



Voices of Resilience: Investigating Afghan Women's Lived Experience during the Second Period of Taliban Rule

Khadije Barzegar^{1*}, Seyed Ali Ahrari², Khadija Karimi³

1-Corresponding Autor, Faculty of Women and Family Studies, University of Religions & Denominations, Qom, Iran

Email: kh.barzegar@urd.ac.ir

2-Women and Family Studies Research Center, University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran

3- Master's Degree in Women's Studies, University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran

Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 16 July 2025

Received in revised form 13 October 2025

Accepted 01 February 2026

Available online 20 February 2026

Keywords:

Discrimination, Taliban, resiliency, violence, women

ABSTRACT

Objective: Following the Taliban's return to power, Afghan women face a uniquely complex and oppressive reality, demanding a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. This phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of Afghan women during the Taliban's second rule. Data were collected through online, in-depth interviews with 16 purposively selected Afghan women between September and December 2023.

Method: A thematic analysis of the verified and transcribed data revealed four central themes that answer the core research questions.

Results: The findings indicate that the Taliban's conduct is shaped by socio-cultural norms, religious misinterpretations, a lack of accountability, and a fundamental lack of readiness for change, all reinforced by systemic brainwashing. Despite superficial claims of moderation, women reported no substantive change in the Taliban's ideology or behavior compared to their first regime, leading to widespread trauma, psychological distress, and a profound loss of future hope. Crucially, the analysis also highlights Afghan women's resilience and resistance, manifested through civil protest, community solidarity, and a steadfast belief in their own capabilities.

Conclusion: Based on these findings, we conclude that the interplay between the Taliban's entrenched oppressions and women's persistent resistance forms the core of their current lived experience, suggesting that external support strategies must evolve beyond condemnation to actively bolster these documented forms of indigenous resilience and advocacy.

Cite this article: Barzegar, Kh. & Ahrari, S. A. & Karimi, K. (2026). Voices of Resilience: Investigating Afghan Women's Lived Experience during the Second Period of Taliban Rule. *Journal of Woman and Family Studies*, 13(4), 77-104. <https://doi.org/10.22051/jwfs.2026.51779.3244>



© Author(s) retain the copyright.

[doi:https://doi.org/10.22051/jwfs.2026.51779.3244](https://doi.org/10.22051/jwfs.2026.51779.3244)

Publisher: Alzahra University.

Introduction

Afghanistan is a country known for its civil wars, ethnic conflicts, insecurity, and rapid change of government (Cordesman 2022). Also, forced migrations, leaving the homeland, refugees, and women's issues have always been the focus of news headlines and one of the problems of neighboring countries as well as international organizations (Majidi 2017). Prolonged conflicts have caused various social groups to suffer a lot, especially vulnerable groups such as women and minorities, who are mainly affected by the growth of the drug trade and the increase in extreme poverty due to the type of governance in that country (Mannell et al. 2021).

After short-term stability, the Taliban has captured the government twice, once from 1996 to 2001 and for the second time from 2021 to the present (Faheem and Khan 2022). The first period of Taliban rule was a period that left many emotional scars in Afghan society, especially among women which have not yet healed. In the second Taliban's nationwide rule, although it is claimed that the Taliban have changed the type and style of governance, the rules of dealing with women are based on their previous principles (Terpstra 2022), which causes concern among Afghan women of all ethnicities and religions.

To understand the situation of women under their rule, it is essential to first examine the group's core beliefs. The Taliban's governance is rooted in a Deobandi-influenced interpretation of Sharia law, combined with a stringent Pashtun tribal code (Pashtunwali). This ideology envisions a society purged of non-Islamic influences, where social order is maintained through strict gender segregation. Within this framework, a woman's primary role is confined to the private sphere as a wife and mother, and her public presence is seen as a source of fitna (social chaos). Consequently, the group's attitude towards women is fundamentally restrictive, viewing their visibility in public life as a deviation from religious piety and a threat to the moral fabric of society (Haqqani, 2005).

During the first period of Taliban rule, women were deprived of their most basic human rights, consequently deteriorating their mental, social, physical, and economic well-being (Jami 2022). Banned from furthering their education, women have been systematically denied basic literacy (14% literacy rate) and stripped of all opportunities in skills and professional development (Kakar and Hasan 2024). Estimated at more than 60% of the total population, the vast majority of Afghan women were prohibited from working outside the home and denied access to public space (Thorpe and Chawansky 2021).

Undeniably, it should not be said that the situation of women is always difficult during war and conflict (Cohen and Karim 2022). Afghan women have experienced much worse and more violent experiences during internal wars by all sides, but what distinguishes the period of Taliban rule is systematic violence and discrimination. Taliban, who then ruthlessly imposed their system of law and order. Women were required to adhere to the *Borga* and

faced execution for disobedience, while those who complied were granted limited freedom of movement (Amin and Alizada 2020).

According to Fatima (2014), it is estimated that there were around 35,000 women-headed households in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. During this time, economic activities were suspended, causing poverty and hunger which pushed many women to turn to sex work, while others were forced into marriages with Taliban members as a means of "eliminating prostitution". Previous research on the impact of the Taliban's initial regime indicates that women in provinces under Taliban control had lower educational attainment and were less inclined to participate in the workforce (Noury and Speciale 2016). De Leede (2022) observed that women who were married in provinces with greater Taliban influence at the time of their marriage had lower levels of decision-making authority.

The resurgence of Taliban control in Afghanistan in 2021 has severely impacted women's rights, with the implementation of discriminatory measures by the leaders to hinder their participation in civil society (McAuliffe and Iqbal 2022). The rights of women in Afghanistan have been severely impacted by the Taliban, who have restricted their participation in society. Currently, Afghan women are encountering entrenched sociocultural barriers that limit their fundamental rights and hinder their ability to access education, employment, and social services (Mazhar and Goraya 2021). The harsh reality facing women under Taliban rule is the ongoing threat of violence, which results in the suppression of their voices (Singh 2023).

Finding a starting place for the discussion of Afghan women's experience is difficult because their lives have a multitude of aspects. The Western world's stereotype of Afghan women is silent oppressed victims dressed in burqas. However, that is a stereotype, not reality, and is certainly not the whole picture (Ghani and Fiske 2020). It is important to look scientifically into the dilemma of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban. The purpose of this research is to examine the lived experience of Afghan women who have experienced both Taliban regimes in Afghanistan. Thus, the current study tries to address these questions:

RQ₁. What significant factors, as identified by Afghan women, shape the Taliban's approach to women's rights and roles?

RQ₂. In what ways do the Taliban's policies and practices toward women differ from those of their first ruling?

RQ₃. What do Afghan women's accounts illustrate the Taliban's place in society and the realities of women's life under their governance?

RQ₄. What measures/actions exist for Afghan women to change and improved their own situation under ongoing Taliban governance?

Literature Review

This study is grounded in the hermeneutic phenomenology of van Manen (2017), which seeks to understand and interpret the essence of lived experience. This approach is

particularly suited to exploring the lives of Afghan women, as it prioritizes the subjective, first-hand accounts of individuals navigating a specific phenomenon—in this case, life under the Taliban regime. The philosophical foundation of this methodology insists that understanding comes from interpreting the "lifeworld" of individuals, making it a powerful tool for giving voice to marginalized groups whose realities are often explained by outsiders (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. 2019). To frame this phenomenological inquiry, we draw upon complementary theoretical lenses that help contextualize the power structures shaping these lived experiences.

In contemporary women's studies, there is a focus on Islam's role in gender dynamics and debates about whether it promotes gender inequality (Sirri 2020). Interpretations of Islam vary, from conservative to feminist. Early Islamic history features prominent women, and modern scholars advocate for moderate interpretations, emphasizing women's rights within Islamic law (Nasruddin and Muliana 2023). Afghan women gained rights and access to education in the 1920s, but ultra-conservative groups in the late 20th century restricted their agency. However, at the end of the 20th century, the culturally ultra-conservative and traditionalist Mujahedeen (1992–1994) and later on the Taliban (1994–2001 and 2021–Present), justified their governance through a Deobandi-influenced Islamist ideology that posits a strictly patriarchal social order. This ideological framework, which they pushed onto the Afghans, is theoretically rooted in a belief that women's primary role is in the private sphere and that their public visibility is a source of social corruption. Consequently, this theoretical stance drastically restricted the agency of women and undid the previous opportunities offered to Afghan women.

Kandiyoti's (1988) theory of the patriarchal bargain within feminist scholarship examines how class, caste, and ethnicity intersect to shape different forms of patriarchy. In Afghanistan, ethnicity influences cultural norms affecting women, particularly through the Pashtuns' 'Pashtunwali' code, which emphasizes honor and male dominance (Pelevin 2022). While Pashtunwali dictates men's duty to protect women's respectability, it also allows women, especially elders, to wield power within certain limits. This dynamic illustrates how women navigate extreme patriarchy, negotiating agency within the constraints of a system that simultaneously empowers and restricts them. The influence of Pashtun dominance on women's roles in society is complex, as traditional customs and cultural norms both unite communities and limit those who challenge established hierarchies (Ibrahimi 2023). Tribal conservatism in Afghanistan reinforces male centrality, often at women's expense. Thus, the strict interpretation of Islam and patriarchal social norms are what bring oppression to women, rather than Islam itself (Webber, 1997).

Theoretical Lens: Patriarchy and the Patriarchal Bargain

Ethnicity, culture, religion, and social class have significant influences on shaping any society. This is particularly true in Afghanistan, where competition for resources and political influence among ethnic groups has led to further fragmentation and, at times, open warfare (Barfield 2010). According to Kaviani and Ahmadi (2021), it is particularly important to understand ethnic groups and religion to comprehend social subgroups and individuals such as gender dynamics and minorities in Afghanistan. Akbary et al. (2022) note that female subordination to men is prevalent across all regions and races in Afghanistan, but local customs and traditions vary among different regions and tribes.

The status of Afghan women is influenced by Afghanistan's history and is closely connected to its political, social, and religious structure. They embody cultural and religious values, especially honor and purity within the Islamic community. Their role reflects wider societal influences, not just recent events (Karimi 2023). According to Chenzaie (2021), Afghanistan's Islam is a non-literate village Islam—a syncretic blending of basic Islamic beliefs with local practices such as those in the Pashtunwali". In addition, these discourses and views on women are linked to the shifting national and ethnic identities of the country (Pourzand 2004). A key framework for understanding these dynamics is Kandiyoti's (1988) theory of the patriarchal bargain within feminist scholarship, which examines how class, caste, and ethnicity intersect to shape different forms of patriarchy. In Afghanistan, ethnicity influences cultural norms affecting women, particularly through the Pashtuns' 'Pashtunwali' code, which emphasizes honor and male dominance (Pelevin 2022). While Pashtunwali dictates men's duty to protect women's respectability, it also allows women, especially elders, to wield power within certain limits. This dynamic illustrates how women navigate extreme patriarchy, negotiating agency within the constraints of a system that simultaneously empowers and restricts them. This concept of navigating constraints is central to a phenomenological investigation of lived experience. The influence of Pashtun dominance on women's roles in society is complex, as traditional customs and cultural norms both unite communities and limit those who challenge established hierarchies (Ibrahimi 2023). Tribal conservatism in Afghanistan reinforces male centrality, often at women's expense. Thus, the strict interpretation of Islam and patriarchal social norms are what bring oppression to women, rather than Islam itself (Webber 1997).

Contextualizing Oppression: Cultural Violence and Marginalization

To further contextualize the environment in which our participants' experiences unfold, we draw upon Galtung's (1990) concept of "cultural violence," which refers to aspects of culture that can be used to justify direct or structural violence. This is evident in the historical and political context of women's rights in Afghanistan.

Feminist Movement in Afghanistan

The feminist movement in Afghanistan emerged as a response to the country's restrictive social and political environment, which has historically denied women the rights and opportunities afforded to men. Afghanistan has a long history of patriarchal attitudes and practices, and women have traditionally been seen as subordinate to men. This has been reinforced by conservative interpretations of Islam, which have been used to justify gender-based discrimination and violence (Nwe 2022).

The emergence of the feminist movement in Afghanistan can be traced back to the 1960s when a group of educated women began advocating for greater rights and opportunities for women in the country (Frogh and Rajath 2022). This movement gained momentum during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, as women took on new roles in society and became more politically active (Khosla 2022). However, the situation for women in Afghanistan deteriorated significantly following the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. The Taliban implemented a harsh interpretation of Islamic law that severely restricted women's rights and freedoms (Singh 2023). This sparked a new wave of activism, with women's organizations working to resist the Taliban and advocate for women's rights.

Afghan Women during the Taliban Rule

In many ways, the behavior of the Taliban mirrored that of other infamous 20th-century "revolutionary" groups (Bahruddin 2021). The Taliban period is recalled as one in which women's agency as autonomous human beings was not just curtailed but completely denied and experienced brutally enforced dehumanization.

The Taliban's rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and their recent resurgence in 2021 have severely restricted women's rights, leading to limited education and job opportunities. The United Nations (2023) has criticized this as gender apartheid. The situation remains concerning with ongoing human rights restrictions (Taylor 2022). The Taliban's claimed shift on women's rights has been met with skepticism due to discrepancies between their rhetoric and actions. They previously enforced strict Islamic laws, like requiring women to wear a burqa in public, which covered them from head to toe.

During the Taliban regime, Afghan women were marginalized and oppressed, living on the outskirts of societal norms. Their experiences fit the concept of marginalization, as they faced ongoing oppression. However, oppression can also lead to resistance, as individuals may use their marginalization as a tool to fight against victimization (Ahsan-Tirmizi 2021).

Human Rights and Afghan Women

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) revealed in 1948 outlines various freedoms and situations that are considered to be universal and applicable to all individuals. However, some argue that the concept of human rights is rooted in Western ideology and may not fully consider the cultural and religious values of non-Western societies, including

Afghanistan. Afghanistan has diverse interpretations of Islam and the Quran among different ethnic groups, clans, and tribes. Despite theoretical commitments to human rights, Afghanistan has faced challenges in upholding these rights in practice, especially for women (Qazi Zada 2021). The prominent human rights violation experienced by Afghan women is domestic violence, taking the form of physical, emotional, educational, and/or economic oppression. It's very difficult to implement international norms on violence against women in cultural contexts with extreme patriarchy. However, according to Galtung (1990), "cultural violence" legitimizes direct or structural violence. From a cultural relativist perspective, violence against women is acceptable if justified by culture, tradition, or religion, often leaving women with little say in determining the rules enforced in the name of religion or cultural practices.

The Taliban's oppressive treatment of women, documented by human rights organizations, includes strict dress codes, limited freedom of movement, and harsh punishments for non-compliance (Azizi 2025). Since the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, an estimated 300 and 600 women have been incarcerated annually in Afghan prisons on the grounds of "moral crimes" (Basu 2023). The hundreds of women annually incarcerated in a formal prison setting might await a better fate than the thousands who face the informal and unreported punishment for committing a "moral crime". In their 2021 seizure of power, the Taliban strongly discouraged women from having independence, restricting their ability to move freely, make decisions, and escape from situations of domestic violence (Azizi 2025).

Synthesizing the Framework: A Feminist Phenomenological Approach

This study synthesizes these theoretical concepts within a feminist phenomenological framework. A feminist approach acknowledges multiple truths and avoids developing universal, context-free principles, which aligns with the phenomenological pursuit of understanding the essence of lived experience from the participant's perspective (Mauthner 2023). Feminist research applies itself to issues that can make a difference for all people and has the potential to empower women (Hamilton 2020).

By recognizing diverse perspectives and individual differences, feminist researchers can better understand the complexities of the human experience. As well, feminist research includes an analysis of power distributions concerning women's oppression. Feminist research reframes women's ways of behaving as different, rather than deficient, from traditionally male ways of being in the world (Cannon and Chu 2021). Therefore, this study employs a feminist-phenomenological lens to explore how Afghan women interpret and find meaning within the patriarchal bargains and structures of cultural violence described above. This feminist study, from a woman's perspective and for women, focuses on the strengths and challenges of participants, aiming to reduce hierarchical relations. Following Raymond's (2021) approach, the present study seeks to uncover Afghan women's stories to reveal their experiences. Ultimately, this conceptual framework allows us to situate the personal, lived experiences of

our participants within the broader political, cultural, and patriarchal structures that define their world, fulfilling the core aim of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Method

Design

This study utilized a phenomenology of practice approach (Van Manen 2017) to examine the firsthand experiences of women living under the Taliban regime. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodology in human science and philosophy that involves examining a phenomenon through the lens of lived experience (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. 2019). Belief in individual distinctiveness helps us react skillfully and flexibly in different situations, locations, and environments. This belief is explained using phenomenological themes, which involves understanding the significance of first-hand experiences in terms of meaning components, patterns, and overarching themes (Van Manen 2023).

Participants

In the period when the Taliban is in power, it is understandable that Afghan women are going through a difficult period and it will be more difficult to ask them for an interview because the Taliban authorities are very strict if they do not have good feedback on any issue. According to Archibald et al. (2019), conducting online interviews is a helpful method to provide support and gain insight into their everyday experiences. To ensure a diverse sample that captured a range of experiences, the study employed purposive sampling to include participants from different major urban centers (including Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif), varying ethnic backgrounds (Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara), and a spectrum of educational attainment (from women with no formal schooling to university graduates). In total, after interviewing 16 interviewees, the researchers of this study reached saturation point.

Inclusion Criteria

The first inclusion criteria of the participants include Afghan women who have been working and/or living in Afghanistan for at least the last five years, especially if they have this experience before 2021 (the complete seizure of power by the Taliban) so that they can describe a more realistic picture of the changes in their situation. To meet the reviewer's request, we confirm that all participants were born in Afghanistan. Furthermore, to capture generational perspectives on regime change, the sample specifically included women who were old enough to remember life prior to the 2001 U.S. invasion, ensuring their lived experiences spanned the pre-invasion, post-2001 Republic era, and the current Taliban regime. Second, those over twenty years of age.

Data Collection

The study conducted from September to December 2023 involved interviewing a bilingual female Afghan postgraduate student proficient in Pashtun and Persian. The semi-structured

online interviews, lasting 30 to 60 minutes, were conducted in the presence of a researcher. All participants were interviewed while residing within Afghanistan. The research team, which included the bilingual interviewer, was physically present in the country to conduct these sessions, ensuring direct access to the participants' context. While the initial interview guideline was prepared beforehand, additional questions emerged based on participants' responses until data saturation was achieved. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and validated by the researchers. Subsequently, researchers collectively analyzed and discussed each interview and transcript.

Data Analysis

In the life story method, researchers play a vital role in data collection. Following van Manen's (2017) approach, this study involved six steps: defining research questions, conducting semi-structured interviews, identifying essential themes from interview transcripts, refining ideas through writing and rewriting, exploring related themes to reflect the research question, and synthesizing final themes reflective of lived experiences. Themes and findings were translated into English from Persian and Pashtun. Researchers used Persian and English to analyze and interpret findings collaboratively. Translation decisions followed the Abfalter et al.'s (2021) guideline. To ensure coding consistency, two researchers independently coded a randomly selected subset of three interview transcripts (approximately 20% of the data). Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa, which yielded a coefficient of 0.81, indicating a high level of agreement. Discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached. Furthermore, to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings through triangulation, the study integrated multiple data sources (interviews from diverse participants across different cities) and employed analyst triangulation, where multiple researchers were involved in the data analysis process to cross-validate the emerging themes.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that the analysis and development of themes do not have any bias, experienced researchers carried out peer reviews to ensure the reliability of this study. To ensure reliability, audits, and notes on methodological issues and decisions have been made. Member checks have also been carried out, where the findings of the study were transmitted to the participants to verify them. Therefore, no change in the results was observed. The findings were endorsed by all the researchers.

Results

In this section, the authors provided the descriptive characteristics of the participants and then offered a qualitative analysis of their answers.

Descriptive Findings

The women who participated in this interview were between the ages of 22 and 40 years old, most of them were married, and almost all of them lost their jobs during the second period of the Taliban regime. Most of the women have a university education and are working in the field related to their education. Currently, more than half of them is either unemployed or doing volunteer work with little or no income. Except for one interviewee, all 15 of them live in Afghanistan. Before the fall of the republic by the Taliban, their monthly salary ranged from a meager figure of \$30 to \$40,000, which indicates the social class distribution of the interviewees available to the researchers of this article.

Table 1. Descriptive information of interviewees

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Education	Ex-Career	Present Career	Marriage status	Ex-Income/Income	Place of Residence
1	Zinat	NM	NM	NM	NM	NM	NM	Mazar-i-Sharif
2	Sahar	38	B.Ec	Governmental officer	NM	Widow	2800 USD	Abroad
3	Soraya	30	Engineering student	NGO volunteer	NM	Single	NM	Kabul
4	Farahnaz	37	Islamic lessons	Teacher	Teacher	Married	NM	Iran
5	Fariha	29	B.Ec	Accountant	Unemployed	Married	NM	Kabul
6	Farzana		NM	NM	Teacher	Married	140USD	Mazar-i-Sharif
7	Mahsa	40	NM	NM	Charity worker	Married	NM	Mazar-i-Sharif
8	Nadia	NM	NM	Policewoman	Unemployed	NM	NM	NM
9	Zahra	NM	Sport sciences	Athlete	NGO worker	Married	2000USD	Herat
10	Sara	30	B.Soc.Sc	District Governor	Unemployed	NM	NM	NM
11	Kinnaz	22	BSc	Reporter	NM	Single	28USD	NM
12	Nageenah	27	M.C.L.C	NM	NM	NM	NM	Herat
13	Hajar	25	Social science student	Publisher	NGO worker	Married	40,000USD	Kabul
14	Veeda	23	NM	Private sector employee	Online teaching	Single	1120USD/300USD	Mazar-i-Sharif
15	Naghma	25	NM	Parliament Reporter	Civil activist	Single	30USDS	Mazar-i-Sharif
16	Nahal	NM	NM	Head of the Women's Rights Council	Unemployed	Married	1200USD	Herat

Note. NM = Not mentioned, B.Ec = Bachelor of Economics, B.Soc.Sc = Bachelor of Social Sciences, BSc = Bachelor of Science, M.C.L.C. = Master of criminal law and criminology

Qualitative Findings

Among all the issues that researchers pay attention to today, one question is prominent: how is the problem formed in the mind of the human subject? Based on this, the main

question of the current researchers to the participants is related to their experience of the second period of Taliban rule and the fears and hopes that they deal with. Figure 1 shows the revealed themes of the study.

Participants' Perspectives on Factors Influencing the Taliban's Behavior toward Women

The interviews revealed participants' descriptions of how the Taliban regime severely restricted the rights and freedoms of Afghan women, which they experienced as oppression and subjugation. In this section, the authors discuss the reasons that participants gave to explain the behavior of the Taliban. Based on their accounts, the following five themes emerged: socio-cultural norms, religious misinterpretations and misconceptions, lack of accountability, lack of readiness for change, and brainwashing.

Theme 1. Socio-cultural Norms

Participants frequently described how socio-cultural norms play a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes and behaviors. When it comes to gender, they believed these norms can either reinforce equality or perpetuate discrimination. From their perspective, these norms often dictate traditional gender roles and expectations, reinforcing the idea that women should adhere to certain behaviors and limitations.

Sub-theme 1. Cultural Poverty

It refers to a situation where a group of people lacks access to or understanding of the cultural resources that are considered valuable or necessary for full participation in society. Participants perceived cultural poverty can contribute to social exclusion and marginalization, as individuals or communities may struggle to navigate and engage with the broader society due to their lack of cultural capital. For instance, Zinat said: “...*they [Taliban] think that women should not be [part of society], because the society of Afghanistan is a poor society, it has not only financial poverty, but also cultural poverty... and illiteracy is at its peak, and people could not even read the Quran.*”

Sub-theme 2. Gender Norms

Participants explained that gender norms can be seen as a form of cultural poverty when they restrict individuals from fully expressing themselves and participating equally in society based on their gender. These norms often dictate rigid roles and expectations for individuals based on their perceived gender, such as women being expected to be caregivers and men being expected to be breadwinners. For instance, Sahar stated: “*Taleb grew up in these places [with traditional customs and beliefs] and took this cultural factor and based on this he makes decisions today.*”

Sub-theme 3. Stereotypes

Participants reported experiencing stereotypes refer to the negative assumptions and generalizations that are made about individuals or communities that are perceived to be

disadvantaged or lacking in cultural capital. These stereotypes often perpetuate harmful beliefs and attitudes that further marginalize and stigmatize those who are already facing socio-economic challenges. For instance, Zinat said: “...they [Taliban] consider women as a danger to themselves.” Fariba said: “...they believe that a woman’s voice is awrat, it should not be heard by non-mohram men”.

Sub-theme 4. Illiteracy

Participants described illiteracy can be seen as a form of cultural poverty when individuals are not given the tools and resources necessary to acquire basic literacy skills. Without the ability to read and write, individuals are often unable to fully participate in society and access opportunities for education, employment, and personal growth. For instance, Nahal stated: “The reason was that there was no education in the [Pashtun] areas, the people were much more backward... and also when you are not educated and have a weak economy, you certainly have a very weak culture.”

Theme 2. Religious Misinterpretations

A common perspective among participants was that religious misinterpretations occur when individuals or groups misunderstand or misinterpret the teachings, beliefs, practices, or scriptures of a particular religion. One common religious they identified misinterpretation is the tendency to take religious texts or teachings out of context, leading to a distorted or inaccurate understanding of the religion. This can result in misrepresenting the beliefs or practices of a particular religion and can contribute to negative stereotypes.

Sub-theme 1. Eisegesis

Eisegesis is a term used to describe the act of interpreting a text, such as a religious text, based on one's own beliefs or preconceived notions rather than on the text's intended meaning. Participants felt that when individuals engage in eisegesis about religious texts, they may twist the meaning of the text to fit their agenda or beliefs. This can result in misrepresenting the original message of the text and promoting false teachings. For instance, Nageenah stated: “They say faith and Islam, but none of their actions are Islamic. For example, when they see a man and a woman, they say it is un-Islamic. Where is it in Islam to take away the honor of a man and a woman? They beat them without investigating.”

Theme 3. Lack of Accountability

Lack of accountability refers to a situation where individuals or organizations fail to take responsibility for their actions, decisions, or performance. The interviewees pointed out what they perceived as a lack of this feature among the Taliban group.

Sub-theme 1. Reluctance and Lack of Planning

Reluctance in the context of lack of accountability refers to a hesitancy or unwillingness to take responsibility for one's actions or decisions. Participants described a reluctance to admit

mistakes, address issues, or follow through on commitments. They believed when individuals are reluctant to be held accountable for their actions, it can create a culture of avoidance and denial within an organization or society. For example, Zahra said: “... *the government of the Taliban is shaky, baseless and weak, and in the meantime, women came and stood in front of their government, while they are confused and do not understand where their situation will end up and the world will destroy them.*”

Sub-theme 2. Systematic Discrimination

It refers to the systemic and institutionalized practices that result in unfair treatment or exclusion of individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Participants described experiencing a lack of accountability from the Taliban, which they saw as a failure to take responsibility for their actions, behaviors, or decisions. For instance, Sorraya stated: “*They [women] do not have individual rights, the right to education, and the right to employment. In the laws that came for women, they are not observed at all. We have not been allowed to go to university for eight months. My field is engineering. They [Taliban] don't allow me to enter the class because I'm the only girl in the class, they didn't let me study in a mixed place.*”

Theme 4. Lack of readiness for Change

It refers to a situation in which individuals, teams, or organizations are not mentally or emotionally prepared to embrace and implement change. The interviewees have repeatedly reported their perception of the Taliban's lack of readiness for change.

Sub-theme 1. Resistance to Challenging Power Dynamics

Participants suggested that resistance to challenging power dynamics can stem from a lack of readiness for change, comfort with the current structure, fear of consequences, insufficient support/resources, limited access to information/education, lack of a platform/network, societal norms, and cultural beliefs that discourage dissent and maintain power imbalances. Kinaaz said: “*The Taliban leaders have felt that it is not possible to eliminate women in all matters, but they are not ready to change due to the fear of the young body of their forces.*”

Theme 5. Brainwashing

It involves the dissemination of false or misleading information to individuals to manipulate their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Almost all the women who participated in the interview mentioned their belief in the effect of brainwashing, which cannot be hidden.

Sub-theme 1. The traditional Structure of Education

The traditional structure of education can be seen as a form of brainwashing in that it often involves the systematic indoctrination of students with specific beliefs, values, and knowledge that are deemed important by the educational institution or society. Participants described how

this can result in students being conditioned to think and behave in certain ways, and to accept authority without question. for instance, Zahra said: *“The Taliban have been extremely taught in religious schools since childhood, and a child who is always dictated to from childhood, for example, from the age of 4 or 5 years old, that women are the cause of sin and the reason men go to hell, and women cause the world will sink to the depths of misery until the age that the Taliban are now when we see their faces on TV, they are no less than 40 to 50 years old, and they have spent all these years in extreme schools and with that ideology that they believe that all human sins are in the responsibility of women.”*

The Taliban Changes regards Women in the Second Round

In the second round of rule, participants observed that the Taliban implemented some changes regarding women, but these changes were largely seen as superficial and did not lead to a significant improvement in women's rights.

Theme 1. The Preference of the Taliban over the Previous Period

Participants discussed the Taliban's expressed preference for their rule over the previous period (before they came to power) for several reasons.

Sub-theme 1. Less Publicized Violent Religious Punishments

It refers to the harsh penalties inflicted by extremist religious groups, such as the Taliban, that receive less attention or media coverage compared to more widely known acts of violence. Participants noted that these punishments may include public executions, amputations, floggings, and other forms of physical harm inflicted on individuals perceived to have violated religious laws or norms. For instance, Farahnaz said: *“Unlike their first period, when they started killing in the name of Islam, now they try not to do many of these things in public for fear of internal and external criticism, and this shows that the pressure is effective.”*

Sub-theme 2. No Change

Of course, according to some participants, the Taliban's behavior towards women has not changed, but it has been delayed to some extent due to various reasons, for example, lack of confidence in the stability of the government and fear of public rebellion. For instance, Farihah said: *“Well, my assessment is clear. They all look almost the same. And with the return of the Taliban, the same dark days as before returned. People again towards suffering and poverty and misery and all the achievements they got with suffering and misery, the people of Afghanistan lost all of them.”*

Collapse of authority and Women's mental health wounds

It refers to the knowledge and understanding that an individual gains about the popularity and legitimacy of Taliban's governance according it's current situation. On the other hand,

psychological consequences of exposure to laws and policies restricting women's social life and personal choices.

Theme 1. Knowing more about the Taliban's Weaknesses

Participants reflected that knowing more about the Taliban's weaknesses can help in developing more effective strategies to counter their influence and operations.

Sub-theme 1. Lack of Popular Support

Participants observed that the lack of popular support for those opposing the Taliban hinders gathering information on their weaknesses due to fear of reprisal or unwillingness to share. They felt that understanding this lack of support is crucial for recognizing the challenges in gathering insights into Taliban vulnerabilities and sheds light on dynamics, fear levels, and risks for individuals challenging their authority. Sorraya stated: "*When they first came, maybe the people thought that they were cooperating with the people, but now with the closing of the school gates, they were disappointed.*"

Sub-theme 2. Disappointment to Change the Policy of the Taliban

Participants expressed significant disappointment surrounding efforts to facilitate policy change within the Taliban is indeed significant. Despite initial hopes for meaningful reforms, they observed that the group has largely reinstated draconian policies from their previous regime. From their perspective, their governance structure remains vague, with an emphasis on ruling according to "Islamic law and Afghan values." However, specific legal or political principles guiding their behavior were perceived as elusive. For instance, Sahar said: "*If we want to analyze the different aspects of the situation, we certainly do not see any improvement in the security situation, which has been the main concern of the Afghan people.*"

Sub-theme 3. Loss of Democracy

It reflects participants' yearning for a time when democratic principles and freedoms were more accessible to Afghan women. They described how the Taliban's takeover has led to the erosion of democratic institutions, stifling women's participation in decision-making processes, limiting their rights, and curtailing their agency. The nostalgia for a more democratic past underscores the stark contrast with the current reality, where women face severe restrictions and exclusion from public life. For instance, Sahar said: "*They [the republic government] have focused more on women's participation in negotiations and peace.*"

Sub-theme 4. Regression

Before the Taliban's rise to power in 1996, Afghan women had varying degrees of access to education and employment. Participants recalled that during their first stint in power, the Taliban imposed a complete ban on women's education and work. Girls aged eight and above were prohibited from receiving an education and were confined to their homes. This severe

restriction stifled opportunities for Afghan women. They reported that the Taliban's recapture of Kabul in 2021 led to a catastrophic reversal. Policies restricting women's access to education and employment were swiftly implemented. As Sorraya said: *"Our people have made great progress in sports and education. Now they say they don't have the right to go without Muharram, they don't have the right to study."*

Theme 2. Psychological Distress

It refers to a state of emotional or mental suffering that can manifest in various ways, such as anxiety, depression, and overwhelming feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. It can be triggered by a variety of factors, including traumatic experiences, chronic stress, relationship problems, and major life changes.

Sub-theme 2. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

During the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, participants reported that women were subjected to severe restrictions on their rights and freedoms. They described being subjected to violence, abuse, and discrimination, they believed could lead to the development of PTSD. For example, women were not allowed to work outside the home, attend school, or even leave the house without a male escort. They were also forced to adhere to strict dress codes and faced severe punishment for not following these rules. Participants felt that living under such oppressive conditions would have undoubtedly caused significant psychological distress for Afghan women, leading to the development of PTSD in many cases. For instance, Zinat said: *"Psychological problems reach their peak... They don't give [women] their rights, so mental problems arise here too. And more depression arises from this."*

Sub-theme 3. Depression and Hopelessness

Participants described the oppressive and repressive nature of the regime, coupled with restrictions on women's rights and freedoms, contributed to a pervasive sense of fear, hopelessness, and helplessness among women in Afghanistan. Moreover, they reported that the constant threat of violence and punishment by the Taliban further heightened women's fears and anxieties. They explained that the regime imposed brutal punishments for any perceived violations of their strict interpretation of Islamic law, including public executions, floggings, and amputations. The constant presence of violence and the fear of being targeted by the Taliban only served to exacerbate women's mental health struggles. Participants also mentioned the lack of access to proper mental health resources and support systems further compounded the issue, as women had limited options for seeking help and treatment for their mental health concerns. The stigma surrounding mental health issues also prevented many women from speaking openly about their struggles and seeking the help they needed. For instance, Fariha said: *"Unfortunately, I failed after Taleb came. Not only in terms of career, was the result of all my efforts zero. Everywhere I go, all social opportunities, and jobs are*

taken away from me. I knocked on every door, but no opportunity was provided for me, and I was in despair. Not only in me but also in my family. Because we four sisters were studying.”

Sub-theme 4. Fear

One of the reasons for fear among Afghan women during the Taliban rule, as described by participants, was the strict enforcement of Islamic laws that severely limited their rights and freedoms. Any deviation from these rules could result in severe punishment, including public beatings and executions, leading to a pervasive sense of fear and self-censorship. Participants reported that the fear of being targeted or violated by the Taliban members greatly impacted the mental well-being of Afghan women, leading to high levels of stress, anxiety, and trauma. For instance, Mahsa said: *“The restrictions that the Taliban have put and the conditions that they have imposed make women face fear. Because women are dealt with seriously. Especially women who disobey the issues, laws, and things that they impose. Unfortunately, it leads to very severe collisions, even to the point of death. It has caused women to become less visible and not take it too lightly.”*

Theme 3. Loss in Future Hope

Loss of future hope refers to the experience of losing a sense of optimism or possibility for positive outcomes in the future. This was a common sentiment expressed by participants.

Sub-theme 1. No Change in the Taliban Compared to the First Period of Rule

Participants explained that upon regaining power, some people were optimistic that the Taliban had learned from the past, but they now felt this perception was wrong. For example, Sorraya said: *“Unfortunately, it did not have a special effect. If it had an effect, the school gates would be opened. We wrote slogans on the walls just yesterday. Several days have passed since the promised opening day, but it has not yet opened.”*

Sub-theme 2. Structural crisis

In the view of participants, the Taliban, it is terrible against the government. They expressed a sense that the country's 20-year achievements were destroyed, not only by women but also by all sections of the society, all the people living inside the country were oppressed. Zinat said: *“With the fall of the republic and the rise of the Taliban, the situation in Afghanistan has faced a very severe crisis.”*

Resilience and Resistance to Change Taliban conduct

It refers to the ability to bounce back or recover from difficult situations or adversity. It involves adapting to challenges, emotions, and stress healthily and positively. Resistance, on the other hand, refers to the act of resisting or opposing something. The interviews highlighted the participants' accounts of the strength and resilience of Afghan women who found ways to resist the oppressive tactics of the Taliban regime and carve out spaces of agency and empowerment for themselves.

Theme 1. Civil Resistance

Civil resistance is a form of nonviolent action that involves individuals and groups peacefully challenging a government or other authority to achieve social or political change.

Sub-theme 1. Solidarity and Allyship

Participants emphasized that solidarity amongst Afghan women is crucial in providing support, strength, and resilience in the face of discrimination and violence. By standing together and amplifying their voices as a collective force, they believed women can effectively push back against the strict limitations placed on them by the Taliban. Additionally, they saw value in forming alliances with other marginalized groups, such as human rights organizations, feminist movements, and international allies, can help Afghan women garner additional resources, expertise, and advocacy to advance their cause. Fereshteh explained: *“If these protests spread, they will be effective. If it is an internal movement, it is useless. But if it is widespread and international, it will be effective.”*

Sub-theme 2. Nonviolent Protest

Participants described engaging in nonviolent protest involves using, using methods such as marches, sit-ins, strikes, and other forms of nonviolent resistance to bring attention to the injustices faced by Afghan women under Taliban rule. By engaging in nonviolent protest, they felt that Afghan women were able to show their determination and resilience in the face of oppression and demonstrate their commitment to fighting for their rights in a peaceful and dignified manner. These acts of nonviolent resistance also helped to garner international support and sympathy for their cause and put pressure on the Taliban to reconsider their policies towards women. For instance, Fariha said: *“Women can be effective if they want to be united ..., as we saw, some women who gathered together and protested, it was a very good move, and I think that if there were no ulterior motives behind it, I think that the scope of these spontaneous protests and movements would have increased, and men would also join.”*

Sub-theme 3. Community Support

In the face of severe oppression and restrictions imposed by the Taliban regime, participants reported that Afghan women found strength and courage in the solidarity and assistance of their communities. Community support provided Afghan women with a sense of belonging, unity, and shared purpose as they fought for their rights and freedoms. Through organizing protests, engaging in acts of civil disobedience, and amplifying their voices collectively, they described how women were able to leverage the power of their community to resist the oppressive policies of the Taliban. For instance, Fariha said: *“Women can be effective if they join hands raise their voices, and stay away from any personal gain. In what way and what strategy do I think the only way is for them to resist?”*

Sub-theme 4. Advocacy for Educational Equity

Throughout the Taliban's rule, women in Afghanistan faced severe restrictions on their ability to pursue education. Participants described engaging in acts of civil resistance to demand their right to education and advocate for educational equity. For instance, Farahnaz stated that: *“The [Taliban] government has a series of demands and implements them, and does not ignore them, we can hope that the influence of women will show itself at some point in time. in society and government. Although this trend may not be very promising now, I cannot say that such changes will come just because of our presence in universities or institutions such as schools. But there is no other way. We will continue this process and hope that changes will be made.”*

Sub-theme 5. Resilience in Adversity

Despite facing severe restrictions on their freedoms, participants reported finding ways to resist and challenge these restrictions. They described organizing underground schools, established secret networks to provide support and resources for one another, and even participated in public protests and demonstrations. Their resilience in the face of extreme adversity was presented as an example of their unwavering commitment to fighting for their rights and equality, even in the face of great danger and risk to their safety. The women's refusal to be silenced or submit to the oppressive regime was described as a powerful example of the strength and power of civil resistance in the face of injustice. Zinat stated: *“We raised our voices many times, we demonstrated many times, and we took action many times, whatever they showed us in these eight or nine months, our women were not the women they were before. I saw that a woman hit Taleb because Taleb hit her.”*

Theme 2. International Support

Participants discussed the role of international support in their lives, which involves providing access to education, health care, job opportunities, and other essential services to help women build their skills and become more self-sufficient. Additionally, they saw international support as a means to help Afghan women resist discriminatory and oppressive practices by the Taliban through advocacy, awareness-raising, and empowerment initiatives.

Sub-theme 1. Multilateral Cooperation

It involves collaboration between multiple countries or international organizations to address a specific issue or achieve a common goal. Participants expressed that multilateral cooperation would be essential in providing comprehensive support to address these challenges and empower Afghan women. For example, they suggested that countries could work together to fund educational programs for Afghan girls, provide resources for women's healthcare clinics, and support initiatives that promote women's empowerment and economic opportunities. International organizations could also collaborate to monitor human rights violations against women in Afghanistan and advocate for their rights on the global stage. For

example, Zinat said: “Afghanistan for the time being, is the issue of women's education and I think that if there are negotiations in this regard by the United Nations, the possibility that women can continue to study, or that women can work, is high. It is negotiable.”

Theme 3. Hope and Belief in their Abilities

Despite the challenges, participants also spoke about holding onto hope and belief in their abilities during times of uncertainty and adversity.

Sub-theme 1. Hope for a Better Future

Hope for a better future is the optimistic expectation and desire for positive outcomes in one's life and the belief in their capabilities to make those outcomes a reality. This was a theme that sustained many participants. For instance, Sahar stated: “Taleb is gradually realizing that if we want a group that is trained and has expertise and experience, it is passive. If we build, we lose a huge force that helps us turn the economic cycle. And this makes them face the challenge that they faced before.”

Sub-theme 2. Belief in their Capabilities

Belief in one's capabilities is having confidence in one's skills, talents, and potential to achieve their goals and overcome challenges. Participants expressed this belief as a source of strength. Veeda stated: “I think that it [the women's movement] does not affect Taleb's thinking, but there is certainly a very serious pressure on Taleb to show flexibility and accept some of the women's demands.”

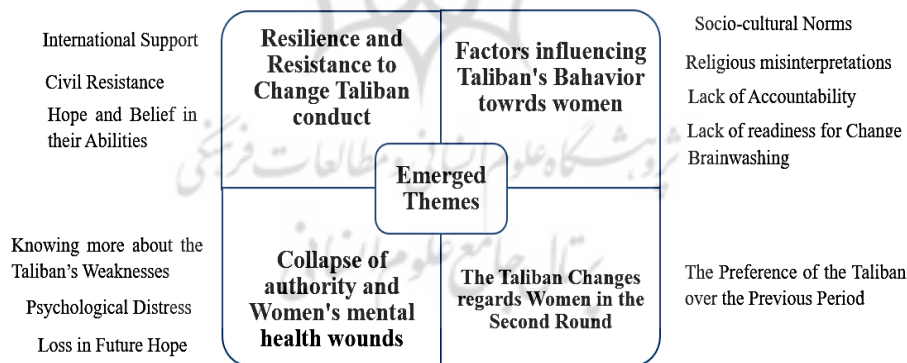


Figure 1. Emerged Themes of the study

Discussion

The present study was conducted to understand the lived experience of women in the era of Taliban regaining power. Based on the findings of the research, the themes describe how the interviewed women perceive and make sense of the factors that shape the current behavior of the Taliban towards them. From their perspective, social and cultural norms, religious misinterpretations, lack of accountability, lack of readiness for change, and brainwashing during childhood are decisive in the way of thinking and behavior of the Taliban towards

women. Usta et al.'s (2016) study, which happened to be conducted in West Asia, Lebanon, discovered the role of social and traditional norms in discrimination against women and violence against them, which resonates with the experiences reported by participants in the current research in Afghanistan. The women in our study described how socio-cultural norms in their context often dictate strict gender roles and expectations, which they experience as perpetuating discrimination against them (Mulhem et al. 2020). These lived experiences are often rooted in patriarchal beliefs that prioritize men's roles and values over women's (Mensah 2023).

Furthermore, the interviewees described a lived reality in which wrong reading along with religious bias is a framework they believe explains the Taliban's continued behavior towards women. Aziz et al., (2020), showed that misinterpretation of the Qur'an leads to discrimination against women in Indonesian society. The participants' accounts suggest that this misinterpretation of religious text leads to consequences they directly experience, such as discriminatory practices in areas such as education, employment, or leadership opportunities for women as well as being used to control women's bodies, justify violence against them, and limit their access to resources (Thelma 2024).

Also, women consider the lack of planning and lack of accountability in the Taliban's thinking as another reason for their violence towards Afghan women. From the participants' standpoint, a lack of accountability creates an environment where discriminatory behavior is tolerated and even encouraged (Chaudhury and Colla 2021). At the same time, contrary to some limited signs, especially among the leaders and the new generation of Taliban, the interviewees do not perceive them as ready to change, and this itself contributes to their lived experience of ongoing discrimination and violence. According to the findings of Watson et al. (2018), being ready to change and the social norms is a paradox that can be seen even in cases of violence in Western societies, a dynamic that is reflected in the participants' narratives of a confrontational culture. In the end, these women narrated how the brainwashing of children in the remote villages in the south of Afghanistan shapes their understanding of the Taliban's thinking and behavior. They expressed a fear that these children, who later become Taliban soldiers, are not only the trouble of Afghanistan but also the cause of insecurity and terrorism in neighboring countries (Irfan et al. 2023).

Regarding the change of governance and the behavior of the Taliban in the second period of their rule, the interviewees highlighted the point that the Taliban appear to them less willing to publicize its violence against women due to local and international feedback which is also mentioned by previous studies (e.g., Jain et al. 2021).

Regarding the third research question, women expressed a double feeling. First, their previous experiences with the Taliban helped them to feel they know their weaknesses and to act more intelligently in dealing with them and defend their rights, and also to have a feeling

of nostalgia for the republic period that had relative freedoms. In addition, the sudden return of the Taliban to power and the change of laws, especially regarding women, has had a deep emotional impact on them, including psychological stress and a sense of hopelessness about the future. Numerous studies have looked into the effects of war-related trauma using PTSD criteria to assess the level of psychological reactions (e.g., Shorr 2021). These studies have demonstrated that war and political instability have profound effects on the mental health of those it touches. The Taliban's return to power has been characterized as an armed struggle to overthrow the republic. Taliban decrees prohibiting a variety of activities for Afghan women and the subsequent psychological impact have been reported by many scholars and organizations using the Western conceptualization of PTSD (Alemi et al. 2022). Rasekh et al. (1998) indicated that the violations of women's rights had extraordinary health consequences for Afghan women. The findings of the present study provide detailed, firsthand accounts of these consequences, illustrating the profound mental health toll. In addition, the study by Schulz and Schulz (1999) is also relevant to the findings of the present study as they analyzed the motives and contextual underpinnings that led to the Taliban's draconian treatment of women. These authors highlighted factors such as the Taliban's drive for power and control and the systematic use of terror in the exercise of that power, which aligns with the atmosphere of fear and control described by the participants.

Finally, the Afghan women questioned in the current study offered solutions to change the existing situation from civil resistance to trust in their abilities. Their narratives revealed that civil resistance in the form of unity, peaceful demonstrations, community support, advocacy for educational equality, and resilience in hardships is a path they see forward against the Taliban to achieve their rights. They also expressed their belief in the role of international protection of women's human rights as being effective in the Taliban regime. Azizah, and Ahsana (2023) clearly showed that UN Women can address women's rights in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, a finding that corresponds with the hopes articulated by the women in this study.

Overall, the lived experience of Afghan women during the second period of Taliban rule underscores the importance of amplifying and centering their voices in discussions about gender rights and empowerment. By listening to and understanding their experiences, we can better support and advocate for their rights in the face of oppressive regimes and patriarchal structures. Ultimately, their resilience and determination serve as a powerful reminder of the strength and agency of Afghan women in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

As a result of the Taliban's return to power, women in Afghanistan have faced significant challenges including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as higher rates of violence and oppression. Afghan women's resilience and determination

continue to shape their experiences under Taliban rule. Their voices deserve attention, recognition, and support as they navigate an oppressive environment. As researchers, policymakers, and global citizens, we must amplify these voices and advocate for their rights, safety, and well-being. Women in Afghanistan have been active agents of change, working within their communities to advocate for their rights and push for social and political reform. Instead of viewing women solely as victims in need of rescue, it is important to recognize their strength and courage in the face of adversity. Supporting and amplifying the voices of Afghan women themselves, rather than imposing solutions from outside, is key to achieving lasting change and empowerment for women in Afghanistan.

Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

The current study was incorporated into a qualitative design to uncover the experiences of Afghan women during the Taliban regime. As a result, the purpose of this research was not to achieve generalizability. This study was conducted with women in Kabul, where access to virtual space is more. Although, Kabul is an urban area women from other less developed parts of Afghanistan may have different experiences than urban women. Therefore, this study did not capture the views of the majority of Afghan women. Additionally, the current research was constrained by a convenience sample of individuals who were in contact with our informant in Afghanistan during the data collection period. This sampling method has several limitations concerning guaranteeing a diverse range of perspectives among the participants. Due to the same reasons, the sample size was also relatively small ($n = 16$), which further restricts the range of perspectives that could have been included. Meanwhile, more themes of the lived experiences of Afghan women may be found in a larger sample. While the current authors believe to reach saturation in the study, conducting a broader study across various provinces and among different races and religions in Afghanistan would be beneficial for future research.

Funding

This research has not received any financial support.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

All authors have participated in the design, implementation and writing of all sections of the present study.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

This study employed AI (Open AI GPT-5) in translation of article to native English.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Board in URD. To observe ethical principles and to attract the trust of the participants, the authors used methods such as not recording identity information, using codes to introduce the participants, and eliminating the data obtained from recorded interviews at the end of the research.

Data availability statement

Data available on request from the author.

Acknowledgements

The authors extends her gratitude to all those who participated in the study.

References

- Abfalter, D., Mueller-Seeger, J., & Raich, M. (2021). Translation decisions in qualitative research: A systematic framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(4), 469–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805549>
- Ahsan-Tirmizi, S. (2021). *Pious peripheries: Runaway women in post-Taliban Afghanistan*. Stanford University Press.
- Akbary, M. F., Ariyo, T., & Jiang, Q. (2022). Sociocultural determinants of attitudes toward domestic violence among women and men in Afghanistan: Evidence from Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey 2015. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 37(11–12), NP9320–NP9344. . <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520980400>
- Alemi, Q., Stempel, C., Montgomery, S., et al. (2022). Prevalence and social-ecological correlates of intimate partner violence in a conflict zone—Evidence from the 2015 Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey. *Violence Against Women*, 28(11), 2825–2856. . <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211051398>
- Amin, S. N., & Alizada, N. (2020). Alternative forms of resistance: Afghan women negotiating for change. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(6), 358–375. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss6/23>
- Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>
- Azizah, N., & Ahsana, F. N. (2023). The role of UN Women in addressing women's rights in Afghanistan under Taliban. *Journal of Islamic World and Politics*, 7(2), 140–150. . <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i2.57>
- Azizi, H. (2025). *Fleeing gender apartheid: A feminist analysis of forced migration among diverse women in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime since 2021* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford]. <https://doi.org/10.5287/ora-qmj0x87j4>
- Bahrudin, D. Q. (2021). State terrorism and Taliban's rule (1996-2001) in Afghanistan [Master's thesis, Marmara Universitesi].
- Barfield, T. (2010). *Afghanistan: A cultural and political history*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400834532>
- Basu, K. (2023). Gender-based violence in Afghanistan: A distraught state in denial. *International Journal of Human Rights and Constitutional Studies*, 10(3), 285–302. . <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJHRCS.2023.131862>

- Cannon, C. E. B., & Chu, E. K. (2021). Gender, sexuality, and feminist critiques in energy research: A review and call for transversal thinking. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 75, 102005. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102005>
- Chaudhury, A., & Colla, S. (2021). Next steps in dismantling discrimination: Lessons from ecology and conservation science. *Conservation Letters*, 14(2), e12774. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12774>
- Chenzaie, A. (2021). From a weak state to a rogue state: The emergence and phases of state decay in Afghanistan (1978-2001) [Doctoral dissertation, American University in Cairo]. https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3522&context=retro_etds
- Cohen, D. K., & Karim, S. M. (2022). Does more equality for women mean less war? Rethinking sex and gender inequality and political violence. *International Organization*, 76(2), 414–444. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000333>
- Cordesman, A. H. (2022). *Learning from the war*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep34154.1.pdf>
- De Leede, S. (2022). *Afghan women and the Taliban: An exploratory assessment* (ICCT Policy Brief). International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep17470.pdf>
- Errasti-Ibarrondo, B., Jordán, J. A., Díez-Del-Corral, M. P., & Arantzamendi, M. (2019). Van Manen's phenomenology of practice: How can it contribute to nursing? *Nursing Inquiry*, 26(1), e12259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12259>
- Faheem, M., & Khan, M. M. (2022). Recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and international community. *Strategic Studies*, 42(1), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.042.01.0014>
- Fatima, Q. (2014). The rise and fall of Taliban regime (1994-2001) in Afghanistan: The internal dynamics. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(1), 35–46.
- Frogh, R., & Rajath, D. V. (2022). Women education in Afghanistan: A historical perspective. *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 12(6), 162–173. <https://doi.org/10.5958/2249-7315.2022.00346.X>
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Ghani, B., & Fiske, L. (2020). 'Art is my language': Afghan cultural production challenging Islamophobic stereotypes. *Journal of Sociology*, 56(1), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319882536>
- Hamilton, P. (2020). 'Now that I know what you're about': Black feminist reflections on power in the research relationship. *Qualitative Research*, 20(5), 519–533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119891583>
- Ibrahimi, N. (2023). The state, identity politics and ethnic boundaries in Afghanistan: The case of Sunni Hazaras. *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(2), 669–685. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12933>
- Irfan, A., Khan, A. W., & Iqbal, J. (2023). Contemporary challenges and Taliban regime in Afghanistan. *VFAST Transactions on Education and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.21015/vtess.v11i2.1337>
- Jain, B., Bajaj, S. S., Noorulhuda, M., & Crews, R. D. (2021). Global health responsibilities in a Taliban-led Afghanistan. *Nature Medicine*, 27(11), 1852–1853. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-021-01547-8>

- Jami, M. (2022). Testing the limits of human rights' dynamism: A comparative study of Afghan women's rights under the Taliban regimes (1996, 2021). *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 78(4), 602–616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284221127786>
- Kakar, A. S., & Hasan, A. (2024). Exploring the combined effects of socio-political conflicts and patriarchic society on a construction career path: Evidence from Afghan female professionals. *International Journal of Construction Education and Research*, 20(1), 98–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15578771.2023.2186981>
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004>
- Karimi, O. (2023). 'They are not a good match': Exploring the attitudes and practices of marriage amongst young Afghans in the diaspora through an intersectional perspective. In E. Chase, N. Sigona, & D. Chatty (Eds.), *Becoming adult on the move*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26534-1_9
- Kaviani, H., & Ahmadi, S.-J. (2021). A cross-cultural and trans-generational study: Links between psychological characteristics and socio-political tendency amongst urban population in Afghanistan. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(12), 6372. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18126372>
- Khosla, T. (2022). Feminism, peace and Afghanistan: An Indian feminist perspective. In *Analyzing the current Afghan context*. Routledge.
- Majidi, N. (2017). *From forced migration to forced returns in Afghanistan: Policy and program implications*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Mannell, J., Grewal, G., Ahmad, L., & Ahmad, A. (2021). A qualitative study of women's lived experiences of conflict and domestic violence in Afghanistan. *Violence Against Women*, 27(11), 1862–1878. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220935191>
- Mauthner, N. S. (2023). Ethics and feminist research. In *Handbook of feminist research methodologies in management and organization studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377035.00012>
- Mazhar, M. S., & Goraya, N. S. (2021). Afghan women education: Bottlenecks & future. *South Asian Studies*, 35(1), 47–72.
- McAuliffe, M., & Iqbal, M. (2022). *Struggling to survive: Gender, displacement, and migration in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/struggling-survive-gender-displacement-and-migration-taliban-controlled-afghanistan>
- Nasruddin, M., & Muliana, S. (2023). The urgency of a moderate Islamic spirit for the liberation and empowerment of women movement. *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman*, 16(1), 59–76. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v16i1.161>
- Noury, A. G., & Speciale, B. (2016). Social constraints and women's education: Evidence from Afghanistan under radical religious rule. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 44(4), 821–841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2016.07.005>
- Nwe, S. M. (2022). *Pathways to public life for professional women in Afghanistan: Negotiating shifting patriarchal political regimes and gender regimes* [Doctoral dissertation, University of

- Bradford]. <https://bradscholars.brad.ac.uk/entities/publication/6ecdaf5d-c6bd-4940-8c3b-ec21ca8339ba>
- Pelevin, M. (2022). Seeking protection and reconciliation: A Pashtun legal custom in recorded tribal histories. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 54(4), 687–704. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743823000016>
- Pourzand, N. (2004). Afghan refugee women's organizations in Pakistan (1980-2001): Struggles in adversity. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 30(3–4), 65–82.
- Qazi Zada, S. (2021). Legislative, institutional and policy reforms to combat violence against women in Afghanistan. *Indian Journal of International Law*, 59(1–4), 257–283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40901-020-00116-x>
- Rasekh, Z., Bauer, H. M., Manos, M. M., & Iacopino, V. (1998). Women's health and human rights in Afghanistan. *JAMA*, 280(5), 449–455. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.280.5.449>
- Raymond, C. (2021). *I forgot how strong I have been: A narrative inquiry of one Afghan woman's storied experiences* [Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University].
- Schulz, J. J., & Schulz, L. (1999). The darkest of ages: Afghan women under the Taliban. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 5(3), 237–254. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327949pac0503_5
- Shorr, J. (2021). *Posttraumatic stress disorder in Biafra war survivors* [Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology].
- Singh, P. (2023). Challenges faced by women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. *Journal of Polity and Society*, 15(1), 25–40. <https://journalspoliticalscience.com/index.php/i/article/view/92>
- Sirri, L. (2020). *Islamic feminism: Discourses on gender and sexuality in contemporary Islam*. Routledge.
- Taylor, J. (2022). *Empathy-based strain among social workers working with couples experiencing infidelity* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University].
- Terpstra, N. (2022). Opportunity structures, rebel governance, and disputed leadership: The Taliban's upsurge in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, 2011–2015. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 45(4), 258–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1702256>
- Thelma, C. C. (2024). The intersection of human rights and education: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(4), 2545–2558. <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.804249>
- Thorpe, H., & Chawansky, M. (2021). Gender, embodiment and reflexivity in everyday spaces of development in Afghanistan. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 28(3), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1719984>
- United Nations. (2023, September 27). *Induce Taliban to end 'gender apartheid' in Afghanistan through all available means, speakers urge Security Council, alarmed by growing oppression of women, girls* (Press Release SC/15421). <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15421.doc.htm>
- Van Manen, M. (2017). Phenomenology in its original sense. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(6), 810–825. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317699381>
- Van Manen, M. (2023). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.

- Watson, C., Bantebya, G. K., & Muhanguzi, F. K. (2018). The paradox of change and continuity in social norms and practices affecting adolescent girls' capabilities and transitions to adulthood in rural Uganda. In C. Watson (Ed.), *Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries*. Routledge.
- Webber, K. J. (1997). The economic future of Afghan women: The interaction between Islamic law and Muslim culture. *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law*, 18, 1049–1062.

