prisões, violência emocional e psicológica, assédio físico e sexual, entre outros. A proibição tem consequências profundas, afetando não apenas o acesso imediato à educação, mas também as perspectivas de longo prazo. Suas repercussões são graves, perpetuando a desigualdade de gênero, impedindo o desenvolvimento social e exacerbando disparidades socioeconômicas. Além disso, mina os esforços em direção ao empoderamento feminino e à estabilidade, reforçando ciclos de pobreza e exclusão. Em conclusão, este estudo oferece uma compreensão detalhada das diversas perspectivas sobre a proibição da educação para meninas afegãs. Ao elucidar os fatores subjacentes que moldam as atitudes públicas, formuladores de políticas, defensores e partes interessadas precisam desenvolver novas estratégias para enfrentar esse problema crítico e promover acesso igualitário e justo à educação para todos.

Palavras-chave: Proibição da educação, Restrições, Atitudes, Empoderamento feminino, Talibã.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Afghan people have experienced many challenges throughout history. Decades of external interference and internal conflicts have ravaged the country, demolished the cultural values and historical integrity (Lali, Zhang, and Arefi n.d.), displaced millions of people (Gall, 2013), destroyed the infrastructure and agricultural system (Formoli, 1995) and disrupted the education progress (Amiri and Jackson, 2021; Spink, 2005). Afghanistan's geographical location also renders it vulnerable to climate-related disasters such as droughts and floods, exacerbating precarious living conditions (Ikram et al., 2024; Sarwari, 2024).

The unstable condition of the country provided opportunities for the emergence of local religious extremists inspired by international radical groups, socio-cultural values, and traditional practices (Babury and Hayward, 2014). According to Noury and Special (Noury and Speciale, 2016). Society's radicalization has contributed to the restrictions on access to education, predominantly for women.

2. Historical Background

2.1. The Education System in Afghanistan

The Afghanistan education system started with religious studies and was shaped by the country's religion, culture, geopolitics, and societal norms throughout history (Babury and Hayward, 2014; Hamidi, 2024). According to Samady (Samady, 2001), during the eras of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, the region thrived as an intellectual hub, with monastic schools at the forefront of education. By the 7th century, Islamic education had supplanted previous religious teachings in Afghanistan. Mosques and Madrasas emerged as key centers for Islamic education, and over time, some Muslim scholars and clergy began to teach mathematics and natural sciences alongside the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (Khwajamir, 2016).

Prominent Muslim scholars such as Ebu Nasr Al-Farabi (Alpharabius) (d. 950), İbn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 1037), and Ebu Reyhan el-Biruni (d. 1061), born in historic Khorasan (included current Afghanistan), made significant contributions to mathematics and natural sciences (Khwajamir 2016; Reetz 2010; Samady 2001). According to Khwajamir (Khwajamir, 2016), cities like Herat, Ghur, Ghazni, and Balkh housed the most prominent Islamic educational centres. During the Abbasid period from the 8th to 13th centuries, education was highly valued, with Balkh alone being home to 400 Madrasas and 900 schools for children (Matthee, 1991). The Ghorid dynasty in the 12th and early 13th centuries also prioritized education, establishing Madrasas and Mosques in Bukhara, Herat, Ghazni, and Balkh (Khwajamir, 2016). This pattern continued from the 15th to the 16th century during the Timurid

dynasty, which saw the establishment of numerous Mosques, Madrasas, and libraries as hubs for knowledge dissemination in various fields such as theology, philosophy, literature, and sciences (Subtelny, 1988). In the 18th century, Mirwais Hotak, the first leader and founder of the Hotak dynasty, established Madrasas in various cities, particularly in Kandahar, to empower Afghan society (Wardak, 2017).

In the 19th century, Amir Sher Ali Khan⁹ played a pivotal role in structuring Afghanistan's formal education system, granting boys access to the classroom (Yazdani, 2020). He established two contemporary schools, Maktab-e-Mulki WA Khawanin (Royalty School) and Maktab-e-Harbiyah (Military School), in 1875. These institutions introduced modern educational practices, incorporating subjects like mathematics and natural sciences into their curricula (Yazdani, 2020; Yazdani and Devere, 2021).

However, during the reigns of Mohammad Yaqub Khan and Amir Abdul Raham Khan, the son and grandson of Amir Sher Ali Khan, respectively, little attention was given to the development of the formal education system (Yazdani, 2020). It was under Habibullah Khan's reign that efforts were made to restructure Afghanistan's formal education system (Khwajamir, 2016; Yazdani, 2020). In 1903, Habibullah Khan inaugurated Habibia High School, a modern institution with ten Afghan and Indian teachers and four hundred students (Yazdani and Devere, 2021; Zaki and Shedenova, 2013).

The modernist king Amanullah Khan (1919–1929), inspired by reform movements in Turkey, implemented significant reforms in Afghanistan, including granting civil rights to both women and men. He established numerous primary schools, high schools, teacher training centers, and military institutions as part of his reform agenda in Afghanistan. These institutions not only fostered political movements but also played a crucial role in shaping modern education in the country (Khan and Amin, 2015; Yazdani, 2020; Yazdani and Devere, 2021). However, Amanullah Khan's development plans had been facing significant challenges, including opposition from radical Islamists, societal resistance, and political instability (Khwajamir, 2016; Yazdani, 2020). Kabul University was founded in 1932 during the reign of King Mohammed Nadir Shah¹⁰ (1929-1933) (Welch and Wahidyar, 2013; Yazdani, 2020). It is noteworthy that before this year, schools and universities in Afghanistan were exclusively for the sons of noble and high-ranking government officials, excluding ethnic and religious minority groups as well as girls from the education system (Yazdani, 2020). Nadir Shah revoked women's right to vote and closed girls' schools, reversing the significant progress achieved in promoting gender equality and modern education during King Amanullah's reign.

Mohammed Zahir Shah (1933-1973) revived many of Amanullah Khan's initiatives, including enrolling girls in formal schools and allowing women to work in offices. His administration also focused on the construction of numerous primary, secondary, and high schools, vocational training institutes, and efforts to promote gender equality (Yazdani, 2020; Yazdani and Devere, 2021). In addition, three major universities, Nangarhar University in 1963, the Kabul Polytechnical University in 1969, and Balkh University in 1986, were established during Zahir Shah's reign (Welch and Wahidyar, 2013).

⁹ Historically and culturally the "Khan" often used as a title of respect, or given to tribal leaders, nobility, or people of significant social standing and influence.

¹⁰ In Persian language, the "Shah" is a title that means "king" or "monarch."

Daud Khan's government (1973–1978) paved the way for changes that allowed women to serve in parliament. As a result, Kubra Noorzai became the first female in Afghanistan's history to serve as the Minister of Public Health (Saba and Sulehria, 2017). Daud Khan's education reforms aimed to expand access to education in rural areas by making schools, increasing the number of teacher training centers, revising curricula, and promoting the national education identity. These reforms, however, once again faced challenges due to political instability and resistance by conservative factions (Barfield, 2022).

The Soviet Union-backed Communist government in Afghanistan (1978-1992) mandated girls' education to align its policies with those of the Soviet Union. This movement included signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1983, aimed at fostering the participation of girls and women in the country's development. Statistics from the early 1990s show that around 70% of teachers, 50% of government staff and university students, and 40% of doctors were women in Kabul (GABIJA and Rosamund 2023). The national curriculum also underwent substantial changes due to the heavy communist influence (Barfield, 2022).

During the Mujahideen government (1992-1996), the positive development in women's rights reversed, the education system and other civil institutions (Rubin, 2002) collapsed, and formal education declined in favour of religious schools (Khwajamir, 2016). The trend continued during the first reign of the Taliban (1996 to 2001), and all schools and institutions deemed incompatible with their ideology (Akhtar, 2008) were closed, and as a result, the central education system was completely paralyzed (Barfield, 2022).

2.2. Overview of education growth during the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Government (2002 -2021)

The Taliban's first administration collapsed in late 2001, and the opportunity reinforcement of Afghanistan's educational system had been achieved. The restoration of a democratic and inclusive central government and international cooperation provided a great chance for the initiatives and nationwide construction and reconstruction efforts in different areas. Schools and universities were reopened, and their quantity and quality progressed over time. The republic government and parliamentary systems were also established, and the participation of girls and women in education and the workforce experienced considerable improvement.

During this period, international aids were dedicated and utilized to improve the educational sector at all levels (Arooje and Burrridge, 2021), spanning from primary education to higher education and research centres (Yazdani, 2020). Efforts focused on reconstruction, modernization, and, most notably, prioritizing girls' education to enhance and support human and women's rights (De Leede and Brief, 2022; Hanif et al. 2022). Schools and universities' curricula were also updated nationwide (Mubashir, 2023). The 1964 constitution was reinstated, and in 2009, the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EVAW) was adopted by the Afghan government, defining and penalizing 22 types of violence, including rape, battery, forced marriage, and the prohibition of girls' and women's right to education (Islam, 2016). Consequently, the enrollment of girls in primary and secondary schools grew from 10% and 6% in 2003 to 33% and 39% by 2017 (GABIJA and Rosamund, 2023). By 2020, 21% of Afghan civil servants were women, including 16% in senior management levels. Additionally, 27% of Afghan members of parliament were women, a significant achievement, as there were no women in civil service or politics under the Taliban regime (GABIJA and Rosamund, 2023). There had been a sharp increase in the number of public

and private educational institutions, including schools and universities. However, despite this progress, due to insufficient honest human resources, hands on experiences in managing things rightly, widespread corruption, systematic discrimination, and security instability, a significant proportion of international supports were misused, and optimal development, particularly in education system had not been achieved (Easar et al. 2023; Momand 2019).

The Taliban's regaining of power in August 15, 2021, reversed Afghanistan's progress once again. This abrupt political change, resulting from the Doha agreement between the USA and the Taliban, brought immense disappointment and upheaval to the lives and ambitions of all Afghans. Developments were suspended, hundreds of thousands lost their jobs, millions fled the country, and socioeconomic prospects were destroyed (Verma, 2024). The deal negatively affected all but particularly affected women and ethnic minorities (Gaharwar n.d.). Women were deprived of their basic rights, such as education and employment, confined to their homes, and excluded from public life (Goldbaum and Rahim 2023; Hanif et al. 2022).

The Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Hibatullah, issued hundreds of decrees that signaled a continuation of their oppressive policies towards women, imposed restrictions on religious practices, and systematically excluded ethnic and religious minorities from both public and private sectors (Gaharwar n.d.; Graham 2023). Although gender-based violence and discrimination against women have deep historical roots in Afghanistan (Basu 2023; Bennoune 2022), the Taliban's bad treatment of women has always been the worst (Hamidi 2024; Hanif et al. 2022). Moreover, the Taliban tries to revise the educational curriculum in support of their ideology at all levels (Amiri and Jackson 2021).

The objective of this work is to investigate the positive impacts of education and employment of Afghan girls on the personal, societal, and country development and, in contrast, the negative effects of education deprivation will be discussed. In addition, Islamic recommendations about women's education and work will also be brought into attention. The findings of the study can be utilized as guidance in efforts to promote gender-inclusive education, women empowerment, and enhancing public information.

3. Literature of the Study

3.1. Attitudes and Perceptions

Societal perceptions and attitudes toward girls' education vary widely across cultures and continents, shaped by numerous factors, including religious beliefs (Boppart et al., 2013), cultural and traditional norms (Tang et al., 2023), and economic and political conditions (Spink, 2005). In numerous countries, attitudes and perceptions regarding education for girls have evolved, transitioning from a state of neglect or opposition to a recognition of its paramount importance. However, in Afghanistan, an unfortunate persistence of anti-feminist beliefs has been noted, which continue to undermine and challenge the progress of women in education (Stokes, Seritan, and Miller, 2016). Historically, in Afghanistan, entrenched gender roles relegated girls to domestic spheres (Meera and Yekta, 2021; Moghadam, 2002), while boys were prioritized for formal education (Hassan, 2023). This disparity was frequently associated with cultural norms and beliefs in biological determinism, which imposed limited roles for girls, primarily confined to marriage and motherhood. Misinterpretation of religious doctrines further contributed

to adverse attitudes towards girls' education, resulting in significant and long-lasting harm for Afghan women and girls, whose rights have been repeatedly violated. (Graham 2023; Hanif et al. 2022).

Economic factors also exert a profound influence on public attitudes toward girls' education (Jayachandran 2020; Noury and Speciale, 2016). For over four decades, the people of Afghanistan have struggled with poverty and economic instability (Arooje and Burrige, 2021), with education perceived as a luxury afforded only to boys, who are seen as future breadwinners (Hassan, 2023). In addition, the political structures and perspective significantly influence the policies and public perceptions and attitudes towards girls' education in Afghanistan (Grove, Remy, and Zeigler, 1974). As a result, each new regime tries to rebuild the nation's foundations, including education policies based on their values and beliefs from the ground (Moghadam, 2002). Thus, the education system has historically been based on political ideology (Amiri and Jackson, 2021). Advocacy and policy reforms are vital to promoting girls' education as a human right and are key to progress, though the path remains challenging.

3.2 Impact of Restrictions

The restrictions against women in Afghanistan have had harmful effects on women's empowerment, gender equality, human rights, freedoms, and overall well-being (Graham, 2023). Women's empowerment in Afghanistan is a multidimensional endeavor that involves tackling deep-rooted cultural traditions (Kumaran, 2014), societal norms and religious barriers (Akpojivi, 2019), systemic obstacles to gender equality (Baruah, 2023), and combating radicalism and extremism (Mahendru, 2021). To protect Afghan societies from radicalism and harmful cultural practices, it is crucial to empower women and equip them with a standard education. Ensuring women's access to quality education is the foremost strategic imperative for their empowerment (Saba and Almas, 2018). Education has been shown to empower women by equipping them with the necessary skills, confidence, and opportunities to enhance their lives, engage in society, participate in eco-political activities, and challenge discrimination, thereby driving positive societal change.

Since August 2021, Afghan women's steadfast determination and resilience have been evidenced by numerous demonstrations demanding rights, access to education, and participation in social practices and employment opportunities (Astuti and Abellya 2024). These acts of resistance have been harshly suppressed by the Taliban, with brave women facing imprisonment, torture, and severe privacy violations, and Afghan women are often subjected to strict dress codes and segregation in public spaces (Goldbaum and Rahim 2023), with limitations on their ability to travel or leave their homes without accompanying a man (Ahmed and Farid, 2024). The restrictions have also severely curtailed access to family planning services and maternal healthcare. Furthermore, the adoption of polygamy and the prevalence of child and forced marriages have increased, as urged by religious and Taliban leaders (Smit, 2021). This has resulted in elevated rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, exacerbating the already dire health challenges faced by Afghan women (Dadras, Hazratzai, and Dadras, 2023). Overall, the implementation of these restrictions has perpetuated gender inequality, marginalization, and human rights violations. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to dismantle discriminatory laws and practices, promote gender equality, and empower women to participate fully in all aspects of Afghan society.

3.3. Education is a basic right

According to UNICEF, education is a basic human right for every child "irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Unicef, 2018). The benefits of educating children are numerous, but human rights activists emphasize two primary reasons. First, it enables children to develop literacy, numeracy, and basic social and life skills necessary to secure a job, lead a fulfilling life, and become active members of a peaceful community (Larsen, Helland, and Holt, 2022). Second, the right to education itself supports human rights, helps overcome inequality, and empowers marginalized people (De Leede and Brief, 2022; Fredman, 2021). However, despite worldwide efforts, 122 million girls and 128 million boys are still out of school globally, and women "account for almost two-thirds of all adults unable to read.

Estimates indicate that there are approximately 12 million illiterate Afghans above the age of 15 (7.2 million females, 4.8 million males) out of a total population of 39.6 million people. UN agencies are concerned that the de facto government's actions may hinder women and girls' access to literacy, worsening poverty and stalling economic progress. (Unicef. -b). Research shows that the lack of access to education can lead to abuses such as domestic violence, child marriages, and young pregnancies for girls (De Paz et al. 2020). These circumstances can significantly impact a child's development both cognitively and socially (Larsen et al. 2022), especially when it prevents them from gaining essential foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy.

3.4. Impacts of Taliban's Policy and Religion

The Taliban has enforced policies that severely limit girls' education and restrict women's participation in public life. These measures have greatly affected secondary and higher education, curbing curricula, academic freedom, and institutional independence (Amiri and Jackson, 2021). The rise of the Taliban regime in the 1990s and its resurgence in 2021 brought catastrophic consequences for Afghan women, depriving them of participation in educational, cultural, and social spheres (Amiri and Jackson, 2021; Hanif et al., 2022). Amnesty International described Afghan women as "prisoners in their own house," highlighting the destructive impact of the Taliban's policies and rigid interpretations of religion on women and ethnic minorities (Amiri and Jackson, 2021; Graham, 2023). The Taliban's policies and strict religious interpretations have severely harmed Afghan women. A survey was conducted to explore the feasibility of implementing an AI-supported educational platform in Afghanistan, considering challenges such as internet connectivity, availability of electricity, access to digital devices, and time constraints (Karimy Azizullah, et al., Dec, 2024). Because of restrictions, this type of activity is also not stable.

3.5. International Contributions

A significant number of international NGOs, including USAID, UN agencies, and others, engaged in collaborative endeavors with local partners to provide funding for policy support and to enhance access to quality education. The focus of these efforts was on development, protection, welfare, and infrastructure for children and women (Unesco, 2020). International organizations helped shape educational policies and improve the system in Afghanistan. They contributed by developing curricula, building schools, equipping labs, training teachers, and promoting inclusive education in rural areas (Unesco, b). Since August 2021, the Taliban has implemented

stringent policies and clear violations of human rights, particularly women's rights, and the involvement of international organizations has been significantly reduced (ADELI, 2024; Amiri and Jackson, 2021). This has caused the closure of some NGO offices and a significant decrease in the presence and activities of these organizations across the country (Mubashir, 2023). The Taliban's restrictive environment has made it increasingly difficult for international NGOs to operate effectively, particularly those focused on promoting gender equality and education for women and girls (Babury and Hayward, 2014; Yazdani and Devere, 2021). Consequently, many international NGOs have had to either withdraw their programs, funds, or withdraw entirely, thereby limiting the support available for the Afghan education system and broader humanitarian activities.

4 METHODOLOGY

This combines both qualitative (in-depth review) and quantitative approaches (online survey design) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

4.1. Instrument and Variables

The online survey form included a closed-ended five-point Likert scale with a score range of ("1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree"). The instrument was developed by experts to identify public perceptions and attitudes towards girls' education barriers and conceptualized into eight main domains as follows:

- **Demographic Information:** The initial section gathered data on respondents' demographic data.
- **Attitudes and Perceptions (AP):** Respondents were asked to express their opinions and attitudes across eight items related to three subscales.
- **Violations of Girls' Basic Rights (VAGBR):** Five items were focused on rating the respondents' perceptions of violations against girls' basic rights resulting from two subscales.
- **Women Empowerment (WE):** Women empowerment served as the variable comprising seven items that evaluated two subscales.
- **Policy and Religion (PR):** Seven items were conceptualized into two subscales.
- **Impacts of Restrictions Against Women (IRAW):** Eight items were used to assess the impact of restrictions against women under two subscales.
- **International Contributions (IC):** In this section, five items were used to evaluate the international efforts aimed at alleviating limitations via two subscales.
- **Urgent Actions (UA):** The final part of the questionnaire gauged opinions on urgent actions concerning two subscales.

4.2. Sampling

Due to limitations and security concerns of in-person, this research employed online survey techniques (Ball 2019). The data was collected between February and March 2024 using the Google form online. To gain a high number of respondents, the questionnaire was distributed through target sampling. To further ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the inter-rate technique was used (Kane 2012). In addition, the instrument

was distributed to 30 participants as a pilot study, and its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 82$).

This study originally comprised 662 respondents, but due to outliers and missing data, the final sample consisted of 651 respondents (Male = 57.60%, and Female = 42.40% who have internet access in four regions of Afghanistan: East-Southeast 185 (38.60%), North 85 (17.75%), South-Southeast 107 (22.35%), and West 103 (21.30%). Table I provides various demographics distributions such as each age range (18-55), of which the age group (25-34) had the highest number, accounting for approximately 46.20% of the total respondents surveyed. In contrast, the age group (45-54) had the lowest number, making up approximately 2.50% of the total respondents surveyed. Moreover, the respondents were also divided according to the respondent's status of work employed in Afghanistan (18.59%), outside of Afghanistan (15.36%), students (29.03%), unemployed (26.57%), and other (10.45%). Out of the all respondents, approximately 73.70% reported being affected by the restrictions imposed by the Taliban.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM SAMPLE, (N=651)

Demographic Data			
Variables and Items		N	%
Gender	Male	375	57.60%
	Female	276	42.40%
Age group	18 - 24	232	35.64%
	25 -34	301	46.24%
	35 - 44	101	15.51%
	45 - 55	17	2.61%
Status of Work	Employed in Afghanistan	121	18.59%
	Employed in outside	100	15.36%
	Student	189	29.03%
	Unemployed	173	26.57%
	Other	68	10.45%
Status of Study	Less than 12th	4	0.60%
	Diploma	11	1.70%
	Semi-High-Edu	6	0.09%
	Bachelor	69	10.6%
	Master	58	8.09%
	PhD	23	3.50%
	Not complete	480	73.70%

Table II presents a comparison of the impact of restrictions across various educational levels. The data reveals that most affected respondents were those pursuing a master's degree, comprising 38.1% individuals. This was followed by those pursuing a bachelor's degree, with 31.30% affected respondents

TABLE II. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS (N= 480)

Level of Education	East and Southeast (%)	North (%)	South and Southeast (%)	West (%)
>12th	2.71%	1.46%	1.25%	1.25%
Diploma	1.46%	0.21%	0.63%	1.46%
Semi-High-Education	0.83%	0.42%	1.04%	1.04%
Bachelor	9.79%	5.00%	5.63%	10.83%
Master	15.21%	6.25%	11.04%	5.63%
PhD	8.54%	4.38%	2.71%	1.25%
Total	38.54%	17.71	22.29%	21.26%

4.3. Data Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was selected to identify the most significant factors in this study. Firstly, we examined the internal consistency of the data using Cronbach's alphas presented in Table III. All test results yielded *p-values* below the 5% significance level, confirming the satisfaction of this regression analysis prerequisite. Furthermore, we assessed multicollinearity across all models. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were well below 10, indicating no issues with multicollinearity.

5 RESULTS

Table III presents seven conceptualized scales, each comprising multiple indicators relevant to their respective categories, to evaluate respondents' perceptions of the ban on the education of Afghan girls at universities and high schools. Descriptive statistics were used to assess the reliability and consistency of these perceptions. The AP scale (Mean = 4.32, SD = 0.78) included three indicators, while the VAGBR (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.88) and WE (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.98) scales were assessed using two indicators each. Similarly, the PR scale (Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.76) and IRAW scale (Mean = 4.36, SD = 0.72) were evaluated using two items each.

Among the scales, the IC (Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.79) highlighted the significance of external collaboration and religious efforts to reopen educational centers, and the UA scale (Mean = 4.04, SD = 0.74) underscored the need for alternative education strategies to advocate for and promote girls' education in Afghanistan.

TABLE III. DESCRIPTION OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES AND CRONBACH ALPHAS (N= 480)

Variables and items included symbols	Mean (SD)	Var	α
Attitudes and Perceptions (AP)	4.32 (0.78)	0.55	0.95
Disruption of the general development of society	4.35 (0.76)	0.58	
Decline in girls' education	4.38 (0.78)	0.61	
Negative impact on social balance	4.22 (0.80)	0.63	
Violations Against Girls' Basic Rights (VAGBR)	3.85 (0.88)	0.52	0.78

Violates basic rights	3.73 (0.72)	0.99	
Does not violate basic rights	4.33 (0.77)	0.60	
Women Empowerment (WE)	3.74 (0.80)	0.63	0.91
Empowerment and capacity building	3.28 (0.67)	0.46	
Social awareness and cultural impact	4.20 (0.93)	0.86	
Policy and Religious (PR)	3.12 (0.76)	0.57	0.71
Cultural and religious values	2.62 (0.85)	0.72	
Political and strategic considerations	3.61 (0.91)	0.84	
Impacts of Restrictions Against Women (IRAW)	4.36 (0.72)	0.45	0.96
Socioeconomic and developmental impacts	4.45 (0.68)	0.46	
Health and security concerns	4.26 (0.75)	0.57	
International Contributions (IC)	3.98 (0.79)	0.50	0.79
External collaboration and support	3.88 (0.76)	0.58	
Religious and Islamic influence	4.08 (0.81)	0.66	
Urgent Actions (UA)	4.04 (0.74)	0.38	0.80
Alternative educational methods within Afghanistan	3.81 (0.63)	0.40	
Education opportunities outside Afghanistan	4.27 (0.85)	0.72	

Values of the α coefficient for all scales' scores were presented in Table IV. The corresponding inter-variable correlation matrix with a mean inter-variable correlation of 0.349 and analyzed at the subscale level (correlation matrix in Table V), the coefficient alpha for the total scale scores was estimated to be 0.79.

TABLE IV. RESULTS OF REGRESSION MODEL DEPENDENT VARIABLES: ($R^2 = 0.49$; $N = 651$)

Variables	β	t	P-Value	95% conf. int	
AP	0.22	6.66	0.00	0.16	0.29
VAGBR	0.11	3.68	0.00	0.05	0.17
WE	0.11	3.93	0.00	0.06	0.17

Variables	β	t	P-Value	95% conf. int	
PR	0.45	11.23	0.00	0.37	0.53
IRAW	0.01	0.42	0.67	-0.05	0.08
IC	0.10	2.33	0.02	0.01	0.18
UA	0.27	1.52	0.13	-0.08	0.62

Table IV shows the regression analysis suggests that AP ($\beta = 0.22, t = 6.66, p < 0.05$), VAGBR ($\beta = 0.11, t = 3.68, p < 0.05$), WE ($\beta = 0.11, t = 3.93, p < 0.05$), PR ($\beta = 0.45, t = 11.23, p < 0.05$), and IC ($\beta = 0.10, t = 2.33, p < 0.05$) are statistically significant predictors of the dependent variable, while IRAW ($\beta = 0.01, t = 0.42, p > 0.05$) and UA ($\beta = 0.27, t = 1.52, p > 0.05$) are not significant in this model. PR has the highest coefficient, indicating that 45% of respondents associate the policy and religious of Taliban has strong positive impact on restriction against women. However, the R^2 value of 0.49 indicates that approximately 49% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables included in the model.

TABLE V. INTERCORRELATION MATRIX (N = 651)

Variable s	AP	VAGB R	WE	PR	IRA W	IC	U A
AP	1.0 0						
VAGBR	0.5 0	1.00					
WE	0.4 2	0.34	1.0 0				
PR	0.2 6	0.16	0.1 3	1.0 0			
IRAW	0.6 3	0.47	0.4 4	0.2 1	1.00		
IC	0.3 4	0.28	0.2 6	0.1 3	0.43	1.0 0	
UA	0.4 0	0.31	0.3 5	0.1 5	0.45	0.4 6	1.0

6 DISCUSSION

The research concluded that educational restrictions significantly impact Afghan girls' personal development and societal progress. Key findings include:

Education restrictions have brought huge shock and disappointment for students, parents, people, and human rights activists. Students pursuing higher education face the greatest challenges due to the restrictions. It has been obvious violence against students and parents' ambitions, investments, time, and dedication. As a result of these restrictions, many were forced to leave the country, and millions of female students and staff were confined to their homes. According to reports, forced marriage and suicide have increased among women and girls due to

the cruel restrictions of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the local socio-economic factors, cultural values, and supportive infrastructures influence how students are affected.

6.1. Negative Societal Impact

The education ban disrupts overall public awareness, affects economic productivity, and undermines community resilience. The strong negative attitudes and perceptions toward the societal disruption caused by the education ban and restrictions were also highlighted as a concern by UNICEF in 2024 and UNESCO in 2023 (Anon n.d.-d, Anon n.d.-c). The positive beta value suggests that the increasingly strong negative public attitudes and perceptions are acutely aware of the long-term detrimental effects on societal development. The U.S. National Academies and Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have warned that education bans on Afghan girls and restrictions on women prevent societies from reaping these benefits, leading to adverse impacts on economic productivity and community resilience.

6.2. Human Rights Concerns

The education bans and restrictions against women are perceived as a significant violation of basic rights, with strong negative attitudes towards these restrictions. Violation against women is an extreme human rights concern with profound implications for gender equality, individual freedoms, and societal progress (Basu, 2023). In this work, violations against girls' basic rights also emerge as a significant predictor, underscoring the importance of recognizing serious human rights violations stemming from the ban and understanding the harmful impact of the restrictions. However, respondents who perceive greater violations of basic rights tend to have stronger negative perceptions of the educational bans and implemented restrictions by the Taliban, which are in line with the findings of ADELI (2024; Ahmed and Farid 2024; Basu 2023; Moorehead, 2023). Addressing these concerns needs sustained international attention, advocacy, and support for those working to secure the right to education for all.

6.3. Women Empowerment

While there is concern over the negative impact on women's capacities, there is also recognition of the potential for overcoming obstacles. The findings indicate that education bans have significantly undermined women's empowerment by restricting them from social inclusion, economic activities, political practices, and healthcare. In this work, the respondents concerned toward women empowerment are likely to perceive the restrictions negatively (Baruah, 2023; Jayachandran, 2020), but this variability suggests social awareness and cultural impact about the potential for women to overcome these obstacles, as well these finding supported by (Baruah 2023; Bennoune, 2022). Addressing this concern is crucial for the societal progress in Afghanistan, which requires more attention from both international and local communities to find fundamental and innovative solutions and exert pressure on the de facto government to change their inhuman policies against women.

6.4. International Support

There is strong support and demand from international assistance and recommendations by international NGOs and Islamic figures to address the restrictions. The respondents strongly believe that external pressures such

as diplomatic efforts (bilateral diplomacy, and multilateral pressure), advocacy (human rights organization and education NGOs), economic leverage (conditional aid, and sanctions), supporting the civil societies and grassroots movements, as well as recommendations from Islamic figures, are crucial for ending the restrictions (Amiry, Hashemi, and Ramazan, 2024; Kumaran, 2014). It is anticipated that these pressures will be detrimental to achieving lasting change and ensuring that Afghan women retain their fundamental rights and freedoms.

6.5 Policy Recommendations

The research suggests that effective strategies and policies are needed to promote gender-inclusive education and address the challenges posed by the ban. In this work, the policies and religious order reveal more nuanced views on adherence to Islamic and cultural values. The findings preserve that there exists for maintaining cultural values and religious concerns, meanwhile, there are significant issues over how the Taliban's beliefs and policies, as well as cultural values, are being used to justify the education ban (Amiri and Jackson, 2021). This underscores the harmful impact of Taliban policies and religious values narratives on shaping education and implementing restrictions against women and girls via force and pressure, which is in line with existing research (Adeli, 2024; Alina, 2021; Barfield, 2022). Implementing such policies demonstrates how widely acknowledged it is that depriving women from social practices, access to public areas, and particularly education, has serious far-reaching negative effects.

It is essential to address this issue with comprehensive policy approaches such as alternative educational models, conditional international aid, diplomatic pressure, support for local civil society, economic empowerment, and legal advocacy. The International Islamic figure's recommendations are crucial and should include engaging in dialogue and policy advocacy, promoting inclusive interpretations of Islam, supporting the moderate local religious leaders, and conducting public awareness campaigns.

In this model, the constructs of impacts of restrictions against women and policies and religious are not statistically significant predictors. This is likely due to the low internal consistency of these constructions. The values of the beta coefficient of both constructs suggest a positive association, although the lack of statistical significance indicates that variables such as socioeconomics, health and security concerns, education opportunities, and alternative education strategies are not strongly predictive of attitudes in the current model.

7 CONCLUSION

Afghanistan's tumultuous history is riddled by conflicts, war, and periods of political instability that continuously disrupt its educational system and societal structures. Despite periods of progress, the long-term impact of its conflicts has historically exacerbated gender disparities, making it even more challenging to implement and sustain reforms. This history of gender inequality remains deeply rooted in traditional and cultural norms that have shaped attitudes towards women's education and have influenced the persistence of restrictive practices. The quantitative research presented in this paper, however, shows a clear consensus on the harmful effects of the education ban, suggesting that these norms may be shifting.

Understanding the attitudes and beliefs that drive harmful traditional norms helps to identify the underlying reasons why gender disparities persist in Afghanistan, particularly regarding education. The enduring nature of

these issues highlights the need for sustained and multifaceted approaches, such as using social behavior change-centered policies and programs, to address the barriers to girls' education.

The international community plays a key role in supporting the rights of Afghan women and girls. Research shows strong support for international aid and guidance from Islamic figures to counter restrictions. Organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO are addressing educational gaps through funding and programs to challenge harmful gender norms and expand opportunities for adolescent girls.

Despite these efforts, socio-political challenges and entrenched norms hinder progress. International pressure is essential to reopening schools and ensuring quality education for girls. Afghanistan's history highlights its people's resilience and the potential of women and girls to drive societal change when supported. This research aims to guide policymakers to promote Afghanistan's future, challenge harmful ideologies, and create lasting change for women and girls.

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