



Afghanistan – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 22 February 2018

Information on the risk to young children in Afghanistan, in particular girls

The 2018 Amnesty International report for Afghanistan, in a section titled “Violence against women and girls”, states:

“In the first half of the year, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission reported thousands of cases of violence against women and girls across the country, including beatings, killings and acid attacks. Against the backdrop of impunity for such crimes and a failure to investigate, cases of violence against women remained grossly under-reported due to traditional practices, stigmatization and fear of the consequences for the victims.”
(Amnesty International (22 February 2018) *Afghanistan 2017/2018*)

The 2018 Human Rights Watch report for Afghanistan, in a section titled “Children’s Rights”, states:

“Despite the fact that the government in 2016 criminalized military recruitment of Afghans under 18 years old, the practice continued, most notably among the ALP and pro-government militias. The AIHRC reported on increased recruitment by groups affiliated with ISKP in Nangarhar. Both the ANSF and the Taliban continued to occupy or use schools for military purposes in contested areas, affecting the access to education of thousands of children, especially girls.

Afghanistan’s new penal code criminalizes the sexual abuse of boys, known in Afghanistan as bacha bazi.

Conflict-related deaths and injuries of children continued at high rates, with 689 deaths and 1,791 injuries in the first nine months of 2017. Almost half of the children detained in relation to the conflict reported being tortured or mistreated.” (Human Rights Watch (18 January 2018) *World Report 2018: Afghanistan*)

A UN News Service report states:

“The first four months of 2017 witnessed the highest recorded number of child civilian casualties resulting from conflict-related incidents in Afghanistan, including the highest number of children killed, for the same comparable period since the Mission began documenting cases.

Between 1 January and 30 April 2017, UNAMA preliminarily recorded 283 child deaths, a 21 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2016. Children are killed by explosive remnants of war in civilian-populated areas and in ground fighting.

Many of the more than 700 children injured have suffered life-changing injuries, including loss of limbs, as well as significant and lasting trauma such as witnessing the death of siblings, parents, destruction to their homes or displacement.” (UN News Service (16 May 2017) *Conflict-related child deaths hit new high in Afghanistan, UN warns*)

A report published by the international NGO Save the Children, in a section titled “Violence against children”, states:

- Children experience high levels of all types of violence. Only 9% of children reported not experiencing any type of violence; 21% experienced from 1 to 3 types; 16% from 4 to 6 types, 10% from 7 to 9 types; 13% from 10 to 15 types, 9% from 16 to 20 types, 20% from 21 to 30 types, and 2.5% more than 31 types.
- Children from urban areas reported experiencing higher number of different types of violence at home than children in rural areas.
- Overall, accounting for all types of violence, boys and girls experience similar levels of violence at home. Differences due to age also could not be established.
- Almost half of the children experienced at least a form of psychological violence at home, including shouting, insults, blaming for parent’s misfortune, cursing, public embarrassment, threats of abandonment, and locking out of home.
- Approximately 30% of children experienced emotional and physical neglect.
- Physical violence remains high where the worst forms of violence include kicking (40%); hitting with objects (approximately 40%); beating (34%); choking to be prevented from breathing (21%); burning or branding (15%). 15% of children were also given drugs.
- Boys are more likely to experience some forms of physical violence compared to girls, especially threats of being hurt or killed, hitting on the head with knuckles, choking to prevent them from breathing, and having their fingers twisted with a pencil in between. On average, girls are more often scared by invoking harmful people, ghosts or evil spirits against them if compared to boys.
- Despite answers on sexual abuse are very likely underreported, sexual abuse at home is high with 11% of children reporting being forced to watch videos or pictures with people with no or little clothes on; 7% admitted that they had to look at adult’s private parts or adults looked at theirs; 7% reported being touched on their private parts in a sexual way or being forced to touch other’s private parts; and 4.7% were forced into sexual intercourse. Sexual abuse at community level was reported in considerably higher percentages, especially by girls.” (Save the Children (1 September 2017) *Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices on Violence and Harmful Practices Against Children in Afghanistan: A Baseline Study*, p.1)

A report published by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in a section titled “Children and Armed Conflict”, states:

“Throughout 2017, conflict-related violence continued to kill and injure children. Whilst noting an overall decrease in the number of victims, children casualties accounted for 30 per cent of all civilian casualties. UNAMA recorded 3,179 child casualties (861 deaths and 2,318 injured), an overall 10 per cent decrease compared to 2016, with decreases in both fatalities and injuries. As in 2016, boys comprised 71 per cent of the casualties among children, and girls made up 29 per cent. UNAMA attributed per cent of child casualties to Anti-Government Elements, who were responsible for 1,384 child casualties (330 deaths and 1,054 injured), a five per cent decrease compared to 2016.44 Pro-Government Forces caused 913 child casualties (313 deaths and 600 injured), and were responsible for 29 per cent of all child casualties, marking a 19 per cent decrease from the previous year Cross-fire during fighting between Anti-Government Elements and Pro-Government Forces where the perpetrator could not be identified resulted in 17 per cent of child casualties. Nine per cent of child casualties, mostly from explosive remnants of war, could not be attributed, and cross-border shelling from Pakistan caused the remaining approximately one per cent of casualties among children.” (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) (15 February 2018) *Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2017*, p.11)

The 2016 US Department of State country report for Afghanistan, in a section titled “Children” (sub-section headed “Child Abuse”), states:

“NGOs reported increased numbers of child abuse victims during the year, and the problem remained endemic throughout the country. Such abuse included general neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, abandonment, and confined forced labor to pay off family debts. Police reportedly beat and sexually abused children; for instance, Agence France-Presse reported a case of a 13-year-old boy kidnapped by a police commander in southern Helmand. NGOs reported a predominantly punitive and retributive approach to juvenile justice throughout the country. Although it is against the law, corporal punishment in schools, rehabilitation centers, and other public institutions remained common.

Sexual abuse of children was pervasive. NGOs noted girls were more frequently abused by extended family members, while boys were more frequently abused by men outside their families. In November a five-year-old girl in Baghlan Province was allegedly raped by relatives of her older sister’s fiance after her sister ran off with another man. There were reports religious figures sexually abused both boys and girls. NGOs noted families often were complicit, allowing local strongmen to abuse their children in exchange for status or money. The Ministry of Interior tracked cases of rape, but most NGOs and observers estimated the official numbers significantly underreported the phenomenon. Many perpetrators of child sexual abuse were not arrested, and there were reports security officials and those connected to the ANP raped children with impunity. The practice continued of bacha baazi (dancing boys), which involved powerful or wealthy local figures and businessmen sexually abusing young boys trained to dance in female clothes. Reports of the practice increased since 2001.” (US Department of

In a section headed “Early and Forced Marriage” this report states:

“Despite a law setting the legal minimum age for marriage at 16 (15 with the consent of a parent or guardian and the court) for girls and 18 for boys, international and local observers continued to report widespread early marriage. A 2014 survey by the Ministry of Public Health showed 53 percent of all women ages 25-49 married by age 18 and 21 percent by age 15. According to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, 17 percent of girls ages 15 to 19 were married. During the ERAW law debate, conservative politicians publicly stated it was un-Islamic to ban the marriage of girls younger than 16. Under the ERAW law, those who arrange forced or underage marriages may be sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years, but implementation of the law was limited. The Law on Marriage states marriage of a minor may be conducted with a guardian’s consent.” (ibid, pp.43-44)

See also section headed “Other Harmful Traditional Practices” which states:

“Girls under age 18 continued to be at risk for honor killings for perceived sexual relations outside of marriage, running away, not accepting a forced marriage, or being a victim of sexual assault. In July 2015 media reported family members of a 15-year-old girl in Baghlan Province shot and killed her and a 17-year-old boy after the two returned home following an elopement.” (ibid, p.44)

A section of the report headed “Institutionalized Children” states:

“Living conditions for children in orphanages were poor. The social affairs ministry oversaw 84 Child Protection Action Network centers and 78 residential orphanages, which were designed to provide vocational training to children from destitute families. Of these, 30 were privately funded orphanages and 48 were government-funded centers operated by NGOs by agreement with the ministry. NGOs reported up to 80 percent of children between ages four and 18 years in the orphanages were not orphans but came from families that could not provide food, shelter, or schooling. Children in orphanages reported mental, physical, and sexual abuse and occasionally were subjected to trafficking. They did not have regular access to running water, heating in winter, indoor plumbing, health services, recreational facilities, or education.” (ibid, p.45)

A report from Human Rights Watch states:

“Any Afghan woman can tell you that sexual harassment is widespread in Afghanistan. A 2016 study found 90 percent of the 346 women and girls interviewed said they had experienced sexual harassment in public places, 91 percent in educational environments, and 87 percent at work.” (Human Rights Watch (20 December 2017) *#MeToo in Afghanistan: Is Anyone Listening?*)

A BBC News report, in a paragraph headed 'No place for tests' refers to the practice of virginity testing as follows:

“Despite the absence of official statistics in Afghanistan, anecdotal evidence suggests that the tests are a common occurrence. Bobani Haidari, a gynaecologist practising in Bamiyan Province, told the BBC that she can be asked to carry out 10 virginity tests in a single day. Some women are reported to have undergone multiple tests. The tests, often done without a woman's consent, have drawn widespread condemnation, with opponents saying they are inhumane and fail to protect the dignity of women. Studies have also discredited the practice. The World Health Organization says ‘there is no place for virginity or “two-finger” testing’ as it has no validity. ‘Virginity tests don't have any scientific basis and should be banned. The test is in violation of the country's Constitution, Islamic law and international regulations,’ Soraya Sobhrang, a commissioner at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, told the BBC.” (BBC News (29 December 2017) *The shame of Afghanistan's virginity tests*)

A report from the Institute for War & Peace Reporting states:

“Up to half of all child labourers working in districts in Balkh province have been victims of serious sexual assault, new research has found. An investigation by the Afghan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Organisation (AHRRAO) revealed between four and five children out of every ten had suffered abuse. Researchers said many of the assaults went unreported due to the victims' sense of shame. They said that community elders and local leaders were also refusing to name offenders for fear of being themselves attacked.” (Institute for War & Peace Reporting) (5 December 2017) *Afghan Child Labourers Exposed to Abuse*)

A report from Human Rights Watch, in a chapter titled “Barriers to Girls' Education Outside the School System” (section headed “Social Barriers, including Harmful Gender Norms”), states:

“In spite of the demand for girls' education, harmful gender norms still keep many girls out of school. Harmful gender norms also account for many of the barriers to education having a disproportionate impact on girls. For example, security concerns or distance are more likely to result in girls being kept out of school, families struggling to meet education costs may prioritize boys, it is often harder for girls to overcome administrative barriers, and lack of female teachers and infrastructure affect girls more.

Gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in Afghanistan, and some families simply do not believe that girls should go to school. Zahra, 15, was never allowed to go to school, even though her father is a teacher in a government school for boys. ‘The men in [this area] don't like their daughters to go to school,’ she said. ‘They think women are only for home chores, so they don't let us go outside—we just stay home.’ She added that there is often malicious gossip directed at girls who go to school and their families. ‘Relatives talk badly about you if you go to school,’ she said. ‘They say it's shameful that they let their daughter get an education.’” (Human Rights Watch (17 October 2017) *“I Won't Be A Doctor, and One Day You'll Be Sick”*: Girls' Access to Education in Afghanistan, p.47)

A section of this report headed “Child and Forced Marriage” states:

“In Afghanistan, 33 percent of girls marry before the age of 18. There is no data available on the percentage of girls who marry before the age of 15. Forced marriage of adult women also occurs with some frequency in Afghanistan. Under Afghan law, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 16, or 15 with the permission of the girl’s father or a judge, while boys must wait until they are 18 to marry. The law’s different treatment of males and females violates international law on child marriage. In practice the law is rarely enforced, so even earlier marriages are likely.” (ibid, p.52)

In a section titled “Poverty” this report states:

“Aside from meeting the essential costs of sending children to school, stigma and shame also contribute to keeping poor children out of school. “Poor people face mental problems during study, because their clothes are not new and they don’t have new bags and they will feel ashamed to go to school,” said Fawzia, who missed school until she was 14.

Girls are often the first to be pushed out of school by poverty. Families that struggle to scrape together enough money for only some of their children to attend school are likely to send boys, not girls. When economic circumstances require that mothers work, daughters —not sons—are the ones likely to be kept home to do housework.

When children are put to work for wages because of economic desperation, girls can do carpet weaving, tailoring or embroidery in the home and their education is seen as more expendable than boys’. In addition to harmful gender norms, there are also economic reasons for prioritizing boys’ education; daughters who marry normally go to live with, and contribute to, their husband’s family, while sons often remain with their parents, so sending them to school is an investment in the family’s economic future in a way that educating a girl is not.” (ibid, p.58)

A report from CNN states:

“Terrorists will stop at nothing to keep Afghan girls from receiving an education. ‘People are crazy,’ said Razia Jan, founder of a girls’ school outside Kabul. ‘The day we opened the school, (on) the other side of town, they threw hand grenades in a girls’ school, and 100 girls were killed. Every day, you hear that somebody’s thrown acid at a girl’s face ... or they poison their water.’ There were at least 185 documented attacks on schools and hospitals in Afghanistan last year, according to the United Nations. The majority were attributed to armed groups opposed to girls’ education.” (CNN (17 March 2016) *Acid attacks, poison: What Afghan girls risk by going to school*)

A document published by the Institute for War & Peace Reporting states:

“Insurgent groups continue to use radical propaganda and exploit local poverty to recruit teenage boys to their ranks, according to speakers at an IWPR debate in Paktika.

“Due to government negligence, poverty, poor levels of education and propaganda, many young children are among the insurgents,’ said Saif-ul-Rahman Shahab, head of Paktika’s Independent Journalists Association.

'Children join the armed groups after they watch videos clips and other propaganda prepared by insurgents to brainwash children.'

He told the event, held in the provincial capital Sharan on July 24 and attended by some 100 men and women, that the Taleban and others found it easy to exploit children's innocence.

'Children can't think critically and their minds are impressionable, so they soon start believing the ideology pushed by the insurgents and secretly approach these groups without informing their families. This means that the insurgents find it easy to recruit them to their armed groups.'" (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (31 July 2017) *Afghanistan: Insurgents Prey on Teenage Boys*)

The 2017 US Department of State report on trafficking in persons from Afghanistan states:

"Men, women, and children in Afghanistan often pay intermediaries to assist them in finding employment, primarily in Iran, Pakistan, India, Europe, or North America; some of these intermediaries force Afghans into labor or prostitution. Afghan women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking and domestic servitude primarily in Pakistan, Iran, and India. The majority of Afghan victims in Pakistan are women and girls subjected to trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, including through forced marriages." (US Department of State (27 June 2017) *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report – Afghanistan*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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