

The Impact of Lack of Education on Young Women in Afghanistan

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Abstract

WPS ranks financial inclusion for women in Afghanistan at 7.2%. As of 2021, only 16% of the population aged 15+ are in the workforce. Our project will create a space for women in Kabul aged 13-25 to come and receive training/education on skills that will allow them to get a job, with the goal of more economic freedom. There are many factors that contribute to this gender inequality in the workplace- the presence of the Taliban has introduced laws that restrict the education of women and their ability to participate in activities outside of the home. If the program is successful, it can increase women's freedoms and reduce economic loss in the country. Our focus will be on education and why women can only go to college for certain focuses, with the goal of expanding educational opportunities for women.

Statement of Need

Knowledge is only attainable through educational opportunity, and this is not a plausible route of success that is accessible to many of the 13-25 year-old females residing in Afghanistan.

Statistically speaking, we can look at specific areas like Kabul, the country's capital. The average overall school life expectancy measured in years according to the World Bank collection of development indicators was found to be just 6.5134 for females (UN News). This statistic makes sense when we realize that on March 23rd of last year, the Taliban government made a rule that girls cannot progress in school past the 6th grade. In accordance with The Washington Post, we see many other alarming statistics are evident. More than 45% of Afghan girls are not attending any sort of educational services or schooling, compared to just 20% of boys (Raghavan). This is an issue because we see psychological toles that coincide with this. A study found that 26% of girls are experiencing symptoms of depression, while 16% of boys are exhibiting the same symptoms (Raghavan). Not only is the current Afghan government robbing women of their scholarly pursuit but simultaneously negatively impacting the minds of the youth female population in a psychological sense. The presence of education that is seen for females in Afghanistan is far from commendable. Only 16% of schools in Afghanistan are girl-only, and even they lack proper sanitation facilities. The issue with this is that attendance is hindered even more when you are not in a sanitary environment to learn. If girls are not encouraged and welcomed to learn, they will not feel invited into the educational atmosphere. The Taliban government also implemented a female ban on all universities, so higher education is completely out of the realm of opportunity, thus deterring women from being able to get higher-income jobs in the future. With bans on schooling, limitations on future employment endeavors, and lack of a sanitary educational environment, it is understandable how the currently corrupt Afghanistan

government has destroyed opportunities for educational prosperity and equity among their young citizens.

History of Women's Education in Afghanistan

The history of women and their ability to get educated varies across time periods depending on who is in power. The Taliban is an Islamic extremist group that tries to control Middle Eastern countries like Afghanistan with promises to restore peace and security and enforce their own version of Sharia, or Islamic law, when they get into power. This law severely diminished the rights of women, seeing them as men's property and without autonomy. When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996, girls were banned from secondary education. This, however, did not stop them from their desire to expand their learning, so there are many reports of secret schools where many fearless teachers risked their lives to teach the girls. A 1997 report found that the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan supported 125 girls' schools during their rule, equating to almost 45,000 students attending in secrecy. While there are continued laws and policies in international organizations that emphasize the importance of education for women, it is rarely enforced and not continuously monitored, which allows for groups like the Taliban to do the terrible things they do. Post- Taliban (2002-2021), there was a huge expansion of women in education with increased social change. Then again in 2022, the Taliban seized power again, and since then secondary education for women has once again been banned.

Void In Knowledge

The advocacy of education for women in Afghanistan is necessary if the country wants to better its nation overall. Statistically, around 73-80% of young adults with a college degree find a job after they graduate, and it ranges around 68-74% for those who have just completed high school. It's recorded that around 18% of women are working in Afghanistan, and it is in large part due that most girls complete upwards to a fifth-grade education. This has led to an increase of child marriages and child labor, along with said children suffering from severe exhaustion and malnutrition. The lack of women working directly affects the nation's economy. A consequence of this is that Afghanistan's GDP stands at 14.79 billion USD, which ranks 113th out of 195 countries. Afghanistan has approximately seen about 0.2% of GDP growth in the last five years, and the trend it is following does not seem to show a promising increase. Women's lack of education directly affects the nation's future and whether or not they flourish. If women are continually denied the right to be educated, the life outcomes of girls and children will continue to decline and possibly reach a point where there is so much damage no recovery is possible. The quality of education is just as important, if not more than just the access to education as it will make women more skilled and more likely to expand their knowledge to other aspects of society in order to strengthen their fiscal conditions. With women being able to have accessible education, it can ensure that the country can improve the problems that they struggle with every day and ultimately give women more opportunities of making changes on a local or national scale for the betterment of Afghanistan.

What is Being Done

Many attempts have been made to help people, specifically women, become educated in Afghanistan. The most effective program seen is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO has been involved in helping improve Afghan women's and men's education for over 20 years. Originally they were providing education on a large scale to almost 600,000 Afghan people, with the majority of participants being women (UNESCO). Since the overturning of the Afghan government and women having access to education is now illegal, UNESCO has shifted its curriculum for educating women in an attempt to continue giving access to education for women. They shifted from a fully encompassed literacy program and skills development program to a community-taught literacy. This new education plan is now providing education to 25,000 Afghan individuals, 60% of which are Afghan women (UNESCO).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has been instrumental in the assistance of women gaining education in Afghanistan for many years, however their recent attempts to continue education of women has some shortcomings. UNESCO's new plan is reaching only four percent of the original number of people they were educating. This is largely due to the Taliban putting fear into women wanting to gain an education. They are fearful of the repercussions they may face if caught in schools. The Taliban instill intimidation tactics into the lives of women, along with the regular surveillance of communities by the Taliban to ensure the Afghan population is abiding by their new rules. The lack of safety that Afghan women feel is inhibiting more women from joining UNESCO's community-based educational program and therefore significantly lowering the overall population of women in school.

Our Proposal

In order for true change to occur in Afghanistan, some things need to happen in the government environment that are out of our control. However, there are multiple ways that people can combat the Taliban's attempt to reduce women's educational opportunities. Our proposal is to create holistic and skills-based educational programs for women to encourage economic independence. This would provide vocational training for women to give them specific skills that enable them to find jobs in fields or industries prevalent in that area. Not only would this benefit women being able to find jobs that would grant them economic security, but also would benefit industries in Afghanistan that need more qualified people to work. The Center for Strategic and International Studies deems this work necessary to push lesser developed countries toward progress, saying, "the need of the hour is to fast-track women's ability to play an equal role in economic growth without adding an unreasonable burden on resources". (Runde & Sundar, 2020)

A similar program was introduced to aid women in Saudi Arabia in 2020 during the COVID pandemic. Examples of vocational skills include painting and décor; buffet preparation; fashion technology; establishing entrepreneurship and small projects; beauty and hair care; the food industry; repairing computers and mobile phones; and using a computer for programming, web design, marketing, and photography (Alajlan, 2020).

There are also multiple ways that we can structure and push resources to help ensure that this program is as effective as it can be. One way that we can do this is by providing finance to these women to help make it possible for them to participate- this could be in the form of cash grants or compensation upon completion of the program (Beegle, 2020). Another way is to provide

childcare; a potentially large barrier could be that these women or girls have children that they cannot leave to participate, so childcare would be extremely helpful. Lastly, providing access to safe transportation would have the potential to increase participation in the program. There was a similar program implemented in Peru that doubled the stipend to female trainees with children under the age of five for transportation, meals, and medical insurance, resulting in long-term positive benefits in formal employment for women (Beegle, 2020).

Who Benefits

If these plans were able to be properly implemented and women could gain significantly greater access to vocational education, there would be much benefit to not only the women of Kabul, Afghanistan but also the nation as a whole. The education of young women in Kabul would increase the ability for women not only to find and hold employment but have the legitimate skills needed to have a skilled job that could provide them and their families with more income. Giving young women access to education in fields besides their current options of traditionally feminine paths and no longer restricting them from university courses such as journalism, engineering, economics, and science would allow women to have the freedom to choose their own career pathways. Not only would this empower women within Afghan society, but it has the potential to better the economy. Women could potentially earn a livable wage and contribute to the household income for themselves and their families. There is great potential for women to feel like they have a stake in their own lives and have greater autonomy.

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