
The Working Conditions and Challenges of Afghan Female Journalists

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Abstract: Journalism is a demanding profession in Afghanistan, where females are less encouraged to become journalists. Even recently, the people of Afghanistan still do not encourage females to work outside. But still, a significant number of females are engaged in journalism. It contributes to society for economic prosperity and changes the attitude toward the concept and process of development. A noticeable change is occurring in the social attitude symbolized by the advancement of females in the journalism sector. These contributions also pave the way for women's and human freedom. Afghan female journalists have made significant gains since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. 1741 working Afghan female journalists are a symbol for other Afghan females, who are living in their homes and are not permitted to work outside. These female journalists report on violence against women every day and publish and transmit them through their media and acquaint them with their Islamic and cultural rights. Even their (people) views towards females, who are working in the media are not very positive, but still, the Afghan female journalists continue to do their jobs. Besides the security issues that female journalists are facing daily, they are facing discrimination in and outside of the office and are also concerned about the future. So in this context, the main reason for this study is to reveal the working conditions and main challenges of Afghan female journalists.

Keywords: Journalism, Female Journalists, Afghanistan, Afghan Female Journalists, Discrimination

1. Introduction

Journalism was once considered to be predominantly a male-dominated profession [24]. As the profession grew, women's admission into the profession was restricted by culture, tradition, and religion, and those who dared faced considerable discrimination. Despite this, females do not succumb to their efforts to reach high and desirable positions like their male colleagues, who are editors, reporters, sports analysts, and journalists. Although the profession is characterized by profound gender segregation, with minority females, they are still conspicuous and appear to be actively involved in journalism [24]. Female journalists aim to better their position and reject the stereotyped mentality that has plagued the profession by embracing traditionally male-dominated sectors such as news, crime, and politics.

Furthermore, Franks analyzed the wage difference between male and female journalists and discovered that there is a significant disparity in how male and female

journalists are paid throughout the world [24]. This is because, despite an increase in the number of females entering the industry, journalism is still organized around masculine ideals [37]. Journalism has always been viewed as an apprenticeship rather than a path to professional advancement through academic qualifications. This is thought to be more successful since informal learning is thought to increase a person's practical competency at work, rather than studying a collection of academic information without spending enough time in the area to develop the required practical expertise.

However, this pattern has shifted, particularly since colleges in the United States began providing Journalism courses, allowing young aspiring journalists to seek formal education and, as a result, encouraging females to enter the field [15]. There has been a progressive growth in the involvement of female Journalism students in the United States since the commencement of official Journalism education, and this trend was later noted in the United

Kingdom and many other nations where the system was implemented [24].

At work, female journalists encounter several unmotivated hurdles. In male-dominated countries, female journalists confront religious and cultural limitations that make the idea of gender disparity a natural one [27].

Discrimination against females in Journalism is not confined to a single field; it may be found in both written and visual media. Females are sexualized in all forms of media, which causes them to talk less than males, ask for fewer comments from them, and are purposefully barred from positions of leadership and professionalism [16].

According to Franks, female journalists are constantly harassed [24]. According to research referenced by Franks by the International News Safety Institute and the International Women's Media Foundation, 64 percent of female journalists globally, out of 875 women from various nations, report encountering intimidation, threats, and harassment while working. These alleged assaults were perpetrated by a boss, supervisor, and even coworkers [24]. This abuse and harassment, however, is not restricted to a certain time in their careers; it continues when these females apply for jobs in the industry and advance to roles as journalists [57].

In a hostile, corrupt atmosphere, journalism is viewed as a risky career for females, particularly for reporters who expose injustice in violent situations and war zones [45]. Threats, confiscation of materials, imprisonment, killings, deportation, arrests, and intimidation are some of the other obstacles that male and female journalists face. Sexual violence is not uncommon, but because of the history and shame associated with it, female journalists who have been sexually attacked prefer to keep silent. These are just a few examples of the kind of abuse that female journalists experience across the world as they go about their jobs. In this context, an attempt is made to investigate the primary obstacles that female journalists in Afghanistan experience in their professions.

Living and leading life in a traditional and unsafe nation like Afghanistan is challenging. Females, in particular, are more likely to have these issues. Despite accounting for half of Afghanistan's population, they are constantly confronted with challenges and bloodshed. With the aid of foreign organizations and the new Afghan law, a new age of Afghan female journalists begins when the Taliban government falls. These Afghan female journalists not only report on everyday atrocities against other Afghan females, but they also strive to educate them about their Islamic, social, and cultural rights. Afghan female journalists are one of the most significant causes, along with other factors (international organizations, non-governmental organizations, public opinion, workshops, and so on) that make life easier for Afghan females.

There are no national or international publications that adequately detail the problems that Afghan female journalists face in their everyday lives and career. The Center for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ), the Afghan Journalists Security Committee (AJSC), and the Afghan Journalists Center (AJC) are just a few of the organizations that work directly or indirectly with Afghan

female journalists. These organizations and centers provide news and articles about Afghan female journalists on a daily, semi-annual, and annual basis. However, all of these articles and publications are generic in nature, and none of them particularly address the difficulties and challenges faced by Afghan female journalists. As a result, this research should be conducted to resolve this issue and produce one piece of article on the challenges that Afghan female journalists encounter.

This paper uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Various pieces from various publications, writers, and websites are examined, and one piece of the everyday problems encountered by Afghan female journalists is presented.

2. Afghan Media

Shamsul Nehar (1873) was Afghanistan's first newspaper, with roughly 40-48 issues produced [48]. In addition, the first radio station, known as Kabul Radio, began transmitting in 1925 [10]. In 1978, the first television transmission was done. The media in Afghanistan was influenced by the Soviet Union between 1979 to 1992, while the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was in power [43].

The media was defined by harsh media regulations during the Taliban government in the 1990s, including the banning of viewing television and listening to music. The lone radio station offered religious and propagandist programming, but no music [29]. Until the Taliban were deposed in 2001, the media environment remained unchanged.

Under Hamid Karzai, the country's media had altered dramatically. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the media was quickly expanding. Media firms and organizations were registered with the government [26]. With the Taliban's collapse, television broadcasts had resumed, and many restrictive restrictions had been removed. As a result, in April 2007, the Afghan media boycotted reporting on the Taliban [41].

The Afghan media is flourishing, although it faces obstacles such as self-censorship, sanctions to discredit people, and the publication of non-Islamic content [13]. Using their positions, some government officials maintain their communication infrastructure in local government entities. Some newspapers and internet media are said to be controlled by the same persons [36]. Censorship is prohibited under a 2004 media legislation. Periodicals, on the other hand, are required to be registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture. Journalists, as well as military personnel, are at risk of kidnapping and murder threats [33].

Most Afghan journalists are men. However, the voices of female reporters and editors are beginning to be heard. Female journalists used to only report on education and health, and these are often considered feminine issues. They work on issues such as modernity and traditions that affect Afghanistan today [26].

In Afghanistan, there are now 96 television stations, 190 radio stations, and 1500 newspapers in operation [59]. As of

March 8, 2020, 7577 people were working in various media platforms, with just 1741 of them being women [12].

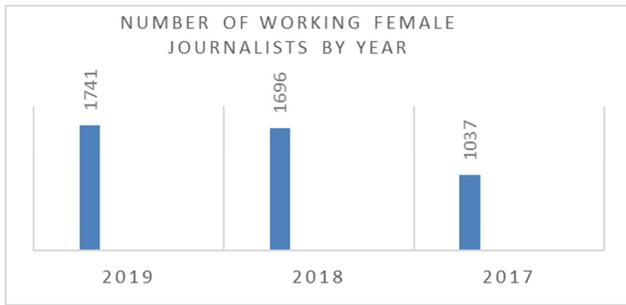


Figure 1. Number of Afghan Female Journalists by Different Years.

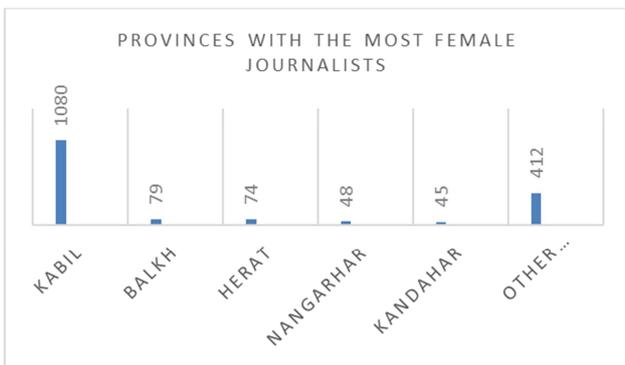


Figure 2. Provinces with most female journalists.



Figure 3. Statistics show on the map of Afghanistan, in provinces with green-colored there is a high number of female journalists, in blue-colored provinces, it's medium, in red-colored provinces, they are less and in black-colored provinces, there is no female journalist.

3. Women in Afghanistan

Despite Afghan society's entrenched hierarchy and patriarchal, central administrations such as Habibullah Khan's in 1903 implemented several social and legal changes to help women and girls improve their position and use the media to promote gender equality. In the popular central government-run journal Siraj ul-Akhbar, Mahmud Tarzi began writing on gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion. Queen Soraya, King Amanullah Khan's wife, created Irshad-e-Naswan, the first women's journal, which concentrated on

domestic abuse and other social and political concerns affecting women. This journal provided the ideal platform for the Queen and the King to express their views on women's rights [25].

During the Soviet-backed Communist regime's reign, the second era of reform occurred. During the communist era, women made up about one-third of all teachers. A substantial percentage of women also worked as physicians and nurses and had high-profile jobs in the security industry. State-controlled radio and television networks, as well as publications, publicized these attempts to free women [25].

On television, radio, and in newspapers, Afghan women were represented as "urbane, educated, and sophisticated" people. For Afghan women, this did more harm than benefit. The elites that were controlling the central government, felt abandoned, frightened, and disregarded by rural populations. In the view of rural Afghans, the central media establishes a clear divide between "good" and "bad" women by exclusively depicting the educated elite. Local communities eventually acquired the impression that trainees wore contemporary European-style attire and people working outside the house were not of good character, based on these pictures generated by the media. Furthermore, despite being the country's biggest demographic, published photographs of women provide a highly particular and rigid gender model for rural women and girls to imitate. In 1990, a local elder labeled a rural lady as "clean, less morally corrupt, and better Muslim," claiming that education would "taint" her character. Even though this remark represents the opinion of a single person, it demonstrates that the elders' opinions on women and women in rural Afghanistan are commonly accepted [25].

In terms of women's rights, the 1990s were the worst years in Afghanistan's history. With the Taliban's takeover of power in 1996, women faced an unprecedented period of persecution. Women were subjected to unrelenting tyranny and violence by the Taliban regime. Almost everything was banned for women: being well-groomed, laughing, having fun, going to school, job, seeing a male doctor, expressing oneself... A woman may not leave the house without her husband's consent, nor may she be seen on the street without her spouse or a male relative. The dwellings' windows had to be fully shut or painted. It was unlawful to keep birds in cages under the Taliban's obsessive ideology, but it was legal to put women in solitary confinement in their houses [62].

Women have achieved tremendous progress since the Taliban government fell in 2001. Women's rights are incorporated in the national constitution of 2004, and consecutive national administrations have pledged to safeguard women's rights, end violence against women, and promote economic empowerment and political engagement for women. In the region and other Muslim nations, the Afghan Constitution and the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women give women unparalleled rights, protections, and possibilities. Although the present Afghan administration is openly devoted to women's rights and empowerment, women still face major obstacles in exercising their rights [35].

Women's rights and engagement in Afghanistan are increasing slowly, according to The Asia Foundation's 2018 Afghan People Survey [52].

When it comes to women's access to justice, the 2018 findings were positive. More females than males (16.4 percent vs 21.8 percent) report going to court, the Law Department, or their local Shura or Jirga to settle their household issues. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, one of the Afghan government's three agencies, is responsible for some of this development. Special teams have been established by the Attorney General's Office and the police to give help to females in cases of violence and civil disputes. Females are also better aware of their rights as a result of media and public awareness efforts carried out by non-governmental organizations and international funders [52].

Since 2001, grassroots activists, NGOs, the Afghan government, and the international community have worked together to make significant progress [52].

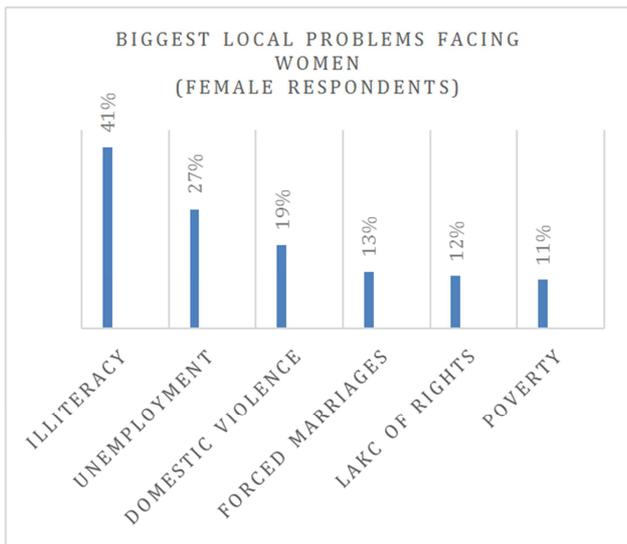


Figure 4. Biggest local problems facing women (Female Respondents).

Illiteracy or lack of education (40.9%), unemployment (26.7%), domestic abuse (19.2%), forced marriage (12.5%), injustice (12.5%), and poverty (11.3%) are the most significant challenges for Afghan females [52].

Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, with about 31% of the population aged 15 and up being literate. According to the UNDP, women make up around 31.7 percent of literate people. According to UNICEF, 3.7 million school-aged children are out of school, with 60 percent of them being girls [52].

4. Working Conditions and Challenges

Since the Taliban's collapse and the formation of a new administration, the function, and visibility of female journalists have grown in importance. Females are drawn to media activities by legal protections and the open space provided by the media; however, for various reasons, the

presence of female journalists is decreasing. The decline in the presence of female journalists is not only limited to a lack of security in the country; on the contrary, low salaries and privileges, discrimination, and workplace harassment are also factors.

Although the media has played a critical role in delivering information, public awareness, restructuring, anti-corruption, freedom of speech, and human rights in Afghanistan after 2001, media professionals still face several obstacles [29].

4.1. Insecurity

Afghanistan has been at war for over 42 years since the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979. It is natural for a country to feel apprehensive during a conflict in this setting. In a war-torn nation like Afghanistan, where no one can guarantee even a second or minute of their life, a person's death, whether male or female, becomes the norm. This instability has a significant impact on journalists, as well as other groups. Consider how difficult it would be for female journalists to operate in a such culture, where even male journalists are restricted from working freely and are constantly threatened. Journalism is regarded as a hazardous profession, particularly for females working in a hostile, corrupt environment, and particularly for reporters who expose injustice in the domains of violence, the environment, and war [45]. In this context, insecurity is one of the most significant difficulties that female journalists in Afghanistan confront.

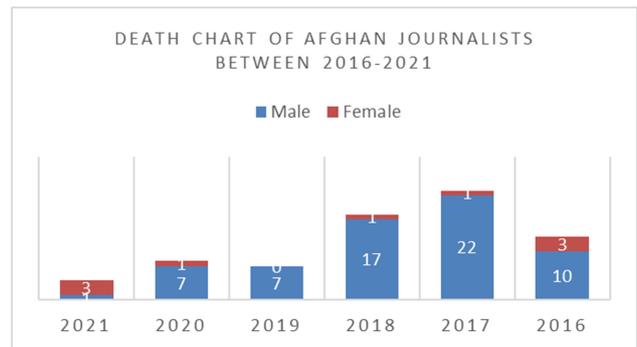


Figure 5. Death table of Afghan journalists by different years.

Afghanistan is the third-deadliest nation for journalists, according to the RSF (Reporters Without Borders) 2020 report (after Mexico and Iraq; before Pakistan and India) [46]. According to the RSF, Afghanistan is rated 122nd out of 179 nations in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index, down from 121st the previous year [47].

It is easy to see why Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous nations for journalists if we look at the following death chart of journalists over the previous six years (2016-2021).

As seen in the graph above, in a society where journalists are not protected, insecurity will be undoubtedly the greatest issue they will confront in their daily job and personal life. Not only for males but also for female journalists, this is a difficult task.

Since 2001, Afghanistan has lost 15 Afghan female journalists and two international female journalists and media workers. Twelve of these female journalists are murdered, while the others are killed in terrorist attacks, suicide bombs, and bombings; six of the 12 murders are carried out by the relatives of females whose killers have been apprehended. Shima Rezaei, Shakiba Sanga Amaj, Zakia Zaki, Donya Zakeri, Plosheh Tokhi, Maryam Ebrahimi, Zeinab Mirzaei, Muharram Durrani, Mina Mangal, Malala Maiwand, Morsal, Sadia, and Shahnaz are among the Afghan female journalists killed. Anja Niedringhaus and Maria Grazia Cutuli are two foreign female journalists who have been killed [59].

According to a study released by the Center for the Protection of Women Journalists (CPAWJ) in Afghanistan at the end of 2019, 65 incidents of violence against journalists have been documented, with six of them being female journalists. However, in 2020, the CPAWJ documented 15 incidents of violence against female journalists and media workers, including murder, injury, physical assault, insult, humiliation, and threats, a 50 percent increase in comparison to the previous year (2019). According to the center's projections, 90 journalists have faced violence in Afghanistan in 2020, with 15 of them being female journalists [21].

Malala Maiwand was the seventh Afghan journalist to be murdered while working in 2020 [22]. Three additional female journalists were killed by unknown assailants in the same city (Nangarhar) on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, barely three months after Malala's assassination. Morsal, Sadia, and Shahnaz, all Enikas TV employees, were killed in two separate attacks on their way home from work [34]. Many journalists and media critics are abandoning their professions and even the nation as a result of growing threats and intentional deaths. According to sources, 12 journalists have fled the nation in the previous two months, including five women, and are presently residing in the United States or Europe [34].

A lot of female journalists regard threats and murders against their female colleagues as a serious issue and impediment to their professional practices and believe that as harassment and threats against them rise, they lose trust in the future of their profession. Many journalists are abandoning their professions, particularly in insecure regions. "Both my husband and I work as journalists, and the Taliban have threatened us, so we decided to move to Kabul," says a journalist from Ghazni. On the condition of anonymity, she stated that there are presently no female journalists working in Ghazni due to rising mistrust [34].

Ranginah Anwari, a media activist in the southern province Kandahar, alleges that she has been harassed by unknown individuals for the past month and has been unable to continue her work. According to Anwari, 18 female journalists have been missing in Kandahar. Golalai Karimi, Zabul's lone female journalist, says, "I quit working in the media due to security worries." Lida Ebrahimi, a journalist with the Roshani TV channel in the northern region Kunduz, emphasizes the importance of prosecuting violent criminals, citing impunity as the primary source of violence against

journalists [34].

Sakinah Ahmadi, a female journalist who works for the local radio station Radio Farhat, says conservative culture is still widespread in society. She claims that the deteriorating security situation and attacks on journalists by various groups are interfering with female journalists' work and instilling fear in their communities. "These kinds of mishaps demoralize female journalists and endanger their media careers," she says [55].

The Taliban recently told media outlets in Ghazni province that they should only broadcast whatever they want. Music, government ads, and women's voices on radio stations must all be removed immediately, according to media executives. The demand is seen as a threat and a warning by the Taliban, who say the media would be held responsible for any consequences if the public is misled. Journalists and media owners in Ghazni fear the Taliban's threats against them, media outlets, and female journalists would stymie their work. Mahjabin Nekzad, a Ghazni-based journalist, claims that female journalists have experienced social and security issues in the past, but that Taliban threats have recently quadrupled, posing a severe threat to her and her coworkers. "We conduct our work with zeal," she adds, "but the Taliban danger has recently diverted female journalists emotionally and caused issues for our community." Anisa Amiri, a female journalist in Ghazni, is likewise concerned about the Taliban's danger. "If the current scenario continues, female journalists' twenty-year activity and growth will be interrupted, and their place in the media would be threatened once more." She goes on to say that if women's issues remain, their position in journalism, as well as other areas of society, would be jeopardized, and the Taliban will prevent them from going to work or school.

Fataneh Mutawakel, a local journalist who quit due to targeted deaths in Baghlan, claims that the threat to journalists poses severe challenges for female journalists. "The government must examine the recent sad incidents that resulted in the deaths of journalists, and serial killings of journalists and media workers must be halted," Mutawakel adds. "My family no longer allows me to report after four media workers were killed in Nangarhar," adds Shamila Hosseini, another journalist forced to retire due to insecurity [54].

The security situation in some regions (Khost and Ghor) is so terrible that female journalists may only transmit their stories and reports to the media through removable flash drives or mail [31].

Sanam Nikzad is another female journalist who has been threatened while doing her job. "I was heading home from college when two guys tried to punch me. They hit my hands, I screamed, and they escaped," Nikzad says [50].

In an exclusive interview with Anadolu Agency in Kabul, Afghan female journalist Zalma Kharooti addressed the challenges of her colleagues in the nation, saying, "I have constantly been threatened with death." As a result, I had to resign from my position. Due to the growing threats, I fled Afghanistan for a short period, but the threats persisted when

I returned. I was threatened with death several times and was pursued by armed guys. I'm unable to leave the house any longer. In Afghanistan, I am not safe" [4].

On May 11, Mina Mangal, a well-known Afghan journalist, political strategist, and women's rights campaigner, was assassinated in Kabul. Mangal's father told the BBC, "I lost an educated and energetic daughter because of a family dispute problem." He goes on to say, "I inquire as to why the government is unable to safeguard my working daughter. I implore them to safeguard other women, like my daughter, who emerge from the other home to serve our community" [14].

According to the Center for the Protection of Women Journalists in Afghanistan, conflict, and insecurity have forced the closure of more than 194 video, audio, and print media outlets across the country's cities and provinces [7].

This problem is quite widespread in Afghanistan, and it has had a significant impact on the country's media.

4.2. Social Problems

Targeted assassinations, terrorist assaults, and conflicts with authorities have all been commonplace in Afghanistan's media industry during the last two decades. As a result, according to international rankings, Afghanistan is one of the most hazardous places in the world to work as a journalist [46]. Female journalists in Afghanistan, unlike their male colleagues, suffer a variety of extra risks, including domestic abuse and harassment by family members, as well as a social censure and uneven treatment at work. In Afghanistan, journalism is seen as an "immoral" career for women [61]. A female journalist is advised during a live radio broadcast that she should cease working, since women are not permitted to work outside the house. Fearing retaliation from religious conservatives, female journalists advise practicing self-censorship. They avoid criticizing warlords and other power brokers, as well as debating contentious subjects like women's rights. Female journalists also say that to protect themselves, they do not use their true identities when working. According to a female journalist, 'night letters' were issued in her area, condemning any lady who worked with the radio station to death. The local elders assembled an informal Jirga, and the female journalist was asked to resign. Out of anxiety, she suspends his radio program for 45 days but then resumes it under a new name, tone, and program [40]. Physical or psychological violence may be pervasive in this setting, affecting interactions at many levels, including family, relatives, coworkers, authorities, police enforcement, religious groups, and society as a whole.

Female journalists in Afghanistan are battling for their rights and livelihoods daily. It entails convincing immediate family members, close relatives, and, in certain circumstances, tribesmen, to allow them to work outside. Many families reject their daughters' suggestion of working outside, as well as the woman's decision to work in the media, which is frequently not her own, even relatives and acquaintances are frequently engaged. In other situations, the major members of their family, such as their dads, brothers,

and spouses, are unconcerned with their media profession, while other relatives, such as the father's and mother's relatives and third-degree relatives are opposed. Because Afghan families are so closely knit, even resistance from distant relatives may have a significant influence.

When writing stories and conducting research outside the office, Afghan female journalists confront several challenges. "When we went to the city to write an investigative piece, any shopkeeper or anybody we encountered would say that this girl is a heretic, that she works in media, or that this girl is immoral," Samira Rasa, a journalist, recalls [49]. Also on January 18, 2020, Mujibur Rahman Ansari, the leader of Herat's Gazargah Mosque, refuses to allow female journalists to cover a recent press conference [50].

According to Franks, female journalists are constantly sexually harassed. In this context, Afghan female journalists are subject to issues not just outside of work, but even inside work [24]. Male colleagues are the most common offenders of sexual harassment at work, according to participants in an AJSC (Afghan Journalists Security Committee) survey. 59 percent of those polled claim they've been sexually harassed at work by their media pals. "One of the causes for the surge in workplace sexual harassment complaints by female journalists is the victims' reticence in reporting these occurrences," the research reads. They frequently keep their mouths shut to protect themselves and their family [1]. Atefa Malekzadeh, a former journalist of one of the state-run media channels of Baghlan, claims that she would continue to work despite economic difficulties and the conventional social structure, but that the only thing that kept her away from this career was sexual harassment in the workplace [8].

Women are frequently prevented from disclosing their true names and identities in the media by traditional culture, gender discrimination, unfavorable perceptions of women, and fear of social isolation. Some female journalists argue that they should create nicknames for themselves because they are concerned about safety, incorrect conventions, and the negative effects of this revelation. "Security concerns, familial prejudice, and ill-treatment have contributed to the anonymity of many females working in the media," says Nasima Ahmadi, a media correspondent in the Farah region. "Females working in the media are seen badly by society," Ms. Ahmedi says, "and these journalists are intimidated or criticized for working in the media by their family and friends." This is why, in their media operations, they strive to adopt pseudonyms." Sonia Teymouri, another media spokeswoman in Farah province says that people do not have a good image of females working in the media, so that's why they prefer to use fake names. Female journalists choose to keep their true identities hidden and continue their journalistic profession be accepted by their families [61].

In a cultural country like Afghanistan, the mentality is not yet ready to accept women as media activists, so it still does not look favorably on female journalists.

4.3. Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap measures the difference between the

average wage levels of all women and all men working in the labor market as waged, salaried, and casual wagers. This difference is not the wage difference between a male and a female employee doing the same job and having the same characteristics, but the difference between the average wage levels of all female and male employees [32].

Franks examined the wage difference between male and female journalists and discovered that there is a significant differential in how female journalists are compensated globally compared to how males are compensated [24]. This is because, despite an increase in the number of women entering the industry, journalism is still organized around masculine ideals [37].

Although journalism is now one of the most challenging jobs for females in Afghanistan, and female journalists confront several obstacles and difficulties, they continue to work in the media while taking the lowest pay. However, in several regions of Afghanistan, female journalists have protested due to a disparity in pay between male and female employees. Many female journalists working in local media of several regions have expressed dissatisfaction with their pay [60].

Gender discrimination is another key problem for women journalists in Afghanistan, according to the AJSC (Afghan Journalists Security Committee) study. According to 51% of their respondents, females in media have lesser mandates and salaries than males. "Unfortunately, the problems they experience such as harassment, discrimination, and uneven privileges dissuade journalists since they suffer prejudice in the job," Farida Nikzad, director of AJSC, explains her opinion in response to this challenge [1].

Insecurity and social difficulties, as well as media economic challenges and poor wages for female journalists, are the primary causes for female journalists' recent inactivity in provinces such as Balkh, Daikundi, Sar-e-Pul, Jawzjan, Samangan, Badakhshan, and Bamyan. Authorities claim that owing to financial difficulties, female journalists are not appropriately compensated for their work in the media, and that in certain circumstances, these females work in the media for free. Susan Samimi, a local journalist in Farah who worked in the media for many years, recently resigned because of not receiving her salary. She explains, "Failure to pay media salaries on time led me to abandon my work." Shakiba Ahmadi is a female journalist who has spent the last 10 years working for several local media publications in the state. She, on the other hand, leaves her work since they are unable to pay her wage. "I worked for 10 years under pressure from my family and friends because of my enthusiasm for reporting and journalism, but in the end, I had no option but to resign because I hadn't been paid for months" [6].

4.4. Accessing Information

Journalists in Afghanistan have another challenge: access to information. Journalists face threats from government authorities, the Taliban, ISIS (Daesh), and other armed

organizations, as well as insecurity and conflict, restricted access to information, death, and injuries, all of which hinder them from covering events as accurately as they should be [29].

Access to information law is seen as a key element in strengthening and promoting freedom of expression, but despite the opportunities available, journalists in Afghanistan still have difficulty accessing information and are sometimes deprived of the information they need [56].

Female journalists in Herat who publish research findings claim they encounter several challenges. People have a negative perception of female journalists on one hand, and they have trouble getting information on the other. Somayeh Valizadeh, a reporter who does research reports, believes that the most difficult difficulty she has while writing her reports is a lack of information. She explains that female journalists are being discriminated against while seeking information from authorities and sources. State officials do not offer information to female journalists in the same way that they do to male journalists, and they do not provide correct information to female journalists. Even female journalists are barred from attending religious scholar gatherings [30].

4.5. Online Harassment

It's no secret that the internet can be a hazardous environment for women. Female YouTubers endure a harsher climate than male YouTubers [58]. Anti-feminist hashtags are common on Twitter, promoting conventional gender roles and specifically targeting women [19]. Bullying of women online is prevalent on many platforms [28]. #GamerGate is a term used to describe attacks against female gamers [42]. Female journalists, on the other hand, have a long history of being harassed at work [39]. The digital world offers a new area for female journalists to encounter abuse as online criticism becomes more accepted as part of journalists' daily routines [17]. Many journalists are required to engage with the public via comments on the news or social media, but these exchanges are frequently tense [18]. For female journalists, this can be an especially potent combination: a digital area that encourages violence, combined with a request to join this room as part of their profession.

Online harassment of women speaking publicly, especially online, is becoming a serious concern several years after the introduction of the World Wide Web [11]. It's the most apparent and worrisome sign of a global culture in which online and offline communication coexist and interweave. Women use the tools provided by the Internet to publicly express themselves online, yet they remain vulnerable in doing so. Women are more vulnerable to online harassment when they write about politics or dispute what is considered political, which can include "name-calling, deliberate attempts to humiliate, physical threats, harassment over a prolonged period, sexual harassment" [23].

The problem of female journalists being harassed online is not unique to Afghanistan. Female journalists confront comparable challenges all around the world. According to an

article in Al Jazeera English titled "Trolls and Threats: Online Abuse of Women Journalists," "While both men and women experience online harassment, many female journalists encounter hate remarks that males would never have to confront." [44]. According to a 2016 poll performed in Finland, male and female journalists receive similar numbers of threats, but the substance of those threats vary by gender. Threats of sexual assault were reported by 14% of female journalists polled. Such threats have never been reported by a male journalist. Approximately 5% of both sexes say they have received death threats [53].

Abusing the names of Afghan female journalists on social media, establishing fake profiles using their names and photos, distributing fake news from their addresses, and propagating misleading and frequently inaccurate stories about their personal lives are just a few of the issues they confront.

Homeira Habib, a teacher at the Herat Provincial NAI (Promoter of Free Media in Afghanistan) Office, says: "Many of the female journalists in Herat fear that their images will be shared on virtual networks, so they instead use landscape paintings or child photos for their profile pictures." Another problem, says Ms. Habib, is that female activists and celebrities in journalism fear that their accounts will cause headaches when someone else creates fake accounts in their name and profile. Therefore, they find that female journalists in Herat have less virtual activity, and if they are active, they prefer to post mostly their enjoyable content, literature, and poetry [9]. "Because I liked to use my original identity and pictures on social media, my pictures had been misused and faked over and over again," says Zahra Nazari, a freelance journalist in Kabul. "Unknown people are harassing me through messages and commenting on my photos with inappropriate and unbearable words." [9].

Although women are harassed on social media or that false identity has been formed on their behalf to try to discredit them by publishing photographs, it is a very sensitive topic for which there are still no rules or solutions [9].

4.6. Concerned About Future

On February 29, 2020, in the capital of Qatar, Doha, the US, and the Taliban sign a peace agreement named Agreement to Bring Peace to Afghanistan. The deal stipulates the departure of all American and NATO forces from Afghanistan, as well as a pledge to prohibit al-Qaeda from functioning in regions controlled by the Taliban and talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. If the Taliban keep their promises, the US will reduce its deployment from 13,000 to 8,600 troops by July 2020, and then leave altogether within 14 months [14]. The US also pledges to dismantle five military bases within 135 days and to remove economic sanctions on the Taliban by August 27, 2020 [51, 36]. Although the Afghan government is not a party to the deal, China, Russia, and Pakistan support it [14].

After months of discussion, the Afghan government released a list of 20 delegates, 15 men and 5 women, who would hold intra-Afghan peace negotiations with the Taliban

[51]. In this list of delegates, there is not even one male or female journalist. This is when the fears begin, according to both female and male journalists, because no one is there to protect their rights and freedom of expression.

The country's media community has been concerned about the future of Afghanistan's press freedom following hard advances over the past two decades since the start of the peace negotiations. Despite its constitutional obligation to defend and preserve this freedom, the Afghan government has refused to accept the media community's request to have a representation on the negotiating team. The Taliban stressed in the last days of the first round of intra-Afghan talks that the safeguarding of a variety of rights, including press freedom, will be done per Islamic principles. However, the question of what type of Islamic ideas must be addressed remains unanswered. The Afghan government's reluctance to take a clear stance on press freedom, which is a critical component of democracy, and the Taliban's equivocal position on press freedom are concerning. The future of press freedom, one of the most important achievements of the previous two decades, remains a source of anxiety for the media community [3].

A group of female journalists expresses both optimism and skepticism regarding the result of the ongoing peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. These journalists urge negotiating teams and foreign nations participating in Afghanistan issues to support press freedom and journalistic rights, particularly the rights of female journalists, and not to overlook female journalists' achievements during the previous two decades [7]. The lack of female journalists from the Doha peace process is causing alarm among female journalists. Meanwhile, female journalists claim that the peace that prohibits the press and female journalists from operating freely in the nation is unsustainable and will never be tolerated [7].

Mina Salimi, a journalist for Melli Radio and Television in Balkh, stresses the need of safeguarding women's scientific, cultural, and artistic qualities and resources. "We will never return, and a peace that ignores women's accomplishments is not a permanent and complete peace," she adds. No woman wants to live in the shadow of an oppressive society and women's representatives and other leaders should continue the peace negotiations while taking into consideration their accomplishments, she says [5].

Another female journalist in Balkh, Rahimeh Yazdani, adds, "Female journalists are concerned because, if the peace process is not well managed, their jobs would be threatened. We want the peace that lies ahead to take into consideration our desires as well as the wishes of the Afghan people" [5].

"I encourage the government and Taliban negotiating teams not to limit female journalists' social position when they achieve a peace accord and create a new administration," says Atefa Mohammadi, a journalist for Banu TV [7].

Journalist Golalai, who works for Radio Naz, a local station in Zabul's southern region, "I work as a journalist in a challenging environment. I hope that peace will not obstruct

my social activities, and that I will be able to better serve my people than now, and that more Zabul females would have the opportunity to work as journalists" [7].

The Afghan people have been longing for peace for 42 years. Will this peace come at the price of media freedom, leading to a return to the dark days of 1996-2001 for Afghan women? No one knows, but a peace that protects the rights of the whole Afghan population will be welcomed by everybody.

5. Conclusion

It is very difficult to live and lead a life in a traditional and insecure country like Afghanistan. Especially females can feel these difficulties more. Although Afghanistan's half population is female, they are always subject to difficulties and violence. Being a journalist in a such country is not without violence and threats.

Since the Taliban's collapse and the formation of a new administration, the function and visibility of female journalists have grown in importance. Despite the challenges they encounter, Afghan female journalists may speak for other Afghan women, particularly those who are subjected to abuse and discrimination and are uninformed of their rights. Afghan female journalists are always significant when it comes to reporting on the condition of women, particularly those who reside in rural areas and are unaware of their rights. It's worth noting that, in terms of rural women's education, not only reporting by female journalists but also special programs for women aired in audio and video media may be as successful as a school.

Women are drawn to media activities by legal safeguards and the open space provided by the media; nevertheless, with time and a deteriorating security environment, this presence is dwindling, and the number of women journalists is also dwindling for many reasons. However, low salaries and privileges, discrimination, workplace harassment, and other challenges for women journalists are not limited to a lack of security in the country; on the contrary, low salaries and privileges, discrimination, workplace harassment, and more are all challenges for female journalists. Female journalists voiced worry not just about threats, terrorism, instability, and violence directed at them, but also about the ongoing peace negotiations.

Despite the challenges, females in Afghanistan have been encouraged to work in the media for numerous years. However, it still confronts several obstacles and issues in this regard, and the attitude in a culturally conservative nation like Afghanistan has yet to embrace females as media activists.

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