

صداهای زنان برای صلح همه‌شمول و پایدار
د ټول بشموله او تلپاتې سولې لپاره د پښتو غږونه
Women's Voices for an Inclusive and Sustainable Peace

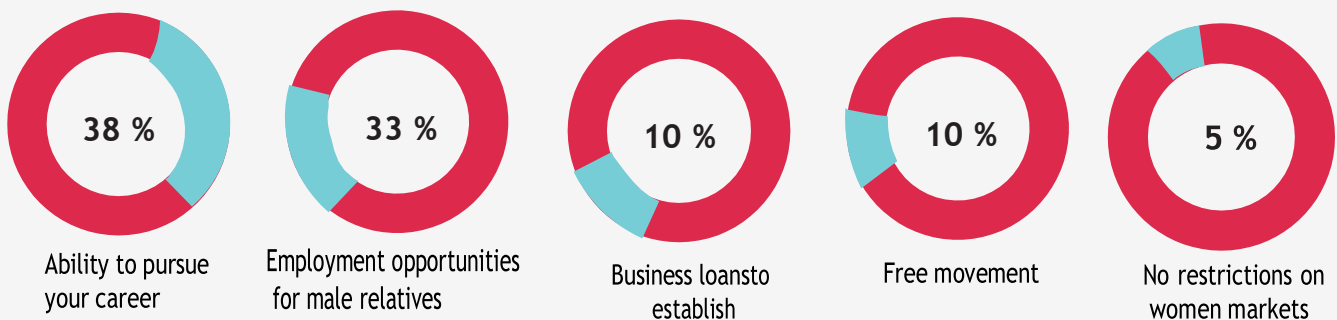
WOMEN'S PEACE BRIEF - March 2023

Impact of Taliban Restrictions on Afghan Women's Economic Conditions and Mental Health

Summary:

- **2,113** women from Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Kabul, Takhar, Bamyan, Kandahar, Daikundi, Panjshir, Kunar, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Baghlan, Panjshir, and Paktia provinces were surveyed on how Taliban restrictions was affecting women's economic conditions and mental health.
- A large majority of respondents (**68%**) said they knew of women and/or girls in their community who suffered from depression or anxiety, that includes (**7%**) of respondents who said they knew someone who self-harmed and (**6%**) that knew someone who had medicated.
- (**30%**) of respondents said improved family understanding of mental health conditions could help improve women and girls' mental health. Prospects for the future (**21%**) and safe spaces to meet and exercise (**18%**) were the next most popular options.
- When asked what they needed to improve their economic situation, the majority of respondents said the ability to pursue their career outside their homes (**38%**) and employment opportunities for their male relatives (**33%**).
- When asked which restriction was most concerning to respondents, the ban on education was the most picked choice when respondents chose a single option (**38%**). But most (**43%**) of the women who responded said all restrictions (the bans on education, mobility, contraception access, and ability to work for (NGOs/I-NGOs) were equally concerning to them.

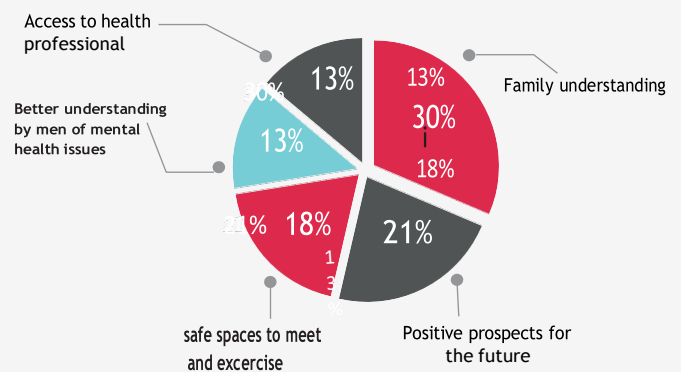
Question 1 What do you need to improve your economic situation?



Question 2 Which limitation on women and girls are you most concerned about?

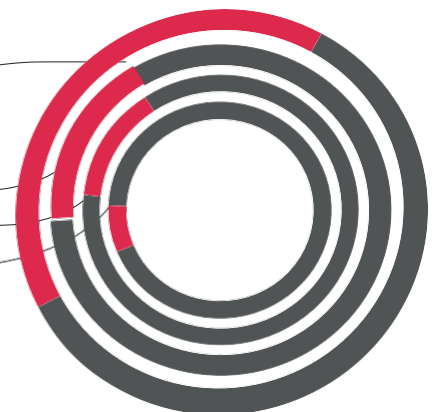


Question 3 What would help improve the mental health of women and girls in your community?



Question 4. Do you know of women or girls in your community who have suffered from poor mental health since the take-over by the De-facto authorities?

- 47% Yes, I know someone who suffered anxiety or depression
- 32% No, I don't know anyone
- 8% Yes, I know someone who has attempted suicide
- 7% Yes, I know someone who has self-harmed



Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) were held in 11 provinces
 Herat, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyán, Daikundi, Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Paktia

Across all provinces, participants of the FGDs were split between those that offered many different ideas of how family understanding of mental health could be developed and those that focused primarily on how grim the mental health situation as for Afghan women (indeed, almost all participants reported knowing or being aware of women and girls in psychological distress).

While the first choice for the participants would no doubt be to remove the bans causing the mental health decline, participants also offered ideas like involving organizations, mental health professionals, and mosques in awareness raising campaigns or creating online and women's support groups. Unlike survey respondents who had to pick one of those options, FGD participants who did contribute answers would often "yes, and" each other, adding to what previous participants might offer. It did occasionally happen that participants would react to these options with pessimism as to their effectiveness.

Effects of the ban on education identified by the FGD participants were mostly along these lines: severe decline in mental health, impoverishment of society, increase in family violence, rise in illiteracy, loss of opportunities and agency, and an increase in forced marriages. According to one participant in Farah, *"Our only hope was the UN. In my own family a 12-year-old girl was forced to marry a 35-year-old man because she can't go to school."* As for how to overcome those impacts, there were some ideas.

A participant in Jawzjan emphasized that *"literacy programs and vocational training can be effective; online systems are the best way but everyone does not have access to the internet due to financial issues."* Online solutions were also offered by participants in Balkh. Elsewhere, family, community, and women's support groups were offered as ways to fill the gap. More prevalent was the desire for the international community to get involved to undo the education restrictions. It is interesting to note that when FGD participants did contribute solutions, they all went to the ability to pursue their career outside the home in some fashion. They omit almost every other option that survey respondents went for, including employment opportunities for male relatives, which was the option chosen by (33.5) survey respondents.

Participants in provinces like Paktia or Nangarhar mentioned past attempts by community leaders to negotiate with the Taliban and keep schools open. While they may have temporarily succeeded in certain specific cases, these negotiated efforts were eventually put to an end. Some participants saw this as an encouraging sign that community leaders might be able to pull off another negotiation as long as they had the proper support. But most other participants feel negotiation with the Taliban is clearly futile given past results. As one participant in Faryab put it, *"the whole world has been trying to find a way with the government but they could not even have an ordinary negotiation with it so how can ordinary people do that?"* As there was little faith that local actors could push the dial forward, many wanted the international community to take a strong role, either sending back in NGOs to run educational courses or finding some way to make the Taliban overturn their ban.

The ways exemptions on women's work in health and education are applied differs somewhat region to region according to the participants. In areas like Herat, Nangarhar, or Farah the effects have mainly been the impediments of always needing to have a mahram around or having to comply with dress codes that make work difficult. In other areas, the authorities have come down much harder. In Kandahar, participants tell of how professionals are slowly being replaced by those selected by the authorities.

In Faryab, draconian cuts in pay and discriminatory new rules that go beyond dress codes and mahram requirements make life even more difficult for female workers. Bamiyan participants describe a minefield of different layers of authority each seeking to enforce their own rules. *"These Taliban security personnel carry out their activities independently and do not obey their superiors,"* said one Bamiyan participant. *"For instance, if anybody is arrested or detained at these security checkpoints, then the security personnel can prosecute the detained person however he wants or release them against a bribe before their superiors even know about it."*

Balkh seems unique in that restrictions are not harshly felt by participants, some of whom even said they could move around without a mahram.

Methodology:

BISHNAW combines a community-based approach with digital survey tools to capture the experiences and opinions of women at the sub-national level in Afghanistan in 'real-time.' It uses three research tools, namely tele-surveys, face-to-face shorthand surveys and focus group discussions, that are triangulated to present a holistic analysis. Its methodology was designed to allow for the inclusion and participation of diverse women representing all demographic and regional backgrounds. In this survey, data from Balkh, Bamiyan, Daikundi, Farah, Faryab, and Jawzjan surpassed the 90% confidence level threshold for representativeness.

About Bishnaw:

Created in 2020 by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) in Kabul, Afghanistan, BISH-NAW-WAWRA is a digital platform that captures the voices of women in real-time and on a diversity of issues. Reflected in its name, BISHNAW which means 'listen' in Dari and WAWRA in Pashto, was developed with the goal of ensuring that the process of 'listening' to Afghan women is not seen as a one-off event but as an integral part of all national and international discussions on peace, security and development in Afghanistan.