



## A Comparative Study of Cultural Barriers to Girls' Right to Education in Bamyan and Kandahar Cities

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### ABSTRACT

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By taking control of Afghanistan, the Taliban regime has closed schools and universities to girls and denied them the right to education beyond the sixth grade. The Taliban government has declared the lack of a suitable environment that is compatible with Islamic standards as the main reason for opposing the education of girls. While the majority of Sunni and Shiite jurists and religious scholars do not agree with the Taliban ruling. An example of such a restriction is not seen even in the most traditional Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia. Many views consider the Taliban's policy towards girls' education as a result of the traditions and cultural values of the Pashtuns. Based on this, the present research, with a comparative study of the cities of Bamyan and Kandahar, tried to investigate the cultural barriers to the right to education for girls in these two cities, which represent the two largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Qualitative method was used in this research and data was obtained through the analysis of questionnaires. The questionnaires of this research were set up in the online form of Google and were given to the respondents using the "available" method. According to the findings of the research, cultural factors are the main obstacle to girls not having access to the right to education, which is not allowing families, wrong culture and traditions, insecurity, lack of morale, unfavorable economic situation, early marriage, lack of awareness, inappropriate educational environment, lack of family encouragement, Men's pessimistic view of girls, and the weak perception of girls compared to boys in society, were identified as the most important.

### KEYWORDS:

Right to education, girls, cultural barriers, Bamyan, Kandahar.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

On August 15, 2021, the Taliban returned to power after capturing Kabul and re-established the Islamic Emirate. In the first days of their administration, they dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs and replaced it with the "Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice." Officials from this ministry, dressed in white, appeared in public and began monitoring the behavior of people, especially women and girls. These patrol officers monitored Afghan women and girls' occupational, educational, and academic activities. Daily, they visited offices, universities, and schools to inspect the dress and appearance of women and girls. As a result, they

prevented some girls from attending universities and schools, deeming their attire inappropriate. The Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, following the orders of Mullah Hibatullah, initially mandated the Ministries of Education and Higher Education to segregate classes for girls and boys and to install curtains in their classrooms. Shortly thereafter, they went further by imposing a complete ban on girls attending universities and reducing their attendance at schools to only up to the sixth grade. Their opposition to girls' presence in universities and schools is so severe that currently, female students who graduated from Afghan educational institutions before the Taliban's rule are not allowed to visit these institutions to process their academic records. Instead, they are instructed to send their fathers or brothers to universities and schools to obtain their educational documents.

The Taliban's opposition to girls' education is not limited to their periods in power. After the fall of their regime in 2001, during the twenty-year Republic period, they undertook

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actions such as closing and burning girls' schools, poisoning girls, bombing schools, and throwing acid on female students to keep girls at home. According to a report, between 2007 and 2009, the Taliban destroyed, set on fire, or bombed hundreds of public schools, 80% of which were girls' schools.<sup>1</sup>

The de facto Taliban Emirate frames all these actions under a religious guise, which Islamic countries, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and religious scholars and jurists currently deem unjustifiable from a religious standpoint. They have repeatedly urged the Taliban to allow girls' education. Following heightened international opposition to the ban on girls' education in Afghanistan, some familiar figures attributed this approach of the Taliban to the tribal and cultural background of their leaders and officials. Some researchers also believe that the Taliban's approach to girls' right to education stems from traditions, customs, and practices that collectively form the culture of a society and reflect the behavior of the people within that society (Sokhanwar, 2018, p 437).

In addition to the clear texts in Islamic sources that affirm the right to education for girls, the fact that no Islamic country has imposed a ban on girls' education is a clear indication that the Taliban's justification for prohibiting girls' education on religious grounds is invalid. Therefore, it seems that the Taliban and their misogynistic actions, particularly their opposition to girls' education, stem from tribal and cultural traditions. The mindset and framework of the Taliban leaders reflect the culture and traditions of the tribal and clan society of southern and eastern Afghanistan. It should be noted that all Taliban leaders from the beginning until now have come from this society. The Taliban's bias towards the Pashto language and their animosity towards Persian should be considered in this context. Moreover, a study on the identity of Taliban leaders shows that out of 29 leaders, only two were not from their tribe, and 15 out of the 29-member leadership council came from one province. (Ansari, 2021, p 26)

Therefore, the current research aims to study the cultural barriers to girls' right to education in two cities with different cultures and cultural values (1- the decision-making center of the Taliban government (Kandahar City) and 2- Bamyan City). The question should be answered whether cultural factors, especially the cultural values ruling in the center of authority of the Taliban group, have prevented girls from accessing the right to education.

This research was carried out in a situation where the Taliban rule over Afghanistan and Kandahar city is their most important decision-making center. The occupation of the atmosphere of terror and the Taliban's intense surveillance on the behavior of the citizens of Kandahar and the lack of a culture of cooperation in research and scientific research have made less people from this city willing to cooperate.

Nevertheless, we spent a lot of effort to get the views of more residents of Kandahar city. It should be noted that after distributing the questionnaire among the residents of Kandahar city, we received several security threats through calls and text messages stating that this research was not carried out, and we had to close the portal for collecting the questionnaire and received a very small number of responses. Let's stop. In addition, it should be added that it was impossible to observe gender equality in this research in general, and a small number of women who received the questionnaire of this research did not want to complete it after some time. This was while we did not face any serious problem in completing the questionnaires in Bamyan province.

### 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RESEARCH

The concept of culture was used in the writings of anthropologists from the middle of the 19th century, and its scientific use was made by the English anthropologist Taylor at the end of this century. From a lexical point of view, this word is synonymous with the word culture in French and English. From a lexical point of view, it means "science, knowledge, upbringing, politeness, tact and solution, intellect and wisdom". From a scientific point of view, culture is a set of material and spiritual values that have been created as a result of repetition in the society and have been approved by the members of the society and used jointly. (Koen 2010: 56-57).

According to the concepts, definitions, and characteristics of culture, it can be said that human behavior is based on their cultural beliefs. Cultural beliefs are the beliefs that have relatively many followers in society. The origin of these beliefs has been different; Sometimes it is rooted in historical or geographical or religious conditions or special events or in science. But what is evident is that a large part of cultural beliefs appear in the form of religious principles, or it can also result from organizational interactions. Therefore, what we know as cultural barriers in this research theoretically refers to the limitations, beliefs and behaviors that exist in a specific culture and prevent the implementation of a program or work in a targeted manner. Therefore, the factors of banning the education of girls can also be discussed as a major part of cultural beliefs in the form of religious principles of a particular group.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Afghanistan's scientific community is alien to conducting sociological and anthropological research. Among all the works and articles that have been published in Afghanistan in recent decades, one can find less research that has introduced the ethnic group in this country from an anthropological point of view. Most of the researches used a descriptive-analytical

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, The Quantitative impact of conflict on education, 2010, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000191304>

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approach and rely on library data and historical documents. However, here is a review of some of the research done in connection with the present topic:

In his article "The Relationship between Culture and Inequality in Women's Education in Afghanistan after 2001", Mohammad Dawood Sakhnour (2017) tried to link the factor of inequality in women's education in Afghanistan with cultural values by using the descriptive-analytical method. He considers the behavior and dealings with women's education in Afghanistan to be the result of the prevailing cultural beliefs in the society, and in this way, the problems that female students have faced in the last few years, such as poisoning in schools, throwing acid on their faces, shooting girls. In schools, he considers school explosions, attacks on schools and universities, and similar behaviors to be the result of wrong tribal traditions that have been inherited since ancient times and still remain in their original strength in many parts of Afghanistan. To prove that cultural beliefs are the reason for educational inequality between girls and boys, he looked at the historical background of some people of this country, including the groups that ruled in Afghanistan, and by mentioning the eleven-article law of Ahmad Shah Abdali, which has seven articles It implied the imposition of restrictions on women, and then the rule of three generations of this family over Afghanistan and the consolidation of the foundations of the eleven-point law are the main reasons for creating culture and values, creating restrictions on women and, as a result, inequality in the education of girls and boys. knows In addition, this researcher rushed to the theoretical basis in this regard in order to prove this inequality. In the theoretical foundations of this study, various theories have been examined, including the theory of class inequality, gender inequality, physiological differences, differences in socialization, patriarchy theory, Marxist theory, spatial inequality, ethnic inequality, and finally cultural inequality. Each of these theories emphasizes the existence of greater opportunities for men and more restrictions on women and girls. Based on these theoretical foundations, it is asserted that throughout the several thousand years of human existence, inequality between men and women has always existed.

In his 2018 article "The Educational Status of Women in Afghanistan," Mohammad Ehsani initially addresses the history of women's education in Afghanistan, followed by a review of the legal status of girls' right to education under Afghan law. He argues that, theoretically and jurisprudentially, there is no issue with girls' education in major cities and secure provinces of Afghanistan. Since this article was written during the previous Afghan regime, when the ruling government with a democratic approach was committed to defending girls' right to education, it can be said that the author's perspective was influenced by the prevailing atmosphere in Afghanistan at that time. However, the current focus is on the idea that the main barrier to girls' access to education is the jurisprudential and value-based views that, with a long historical background, persist in both major cities

and rural areas, leading to the closure of educational institutions' doors to girls.

In her 2018 article "Deprivation of Children's Right to Education in Afghanistan," Mehri Rezaei examines the status of the right to education within Afghan domestic laws and international documents, and reviews the historical background of education in Afghanistan. The article focuses on the challenges of providing education in Afghanistan, particularly for women. Rezaei identifies several key factors preventing girls and children from accessing education: lack of schools and educational facilities, shortage of qualified and experienced teachers, insecurity on the way to school, poverty and economic difficulties, cultural and traditional beliefs against education, and child marriages. This article was written when educational institutions were still open to girls, and the author aimed to highlight the barriers that persisted despite the government's efforts to improve educational access. However, the situation has now drastically changed, with girls being banned from attending school beyond the sixth grade. Therefore, it is essential to explore the underlying reasons and motivations behind such policies by the Taliban.

In their 2009 book "Women, Sharia, and Gender," Nooruddin Alavi, Zia Mola Jafari, and Ali Zia aim to uncover religious and legal interpretations regarding women and girls. The authors state that the objective of their research is to achieve a scientific understanding of women's rights in Islam, thoroughly evaluating the theoretical foundations of women's rights in religious texts and international documents. Throughout this study, the authors focus on the status of women in Afghan society. They assess women's participation in governmental and non-governmental institutions, their involvement in political, social, and civil affairs, their employment status, their level of education, their presence in schools and universities, and the challenges they face. The findings indicate a disparity between the values governing the lives of women in rural and urban areas. Urban women have a broader perspective on their rights and believe that Islam does not oppose women's education and societal participation. Conversely, in rural areas, such views on women's rights are not prevalent, and rural women have accepted the hardships and challenges imposed on them under the guise of culture and Sharia.

In addition to these articles and studies, various ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Independent Human Rights Commission conducted periodic research on the legal status of women and girls, particularly their right to education and access to education, during the twenty years of the republic. Some of these institutions' websites are still accessible. Many of these studies examined cultural factors, such as early marriage, family disapproval of women's education, meaningless traditions, and insecurity, as separate

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variables that contribute to the lack of access to education for girls.

Despite the recognition of many cultural factors by the aforementioned researchers and studies as the main obstacles to girls' access to education, this present research is novel in this field. Previous researchers have considered cultural barriers as a whole across the country. However, my perspective is that not all regions of Afghanistan agree with the cultural barriers to girls' education. Rather, the restrictions and obstacles imposed by the Taliban government stem from specific tribal cultural values, which are forcibly imposed on other Afghan citizens through the exercise of power. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the roots of the cultural barriers to girls' education in the hometowns of the Taliban leaders and to assess the extent to which these barriers are also present among non-Pashtun populations.

### 4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- 1) It seems that cultural barriers are the main factor preventing girls from accessing education in Afghanistan, particularly in the cities of Kandahar and Bamyan.
- 2) Ethnic and tribal traditions prevail among the residents of Bamyan and Kandahar, which have imposed limitations and restrictions on girls' education.
- 3) Rigid interpretations of religion are common in Kandahar and Bamyan, and this has led to obstacles and limitations on girls' education.
- 4) The residents of Bamyan and Kandahar hold a series of beliefs that deny the right to education for girls, which has prevented girls from reclaiming their right to education.

### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, a qualitative method was employed, and information was gathered using a questionnaire containing thirty questions. The questionnaire was designed in two formats. The first part comprised twenty-seven closed-ended questions, designed as a five-point Likert scale, where respondents were asked to select their preferred option. The second part included three open-ended questions where respondents could share their opinions.

The questionnaire collected respondents' views on three categories of cultural factors that hinder girls' education. The first category included ethnic and tribal traditions (9 items), the second category encompassed prevailing beliefs among people (10 items), and the third category dealt with rigid religious interpretations (8 items). Additionally, four questions focused on the perspectives of residents in Kandahar's provincial capital regarding the future of girls' education.

After drafting, the questionnaire was reviewed by two specialists: one with a Ph.D. in Constitutional Law and a

former commissioner of the Research and Evaluation Unit of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and another with a Ph.D. in Political Science and a researcher in Islamic political studies with five scholarly works related to Islamic movements in Afghanistan. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was finalized and set up in an online Google form.

Considering current security issues, the questionnaires were distributed to residents in Kandahar's provincial capital through messaging apps. Respondents were given ten days to complete the questionnaire, and ultimately, twenty respondents participated. The collected data were analyzed using Excel and SPSS software, and the results were presented descriptively.

Although the exact population of the two cities (Bamyan and Kandahar) is not available, this study aimed to achieve greater accuracy in results by ensuring a larger number of participants with gender equality. However, due to the stringent control exerted by Mullah Haibatullah in Kandahar, it was not possible to contact a larger sample or maintain gender equality, whereas in Bamyan, we did not face significant limitations.

Using the "convenience sampling" method, we managed to distribute the questionnaire to 28 men and 7 women in Kandahar, and 25 men and 25 women in Bamyan. Ultimately, after the specified period, 20 questionnaires were collected from Kandahar, with 17 (85%) answered by men and 3 (15%) answered by women. Similarly, 40 questionnaires were collected from Bamyan, with 24 (60%) answered by men and 16 (40%) answered by women.

In Kandahar, 15 respondents (75%) were aged between 20-25 years, and 5 respondents (25%) were aged between 26-35 years. All participants in Kandahar were ethnically Pashtun and religiously Sunni. In Bamyan, 8 respondents (20%) were aged between 15-25 years, 27 respondents (67.5%) were aged between 26-35 years, and 5 respondents (12.5%) were aged between 36-45 years. These participants were ethnically Hazara and religiously Shia.

### 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this research, relying on the personal experiences of the authors, the opinions of the two aforementioned experts and the review of the sources that we mentioned in the literature review section, a number of cultural factors were provided to the respondents in the form of a questionnaire. The purpose of distributing the questionnaire was to find out the opinion of the respondents of Bamyan and Kandahar about the right to education for girls, and in this way to understand to what extent the residents of Bamyan and Kandahar consider cultural barriers as the main reason for girls not having access to the right. They know education. The total of these factors is listed in table number (1):

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**Table 1: Cultural barriers to girls' right to education**

No	Ethnic and tribal traditions	Beliefs	Solid religious readings
1	early marriage	More emphasis on marriage and childbearing instead of education	Marrying off girls at a young age is one of our religious values
2	Preferring the presence of girls at home	Girls should be trained for housework and family care and should not seek employment outside the home	Islam has not allowed evening education for girls
3	Childbearing	Education for girls costs more and should be avoided	Girls should only receive religious education
4	Allocating housework to girls	Girls' education should be limited within specific limits and should not be far from their family's place of residence	It is a sin for girls to go to educational centers
5	trivializing the education of girls	Girls should think about housekeeping and taking care of the affairs of their husbands and children	Islam advises girls to stay at home
6	Family care	Education of girls away from the family causes girls to be stigmatized	Islam does not allow girls to be taught by a male teacher
7	Imitation of old traditions	Girls should not study in a mixed class with boys	According to Islam, it is not permissible for illegitimate boys and girls to live under the same roof
8	Discrimination between girls and boys	Girls cannot travel far from their families for education without Muharram	Islam has not allowed higher education for girls
9	Families not allowing girls to be taught by a male teacher	Blocking the gates of schools and universities has made girls live in greater security	
10		A girl should have the same right to education as a boy	

In order to clarify the views of the residents of Bamyan and Kandahar against each factor listed in the table above as cultural barriers to the right to education for girls, five options were placed so that each respondent considered the role of these factors in girls not having access to the right to education in a "low" manner, determine "very little", "medium", "much" and "very much". Also, in order to understand the role of existing beliefs on girls' lack of access to their right to education, the respondents were given the options of "agree", "completely agree", "somewhat agree", "oppose" and "completely oppose". The level of agreement or disagreement of the respondents with each of the mentioned beliefs should be determined.

Three open-ended questions were provided to the respondents. In response to the first question, most of the respondents in Kandahar city spoke of the prevalence of early marriages in their region; While the respondents from the city of Bamyan mentioned the minor cases of early marriage in this city and noted that currently such a thing is not common as a general culture in this city. About which one is more important for the respondents to educate girls or boys; Some respondents of Kandahar City prioritized the education of boys.

Others had an equal view, and some considered both as an equal priority. However, the respondents of Bamyan province did not differentiate between girls and boys and prioritized

both equally. In the meantime, none of the respondents from the cities of Bamyan and Kandahar emphasized prioritizing the education of girls. Regarding the reasons why girls cannot continue their education, respondents from both cities listed the following:

1- Not allowing families; 2- Culture and customs; 3- insecurity; 4- lack of spirit; 5- Unfavorable economic situation; 6- Marriage; 7- lack of awareness; 8- inappropriate educational environment; 9- lack of family encouragement; 10- Men's pessimistic view of girls; 11- Considering girls as weak compared to boys in the society; 12- Incorrect interpretation of religion; and 13- the government of the dogmatic and short-sighted group. We examine the questions that were designed in a closed form under separate sections.

### 6.1. Ethnic and Tribal Traditions

A large part of the culture of a society is formed by the ruling traditions and values within that society, which have a history of long-standing actions and play a decisive role on the behavior and decisions of the members of that society. In this research, ethnic and tribal traditions were considered as part of the cultural barriers to girls' right to education, and in general, nine cases were investigated as ethnic and tribal traditions. The results of this investigation can be seen in Table (2).

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**Table 2: The number and percentage of respondents regarding the role of ethnic and tribal traditions on girls not having access to the right to education**

Factor	Response	Number of Kandahar	Percentage (Kandahar)	Number (Bamyan)	S
Early marriage	little and very little	1	5%	0	0%
	to some extent	3	15%	2	5%
	Much and very much	16	80%	38	95%
Preferring the presence of girls at home	little and very little	7	35%	2	5%
	to some extent	5	25%	0	0%
	Much and very much	8	40%	38	95%
Childbearing	little and very little	6	30%	0	0%
	to some extent	4	20%	5	12.5%
	Much and very much	10	50%	35	87.5%
Allocating housework to girls	little and very little	4	20%	5	12.5%
	to some extent	3	15%	14	35%
	Much and very much	13	65%	21	52.5%
Trivializing the education of girls	little and very little	4	20%	1	2.5%
	to some extent	2	10%	1	2.5%
	Much and very much	14	70%	38	95%
Family care	little and very little	2	10%	5	12.5%
	to some extent	9	45%	13	32.5%
	Much and very much	9	45%	22	55%
Imitation of old traditions	little and very little	2	10%	0	0%
	to some extent	5	25%	1	2.5%
	Much and very much	13	65%	39	97.5%
Discrimination between girls and boys	little and very little	3	15%	1	2.5%
	to some extent	2	10%	6	15%
	Much and very much	15	75%	33	82.5%
Families not allowing girls to be taught by a male teacher	little and very little	5	25%	4	10%
	to some extent	8	40%	9	22.5%
	Much and very much	7	35%	27	67.5%

Based on the contents of the above table, it can be seen that 80% (16 individuals) of the respondents consider "forced marriage" as a significant cultural barrier to the education of Kandahari girls. In this way, 75% (15 individuals) pointed to gender discrimination between boys and girls, 70% (14 individuals) noted the trivialization of girls' education, 65% (13 individuals) mentioned the assignment of household chores to girls, 65% (13 individuals) cited the imitation of old traditions, and 50% (10 individuals) considered childbearing as the most important cultural traditions in Kandahar province that hinder girls' education.

Among the respondents from Bamyan city, 95% (38 individuals) considered forced marriage as a significant barrier, 82.5% (33 individuals) pointed to gender

discrimination between boys and girls, 95% (38 individuals) noted the trivialization of girls' education, 97.5% (39 individuals) mentioned the imitation of old traditions, and 87.5% (35 individuals) considered childbearing as the most important traditions preventing girls from accessing their right to education.

### 6.2. Beliefs

In this section, ten statements were considered as the existing beliefs among the residents of Bamyan and Kandahar. The respondents were asked to share the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of these beliefs in the questionnaire. The results obtained in this regard can be seen in the table below.

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**Table 3: Responses Regarding the Role of Existing Beliefs in Denying Girls the Right to Education**

Factor	Response	Number of Kandahar	Percentage (Kandahar)	Number (Bamyan)	Percentage (Bamyan)
Marriage and having children are emphasized more than education	Agree and completely agree	7	35%	11	27.5%
	somewhat agree	5	25%	10	25%
	disagree and completely disagree	8	40%	19	47.5%
Girls should be trained for housework and family care and should not seek employment outside the home	Agree and completely agree	5	25%	2	5%
	somewhat agree	3	15%	2	5%
	disagree and completely disagree	12	60%	36	90%
Education for girls costs more and should be avoided	Agree and completely agree	11	55%	0	0%
	somewhat agree	8	5%	0	0%
	disagree and completely disagree	1	40%	40	100%
Girls' education should be limited within specific limits and should not be far from their family's place of residence	Agree and completely agree	16	80%	1	2.5%
	somewhat agree	3	15%	5	12.5%
	disagree and completely disagree	1	5%	34	85%
Girls should think about housekeeping and taking care of the affairs of their husbands and children	Agree and completely agree	2	10%	2	5%
	somewhat agree	6	30%	5	12.5%
	disagree and completely disagree	12	60%	33	82.5%
Education of girls away from the family causes girls to be stigmatized	Agree and completely agree	5	25%	0	0%
	somewhat agree	1	5%	1	2.5%
	disagree and completely disagree	14	70%	39	97.5%
Girls should not study in a mixed class with boys	Agree and completely agree	11	55%	4	10%
	somewhat agree	0	0%	3	7.5%
	disagree and completely disagree	9	45%	33	82.5%
Girls cannot travel far from their families for education without Muharram	Agree and completely agree	8	40%	1	2.5%
	somewhat agree	4	20%	0	0%
	disagree and completely disagree	8	40%	39	97.5%
Blocking the gates of schools and universities has made girls live in greater security	Agree and completely agree	4	20%	1	2.5%
	somewhat agree	1	5%	1	2.5%
	disagree and completely disagree	15	75%	38	95%
A girl should have the same right to education as a boy	Agree and completely agree	18	90%	39	97.5%
	somewhat agree	1	5%	0	0%
	disagree and completely disagree	1	5%	1	2.5%

Based on the above table, respondents from Kandahar City showed a belief in prioritizing marriage and childbearing over education, with 35% (7 people) agreeing and strongly agreeing, and 25% (5 people) somewhat agreeing. Regarding the belief that girls' education should be abandoned due to economic costs, 55% (11 people) agreed and strongly agreed, while 5% (1 person) somewhat agreed. Additionally, 55% (11 people) strongly agreed and agreed with the statement that

"girls should not study in mixed classes with boys." Furthermore, 40% (8 people) agreed and strongly agreed, and 20% (4 people) somewhat agreed with the statement that "girls cannot commute for education away from their family without a male guardian."

In contrast, participants from Bamyan city mostly opposed these beliefs rather than agreeing with them. For example, all respondents from the city (100%) opposed the belief that

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girls' education should be abandoned due to economic costs. Similarly, 97.5% (39 people) of Bamyan respondents emphasized the equal right to education for girls and boys. Additionally, 82.5% (33 people) of Bamyan respondents opposed the belief that girls and boys should be educated in separate classes. While 80% of respondents from Kandahar city agreed with the statement "girls' education should be limited to specific areas and should not be far from their family's residence," 85% of respondents from Bamyan city disagreed with this statement.

### 6.3. Rigid Religious Beliefs

Religious beliefs and interpretations are also connected with cultural values and factors. Many sociologists consider

religious beliefs to be a significant part of cultural values. On the other hand, the citizens of Afghanistan, given their ethnic, tribal, and regional affiliations, have different interpretations of religious values. In Afghanistan, strict interpretations of religion are prevalent in almost all regions. This rigidity in religious beliefs is more pronounced in the southern regions of Afghanistan compared to the central regions. Therefore, in the questionnaire provided to the respondents, rigid and strict religious beliefs regarding the right of girls to education were listed, and respondents were asked to determine the role of these beliefs in relation to the right to girls' education. The table below reflects these beliefs and interpretations from the respondents' perspectives.

**Table 4: Number and Percentage of Respondents on the Role of Rigid Religious Beliefs in Denying Girls' Right to Education**

Factor	Response	Number of Kandahar	Percentage (Kandahar)	Number (Bamyan)	Percentage (Bamyan)
Marrying off girls at a young age is one of our religious values	- Agree and completely agree	4	20%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	6	30%	1	2.5%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	10	50%	39	27.5%
The religion of Islam has not permitted modern education for girls	- Agree and completely agree	5	25%	1	2.5%
	- Somewhat agree	1	5%	1	2.5%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	14	70%	38	95%
Girls should receive only religious education	- Agree and completely agree	3	15%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	3	15%	4	10%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	14	70%	36	90%
The movement of girls to educational centers causes sin	- Agree and completely agree	2	10%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	2	10%	0	0%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	16	80%	40	100%
The religion of Islam has recommended that girls stay at home.	- Agree and completely agree	8	40%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	2	10%	2	5%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	10	50%	38	95%
The religion of Islam has not permitted the education of girls by a male teacher	- Agree and completely agree	10	50%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	4	20%	2	5%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	6	30%	38	95%
According to Islam, it is not permissible for non-mahram (unrelated) girls and boys to be under one roof	- Agree and completely agree	9	45%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	2	10%	3	7.5%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	9	45%	37	92.5%
Islam has not allowed higher education for girls.	- Agree and completely agree	3	15%	0	0%
	- Somewhat agree	2	10%	0	0%
	- Disagree and completely disagree	15	75%	40	100%

Based on the above table, strict interpretations or rigid religious beliefs, contrary to Bamyan city, are among the important cultural factors in Kandahar city that have led to the lack of access for girls to education. Regarding rigid religious beliefs, many components can be enumerated, but what we identified about girls' right to education was provided to respondents through the questionnaire. One of these rigid interpretations is the belief that early marriage for girls as a religious value. Among the respondents from

Kandahar city, 20% (4 people) agreed and strongly agreed with this belief, and 30% (6 people) somewhat agreed, while none of the respondents from Bamyan city agreed with this belief. Another rigid interpretation of religion is keeping girls at home as a religious value. With this belief, 40% (8 people) of respondents from Kandahar city agreed and strongly agreed, and 10% (2 people) somewhat agreed, but none of the respondents from Bamyan city agreed with this belief.



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Another strict interpretation from Islam is that it does not allow unrelated boys and girls to be under the same roof. With this belief, 45% (9 people) of respondents from Kandahar city agreed and strongly agreed, and 10% (2 people) somewhat agreed. None of the respondents from Bamyan city agreed with this belief, and 92.5% (37 people) disagreed and strongly disagreed with it. Among the various strict interpretations of religion, the belief that Islam does not permit girls to be taught by a male teacher is also highly prevalent. 50% (10 people) of respondents from Kandahar city agreed and strongly agreed with this belief, and 20% (4 people) somewhat agreed. Meanwhile, 95% (38 people) of respondents from Bamyan city chose the disagree and strongly disagree options, with none selecting the agree and strongly agree options. Regarding the belief that girls should only receive religious education, 15% (3 people) of respondents from Kandahar city agreed and strongly agreed, and 15% (3 people) somewhat agreed. Among the respondents from Bamyan city, none agreed that girls should only receive religious education. In contrast to the respondents from Kandahar city, 90% (36 people) of respondents from Bamyan city opposed this belief.

### 7. DISCUSSION

The research findings indicated that cultural factors are the most significant barriers to Afghan girls' access to education. These cultural barriers were more pronounced in Kandahar city than in Bamyan city. However, since the current rulers of Afghanistan align with the cultural atmosphere of Kandahar, these barriers have led to girls across Afghanistan being deprived of education. The results of this research demonstrate a deep intellectual and cultural gap between the citizens of Kandahar and Bamyan. Respondents in Kandahar generally agreed with the pre-selected cultural barriers, whereas respondents in Bamyan mostly disagreed with the mentioned barriers.

Although the participants in this study were aged 15 to 45 years, it was expected that respondents in this age group would be less adherent to old cultural values. However, unlike the participants from Bamyan, most respondents in Kandahar prioritized cultural values in their social order. None of the respondents emphasized prioritizing girls' education over boys, and more than half of the respondents in Kandahar stated that girls should not study in mixed-gender environments. As such, in the absence of separate educational facilities, respondents preferred that girls stay at home. Even 60% of respondents in Kandahar said girls cannot commute for education without a male guardian. In contrast, 97.5% of respondents in Bamyan agreed with girls' education in places far from their families and did not oppose girls commuting without a male guardian for education.

Nearly all respondents in Kandahar (95%) agreed, completely agreed, or somewhat agreed that girls' education should be limited to specific areas and should not be far from their family home. However, respondents in Bamyan had a completely opposite view, stating that girls have the right to

equal education as boys and that girls' education should not be limited in terms of the extent of education and educational locations.

The findings related to Kandahar are even reflected in the views of prominent scholars of Kandahar province, who are Shia Muslims. For example, Ayatollah Mohseni, one of the notable scholars of this province, has written extensively on religious and social issues. In one of his works, he focused on the right to girls' education. According to his writings, "Studying in mixed-gender environments, especially at the university level and even in the secondary grades of ten, eleven, and twelve, has many dangers, and the Islamic state should even take money from male and female students to separate the educational facilities" (Mohseni, 2012: Issue 290). This ruling issued by a renowned religious scholar certainly plays a role in reinforcing cultural values within a society. It should be noted that Mohseni is a Shia and Pashtun religious scholar. Therefore, it can be said that in the cultural geography of Kandahar, cultural restrictions are independent of religious affiliations.

Sheikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the current head of the Taliban judiciary, in a book recently published titled "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," which has been endorsed by the current Taliban leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, stated regarding women's education: "There is no doubt about the prohibition of mixed-gender education as seen in schools and universities" (Haqqani, 2022: 500).

These points accurately prove the hypothesis that cultural factors are determinant in the behavior and actions of the people of Kandahar province, and therefore, these beliefs and cultural values are the main barriers to girls' access to education. The economic situation and lack of access for families are other factors affecting girls' lack of access to education. This situation has led respondents in Kandahar to believe that due to the lack of financial resources, girls' education should be abandoned. 60% of Kandahar respondents agreed with this belief and said that due to the costs, they forgo their daughters' education. In contrast, this issue had no support and faced complete opposition from all Bamyan respondents.

While most respondents expressed agreement with the equality of boys and girls in the right to education, it is common in Afghan society to give more importance and value to boys than girls. This tradition has been prevalent in families for a long time, as past generations typically valued boys more due to their economic contributions, which over time became a widespread tradition that adversely affected gender equality in education (Sokhanvar, 2018: 451). Therefore, despite emphasizing gender equality in education, respondents sided with boys in many aspects and deemed it necessary to impose restrictions on girls. For example, nearly 40% of Kandahar respondents said that girls should be trained for household and family care duties. This belief deprives girls of the freedom to choose their field of study and restricts them to learning subjects related to household and family

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matters. Additionally, about 30% of Kandahar respondents were satisfied with the notion that girls should receive only religious education and should not learn non-religious subjects. Interestingly, 90% of Bamyan respondents opposed girls receiving solely religious education.

### 8. CONCLUSION

The findings and results of the research fully confirm the third hypothesis for the respondents from Kandahar and reject it for the respondents from Bamyan. According to the findings, 50% of Kandahar respondents believed that Islam recommends girls to stay at home. In contrast, 95% of Bamyan respondents did not hold this interpretation of Islam and opposed keeping girls at home and preventing their education for religious reasons. Nearly 70% of Kandahar respondents completely agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed that Islam does not permit the education of girls by a male teacher. However, 95% of Bamyan respondents supported the education of their daughters by men and dismissed the interpretation that Islam prohibits male teachers from educating girls.

Additionally, 55% of Kandahar respondents stated that, based on their religious beliefs, the education of girls and boys under one roof is not permissible. Moreover, 50% of Kandahar respondents considered marrying off girls in their teenage years as a part of their religious values and confirmed that early and forced marriages or marriages without the girls' consent exist in their families and tribes. This religious interpretation is supported by the religious scholars of this province. Ayatollah Mohseni, a prominent scholar in Kandahar, wrote: "It is forbidden for young people [boys and girls] to attend university, except for those who go with the intention of fulfilling Islamic duties" (Mohseni, 1983: Issue 187).

Similarly, a ruling by the head of the Taliban Supreme Court on girls' education in the medical field, as stated in his book, highlights the Taliban's and their Kandahari leader's extreme opposition to girls' education. According to Haqqani, "If a woman's pursuit of medical education leads to mixing with men during education or using public transportation, it is not permissible for her to leave the house, as preserving honor and dignity is an obligatory duty, and medical education is a collective obligation. In terms of prioritizing, the obligatory duty outweighs the collective obligation. However, merely talking to a patient or a medical teacher is not forbidden unless it involves speaking in a soft and alluring voice, which might provoke sinful desires in corrupt and hypocritical individuals. This issue is not confined solely to medical education" (Haqqani, 2022: 525).

With such rulings in place, it is not expected that the people of Kandahar, who follow these leaders and contribute to their authority, will act contrary to their directives. Consequently, it becomes clear that the religious and legal rules that have caused educational centers for girls to remain closed are a part of the culture of those who hold power and issue religious

commands from a tribal cultural perspective. These directives are rooted in the historical conditions of Afghanistan's current rulers. They are the heirs of those who ruled Afghanistan for centuries with a similar approach, institutionalizing laws that have become an inseparable part of their culture today, thereby depriving half of Afghanistan's population of their most basic human rights.

Mohammad Dawood Sokhanvar attributes the Taliban government's opposition to girls' education to cultural factors rooted in their history. He quotes Jalaluddin Siddiq, who wrote an article titled "The Ascendancy of Tribal Governance," mentioning a law that Ahmad Shah Durrani implemented in Afghanistan after ascending to power. Historians know this law as the "Yassa" law, comprising 11 articles, seven of which directly imposed restrictions on the presence of women and girls in society. According to Sokhanvar, "These rules remained a fixed law among the regions of this land, and because the social structure of most areas of this country revolved around the solid framework of tribalism, tribal customs and values often outweighed Islamic directives and Sharia law" (Sokhanvar, 2018: 450). The rule of the Durrani in Kandahar, with the structures of the Sadozai and Mohammadzai, dominated Afghanistan's political scene for nearly three centuries from 1747 onwards. During this period, specific views and beliefs regarding women were promoted and established, and after the collapse of their rule, their traditions and policies continued to hold significant influence among their descendants and heirs. These traditions established a patriarchal view in Afghanistan's public sphere, and without a doubt, the negation of women's presence in society and the weakening of their role in all areas is a centuries-old legacy of the old Kandahari rulers to the contemporary Kandahari rulers.

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