

Women under Taliban Assault

written by Azadeh Omid | August 16, 2026



I am writing from Afghanistan, where days end with fear and nights end with anxiety. We Afghan girls no longer know whether life should be called life or simply “survival.”

Every day upon awakening, I hope not to hear more bad news. Sometimes, I prefer not to look at my cell phone because incoming news is so traumatizing: Women viciously beaten for not wearing their burqa; women murdered; women kept from continuing their education; women whose small businesses have been shut down by the Taliban. Hearing about Afghan women’s deprivations and traumas makes us feel our pain more intensely.

A while ago, one afternoon when I was writhing in pain during my menstrual cycle, a text message from my sister arrived: “I have been locked up in a basement. I will call you when I get out. If you don’t hear from me, know that the Taliban have taken us.” I jumped and suddenly forgot my pain. I tried to call her back, with trembling hands, but did not get a response. Gasping for breath, I quickly put on my hijab and headed toward her underground school.

When she was released from the basement, she told me that she had arrived in class early and was waiting for the teacher and other students when a Talib entered and began screaming at her: “You whore, what are you doing here?” When she said that this was her classroom, he continued calling her a “whore” and asked for her cell phone. When she cried and said that she was not allowed to carry cell phones, he threatened to beat her and “bring this building down on the heads of you whores.” After he left, one of the school employees hid her in a dark basement and locked the door. She discovered other girls there who were also crying. Soon, more girls arrived. They embraced each other, held hands, and commiserated. After a couple of hours, the principal of the school came in and apologized for having to hide them in the locked basement for fear of the Taliban.

My sister’s experience once again made me think about the miserable state of the women and girls of Afghanistan. *We have been left alone, helpless, and without recourse. We have been forgotten as if we do not even exist.*

Nowhere in this world do girls have to study underground and tolerate being called “whores” for going to school. We live with fear every day, night, and second.

Just yesterday, I watched the video of a woman in Kabul getting viciously beaten in the middle of a busy street. From a distance, I could feel the destruction of her being. That pain took over my body.

What crime have we committed?

Under the Taliban, child marriage is acceptable. The future of a girl is set from childhood and without her consent. The Taliban government’s new divorce law speaks of “the right to annul a

marriage after puberty,” as if a girl can later make a decision. But here in Afghanistan, “making a decision” for a girl means standing up to her family, her society, and a judge who is anti-woman and knows her not as a human being but as an animal. We do not have the right to make a decision. We can only scream after a rape has taken place.

The Taliban define child custody as the mother’s right to embrace her child for only a few years before the child is taken away from her. For them, motherhood is an instrument that turns into a shadow and is no longer seen after the production of the child takes place.

These misogynist, inhuman, and horrific laws are not just written in books. They are repeated daily in our lives, on the streets, at home, and on short travel distances that should be simple but are not.

A few days ago, when I had gone to the market to buy food, the authorities stopped the cab that I was riding in. A Talib ordered me to lower the window and screamed at me for showing my face and not wearing a mask, even though I had the full hijab that fully covered my body and my hair. The driver apologized profusely to the authorities and said he would soon obtain masks for women passengers. The authorities held us for 40 minutes, humiliated me, and lectured about what a “crime” it is for a woman to show her face. In the end, they warned that if I am seen without a mask again, I will be imprisoned. I just sat there, motionless and silent. I nodded not out of acceptance but out of fear.

This is only one moment of our lives, a moment that demonstrates how easily human dignity can be crushed. This is where laws and reality meet. Laws that take away women’s control over their lives are the same laws that allow girls to be imprisoned in dark basements for the “crime” of continuing their education. Laws that allow for child marriage take our future away from us before we even know what life is about.

We Afghan women are stuck between two stones. On one side, the pressure of laws and limitations that become more severe every day. On the other side, poverty, hunger, and lack of safety and security. Prices increase every day. There is no employment. There is no hope. There is only fear and waiting.

I wonder whether the world even sees us as human beings or only shadows?

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