



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES FOR AFGHAN GIRLS

Mohammad Shah Zakiⁱ

Associate Professor Dr.,
Foreign Languages Department,
Istinye University,
Turkey
orcid.org/0000-0002-8004-2870

Abstract:

This study investigated the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls after the change of regime in 2021. This study specifically targeted girls who faced school closures. A total of two hundred fifty-two (252) participants took part in this study to express their views and opinions regarding the school closure based on a questionnaire and provided open-ended reflections regarding the impact of school closures. The majority of them were from university, followed by high school, secondary school, and primary school students, as girls are only permitted to attend school up to grade six. The findings revealed significant serious psychological effects. A large number of respondents reported hopelessness about the future and expressed anxiety, depression, and loss of motivation, indicating widespread despair and lack of direction. Additional consequences include low self-esteem, mental disorder, loneliness, and sleep disturbance. Moreover, most of the participants described feeling trapped at home, experienced mood disorders, and reported physical illness. Other concerning outcomes included experiences of dehumanization and exposure to violence. Despite these severe challenges, most students expressed resilience and a strong desire to continue learning. Almost all the participants sought alternative opportunities, such as looking for scholarships, considering leaving the country, if possible, and pursuing online study. A smaller number of participants studied at home with their parents, while only a few accepted this situation passively. Participants also identified forced marriage, underage marriage, an increase in child labor, and youth suicide rates as additional consequences of school closures. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority demonstrated hope for the future and refused to give up their education and strong desire to achieve their goal.

Keywords: psychology, consequence, child labor, suicide rate, forced marriage, underage marriage.

ⁱ Correspondence: email mshah.zaki@gmail.com

1. Introduction

During the two decades of democratic governance in Afghanistan, citizens experienced significant opportunities for progress across multiple sectors, including politics, economics, communication, and, most notably, education. In big city centers, girls accounted for nearly half of the student population in schools, universities, and other educational institutions, and they were also represented in the workforce, feeling a sense of balance and gender equality. However, in smaller cities, villages, and remote areas, employment was mainly male-dominated, even within the educational sector. Deep-rooted conservatism and restrictive cultural norms in these regions discouraged women from working outside the home. It is important to emphasize that the pursuit of knowledge—whether in modern sciences or Islamic studies—is obligatory for both men and women according to Islamic teachings, as highlighted by the well-known saying, *“Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”* Afghanistan has historically been home to prominent philosophers, poets, and scholars whose contributions continue to benefit the world.

Despite this legacy or situation, the country is currently experiencing a severe regression in educational access, particularly for women, reminding you of pre-modern conditions. Traditionally, Afghan women were given to domestic responsibilities, including household chores, childbearing, and family care. It is distressing that in the 21st century—an era defined by rapid technological advancement and artificial intelligence—Afghan society is once again fighting and struggling with widespread illiteracy. The current regime has employed Islam as a justification to reduce female education, despite the religion’s strong support of learning for both genders. This situation has not only resulted in the exclusion of girls from schools and universities but has also led to the removal of several academic subjects from boys’ curricula on the grounds that these subjects openly contradict cultural traditions and customs.

This study investigated the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls following the Taliban’s return to power in 2021. It specifically examined the impact of educational deprivation on their mental health, with a focus on depression, anxiety, loneliness, loss of motivation, and so on. Moreover, it sought to determine whether Afghan girls continue to resist these restrictions and pursue their educational rights through alternative means. Although they have faced severe barriers, almost all the girls have shown resilience, adopting informal methods of learning in their determination to acquire knowledge and contribute to society.

In conclusion, Afghanistan’s current educational and social environment leaves little hope for the future, particularly for women. While girls have been systematically excluded from formal schooling and boys’ curricula have been significantly reduced, Afghan girls have nonetheless shown remarkable perseverance. Despite systemic prevention, Afghan girls continue to explore alternative strategies to enhance their knowledge and defend their right to education.

2. Importance of the Study

This study focuses on the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls in the modern technological era in the 21st century. Education is not forbidden for anyone, neither

boys nor girls, in different religions around the world, from Islam to Christianity; however, wrong interpretations deprive girls of the education system. It is way more important because it addresses not only the educational disruption resulting from school closures but also the profound psychological effects that often remain overlooked. In addition, it is rumored that girls should not go to school because Islam does not allow them, and also it is against Afghan tradition and culture. However, not only are these claims not correct, but also they are against Islam and Afghan tradition and custom. It is very important and significant to reach the hidden feelings of Afghan girls in countries around the world that defend human rights and equality. It emphasizes that education is not merely a means of knowledge learning/acquisition but also a protective factor for mental health and social well-being.

2.1 Aim of the Study

This study's main goal is to investigate and evaluate the psychological effects of Afghan girls' school closures after the Taliban took over the country. The study specifically seeks to determine how much school closures affect girls who are denied their right to an education in terms of feelings of loneliness, anxiety, despair, and hopelessness. Additionally, it looks into how their social and emotional development is affected by the absence of peer interaction and structured learning environments. By doing this, the study not only draws attention to the unintended consequences of closing schools but also highlights how crucial it is to protect Afghan girls' educational rights and mental health.

2.2 Research Questions

- 1) What are the major psychological consequences experienced by Afghan girls as a result of school closures under Taliban rule?
- 2) How does the absence of peer interaction and structured learning environments influence the emotional well-being of Afghan girls?
- 3) In what ways do school closures impact the future aspirations and hope for Afghan girls?
- 4) What types of alternative educational opportunities can help reduce the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls?

4. Literature Review

4.1 The Psychological and Socioeconomic Impacts of Education Denial on Afghan Girls

According to Randhawa, Tahir, and Zaman (2025), educational limitations and the denial of Afghan girls raised the levels of depression, anxiety, and struggles with identity among Afghan girls. The lack of education opportunities heightens the risk of early and forced marriage, as families unable to educate their daughters often resort to marrying them off at a young age. That's why many of them faced forced marriage, early marriages, and lifelong financial dependence on male relatives (UNICEF, 2022). According to a Bamyan Focus Group Discussions (FGD) participant, it was stated that children were being sold for labor, which is very shocking. Furthermore, the lack of female education affected Afghanistan's economic development, reducing workforce participation and continuing to exist in cycles of poverty. The Taliban has

systematically excluded females from all sectors; therefore, domestic violence increased (Kelly, Levitt, & Noori, 2024).

According to the survey, which was conducted by Bishnaw-Wawra (2023), 42.99% of the participants could not choose which ban was more oppressive and expressed concern about all the recent unfairness, including lack of access to education, work, and the ability to move easily from one place to another. Over a third of women—37.12%—said they were most concerned about the ban on education. In Kandahar, families previously encouraging their daughters to get an education to secure better opportunities now believe there is no future for educated women and are forcing their daughters into early marriage. Neyazi *et al.* (2023) acknowledged that the Taliban created a worse situation in the cases of women from ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities, such as the Hazara, Tajik, Hindu, and other communities, whose differences make them even more vulnerable in Afghanistan. The study conducted by Neyazi *et al.* (2023) revealed that depression symptoms commonly affect 80.4% of women surveyed. Additionally, 81.0% acknowledged that they experienced extremely severe anxiety. The study also highlighted key factors associated with depression, including age, number of children, education level, exposure to negative events, and physical illness.

In Paktia and Nangarhar, there have been reports of severe beatings, imprisonment, disappearances, and death threats against people who protested against the Taliban. According to Safi (2023), Fetrat (2024), and Kumar (2023), the Taliban also forced them to sign confessions or agreements not to protest. As a result, families are physically disciplining their daughters, and people are afraid to voice concerns or opposition in public.

On the contrary, women and girls are taking risks to continue their education and look forward to other sources, such as online education programs. Online programs allow women and girls to follow a course of instruction from their homes. In Balkh and Jawzjan, online programs are being accessed by many girls in urban areas, and distance learning is allowing girls to continue with aspects of their education despite high school and university closures. However, online education cannot be an alternative to formal education, and many families cannot afford internet access, smartphones, or computers to access online classes. UNESCO financially supported and established community-based literacy classes in several provinces, partnered with overseas universities offering online courses, and supported educational programs via radio and television (Bishnawa, 2023).

Restricting Afghan girls' access to education significantly affects their mental well-being, cognitive growth, and social identity. Most importantly, education shapes their individual self-esteem, confidence, and ability to engage with the community. As a result, denying someone this basic right causes long-lasting developmental failures, emotional stagnation, and increased mental health problems. Studies showed that not accessing education frequently, Afghan girls suffer from increased psychological distress, as education serves not only as a pathway to knowledge but also as a crucial component of self-discovery and future aspirations (Ryan and Deci 2000). Furthermore, they increased feelings of worthlessness, profound sadness, and suicidal ideation. Similarly, the United States Institute of Peace (2023) documented social withdrawal and self-harm among Afghan girls who lack educational opportunities.

4.2 Impaired Cognitive and Emotional Development

According to the World Bank (2022), when children, especially girls, are denied access to education, their cognitive growth is severely restricted, leading to the following: firstly, it reduces the ability for memory retention and analytical thinking; secondly, it restricts the advancement in language skills and communication; and thirdly, it weakens the capacity for engaging in complex reasoning processing (Piaget, 1950).

Another study conducted by Safi (2023), Kumar (2023), and Fetrat (2024) acknowledged that uneducated girls are likely to be isolated from society. Firstly, they are more hesitant to confront domestic violence; secondly, they are less likely to engage in political or social discourse; and thirdly, they are more likely to accept lower positions or less authority without challenges.

4.3 The Effects of Learning Denial on Girls' Self-image and Empowerment

Girls who are led to believe they are unworthy of education develop profound feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and worthlessness. According to UN Women (2023), Afghan girls who are denied education demonstrate the following points: firstly, the reduction of self-esteem and ongoing self-doubt; secondly, social isolation and reluctance to express their views; and thirdly, they express feelings of guilt and shame for desiring academic success. The preplanned exclusion of Afghan girls from education is not only a violation of their individual rights but also poses a threat to the future of Afghanistan (Neyazi *et al.*, 2023, and Kelly, Levitt, & Noori, 2024).

4.4 Consequences of Education Restrictions on Women's Health and Maternal Mortality

The most significant impact of banning female education was on women's healthcare. The Taliban's imposition of educational restrictions on women has critically made the medical training ability less effective, leading to a shortage of female doctors, nurses, midwives, female teachers, and educated women professionals from various walks of life, which causes a direct threat to women's lives (Azoulay, 2025). Notably, males and females were the two wings of the healthcare system. The education ban resulted in fewer women being trained as healthcare providers (WHO, 2023). In Afghanistan's conservative society, many families restricted women from receiving care from male physicians, creating a critical healthcare crisis. The WHO (2023) warns that the lack of trained female doctors leaves millions of Afghan women without the necessary medical care, resulting in preventable deaths from pregnancy-related complications, infections, and chronic diseases. Additionally, social restrictions, marginalization, and exposure to trauma mean that Afghan women and children experience higher levels of mental distress than Afghan men while also having less access to resources and support (Rivas, 2011).

According to the survey implemented by Bishnawa, women and girls suffer from mental illness. Depression and anxiety were the most commonly cited mental health conditions. Additionally, suicide and attempts at self-harm or self-medicating are increasingly prevalent. Sexual violence, gender-based violence, and domestic violence also created mental health issues, which severely affected women's and girls' psychology and kept them distant from society. The culture of terror and fear shown or taught by the Taliban is also fueling intergenerational violence (2023).

Afghan culture is centered around the collective, meaning the family and community. Despite decades of war, violence, and social conflict, and in the absence of state-led social welfare, these structures have provided life-sustaining support and protection. In Herat and Balkh, women experiencing mental health problems reported being beaten by male family members because of their condition. In Balkh province, one Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participant explained that depression, suicides, physical violence, self-harm, aggression, and rape have increased, and the main reason for all this is the ignorance of families (2023).

5. Research Methodology

The study implemented both quantitative and qualitative research procedures within a mixed-methods framework. In order to ensure clarity, the researcher presents the details of the participants, research instruments, data collection processes, data analysis procedures, and study limitations under separate subheadings.

5.1 Research Participants

Following the political regime change in Afghanistan in 2021, school attendance for students, particularly girls beyond the sixth grade, was officially prohibited. This study investigates the psychological consequences of these school closures on Afghan girls. In this study, two hundred fifty-two (252) female students participated to share their thoughts and concerns about the issue. Although the questionnaires were distributed online, the majority of the participants were residents of Mazar City, located in the northern part of the country.

5.2 Research Instrument

The researcher implemented a limited number of instruments for data collection in this study. A questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and then distributed by providing the link to three of my students in Afghanistan, who shared it within their study group to facilitate participation. As the data collection process was conducted entirely online, participants were only required to have access to the internet for a short period of time to complete the questionnaire.

5.3 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher designed the questionnaire using Google Forms and distributed the link to students in Afghanistan to collect the targeted data. The data collection procedure was carried out as follows: initially, the researcher shared the questionnaire link with three Afghan female students, each of whom had a wide network of acquaintances and friends on social media platforms. Especially, one of these students—Mursal Sharifi—was engaged in an online study group and also taught classes practically, which further facilitated the spread of information of the survey. Considering the context and available resources, online distribution was identified as the most efficient and reliable method for data collection. In contrast, paper-based questionnaires were considered impractical and faced challenges in keeping the original data. Therefore, the researcher implemented online data collection, supported by the assistance of his students in Afghanistan.

5.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The study, entitled “*The Psychological Consequences of School Closure for Afghan Girls*,” utilized an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The responses were first processed and summarized by the Google Forms analytical tools. After that, the researcher printed the participants’ responses to review and narratively interpret their views in detail. Each response was examined carefully to ensure accuracy and completeness. Finally, the data were transferred from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for further organization and analysis. These systematic steps ensured a comprehensive and careful analysis of the collected data.

5.5 Research Limitation

Although the study was successfully implemented, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, while the research aimed to engage a broader range of participants across the country to obtain various views and opinions, limited internet access was a significant challenge. Second, financial issues represented another obstacle, as many families were unable to afford reliable internet connectivity. Third, the closure of schools resulted in desocialization, depriving students of opportunities for regular interaction and peer engagement, which may have influenced their willingness to participate. Finally, some female students, having lost hope for their educational future, may have chosen not to participate in the study.

6. Findings

The study entitled “*The Psychological Consequences of School Closures for Afghan Girls*,” conducted after the collapse of the government in 2021, highlights the profound psychological impacts experienced by students, particularly female learners. The significance of this research lies in its contextual relevance to the 21st century, an era defined by modern technology, communication, and globalization, within which Afghan girls remain systematically deprived of education, a fundamental human right. The following sections of the study, supported by figures and analyses, examine the psychological consequences of school closures on Afghan girls and explore the strategies they employed to navigate and overcome these severe challenges.

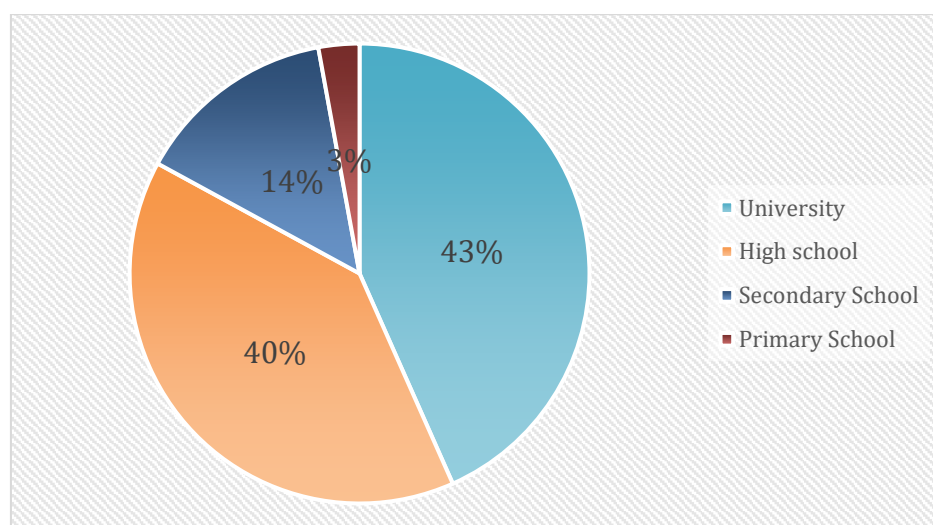


Figure 1: Which term (school) were you in when the school closed for girls?

In this study, participants were selected from diverse educational levels, encompassing university, high school, secondary, and primary schools. The biggest group was made up of university students, who made up 43% of the sample. High school students came in second with 40%. Thirteen percent (14%) of the participants came from secondary schools, while only four percent (3%) came from primary schools. These numbers show that there is a big difference in representation between higher levels of education (university and high school) and earlier stages of schooling (secondary and primary). Additionally, the results show that most of the girls who were not allowed to go to school were in high school or university, not in the earlier stages of education. While girls at the primary school level are still permitted to study, access becomes restricted at the secondary stage and beyond, particularly for girls aged 12 and older, whose schools have been closed.

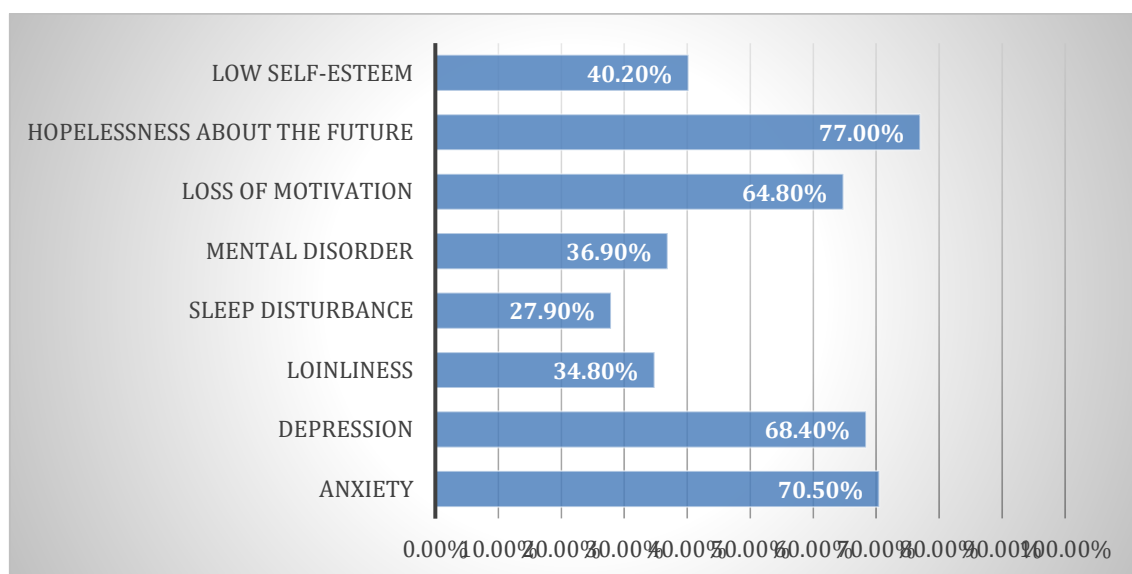


Figure 2: What were the negative impacts of school closure?

The findings related to the research question, “*What were the negative impacts of school closures?*” indicated that the most frequently reported consequence was a sense of hopelessness about the future, identified by 77% of participants. Similarly, 70.50% of participants mentioned experiencing heightened anxiety, which, along with hopelessness, emerged as one of the most outstanding psychological challenges. Depression (68.40%) and loss of motivation (64.80%) were also stated at substantial levels, highlighting the significant mental health burden associated with school closures. Additional concerns raised by participants included low self-esteem (40.20%) and mental disorders (36.90%), while feelings of loneliness (34.80%) and sleep disturbances (27.90%) were identified as further negative consequences. These findings emphasized the multidimensional nature of the psychological challenges faced by students, with hopelessness and anxiety standing out as the most common effects, while other issues, such as depression and loss of motivation, further illustrate the profound impact of disrupted education on students’ mental well-being.

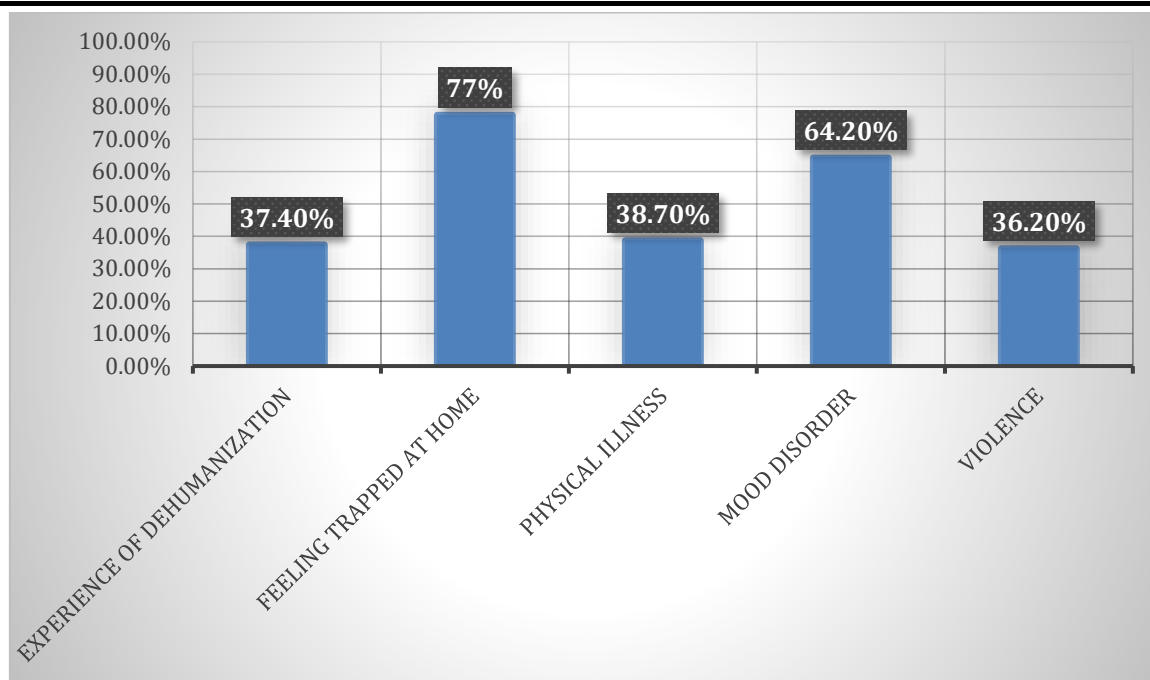


Figure 3: What other consequences might the school closure have on you?

The responses of the study participants revealed that the consequences of school closures extended far beyond academic disruption, influencing profound effects on their physical, emotional, and social well-being. A large number of respondents (77%) reported experiencing a “feeling of being trapped at home,” which reflects a pronounced sense of isolation and restriction of personal freedom. The second most frequently cited effect was the onset of “mood disorders” (64.20%), suggesting that the disruption of daily routines, heightened uncertainty, and diminished opportunities for social interaction contributed significantly to emotional instability among learners. Moreover, 38.70% of participants reported “physical illnesses” associated with school closures, which may be attributable to changes in lifestyle, limited access to healthcare, or psychosomatic – illness, which is caused by fear or anxiety rather than by any physical problem- responses to prolonged stress. Additionally, 36.20% of respondents identified “violence” as a consequence, potentially occurring in multiple contexts such as the home, community, or workplace. Furthermore, 37.40% indicated that school closures fostered feelings of “dehumanization” among female learners, who perceived themselves as excluded from wider society. Collectively, these findings highlighted that school closures not only impeded educational continuity but also engendered conditions that heightened emotional distress, physical health risks, and social marginalization. These outcomes emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive support mechanisms that address both the psychological and physical dimensions of students’ well-being during periods of crisis.

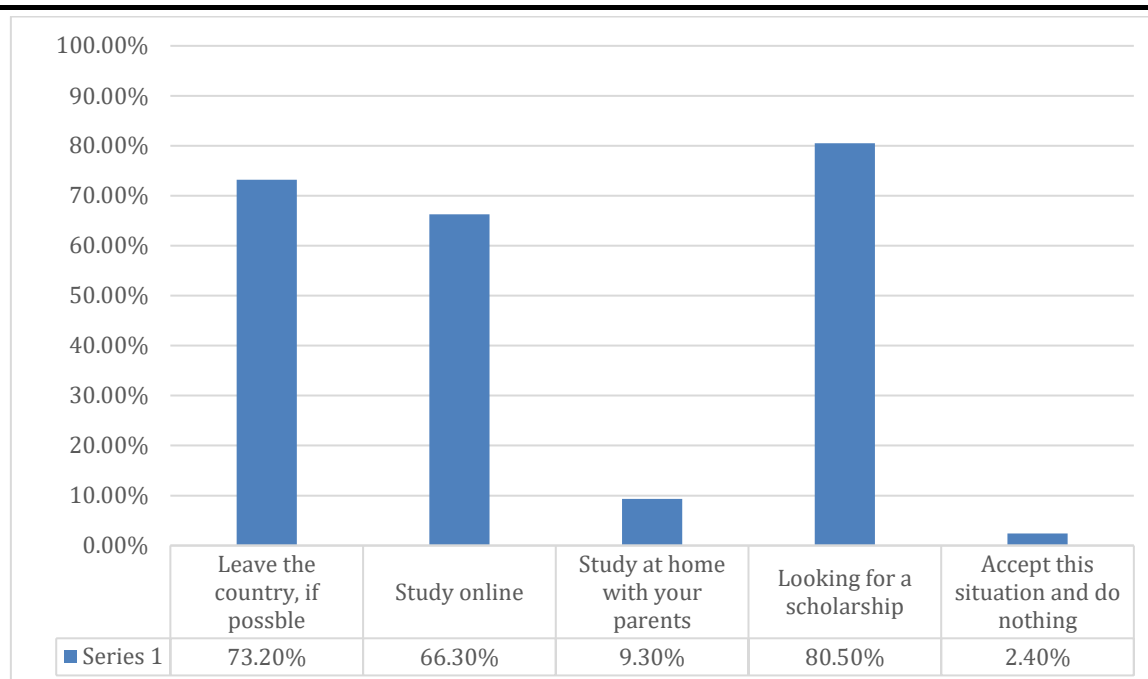


Figure 4: How do you overcome this challenge?

The participants' responses on how to attempt to overcome the challenges of school closures clarified not only active coping strategies but also expressions of resignation. The most constantly stated strategy was “looking for a scholarship” (80.50%), which proved clearly that the majority of the participants viewed education as a long-term solution. Furthermore, they were highly motivated to pursue opportunities that could secure their academic future. To support the above points, a large number of respondents indicated “leaving the country if possible” (73.20%) was another option to overcome the school closure challenges. Similarly, many participants (66.30%) stated that “study online” was another key alternative, reflecting not only the aspiration for the ability to move but also the reliance on digital platforms as a replacement for the traditional school system.

However, the remarkable number of participants (9.30%) selected the option “study at home with their parents,” suggesting that home-based learning support may be limited, either due to parental educational background or lack of sources and updated materials. Surprisingly, only 2.40% of the study participants acknowledged accepting the “situation and doing nothing,” which showed that, in spite of adversity, almost all the participants remain proactive in looking for ways to continue their education.

In short, the findings emphasized the resilience and determination among students, but they also highlighted the structural barriers that lead many of them to seek opportunities abroad or depend heavily on external support like scholarships and online platforms to overcome this difficult time and challenges.

6.1 A Short Narrative About the Impacts of School Closures for Afghan Girls Based on Participants' Opinions

In addition to answering the above research questionnaires, participants also stated their opinions about the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls in the

comment part of this study. Although the majority of the participants viewed the negative side of this study, some of them gave a concrete solution for this huge challenge. In addition to the many challenges in front of Afghan girls, they did not lose hope and insisted on fighting for their rights, specifically the right to education. They strongly believed that nothing would last forever, and everything has an expiration date, even the dictatorial government and human life. Alongside this struggle, efforts to teach illiterate people represent a vital step in empowering communities and reducing inequality. Hope and struggle, when combined, serve as powerful driving forces toward achieving justice and equality. Ultimately, the return of educational rights for girls is not only a matter of social justice but also a crucial foundation for the progress and development of society as a whole.

The shutting down of schools and the lack of educational opportunities for girls have had very bad effects on their mental health, social life, and finances. A lot of girls say their lives are useless, with no destiny, and full of stress at home. Because they haven't been to school, they don't have any hope for the future, which makes them feel sad, blame themselves, and even cry for themselves. Instead of going to school, a lot of people are forced to get married young, which they see as a huge disaster for both their own growth and society as a whole. Parents are also very worried because everyone is worried about their children's future and knows that education is important for both personal and national progress.

Social repercussions affect the entire community in addition to individual experiences. In addition to contributing to long-term inequality, the rise in forced and underage marriages represented a grave violation of children's rights. The gender gap has widened as a result of the denial of education, which has also led to an increase in child labor, unemployment, illiteracy, and social problems. These results disregarded human rights and fostered unfavorable attitudes that normalize oppression and discrimination. Some participants highlighted the terrible psychological toll of even connecting these conditions to an increase in youth suicide rates.

School closures seriously affected the psychological and emotional state of women, which is worrisome. Girls talked about feeling alone, being afraid of being judged, and being cut off from important sources of support like peers, teachers, and daily routines. Many people who lack access to education spend their days solely taking care of the house, which feeds the cycle of dependency and low self-esteem. Conversely, education encompasses more than just learning; as Participants (2025) emphasized, *"Education is not just about books; it is about building confidence, fostering creativity, and creating pathways to a better life."*

Human rights and religious viewpoints also emphasized how unfair it is to deny girls' education. According to participants (2025), *"In Islam, it is stated that seeking knowledge is obligatory for both men and women,"* which directly challenges the exclusionary practices that Afghan girls must endure. Additionally, Participants (2025) emphasized the pressing need to restore girls' access to education by acknowledging that *"education is not a privilege but a right."* They also made the point that *"an illiterate mother cannot hope to raise a literate child,"* continuing to exist in the cycles of desperation, poverty, and exclusion.

In conclusion, denying people, specifically girls, access to education has led to a major catastrophe in both personal and societal life. It made the national development difficult, worsened social inequality, and reduced individual potential. In addition to being a question of

justice, restoring girls' educational rights is also an essential first step in ending cycles of poverty, hopelessness, and illiteracy and promoting a more just and prosperous future.

7. Conclusion

This research investigated the psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls, expressing a profound and varied impact of educational prevention following the political changes of 2021. The findings revealed that the school closures not only deprive girls of their educational rights but also impose severe emotional, social, and psychological burdens on them. The respondents consistently expressed feelings of isolation, hopelessness, anxiety, and so on to clearly prove that the absence of formal education negatively affected their mental well-being and sense of personal identity. Many participants experienced mood disorders, loss of motivation, and reduced or lessened their attitude toward the future, which emphasized the deep emotional roots of educational restrictions.

The research paper further showed that school closures disrupted very important social interactions, because schools are not only places for learning but also crucial places for building friendships, exchanging ideas, and enhancing essential and basic life skills. The limitation for interactions expanded desocialization, creating an environment where many girls felt trapped at home, disconnected from their peers, and deprived of opportunities for personal growth. In addition, economic challenges and limited access to the internet added to these challenges and restricted access to alternative forms of learning, leaving many girls with no hope for their future careers.

The research emphasized the urgent need for policymakers, educational authorities, and most importantly, international organizations to address both the educational and psychological needs of Afghan girls. Efforts must be made to create alternative learning opportunities, provide psychological support, and ensure that girls are not left behind in terms of development and empowerment. Therefore, educational access is not only a matter of academic advancement but also an essential step toward safeguarding the mental health and future aspirations of Afghan girls.

In conclusion, school closures have seriously and negatively affected Afghan people, especially girls. These negative impacts were not limited to education and knowledge acquisition or learning but also extended to many aspects of life, such as economic conditions, social interactions, academic achievement, relationships with peers, and, most importantly, their fundamental right to education.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted the profound psychological consequences of school closures for Afghan girls following the regime change in 2021. The participants consistently emphasized experiences of frustration, hopelessness, and emotional distress resulting from being deprived of their fundamental right to education. These outcomes were consistent with previous research indicating that restricted access to education negatively affected not only academic achievement but also psychological well-being, self-esteem, and social development.

For Afghan girls, education was not merely an academic pursuit but also a pathway toward empowerment, independence, and active participation in society. The sudden loss of this opportunity has intensified feelings of isolation and diminished their sense of future prospects. The school closures led to girls marrying at an earlier age, forced marriage, child labor, and suicide, which was completely aligned with previous studies conducted by Randhawa, Tahir, & Zaman, 2025; Kelly, Levitt, & Noori, 2024; UNICEF, 2022; and Bishnawa, 2023, that the lack of educational opportunities heightened the risk of early marriage, forced marriage, child labor, and suicide rates.

The data further revealed that many participants experienced symptoms associated with anxiety and depression, reflecting both the immediate and long-term consequences of educational exclusion. Aligned with it, Randhawa, Tahir, and Zaman (2025) stated that the limitations of education and the denial of Afghan girls' elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and struggles with identity among them. These symptoms were exacerbated and worsened by uncertainty about the future and the lack of clear alternatives to formal education. Such findings underscored the broader notion that education was intrinsically tied to psychological stability. When this structure is disrupted, particularly for young girls in vulnerable contexts, the consequences extend far beyond academic setbacks and affect their overall identity formation and life satisfaction. To support this idea, school closures also badly affected girls and increased the rate of suicide, self-harm, and self-medication. Additionally, sexual violence, gender-based violence, and domestic violence also created mental health issues (Bishnawa, 2023).

Another critical theme that emerged was the role of social interaction. Schools serve as vital social spaces where students build peer networks, engage in collaborative learning, and develop interpersonal skills. According to Rivas (2011), school closures brought social restrictions, marginalization, and exposure to trauma, meaning that Afghan women and children experience higher levels of mental distress than Afghan men while also having less access to resources and support. The closure of schools deprived Afghan girls of these interactions, leading to social withdrawal and a sense of disconnection from peers and communities. This social desolation intensified psychological burdens, as isolation has been shown to reinforce feelings of worthlessness and despair among adolescents. Aligned with it, school closures increased feelings of worthlessness, profound sadness, and suicidal ideation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Similarly, the United States Institute of Peace (2023) documented social withdrawal and self-harm among Afghan girls who lack educational opportunities.

Importantly, the study also revealed resilience among almost all participants, who sought alternative methods of learning through online resources, private classes, or self-study. According to a survey done by Bishnawa (2023), women and girls are taking risks to continue their education and look forward to other sources, such as online educational programs and community-based literacy programs created in several provinces. This adaptability demonstrated the determination of Afghan girls to pursue education despite systemic barriers. However, such alternatives were not universally accessible due to financial constraints and limited internet availability, which created further disparities and reinforced feelings of inequality.

As a conclusion, the study confirmed that school closures have multifaceted psychological consequences for Afghan girls, encompassing emotional distress, social isolation,

and reduced aspirations for the future. Additionally, girls had to marry at earlier ages and faced forced marriage, child labor, suicide, and even sexual violence, especially in small and remote areas. Furthermore, they experienced different violence, such as domestic violence and limiting their role in society and the workplace. Amazingly, they stood firmly against all these discriminations and have been continuing to seek ways to educate, such as online, scholarships, and home-based study. The findings called for urgent attention from policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and international educational bodies to provide alternative educational opportunities, psychosocial support, and advocacy for the right to education. Without such interventions, the long-term effects risk undermining not only the individual well-being of Afghan girls but also the social and economic progress of Afghan society as a whole.

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author, Mohammad Shah Zaki, declares no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article *"The Psychological Consequences of School Closures for Afghan Girls."*

About the Author

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohammad Shah Zaki holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree and specializes in English Language Teaching (ELT), with a particular focus on the processes of foreign and second language learning and acquisition. His research interests include applied linguistics and pedagogical approaches to teaching foreign and second language learners. The participants in this study were Afghan girls representing various educational levels, including universities, high schools, secondary schools, and primary schools.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8004-2870>

Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohammad-Shah-Zaki?ev=hdr_xprf,

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/ZakiMohammadShah>

Institutional webpage: <https://www.istinye.edu.tr/>

References

- Azoulay, A. (2025). *UNESCO gives voice to Afghan girls and women and calls for their rights to be restored*. UNESCO Director-General. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-gives-voice-afghan-girls-and-women-and-calls-their-rights-be-restored?utm_source=.
- Bishnawa (2023) 'Impact of Taliban Edicts on Afghan Women's Economic Conditions and Mental Health'. DROPS 31 March (<https://www.bishnaw.com/survey/31-mar-2023>).
- Fetrat, S. (2024, September 17). Taliban's attack on girls' education is harming Afghanistan's future. 1-3. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/17/talibans-attack-girls-education-harming-afghanistans-future?utm_source=
- Kelly, A., Levitt, T., & Noori, H. (2024, January 14). Nobody is Coming to Help us: Afghan Teenage Girls on Life without School. Rights and freedom: Women's rights and gender equality, 1-5. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jun/14/nobody-is-coming-to-help-us-afghan-teenage-girls-on-life-without-school?utm_source=#img-1
- Kumar, R. (2023, February 26). Books they love: A Kabul graveyard library for two schoolgirls. 2-4. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/2/26/books-they-love-a-kabul-graveyard-library-for-two-schoolgirls?utm_source=
- Neyazi, A., Padhi, B. K., Mohammadi, A. Q., Ahmadi, M., Erfan, A., Bashiri, B., . . . & Griffiths, M. D. (2023, April 25). Depression, anxiety and quality of life of Afghan women living in urban areas under the Taliban government: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2023-071939>
- Participants, F. G. (2025, July). The Psychological Consequences of School Closures for Afghan Girls. (M. S. Zaki, Interviewer)
- Piaget, J. (1950). The psychology of intelligence. *Routledge*. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/tj/books?id=rIKBAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Rivas, A. (2011). Health and Education in Afghanistan: Ten Years Later – Quantity Not Quality, Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR). Retrieved from <https://www.acbar.org/upload/1474534465893.pdf>
- Randhawa, A. A., Tahir, M., & Zaman, U. M. (2025, February). The Psychological and Socioeconomic Impact of Education Denial on Afghan Girls. *Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR)*, 3(2), 105 -110. Retrieved from <https://thedssr.com/index.php/2/article/view/347>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78. Retrieved from https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanDeci_SDT.pdf
- Safi, M. Rivas A-M. (2023). The mental health crisis among Afghan women and girls. Women's voices for an inclusive and sustainable peace, 6-16. Retrieved from https://media.odi.org/documents/The_mental_health_crisis_among_Afghan_women_and_girls_mh6O2uX.pdf
- UNICEF. (2022). *The rise of child marriages in Afghanistan*. UNICEF.
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2023). Psychological impact of education denial on Afghan girls. UN Women.

- United States Institute of Peace (USIP). (2023). Psychological effects of education deprivation in Afghanistan. USIP.
- World Bank. (2022). The effect of education restrictions on Afghanistan's economy.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). Mental health crisis among Afghan women. WHO.