

The causes and types of violence against women in Afghanistan

Author: Sanatulla Frotan,

Lecturer in Parwan University

Abstract

The article is devoted to the timely questions, concerning to the violence against women in Afghanistan. Throughout the history Afghan women faced to different challenges. One of the major challenges is violence which suffered them. Violence against women in Afghanistan is one of the most important and complex issues, especially in three recent decades. The violence which scars the lives of a huge proportion of Afghan women and girls is rooted in Afghan culture, customs, attitudes, and practices. Afghan women have limited freedom to escape the norms and traditions that dictate a subservient status for females. In this article which is titled "The causes and types of violence against women in Afghanistan" the author tries to consider all types of violence. The present study is performed to consider, the main causes of violence against women in Afghanistan also. This article consists to two parts: The first part is containing the economic, social and cultural causes of violence against Afghan women. The second part includes the types of violence against women in Afghanistan.

Key words: *Afghanistan, Women, violence, Marriage, Human rights, culture, discrimination.*

The definition of anger and violence

Anger (Anger) a feeling that the slight irritation and resentment of the emotionally intense and crazy fluctuate. Anger is a natural reaction to the failures and abuses in total. We have all faced with situations in life that make us angry. So anger is a natural reaction sometimes is necessary for life. The natural reaction is to provide the possibility to deal with the enemy. The term "violence" refers to behavior in order to hurt and harm to others. Anger leads to violence. In fact, we can say that if anger is a natural emotion if not management control and become violent behavior which is inappropriate to the pathogenic consequences both for themselves and for the other. [1]

Violence against women is, collectively, violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Sometimes considered a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with the victim's gender as a primary motive. This type of violence is gender-based, meaning that the acts of violence are committed against women expressly because they are women. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that:

"Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" and that "violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. [2]

Violence against women can fit into several broad categories. These include violence carried out by "individuals" as well as "states". Some of the forms of violence perpetrated by individuals are rape; domestic violence; sexual harassment; coercive use of contraceptives; female infanticide; prenatal sex selection; obstetric violence and mob violence; as well as harmful customary or traditional practices such as honor killings, dowry violence, female genital mutilation, marriage by abduction and forced marriage. Some forms of violence are perpetrated or condoned by the state such as war rape; sexual violence and sexual slavery during conflict; forced sterilization; forced abortion; violence by the police and authoritative personnel; stoning and flogging. Many forms of VAW, such as trafficking in women and forced prostitution are often perpetrated by organized criminal networks.

Violence against women in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, women are the most vulnerable segment of the society. For decades, they have suffered from violence, deprivation and misbehaviors stemmed from wars and the dominant conservative attitude towards them. In general, the widespread violence against women can be examined in two different but related contexts. First, the women have suffered from the deeply-rooted violent conservatism in the Afghan society and a culture based on male-dominant traditions. Second, the long-lasting wars and adverse security conditions have

affected all vulnerable segments of the society, most severely the women. The over-a-decade efforts for promoting women's rights and improving their conditions have had considerable impacts, but enormous challenges are still remaining. [3]

Obviously, the most important reason behind the widespread violence against women is the fact that the Afghan society is deeply conservative. The common view to women as the inferior gender can be attributed to the Afghan conservatism. [4] The widespread domestic violence and violent behaviors against women are closely related to the conservative attitude of the male members of the families to the women. Male family members usually seek superiority in form of guardianship over female members. Inevitably, efforts from the male in seeking superiority result to conflicts in the families and consequently violence against women. The major reason behind the attitude of violent domination of male members over the women and girls in the families is the traditions, flawed interpretation of religion and the low rate of literacy in the society. Therefore, the Afghan women have long suffered from domestic violence and discriminations in the male-dominated Afghan families. [5]

In this context, women's rights are systematically violated, their legitimate freedoms and rights are severely restricted and they usually have less say in decision-makings. Due to the conservative attitude and lack of respect and commitment to women in the war-torn country, girls and women encounter discriminations and violent behaviors in workplaces and public areas on a daily basis. Despite considerable progress in the cities, the status of women in the remote villages and rural areas remains distressing. Still, a large portion of women and girls are deprived of accessing education and work opportunities due to the dominant conservative culture.

Moreover, Afghan women have been deprived of their basic rights and freedoms as they have been treated as an inferior class in the society as well as the families. For instance, for a typical Afghan girl, particularly in rural areas, it has been less likely to have the permission of her family to go to school, university or workplace, virtually leading to her deprivation from opportunities critical for a better life. In more conservative areas, a girl has no say about her preference or endorsement for marriage while the male members of the family have the final authority in making decisions. [6]

The decades of war and violence have played a major role in violation of women's rights and limitation of their freedoms. In fact, the women have been direct victims of war and instability, and the most affected segment of the society during the past decades of wars. They have suffered from wars and subsequent displacements. The militant groups still target the women activists as well as the women and girls who go to schools or work outside. The insurgents continue to target women activists and school girls to discourage them from their social activities and attending public schools. Despite extensive pro-women campaign during past fourteen years, there are many cases of violence against women on daily basis. Time and again, there are reports of shocking cases of violence against women such as honor killings, rapes and tortures.

Despite all concerns about the future, the fact is that Afghanistan has changed and the status of women in Afghanistan has considerably improved since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The programs aimed at improving the life conditions of women have worked and helped in reshaping public opinions towards the women. The government-led policies and strategies towards promoting the rights of the women have been effective – though insufficient. The government is continuing to provide support to the media, human rights organizations, women activists and other women's rights advocates. The collective efforts of the government of Afghanistan and the international community have helped to encourage other parties in the society to step in the campaign for the cause. Human rights organizations and women activists bear the brunt the campaign against extremists and in the conservative society.

The conservative Afghan society is opening up for embracing new status and rights for the women in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In recent years, the situation has much improved as the collective move towards the goal of a violence-free society for women impacts the society. While there were almost a-zero percent of girls in school during the Taliban era, there are now millions of girls going to schools and universities, which virtually would change their life as well as the attitude of the society and that of families. During the Taliban regime, the women of Afghanistan were fully banned from working outside and in public services and were forced to stay indoors. They were forced to be accompanied by a male relative when going out, visiting relatives or shopping. But now, they are memories of the past. [7]

The main causes of violence against women in Afghanistan are:

1. Illiteracy and low-literacy women and men.
2. Non-informed of their rights within the framework of Islam.
3. The lack of women's economic independence.
4. The low social status of women.
5. Culture Entertainment patriarchy.
6. Failure to educate men about women's rights
7. Traumatic effects of three decades of war.

8. Unemployment and poverty men in the family business.
9. Social norms and taboos.
10. Customary practices and beliefs of religious extremists.
11. Discrimination against Women.
12. Insecurity and weak rule of law [8].

The types of violence against Afghan Women

Domestic (family) violence:

Violence against women in the home by husbands, male family members and, on rare occasions, female family members is widely reported. Majority of women in both rural and urban areas are faced with family violence. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission's report shows 50% of women undergo daily beatings at home. Few cases of abuse, however, are reported either to the authorities or NGOs. Severely injured women seek treatment at hospitals all over the country. According to one woman doctor interviewed by Amnesty International, "domestic and physical violence are normal practice – we have a lot of cases of broken arms, broken legs and other injuries.

Underage marriages:

The legal age for marriage in Afghanistan for men is 18 and for women is 16 years of age. However, a clear pattern of widespread underage marriage of girls emerges, particularly in rural areas. It appears relatively rare for girls to remain unmarried by the age of 16. Amnesty International asked focus groups of women about the typical age of marriage in their communities. All groups gave the age at which girls married as typically between 12 to 16 years. A women's shura (traditional Afghan decision making body) in Nangarhar Province in eastern Afghanistan reported marriage age for girls to be between 10 and 12 years in the region. On occasion, girls are forced into marriage below the age of puberty, sometimes at extremely young ages.

Underage marriage is a breach of Afghan law and Afghanistan's international obligations. In Afghan civil law, the legal age of marriage is given in the article 71 of the constitution: "Marriage or the consummation of marriage is not allowed before the age of 16." However, early marriages are part of Afghanistan's traditions and continue to take place despite the law. There exists no punishment for violators and the percentage of child brides remains shockingly high. [9]

Forced Marriages:

Forced marriages are those that do not include the consent of the intending spouses, and are contracted under pressure or through the use of force by a third party within or without the family. According to law and international conventions Afghanistan is signatory to, clear and explicit consent by both partners is required before a marriage can be contracted. However, the law is routinely violated in Afghanistan and is almost never punished by authorities. The roots of this practice again reach deep into the traditions of Afghan society.

Women in focus groups in a survey conducted by Amnesty International described marriage practices that denied them the right to choose a spouse. A husband would be chosen by the father or another close male relative, and the marriage imposed upon girls and women, if necessary in the face of protest and against their will. This oppressive process reflects in part the fact that girls and women are treated as an economic asset, with families receiving a price from the family of the groom on marriage in all communities where Amnesty International conducted research. They are also reflective of the pervasive control exerted by husbands and male relatives on women's lives. The prime reason for forced marriages is the use of women to settle family or tribal feuds. In such cases huge dowries are demanded and women are subjected to entering into engagement without their consent.

Temporary Marriages:

There is another terrible aspect of Afghanistan's women's life, and that is temporary marriage. Temporary marriages have made some women fate-less. According to this practice which is common among the Afghan Shiite community, the wife and the husband can be separated after the fixed period or change the temporary marriage to a permanent one. The husband and wife can marry and live together for a day or till whenever they want, but after the end of the fixed period the legal relationship ends and the wife is illegal to the husband. This leaves women hanging in the balance, shelterless and undecided about the future. The stigma of having been in a marital relationship makes seeking a new relationship almost impossible for the woman. She has no legal rights to demand anything from the husband in case of a temporary marriage.

Exchange marriages or trading of women as chattel:

In Afghanistan, marriages take place with intimidation by powerful people in order to repay debts. Poor families, who cannot afford to pay off debts in cash, sell off their daughters as chattel under pressure from creditors. Other than that, families also resolve disputes with other families or tribes by handing over daughters in marriage, or exchanging girls through marriage. Blood feuds are settled through the same practice. Women are exchanged instead of blood money to avenge murders. Naturally, the woman is later subjected to extreme violence, abuse and punishment as the second family 'sees the killer in her.

Forced marriage of girls and women also occurs as a result of decisions of jirgas. People report the giving of girls, usually below the legal age of marriage, as the preferred means of resolving cases of unintentional killing. Typically, the family of the perpetrator will be ordered to provide a girl, or girls, to the family of the deceased, in order to compensate for the alleged crime. Girls "exchanged" are then forcibly married to male members of the victim's family.

Other than the spate of violence victimizing women, there are also numerous other forms of injustice and discrimination that the women of Afghanistan routinely suffer, and most of these relate to the weaknesses and flaws in the legal system of Afghanistan and its feeble implementation for example:

1. Restrictions on mobility and public life due to insecurity
2. Lack of access to the right of divorce
3. Lack of information and awareness of women's rights
4. Inefficiency of the Criminal Justice System
5. Lack of adequate provisions for women in the legal system
6. Failure of police and courts to investigate crimes against women
7. Failure to investigate rape and forced marriage
8. Pressure by influential people on the Judiciary
9. Women's inability to reach courts of law
10. Confusion and lack of clarity about laws
11. Lack of adequate training and capacity in state institutions
12. Under-representation of women in the criminal justice system
13. Inadequate provision for shelter and legal aid for women. [9]

Conclusion

Although there have been some gains and progress in women's rights and empowerment in Afghanistan, the obstacles and challenges are exceptionally disheartening. The trends in violence against girls and women are especially discouraging and worrying. Reforming the laws and penal codes, improving the judiciary, aligning the law more closely with Afghan criminal law, criminalizing rape and redefining it in a way that dissociates it with zina (adultery), building awareness of the plight of girls and women, and facilitating attitudinal shifts toward a more gender balanced society are all imperative. Seeking political expediency at the expense of human rights, especially women's rights, must stop. Conflict resolution, stability, and security are also critical requisites for rebuilding and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Without the necessary infrastructure and appropriate institutional structures in place, human rights efforts and educational goals will continue to face major challenges and impediments.

The vicious cycle of the lack of education, poverty, illiteracy, and violence and insecurity fueling and supporting the highly patriarchal society, and even fundamentalism and militancy, continues to exist in today's Afghanistan. Breaking the cycle will take great resolve and courage, as many Afghan women and men have demonstrated, sometimes paying with their lives.

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