

Economic and Human Development Impacts of Girls' Educational Deprivation in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan

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Abstract. This research analyzes the effects of girls' exclusion from education in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, with a particular emphasis on the economic and social aspects of this crisis. Using data analysis and international reports, articles, and authoritative sources, this research shows that excluding girls from education leads to a significant reduction in household income, economic growth, and job opportunities in the short term. In the long term, this crisis will lead to the weakening of social and economic structures and also pose a serious threat to the sustainable development of Afghanistan. The study also emphasizes that the Taliban's policies of prohibiting girls' education are not only a clear violation of human rights, but also slow down the process of human and economic development in the country and lead to the exacerbation of social and economic inequalities. The study concludes that continuing these policies could lead to dire consequences for the future of Afghanistan and future generations of girls in the country.

Keywords: Educational Exclusion, Socio-economic Impact, Sustainable Development.

1 Introduction

According to UNICEF's 2025 report, more than 2.2 million girls in Afghanistan are currently deprived of education[1]. following the Taliban's ban on female education. This educational crisis has led to a sharp rise in illiteracy rates, which in turn has significantly harmed Afghanistan's human development. Human development, as defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), refers to improving people's abilities in areas like education, health, and living standards, ultimately providing greater opportunities for people to enhance their quality of life and participate more actively in society[2]. Esman describes development as "steady progress toward improvement in the human condition" (1991)[3]. Both of these definitions emphasize not just economic improvement, but a broad expansion of human potential, with education being a key element in empowering individuals socially and economically.

Depriving girls of education is thus not only a violation of their human rights but also contributes directly to poverty and economic inequality. A report by the World

Bank highlights that in 2013, 38.3% of Afghans were living below the poverty line; by 2017, this figure had risen to 54.4%[4]. International studies show that girls' lack of access to education is one of the core factors in reducing workforce skills and employment opportunities for women, which only worsens poverty and inequality (UNESCO, UNICEF, and The World Bank, 2021)[5]. The main question this paper seeks to tackle is: What are the immediate and long-term economic and human development impacts of depriving girls of education under Taliban rules in Afghanistan?

This research paper is divided into four main sections. The introduction outlines the background, significance, and main research question. The research method explains the normative approach, based on secondary sources such as legal documents and international reports. The Discussion provided a critical analysis of Taliban policies towards women and their impact on human rights. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key findings and offers recommendations.

2 Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical method based on library research. Data is collected from international reports, academic articles, and credible sources such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank to analyze the social and economic impacts of girls' educational deprivation under Taliban rule.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the theoretical framework of Human Development Theory (UNDP, Amartya Sen), Human Capital theory, which considers education a key factor in expanding human potential. Denying girls education limits their capabilities and hinders long-term economic and social development.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Historical and Political Context

Throughout Afghanistan, girls' education has consistently faced challenges. Until the reign of Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), there were no schools for women. Amanullah Khan was the first Afghan monarch to establish schools for girls and allow them to attend. This marked the beginning of literacy among Afghan girls. With the end of his reign, the issues facing women and girls reemerged, and their schools were closed. Girls' schools reopened during the rule of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan (1960)[6]. Women and girls attended school until the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 1996, after which girls' schools were closed until 2001[6]. During the Taliban's five-year rule, girls' education was effectively eliminated, and no girls were allowed to study. In 2001, when the Republic of Afghanistan government was established, a new era of enlightenment in women's education began. During this period, the government sought to establish schools for women across the country, facilitating girls' access to

education. By 2021, the situation for girls had significantly improved. Almost the majority of girls were literate and had graduated from schools and universities. In late 2021, Afghanistan fell for the second time, and the Taliban took control. Since then, the Taliban has closed all schools and universities for girls and women. Now, no girl in Afghanistan has the right to continue her education beyond the 6th grade.

3.2 The Impact of the Taliban's Rise and Long-Term Rule on Girls' Access to Education.

The Taliban's rule in Afghanistan had numerous negative consequences, most notably an increase in violence and challenges for women. The closure of schools to female students created many challenges for girls, which could have immediate and long-term negative consequences[6]. The immediate consequence of this Taliban action is an increase in the marriage of young girls. Parents are forced to marry their daughters at a young age, fearing that the Taliban will take them with them. Some parents disregard the age difference and force their daughters to marry significantly older men[7].

Another factor that has had a serious impact on girls since the Taliban took control is the increase in violence against women and girls and their susceptibility to mental and psychological illnesses. During the Taliban rule, a large number of girls committed suicide due to dire family and economic conditions. Unemployment of women and girls and the emergence of poverty are also among the worst factors that have made girls' lives face many hardships.

3.3 Changes in the Taliban's Laws and Policies in the Field of Education and the Challenges Created

After coming to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban has made many changes in its laws and policies. None of their laws are supported by Islam's primary sources: the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet. This group considers itself to be pure Muslims, while their behavior is completely the opposite. The religion of Islam itself is founded on the word "Iqra" (read), "اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ" Read in the name of your Lord who created[8]. Nowhere in the Quran or the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam does it say that women and girls are forbidden to study. Or that women and girls do not have the right to work or participate in politics or society. Rather, their only duty is to take care of the house. The Taliban have abolished the old laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and have made fundamental changes in their policies. They have imposed many restrictions on women and girls in their laws and policies. Among their laws are:

1. The Creation of the Law of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil: This law imposes numerous restrictions, including prohibiting women from speaking loudly in public. It forces women to cover their faces, and they do not have the right to travel alone but must be accompanied by their religious mahram (brother, father, or husband). This law is a means of suppressing women and girls[9].
2. Restriction on Girls' Education, Another Law: The Taliban has imposed a new law and policy limiting girls' schools to grade 6. It has closed middle

schools, high schools, and universities to girls. Currently, girls are only allowed to study up to grade 6 by enacting a new law. In a report recently published by UNAMA, 2.2 million girls in Afghanistan have been denied the right to education in the last four years under Taliban rule[10]. In some provinces, they have even closed private courses. They say that girls do not need to study. Rather, girls must stay at home and get married. This group believes that women and girls were created only for housework and raising children[11].

3. **Emphasis on Religious Education and Removal of Certain Books from the Education System:** The Taliban asserts that education should prioritize religion. They have excluded some texts from the Afghan school curriculum, including those on Art, Patriotism, and professions. The Taliban have also changed Shia jurisprudential books to Sunni (Hanafi) jurisprudential books in Hazara areas. The Taliban has reduced the number of schools and instead increased the number of religious schools[12].

3.4 The Short-Term Social and Economic Impacts of Deprivation of Education

Quality education is essential for improving life in modern societies, and many countries have adopted it as a key part of their social and cultural policies[13]. Providing quality education not only promotes individual development and job creation but also strengthens the social and economic foundations of a country. Conversely, neglecting this issue may lead to negative short- and long-term consequences such as poverty, unemployment, and social instability.

The Taliban's exclusion of girls above the age of 12 from education deprives them of access to the education system, at a time when adolescence is the most sensitive period of their lives. This is a period of life in which adolescents have a greater need for social approval and connection with peers. Since adolescents are more behaviorally sensitive than children and adults, social interactions play an important role in the formation of social identity[14]. The removal of the educational environment has profound and negative effects on them. These include: effects on self-esteem and self-worth, inability to form positive relationships, social exclusion, problems with resilience and emotional stability, and effects on social growth and development[15].

A shortage of around 11,000 female teachers is expected to exacerbate this crisis by 2030 (UNESCO_2023)[15]. The shortage of female teachers means fewer women in the workforce, as well as fewer who can empower other professionals. This shortage not only limits educational opportunities for girls but also removes successful female role models from society, who play a significant role in girls' decisions to continue their education. The result is a significant decline in Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP). A report conducted in India suggests that the country could increase its GDP by 9 percent by increasing female labor force participation to 50 percent[16].

Although the social and economic conditions in India and Afghanistan are different, data shows that investing in the female workforce is a key element for

economic development.

Investing in education despite the initial costs and the loss of other opportunities for investment, such as health and industry, is profitable in the long term for people and governments. The costs of opportunity need to be considered in this regard, especially in developing countries, because education has been recognized as a main factor for future economic development. This improvement is possible by increasing the job opportunities and quality of employment over a long period[17]. While the Taliban led to a decrease in families' income and restrictions on girls' access to the labor market, by depriving girls of education, this action led to the loss of job opportunities and economic development in the future[18]. These short-term consequences are due to the dangerous results for Afghanistan. According to UNESCO's report, if Afghanistan continues this policy to deprive girls, its economy will suffer 9.6\$ billion until the year 2066[15].

3.5 Deprivation of Education and its Long-term Economic Effects

Educational deprivation is one of the major obstacles to development in both developed and developing countries. Education affects not only individual development but also the economy of the country. Economic growth is influenced by the skills of workers and the quality of education. An educated workforce leads to increased labor productivity, faster innovation, and consequently, a prosperous economy and sustainable development[19].

In societies where individuals are deprived of education due to factors such as poverty, insecurity, and discrimination, the effects extend beyond the individual to the national economy. Increased poverty, reduced labor force participation, and the prospect of facing poverty and unemployment for children are among the long-term consequences of educational deprivation. Research shows that excluding girls from education significantly reduces national income and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. A new study on the economic consequences of excluding Afghan women from education and work suggests that the Taliban ban costs the Afghan economy more than \$1.4 billion annually, far more than previously reported by the United Nations Children's Fund[20].

Deprivation of education prevents girls from adequately taking care of their own health and that of their future children. They lack sufficient knowledge about health care during pregnancy, child nutrition, and disease prevention, which leads to increased medical costs and further poverty. Furthermore, girls who are deprived of education struggle to cope with stress, anxiety, and mental health issues that exacerbate these costs[21]. Education develops girls' skills and leads to increased labor productivity. Educated girls acquire technical knowledge that enables them to perform complex tasks and increases their decision-making power. They also develop the confidence to face challenges and improve the quality of work through creativity[22].

3.6 Long-term Effects on Future Generations

Depriving girls of education not only stunts their growth but also negatively impacts

future generations and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Studies in the United States show that people who grow up in poverty for a long time often remain in poverty as adults. Therefore, it can be predicted that Afghan girls will be deprived of education.

Today, they will face poverty as adults[23]. Children deprived of education are more dependent on government support than adults. Afghan girls will also rely on government assistance and aid agencies as adults, placing a financial burden on the Afghan government.[24]

3.7 Economic Implications of Girls' Education

As stated in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, education is both an individual right and a social necessity. “It not only leads to personal development, but also fosters mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and social stability.”[25]. Girls’ education is essential for building a more humane, equal, and stable society. However, the Taliban’s continued policy of banning girls from education has led to a severe shortage of female teachers in the education system, reducing the potential workforce. This has a direct impact on economic productivity and GDP. According to the World Bank (2024), Afghanistan’s GDP has declined by about 26 percent in the past two years, reflecting a significant decline in the sources of economic growth, reduced investment, and loss of productive capacity[26].

3.8 Long-term Effects on Economic Institutions

The deprivation of girls’ education not only impacts individual growth but also has long-term consequences for the country's economic institutions. A critical aspect of these effects is the disruption in the formation of a skilled workforce, which is essential for economic development. Without access to education, the potential of a significant portion of the population remains untapped, directly affecting the productivity and innovation capacity of the economy. This educational deprivation exacerbates the economic strain on national institutions. The lack of female participation in the workforce, particularly in skilled sectors, leads to an overall reduction in national economic output. As fewer women enter the labor market due to a lack of education and skills, the financial dependency on male breadwinners increases, further weakening the economic resilience of households and institutions.

The lack of an educated female workforce leads to significant shortages in vital areas such as health care, education, and public services. This places additional pressure on already-strained economic institutions, which must adapt to these gaps. The decline in national income and productivity places a strain on government resources as the government struggles to support a growing and dependent population[26]. This dependency exacerbates reliance on international aid and makes it difficult to achieve self-sustaining economic growth and stability. According to the UN Women report (2024), Afghanistan faces multiple crises, including economic, humanitarian, and political, which are exacerbated by a women's rights crisis[27].

Taliban policies, particularly the ban on girls’ education[28], limit women’s opportunities for education and employment, making them more vulnerable and

reducing their economic resilience. This also threatens the economic stability of families and undermines the overall stability of society.

4 Conclusion

In the short term, this policy leads to psychological trauma, social isolation of girls, and a reduction in GDP. In the long term, it leads to impaired human development, labor shortages, and economic stagnation. Ensuring girls' access to education is both a fundamental human right and a critical element in achieving long-term development and economic reconstruction. Thus, depriving girls of the opportunity to learn poses a significant risk to Afghanistan's economic prospects.

It is recommended that the international community or international organizations, in cooperation with the Afghan government (if any), establish temporary economic support programs to maintain economic stability and prevent future collapse. These programs could include support for key production sectors, job creation, and informal education for women. Support for technological innovations and solutions could also help reduce unemployment and strengthen the digital economy.

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