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A NEW REALITY- AFGHAN WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN

ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to shed light on the perspectives of Afghan women on their women's rights in Afghanistan between May and October 2021. The purpose of this thesis is to elaborate on the perceptions of those women through thematic analysis, utilising women's rights, and the human rights-based approach as the theoretical framework and key concepts.

This qualitative research analyses eight published texts containing Afghan women's various experiences during the period following the imposition of regulations by the Taliban restricting their rights. This analysis reflects on the aspects of the Afghan women's experiences that are related to women's rights. The qualitative research shows that the common theme in the texts is fear. Afghan women expressed fear about rights related to their self-development, safety, participation in society, and health. Perspectives on women's rights differed between Afghan women from urban and rural parts of Afghanistan.

This thesis explores the perspectives of several Afghan women on their ability to enjoy their women's rights by addressing their position as women in vulnerable situations and by looking at them from a women's rights perspective. The results indicate a need for further research on women in vulnerable situations and on the perspectives of Afghan women from rural areas. The data in this thematic analysis revealed further suggestions for the international community to get involved in promoting and maintaining women's rights in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan 2021, Afghan women perspectives, women's rights, Taliban

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWW	Afghan Women Writers
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ENNHRI	European Network of National Human Rights Institutions
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN	United Nations
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
US	United States

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is qualitative research seeking to uncover and highlight how Afghan women perceived and experienced the women's rights situation between May and October 2021 in Afghanistan. On May 1st, 2021 the Taliban offensive began when the United States troops withdrew from Afghanistan. On August 15th, 2021, Afghanistan was taken over by the Taliban, who immediately imposed new regulations, (see chapter 2.1) which drastically limits the extent to which Afghan women can exercise their human rights. (United Nations Women, 2021.) In this thesis, published texts about Afghan women who presented their views on women's rights in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime in 2021 were analysed. The research question "*What are Afghan women's experiences and perspectives concerning their women's rights in Afghanistan during the Taliban advance and takeover of the government in 2021?*" was approached through the framework of the human rights-based approach with a focus on women's rights.

Because of the current and ongoing nature of this topic, as well as its importance to the researchers, this thesis aims to contribute to advocating for the rights of Afghan women. This is done by synthesizing their experiences and creating a body of work that can be used by different units in the field of social services in their work with women in vulnerable situations. This research can help create suggestions to the social work field, to help support these women, to provide better services tailored to their experiences, and take the opportunity to promote women's rights in Afghanistan. For the social work field, this research can also be useful by elucidating the perspective of one group of women in vulnerable life situations and presenting their experiences. Social service professionals and organisations could further be encouraged to educate themselves on the context of those they work with, whether they are refugees/displaced persons, women in vulnerable situations, or any other group of service users.

Human rights organisations, women's rights associations, and agencies intervening in one way or another in Afghanistan can benefit from this research as their actions and focus is on women's rights as well as women in Afghanistan, which is the topic that our thesis approaches. Some examples are Amnesty International, the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA), and the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. This work could also be a foundation for more research focused on Afghan women's situation in Afghanistan in particular. Further research could explore the various factors and power dynamics that contribute to the current condition of respect for women's rights in Afghanistan.

The thesis was conducted without a work-life partner due to the theoretical approach most suitable for qualitative research. Additionally, the timing of this research, which took place during the aftermath of the Afghan government's overthrow, prevented organisations that work with women's rights in Afghanistan, to find the time to supervise the thesis process.

2 BACKGROUND

To elucidate the context of our research, we provide this chapter in which we summarise the history of women's rights in Afghanistan between 1990 and 2021. We also elaborate on previous research done on our topic as well as on our situation regarding a work-life partner.

2.1 A summary of women's rights in Afghanistan

To be able to understand the current situation of women and women's rights in Afghanistan better and to put our research into context, we have summarised the history of women's rights in Afghanistan from the 1990s until 2021.

In 1990 the Taliban advertised a peaceful and modern government to the nation, but once in power, from 1996 until 2001, the reality was very different and had a substantial impact, especially on women. Suddenly women and girls no longer had the right to education, to leave their homes without being accompanied by a male, or to speak publicly. Women were also no longer able to participate in politics in any way and were forced into wearing burqas, which covered the entire head and body. Should any woman disobey, punishments could include public whipping and death by stoning which resulted in a rising suicide rate among women. Specific women's hospitals were required, which, in combination with the restriction of movement, diminished women's access to healthcare. (Alexander, 2021.)

In 2001 the United States invaded Afghanistan after the Taliban refused to extradite al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. After the Taliban leadership fled the US mission focused on improving the lives of Afghan women and girls. (Alexander, 2021) In 2004, Afghanistan's constitution included distinct regulations to assure women's rights and their participation in politics. "*Girls and women joined the army and police forces, trained as surgeons, judges, and prosecutors, and worked as journalists, translators, and television presenters*" (Alexander, 2021). Research indicates that around 90 percent of Afghan women still experienced abuse. Many new laws and reforms did not take root in more rural areas, where they remained seen as "un-Islamic" and resulted

in women still being prevented from buying property, girls and women being banned from education, forced marriage, rape, and assault. (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Many laws, robbing women of their rights, that were instituted during the Taliban regime, remained very common in the rural areas, including "*the practice of exchanging girls and young women to settle feuds or to repay debts*" (Alexander, 2021).

In May 2021, the official withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan began. After almost two decades, the Taliban regained power in Kandahar, Afghanistan's second-largest city. In August 2021, the Taliban took control over Jalalabad, and the Afghan President fled abroad. At the same time, the Taliban moved into the capital and occupied the presidential palace. (Saarbrücker Zeitung, 2021.) The new Taliban regime is in place and even though a softer image has been promoted, the reality appears to be far from that. Since its establishment women no longer have the right to study or teach at universities, until there is the possibility to strictly separate males from females, according to the Taliban. Once this separation takes place, the subjects that women will be allowed to study will be reviewed. Girls and women have also been banned from playing sports. (Alexander, 2021.) Women's movement is severely restricted and unmarried females must fear being forcefully married off to Taliban fighters (Knipp, 2021). Women are obliged to wear long clothes or burqas and though there is no common rule yet for the whole of Afghanistan, in some areas women cannot leave their house without a male chaperone. Even in areas in which it is not clearly stated (like Kabul) many women do not dare to leave the house without a male companion in fear for their safety. (HRW, 2022) According to the Taliban, they will "*respect women's rights within the framework of sharia, or Islamic law*" (Alexander, 2021). The Sharia can be interpreted in several ways and does not clearly state what rights women should have. (Alexander, 2021)

2.2 Women in vulnerable life situations

Academic research and social policy debates have shown much interest in welfare services for the majority of society, and not as much interest in those who are in the margins of society. More research has also been done on women as care providers than has been done on them as persons in need of care and welfare services, as well as on their encounters with service providers. As it stands, very little is known about the

service needs of women on the margins of society and in vulnerable life situations. Women who fall in this category are poor women, homeless women, and women who are forced migrants and asylum seekers (Kuronen et al., 2010, 1).

'Vulnerability' as a term has different meanings for various agencies and organisations and can be conceptualised in many ways. For some, the term may indicate physical vulnerability, whereas, for others, it can mean social vulnerability. Social vulnerability refers to the vulnerabilities experienced by different social groups in any society (Thomas, et.al., 2013.) Vulnerability is often present due to certain situations and contexts which can mean that vulnerability can be temporary or inconstant (J., 2017, ii).

Referring to adults as 'vulnerable' is becoming more and more common in social care (Pritchard, 2001, 9). In the social care context, the term 'vulnerability' or 'vulnerable' is often used to show susceptibility to harm or risk, as an indicator of enhanced need. Individuals are usually grouped under broad categories of vulnerability, either based on their capacity to protect themselves, develop resilience or effective coping strategies, or who have extra needs. Essentially, the term 'vulnerability,' when applied to groups of people, is used to indicate that they have distinct needs or experience particular challenges or difficulties. (Aldridge, 2015, 12).

With the understanding that has been established of what "vulnerable situations" entail, it may be easier to recognise that women in vulnerable situations are present all over the world. They are often recipients or persons in need of various social services, making their perspectives relevant for social service providers and the social service field. Any organisation, institution, or welfare state, as well as social work or social service professionals, is expected to take responsibility for improving the life situations of such women (Kuronen et al., 2010, 4-6.)

2.3 Significance of the study

We reached out to several organisations and associations that we thought could benefit from our thesis. Many of them did not respond, but one, namely Amnesty International, expressed interest in the topic and found it particularly important. However, they did not have the resources to support us in carrying out our research at this time.

This was due to most of their efforts being focused on providing immediate response to the situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover.

Although we do not have any research partners in conducting our qualitative research, we believe that our thesis could be useful to any number of human rights organisations, women's rights associations, and any agency intervening in one way or another in Afghanistan. Some examples are Amnesty International, the UNFPA, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, who all have it as one of their goals to research matters that they are involved in such as the situation in Afghanistan. More organisations that could benefit from our research are Women for Afghan Women which is the biggest women's organisation in Afghanistan, non-governmental organization (NGO) Working Group on Women, Peace and Security which advocates for the respect of women's rights and collaborates with civil society leaders from affected countries, and Medica Mondiale who are a feminist women's rights and relief organisation. All these organisations could benefit from our research because their actions and focus are on women's rights as well as women in Afghanistan, which is the topic that our thesis approaches.

We also believe that our work could be part of a foundation for more research focused on Afghan women's situation in Afghanistan in particular. Further research could explore the various other factors and power dynamics that contribute to the current condition of women's rights in Afghanistan. This exploration could also extend to women in vulnerable situations, the challenges they encounter, and their service needs.

In a broader context, this thesis could fit into the existing body of work exploring the particularities of women's rights issues and serve as an additional demonstration of the interrelation between various women's rights, especially in conflict zones. It can also fit into the body of work that demonstrates the discrepancy between the recognition of women's rights and its actual implementation. The thesis provides a glimpse into how various aspects of social life intersect and influence the experiences of women. It draws attention to how restrictions placed on women influence not only their wellbeing and safety, but the stability of the world as a whole since women fleeing their countries and seeking refuge in others affects those countries, and that effect can have rippling repercussions throughout different aspects of different societies. This is a substantial reason for the international community to become more involved and join Afghan

women in their fight for their rights while being careful not to harm them in the process as has been the case during the war.

2.4 Previous research

While conducting preliminary research for this thesis, it became apparent that not much previous research that was similar to ours could be found, neither from 2021 nor from the previous Taliban regime. Because the subject of this research is so recent, it was expected to not find much scientific work on the matter.

Although research and scientific data exist on the topic of Afghan women and women's rights in Afghanistan, for example, "*Hearing Afghan Women's Voices: Feminist Theory's Re- Conceptualization of Women's Human Rights*" published in 1999 Shefali Desai, it differed in many points from the research conducted in this thesis. Desai's research tends to the struggle with the definition of women's rights depending on their background. "*The issue of Afghan women's human rights is entangled in a web between those who insist upon the existence of universal human rights standards and those who declare that human rights are contingent upon the particular culture of a given society*" (Desai, 1999), as well as the application of the feminist theory on the differing beliefs of relativism and universalism. Desai then applied this, within the research created alternative, to an Afghan woman seeking asylum. Whereas Desai's research deals with the feminist theory and the experience of one (or more) Afghan women during the last Taliban regime, it does not present Afghan women's perception of their human rights and how they are affected by the Taliban, as this research does.

It proved difficult to find research that included the analysis of published stories about Afghan women that presented their view on women's rights, especially during a Taliban regime. However, one scientific paper was found which appeared to be most comparable to the research conducted in this thesis even though it comprises opinions of Afghan women post-Taliban regime.

Huma Ahmed-Gosh's article and research "*Voices of Afghan Women*" published in 2006, overlapped with our exploration in many points. She interviewed three Afghan women at a conference in Italy in 2001, and additional women in Kabul in 2003, to be

able to understand the Afghan women's point of view on their needs and subjective understanding of their human rights situation. While our research was more focused on the Afghan women's perception of the human rights situation in present Afghanistan per se, Ahmed-Ghosh was also concerned with "*bridging the tensions between a perceived 'human rights' international agenda, and women's needs in their own cultural setting.*"

Our exploration was limited by certain factors which will be further explained later, and which included being only able to read interview transcripts and blog entries (etc.) that were written in the English language. In her research, Ahmed-Ghosh faced similar limitations, among others. Whereas she focused on women from urban areas that could be described as middle class, (knowing it would limit her research as she did not take the opinion of women in remote areas into account) and who happened to have at least a high school degree, we did not make that choice beforehand, yet most of our data consisted of Afghan women who were educated and had the possibility to attend university. This again sheds light on the limitations of our research.

Throughout our study, it became quite clear that many women feared for their safety and felt hopeless about the current situation and women's rights in general in Afghanistan. Ahmed-Ghosh also mentions in her study that the interviews with Afghan women in Italy and Afghanistan "*revealed their* (the women's) *sense of hopelessness with the security situation.*"

While in our research rights such as "freedom from violence", "right to education" and "freedom of movement" seemed to be issues of most concern, Ahmed-Ghosh discovered that women throughout her research were more concerned about the political aspect. They believed that "*democracy can only be ensured through full participation of women in the political process, especially when women comprise at least 60 percent of the country's population.*" In the article she wrote, which was the culmination of her research, she emphasized "*the urgency of economic empowerment and social and physical security for Afghan women.*"

In this context, it is important to note that the background against which the studies were made was a little different. Whereas we have been looking into the Afghan women's perspective of the human rights situation during a Taliban regime, the

research Ahmed-Ghosh conducted took place just after the previous Taliban regime (1996-2001) which explains the different perspectives and immediate needs of those women. Women in post-Taliban Afghanistan were looking for ways to be more equally included in society by "*rallying around a common agenda of education and employment of women of Afghanistan, a change in the family law giving women autonomy, and ultimately working toward a secular democracy.*" While women interviewed by Ahmed-Gosh were trying to build a base for a more equal Afghanistan, women from the texts and interviews that we have analysed, which originated amid the new Taliban regime, seemed to be more concerned about immediate threats to their hard-won rights.

Summing up, we can unequivocally state that women's rights have been then as well as now a big concern (at least) for women from urban areas. Women within Ahmed-Ghosh's research as well as ours were apprehensive of their current human/women's rights situation and have been and still are striving for more equal rights.

3 WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This chapter clarifies the main concepts related to the thesis topic, which are women's rights as human rights, the human rights-based approach, and women in vulnerable life situations. The meaning of each concept is explained as well as its relevance to the research question.

3.1 The Human Rights-Based Approach

The UN Sustainable Development Group defines the human rights-based approach (HRBA) as a conceptual framework for the process of human development. Its foundation lies in international human rights standards and its goal is to promote and protect human rights. The approach seeks to analyse inequalities at the core of development problems and rectify inequitable practices and uneven distributions of power that hinder development progress and often lead to groups of people being left behind. (UN Sustainable Development Group.)

The HRBA is underpinned by five key human rights principles, which are Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, and Legality (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI)). Its focus is on those who are most marginalised, excluded or discriminated against. This approach typically requires an analysis of gender norms, different forms of discrimination, and power imbalances to make sure that interventions reach the most marginalised portions of the population. (UNFPA.)

In the context of this thesis, the main way in which the human rights-based approach was employed was as a guide to our perspective. This means that in reviewing the accounts of Afghan women, we recognised those accounts as the subjective experience of Afghan women. We also approached these accounts as what can be the basis of advocacy for Afghan women's rights, as well as a basis for further research into the intricacies and peculiarities of women's rights and their respect in Afghanistan. In addition to this, the human rights-based approach was demonstrated by the angle from which we analysed the accounts, which was the human rights articulated in the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These human rights are seen as applicable to Afghanistan because Afghanistan ratified all four of them.

The human rights-based approach consists of two parts. One is to encourage governments and duty-bearers to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights of the people. The other part is to elevate the voice of the people and empower them in claiming and exercising their rights (ENNHRI). We chose to focus on the latter because we do not have the legal and political knowledge required to analyse the first aspect. We are also limited by the scope of our thesis, which is a bachelor's thesis that must be written according to the guidelines of Diakonia University of Applied Sciences.

3.2 Women's rights as human rights

The recognition of gender equality as a human right all around the world originates from the adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1945, which promoted equal rights for men and women. Afghanistan was one of the earliest members of the UN, having joined on 19 November 1946 (UN). The UDHR, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted in 1948 is a document that describes and enumerates human rights to be universally protected (UN). Two separate Covenants were also created that together with the UDHR form the International Bill of Rights. Those ICCPR and the ICESCR. Both Covenants were ratified by Afghanistan on January 24th, 1983.

In the documents, human rights are described as rights that are inherent to all human beings, regardless of their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status (UN General Assembly, 1948, Article 2). Every human being is entitled to these human rights without discrimination. All these rights are interrelated, interdependent, indivisible, universal, and egalitarian (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR)).

In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action firmly embedded the attainment of gender equality within a human

rights framework. It declared that women's and girls' rights are fundamental human rights, and it confirmed that the protection and promotion of human rights is the first responsibility of governments and core to the work of the United Nations (OHCHR.)

Women's rights are not divided into distinct categories or articles independent of Human Rights, neither are they clearly distinct nor articulated like human rights are in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Women's rights are instead included in the Universal Human Rights Declaration in that every right articulated in the declaration applies to women as well. In Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the change of the phrasing from "*all men are born free and equal*" to "*all human beings are born free and equal*" reflects the inclusion of women in those who are born free and equal, making it humans. This change was made in a big part because of Hansa Mehta, an Indian reformist and feminist's advocacy. (UN.)

In addition to the revisions made to the UDHR to include women, on 18 December 1979, the CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This is because, in spite of gender equality being fundamental to human rights and United Nations values, a large number of women worldwide continue to experience discrimination and restriction in exercising their civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. (Office of the High Commissioner.) The Convention's purpose is to bring the female members of humanity into the focus of human rights concerns (CEDAW). It should be noted that Afghanistan signed the CEDAW on August 14th, 1980 and ratified it on March 5th, 2003.

Having established that women's rights are human rights, which are articulated in the UDHR, ICCPR, and ICESCR, with rights related to women being specifically outlined in the CEDAW, we will henceforth use the term "women's rights" throughout this thesis as including the rights in the aforementioned Declaration and Covenants. Women's rights, within the framework of the human rights-based approach, are the lens through which the accounts collected in this thesis are analysed.

4 PURPOSE AND AIMS

Our aim in this thesis was to analyse the experiences of Afghan women in present-day Afghanistan by using the human rights-based approach. In so doing, we hoped to synthesise their experiences and create a body of work that can be used by different units in the field of social services in their work with women in vulnerable situations. Such units include third sector organisations working with women, human rights and women's rights, immigration centres, refugee reception centres, as well as any individuals, companies, and organisations that work with immigrants, immigrant women, and women in vulnerable life situations.

Our focus was strongly on how Afghan women understand and experience their human rights situation without putting any labels on them. We did this to get insight into their own thoughts that is as free from external interpretations as possible. Our purpose was to present their perspective as objectively as possible, in a bid to contribute to the amplification of the perspective of Afghan women, and by extension all women in vulnerable life situations. We hope to contribute to the betterment of services offered to such women wherever they are in the world.

To carry out our research, we formulated a research question to which the data collection and analysis seek to provide an answer. The research question is as follows:

What are Afghan women's experiences and perspectives concerning their women's rights in Afghanistan during the Taliban advance and takeover of the government in 2021?

5 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research refers to approaches that study natural social life and focus on how people perceive their experiences and the world they live in. (Saldana, 2011; Holloway & Wheeler, 2009; Adams et.al., 2014). Data that is collected and analysed for qualitative research mostly consists of texts such as interview transcripts, field notes, documents, visual material, and internet websites that document human experiences about others and/or oneself in social contexts (Saldana, 2011; Flick, 2009). Although most qualitative research involves observation and interviewing of people, some qualitative research may use only documents or media that humans have already created (Saldana, 2011, 26; Flick, 2009). Such is the case in this thesis, where already existing material was sought, chosen, and analysed. Patterns were identified in the analysis of the data by reorganising and grouping its contents into themes (Adams et.al., 2014; Saldana, 2011). Results of qualitative research were presented as salient findings from the analytic synthesis of data (Saldana 2011, 4).

5.1 Data collection

For the data collection, we applied the PiCo-model for qualitative analysis as our foundation for identifying our inclusion and exclusion criteria. PICo stands for P – Population/Problem, I – Interest, and C – Context. (LibGuides, 2021.) In our case, we asked ourselves: What are the characteristics of the population we are reviewing? The answer is Afghan women, who have been interviewed or have written texts about their own experiences between May and October 2021. Our interest is the Afghan women's perception of the current state of their human rights in the context of present-day Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover and the accompanying human/women's rights violations.

The data we collected consists of texts and interviews of Afghan women between May and October 2021. This time period was chosen based on the Taliban forces' final offensive which began on May 1st and lasted until August 15th, when they overthrew the government. During this time, they gained more territorial control of many provinces and districts in Afghanistan. (The National Broadcasting Company; Council on

Foreign Relations.) Because our research also sought accounts of women during the overthrow, we included September and October in our time period, the latter being when we began writing our thesis. For this qualitative research, the data was collected from various Diak databases (EBSCO, Pressreader), and web searches.

The criteria that the literature must meet are as follows: it must be texts by or from Afghan women. The literature timeframe is between May 2021 and October 2021, and it must be in English due to the linguistic limitations of the reviewers. However, due to the relatively recent timeframe within which the chosen data should have been published, there was scarce scholarly literature on the subject matter. To address this limitation, we asked ourselves a question that some researchers ask themselves when designing a study, which is "*If resources were unlimited, how would I design a study that answers the question I have?*" (Hempel, 2019, 53). Considering that we wanted to obtain literature either authored by Afghan women or that was about interaction with them on how they perceive the expression of their rights in a period that is so recent and is six months long, the best sources where we could find such literature were in contemporary and mass journalism. We anticipated that the literature would likely be available as first-hand accounts in essays, stories, interviews, interview transcripts, and blogs. Although most of the material was easier to access in mass media, we wanted to ensure a minimum level of reliability of sources, which is why we tried to find it through various academic databases.

The keywords chosen for the information search are words that reflect the research question of the thesis. The research question, which is made up of the three components of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, was translated into the search strategy, which then defined the type of literature to review. We identified terms that described the population we wanted to focus on (Afghan women), terms that indicated the intervention we were looking for (the experience of Afghan women after the 2021 Taliban takeover with regards to their rights), as well as terms that indicated the outcomes we were interested in (interviews and texts authored by Afghan women after the 2021 Taliban takeover). (Hempel, 2019, 38-39.)

For the first component, Afghan women, we produced the following words: "Afghan," "women," "Afghanistan" and "Afghan women." We decided to narrow it down to "Afghan women" and "Afghanistan." The second component, the experience of Afghan

women regarding their rights after the 2021 Taliban takeover, had the following words: "perspective" "experience" "interviews" "blog" "literature" "women's rights" "human rights". The third component was the outcome we were interested in, which is material from after the Taliban takeover in 2021. The terms for that were "2021" "Taliban". With those words identified, we conducted an initial search in Diak databases and on the web, using the Boolean search method which is a systematic way of conducting electronic searches which makes it possible to broaden or narrow down the search subject (Oliver 2012, 56). We used this method to see what types of results our keywords produced. We then grouped the words in broader terms. This left us with the following keywords: "Afghanistan," "Afghan women," "women's rights," "human rights," "Afghan women literature," "Afghan women interviews," "2021". We further narrowed those terms down to "Afghanistan 2021", "Afghan women perspectives", "women's rights" and "Taliban". We decided which texts to analyse based on our criteria that they must be either written by Afghan women or be interviews with them about their experiences.

We included an article found through our web-search, written by Robyn Huang of "The New Humanitarian," because we believe "The New Humanitarian" to be an important and reliable source. "The New Humanitarian" was founded by the UN in 1995 and was a part of the UN until 2015 when it became an independent non-profit news organisation. This background along with the fact that the UN and other organisations continue to be their audience is the basis for our consideration of it as a reliable source from which to collect data for our research. We also included a blog called "Afghan Women Writers" which was found through a web search. The blog was chosen because various Afghan women shared their stories by themselves and with their own words, which is exactly what we were looking for.

TABLE 1. Data collection process

Database	Source	Keywords used	Name of the article/Text/Blog entry	Type of source (blog/interview)
Web search	Afghan Women Writers	Afghan women, literature, blog	Text 1 My journey from Kabul airport to Washington DC	Blog entry

Web search	Afghan Women Writers	Afghan women, litera-ture, blog	Text 2 Zeba's story: from Kabul to Wisconsin	Blog entry
Web search	Afghan Women Writers	Afghan women, litera-ture, blog	Text 3 Afghan Women and the dark future	Blog entry
Diak Pressreader	The daily Tel-egraph	Afghan women, Tali-ban, Inter-view, Women's rights	Text 4 I'm hiding from the Tali-ban, but I won't run	Transcribed in-terview
Web search	The new Hu-manitarian	Afghan women, women's rights, 2021, interview	Text 5 Why these Af-ghan women are speaking out	Transcribed in-terviews
Diak EBSCO	The new Yorker	Afghan women, (plus refining of re-sults being publications from 2021)	Text 6 The other Af-ghan women	Article
Web search	The Christian Science Moni-tor	Afghan women, 2021	Text 7 'Driven by hope.' An Af-ghan refugee fights to save her sisters.	Article
Diak Pressreader	Hindustan Times (East UP)	Women's rights, human rights, Af-ghanistan, 2021, Afghan women,	Text 8 Hear the voices of the women of Af-ghanistan	Article/ tran-scribed inter-view

When collecting our data, we encountered many results that arose when searching with the previously stated keywords. We read many headlines and if something appeared suitable, we read the texts to further ascertain if they were compatible with our criteria. If a text fit our inclusion criteria, we added it. Through our data collection process, we decided to use the eight texts which have been summarised in our appendix to provide a quick overview of their contents. We did not include more than eight texts due to the scope of our thesis. Out of the chosen texts, three are blog entries written by three

different Afghan women. The other five are transcribed interviews conducted by various newspapers with numerous Afghan women. The summaries of the mentioned texts, including their assigned codes, can be found in Appendix 2.

5.2 Data analysis

The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, which is one of the most prevalent forms of analysis that is used when conducting qualitative research and will be the lens through which the chosen literature will be critically examined. One advantage is that the method can be used with existing data, regardless of the data collection method. (MAXQDA International Conference, 2021.) A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in data, (Nowell et al., 2017, 7) which in our case are existing texts and interviews found through various Diak databases such as "Pressreader," "EBSCO" as well as a web search, conducted with/ written by Afghan women about the situation in Afghanistan in 2021 and how it affects the expression of their rights. According to Braun & Clarke, it is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that are useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 78) This means in our case, that we could use it to identify women's rights themes throughout the interviews and written texts with and by Afghan women. (Kiger, et al., 2020) *"Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data"* (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 78). The steps involved in carrying out a thematic analysis are to familiarise ourselves with the data, to be able to describe the content, to search for patterns or themes in our codes across the data, in our case existing transcribed interviews and texts written by Afghan women, to review themes, to define and name themes and finally to produce our report. (Kiger, et al., 2020, 1).

The following table indicates the steps of a thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke and demonstrates how those steps were applied to this thesis.

TABLE 2. Steps in thematic analysis

Steps in thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke	Steps taken in this thematic analysis
Familiarize with data	- Reading the texts - Summarizing texts for an easier overview
Assign codes	- Assigning preliminary codes - Discussing and comparing codes
Generating themes	- Joining codes into broader categories - themes
Review themes	- Reviewing if codes within themes appeared fitting - Adjusting codes to suiting themes
Define/name themes	- Combining interconnected themes into broader themes - Naming broadened themes according to fears women throughout the texts expressed - Connecting corresponding women's rights to each broadened theme
Produce report	- Presenting the findings - Summarizing findings - Answering research question

After identifying our data, consisting of three already existing blog texts and five existing, transcribed interviews, we started applying codes to it. For this process, we used a combination of two methods, namely: the deductive approach, and open coding/ inductive coding. The deductive approach in qualitative research refers to a theory-driven method (Crabtree, 1999) in which the researcher looks at the data through the lens of a certain concept or framework. In our case it meant looking at the data from a women's rights perspective, so we created codes based on women's rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Covenant on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. (Braun & Clarke, 2012) Open or inductive coding refers to a process in which one does not have predetermined codes but develops the codes while reading the data, which was the case when coding the data in this research. *(Maguire &* Delahunt, 2017, 5) As mentioned

before, a code establishes a certain matter of interest within the chosen data, this can be done at a semantic or latent level. (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016, 193) While semantic codes identify the exact meaning of the data, latent codes are meant to grasp the underlying meaning behind the texts. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 84) In our case it meant looking at the data from a women's rights perspective, so we created codes based on women's rights from the UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, and the CEDAW. For our data analysis, we decided to apply semantic codes and not latent codes. This is because the purpose of our research is to uncover the exact perception of Afghan women and not to interpret it, which is what using latent codes would entail.

Keeping the above in mind, we worked through each paragraph of text and coded everything relevant to women's rights. We agreed to read the texts individually and applied preliminary codes. Once this step was completed, we shared the codes we had found and compared them to each other. According to "*Introduction to open coding*" by Khandkar, talking about the codes can help define more exact codes as well as maintain the data perspective more consistently. (Khandkar, 4.) After creating all our codes and examining them, we observed which codes fit well together into categories of "fears" that these women expressed.

We then grouped those codes into themes, which according to Maguire and Delahunt, is a common step when conducting a thematic analysis. (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, 6) According to Braun and Clarke, there is "*a clear but not absolute difference between codes and themes*". While a code is focused on one specific observation within the data, a theme connects various observations organised around a particular concept. (Braun & Clarke, 2012.) In the case of this thesis, we also connected corresponding women's rights to each of the four themes that we created.

The table below clarifies the process of grouping the initial codes into the final four themes.

TABLE 3. Steps in creating the themes

Codes	Broader categories and corresponding rights	Themes
Gains lost Women's oppression Gender gap Imposition of burqas	Gender-based discrimination (Right to freedom from discrimination)	Fear related to self-development and self-determination
Student Losing possibility to study/Freedom to study Educated/education Losing women's education	Education (Right to education)	
Employment, Losing possibility to work/ Freedom to work	Equal employment (Right to work and to free choice of employment)	
Losing freedom Hiding Going outside Difference in personal freedom ideology Hopeless/losing hope Male chaperone	Restriction of movement (Right to freedom of movement)	
Fear for life Fear of punishment Massacre Violence Safety missing Mistrust Doubt	Violence (Right to freedom from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment)	Fear for safety
Fleeing/refugee Helping women/families to flee Hopeful	Fleeing and seeking asylum (Right to seek asylum in other countries from persecution)	
Right to be in Afghanistan Not fleeing Courage Nothing to lose Safety	Assertion of right to be in own country (Right to life, liberty, and security)	
Ethnic minority Hazara Persecution	Human rights related to ethnic minorities (Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to	

	National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities)	
Control Activist Afghan women fighting for their own rights Talk/speaking up City women Village and country-side women	Speaking up/Advocating (Right to freedom of opinion and expression)	Fear related to participation in society
Women leading Political rights/decisions/ participation Participation in society	Participation in society (Right to take part in the government of one's country)	
Forced marriage/ underage marriage	Forced marriage (Sexual and reproductive rights)	Fear related to women's health

While conducting the analysis of the texts and the codes within them, we encountered some codes that did not fit into the women's rights themes, but that were still relevant to Afghan women's perspectives and experiences of their human rights. Those terms were the following: restoration of order, Americans, world leaders, international community action/ support, international advocacy, United Nations.

These codes mainly point to the political aspect of women's rights. The terms refer to actions of those who claim to safeguard women's rights, or whose actions are perceived as having worked in the favour of the realisation of human rights in Afghanistan. In addition, they also point to the cost to Afghan women of such actions and inactions. For the purpose of this thesis, exploring the broader political context is not relevant, but its presence and effect on the perspectives and experiences of Afghan women cannot be omitted.

The table below illustrates the identified themes, the rights that correspond with each theme, and which texts they appeared in.

TABLE 4. Display of themes and their frequency in the texts

Theme & corresponding women's rights	Occurrence in texts (total of 8)
Fear related to self-development and self-determination - Right to freedom from discrimination - Right to Education - Right to equal employment - Right to freedom of movement	1. 4/8 (Text 3, 4, 6, 7) 2. 7/8 (Text 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) 3. 5/8 (Text 1, 3, 5, 6, 8) 4. 7/8 (Text 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)
Fear for safety - Right to freedom from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment - Right to seek asylum in other countries from persecution - Right to life, liberty, and security - Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities	1. 7/8 (Text 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) 2. 5/8 (Text 1, 2, 4, 6, 7) 3. 3/8 (Text 4, 5, 8) 4. 1/8 (Text 7)
Fear related to participation in society 1. Right to freedom of opinion and expression 2. Right to take part in government of their country	1. 6/8 (Text 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8) 2. 5/8 (Text 3, 4, 7, 8)
Fear related to women's health 1. Right to health 2. Right to sexual and reproductive health	1. 1/8 (Text 5) 2. 2/8 (Text 3, 4)

6 RESULTS

After analysing the data, we structured the results of the analysis and presented them as a connected narrative that we supported with quotations from the texts (Adams et al, 2014, 159). This result presentation structure was chosen following an analysis of how the different rights within the themes we identified were interrelated and affected each other. The interrelationship between the themes and the rights within them is demonstrated in the ways in which they influence each other and where they sometimes overlap (Saldana 2011, 92).

In the following paragraphs, we present our findings regarding Afghan women's perception of their human rights between May 2021 and October 2021, by displaying the frequency in which the themes appeared (as shown in the table above). We do so by presenting the themes present in our data in sequential order, from the most pertinent to the least pertinent.

6.1 Fear related to self-development and self-determination

The most prevalent theme in the data we analysed was fear related to self-development. Many women whose texts we focused on are educated women who have been working toward different career goals. Thus, they feared losing their rights to education and equal employment or being able to work at all. They were greatly affected by the restrictions to movement that were imposed by the Taliban, because in addition to it affecting their ability to move around, it also directly impacted their ability to access education and be employed, and thus develop themselves.

The women's experiences of violent treatment in our data were often directly related to their gender, as were their fears concerning their own development and self-determination. Although their gender should not serve as a basis for them to be unable to exercise all the rights articulated by the right to freedom from discrimination (UDHR, Article 2), women throughout the texts conveyed worry and fear about losing many rights because of their gender. Women worrying about losing their rights and being discriminated against on the basis of their gender is consistent with the CEDAW's

statement that extensive discrimination against women continues to exist (CEDAW), as well as with the experiences of women during the previous Taliban regime. Many of them discussed the restrictive regulations imposed by the Taliban, which are the means through which they are robbed of their rights to be educated, to work, and to move around freely and independently. Manhaz Aliyar shared that in the Herat province, Taliban have demanded all women "*to wear burqas and must be accompanied by a male relative when going outside, even for grocery shopping*" (Text 3). Another woman recounted that in the Sangin Valley, which is in Helmand Province, in southern Afghanistan, "*women must not be seen by men who aren't related to them*" (Text 6).

These examples of restrictions mainly concern freedom of movement which refers to the rights of all individuals to move freely within a country, to leave that country, and to return to it. Not being able to leave the house without a male chaperone, for example, prevents many women from meeting basic needs such as seeking lifesaving services. (UN women, 2021.) In relation to that, Pazaro explained that "*The Taliban are saying women cannot go outside, but there is actually no Islamic rule like this,*" and if women are covered, they should be allowed to leave the house without a male chaperone. (Text 6) In Zeba Mohammadi's case, she witnessed it when she tried to leave Afghanistan and had to see how people were unable to leave the country when the Taliban "*fired from all sides and in many cases even shot at people or whipped them away from the airport gate*" (Text 2). Many women who were used to going outside, drinking tea or partying are now restricted to their homes or in hiding. Durrani said that she misses her old life, in which she could just go outside, meet with her friends and go out. (Text 4) Another woman who used to move freely is now restricted to her home and was not able to leave her house for two weeks at that time. (Text 6)

The restrictive regulations greatly affect women's ability to study and receive an education. Although the UDHR stipulates that everyone should have access to education (UDHR, Article 26), already now, women and girls hardly have the possibility to study anymore, even though some underground networks provide secret online classes to enable girls to continue their education (The Daily Telegraph, 2021) and they have been very concerned about their and other Afghan women's and girls' right to education. "*Over the last 20 years, many women went abroad for studies and professional courses and came back to build a better Afghanistan. I am one of those women. Now all these possibilities are gone.*" said Mahbouba Siraj. (Text 8)

The possibility of losing access to education affected the women in our data very profoundly. According to Durrani, different kinds of freedoms exist, but for her, the most important one is the education of Afghan girls. She asked if those girls cannot access general education, what is their future? She believes if they "*lose this moment, nobody's going to stand for us. The world is going to forget us, and Afghan women will suffer.*" (Text 4) Manhaz Aliyar said that she feels most comfortable when she is busy with her studies and that for her this is a dream come true. In her opinion "*Every woman is a mother, a sister and a leader of her family, who can change the destiny of the entire family. When a mother is uneducated, the whole family will be uneducated. Every Afghan woman is afraid of going back.*" (Text 3) Rahmati disclosed that it frustrates her that women and girls are not allowed in school, because in her opinion schools and universities are the only way for a country to grow. (Text 5) Another woman conveyed the extent to which women are afraid of the repercussions of violating Taliban regulations by sharing that some women burned their school records and went into hiding when the Taliban took over. She said that many of them feared a return to the previous regime when they had restricted girls' education and freedom of movement. (Text 6)

Women's fear of losing their ability to educate themselves is interwoven with their concerns over losing the possibility to work, as access to education is related to access to employment, and restrictions to education come hand in hand with restrictions to employment. According to an article written by Human Rights Watch (HRW) soon after the Taliban takeover, "*Women are mostly out of university, and due to new restrictions, it is unclear when and how they can return. Many female teachers have been dismissed.*" (HRW, 2021.) Durrani stated that in Kandahar, the Taliban asked women working in a bank "*to leave their work posts and go home, and to send their male counterparts to work instead of them*" She said she is not sure if the Taliban will allow them back to work or not. (Text 5) This is only one example of how currently, Afghan women cannot count on exercising their right to equal employment, which entitles them to employment that they choose, and to protection when confronted with unemployment. Pazaro's opinion supports this, as she shared that just like during the previous Taliban regime, women are unable to work in any area they choose, except for midwifery, and that in her opinion the Taliban remained the same as during the first regime. (Text 6)

In addition to the direct bans to work, restrictions to movement imposed on women further make it impossible for them to work. Already during the first Taliban regime (1996-2001) women who were for example widowed had no possibility of leaving the house and e.g., work. Thus, families that depended on the women's source of income for survival were now in an impossible situation. (Desai, S., 1999, 825) They thus did not receive the support that the right to education entitles them to when faced with unemployment. Having those kinds of laws imposed on Afghan people once more might result in similar plights. Women were able to gain access to education, have careers and run for offices until the Taliban took away those rights, Manhaz Aliyar said. (Text 3)

Many women have worked very hard to reach their goals within their careers and are now looking at a future in which they might lose all that they have achieved. A dermatologist shared that she was running a large clinic, employing a lot of women. She studied in several countries and worked very hard to get where she was when the Taliban took over. It was her life's dream to create her own clinic and to achieve what she did. Now she remains inside her home and has no way of knowing if she will be able to continue her work. (Text 6) Nasiba Hakimi shared that when the Taliban took over, she had to leave her site office and hide in the main office in an attempt to be safe. Later that day she was sent home and did not return to her workplace until she fled the country. (Text 1)

Over the past twenty years, women's rights activists in Afghanistan have been fighting hard for more equal rights and have made a lot of progress since the Taliban were previously in power (1996-2001) (HRW, 2021). A woman in text 4 said that one of her (and other women's) main goals is to ensure the progress women have made in relation to education and freedom, is not restrained by the Taliban. (Text 4) With the new Taliban regime, many expect to lose most of the gained rights. "*Women's successes should be celebrated and protected. We are bringing change for our country. Nobody else will. The suffering of people in Afghanistan must stop, from the humanitarian catastrophe to the prevention of women's rights.*" (Text 4) However, some women do not feel so discriminated against based on their gender. Shakira interpreted the situation differently and is of the opinion that men and women are not equal. "*They are each made by God, and they each have their own role, their own strengths that the other doesn't have*" (Text 6).

6.2 Fear for safety

Fear for safety, which was expressed by many women in relation to violent treatment, and absence of safety was the second most reoccurring theme throughout the data. Following is a description of the experiences Afghan women had or witnessed, how that made them feel unsafe, and how they responded by either fleeing the country or remaining in it. Many who remained in the country did so to help others in various ways, and some who are outside also contribute to that work which is demonstrated in our data as assistance for an Afghan ethnic minority.

The right to freedom from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment protects all people from being subjected to torture, punishment, and treatment that is cruel, inhuman, and degrading (UDHR, Article 5). The right to freedom from violence serves the purpose of protecting individuals from all forms of violence. This includes barbaric treatment, punishment, and torture.

Many Afghan women whose texts we analysed feared and/or have experienced one form of violence or another since the Taliban gained power. Zeba Mohammadi recalled the moment the Taliban entered Kabul, to be the worst moment of her life. Women and children tried to get home as fast as possible out of fear for their lives. (Text 2) She shared that at the airport when she was trying to leave Afghanistan, she witnessed how many people, including women and children, were being whipped or had shots fired at them for trying to leave the country. (Text 2) Nasiba Hakimi disclosed that after the Taliban take over, she feared for her safety when walking the streets by herself. (Text 1) Many women are still working but have to do so secretly and in hiding in fear for their lives, according to Durrani (Text 4.) In accordance with text 5, it was reported that some women have been flogged and beaten in some areas, for leaving the house without a male chaperone. (Text 5) As mentioned earlier, Shakira's family was internally displaced because of a death threat, should they not leave their homes and the area immediately. (Text 6) A woman told that a Sangin woman, her husband, and a shopkeeper got beaten, for her buying cookies in the Bazar for her children. (Text 6) Experiences and fears of violent treatment are pervasive in the accounts from our data.

These experiences of violence and degrading treatment serve as evidence of the extent to which these women's right to life, liberty, and security of person (UDHR, Article 3) is infringed upon. The right to life refers to the right that individuals have to safety from unnatural and premature death as well as the assurance of a life with dignity (OHCHR). Women throughout the texts have voiced their fear regarding their safety and right to liberty as shown in Rahmati's statement that especially female medical staff is lacking safety, but many must continue their work to support their families. Durrani herself expressed uncertainty if staying amidst the Taliban regime is the right thing to do but she feels like it is her right to stay and feel safe. (Text 4) In text 8 a woman stated that she doesn't feel entirely safe, but she does not want to leave Afghanistan. She believes that she has the equal right as the Taliban to stay in her own country, even if staying holds the possibility of not surviving. (Text 8)

Against the background of the experiences of violence and the very real threats to their safety, many women sought and continue to seek refuge in other countries, as they are entitled to do according to the right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries (UDHR, Article 14 a). Nasiba Hakimi, for example, decided to leave Afghanistan even though when entering the airport, she did not know where she was going. When their plane first landed in Saudi Arabia, Hakimi reports that she and others were surprised that they actually managed to leave the country and arrived at a place in which they felt safe from the Taliban. (Text 1) Zeba Mohammadi described that she and others had to endure a lot of terror before, after three days of trying to enter the airport, being able to leave Afghanistan with US military planes. (Text 2) Shakira, another woman, had to leave her home and flee with her family, seeking refuge elsewhere, due to the threat of Taliban fighters, to kill everyone who would not leave Sangin Valley/ Helmand Province and was thus internally displaced. In another text, Durrani stated that many friends of hers have fled the country to seek a better, free life abroad. (Text 4) Durrani is trying to get friends of hers onto evacuation lists out of Kabul and arrange for girls to receive network stipends because banks were starting to shut down. (Text 4)

Women have responded to the threat to their security and the threat of violent treatment in different ways. Some women decided to stay in the country and help people in need of safety within or outside of Afghanistan. Durrani, among many other women, stayed and went underground since the Taliban takeover. They communicated via private chat

groups or through social media to "*discuss their fears, find support, share reports of what's happening in the country through the Afghan diaspora, and speak about defending hard-won opportunities for women and girls*" (Text 5). Other women, like Halima Bahman (Text 7) are trying to help women from outside of the country. Bahman is setting up safe houses for Hazara families and tries to arrange their "*clandestine escape*" from Afghanistan. Bahman's work to help the Hazara people escape Afghanistan is necessary because the Hazara people, including the women, face the threat of genocide. The Hazara ethnic group used to be the Shi'a Hazaras and was the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan before the 19th century (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Throughout the past, the Hazara population has experienced diverse forms of oppression including during the past Taliban regime (Al Jazeera, 2021). Bahman is a Hazara woman herself, who experienced the persecution of the Hazara and who fled the country when she was a child; "*It was 1998. The Taliban had taken over her town in northern Afghanistan, Mazar-e-Sharif, staging a massacre of her fellow Hazaras, an ethnic minority*" (Text 7). In the present day, Bahman is dedicated to identifying and protecting vulnerable Hazara women and children, as the situation under the Taliban regime proceeds to worsen for them especially. According to Al Jazeera, the violence against the Hazara people has escalated with the withdrawal of the international troops from Afghanistan and the fear of genocide against them is justified. (Al Jazeera, 2021.) This matches what was shared in Text 7, which mentioned that "*international human rights groups have issued dire warnings about the Hazaras' safety now, threatened by both the government and a rival Islamic State affiliate group.*" The fact that the Hazara ethnic minority is threatened by their government points to the failure of the government as a state to protect the presence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, as they are bound to do according to the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (OHCHR).

6.3 Fear related to participation in society

Women throughout the texts expressed considerable fear and concern regarding their possibility to continue participating in Afghan society. This includes their political participation as well as their possibility to speak up and advocate for women's rights.

The right to freedom of opinion and expression entitles everyone to freely express themselves and their opinions, without the interference of anyone. This right also allows everyone to seek and share information and ideas through any media without being restricted by frontiers (UDHR, Article 19).

Many women throughout the texts expressed the need for speaking up, sharing their stories, and fighting for their rights. Under the current circumstances, evoking that right by voicing their opinion against the Taliban publicly is a very dangerous endeavour for Afghan women. According to BBC some women were taken by the Taliban after speaking up and could not be found since (Summerville, 2022.) Yet, despite the frightening consequences that speaking up could have on them, some women like Mahbouba Siraj who have been active in promoting women's rights already before the Taliban took over chose to remain in Kabul, Afghanistan, and advocate for Afghan women. Mahbouba Siraj is the president of the board of the Afghan Women's Network and human rights activist. She publicly voiced that she is unsure if the Taliban will truly give women the right to education and employment. (Text 8)

Other women, like Nasiba Hakimi, advocate for women's rights from abroad. Now that she is in the safety of another country, she pledged to herself to educate herself and advocate for her people who are in danger. (Text 1) Zeba Mohammadi also escaped and dreams of supporting and advocating for people in need, even if that means that she needs to be patient and struggle through current conditions. In her opinion, nothing is impossible for Afghan women, and no one can stop them. (Text 2) Durrani shared Mohammadi's sentiment when she talked about having an army that fights for women's rights. "*This army wields pens, paper, and tablet computers, not guns. We don't have a name, nor a leader. But we do have a purpose. Our unshakeable goal is to make sure that the progress, education, and freedom of women and girls is not stifled by the Taliban.*" (Text 4) She believes that it is important for women to speak up and talk about women's rights, the right to education, and what rights they are about to lose. She said, because nobody else is speaking on behalf of Afghan women, she is speaking up and she has nothing to lose. (Text 4)

Not every woman we came across in our data spoke up against the Taliban rule. Some women in an Afghan rural area, Helmand province, preferred the Taliban rule over the US occupation. In their opinion what the Taliban expected was simple. "*Obey us and*

we will not kill you" (Text 6). Khalida from the same area voiced that in her opinion it is not women's rights when consequently their family members are being killed. She experienced the time of the occupation very differently from other women (from the urban areas). She did not gain any rights in the past, the Americans "*just came, fought, killed, and left*" (Text 6).

Although the women from our data expressed strong desires to actively work towards improving their plight, they also expressed their fear of not being able to be present or represented in leading positions, or to be able to take part in society and political decisions at all anymore. Having the right to take part in the government of their country means that everyone should have the possibility to be part of choosing who governs them and represents them in political spheres. This is usually realised through the right to vote. Everyone should also have the choice to run for elections to be a governing entity. (UDHR, Article 21a). Manhaz Aliyar said that women had the chance to do many things, including running for offices, but since the Taliban take over these possibilities no longer exist. (Text 3)

Durrani stated that even though Afghanistan is a hard place for women to be free, a lot of progress had been made and women will have to find a way to do something about their rights, including political participation. (Text 4) Women feel like they have the knowledge and education to be part of building a better Afghanistan. With their expertise**,** a lot of women had participated in "*many systems across the political and social spectrum*" (Text 8). Now all those possibilities to participate have vanished, according to Mahbouba Siraj. (Text 8) According to text 5, the international community should be making a stand on behalf of the political rights of women. Durrani asked: "*If women can't be in leadership positions or choose who can represent them, then are they even citizens of the same country? How is this even possible in the 21st century?*" (Text 5)

6.4 Fear related to women's health

Women expressed their fear regarding their health as well as the fear of forced marriage. Female health care professionals voiced fear of not being able to assist women in need with their healthcare.

The right to health encompasses the necessity for a person to have a good health standard. For this right to be enjoyed, a person's basic needs, such as their need for housing, food, clean water, and clothing must be met. This right also includes the right to be educated on health matters and to have access to social and medical services. Moreover, mothers and children are considered deserving of special care and assistance. The entitlement of individuals without a livelihood to social security is also ensured by the right to health, (Article 25, UDHR) which is closely related to the right to sexual and reproductive health (CEDAW) According to the OHCHR, "*women's sexual and reproductive health is related to multiple human rights including (…) the right to health (…)*". The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and CEDAW have both stated that women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health. (OHCHR) Women are entitled to good quality health services that cater to their sexual health and reproductive needs, as well as matters related to family planning. In addition to that, these rights entitle women to live without fearing sexual violence and to not be forced into marriage at an early age. (CEDAW)

As mentioned before, the right to sexual and reproductive health is intertwined with several other rights, such as the right to health, the right to education, and the right to freedom from violence and torture. Due to the Taliban's new regulations (see 4.1) many women, who already before had limited access to health care, now have even less access. (The Lancet, 2022)

Fatima Rahmati is a doctor who is treating Taliban-displaced families, who have currently no access to health care. Rahmati had to close her own clinic due to the Taliban threat, and even though it is not safe for her (or any female medical staff) she continues treating patients outside of the clinic, knowing the risks and danger she puts herself in. (Text 5) Pashtana Durrani, an Afghan activist, described knowing a woman who was being chased by the Taliban for leaving the house without a male chaperone, thus she was to be married to one of the Taliban fighters once she would have been found. (Text 4) Manhaz Aliyar disclosed that in some Afghan provinces the Taliban have ordered landowners to provide lists of girls and women (widows) aged between fifteen and forty-five, to be married to Taliban fighters. (Text 3) This fundamentally violates the right to sexual and reproductive health. Not only by forcing women to marry but also by promoting underaged marriage.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, suggestions for further research are made, and the extent to which the aims of the thesis are reached is reviewed, with an emphasis on the contributions of the research to the social work field. Additionally, the reflections prompted by the finding of the thesis are discussed.

As shown in the previous sub-chapter, Afghan women whose texts were analysed were concerned about a broad spectrum of women's rights violations. The main takeaway is that they expressed fear concerning self-development and self-determination, safety, participation in society, and health.

Another result of our research was that there was a significant difference in the data we analysed between the perspective of Afghan women who live in urban areas like Kabul, and that of Afghan women who live in the rural parts of Afghanistan. From the perspective of Afghan women from rural areas, only Afghan women in urban areas have benefitted from any efforts to increase the expression of their women's rights. Women from the Afghan rural parts had different opinions on what rights they considered women's rights, and on whether women's rights as we have described them in our key concepts are something that they believe in. As it stands, about 70 percent of the Afghan population lives in Afghanistan's rural areas. This is a considerable percentage, which renders the opinions of women from those parts of Afghanistan impossible to ignore when trying to shed light on the perspective of Afghan women on their human rights situation during the Taliban takeover. (Anand, 2021.)

In contrast with the opinions of Afghan women living in urban areas, who saw the Taliban as a precursor of dark times and the loss of their hard-earned rights, Afghan women from the rural areas perceived the Taliban as a regime that preceded a restoration of order in their lives. This perspective was caused by the fact that the Taliban drove American forces away, and American forces had wreaked considerable destruction in the lives of thousands of families living in the rural areas. (Anand, 2021.)

The rights that Afghan women from this analysis were most concerned about fall into the category of civil rights, which are explicitly addressed in the CEDAW and the

ICCPR. As stated in the CEDAW, "*In its approach, the Convention covers three dimensions of the situation of women. Civil rights and the legal status of women are dealt with in great detail.*" (CEDAW introduction).

It is customary in research to review the aims set in its beginning and to assess the extent to which those aims were met. If the aims have not been adequately achieved, a discussion of the limitations to that achievement is necessary (Oliver, 2012, 35). The limitations of the thesis are discussed in the previous chapter, and this paragraph examined the extent to which the aims of the thesis were met. When we set out to write this thesis, we aimed to analyse the experiences of Afghan women in 2021 Afghanistan from the point of view of women's rights. We reached our aim of uncovering Afghan women's perspectives of their own experiences from the perspective of women's rights, and we did that by answering our research question, which was "*What are Afghan women's experiences and perspectives concerning their women's rights in Afghanistan during the Taliban advance and takeover of the government in 2021?*".

It was clear from our findings that the right to education and the right to freedom of movement which were rights corresponding to fear related to personal development, and the right to freedom from violence which corresponded with fear for safety are the rights that the Afghan women from our data were most concerned with. We were also able to demonstrate that Afghan women's perspective is not singular, but multidimensional. Our hope in writing this thesis was to synthesise some Afghan women's experiences and create a body of work that can be useful to the field of social services when it comes to working with women in vulnerable situations. We succeeded in doing this within the frame of our limitations and the reviewing of the opinion of a limited amount of Afghan women.

Nevertheless, there were some limitations to the exhaustive achievement of our aim. We could not apply the uncovered perspectives to all Afghan women. We cannot with complete assurance state that we know all the perspectives that Afghan women have of their situation from the point of view of their women's rights, given that the discovered perspectives cannot be applied to all women without taking into account their backgrounds. Additionally, because of the scope of this thesis, there was a limit to the depth to which we could analyse the data that we chose for the research.

In the chapter of this thesis that defined the concepts which form the basis for this thesis, we developed the concept of women in vulnerable life situations. We placed Afghan women in that category, because upholding their rights in their country seems fragile, and the fact that they are forced to flee and become refugees in other countries.

7.1 Professional development

As social service workers, it is useful for us to consider the meaning of this research for our field. It is pivotal for us to critically examine how the social work field can provide the correct (and customised) services and aid to their service users. In conducting this research, it became apparent to us how challenging it can be to find "the perfect" solution for a group of people and it revealed how much more research into certain areas could be done in order to give social work professionals an even stronger grounding in their work.

In the case of this thematic analysis, Afghan women expressed very differing needs and requests for assistance, depending on their individual circumstances and experiences. As researchers and future professionals conducting this research was a major learning opportunity regarding different stances on the topic of women's rights, not only from differing perspectives between the Afghan government and women living in Afghanistan but also among these women. This awareness can surely be applied to many other areas within the social work field.

Considering the possibility of a career in the field of human and women's rights related issues, this thesis has been greatly beneficial in gaining a better understanding of the dynamics of human rights, the state women's inclusion in those rights, and the extent of their being put in practice in various contexts. Understanding the interconnection of human rights and the fact that they cannot exist without each other has helped us to gain important knowledge as future professionals. By defining the perspective of one group of women in vulnerable life situations and presenting their experiences, we acquired a deeper awareness of the matter and believe these findings can be applied to other areas of the social work field and groups of service users, and thus benefit us and other (social work) professionals in our/their professional development.

7.2 Recommendations

During our research process prior to starting the thesis, as well as during the data collection and analysis process, we became aware of several areas that could be further researched and explored. The area that struck us most was the realisation that women's rights are viewed in such a different way by Afghan women living in urban areas and Afghan women living in rural areas. Gaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of the perspective of women from rural areas could be useful for the international community and for human rights organizations to have a better understanding of Afghanistan's women and their needs. Considering that about 70 percent of Afghan women live in the rural areas of Afghanistan (Anand, 2021), making their perspective known to anybody who interacts and works with them on issues related to women's rights could be beneficial for both sides. Further research into this perspective could also potentially affect the narrative that the world hears about Afghan women and their women's rights.

Another area that our work could inform or inspire more research into is women in vulnerable life situations. Finding academic material on that topic proved challenging and revealed a gap in research that needs to be filled. More research could investigate or seek a better understanding of the background of other women in vulnerable situations and their experiences enjoying their human rights. From the standpoint of human rights, all women as a group are considered a vulnerable group for several reasons. This is mainly because to this day, no nation has succeeded in reaching the real conditions of equal opportunities for all genders. Women continue to face social difficulties such as glass ceilings, wage gaps, gender violence, or social exclusion risks in developed countries. These issues are more pronounced in under-developed countries, where poverty, the distribution of wealth, nutrition, health, the absence of rights to literacy teaching, to work, and to a freely consented marriage, lead to women being exposed to poor living conditions. (J., 2017, 107.)

By elucidating the perspective of one group of women in vulnerable life situations and presenting their experiences, we also hope to further encourage social service professionals and organisations to educate themselves on the context of those they work with. Whether it is when working with refugees/displaced persons, women in vulnerable

situations, or any other group of service users, the practice of familiarising themselves with their client's perspective on their situation will help professionals to adopt the right approach in their work. Improvements and updates made in the field of social services for women are for the benefit of all women.

The analysis of the data collected for this thesis work has prompted much reflection on the context in which the narratives in the texts take place. The data indicate that some women in Afghanistan believe the international community should step up and get a lot more involved than they currently are. (Text 8) Women expressed the concern that "*As soon as the international media is distracted by another big story, they will leave Afghanistan and the Taliban will go back on everything they have pledged*" (Text 4). Durrani stated that if world leaders fail to stand in solidarity with Afghan women, the chances of losing yet another country in which women's rights are achievable, are very high. (Text 5)

From that perspective, the data revealed suggestions for the international community to get more involved in promoting and maintaining women's rights in Afghanistan. Some Afghan women's rights groups noted that the United Nations and other human rights organisations could get more involved by shielding women's rights in Afghanistan in the present moment. One of the women suggested that an international force, comparable to a peacekeeping mission, could be put in place to safeguard women's rights. (Text 8) Other suggestions include negotiations between the international community and governments with the Afghan government, to aid a safe escape from the country for the Afghan population, particularly women, to save their lives. (Text 5)

The United Nations has created the conditions for the international community to assemble "*an outstanding corpus of international rights and standards for a life of dignity and wellbeing for all*" (UNSDG). Yet, one can notice the divide between the international human rights norms that have been produced and their application to the everyday lives of people, especially women, all around the world. It has been difficult for the international community to support and intervene in favour of women in vulnerable situations in Afghanistan because of a disconnect between the rationality of human rights and the instrumental procedures and institutions that try to practicalize those rights. (Turner 2015, 31; J., 2017) Human rights were made international to assure that citizens' rights are respected by their states. However, creating international

agencies that can apply pressure on states morally and legally has been challenging. (Turner 2015, 33) The fact that none of the member states of the UN have reached a full application of human rights for all human beings suggests the need for more action to be taken in the direction of concretising the enjoyment of human rights globally.

Despite the international community's actions and interventions not being what Afghan women expect, they have demonstrated much strength and courage in tackling the situation they have found themselves in. Our results shed some light on the empowered nature of Afghan women. These women in vulnerable situations were the ones creating solutions - which could also be looked at as services - for themselves and others, to meet their needs, and help ease their fears. They helped others with fleeing Afghanistan (freedom of movement and right to asylum), with providing underground classes (right to education), and secretly providing health care for each other. This demonstration of courage, determination, and sensitivity of Afghan women can serve as an inspiration and example for other women in vulnerable situations.

We think it is important that all women gather to support and amplify the voices and perspectives of other women who face challenging situations, especially when the circumstances that create those situations are pervasive in many societies. We want to express our full agreement with a statement that Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights made on International Women's Day on the 8th of March 2021, which is: *"Patriarchy works to exclude us. We must push back, in solidarity and sisterhood with other women, and with all those affected by discrimination and oppression."* (OHCHR). That thought is the driving force behind this qualitative research into the perspectives of Afghan women on their situation.

8 ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RELIABILITY/ LIMITATIONS

Ethical considerations within qualitative research are of utter importance. Generally, in qualitative research, research ethics consist of two specific areas, namely ethical principles that were created to protect the participants and professional ethics standards that aim to ensure *"good scientific practice as well as publicly accountable research"* (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho, Kyngäs, 2020, 49) In the following chapter we are presenting research ethics in qualitative research as well as connecting them to our analysis, along with displaying our limitations.

8.1 Ethical perspectives

Beauchamp and Childress display four principles that define the standards for participant protection and that are supposed to be closely followed. Those four principles are the following: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. (Beauchamp, Childress, 2013, 13) This approach is often being used for research in the field of nursing science or like in our case, in the field of social sciences to ensure ethical research. (Townsend, Cox, 2010, 1) In this paragraph, the four principles will be expounded.

The first described principle is the "autonomy" of the participant. Autonomy refers to the participant's right to liberty, self-governance, freedom of will, and the right to individual choice. his regulation is essential in research ethics when conducting qualitative research. To assure autonomy, it is crucial, that the participant is precisely informed about the research and the involved steps, and the participation is completely voluntary. (Beauchamp, Childress, 2013) The principle of "beneficence" and the principle of "non-maleficence" go hand in hand as they describe how the researcher is responsible for "maximising potential benefits and minimising detrimental effects" (Beauchamp, Childress, 2013) throughout their research. Benefice points out the researcher's ethical obligation to promote the participants' wellbeing as well as maximising their benefits. The principle of non-maleficence states how the researcher is ethically obligated to assure the participants' safety by minimising risk and avoiding any harm throughout the research as well as its aftermath. (Beauchamp, Childress, 2013) The last of the four principles is named "justice" and refers to the fact that "all

individuals should be treated fairly and equally" (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho, Kyngäs, 2020, 53).

Within the data we analysed, some of the women's names were stated only in part (only first names, no second names), whereas some were stated in their entirety. One of the women remained anonymous. Because all the texts we analysed were already existing texts, the choices on whether or not to use the real names of the women had already been made, and we respected and adopted the same decisions.

"*The researcher who demonstrates empathy and care and engages on an emotional level with subjects can enter the ground of the therapist, but without the same training and back-up support in sociology and anthropology needed for debriefing or counselling services and sessions. Overlapping or multiple roles and relationships present researchers with a range of complex and unavoidable ethical and practical dilemmas.*" (de Laine, 2000, 2.) This quote very much resonated with us, since we believe staying professional and distant while conducting very emotional intense interviews with those women would prove extremely difficult for us. One reason for us to decide against conducting any interview ourselves is that we mutually agreed that interviewing Afghan women for our thesis might cause greater harm than an advantage and we could not ethically justify doing so. The chosen topic is a very personal and delicate one and we did not want anyone to relive their trauma for our research. We also believe that we are not able to give possibly needed support. As stated by Scheytt, ethical research aims to shape the relationship between the researcher and the participant in such a way that the participant is not harmed by the research. (Carla Scheytt, Methodenzentrum, 2021) We knew that we could not ensure this and thus decided to use existing data.

In using "women in vulnerable life situations" as one of our key concepts, it is important to mention that although the term 'vulnerability' is widely used to refer to women in certain situations, it is also widely contested, criticised, and seen as a vacillating concept in many regards (Kuronen et al., 2010, 2; Aldridge, 2015, 16). This is because the term may be stigmatising when used in connection with certain groups and individuals. Additionally, that may not be how the groups in question see themselves. (Aldridge 2015, 12) Definitions of the idea vary depending on context and perspective, but the current understanding of vulnerability is founded on notions of

equality and power or the absence thereof. What is central to this thesis' relevance is our intention to address inequality and powerlessness by highlighting the perspective of Afghan women in vulnerable situations, who may be marginalised or excluded. (Aldridge, 2015, 14).

We would like to clarify and emphasise the distinction that we make between referring to a group of people as a vulnerable group or a group in vulnerable life situations. We see Afghan women in the context we mention as women in vulnerable life situations, and not as vulnerable women. We do not consider vulnerability an individual trait of theirs or a component of their identity. According to Kuronen et al., it is important to distinguish between "vulnerable women" and the term "women in vulnerable situations," to clarify that vulnerability is not a part of their identity (Kuronen et al.,2010, 3). For that reason, we refer to them as women in "vulnerable situations" instead of as "vulnerable women."

In this thesis, when approaching vulnerability from an ethical standpoint, the perceptions that Afghan women may have of themselves when it comes to vulnerability or marginalisation, as well as the debates about the concept of vulnerability as applied to groups of people, are not relevant. What is important is that the Afghan women whose texts and interviews we examine are not put more at risk of harm and that their vulnerability is not aggravated by our research processes. It is equally important that we the researchers and the institution we carry out our research under are protected. (Aldridge, 2015, 12).

8.2 Reliability/Limitations

Since we decided for ethical reasons as well as logistical difficulties to not conduct any interviews ourselves, we must rely on the researchers/interviewers to have taken the four ethical principles of ethics into account and to have provided the interviewed Afghan women with the information and care that was required.

We need to highlight that our philosophy on women and women's rights issues influenced the perspective from which we approached the data. While reviewing the data we chose to review, it is crucial to note that in no way were we able to draw a picture

of the perception of the entirety of Afghan women. The findings from this thesis are not intended to be applied to Afghan women as a whole but serve as an insight into some Afghan women's perspectives. Due to several factors, our research possibility is limited. One limitation is that the information we will have access to will be in English, meaning that it will likely be by women who can either express themselves in English or whose accounts have been translated or transcribed by reliable sources into English. We automatically have to exclude data in any other language. Information in Farsi or Dari, which are the two main languages spoken in Afghanistan is inaccessible to us since neither of us can speak those languages. Bearing that in mind, we believe that our research can be beneficial to the social work field, as we have mentioned above, and to Afghan women, albeit tangentially.

Three of the texts chosen for analysis are blog posts from a website called, "*Afghan Women Writers*". In its self-description, the website claims the following: "*Afghan Women Writers is a free-of-judgment platform for Afghan women and girls to write and tell their extraordinary stories. AWW highlights Afghan women who want to share their opinions, ideas, suggestions, and poetry, according to the topic of their choice, and publish them on our website.*" The source is not an academic source that has undergone any known reliability check, and it is important to recognise the limitations that it poses to this thesis, due to the reviewers' inability to verify or certify the reliability of the blog by checking if the stories are indeed written by Afghan women and if they are true.

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APPENDIX 1 - Links to the collected data

1. Blog Post "Afghan Women Writers": "My Journey from Kabul Airport to Washington DC" *Nasiba Hakimi* https://afghanwomenwriters.com/index.php/2021/09/23/my-journey-from-kabul-airport-to-washington-dc/

2. Blog Post "Afghan Women Writers": "Zeba's Story from Kabul to Wisconson; the chaotic airport where people were shot by the Taliban for fleeing the country." *Zeba Mohammadi* https://afghanwomenwriters.com/index.php/2021/09/27/zebas-story-from-kabul-to-wisconson-the-chaotic-airport-where-people-were-shot-by-the-taliban-for-fleeing-the-country/

3. Blog post "Afgha**n** Women Writers": Afghan Women and The Dark Future *Manhaz Aliyar* https://afghanwomenwriters.com/index.php/2021/07/19/afghan-women-and-the-dark-future-2/

4. Interview "The daily Telegraph": I'm hiding from the Taliban, but I won't run. *Pashtana Durrani* https://www.pressreader.com/article/282325388057865

5. Interview "The new humanitarian": Why these Afghan women are speaking out. *Pashtana Durrani & Fahima Rahmati* https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2021/8/19/why-these-afghan-women-are-speaking-out

6. Interview "New Yorker": The Other Afghan Women. *Khalida, Pazaro & Shakira* https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=22&sid=e817d22c-8104-47d4-8c96-9584a5168854%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=151410103&db=aph (The other Afghan Women (article/interview) Ebsco - Gopal, A., 2021. The Other Afghan Women. New Yorker. 9/13/2021,

Vol. 97 Issue 28, p34-47. 14p. 1 Color Photograph, 8 Cartoon or Caricatures.)

7. Interview "The Christian Science Monitor": "Driven by hope." An Afghan refugee fights to save her sister. *Halima Bahman* https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2021/1020/Driven-by-hope.-An-Afghan-refugee-fights-to-save-her-sisters

8. Interview "Hindustan Times": Hear the voices of the women of Afghanistan. *Mahbouba Siraj & Samira Hamidi* https://www.pressreader.com/india/hindustan-times-east-up/20210905/281865826581414

APPENDIX 2 - Summaries of chosen data (blog entries and interviews)

Text 1 Blog post by "Afghan Women Writers": My journey from Kabul airport to Washington

Nasiba Hakimi was a promising student at the university and was looking to a bright future when the Taliban took over and her life changed rapidly. On 15th of august she had to leave her workplace and try to escape the Taliban who had entered Kabul. From then on, she was unable to work or return to university and she feared for her life. Starting from when the Taliban came to power, all women, girls, and female students lost their right to education and freedom of movement. "Taliban is like another wild animal that did not know anything about humanity and human right." (Nasiba Hakimi, 2021) Nasiba never imagined that one day she would have to escape and go somewhere far from Afghanistan, because of the Taliban, to save her life. She tried to leave Afghanistan, but she and others were not permitted into the airport. After trying again later she was able to board a US military plane. She was scared but was relieved to eventually arrive in the US where she did not have to fear for her life. She wants to finish her studies and be able to help people in her country but fears for her life during the Taliban regime and does not want to go back until the Taliban has left again.

Codes: student, educated, fear for life, losing freedom, loosing possibility to study, fleeing, Taliban, activist

Text 2 Blog Post by "Afghan Women Writers": Zeba's Story from Kabul to Wisconson; the chaotic airport where people were shot by the Taliban for fleeing the country.

Zeba Mohammadi is an educated young woman with excellent English-speaking skills who used to be first in her class. She then was able to study at the Asian University for women. Having to leave her country and losing the hope she had for her future, within Afghanistan, was devastating for her. On 15th of August when the Taliban entered Kabul she was horrified and describes it as the worst day of her life. Zeba and other students were supposed to flee the country with help of their university but when the Taliban came, all flights were cancelled. When going to the airport she had to witness

how many people, including women and children, were being whipped or had shots fired at them for trying to leave the country. After three days they managed to get on a US army plane and via Saudi Arabia and Spain arrived in the US. (Same plane as Nasiba Hakimi) She is now in a refugee camp but has big dreams and wishes to stand up and fight for women's rights and people in need.

Codes: student, educated, losing hope, fear for life, losing freedom, loosing possibility to study, fleeing/refugee, violence, women's rights, activist

Text 3 Blog Post by "Afghan Women Writers": Afghan women and the dark future

Manhaz Aliyar is an educated woman who is deeply apprehensive and hopeless about what women's lives and her own future will be like after the Taliban takeover. She reflects on what the fate of women had been the last time the Taliban regime was in control, calling it a dark time for all, but especially for women. That time brought an undoing of the achievements and successes of women regarding education, employment, and political participation. Manhaz anticipates a similar situation now, calling it a disaster for women after remarking that although the Taliban at some point seemed to have changed when making negotiations, they have not based on the rules they have issued in the provinces they control. Some of those rules instruct women to wear burqas and forbid them from going outside for any purpose without a male chaperone.

For Manhaz, being able to study gives her comfort and confidence in her dreams coming true. She believes that the negative effects of the regime on women's freedoms and rights will also affect the generation to come, especially concerning education. She expresses the opinion that if women, who are leaders of their families, are not educated, their families will likely not be either. After hearing of the Taliban requesting lists of unmarried women /girls older than 15 years old, to force them into marriage with Taliban fighters, Manhaz cannot help but express sadness and worry at the events in Afghanistan, which are not in any way beneficial to women.

Codes: education, employment, political participation, forced marriage, underage marriage, going outside, male chaperone, imposition of Burqas, hopeless

Text 4 Interview by "The Daily Telegraph": I'm hiding from the Taliban, but I won't run.

Pashtana Durrani is an educated woman who is currently in hiding with her family, having a target on her back for advocating for girl's and women's right to education. She grew up in a very progressive family in which it was natural for girls to study. Pashtana started an NGO in 2018 called "learn". Currently she is not able to leave her house and her movement is completely restricted as she fears for her life. Even though the Taliban talk about upholding women's rights, she does not believe in it. A woman she knows is currently being chased by the Taliban to be married off to one of their fighters, for the simple reason of being in the streets without an escort/chaperone. Even though in hiding she is still fighting for girl's and women's safety and helps females leave the country or find safe places to go underground. She is also trying, through underground networks, to enrol girls for virtual classes to be able to help as many to continue studying. She says that women have lost many rights they have fought so hard for since the last Taliban regime.

Codes: educated, hiding, fear for life, losing freedom, forced marriage, loosing possibility to study, helping women to flee/hide, violence, women's rights, political rights/decisions, gender gap, nothing to lose, gains lost, women leading, international community/action, Afghan women fighting for their own rights, not fleeing, male chaperone, activist

Text 5 Interview by "The new humanitarian": Why these Afghan women are speaking out.

Fahima Rahmati is a doctor and activist who runs the Heela Charity Foundation, whose work included helping families displaced during the Taliban siege of Kandahar in July. Fahima says that Afghan women are afraid, they cannot go to work and cannot continue their studies and school. She feels defeated but does not give up helping people in need, by going to their camps, giving them needed medicine, and treating them as her patients. As a medical professional, she fears for her safety as well as for others with the same education, especially female staff. In her opinion the international

community must get together and ensure that people, especially women, can safely leave the country, to save their lives. Fahima grew up in poverty and has worked very hard to become a doctor and put a lot of effort into promoting women's education. She wants to be heard and to be able to tell her story so that there can be change, the suffering in Afghanistan could stop and the humanitarian crisis, as well as the prevention of women's rights, could be reversed.

Pashtana Durrani is very concerned about her political and educational rights. Everything she and her family have been fighting for has vanished. She cannot understand how a situation like this is possible in the 21ˢᵗ century, in which women should have the possibility, anywhere in the world, to be in leadership positions, or take part in political decisions. Currently, their lives are being decided by the Taliban, which means women are being pushed into a wider gender gap with virtually no rights. Pashtana says the international community needs to stand in solidarity with Afghan women, otherwise, they will lose another country in which women's rights are possible. So, she speaks up to share her story because she believes she has nothing to lose.

Codes: doctor, treating people in need, educated, activist, fear for life, safety missing, losing possibility to work, losing freedom, losing women's education, women's rights, international community support, Afghan women fighting for their own rights, not fleeing, Talk/speak up

Text 6 Interview by "New Yorker": The Other Afghan Women
Several Afghan women share their perspectives

Shakira is an Afghan woman in her early forties, forced to suddenly flee the rural province where she lives with her family because of a looming Taliban attack on Afghan army forces posted nearby. In the middle of fleeing, as they heard sounds of gunfire and saw Taliban vehicles approaching them, Shakira decided to stop running.

As soon as the Taliban took control of Kabul, women began to panic. Some burned their school records and went into hiding. The wins that these women in urban areas lived and have now lost are huge. A dermatologist who has studied in multiple countries and runs a big clinic shared that she had not been outside in two weeks, after

having accomplished her life's dream of studying, creating her own business, and starting her own clinic.

The perspectives of women living in rural Afghanistan differ from those of women in urban Afghanistan. Women in rural Afghanistan were unwilling to judge the Taliban movement against a universal standard—only against what they had previously experienced of the Taliban.

Pazaro, another woman living in an Afghan village said of the Taliban that "They were softer," and "they were dealing with us respectfully." They were the ones who felt the human losses of the war between Afghanistan and America the most, losing thousands of lives. For the women in the conservative rural areas, the Taliban have been a source of restoring calm, having caused the Americans to retreat, while for women in the comparatively liberal urban areas, the Taliban bring fear and hopelessness. When interrogated about gender, the reaction of women from rural parts of Afghanistan was one of contempt.

Pazaro said "They are giving rights to Kabul women, and they are killing women here. Is this justice?"

Another woman, Marzia, said, "This is not 'women's rights' when you are killing us, killing our brothers, killing our fathers."

Khalida, from a nearby village, said, "The Americans did not bring us any rights. They just came, fought, killed, and left."

The perspective of the women from rural areas is mixed, concerning what rights they should have. While some would like to see old rules crumble and be able to go out to the marker or have picnics without negative consequences, others remain attached to more traditional interpretations.

Shakira shares, "Women and men aren't equal. They are each made by God, and they each have their own role, their own strengths that the other doesn't have."

Because of stories that she hears from friends of broken marriages and prostitution being prolific in urban areas, she feels that there is such a thing as too much freedom and that it causes people to be unaware of limits.

One thing that all the women from the rural areas do agree on, is that whatever rights they have to be obtained through war, and that Afghan communities themselves must improve the conditions of women.

Codes: losing possibility to work, losing possibility to study, dreams, educated, hopeful, Taliban, countryside/village women, city women, Kabul, going outside, different women's rights perspectives, fear of punishment, gains lost, restoration of order, hiding, Americans

Text 7 Interview by "The Christian Science Monitor": "Driven by hope." An Afghan refugee fights to save her sisters

Halima Bahman is an Afghan activist for women and girls from the Afghan Hazara ethnic minority, the same minority she is from. She has been an activist since she came to Canada as a refugee almost 15 years ago at the age of 11, following the mass massacre of thousands of Hazara Afghans by the Taliban, to which she also lost a friend. She works tirelessly to identify Hazara women and children and protect them, as they are in a desperate situation faced with the Taliban efforts to exterminate them. When she started her work in Canada, she was initially the only woman, but she has met other Hazara refugee women with whom she continues to advocate for the protection of Hazara people. She co-founded the Hazara Women's Organisation, and she has been working with women because of the discrimination they face. Reflecting on the situation of women, she mentions that although women have always been oppressed and told they cannot lead a community, they can if given the opportunity.

Halima has played and continues to play a key role in providing relief to Hazara women and children in Afghanistan. She managed to convince the Canadian Immigration Minister that in addition to adding Hazara people to the priority groups of vulnerable Afghan people that the Canadian government wanted to resettle during the Taliban takeover. She is currently focused on finding safe houses for Hazara families, and on helping them escape from Afghanistan.

Codes: massacre, ethnic minority, Hazara, persecution, women's oppression, activist, hope, helping families to flee, political participation, women leading, Taliban, refugee, violence

Text 8 Interview by "Hindustan Times": Hear the voices of the women of Afghanistan

Mahbouba Siraj is an Afghan journalist and human rights' activist. Her perspective on the promises the Taliban has made to allow women to be educated and to work is that it remains to be seen whether or not that is true. She also remains unsure of the extent of the Taliban's control, in light of violence coming from other "more fundamentalist" groups. She also highlights that the progress made in Afghanistan concerning women's rights' is more because of Afghan women themselves, and not as much the result of actions from the rest of the world. She shares that she feels neither safe, nor unsafe, and is determined to remain in Afghanistan, evoking her right to be in her country.

Samira Hamidi is an Afghan country campaigner for Amnesty, South Asia. She echoes Mahbouba's thought that the Taliban's promises concerning women are questionable. This is further buttressed by her stating that there is a gap between Afghan women's idea of personal freedom and that of the Taliban.

Codes: educated, activist, gains, political participation, safety, women's rights, world leaders, international action, international advocacy, united nations, participation in society, freedom to work, freedom to study, mistrust, doubt, Afghan women fighting for their own rights, right to be in Afghanistan, not fleeing, difference in personal freedom ideology, control, courage, human rights, talk