

# Issues Related to Deprivation of Afghan Students from School

**Zahra Sadry**

Lecturer, English language and literature Department, Balkh University, Balkh, Afghanistan

Email: Zahrasadry21@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to explore the factors related to deprivation of Afghan students from attending school. First, the paper discusses education in context of Afghanistan and then it focuses on several factors that contributes to the deprivation issue. Mainly, corrupted education system in Afghanistan, insecurity (explosion, armed conflict and terror acts), poverty, early marriage, tradition, and harassment are the major factors that causes school students not to attend school. Finally, at the end of paper a number of recommendations has been made in order to improve accessibility of education for Afghan children.*

**Key Words:** *Education, Afghan students, deprivation, school.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Education is a vital sector in all communities around the world. In a society where there are educated individuals; people will live in peace and harmony. In particular, Children who are the future of a society need to have access to education because it is one of their fundamental human rights. According to article 28<sup>th</sup> of United Nation Convention of the rights of the child “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.” UNICEF (1989). Basically, the focus of this article is on education right of children that each child has the equal right to receive the education. According to Howe and Covell (2005) children who learn about their rights, they feel their responsibility towards their society and they become good citizens of their country. Therefore, societies that want to have prosperous life condition for their citizens need to provide each child with education which is one of the fundamental human rights.

In Afghanistan, a country which is in south of Asia, education is divided into three main parts: traditional, Islamic and Modern education. Traditional or indigenous education is related to cultural values, skills and moral stories which is passed from one Afghan generation to another. Islamic education is the one which is done in mosques to teach Holy Quran to students. Nowadays, there is another place called “Madrassa” not a mosque where students go and learn holy Quran and other Islamic subjects. In terms of modern education, the first primary schools for boys established in 1903 in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan and the first school for girls established in 1921. Moreover, in 1975 “around 900,000 students were enrolled” in school. But in 1983 about fifty percent of established schools were demolished due to war. In 1995 several schools were established for girls. Then, in 1996 Taliban attacked to Afghanistan and existed there for five years during this five years girls were not allowed to go to school but in 2001 after of Taliban girls attended schools (Karlsson and Mansory, 2002).

Till now there are some problems that Afghan students encounter in Afghanistan that causes deprivation of these students from school. According to Ventner (2011), one reason that children in Afghanistan are deprived of their education right is corrupted education system. Another reason is day to day insecurity namely explosion and armed conflict in different provinces of Afghanistan and based on midyear report 2016 of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on protection of civilians in armed conflict, in 2016, 388 children died, and 1121 others injured in Afghanistan (Faizi, 2016). Furthermore, poverty and early marriage are another reason that affects Afghan children not to have access to education. Hence children are obliged to work or do remunerative activities to help their family member make ends meet or to earn in order to survive (Jackson, 2011). Tradition is another factor that contributes to deprivation of children from education.

## 2. METHODOLOGY:

The methodology used in this article is qualitative approach using previous researches and studies which were regarding deprivation of Afghan students from school. Almost all of the resources which are utilized in this study is carried out by national and international organizations in Afghanistan. Moreover, some journal articles which were published in prestigious and reliable journal in other countries were also employed to get a more in-depth information about the issue.

## 3. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DEPRIVAL OF AFGHAN CHILDREN FROM SCHOOL:

### 3.1 Corrupted Education System in Afghanistan

According to article 28<sup>th</sup> of convention on the rights of the child, every child can have equal opportunity to get education regardless of any difference in terms of gender, ethnic and so on (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2007). Unfortunately, because of corrupted education system in Afghanistan millions of children are deprived of their education right (Ventner, 2011). This is a problem that Afghan students faced and are encountering till now. According to order of president of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai in 2010, all ministries including ministry of education were responsible to plan anti-corruption plan to deal with this harsh phenomenon but still, corruption continues in Afghanistan. Based on a survey in 2010, fifteen percent of Afghans thought and ranked ministry of education as one of most corrupted ministry among three other ministries. For instance, a type of corruption which is existed is that some teachers grade students based on the bribe they receive from students or based on family relationship that they have with student. They take bribe due to having insufficient salary and this means that those students who are poor cannot pass the subject and become disappointed. Some of these children leave school and other try to hurt themselves. This is one way that students get deprived of education which affect country's present condition and future because education is one of strong pillar of strong a government.

### **3.2 Insecurity (Explosion, Armed Conflict and Terror acts in Afghanistan)**

According to United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2016, the number of victim children has increased eighteen percent compared to statistics in 2015. In the beginning months of 2016 as a result of conflict in Afghanistan 388 children have died and 1121 have injured (Faizi, 2016). According to Jackson (2011), 32.4% of participants of his study mentioned that security is a problem for attending school for them. On the other hand, children are used by "anti-government parties/elements" to take part in conflict and suicide attack. From 2009 to 2012 about four hundred cases of children used in conflict is recorded and registered in Afghanistan (UNICEF, 2014). Therefore, there are some families in Afghanistan that prevent their children from going to school. They think that because of insecure situation their child may be kidnapped and used by anti-government parties for difference harsh purposes. The other phenomenon which is frequently occurs in Afghanistan is suicide bombing. Fourteen school children aged 8 to 10 were killed in a bomb attack near a school in Khost, a province in Afghanistan. In 2009 due to insecurity around 670 school which most of them were located in southern parts were close and no one attends and goes there (Glad, 2009). Hence, families are worried because their children lives are endangered. In some provinces, parents do not let their children go to school and this way armed conflicts and bomb explosion causes that children become deprived of education.

Other terror act that anti-government elements are doing in Afghanistan against education and school children are throwing acid to girls' school students. According to CNN report by Torgan (2016), there are some schools that the drinking water was poisoned, and acid was thrown into face of girls. The case of acid attack happened in Kandahar province to Shamsia and her sister Atifa, who were school student. While they were going to school, two men, one with motorcycle and the other who was standing throw acid into Shamsia and her sister's face. This is not only one case of attack but there were several attacks took part in different schools and different provinces of Afghanistan (Abawi, 2009). Another case of throwing acid happened in Herat province of Afghanistan where two other school girls were the injured by acid. According to them two men who throw acid into their faces said to them that it is a reward for going to school (The reality of life in Afghanistan, 2015). For the mentioned types of terror acts, school students are no longer eager to go and attend school and they are scared because any time it can happen to them as well.

### **3.3 Poverty**

In countries around the world, the aim of schools is to invest or devote on human capital, the skill, and knowledge (Tembon and Fort, 2008). Therefore, counties whose children do not have access to education is poor, and it directly affects county's economy as well. Without education, people get poor and poorer day by day and face long-term poverty if the same thing continues for the other generations. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary poverty is "the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions." This means that poor people have difficulty to meet their everyday life needs. Afghanistan is also known as one the countries that suffer from poverty and this condition affects Afghan children to be deprived of some of their rights. According to Biggeri, Trani, & Mauro (2010) poverty cause between 40 to 75% of Afghan children to become away from safe drinkable water, forced to work and leave school at the early age when they are required to be in school. This is serious in rural areas comparing to urban places. So, another reason for not getting education and working while being a child in context of Afghanistan for children is poverty. According to Jaskson (2011) "Nine million Afghans or 36% the population are not able to meet their basic needs."

Afghan girls are deprived of their education right and going to school because they need to help their parents at home in order to support them financially; therefore, they do not have the time to go to school. Jackson (2011) stated that after interviewing parents, teachers and school aged females in seventeen different provinces of Afghanistan, it is revealed that 71.8% of females are eager to continue education and 50.8% of parents want their

daughter to go to university and finish their studies. Among females who were interviewed in this study only 41.2% mentioned that poverty is one main obstacle preventing girls from going and attending school. The family that cannot provide even basic needs such as food for their family members, how the parents pay for their children to have stationary, special clothes for school and transportation fee. When a family is poor in Afghanistan and besides that parents work, the way that the family can survive is compelling their children to work. Mostly girls work at farms or they are busy with waving carpet. Boys does begging and sell items on the streets. Girls also beg to support their family financially, but their number is less. In context of Afghanistan mostly males are the bread owner of the family, so in terms of poverty boys are more affected not to be able to attend schools than girls in some areas. This brings the focus on street children in Afghanistan. There are children who are working and hawking on street in different provinces of Afghanistan day and night to earn at least \$2 or less than two dollars per day to take it home to keep his/her family survived. Although World Food Program (WFP) hold a campaign of “Back to school” in 2002 in Afghanistan but still the problem of poverty and labor children are existed in diverse provinces of Afghanistan. In fact, WFP’s campaign was not sustainable to uproot the poverty in the country.

### 3.4 Early Marriage

Early marriage is another problematic issue in context of Afghanistan where girls who are 10 to 15 years old are married to a man. In some of early marriage cases, it can be forced marriage in which the girl does not agree or ready for marriage, but she is forced to get married by an elder family members or others. According to Jackson (2011) from a total number of interviewees including parents, teachers, and girls 39.4% declared that “early forced marriage” was problem that deprives girls of education. The idea of early forced marriage is also related to family’s poverty level. Based on Afghani culture in some families, girls should receive more money as their dowry when wedding to older man, so parents forced them to get married in order to take that much money and make ends meet for the rest family members. Though in Islam religion there is “Mahar” which is not high amount of money and the focus of Islam is to not to take higher amount of money, some Afghan families do it (Noori, 2017). After the marriage, some families do not allow girls to continue their education because they think that now it is time for the girls as a wife and a mother to take care of their new family and children. They also think it is enough that they have the basic literacy which is reading and writing. This is another issue for deprival of girls from school and forcing them to be at home.

### 3.5 Tradition

According to Noori (2017), there are some Pushtons (a racial group) in Afghanistan especially those of who live in rural areas that are against female education. They think that if females go to school, it has a negative stigma to their family members. Therefore, they believe that females are created for doing house chores, caring children and house. In contrast, Pushtons do not have any problem with male’s education. If son of family goes to school, it creates no problem for family members. He is free to go to school without any obstacles but when it comes to female’s education it refers to honor and dignity of family. Moreover, not only Pushtons but other ethnic groups who are living in rural areas are not open-minded regarding female education in Afghanistan. This itself is a discrimination against female in Afghanistan which is imposed by Afghans males themselves and the victims are poor Afghan females. This is another factor that Afghan female are affected in terms receiving education.

Regarding tradition, some religious leader (Imam or Mullah) have limited view towards female education. They trust that Islam does not allow female to get education and go to school (Jamal, 2016). Although they are unaware of pure and holy Islam that it encourages everyone to get education. There are two sayings of prophet Mohammad P.H.B. which are related to receiving knowledge and education and they are “Gaining knowledge is an obligation both for men and women” and “Seek knowledge from cradle to grave.” This speech of Prophet P.H.B. clarifies that the holy religion of Islam does allow both genders to obtain knowledge and there is no discrimination in term of gender differences between male and female. Additionally, there are some Afghans who think that when a girl is matured, she should be prevented from going to school or there is no need to go to school after puberty or sexual maturity.

### 3.6 Harassment

In terms of girls’ education, another factor that influence girls’ deprival from school is harassment which is imposed on female students by the opposite gender (Jackson, 2011). There are cases that girls have been kidnapped or have been sexually abused or raped in Afghanistan while going to school or coming back home from school. When parents know about these cases, they get convinced not to let their daughters go to school because they think that there is no guarantee that this situation happen to their daughter in the future. This type of violence against female is existed till now in various provinces of Afghanistan. Mostly the harassment and other types of violence against women occurred in calm and lonely places where there are no one around to rescue the female. So, this refers to location and distance of school from houses of school students. If the location of school is far away from female students’ house, there is a tendency that parents may not allow their daughter to go to school.

According to Maryam who left the school because of his father's request, some her classmate quit school because of harassment. Maryam who is eighteen years old wanted to finish school and become a doctor or an influential person in the future but now she cannot bring her dream to reality because she has left school because of such type of violent in Afghan society. Mohammad who is father a school girl said to Reuters that he is happy that his children go to school and learn but due to situation of Afghanistan which is worst for female he cannot take this risk to let his daughter go to school and encounter kidnapping, or sexual assault which will affect family's reputation (Shalizi, 2009).

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

This paper has investigated the main issues regarding deprivation of Afghan students from one of their essential rights which is education. Based on previous studies, six major factors have been emerged as barrier to presence of students into school. First, corrupted education system in Afghanistan cause students not to go to school. Second, insecure condition including explosion, armed conflict and terror act is another reason for deprivation of students from school. Furthermore, poverty which lead students to work at very young age divest these Afghan children from getting education. Another issue is early marriage. Girls in very early age are obliged to marry, stay at home and leave school. In addition to early marriage, tradition in some provinces of Afghanistan causes problem for girls (female gender). There are some families and member of Afghan society that believe female should not get education or to study only the elementary school. In terms of female education, harassment is the other factor that prevents girls from school especially in areas where school is far away from residential places.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATION:

Based on existed problems in Afghanistan, it is recommended that government of Afghanistan should create anti-corruption policies for ministry of education and schools in each province of Afghanistan and makes each principle to follow the policy. In addition to that, there should be an independent commission that monitors schools monthly, record corruption and apply its punishment. This way government will be able to solve the issue of corruption in education sector to some extent. Moreover, increasing teacher's salary is the best possible way to eradicate corruption in education sector.

Poverty causes limitation to access education and lack of education also causes poverty in a society. It is because when people are poor they only care on how to feed themselves to survive rather than thinking on any other needs, and when there is large number of uneducated people, the rate of unemployment will also increase which leads to poverty. Since Afghanistan is in category of poor counties, therefore, children in some part of the country are not having access to education. It is responsibility of the government to enhance access of children to school by bringing peace and stability in the society and providing job opportunity for citizens to ensure a safe living and learning environment for students.

To end up the occurrence of harassment in Afghanistan, it is recommended that Afghan government along with international organizations that are the supporter of human rights should make policy to stop this phenomenon. Precisely, there should be a mandatory penalty or punishment for those who are disturbing and harassing females and it should be applied accordingly in each district and province of Afghanistan. This way females will get their freedom to be an active member of their society.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Abawi, A. (2009, January). Afghan girls maimed by acid vow to go to school. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/01/22/acid.attacks/index.html>
2. Afghanistan Independent Human Right Commission. (2007). The general situation of children in Afghanistan
3. Biggeri, M., Trani, J. F., & Mauro, V. (2010). The multidimensionality of child poverty: An empirical investigation on children of Afghanistan. *OPHI Research in Progress*, 19.
4. Faizi, F. (2016). Afghanistan midyear report 2016 Protection of Civilians in armed conflict. Retrieved from: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/ProtectionCiviliansArmedConflict2016.pdf>
5. Glad, M. (2009). Knowledge on fire: Attacks on education in Afghanistan risks and measures for successful mitigation. Care.
6. Howe, R. B., & Covell, K. (2005). *Empowering children: Children's rights education as a pathway to citizenship*. University of Toronto Press.
7. Jackson, A. (2011). *High stakes: Girls' education in Afghanistan*. Oxfam.
8. Jamal, A. (2016). Why He Won't Send His Daughter to School—Barriers to Girls' Education in Northwest Pakistan: A Qualitative Delphi Study of Pashtun Men. *SAGE Open*, 6(3), 2158244016663798.
9. Karlsson, P., & Mansory, A. (2002). Islamic and modern education in Afghanistan: conflictual or complementary ? *Afghan Digital Libraries*.

10. Noori, A. (2017). Issues Causing Girls ' Dropout from Schools in Afghanistan. *International journal for innovative research in multidisciplinary field*, 3 (9) 111–116.
11. Panter-Brick, C., Eggerman, M., Mojadidi, A., & McDade, T. W. (2008). Social stressors, mental health, and physiological stress in an urban elite of young Afghans in Kabul. *American Journal of Human Biology*, 20 (6), 627-641.
12. Tembon, M., & Fort, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Girls' Education in the Twenty-First Century*. World Bank Publications.
13. The reality of life in Afghanistan. (2015, July). Afghanistan: Men throw acid into girls' faces "for going to school". Retrieved from <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2015/07/04/afghanistan-men-throw-acid-into-girls-faces-for-going-to-school.html>
14. Torgan, A. (2016, March). Acid attacks, poison: What Afghan girls risk by going to school. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/02/world/meast/cnnheroes-jan-afghan-school/index.html>
15. Ventner, A. J. (2011). Implementing international anti-corruption standards to improve Afghanistan's education system. *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.*, 44, 847.
16. Shalizi, H ( 2009, February). Harassment forces Afghan girls out of school. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghan-education/harassment-forces-afghan-girls-out-of-school-idUSTRE50S09V20090129>
17. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2014). Children and women in Afghanistan: A situation analysis
18. Unicef. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Child Labor*, 8.

#### Web resources

- <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/14-children-die-in-afghan-school-bombing/>
- <http://gvnet.com/streetchildren/Afghanistan.htm>

#### Author's Biography

Zahra Sadry was born in 1992 in Balkh province, Afghanistan. She graduated from Fatima-e- Balkhi High School in 2009. She entered English Department of Literature Faculty at Balkh University in 2010. From 2009 till 2013, she participated in various training and programs. An example of mentioned trainings is AUSEP which was a culture and academic exchange program in India. Besides, she has been working as an English language instructor in different projects of U.S. Embassy and English Department, Balkh University. In addition, she is acting as volunteer deputy regional coordinator of Balkh AUSEP Alumni. This enabled her to conduct a teacher training program for 20 English teachers in 2013. She is also interested in literary type of works and some her writings has been published in Afghanistan Alumni Newsletter. Moreover, she is extremely interested to do research and find new phenomenon. She has done two research "A Concise Study on Dyslexia and Foreign Language Learning" and "A Survey of First Year Students' Expectation of English Department, Balkh University.