

**GENDER APARTHEID IN AFGHANISTAN: ANALYSIS
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE TALIBAN
REGIME (2021-2023)**

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Abstract

This article examines gender equality and the systemic discrimination faced by women under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan from 2021 to 2023. It offers a critical analysis of the Taliban's policies, emphasizing their detrimental effects on women's rights, access to education, employment opportunities, and participation in public life. Employing a descriptive method and a case study approach, the study draws on secondary data gathered through a comprehensive literature review of scholarly articles, journals, and reports. The findings reveal that the Taliban's policies constitute a form of institutionalized gender apartheid, violating both international human rights standards and core Islamic principles of justice and equality. Furthermore, the study argues that these discriminatory practices significantly impede Afghanistan's socio-economic development. The article highlights the urgent need to recognize gender apartheid as an international crime and calls for coordinated global efforts to address and prevent such systemic violations. This research contributes to the wider discourse on gender equality and advocates for policy reforms that promote justice and equal rights for women in Afghanistan and beyond.

Keyword: Gender Apartheid, Women, Afghanistan, the Taliban Regime

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji kesetaraan gender dan diskriminasi sistemik yang dialami oleh perempuan di bawah rezim Taliban di Afghanistan pada periode 2021 hingga 2023. Studi ini memberikan analisis kritis terhadap kebijakan-kebijakan Taliban, dengan menyoroti dampak merugikan terhadap hak-hak perempuan, akses terhadap pendidikan, peluang kerja, dan partisipasi dalam kehidupan publik. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif dan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini mengandalkan data sekunder yang diperoleh melalui tinjauan pustaka terhadap artikel ilmiah, jurnal, dan laporan terkait. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan Taliban membentuk suatu bentuk apartheid gender yang terlembagakan, yang tidak hanya melanggar standar hak asasi manusia internasional, tetapi juga prinsip-prinsip dasar keadilan dan kesetaraan dalam Islam. Selain itu, praktik diskriminatif ini secara signifikan menghambat pembangunan sosial-ekonomi di Afghanistan. Artikel ini menekankan urgensi pengakuan apartheid gender sebagai kejahatan internasional dan menyerukan upaya global yang terkoordinasi untuk mengatasi serta mencegah pelanggaran sistemik semacam ini. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskursus yang lebih luas mengenai kesetaraan gender dan mendorong reformasi kebijakan yang menjamin keadilan serta kesetaraan hak bagi perempuan di Afghanistan dan wilayah lainnya.

Kata kunci: Gender Apartheid, Perempuan, Afghanistan Rezim Taliban

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality remains a global concern, sparking movements and ideologies across diverse cultures and regions. In the Western context, the concept of feminism emerged as a response to longstanding gender-based disparities. The term feminism was first recorded in the 1880s, as noted by Bryson (2003), and is etymologically derived from the Latin word *femina*, meaning “having female characteristics.”¹ Theoretically, feminism represents a collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies aimed at achieving the emancipation of women. It advocates for women's rights in education, politics, society, and the economy—rights that have historically been denied. Importantly, feminist movements have not been confined to the West; they have also taken root in the East, where similar struggles for gender equality persist, challenging discrimination against women across cultural boundaries.²

Despite global progress in advancing women's rights, gender-based discrimination remains a persistent challenge. One of the most severe contemporary examples can be found in Afghanistan, a landlocked nation often referred to as the “heart of Asia” due to its geographic position bordered by six countries: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the north, China to the east, Pakistan to the southeast and south, and Iran to the west. Although India does not share a direct border, it lies in close proximity, as noted by Akbar (2018).³

Following two decades of relative progress after the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan once again faces a grave humanitarian crisis. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, the situation regarding women's rights has drastically deteriorated..⁴ The Taliban regime, characterized by a rigid interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia), has implemented policies that severely restrict women's freedoms..⁵ These include bans on education, employment, public participation, healthcare access, and the imposition of strict dress codes. While the regime claims to enforce Islamic values, their actions stand in stark contrast to broader Islamic teachings that emphasize justice, compassion, and the equality of all human beings..⁶

Within the Qur'anic framework, the creation of Adam and Eve may be described differently Adam from the earth and Eve from Adam but the Qur'an makes no hierarchical distinction between men and women. On the contrary, it upholds their moral and spiritual equality.⁷ One significant example of this recognition is Surah An-Nisa, a chapter specifically addressing women's rights and emphasizing justice, responsibility, and protection. However, the Taliban's treatment of women deviates sharply from these principles. Through their policies, the regime seeks to control nearly every aspect of women's lives: prohibiting education, denying the right to work, restricting movement without a male guardian (*mahram*), mandating specific dress codes, and erasing women's public identities..⁸ These oppressive

¹ Zul, Muhammad. “Feminisme: Suatu Pengantar Singkat”. Social Science. (2017) <http://muhammadzul.lecture.ub.ac.id/>.

² Chusnul Novita, N., Ris'an Rusli, Y., & Fikri, R. (n.d.). *FEMINISME BARAT DAN TIMUR (Studi Komparasi Pemikiran Simone de Beauvoir dan Murthadha Muthhari)*. (2023): 2.

³ Hudaya M, et al., “Di Balik Kekalahan Militer Afghanistan Terhadap Taliban: Sudut Pandang Budaya.” *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*. 17 no.1 (2024) : 30.

⁴ Andani, Wahyu Rafika. “Segitiga Kekerasan, HAM, dan Perempuan Afghanistan Era Kepemimpinan Taliban.” *Jurnal Pena Wima*. 2 no.1 (2022). <http://dx.doi.org/10.31315/jpw.v2i1.6165>

⁵ Rois C., Robanyah N., “Praktik Politik Islam: Kepemimpinan

Taliban di Afghanistan dalam Tinjauan Politik Islam Kawasan.” *Jurnal Tapis: Teropong Aspirasi Politik Islam*. 19 no.1 (2023) : 2. <https://ejournal.radenintan.ac.id/index.php/TAPIS/index>

⁶ Wibisono Y., “Konsep Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam.” *Al-Mabsut : Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial* (2013). <https://doi.org/10.56997/almabsut.v6i1.61>

⁷ Abidin, Z., Kesetaraan Gender dan Emansipasi Perempuan dalam Pendidikan Islam: *Jurnal Tarbiyah*. 12 no. 1 (2015).

⁸ Lestaria, Oriza D., “Upaya Perlawanan Perempuan Afghanistan dalam Menghadapi Ancaman Operasi/Kebijakan Operasi Taliban.” *IJPSS: Indonesian Journal of Peace and Security Studies*. 3 no.2 (2021): 68. <https://doi.org/10.29303/ijpss.v3i2.88>. and Ekanoviarini Tsabit, R., Wibowo

measures have led international organizations including UN Women to classify the situation as a form of gender apartheid, due to its widespread and intergenerational impact. The United Nations defines gender apartheid as systematic discrimination based on gender, affecting access to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation.⁹ In Afghanistan, gender inequality has become institutionalized under the Taliban regime, turning the everyday reality of Afghan women into a nightmare. Women are denied opportunities for self-expression, employment, identity, and autonomy; they are treated not as individuals with rights, but as property devoid of voice or power..¹⁰

Although the Taliban claim that their policies are rooted in Islamic teachings, their interpretations appear highly selective and patriarchal, leading to a fundamental misalignment with the core Islamic values of justice and equality. This contradiction raises critical questions about the theological foundations invoked by the Taliban to justify their treatment of women. Therefore, this article aims to explore the Taliban's conservative approach toward women through a theological lens, while critically analyzing the regime's policies between 2021 and 2023. The study seeks to assess whether these policies constitute gender apartheid and to provide a comprehensive overview of the systemic oppression inflicted on Afghan women under the Taliban rule.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a descriptive method combine with a case study approach. Descriptive research involves the systematic investigation of phenomena, events, social activities, and various attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions.¹¹ To conduct the descriptive analysis, the researcher utilizes a case study approach, which focuses on an in-depth examination of a specific case—whether individual or collective—in order to gain a comprehensive understanding and draw accurate conclusions.¹² In this study, the specific case under investigation is the Taliban's policies toward women in Afghanistan, with the objective of determining whether such policies can be classified as a form of gender apartheid. The descriptive method with a case study approach was selected because it not only facilitates the presentation of factual phenomena followed by analysis, but also provides a nuanced understanding and interpretation of the issues under study.

The primary data collection technique used in this research is a literature review, which serves to gather secondary data from a wide range of credible sources. These sources include books, peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from international organizations, and news published by reputable national and international media outlets.. According to Sugiyono, literature review involves examination of theories and other references related to the values, culture, and norms present in the social situation being studied. It is a vital component of research, as it ensures that the study is grounded in existing scientific literature.¹³

A., Pelanggaran Hak Perempuan di Afghanistan Selama Kekuasaan Rezim Taliban Berdasarkan Konvensi CEDAW (Reformasi Hukum Trisakti). 4 no.4 (2022), 723. <https://doi.org/10.25105/refor.v4i4.14097>

⁹ dunia.tempo.co. "Mengenal Apartheid Gender: Diskriminasi Taliban ke Perempuan Menurut PBB." (2023).

¹⁰ Nurfaahira A, et al., "Upaya United Nations Women (UN Women) dalam Menangani Diskriminasi terhadap Perempuan di Afghanistan." *Jurnal Transborders*. 5 no. 2 (2022): 106. <https://doi.org/10.23969/transborders.v5i2.5297>

¹¹ Sukmadinata, N.S. *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, (2011). Rusandi & Rusli. "Merancang Penelitian Kualitatif Dasar/Deskriptif dan Studi Kasus." *Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Studi Islam*. 2. no.1 (2021). 10.55623/au.v2i1.18

¹² Muhlisian., A. A., *Analisis Kesalahan Terjemahan Bahasa Jepang yang Terdapat dalam Karya Ilmiah Mahasiswa S2 Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*. (2013): 31. repository.upi.edu.

¹³ Ansori, Y. Z., Publikasi, M., Bidang, P., Dasar, P., Dan, I., & Multikultural, P. Islam Dan Pendidikan Multikultural *JURNAL CAKRAWALA PENDAS. Jurnal Cakrawala Pendas*, 5 no.2 (2019), 110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31949/jep.v5i2.1370>

Following the data collection process, the researcher categorizes the information into two main types: qualitative data, presented in narrative or descriptive form, and quantitative data, expressed in numerical terms. The use of both data types is intentional, as each has its own limitations, and their combination allows for a more comprehensive and balanced analysis. To further strengthen the credibility of the findings, the researcher applies triangulation a technique used to validate data by cross-verifying information from multiple credible sources. Triangulation enhances the consistency and reliability of the research, thus establishing a solid foundation for drawing well-substantiated conclusions..¹⁴

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Gender Apartheid

The term apartheid, meaning "separate," originated in South Africa and referred to the institutionalized system of racial segregation and discrimination designed to uphold the dominance of white South Africans over black South Africans—hence the term racial apartheid.¹⁵ This system was implemented based on racial and skin color-based discrimination, grounded in the belief that white people were inherently superior to people of color, particularly black South Africans, in all aspects of life.. The enforcement of apartheid policies in South Africa was deeply rooted in racial ideology. Issues of race and skin color were embedded in all aspects of social life and governance, reflecting a form of systemic discrimination that severely restricted the basic rights of the non-white population. From birth,

black South Africans faced numerous constraints, including restrictions on residence, education, employment, and freedom of movement. These policies imposed conditions of hardship and helplessness, perpetuating inequality, exacerbating socio-economic disparities, and contributing to reduced life expectancy due to the deliberate limitation of opportunities for personal and collective development..¹⁶

The formal adoption of apartheid policies in 1948 led to widespread domestic resistance. The South African people continued to oppose the system, and global condemnation of apartheid grew steadily. One of the most prominent voices in the anti-apartheid movement was the African National Congress (ANC) led by Nelson Mandela.¹⁷ Mandela sought international solidarity by engaging with global leaders and visiting such as France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan. As a result of these efforts, apartheid was officially abolished in South Africa on June 30, 1991. Subsequently, in 1993, new legislation was enacted to recognize equal rights for all South African citizens, regardless of race. In the following year, South Africa held its first democratic elections, resulting in Nelson Mandela being elected as the country's first black president officially inaugurated on May 10, 1994..¹⁸

While racial apartheid represents one form of systemic oppression, a different yet similarly destructive manifestation is gender apartheid. Gender apartheid refers to the state-sponsored or institutionally supported restriction of the rights and freedoms of women and girls, resulting in systematic gender-based discrimination..¹⁹

¹⁴ Nur Fauziyah R., Efektivitas Penggunaan Alat Bantu Reaksi Gerakan Tangan Bagi Kaum Disabilitas, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia . upi.edu perpustakaan.upi.edu. (2015)

¹⁵ endgenderapartheid.today. "End Gender Apartheid". dalam <https://endgenderapartheid.today>.

¹⁶ Nainggolan., E., A. Perlawanan Masyarakat Afrika terhadap Diskriminasi Kulit Hitam dan Praktik Apartheid sebagai Integrasi Regionalisme Kawasan Afrika Dimensi Sosial Budaya. Universitas

Brawijaya. (2022) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365375694>

¹⁷ Subroto & Ningsih. Berakhirnya Politik Apartheid di Afrika Selatan. Dalam Kompas.com. 2022. <https://www.kompas.com>

¹⁸ Anggraini Reni. Upaya Nelson Mandela Mengakhiri Apartheid di Afrika Selatan. Skripsi: Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. Hal. 18. (2016)

¹⁹ Ishr.ch. "End Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan." (2023)

This form of oppression obstructs equal access to essential rights and freedoms that are necessary for individual and societal advancement..²⁰

The United Nations defines gender apartheid as encompassing acts of sexual, educational, economic, and social discrimination based on gender or sex. In recent years, dozens of prominent legal scholars, experts, and civil society representatives from around the world have signed a joint letter calling on UN Member States to formally recognize gender apartheid as an international crime. According to the letter, gender apartheid consists of inhumane acts aimed at sustaining a regime of systemic and institutionalized gender-based oppression. It occurs when one gender group exerts dominance over another and is among the most severe forms of injustice, as it seeks to institutionalize control and subjugation for the benefit of the dominant group.²¹

Drawing on these definitions, the author concludes that gender apartheid constitutes a form of institutionalized and systemic discrimination that undermines the rights and freedoms of women and girls. Rooted in gender-based hierarchies, it seeks to perpetuate the dominance of one gender group over another through restrictions across sexual, educational, economic, social, and other domains. From the author's perspective, gender apartheid represents one of the most pervasive and damaging injustices facing modern society. It not only violates fundamental human rights but also suppresses the immense potential that could be realized through the full inclusion of women in all aspects of life. When women and girls are denied equal access to education, employment,

and other basic freedoms, society forfeits the valuable contributions they could otherwise offer.

Taliban conservatism toward women

The term Taliban originates from Arabic, where *ṭālib* (plural: *ṭullāb*) means "seeker of knowledge" or "student," typically referring to males. In Persian and Pashto, the term evolved into Taliban, referring specifically to students enrolled in madrasas, Islamic educational institutions in Afghanistan.²² The rise of the Taliban movement is therefore closely linked to the role of madrasas in Afghanistan, particularly in the Pashtun-majority regions and surrounding areas, where many madrasas follow the Deobandi school of thought. The Deobandi movement first entered Afghanistan during the period of Soviet occupation, when many Afghans were displaced to refugee camps in the south and east. Within these camps, educational institutions were established by Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam, a Pakistani Islamic political party, further spreading Deobandi ideology.²³

Deobandism emerged in 19th-century India and later spread to Pakistan. According to Dr. Haroun Rahimi, Assistant Professor of Law at the American University of Afghanistan, Deobandis interpret Islam through an exclusive and uncritical lens, relying heavily on pre-modern texts. This approach characterizes them as retrospective traditionalists, resistant to change, progress, and social evolution in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. For instance, when questioned about women's eligibility for leadership roles, Deobandi scholars typically refer to classical texts, often from the Mughal era, and are likely to respond in the negative.²⁴

²⁰ dunia.tempo.co. "Mengenal Apartheid Gender: Deskriminasi Taliban ke Perempuan Menurut PBB." (2023).

²¹ Atlanticcouncil.org. "Gender Apartheid is A Horror. Now the United Nation Can Make It A Crime Against Humanity." (2023). dalam <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>.

²² Ashghor, A., Taliban di Afghanistan: Tinjauan Ideologi, Gerakan

dan Aliansinya dengan ISIS (Taliban in Afghanistan: Overview of its Ideology, Movement and Alliance with ISIS). In *Jurnal Keamanan Nasional: Vol. VII* (Issue 1). (2021): 73. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31599/jkn.v7i1.502>

²³ Machmudin, Yon, et al., "Era Baru Afghanistan." Depok: Gema Insani. (2021).

²⁴ bbc.co.uk. "What Do the Taliban Believe".

Furthermore, Taliban policies bear some resemblance to those of Saudi Arabia, particularly the revivalist ideology propagated by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, commonly referred to as Wahhabism.²⁵ Research by Muh Ilham Wahid indicates that the Taliban's ideological roots can be traced to the Darul Uloom seminary, founded by Rashid Ahmad Gangohi and Qasim Nanautavi in 1866. Mullah Omar, the founding leader of the Taliban, inherited the Sunni Deobandi tradition through the teachings of Shah Waliullah, originally centered in India and later spread to the Afghan border regions. The Deobandi movement, while distinct, drew inspiration from Wahhabism and eventually developed into a localized variant of Wahhabi thought in South Asia. As a result, the Deobandi movement received support from the Saudi Arabian government as a counterforce against the growing influence of Shia Islam in Pakistan and India.²⁶

Afghanistan has long been a Muslim-majority country where Islamic law has traditionally been enforced through deeply embedded cultural norms. Afghan culture, however, is not derived exclusively from Islamic teachings; rather, it is a complex synthesis of local customs, traditional values, and religious interpretations. Among these, patriarchal norms are particularly entrenched and often perceived as religiously sanctioned. Long before the rise of the Taliban, many Afghan communities already adhered to highly patriarchal social structures that significantly limited women's roles in public and private life.

With the Taliban's rise to power, these patriarchal norms were further institutionalized

under the guise of Islamic law. The Taliban's extremely conservative interpretation of Islam has had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of Afghan women. Since regaining power in 2021, the Taliban have reinstated a series of repressive measures that effectively ban women from most public spaces and prohibit girls from attending school beyond the sixth grade.²⁷ These policies reflect a patriarchal worldview that ignores women's rights and reduces their participation in social, educational and economic life.

Prior to Taliban rule, extremist Islamic sects such as the Deobandi school had little significant presence in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban emerged during a period of national crisis and ideological vacuum, positioning themselves as reformers.²⁸ Their reforms, however, were guided by an interpretation of Islam rooted in conservative and traditional values drawn from the Deobandi school and heavily influenced by Pashtun tribal culture, which remains deeply patriarchal.

As Afghan sociologist Ali Kaveh notes, male honor in Afghan society often dictates that women not only conceal their bodies but also their identities. The ideal woman, in this context, is one who is neither seen nor heard—a saying that encapsulates this ideal claims that "the sun and the moon have not seen her." The most respected men are those who are perceived as the most authoritative and controlling, while any sign of female liberalism within their families is regarded as immoral and dishonorable.²⁹

Traditional Pashtun cultural practices, particularly in rural areas of northwest Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, have significantly

²⁵ Prasidya, Saktya Nadhil. "Islam dan Fundamentalisme Agama (Studi atas Penerapan Hukum Syariah oleh Pemerintah Taliban di Afghanistan dan Dampaknya terhadap Kaum Perempuan)." Skripsi: Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Politik, UIN Syarif hidayatullah Jakarta. (2022).

²⁶ Wahid Muh I., Ekstremisme Taliban dalam Memperkuat Paham Islam Koservatif di Afghanistan: Analisis Kritik Ideologi Jurgen Habermas. Skripsi: Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. (2022).

²⁷ Voaindonesia.com. "Tahun Ajaran Baru di Afghanistan, Lebih 1 Juta Anak Perempuan Dilarang Bersekolah." (2024).

²⁸ Rashid, Ahmed. "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism, Foreign Affairs". (1999). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20049530>

²⁹ bbc.com/Indonesia/dunia. "Kisah Para Perempuan Afghanistan yang Melawan Tradisi Demi Hak atas Identitas Pribadi." (2021).

shaped the Taliban's ideology. In these communities, girls are rarely sent to school—at most, they might attend Qur'anic classes. It is also customary for girls to marry between the ages of 16 and 18. In many cases, such cultural norms override religious doctrine. For example, Hanafi jurisprudence—one of the four major Sunni schools of law—permits women to serve as judges. However, despite the Taliban's claim to adhere to Hanafi fiqh, they often ignore these more progressive aspects in favor of enforcing traditional Pashtun culture.³⁰

In conclusion, the Taliban movement emerged as a product of intertwined influences: the conservative interpretations of Deobandi Islam, entrenched patriarchal values, and traditional Pashtun cultural practices. These elements collectively shape the Taliban's highly conservative view of women, which is presented as protective but, in practice, significantly restricts women's rights. The Taliban have created a regime that resists compromise and applies Sharia law in a rigid and exclusionary manner, particularly with regard to gender.

Taliban policies on women's rights as a form of Gender Apartheid

In August 2021, the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of United States and allied forces. Since then, the policies enacted by the Taliban regime have significantly curtailed the ability of Afghan women to exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms. Rather than pursuing a more moderate or progressive approach, the regime has instead revived many of the restrictive practices seen during its previous rule, effectively repeating history.³¹

The renewed rise of the Taliban has generated widespread international concern, particularly with respect to the status of women's rights. From 2021 to 2023, Taliban policies have exhibited a systematic pattern of gender-based discrimination, prompting critical discourse on whether these actions may constitute a form of gender apartheid. Since reclaiming power, the Taliban have implemented a range of policies that severely restrict women's participation and autonomy across multiple domains of public and private life.

The following section outlines key policies introduced by the Taliban concerning women, across various sectors of Afghan society, and examines their broader social and human rights implications

Prohibition on education for girl over the age 12

The Taliban has asserted that the continuation of girls' education contradicts their strict interpretation of Islamic law, stating that girls will only be permitted to return to school under specific conditions. Although the Taliban initially pledged to adopt more moderate policies, there has been little to no progress in this regard. On the contrary, they have increasingly imposed restrictions on women's rights.³² As of 2020, approximately 2.22 million girls were already out of school—a figure that has continued to rise following the Taliban's suspension of education for girls over the age of 12 and the closure of universities to female students. According to the United Nations, more than 330,000 girls were barred from secondary education in 2021,³³ contributing to a total of approximately 2.5 million girls and women who remain out of school in Afghanistan.

³⁰ [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk). "What Do the Taliban Believe".

[dunia.tempo.co](https://www.dunia.tempo.co). "Mengenal Apartheid Gender: Deskriminasi Taliban ke Perempuan Menurut PBB." (2023).

³¹ Ekanoviarini Tsabit, R., Wibowo A., Pelanggaran Hak Perempuan di Afghanistan Selama Kekuasaan Rezim Taliban Berdasarkan Konvensi CEDAW (Reformasi Hukum Trisakti). 4 no.4 (2022), 723.

³² [Voaindonesia.com](https://www.voaindonesia.com). "Tahun Ajaran Baru di Afghanistan, Lebih 1 Juta Anak Perempuan Dilarang Bersekolah." (2024).

³³ [bbc.com/indonesia](https://www.bbc.com/indonesia). "Ratusan ribu anak perempuan di Afghanistan dilarang bersekolah oleh Taliban." (2024). dalam, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/>

On March 23, 2022, the Taliban's Ministry of Education formally ordered the closure of secondary schools and universities for female students, allowing only male students to attend. In addition to the closures, a number of discriminatory restrictions were imposed on female students. Universities were required to establish separate entrances and classrooms based on gender. Women could only be taught by female lecturers or older male instructors, and several academic disciplines were declared off-limits for women, including veterinary science, engineering, economics, and agriculture. Journalism programs for women were also heavily restricted. In December 2022, the Taliban officially banned women from attending university, citing improper observance of the hijab as justification.³⁴

A 2021 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) indicated that approximately 1.4 million Afghan girls and young women had lost access to formal education. By April 2023, that number had increased by an additional 300,000. When combined with the number of girls who were already out of school prior to the ban, the total reaches an estimated 2.5 million girls who are currently unable to pursue their education.³⁵

UNESCO's latest report, published in March 2024, highlighted that literacy rates among Afghan women remain critically low—only 20.6% of Afghan women are literate, placing the country among those with the lowest female literacy rates in the world.³⁶ This trend is likely to worsen as access to education for girls

and women continues to be restricted..

According to UNICEF, these education bans and broader restrictions on women and girls have profound implications for Afghan society and its future. The continued prohibition of secondary and post-secondary education, along with the widespread exclusion of women from the workforce, severely limits their participation in public life and their access to essential services. These policies constitute a clear violation of fundamental human rights and contribute to widespread social and economic marginalization. Moreover, they lead to increased psychological stress, social isolation, and the adoption of harmful coping mechanisms.³⁷

Prohibition on working for women

Afghan women and girls are not only being deprived of the opportunity to learn but also of the ability to teach. On December 24, 2022, the Taliban issued a directive prohibiting women from working in both international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs)..³⁸ One woman, who had previously taught karate to girls and religious studies to boys, recalled the sense of unease she and her colleagues experienced when the Taliban allowed male students and teachers to return to school while remaining silent about the status of women.³⁹

As reported on April 4, 2023, the Taliban further expanded the restrictions on women's employment outside the home, including a ban preventing approximately 400 Afghan women from accessing United Nations offices across the country..⁴⁰ Nearly 4,500 women were reportedly laid off from education jobs in June and July. In

³⁴ Halim Celwi, D. Tinjauan Yuridis Terhadap Upaya Unesco dalam Mengatasi Diskriminasi Hak Pendidikan Bagi Perempuan di Afghanistan (Studi Larangan Memperoleh Pendidikan Bagi Siswi dan Mahasiswi oleh Taliban pada Tahun 2022). Skripsi Universitas Sumatera Utara. <https://repositori.usu.ac.id/handle/123456789/96482>

³⁵ Kumparan Women. UNESCO Ungkap 1,4 Juta Anak Perempuan Afghanistan Dilarang Mengenyam Pendidikan (2024) <https://kumparan.com/kumparanwoman/>

³⁶ Unicef. Protecting education for all Afghans. (2024) <https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education/afghanistan>

³⁷ Unicef, Humanitarian Action for Children. (2025) <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/afghanistan>

³⁸ Un Women. Women in Afghanistan have not stopped striving for their rights, and neither should we. (2024). <https://www.unwomen.org>

³⁹ Azizi Tamana. Afghan Women's Rights Under Taliban Rule (Thesis and Dissertation : Universita Degli Studi Di Vadova) 2022/2023. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12608/50056>

⁴⁰ Aljazeera. Afghan women stage rare protests, braving Taliban reprisals: As handfufs gather on International Women's Day, UN rights rapporteur calls for release of detained rights activists. (2024), in

addition, since July 2023, beauty salons have been forced to close, affecting around 60,000 women-owned businesses, according to a UN report.⁴¹

The Taliban's policies prohibiting women from working and accessing education have had a profound impact on Afghan women and on society as a whole. The loss of employment opportunities has deprived many women of their livelihoods, thereby deepening economic and social inequalities. These restrictions have also had severe psychological consequences, contributing to deteriorating mental health among women due to loss of identity, purpose, and opportunities for personal growth. Overall, these policies not only harm women but also impede the nation's social and economic progress and threaten its long-term stability. Afghanistan continues to experience a severe humanitarian crisis driven by prolonged conflict, political instability, economic collapse, and climate change-induced drought. The Taliban's decision to prohibit Afghan women from working with the United Nations has been particularly detrimental to humanitarian aid distribution. This restriction exacerbates the ongoing crisis by limiting access to essential assistance for vulnerable populations, including children, women, and persons with disabilities. Women play a vital role in delivering health, education, and nutrition services; their exclusion places additional lives—especially those of children—at grave risk. Moreover, this policy constitutes a serious violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls. According to a UNICEF report, 23.7 million people in Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 12.3 million

children. Among them, 857,155 children under the age of five are acutely malnourished and in urgent need of treatment, while 17.9 million people require health-related aid..⁴²

Restrictions on Women's Political Participation and Public Presence

The Taliban has imposed severe restrictions on women's participation in politics and their visibility in public spaces. Women are prohibited from holding political positions or engaging in political activities, and they are not permitted to appear in public without a male guardian.

On September 7, 2021, the Taliban announced the formation of an interim Afghan government composed entirely of male cabinet members. One week after this announcement, the Taliban dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) and replaced it with the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Established in 2001, MOWA had served as a vital institution dedicated to protecting and empowering women in Afghanistan. Its existence symbolized women's participation in the public sphere and their recognition within state structures. However, the ministry's abolition and the exclusion of women from governance underscore the Taliban's adoption of a patriarchal and male-dominated leadership framework..⁴³

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement and Expression

Most Afghan women are now confined to their homes, stripped of their voices, identities, and autonomy. The Taliban's directives extend into the private sphere, dictating what women may or may not do within their own homes, including prohibiting them from listening to music.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/>

⁴¹ Reditya Tito H. Perempuan Dilarang Bekerja, 3.300 Staf PBB Afghanistan Diam di Rumah (2023). in <https://www.kompas.com/>

⁴² Unicef, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Situation Report 1-30 November (2024). dalam [https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/documents/unicef-afghanistan-](https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/documents/unicef-afghanistan-humanitarian-situation-report-1-30-november-2024)

[humanitarian-situation-report-1-30-november-2024](https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/documents/unicef-afghanistan-humanitarian-situation-report-1-30-november-2024)

⁴³ Veranda., C & Achmad., Y. Penegakkan Nilai-nilai CEDAW dalam Kebijakan Taliabab terhadap Perempuan Afganistan pada tahun 2021-2023. *Diversi Jurnal Hukum*. Vol. 10, no. 1 (2024) : 75-76. <http://dx.doi.org/10.32503>

Consequently, Afghan women have experienced severe psychological distress, including fear, anxiety, anger, helplessness, insomnia, diminished self-esteem, and, in some cases, suicidal ideation and self-harm.⁴⁴ The Taliban has further imposed requirements that women be accompanied by a mahram (male guardian) for long-distance travel and has decreed that women may not leave their homes unless absolutely necessary. In addition, the enforcement of a rigid dress code further infringes upon women's rights to freedom of movement and personal autonomy. Women who resist or protest against these restrictions face severe repercussions, including enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and torture. Reports indicate that female activists have been subjected to threats, beatings, and other forms of inhumane treatment during detention and following release. Such actions represent ongoing and often under-reported violations of women's fundamental rights, particularly the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and participation in public life.⁴⁵

Dress Code Policies for Women

On May 7, 2022, the Taliban-led Afghan government issued a decree mandating that women wear full-body coverings, allowing only their eyes to remain visible. Male family members were made responsible for ensuring compliance, under threat of sanctions. This decree significantly altered women's public appearance, as colorful clothing was replaced by black abayas, hijabs, and burqas.⁴⁶

The compulsory wearing of the burqa represents not only a physical and psychological burden for women but also an economic one.

The garment is often costly, and in some cases, women are forced to share a single burqa among several individuals.⁴⁷



The series of policies implemented by the Taliban toward Afghan women demonstrates pervasive and systematic discrimination against women's rights. These restrictions encompass the prohibition of education, employment, public participation, freedom of movement and

⁴⁴ United States Institute of Peace. Two Years of the Taliban's 'Gender Apartheid' in Afghanistan: Afghan women and girls deserve moral and material support to sustain their resiliency against the Taliban's worsening repression. (2023). in <https://www.usip.org/>

⁴⁵ Amnesty Internasional. Death in Slow Motion: Women and

Girls Under Taliban Rule (2022). in <https://www.amnesty.org/>

⁴⁶ BBC News Indonesia. Taliban : Lima Momen Penting ketika hak-hak Perempuan Afghanistan dihancurkan. (2021). dalam <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia>.

⁴⁷ Op., chit. Veranda., C & Achmad., (2024) : 84.

expression, and extend to instances of sexual violence. As stated by Bennet, severe, systematic, and institutionalized discrimination against women and girls lies at the core of the Taliban's ideology and governance, raising concerns that their practices amount to gender apartheid (news.detik.com). Such policies not only harm women directly but also impede Afghanistan's economic, social, and cultural development..

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres similarly emphasized that Afghanistan has witnessed a "systematic and unprecedented attack on women's rights," noting that the violation of international obligations has created conditions amounting to gender-based apartheid (Statement by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, January 12, 2023, as cited in ishr.ch). Key international figures, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, have also described the situation as "gender apartheid," reflecting the depth and institutional nature of these discriminatory practices. Gender apartheid is not merely a theoretical or legal concept but a lived and ongoing reality for millions of women and girls in Afghanistan and beyond.. Although no conventional legal framework currently governs Afghanistan, a series of written and oral decrees issued by the de facto authorities has forcibly curtailed the fundamental freedoms of women and girls.⁴⁸

At an international conference held in Islamabad in January 2025, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai condemned the Taliban's policies, describing them as constituting a gender-based apartheid system in which women and girls are punished for violating restrictive rules that limit their basic rights. She asserted that the Taliban's actions not

only violate women's rights but also contradict Islamic values. Malala called on Muslim leaders worldwide to challenge the Taliban's governance and to advocate for Afghan women's rights, particularly their access to education and employment. She further underscored that Afghanistan remains the only country in the world where girls are prohibited from pursuing education beyond the sixth grade—a policy that gravely endangers the future of an entire generation of Afghan women.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

Gender apartheid in Afghanistan constitutes a form of systematic and institutionalized discrimination that severely restricts the rights and freedoms of women. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, a series of policies have revealed a consistent pattern of deep-rooted gender-based oppression affecting nearly every aspect of women's lives, including education, employment, mobility, and freedom of expression. The prohibition of education for girls, the dismissal of women from their jobs, and restrictions on travel without a male guardian exemplify the Taliban's efforts to maintain male dominance and control. These measures not only violate fundamental human rights but also obstruct Afghanistan's social, cultural, and economic development. The exclusion of women from public life significantly limits their potential contributions, thereby undermining the progress and well-being of Afghan society as a whole.

Racial and gender apartheid share fundamental characteristics, as both are founded on ideologies of dominance, exclusion, and systemic oppression. In both systems, the marginalized group is treated as subordinate, denied equal access to basic rights and

⁴⁸ Gul Ayaz. Sekjen PBB Kecam Taliban Terkait "Serangan Sistemis" terhadap Hak-hak Perempuan Afghanistan (2023). in <https://www.voaindonesia.com/>

⁴⁹ DW. Malala Kecam 'Apartheid Gender di Afghanistan. 2025 dalam <https://www.dw.com/id/>

opportunities, and stripped of autonomy. Such discrimination suppresses individual potential and hinders collective societal advancement. Therefore, just as racial apartheid was ultimately recognized as a crime against humanity, gender apartheid should likewise be acknowledged as an international crime that demands global condemnation and eradication. Recognizing gender apartheid as such is essential for promoting justice and building a more equitable global society in which all individuals can thrive free from barriers based on gender or identity.

Calls from legal scholars, human rights experts, and civil society organizations urging the United Nations to formally recognize and codify gender apartheid as an international crime reflect a growing global awareness of the need for decisive action against systemic violations of women's rights. The ongoing situation in Afghanistan—marked by the Taliban's institutionalized oppression of women—underscores the urgency of such recognition and international intervention. While global advocacy and legal reform are vital, they must be complemented by internal policy transformations within Afghanistan to dismantle structures of discrimination and restore women's rights and freedoms. Only through a combination of international accountability and domestic reform can meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality be achieved.

SUGGESTION

This research certainly has its limitations. One of the main shortcomings is the limited access to direct data from women in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Given the very difficult situation and the limited space for women to express their opinions openly, this research may not fully capture the experiences and challenges they face in depth. However, the

suggestions provided in this research are open to improvement and further development. Input from experts, women's activists, and field practitioners is highly welcomed to refine this article and make it more relevant to the existing context.

Based on these conclusions, future research could focus on strategies to empower Afghan women under the Taliban regime. Research can identify and analyze various strategies that have been implemented by international organizations in an effort to improve the welfare and rights of women in Afghanistan. Several international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and UN Women, have carried out various initiatives aimed at supporting women in Afghanistan despite the significant challenges posed by the regime that restricts women's basic rights.

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