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

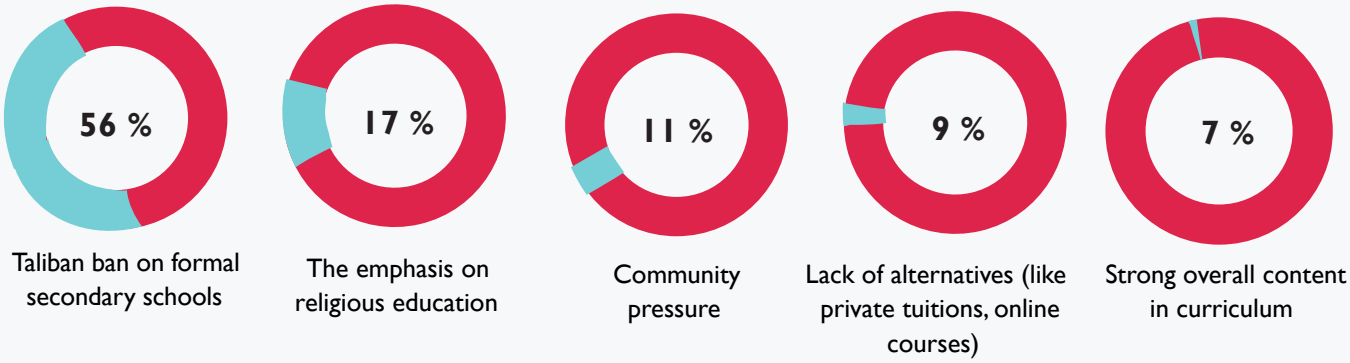
# WOMEN'S PEACE BRIEF – October 2024

## Girls' Enrollment in Madrassas: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan

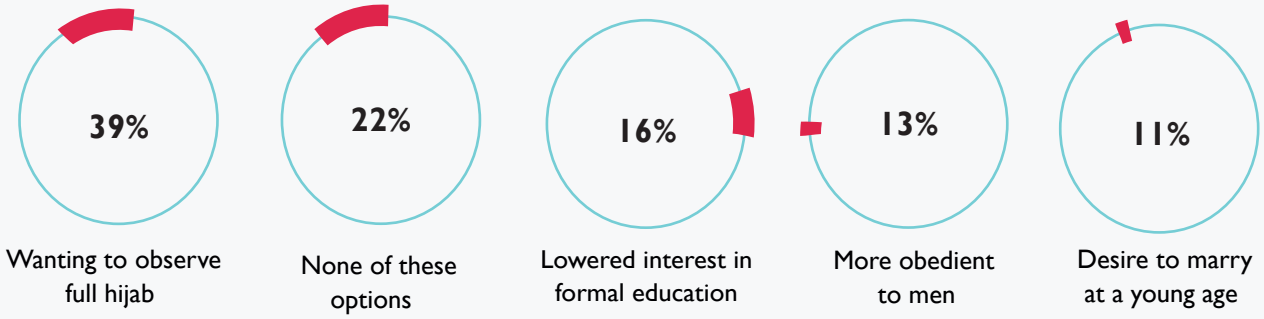

### *Summary:*

- A total of 8,245 women from all 34 provinces in Afghanistan were surveyed on the motivations behind girls' enrollment in madrassas, the quality of madrassa education, and shifts in gender norms resulting from their attendance.
- Taliban ban on formal secondary schools was cited as the primary motivation behind family decisions to send their secondary-school aged daughters to a madrassa, accounting for (56%) of total responses.
- Emphasis on religious education emerged as the second major influencing factor, motivating families to send their secondary-school aged daughters to a madrassa. Community pressure accounted for (11%), while (9%) pointed to the lack of alternatives, such as private tuition or online courses as influencing factors.
- Only (7%) cited strong overall curriculum content as a reason motivating families to enroll their daughters in madrassas, indicating low satisfaction with the content provided.
- The most common behavioral change observed among girls who attend madrassas is a desire to observe the full hijab within the home, with (39%) of respondents identifying this as the most prevalent shift.
- Increased obedience to men (13%), a desire to marry younger (11%), and a noticeable decline in interest in formal education (16%) reflect how madrassa teachings are reinforcing traditional and conservative gender norms and expectations.
- When asked whether madrassas aligned girls' roles and responsibilities with the respondents' own views, opinions varied, with responses split among positive (31%), partial (27%), and negative (23%) perspectives. This suggests differing perceptions of madrassa teachings and varying levels of acceptance and understanding of the curriculum.

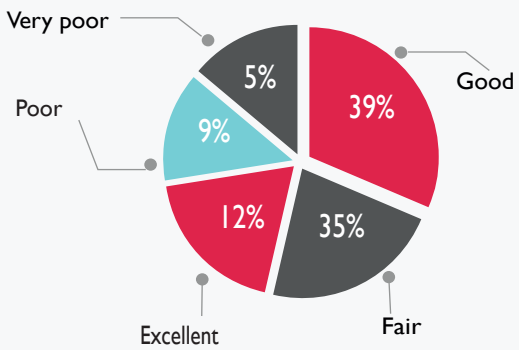
*Question 1* What is the most important motivation behind family decision to send their secondary-school aged daughter to a madrassa?



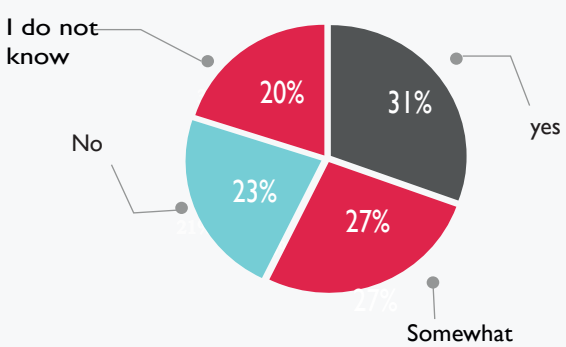

*Question 2* What is the most common behavior change you have noticed in girls who attend madrassas?




*Question 3* How do you rate the quality of education provided in madrassas?




*Question 4* Do madrassas teach girls about their roles and responsibilities that align with your beliefs?



## Key Findings from the Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs)

### Increased reliance on madrassas for girls' education:

With formal schools closed to girls under Taliban rule, madrassas have become the primary option for continued education. Families view madrassas as an alternative to keep girls engaged, with some offering certifications recognized by the current regime. The shift to madrassas is not solely a functional response to the ban on formal education; it also reflects the deep psychological trauma caused by the closure of secondary education. The confinement of girls at home has heightened mental health concerns, while madrassas provide a semblance of social interaction and routine. *"Parents say madrassas have become a form of escape from isolation and mental distress for their daughters, providing structure and hope in otherwise bleak circumstances"* (Kunduz FGD).

### Motivations behind madrassa attendance:

Motivations for madrassa attendance extend beyond religious reasons, encompassing community acceptance, combating isolation, and ensuring compliance with Taliban directives. Some families see madrassas as a means to prevent early marriages, offering an avenue for their daughters to continue some degree of learning. On the other hand, economic hardship and social expectations push other families toward sending their girls to madrassas. *"There are pressures from both family and society. Families, not wanting their children to remain uneducated, see madrassas as their only option"* (Farah FGD).

### Community and religious pressure:

Religious and community leaders are perceived to exert significant influence over family decisions. Respondents mentioned that these leaders create a sense of obligation for families to enroll their daughters in madrassas. In some provinces, this influence is strong and overt, while in others it remains more subtle but deeply rooted in cultural expectations . *"Societal pressure, particularly from religious leaders and community elders, compels many families to send their daughters to madrassas. It's not always voluntary"* (Badghis FGD).

Families face dual pressures from community expectations and religious norms, feeling obligated to comply to avoid social stigma and ensure conformity. The desire to maintain cultural norms, combined with the need for compliance with the Taliban's strictures, results in an environment where opting out of madrassa education is challenging. FDGs, show that while some provinces experience overt community pressure, others report more subtle cultural influence. *"In our province, I haven't seen government forces pushing girls to attend madrassas, but community elders often make it a matter of honor"* (Kandahar FGD).

### Educational content and gender roles:

The curriculum taught in madrassas across the country emphasizes traditional gender roles and reinforces conservative ideologies, particularly regarding women's roles in society. *"In madrassas, there's a strong focus on diminishing the role of women in society. They try to mold girls to live within strict limits"* (Kabul FGD). Teachings emphasize obedience, modesty, and religious obligations, often to the exclusion of broader educational subjects. For example, girls are primarily taught to prioritize modest dress, submission to male authority, and traditional domestic roles, according to FGD participants from Badghis, Faryab, and Daikundi. However, there is a notable disparity in the madrassa education boys and girls receive; boys have broader access to modern sciences and non-religious subjects, while girls are restricted to religious curricula. *"Boys might learn a broader curriculum, but for girls, the focus is on religious teachings and little else"* (Bamyan FGD).

The portrayal of women's roles often includes narratives that discourage modern education and independent thought.

### Community and behavioral shifts:

Behavioral changes among girls educated in madrassas are noticeable and, according to FGD participants, align with traditional norms, the Taliban's vision of society, and stricter adherence to dress codes. Increased emphasis on dress codes, such as the strict wearing of the hijab, is often cited, along with more conservative attitudes towards gender roles. *"Madrassas emphasize conservative practices that deeply influence girls' behavior, shaping their outlook and interactions in society"* (Baghlan FGD). Additionally, it was noted that family influence often interacts with madrassa teachings to reinforce adherence to conservative values. The interplay between family expectations and madrassa teachings creates a feedback loop, shaping girls' behaviors through both their home environment and madrassa education. *"While madrassas may try to teach certain ideas, the family's influence remains strong and shapes how girls internalize these teachings"* (Balkh FGD). Nonetheless, families' perceptions of the Taliban's impact on girls' madrassa education are mixed. While some view compliance with religious teachings as necessary for survival, others see it as an imposition that severely limits their daughters' potential. *"The influence of the Taliban on education is seen as repressive by many, but families comply out of fear and necessity"* (Kabul FGD).

There are also notable variations in how madrassa education is experienced across different provinces, reflecting local cultural norms, community leadership, and the relative influence of the Taliban. These differences highlight the diverse ways in which communities are adapting or resisting under new restrictions. FGD participants explained that there are discussions taking place in some communities about the potential for madrassa reform to include a broader curriculum while maintaining religious studies. This reflects a desire for balance and adaptation to modern educational needs. *"If madrassas could be modernized to include other subjects, they would truly benefit our girls"* (Daikundi FGD).

### *Methodology:*

Our Women's Peace Briefs reflect data gathered through Bishnaw's digital research tools to capture the experiences and opinions of women and girls in real time across Afghanistan. Using an online polling survey featuring four multiple-choice, closed-ended questions, we surveyed 8,245 respondents over the age of 18 in all 34 provinces. Additionally, we conducted face-to-face key informant interviews (KIIs), using the same questions as the polling survey, with 4,979 respondents. To probe deeper into our quantitative findings, we also conducted 25[1] FGDs with a total of 492 participants, representing Bishnaw's Women's Peace Circles. Bishnaw's methodology was designed to ensure the inclusion and participation of diverse women representing all demographic and regional backgrounds. In this survey, data from 16 provinces, including Balkh, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Paktia, Badghis, Kabul, Badakhshan, Takhar, and Kunar, surpassed the 90% confidence level threshold for representativeness.

### *About Bishnaw:*

Bishnaw is powered by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS). It is a digital platform that captures the voices of women and girls in Afghanistan in real-time and on a diversity of topics. Reflected in its name, BISHNAW means 'listen' in Dari and was created to ensure 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, platforms, and decision-making processes.

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[1] KIIs and FDGs were conducted in the following provinces: Balkh, Bamiyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Herat, Kapisa, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Baghlan, Paktia, Badghis, Kabul, Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunar, Samangan, Helmand, Nuristan, Nimroz, Sar-e-Pol, Ghazni, Kunduz, Parwan.