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## Impact of Corruption on Women in Afghanistan

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### Abstract:

Corruption severely impacts various aspects of women's lives in developing countries, with Afghanistan serving as a poignant example. Despite the potential for progress during the democratic governance established in 2001, systemic corruption within the government has led to a dismal situation for women. Dominated by patriarchal norms, Afghan society presents numerous challenges for women, including a lack of legal protection and fundamental rights, which are eroded by pervasive corruption. Research indicates that women, particularly in Afghanistan, face disproportionate suffering due to these corrupt practices, which have entrenched barriers to social and economic advancement.

The methodology of this research involves analyzing the experiences of Afghan women within the context of widespread corruption. By examining various academic articles, reports, and first-hand accounts, the study highlights the dire consequences of corruption on women's access to education, healthcare, and justice. Key data sources include interviews and discussions with local scholars, as well as reports from organizations such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). The focus is on understanding how these systemic issues contribute to the ongoing marginalization of women and inhibits their ability to seek justice and support.

Ultimately, the findings reveal that Afghan women are among the most affected by corruption, facing severe challenges such as violence, poverty, and lack of educational opportunities. The study emphasizes that empowering women through education and political representation is crucial to combating corruption. Without their active participation in policymaking and governance, the cycle of corruption will likely persist, further entrenching inequalities and undermining women's rights. This research calls for increased efforts to enhance women's roles in leadership positions, recognizing that their involvement is essential for driving systemic change and promoting transparency in governance.

**Keywords:** corruption, developing countries, embezzlement, gender, official position, and women empowerment

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### Introduction:

Corruption refers to the misuse of power that has been entrusted to individuals for personal benefit, leading to a decline in public confidence and obstructing both social and economic progress. It can take several forms, such as bribery, where officials accept illegal payments in exchange for favorable outcomes; embezzlement, which is the illegal use of funds; extortion, where threats are leveraged to acquire money or services; and nepotism, which gives preferential treatment to family members in hiring or contracting processes. Additionally, it encompasses money laundering, which involves hiding the sources of illegally obtained funds, and fraud, which involves deceit for financial or personal advantage (Transparency International, 2023). Corruption has a profoundly negative impact on various facets of women's lives in developing nations (Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma, 2003). This study, conducted in 2020 within the context of Afghanistan's democratic government, anticipated

ushering in a positive era for women, supported by global cooperation focused on women's issues. However, widespread systemic corruption within the government has created a grim reality for Afghan women. In a society where male dominance prevails, the conditions for women remain significantly regressive, leading to numerous challenges (Ramez, Farooq, & Raju, 2019). The absence of effective legal frameworks enables corruption to undermine women's natural rights, with marginalized groups—particularly vulnerable women—suffering disproportionately. As a result, Afghan women often find themselves among the most disadvantaged in global rankings regarding gender equity (Jarvis, 2020).

Moreover, Afghanistan's legacy of forty years of civil conflict, combined with low levels of public awareness and a weak rule of law, has resulted in a notorious environment rife with corruption. This corruption manifests in various forms, including bribery, extortion, cronyism, and

nepotism, which collectively exploit women's rights on a massive scale (Sais, 2011). The entrenched nature of corruption within public administration facilitates criminal activities such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, further aggravating the erosion of women's rights and opportunities. Consequently, the political, judicial, educational, and financial systems in Afghanistan are deeply affected by this pervasive corruption.

Additionally, women in Afghanistan are often heavily dependent on public services due to limited access to alternative private options. This dependence exacerbates their vulnerability compared to women in more developed nations. Alarming, approximately 90% of Afghan women live in poverty, severely limiting their opportunities to engage meaningfully in shaping public policies related to health, education, and economic resources (Otenyo & Besmel, 2017). This systemic disenfranchisement underscores the significant barriers that prevent Afghan women from improving their socio-economic conditions.

In conclusion, the intersection of corruption and the marginalization of women in Afghanistan highlights a pressing issue that warrants attention. The detrimental effects of systemic corruption not only obstruct women's rights and development but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality. To address these critical challenges, there is an urgent need for comprehensive strategies that enhance legal protections, improve access to public services, and empower women to actively participate in policymaking. Only through such initiatives can the systemic barriers that hinder women's progress be dismantled, paving the way for a more equitable society.

#### **Effects of Corruption Against Women in Afghanistan:**

The principal challenges faced by Afghan women include a lack of security, minimal participation in the reconciliation process, and limited access to an impartial justice system and legal representation, particularly in a context where corruption permeates the traditional justice system. Access to essential health services and education remains inadequate for women, who endure systemic discrimination and various forms of violence, including physical, economic, psychological, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, there exists a noticeable absence of political will to acknowledge women as equal members of society or to include them in efforts to rebuild Afghanistan as a progressive nation (Knowles & MacLachlan, 2015).

To better understand the plight of Afghan women, it is important to consider their characteristics. Afghan women are known for their patriotism and deep love for their homeland. Throughout history, they have supported Afghan warriors during conflicts, providing essential services

such as transporting supplies and aiding wounded soldiers. A notable example is Malaly, who became a symbol of courage during the Maiwand battle in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. However, when compared to women in other societies, Afghan women represent the most vulnerable and oppressed segment of the population, facing significant political, economic, social, and cultural challenges (Rostami-Povey & Poya, 2007).

In stark contrast to women in more privileged societies, nearly 75% of Afghan women live below the poverty line, enduring oppression and harsh living conditions. Despite their many strengths—such as loyalty, hard work, and resilience—corruption has stifled their potential and left them voiceless (Dyvik, 2014). Reports of the struggles faced by Afghan women are prevalent in international media, development studies, and academic literature, detailing harrowing issues such as starvation among widows, forced marriages of underage girls, high maternal mortality rates, and various forms of abuse, including rape and domestic violence. This pervasive corruption not only hampers national development but also severely impacts the individual well-being of women, who suffer the most from the widespread dysfunction within Afghanistan's political and economic systems (Barkhouse, Hoyland & Limon, 2018).

Understanding why corruption is such a formidable barrier to women's rights in Afghanistan requires a closer examination of its consequences. Numerous cases of violence against women are reported to the justice system each year, yet only a fraction of these cases receive proper legal attention. The majority are left unresolved, withdrawn, or closed, primarily due to corruption and the misuse of influence within the judicial system. With many districts lacking access to courts and a scarcity of female legal professionals, the pursuit of justice for women is particularly daunting (Bohra et al., 2015).

Moreover, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) frequently hears accounts of women being compelled to return to abusive environments or feeling pressured to withdraw their complaints. While some women accept these outcomes, others, distressed by their circumstances, seek protection and justice through the AIHRC (Qazi Zada, 2021). Although the government has made some efforts to combat violence against women, it has failed to effectively address the associated cases. Public hearings reveal that corruption severely hinders the investigation and prosecution of serious offenses like rape and honor killings. Additionally, corruption has adversely affected women's social and economic rights, significantly limiting access to education and healthcare, particularly in rural areas, while also impacting urban centers where women's rights are compromised due to mismanagement (Deol &

Sandhu, 2020).

Despite substantial international aid aimed at improving the conditions for women in Afghanistan, much of this assistance fails to reach its intended recipients, consumed instead by the pervasive corruption that plagues the nation. Transparency International has ranked Afghanistan as the fourth most corrupt country globally, highlighting how corruption obstructs humanitarian efforts and exacerbates the plight of women (Singh, 2015). Thus, corruption stands not only as an obstacle for all Afghans but particularly as a severe adversary to women, significantly undermining their rights and opportunities for advancement.

#### **Life for Women in Afghanistan:**

Afghanistan, with a population exceeding 38 million, of which over half are women, serves as a critical case study for examining the status of women in developing nations. Research conducted over the past two decades has consistently shown that pervasive corruption in Afghanistan places it among the four most corrupt countries globally, alongside Syria, South Sudan, and Somalia. This ranking, according to Transparency International's Annual Corruption Perception Index in 2018, reflects the ongoing social and economic crises affecting various sectors, including administration, politics, sports, and culture (Tolo TV, 2018). Consequently, Afghan women bear the brunt of this systemic corruption, which manifests in severe challenges such as poverty, insecurity, and harmful traditional practices that significantly hinder their access to essential public services, including education and healthcare.

In war-torn societies like Afghanistan, women disproportionately experience the negative consequences of conflict and corruption. Currently, Afghanistan is regarded as one of the most dangerous places for women globally. Despite efforts by the Afghan government and international donors to promote girls' education, statistics reveal that approximately 70% of Afghan girls do not attend school. Alarming, around 87% of these girls face forced marriages, often before reaching the age of 15 (Otenyo & Besmel, 2017). Government data from 2014 indicate that women account for 80% of all suicides, marking Afghanistan as one of the few countries with such high rates among females. Psychologists attribute this troubling trend to a persistent cycle of domestic violence and poverty that entraps many women.

Moreover, a 2008 Global Rights survey highlighted that approximately 90% of Afghan women have encountered domestic abuse, educational neglect, and violations of their fundamental human rights. The most common forms of abuse include emotional, mental, and physical harm, severely undermining the dignity and rights of women in Afghan society (Hozyainova, 2014). This

alarming prevalence of abuse not only illustrates the profound impact of corruption on women's lives but also underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to address these critical issues and promote the well-being and rights of women in Afghanistan.

#### **Women's Role in Reducing Range of Corruption:**

The plight of women in Afghanistan is marked by deeply troubling realities that evoke a strong emotional response. Afghan women face significant challenges, including a lack of security, limited participation in reconciliation efforts, and insufficient access to an impartial justice system. These issues are exacerbated by a corrupt traditional justice system, which further undermines their rights. As a result, women often experience systemic discrimination and various forms of violence, including physical, economic, psychological, and sexual abuse. This situation reflects a broader political reluctance to recognize women as integral members of society and to include them in the efforts to rebuild Afghanistan as a progressive nation.

To better understand the resilience of Afghan women, it is essential to explore their characteristics in more detail. Afghan women are inherently patriotic, demonstrating a profound love for their homeland. Throughout history, they have contributed significantly during times of war, supporting Afghan fighters by providing essential services such as carrying supplies and assisting the wounded. A notable figure is Maiden Malaly, who became a symbol of bravery during the Second Anglo-Afghan War at the Battle of Maiwand. Despite their courage and contributions, Afghan women remain one of the most vulnerable and oppressed groups in society, a reality that is both unjust and disheartening (Goetz, 2007).

Moreover, the disparity between Afghan women and their counterparts in more affluent societies is stark. While women in many parts of the world enjoy access to modern amenities and a higher quality of life, nearly 75% of Afghan women live below the poverty line, enduring oppressive conditions. Despite facing numerous challenges, Afghan women are often depicted as loyal wives and dedicated family members, embodying qualities such as hard work, passion, and generosity. Unfortunately, widespread corruption has relegated them to a state of silence and neglect, exacerbating their struggles (Burrige, Maree, A., & Rahmani, 2016).

In conclusion, the systemic issues faced by Afghan women, combined with their resilience and patriotism, highlight the crucial role they can play in combating corruption. By advocating for their rights and increasing their participation in societal processes, Afghan women could significantly contribute to reducing corruption in their communities. Their empowerment is not only a

matter of social justice but also a vital step towards fostering a more equitable and transparent society in Afghanistan.

#### **Recommendations:**

Our current research regarding problems posed by corruption against women in developing countries is mostly theoretical and focuses on the definition of women's problems and the dangerous consequences of corruption for women in general in Afghanistan under the democratic governmental system before the year 2021. Also, due to various obstacles and barriers imposed by COVID-19 at the same time during conducting this research, we did not have the flexibility of traveling to the fields that could help to do more comprehensive and complete, like visiting the various women's groups or women organizations affairs in India or Afghanistan, unfortunately.

Afghanistan is a country that has faced irreparable challenges from multiple directions as a result of civil wars and tensions in different periods between groups claiming power, and it can be said that women have been its main victims.

In this regard, one of the priorities of the needs for the progress and growth of any society after national security is the need for education. Unfortunately, women are the main victims of this shortage, so much work, and research should be done so that the women of Afghanistan should have the right in the first stage to have education so that they can serve their country in various jobs with full ability and capacity.

#### **Conclusion:**

The topic of the impacts of corruption on women, as well as their role in fighting against it in Afghanistan, underscores the significance of this research in understanding corruption issues within developing nations. Corruption presents a formidable challenge in many Third World societies, with women disproportionately affected by its consequences. In Afghanistan, a country characterized by persistent patriarchal structures, approximately 75% of the population resides in rural areas. These areas are marked by inadequate educational resources, exacerbated by safety concerns and traditional norms that prevent girls from attending school. Consequently, women face significant neglect and are often the primary victims of corruption.

Furthermore, the lack of educational opportunities for girls contributes to their ongoing marginalization, positioning women as the foremost victims of corrupt practices. Afghanistan frequently ranks among the most corrupt nations globally, largely due to widespread societal illiteracy and a lack of awareness regarding individual rights. Research indicates that in contexts where women's communities are under-resourced and lack empowerment, corruption thrives. The limited

representation of women in high-ranking government positions further complicates this issue, as their absence in decision-making roles diminishes the likelihood of addressing corruption effectively.

Nevertheless, there is potential for women to play a critical role in reducing corruption, particularly if they achieve representation in political spheres. Increasing the number of women in policymaking positions, especially in key administrative roles, can significantly impact corruption levels. Women constitute half of the population and inherently possess the right to participate in governance and influence decisions that pertain to their fundamental rights. Their involvement is crucial for promoting transparency and accountability in government.

In conclusion, as long as women remain excluded from leadership and policymaking roles, the cycle of corruption is likely to persist and potentially worsen. Empowering women to take on significant positions within government is essential not only for advancing their rights but also for combating corruption effectively. By ensuring that women have a meaningful voice in shaping policies and governance, societies can move towards a more equitable and just environment, ultimately mitigating the harmful impacts of corruption.

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