



Psychological Consequences of Being Deprived of Education for Female Students in Afghanistan: A Cross-Sectional and Qualitative Study

¹Mohammad Zaher Fahimi, ²Mohammad Davood Sokhanwar, ³Sardar Mohammad Saeed

¹ Assistant Professors at Kabul Education University,

² Fellow of Academy in Exile at Dortmund university of Germany,

³ Assistant Professors at Kabul Education University,

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ABSTRACT:

Deprivation of education is an event that has affected the lives of thousands of Afghan girls in different dimensions, including the psychological dimension. The aim of the current research is to objectively and deeply know the psychological experience of girls who have been banned from Education.

Method: This research is of a qualitative type, and Banner's interpretive phenomenology method is used in it. The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with 18 female students who were selected through purposeful sampling. Data were analyzed by Banner's theme method.

Results: Generally, one main theme and 11 sub-themes deduced from the results of this study. Main theme is depression.

Conclusion: Banning graduation of hundreds of thousands of girls in Afghanistan has caused alarming depression in them and has caused serious disruption in their personal and social life. If this disorder is not taken into account, it can cause a social and human disaster in Afghanistan.

Introduction

Rukhshaneh was one of the students of Kabul University who was banned from continuing her education after the Political and military changes and was locked up at home in complete despair. She completed her training course in 2022 and according to her classmates, she was very talented, hardworking and had dreams and a promising future.

Last week, she went to the roof of the fourth floor of her residence, away from her family members and relatives, and threw herself to the ground with the intention of suicide, and died.

Rukhshaneh's parents say that during her studies, she always tried to learn her lessons and text books. The girl was active and cheerful and usually had a positive and active relationship with her family members, relatives and friends. She was funny and always had a smile on her face. But after the ban on girls' education, her mental and psychological condition gradually changed and day by day her normal life became disturbed. According to *Rukhshaneh's* mother, in recent months, *Rukhshaneh*

had been having trouble sleeping and resting, she was eating less, had lost weight, and was usually nervous, impatient and aggressive. She did not pay attention to family issues and even personal matters of daily life such as hygiene, clothes and belongings. She did not participate in family conversations and if she was forced to participate, she usually took a negative stance.

It seems that *Rukhshaneh* was suffering from some kind of depression and acute psychological trauma. An injury that occurs as a result of failure and severe mental pressure and causes problems in a person's normal life. From Atkinson and Hilgard's point of view, "Failure occurs when the path to achieving a desired goal [here, continuing education] is blocked or delayed" (Atkinson et al., 1983). Frustration is the feeling of anger or annoyance that comes from not being able to do something or achieve something (Britannica Online). Failure can have internal factors and external factors.

This feeling, whether it is due to external or internal factors, cannot be avoided by itself and it occurs and exists for people in all societies and cultures. But what



makes the problem, different and remarkable is how people face failure or its psychological consequences. People in frustrating situations usually temporarily experience direct anger towards the source of failure, displaced anger, withdrawal or indifference and resort to one or a set of defense mechanisms (Atkinson et al., 1983). Sometimes, failure causes depression and mental disorder (Goldman, 2022; Scott, 2022) and in case of lack of attention and timely treatment, it brings irreparable consequences.

Based on this, it seems that *Rukhshaneh's* case was one of the cases where failure (deprivation of education) caused a kind of mental disorder, which, if not paid attention to, led to a terrible act (suicide) for him and his family.

The point that adds to the importance of the issue is that in Afghanistan, *Rukhshaneh* was not the only girl who was deprived of continuing her education and was deprived of her right to education, but she was one of thousands of Afghan girls who faced this kind of failure. had encountered Therefore, naturally, several questions can be raised in this case, the answers to which require a methodical and reliable study: Are other girls deprived of education also suffering from some kind of mental pressure and depression, like *Rukhshaneh*, which may Will one day lead to their victimization? In the face of being deprived of education (failure), these girls are caught in which mental and psychological condition? How have they been able to adapt to the frustrating conditions of being deprived of education? How have their families been able to help them? What kind of behavioral or physical forms have their symptoms and troubles appeared? And... ?

In this field, unfortunately, no systematic research and study has been done so far, and the issues of Afghan girls deprived of education which probably, directly or indirectly, affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in this land and even its society, is not taken to attention.

This research is the first systematic study that has dealt with this issue methodically and scientifically in order to identify at least some of the psychological problems of girls' deprivation from education.

The purpose of this research is to know the psychological experiences of girls deprived of education and to understand their experience in order to help them.

Methodology

This study was conducted using Patricia Benner's interpretive phenomenological approach. The goal of phenomenology from Benner's point of view is to understand the main structures of human experienced phenomena through analysis of verbal explanations of experiences from the participants' point of view (Benner, 1994). In other words, interpretive phenomenology is a method through which phenomena experienced by others, can be identified. In fact, this method is a Method and a mechanism for knowing others. In this method, the researcher does not have any interference or preconceptions regarding the experiences of others, and the viewpoint or mentality of people from their own personal experiences is heard and finally interpreted away from any mental prejudice. Therefore, the interpretive method is an objective to abstract (Holloway, 2002).

The statistical population of the research is the collection of female students who were previously studying in the bachelor's degree in public universities and private higher education institute, in Kabul, Afghanistan, but since the ban on girls' education, they have not been able to continue their education.

The sampling of this research was done based on the accepted criteria of qualitative research. In qualitative research, the focus is more on the information obtained from the situation or event rather than the number and quantity of the sample. Therefore, in qualitative research, the number of samples is determined based on information saturation. It means that the researcher starts sampling and interviewing them and continues until he feels that increasing the number of samples and interviews does not add new information to the previously collected information. It is slow and the required information has reached saturation level. In this case, the process of quantitative increase of the sample stops and the researcher decides that the amount of data is enough. (Nikbakht, 2013).

Therefore, in this research, 18 female students between the ages of 20 and 25 years old were gradually selected over the course of two months (February 20 - April 20,



2023) as a sample and through software such as: WhatsApp, IMO, and Telegram. (13 cases) and were interviewed face to face (5 cases). Also, in order to increase the accuracy and as collateral evidence for the statements of the interviewees, in 12 cases, in addition to the students themselves, with one of their family members (6 cases: mother, 3 cases: sister, 1 case: brother, and 2 cases: husband). The interview took place. By conducting this number of interviews, which in fact totaled 30, information saturation was achieved for the researcher.

The students who participated in this interview had completed the fifth, sixth and seventh semesters of their studies, respectively, before the ban on studying in Afghanistan, and no problems were seen in their behavior and mental state. Sampling was done by the snowball method based on asking people about their mental and behavioral status after the ban on education and their interest in interviewing the researcher or introducing them by friends and acquaintances and their own consent. The girls who were selected as samples belonged to different ethnic groups: *Pashtun*: (4 cases), *Tajik*: (5 cases), *Hazara*: (7 cases) and *Uzbek*: (2 cases).

In this way, data collection was done in a flexible manner and based on the research objectives. That is, according to the procedure that is usually considered valid and acceptable in qualitative studies (Koch T. 2004).

The conducted interviews were semi-structured, during which the feelings and thoughts of the interviewees were asked about their fasting lifestyle. All the interviews were fully recorded and after the interviews, they were implemented and turned into text.

After this stage, information and written texts were read and studied several times, and each time an effort was made to extract a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the propositions and text by moving from the part to the whole and vice versa.

In the explanation stage, an effort was made to gain a deeper understanding of the text by considering all the unique features of the text in order to receive the hidden meanings, more accurately.

The next step was to reveal the commonalities and differences in the statements and text of the interviews. At this stage, it was important for researchers to

maintain trust and prevent any manipulation of statements and interviews. Because understanding the commonalities and differences can help to understand the phenomenon properly when the studied phenomenon is examined as it is, away from any manipulation (Burns, 2003).

After these steps, finally, clear and unambiguous expressions of the basic structure of the girls' psychological state (phenomenon) were created and the main and sub-themes of the interviews were extracted.

To prove the validity of the research data, two criteria of reliability and believability (equivalent of validity and reliability of data collection tools in quantitative research) were used. In qualitative research, continuous interaction with data, checking and regularizing them, searching for evidence and conflicting articles are criteria that can increase the level of reliability and believability. In fact, they are used to determine the validity and reliability of the tool. (Heber J., 2002). For this purpose, in the process of collecting information, the texts and the conducted interviews were provided to each student to study the contents of his interview and evaluate its validity. Also, some of the interviews, meanings and common themes extracted for studying, reviewing and evaluating the prepared texts were provided to a number of academic colleagues of the researcher to help increase the accuracy and accuracy of the analysis process.

Among the limitations of this research was that the interviews, except for five cases, were all conducted offline and through WhatsApp, IMO and Telegram software. Although this was done in audio and video, it is natural that it lacks the capacity and characteristics of face-to-face interviews. Among the ethical considerations of this research, we can mention obtaining informed consent from the participants to participate in the research process and recording their interviews, not including the names of the interviewees on files and texts, observing the principle of confidentiality and confidentiality of information and maintaining the necessary conditions. . The right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

Results

At least one main theme (depression) and 11 sub-themes were extracted from the data collected in this research.



Most of the participants in this study had experienced some degree of depression symptoms (with varying degrees) at the time of the interview. In most of the girls (9 cases), these symptoms were seen in severe degree, in some (4 cases) in moderate degree, and in the third category (5 cases) with lesser degrees. These symptoms include: irritability, feeling of sadness, feeling of inefficiency and hopelessness, insomnia, severe decrease in appetite and desire for food, lethargy and unwillingness to do normal activities, unexplained physical problems, feeling of worthlessness, Lack of mental focus. Self-blame for past failures, Inability to decision-making, thoughts of death and suicide. These themes are considered to be part of the most important symptoms of depression, which have already been identified in the field of psychological studies (Smith, 2022).

Out of all these symptoms, six ones: sadness, despair, Lack of mental focus and self-blame for past failures, Inability to decision-making and insomnia were seen in almost all interviewees. "I wish I wasn't a girl." "I wish I was a boy." "I wish I wasn't born a girl" "Now, I just became a housewife" "Happy days will never come back" "Happy days have been gone". "There is no hope for anyone anymore" "There is no happiness in Afghanistan". "I wish I didn't do such and such a thing and did such and such a thing" "To do anything, I think too much but finally I can't make up my mind." Such sentences are frequently mentioned in the statements of the interviewed students.

The interviewees said that "I can't sleep at night and remember things". Also, "I don't want to eat and many times I eat a little reluctantly due to the insistence of people around me or fear. "I have lost weight."

The interviewees also stated that they had memory problems in such a way that their daily life was difficult and disturbed. "I have forgotten the names of my classmates. "Most of the time I wander a lot to find my friends page on WhatsApp or Facebook."

Such symptoms were also present in the statements of the students' relatives. The mothers of ten students said: "So-and-so [student's name] forgets things." They gave examples. In one case, a mother said: "Last week, she went outdoor and left the gate of the house open. Then the stray dogs came into the yard of the house." The student herself also stated that "I leave my personal

belonging in one place inside the house and then I don't remember where I left it".

Irritability is another theme that was seen in the interviewed students. "Everything makes me angry. I even get angry at the shape of the bread which is brought from the bakery." The wife of one of the students says: "she even aggressively fights and beats her own child." Sometimes mother and child cry simultaneously.

Lethargy and unwillingness to do normal daily activities is another theme that could be identified in the interviewed girls. "I don't feel like taking a bath, washing clothes and even taking water to drink." "Sometimes I'm thirsty, but I don't have the patience to get myself a drink." "It's hard for me to make the bed. "Many times, my mother or sister argue with me about this issue." "At night, I sleep on the carpet, but I don't have the patience to spread the sheets." The sister of one of the girls says: "It has happened many times that an argument broke out in our house because of washing the hands and face of [student girl]. In the morning, she doesn't feel like washing her hands and face to eat breakfast, but my mother insists on this. That's why there is an argument."

Regression, as a return to immature ways and behavior or a return to childhood behavioral characteristics, happened to more than half of the interviewees. Regression is a type of defense mechanism and psychological anesthesia that blocks the person's memory or feeling towards the painful event and reduces their anxiety level (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012). Mother of one of the students says: "She refuses to do very simple tasks and expresses his inability. When he puts on his tent, he expects me to arrange it for her. Her sister will find her socks for him." "Like children, she throws herself on my knees and tries to fit herself in my arms. She talks like children. She is stubborn like children. She used to be an active girl and even did other people's personal chores for them, but now she has become lazy and childish".

Also, in the statements of the interviewees, there was headache and back pain. "My head hurts. No matter how much medicine I take, it doesn't get better." "These days, apart from other problems, I also have back pain."



Death-seeking thoughts were seen relatively less in this research. However, a number (6 cases) of the interviewees had reported the existence of these types of thoughts. "I think death is better than this kind of life." "I am afraid, otherwise I would kill myself." "I would rather die than to live like this ". "I wish I would die" Of course, some interviewees had not experienced this theme or had experienced it less.

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