

**UNCEDAW Afghanistan Shadow Report**  
**July 2013**

**Afghanistan Breaches its Duty to Protect Female School Children from Gender-Motivated Violence and its Duty to Provide Equal Opportunities for Girls to Receive Education by Failing to Address the Forced Marriage of Young Girls and Failing to Provide Adequate Numbers of Female School Teachers, and Thus Violates Articles 10 and 16 of the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Shadow Report to the  
United Nations Human Rights Committee Addressing List of Issues –  
Issue 9 – Stereotypes and Harmful Practices  
**Issues 14, 15 – Education**  
Issue 19 – Rural Women  
Issue 22 – Marriage and Family Relations

Submitted by

**AWAKEN**

Afghan Women and Kids Education and Necessities, Inc.

AWAKEN is a not-for-profit organization formed to enable Afghan individuals and families to become literate and self-sufficient.

International Human Rights Law Society  
A Student Organization of  
Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law

Submitted to the  
**UNITED NATIONS**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**  
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**Authors and Endorsers of this Shadow Report Submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on Afghanistan's Non-Compliance with the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.**

**Afghan Women and Kids Education and Necessities, Inc. (AWAKEN)** is a not-for-profit that endeavors to help individuals, especially women and girls, become literate and self-sufficient by assisting its Jalalabad office with the planning and development of programs that will provide educational opportunities, vocational training, health care services, and emergency assistance to Afghan families, particularly women and children.

The **International Human Rights Law Society (IHRLS)** is a student organization at Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The IHRLS provides research services for domestic and overseas human rights organizations, hosts speakers focusing on human rights issues, and supports students who travel overseas to participate in a variety of human rights activities. More generally, the IHRLS facilitates student access to the world of international human rights law, spreads awareness, and increases communication amongst likeminded individuals.

# Acknowledgments

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AWAKEN



# **Recommendations**

## **1. Bring education to the countryside.**

There needs to be cooperation between NGOs, local governments, and the Ministry of Education to provide greater access to education to the rural areas of Afghanistan.

Because security is still a problem in Afghanistan, families are unwilling to send their children far outside their villages to receive education. Even families fortunate enough to have automobile transportation still fear sending their children, particularly their daughters, away from the village to go to school.

When educational and higher educational opportunity is concentrated in larger cities, the graduating professionals are generally unwilling to take their degrees and move to rural villages to teach. Afghanistan already has a shortage of female teachers, and getting the few graduates to teach in the countryside is challenging. By developing greater educational systems in rural areas, the Government of Afghanistan can begin to see a positive cycle whereby education breeds greater education.

## **2. Cultural education and ambassador programs.**

The Afghanistan Government should sponsor and encourage cultural education programs and ambassadorial exchange programs so that leaders and decision-makers can experience how other systems of education can be effective. The exchange programs should focus on the roles gender plays in the host country's culture in order to promote discourse regarding and bring about a change in the traditional belief structure in Afghanistan that women should not be educated.

**I. The government of Afghanistan has failed to meet its obligations under Article 10<sup>1</sup> of the CEDAW because: it has failed to protect female Afghani school children from gender motivated violence; early forced marriage makes it impossible for many Afghani women to pursue education; and the lack of female teachers makes meeting the needs of Afghani women impossible due to the historic, cultural rules regarding intermingling of the genders.**

**1. Education and literacy statistics**

- 1.1. Around 5,000 Afghan girls were enrolled in school in 2001. In 2011, there were 2.4 million, a 480-fold increase.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.2. As of 2010, Afghanistan was the only country with an educational gender parity index (GPI) below 0.70 according to UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring. 160 countries agreed to set the goal that all children will have primary education by 2015. The report said Afghanistan will miss that goal "by a large margin."<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3. In 2009 approximately 22% – around 446,682 – of female students were considered long-term absentees.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.4. The percentage of girls in universities is increasing year by year. In 2006, girls formed 20% which reached to 22% in 2007 and 24.8% in 2009.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.5. Since 2002, the Afghan government and donors have built more than 4,000 schools, recruited and trained more than 175,000 new teachers, and increased enrollment rates for school-aged children to nearly 50 percent.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.6. According to the National Risks and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007 (1386/1387), around 26% of the population were literate which included only 12% of women. The illiteracy rate in urban, rural and between nomads are accordingly 52%, 79% and 94%.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CEDAW Article 10.

<sup>2</sup> Annie Kelly, *Afghan girls' education backsliding as donors shift focus to withdrawal*, the guardian, February 24, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2011/feb/24/afghanistan-girls-education-report>. [Hereinafter **Kelly, Afghan girls' education backsliding**].

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Report, *Afghanistan 'clears big obstacles' in girls' education*, BBC, October 16, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-19966043>.

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, *Afghan girls' education backsliding*.

<sup>5</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women, *Combined Initial and Second Periodic Reports of State Parties: Afghanistan*, CEDAW/C/AFG/1-2 (21 December 2011) at 58. [Hereinafter **UNCEDAW Report**].

<sup>6</sup> USAID, *Education: Increasing access to quality education and suitable learning environments*, USAID, February 2013, <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/programs/education#Tab=Description>.

<sup>7</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 6.

- 1.7. Only 26% of all Afghans, and only 12% of Afghan women, are literate.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.8. The majority of girls don't stay on after fifth grade and nine out of ten 15 year old girls are illiterate.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.9. Articles 43 to 47 state that education is the right of all citizens and education up to bachelor level is free of charge. In addition, secondary school education is considered mandatory and the government must establish balance in and improve education for, women and nomads and eliminate illiteracy. The government also supports the cultural activities.
- 1.10. Article 3 of Education Law also states that "citizens of Afghanistan have the right to education without any discrimination."<sup>10</sup>
- 1.11. The total number of students in grades 1-12 is 7,381,331 and 2,749,553 of them are girls.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.12. Despite significant improvements in the field of employment, the level of women employment in governmental offices is only 21%. This is due to many factors; the main factor is the low level of literacy among women.<sup>12</sup>
- 1.13. In each school, there is a council in which the parents of students, local elders and managers of school are members. The goal of this council is to encourage enrolment of children, particularly girls and monitoring the provision of the education.<sup>13</sup>
- 1.14. "Most of our students are the first generation of girls to get educated."<sup>14</sup>
- 1.15. Ten years ago, fewer than a million Afghan children attended school, according to UNICEF. Today, more than 8.2 million children are going to school.<sup>15</sup>
- 1.16. Afghanistan has one of the highest proportions of school age children in the world. About one-fifth of Afghans are between the ages of 7 and 12.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy McVeigh, *We don't want our burqas back: women in Afghanistan on the Taliban's return*, the guardian, January 12, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/13/burqa-women-afghanistan-taliban-return>. [Hereinafter **McVeigh, We don't want our burqas back**].

<sup>10</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 51.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 60.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 50.

<sup>14</sup> Allie Torgan, *Acid attacks, poison: What Afghan girls risk by going to school*, CNN.com, August 2, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/02/world/meast/cnnheroes-jan-afghan-school>. [Hereinafter **Torgan, Acid attacks**].

<sup>15</sup> McVeigh, *We don't want our burqas back*.

<sup>16</sup> Allie Torgan, *Despite deadly risks, Afghan girls take brave first step*, CNN.com, September 26, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/26/world/asia/cnnheroes-afghan-schoolgirls>. [Hereinafter **Torgan, Despite deadly risks**].

- 1.17. “We still have 1.2 million girls of school age who do not have access to schools,” said Catherine Mbengue, UNICEF Country Representative in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup>
2. **Afghanistan’s government has violated Article 10<sup>18</sup> of the CEDAW, which mandates the creation of equal opportunities for children to attend school, by failing to create a safe environment for girls to attend school.**
- 2.1. Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women came to force according to legislative decree issued in 2009 and is cited in the courts regularly.<sup>19</sup>
- 2.2. School Attacks, Generally
01. 2013. Monique Ross, head of the Young UN Women Sydney Australia, notes that “attacks on civilian women and children as they go to work or school have increased by 20 per cent in the past 12 months.”<sup>20</sup>
02. 2013. While the Paktia Province reports 40,000 females attending school, 31,000 of those girls are in grades one through five. Last year only 75 completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade and only 15 of them went on to higher education. Safety is a primary cause of the high drop-out rates and abductions fuel some of the fear.<sup>21</sup>
03. A total of 613 attacks on schools were recorded from January to November 2009.<sup>22</sup>
04. “In 2008 alone, there were 283 violent attacks on schools, resulting in 92 dead and 169 injured.”<sup>23</sup>
05. Anti-governmental insurgents are against women’s education and have closed girls’ schools. In some cases, they have burnt girls’ and boys’ schools.<sup>24</sup>
06. In years 1386 and 1387 (2007-2008), 673 schools were closed from which 453 are still closed. As a result, 200,000 students and 600 teachers cannot go to schools.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> UN Report, *Millions of Afghan children, mainly girls, still not attending schools*, UN News Centre, April 21, 2008, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26399&Cr=afghan&Cr1=#.UVGeio45vGi>.

<sup>18</sup> CEDAW Article 10.

<sup>19</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> Alexis Carey, *Leichardt resident helping Afghan Women and Girls*, theTelegraph.com.au, June 24, 2013, <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/inner-west/leichardt-resident-helping-afghan-women-and-girls/story-fngr8h4f-1226668651383>.

<sup>21</sup> Daud Khan, *Girls’ Education Cut Short in Southeast Afghan Province*, RAWA News, June 28, 2013, *Girls’ Education Cut Short in Southeast Afghan Province*, <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2013/06/28/girls-education-cut-short-in-southeast-afghan-province.html#ixzz2XhiGRGRP>.

<sup>22</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 53.

<sup>23</sup> Jen Banbury, *Girls’ education in Afghanistan*, UNICEF USA, <http://www.unicefusa.org/news/news-from-the-field/feeding-girls-hunger-to.html>. [Hereinafter **Banbury, Girls’ education in Afghanistan**].

<sup>24</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 53.

07. From the previously 673 closed schools during 2007-2008, 450 schools are still closed and 200,000 students and more than 6,000 teachers do not have access to education.<sup>26</sup>
  08. Despite the fact that general education up to secondary school is obligatory, those who prevent children from going to schools do not face any penalty and only the LEVAW imposes punishment on those who prevent women from education.<sup>27</sup>
  09. There were at least 185 documented attacks on schools and hospitals in Afghanistan last year, according to the United Nations. The majority were attributed to armed groups opposed to girls' education.<sup>28</sup>
  10. There have been reports of schoolgirls poisoned and beaten, head teachers assassinated and classrooms firebombed.<sup>29</sup>
  11. The High Commission on Elimination of Violence Against Women has reviewed 3,299 cases of violence against women, land and other properties, theft and others in Kabul and 2,920 cases in provinces and has instructed the responsible organizations to implement the decisions of the Commission.<sup>30</sup>
  12. In 2009 there were 50 attacks on schools across Afghanistan every month.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.3. School Attacks, Specific Incidents
01. In fall of 2012, "Ahmed" and his daughter just missed a roadside bomb explosion as they walked back home from her boarding school. Upon arriving home, he received a threatening phone call. Ahmed was told that if he continued taking his daughter to school they would try again.<sup>32</sup>
  02. 2012. 18-year-old Rahmaniya reports that her brother threatens to stab her to death or throw acid in her face if she continues to go to school.<sup>33</sup>
  03. "To shield students from attacks, Jan has built a new stone wall to surround the school. She also employs staff and guards who serve as human guinea pigs of sorts."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 56.

<sup>28</sup> Torgan, *Acid attacks*.

<sup>29</sup> McVeigh, *We don't want our burqas back*.

<sup>30</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 58.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, *Afghan girls' education backsliding*.

<sup>32</sup> Shabana Basij-Rasikh, Dare to Educate Afghan Girls, TEDxWomen 2012, [http://www.ted.com/talks/shabana\\_basij\\_rasikh\\_dare\\_to\\_educate\\_afghan\\_girls.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/shabana_basij_rasikh_dare_to_educate_afghan_girls.html).

<sup>33</sup> Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, *For Afghan Girl, Going to School Is Act Of Bravery*, NPR.com, September 3, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/09/03/160501527/for-afghan-girl-going-to-school-is-act-of-bravery>.

<sup>34</sup> Torgan, *Acid attacks*.

04. "When I go to classes, only half of my energy is spent on my studies because the other 50% is spent in dealing with harassment from the male students. The teachers do not interfere because they do not want to get involved. You cannot complain to the principal because they say there are not these problems at our university, and I often want to leave. I am so tired of it."<sup>35</sup>
- 2.4. School poisonings are becoming the preferred method of deterrence utilized by those opposed to female education.
01. June 2, 2013. Yet another girls' school was poisoned in the Faryab Province while neighboring Sar-i-pul saw many girls mysteriously lose consciousness. Faryab Public Health Director Abdul Ali Halim confirmed that girls had been rushed to the Afghan-Turk hospital while a doctor there said 77 girls received medical attention. That same afternoon in Sar-i-pul, 20 girls fell unconscious and had to receive medical attention, though there was no evidence of how they might have been poisoned.<sup>36</sup>
02. In response to increased instances of poisonings at schools the Afghan Education Ministry, Ghulam Farooq Wardak, has closed 550 schools across, affecting 300,000 students in eleven provinces.<sup>37</sup> While closing schools for security concerns, the minister has blamed students, threatening punishment. "From now on, if I find anyone saying 'I'm poisoned' and the poisoning is not proved by the hospital, I will punish the student... I will punish the teacher, I will punish the head teacher, and I will punish the school director."<sup>38</sup>
03. In the Faryab Province, on May 21, 2013, the Sherin Tagab district chief confirmed 80 school girls were poisoned at the Islam Qala girls' school.<sup>39</sup>
04. April 21, 2013. In Taluqan, as many as 74 schoolgirls from BibiMaryamHigh School received medical attention for possible poisoning. The incident has not yet been confirmed.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> McVeigh, *We don't want our burqas back*.

<sup>36</sup> Qutbuddin Kohi & Zabihullah Ihsas, *97 schoolgirls poisoned in Faryab, Sar-i-pul*, Pajhwok Afghan News, June 2, 2013, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/06/02/97-schoolgirls-poisoned-faryab-sar-i-pul>.

<sup>37</sup> Shwetika Baijal, *Afghan Girls School Poisoning: 74 Girls Poisoned in Suspected Taliban Gas Attack*, Polycymic.com, <http://www.polycymic.com/articles/36945/afghan-girls-school-poisoning-74-girls-poisoned-in-suspected-taliban-gas-attack>. [Hereinafter **Baijal, Afghan Girls School Poisoning**].

<sup>38</sup> AFP, *Afghan minister vows punishment for girls feigning illness*, Dawn.com, May 8, 2013, <http://dawn.com/2013/05/08/afghan-minister-vows-punishment-for-girls-feigning-illness/>.

<sup>39</sup> Sayed Jawad, *80 school girls poisoned in Faryab province in Afghanistan*, Khaama.com, May 21, 2013, <http://www.khaama.com/80-school-girls-poisoned-in-faryab-province-of-afghanistan-2403>.

- (a) The April 21<sup>st</sup> attack follows a similar one reported three days earlier in the same city. A dozen girls were hospitalized as a result of that attack.<sup>41</sup>
- (b) “Taluqan's schools witnessed four similar poisonings on girls' schools between May and June of 2012, poisoning 700 girls through contaminated drinking water and poisonous gas, prompting provincial officials mandating principals of schools to instruct staff and faculty to remain on the grounds after students' dismissal, and inspect the schools for any suspicious objects or activity. One such poisoning on May 23, 2012 affected 120 girls on the same day, and another poisoning of a local boys' school sickened 200 students.”<sup>42</sup>
05. On May 23, 2012, Al Farooq, an arm of the Taliban, released toxic powder into the air feeding into classrooms of a girls' school. 120 girls and 3 teachers were hospitalized in part of an offensive aimed at closing girls' schools and intimidating families into pulling their daughters out of school.
06. “Jan says she is so scared of poisoning that school staff members accompany children to the bathroom and make sure the children don't drink water from the faucet... Additionally, the day guard arrives early each morning to check for any gas or poison that might be leaked inside the classrooms.”<sup>43</sup>
- 2.5. One of the most important reasons behind violence against women is vast illiteracy among Afghan women and men.<sup>44</sup>
01. "People are crazy," said Razia Jan, founder of a girls' school outside Kabul. "The day we opened the school, (on) the other side of town, they threw hand grenades in a girls' school, and 100 girls were killed."<sup>45</sup>
02. A 2010 report by the Feinstein International Center on security and aid in the relatively secure Balkh Province found that children were not attending local schools because they had been built by the "wrong" people.<sup>46</sup>
- 2.6. War and Conflict, Generally

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<sup>40</sup> Folad Hammad, *Afghan girls' school feared hit by poison gas*, REUTERS, April 29, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/21/us-afghanistan-poisoning-idUSBRE93K09V20130421>.

<sup>41</sup> Baijal, *Afghan Girls School Poisoning*.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> Torgan, *Acid attacks*.

<sup>44</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 56.

<sup>45</sup> Torgan, *Acid attacks*.

<sup>46</sup> Kelly, *Afghan girls' education backsliding*.

01. One estimate counts 530 schools that have been closed due to Taliban-led insurgency and the ensuing conflict with NATO. According to a UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report, the year 2012 saw 488 children killed and another 814 wounded in conflict-related incidents.<sup>47</sup>
  02. The most important reasons for girls' low attendance in some areas are security and lack of space and buildings for girls' schools.<sup>48</sup>
  03. Girls account for 60% of the 4.2 million children not getting any education. "Most live in rural districts and the southern and eastern province where Nato-Taliban clashes have been most fierce."<sup>49</sup>
3. **Afghanistan's government has violated Article 16<sup>50</sup> of the CEDAW, which mandates the right to freely choose a spouse and bans the betrothal of children, by allowing the continued practice of forced marriage of young girls. In doing so, the government has also violated Article 10<sup>51</sup> of the CEDAW, as the betrothal of young girls requires those girls to drop out of school and generally contributes to inequality in general and higher education.**
- 3.1. Generally
01. In June 2013, the Afghan Parliament considered and rejected a measure that would have made it illegal for men to marry girls under the age of 16. Opponents believed the measure went against Islamic principles.<sup>52</sup>
  02. The definition of force marriage in international conventions includes all those marriages that one party to the marriage does not have consent. Based on this definition, the underage marriage is considered forced marriage. Likewise the marriages of widows without their consent and the marriage in which the girl is given as BAAD (giving girls as blood price) are considered forced marriages.<sup>53</sup>
  03. Early marriages forces girls to leave the school.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Farid Behbud, *Afghan children face bleak future amidst poverty, continued violence*, Xinhuanet.com, June 1, 2013, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-06/01/c\\_132423763.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-06/01/c_132423763.htm).

<sup>48</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 52.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew North, *Successes and challenges in Afghan girls' education*, BBC, October 11, 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19911341>.

<sup>50</sup> CEDAW Article 16.

<sup>51</sup> CEDAW Article 10.

<sup>52</sup> Cheryl K. Chumley, *Afghan parliament upholds right to marry children*, The Washington Times, June 10, 2013, [http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/10/afghan-parliament-upholds-right-marry-children/?utm\\_source=RSS\\_Feed&utm\\_medium=RSS](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jun/10/afghan-parliament-upholds-right-marry-children/?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS).

<sup>53</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 21.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* at 53.

04. The traditions which lead to child or forced marriages such as BAAD (giving girls as blood price), BADAL (marriage of one boy and one girl with another girl and boy from the other family respectively) and exchange of girls for money, properties, land or loans do exist in the country.<sup>55</sup>
  05. Afghanistan Human Development Report (2007) shows in many marriages, the girls are under 16 to 6 years old and some of the marriages are done without the consent of the girls and boys. Most of these marriages prevent girls from their civil rights such as education.<sup>56</sup>
  06. As part of its achievements, The High Commission on Elimination of Violence Against Women has prepared its 5-year strategy and has conducted study trips and seminars on child and forced marriages which lead to the endorsement of prohibition of the Eradication of Child and Forced Marriage Protocol.<sup>57</sup>
  07. AIHRC has announced 6.7% of the marriages are forced marriages.<sup>58</sup>
  08. Separate classes and facilities with different courses regarding house management, child development and growth, are provided for married girl student.<sup>59</sup>
  09. According to Afghanistan laws, registration of marriages and divorces in courts are voluntary.<sup>60</sup>
  10. Child and early marriages are very common in rural areas.<sup>61</sup>
  11. The average age of marriage is 17.9 for women. Women who marry under the age of 15 make up 3% of married women.<sup>62</sup>
  12. From the total of 1940 registered cases within the Ministry of Women's Affairs during 2006-2009, 30% of the marriages occurred at an early age.<sup>63</sup>
- 3.2. Overcoming cultural barriers is the "first challenge for girls' education in Afghanistan," says FazlulHaque, UNICEF Chief of Education for Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup>
01. "[I]f you aren't married in Afghanistan, that's seen as a problem. If you aren't letting your girls go get married, this will be a shame for your family. Finally, Afghans typically

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<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 96.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 97.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.* at 97.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at 97.

<sup>64</sup> Banbury, *Girls' education in Afghanistan*.

have very large families, from four to sometimes 12 children, even 15. How can they feed their families with only one male in the household working while the rest of the family is spending? Many families decide to just let their girls get married instead of go to school because they don't have enough resources to feed them.”<sup>65</sup>

02. The period between pregnancies for one third of women is 18 months or less and 24 months for half of the women.<sup>66</sup>

03. In most families, parents or close relatives decide on the daughters' marriage.<sup>67</sup>

04. Civil Law has determined 18 years of age for men and 16 for women as the minimum age for marriage.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3. Specific Instances

01. 2011. After SaharGul's father died, she went to live with her stepbrother, Mohammed. Despite her hard work, Mohammed's wife resented the girl. At age 13, she was sold for over \$5,000 and had to move hundreds of miles away with her new husband, GhulamSakhi. Refusing to consummate the marriage, Sahar would be drugged by her mother-in-law and raped by her husband. Facing physical abuse and torture, she was made to live in the cellar, bound, tied, and sleeping on the floor.<sup>69</sup>

02. "Amina", aged 12, was forced to marry and bear a child so that her brother could receive the dowry.<sup>70</sup>

## 4. **Afghanistan's government has violated Article 10<sup>71</sup> of the CEDAW by failing to bridge the gap in the number of male and female school teachers.**

### 4.1. Generally

01. In Afghanistan boys and girls have separate schools and only students in grades 1 to 3 study in co-educational classes.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Asia Foundation: Q&A Survey Findings Reveal Ongoing Challenges for Afghan Women, with NajlaAyubi, November 16, 2011, <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2011/11/16/qa-survey-findings-reveal-ongoing-challenges-for-afghan-women/>. [Hereinafter *Asia Foundation*].

<sup>66</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 78.

<sup>67</sup> *Id.* at 94.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 97.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Bowley, *Wed and Tortured at 13, Afghan Girls Finds Rare Justice*, NY Times, August 11, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/world/asia/wed-and-tortured-at-13-afghan-girl-finds-rare-justice.html?ref=women&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/world/asia/wed-and-tortured-at-13-afghan-girl-finds-rare-justice.html?ref=women&_r=0).

<sup>70</sup> Betsy Anderson, *'Girl Rising': How to Help? Give, Share, and Rise Up*, CNN.com, May 22, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/04/30/world/iyw-girl-rising/index.html>.

<sup>71</sup> CEDAW Article 10.

<sup>72</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 51.

02. A number of schools do not have enough teachers; therefore, girls who are interested in studying upper grades are not able to continue their education.<sup>73</sup>
03. The majority of teachers in girls' schools are women, but in case of lack of female teachers, male teachers also teach girls. Examinations for male and female students in school are the same and there is no discrimination against male or female students.<sup>74</sup>
04. "Although girls' enrollment is higher now at the primary school level, as you approach 12th grade, that drops significantly. This is in part due to a lack of trained female teachers, and the families aren't letting the girls go and study under male teachers. If there are no female teachers in one village, the family will definitely not let their girls travel to another village because of security concerns."<sup>75</sup>
05. "The number of available female teachers is insufficient to meet demand. More than a quarter (26.4%) of the individuals interviewed named the lack of a female teacher as a major obstacle to girls' access to education. More than two-thirds of teachers (68.4%) reported that their school does not have enough teachers. Of these teachers, more than half (54.6%) stated that they need only female teachers, 27.3% said they need both male and female teachers, 12.3% said they only need additional male teachers and 5.7% were unsure."<sup>76</sup>
06. According to the Higher Education Strategy, 1,000 faculty board members work in Afghan universities and it is planned to employ other 18,000 members for universities. Female lecturers will be hired in the process.<sup>77</sup>
07. Women represent 16% of lecturers in Afghanistan state universities with only 419 of 2,539 lecturers being women.<sup>78</sup>
08. NAPWA has a target of 30% women in governmental positions until the end of 2013. To reach this goal, the government will take steps towards positive CEDAW/C/AFG/1-2 34 11-64682 discrimination in employment, increasing number of female teachers, increasing capacity-building programs for women, emphasizing women's education,

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<sup>73</sup> *Id.* at 53.

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> Asia Foundation.

<sup>76</sup> Joint Briefing Paper, *High Stakes; Girls' Education in Afghanistan*, Oxfam, February 24, 2011, <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/afghanistan-girls-education-022411.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 59.

<sup>78</sup> *Id.* at 58.

providing educational scholarships for women and organizing awareness programs on the role of women in their communities.<sup>79</sup>

09. The Afghanistan Compact has also set a target of CEDAW/C/AFG/1-2 50 11-64682 inclusion of 75% of boys and 60% of girls in schools. This Compact also sets the indicator to increase the percentage of female teachers by 50% by the year 2010.<sup>80</sup>
  10. In provinces with a need for female specialists, especially in war stricken such as Kandahar and backward areas, more practical measures have been taken to absorb and invite women.<sup>81</sup>
  11. Only 31% of all teachers in Afghanistan are female and a disproportionate amount of those women are in urban areas.<sup>82</sup>
  12. “There are 400 rural districts. In 200 of them, there are no female teachers or girls’ schools.”<sup>83</sup>
  13. Under EQUIP II (Education Quality Improvement Project) a system of scholarships has been initiated for female teachers resulting in a total of 3,500 female teachers receiving scholarships in Teacher Training Centers.<sup>84</sup>
  14. To address the critical need for qualified teachers, USAID helped train more than 74,000 Ministry of Education (MoE) teachers, of which 31 percent were female. USAID’s CBE project has allowed approximately 105,000 students (65 percent female) to attend schools in remote locations, which were beyond the reach of MoE schools. In 2012, USAID’s work on teacher training, community-based education, literacy training, and textbook printing were largely shifted to direct, on-budget assistance to the MoE.<sup>85</sup>
- 4.2. Roles of Female Teachers
01. Many families think that government and NGOs are not suitable environments for women to work. Many women working in the governmental sector work as teachers.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Id.* at 34.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.* at 49-50.

<sup>81</sup> *Id.* at 34.

<sup>82</sup> Torgan, *Despite deadly risks*.

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*

<sup>84</sup> Press Release, *Government of Afghanistan Signs \$125 million Grant with the World Bank to Increase Equitable Access to Quality Basic Education*, World Bank, September 5, 2012, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2012/09/05/afghanistan-grant-increase-equitable-access-education>.

<sup>85</sup> USAID, *Education: Increasing access to quality education and suitable learning environments*.

<sup>86</sup> UNCEDAW Report at 61.

02. Teachers usually teach for half a day then the other half of the day is spent doing household chores and taking care of their own children.<sup>87</sup>
03. To improve rural numbers, Save the Children has implemented high school training programs so girls can become teachers right after graduation.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> Torgan, *Despite deadly risks.*

## APPENDIX

### Transcript of Recorded Interview on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013

**Interviewees:** Bibi Bahrami, founder of AWAKEN and Dr. Mohammad Bahrami, M.D.

**Interviewers:** Timothy Weber, J.D., Ryan Naylor, and Natalie Carpenter

*Upon review of an initial draft of the Report and discussion of the three focus points (violence, early marriage and lack of female teachers), the interview began.*

**Bibi:** I think when it comes to the violence you are asking about at our school, unfortunately, security is not in place overall throughout Afghanistan.

**Ryan:** Right

**Bibi:** It is very, very sad. That would be my first issue with sending my child, especially a girl, to school. That is the biggest issue and the reason that a lot of the families in the villages do not allow their girls to go to school; because of the lack of security and the violence.

**Ryan:** Especially if there is not a school nearby in your neighborhood, you can't go 20 miles away.

**Bibi:** Exactly. That is the exact reason that we built a school in the area. I am from the village and have some family members and friends and I know people in the area. With a lot of the families that I visited, that was part of the reason that a lot of the girls were deprived of education, because they had to travel so many miles to a school, which they used to do and it was not a problem, but now the violence and the security makes it a different situation.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Kidnapping.

**Bibi:** Yes; kidnapping and boys bothering them on the way and giving them hard time. And as a mother, I would not let my child walk to school and be disturbed on the way even though education is very important to me. And education is not important to too many people in the village in the first place because they are not as educated. Overall, the system in Afghanistan is 20% education unfortunately. Even to someone that it is very important, they will still try to avoid school because of the security problems. That is a big issue.

**Dr. Bahrami:** My own brother, I have four brothers in that village, I bought him a mini-van just for the girls to take them from the village to the school. My older brother is very conservative, so he didn't want the girls when they became a certain age to still go all the way there even in a mini-van because they still could be exposed to some violence. Somebody could stop them and kidnap them. This has happened to our family who are there now.

**Bibi:** When I went to the village again to meet with these girls, I mean, some of these girls were crying saying they really need the school in the area and up to like even high school, because you know we had up to sixth grade and we went to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but now we are hoping, planning for high school graduation from our school. These girls are stopping at an even younger age to be together with the boys because girls develop and grow and the parents feel insecure. The parents ask if we can make the school to high school because the girls say they want to finish high school. And that is a personal experience that I have had visiting girls who have cried to me that they are not able to participate in education because of the violence and security. Another example is the female teacher. I mean, again, so many personal experiences, even within our own family members who live in the village and some other relatives and friends, and they always say that we want a female teacher for their child. This is one of the struggles we have. Some of these girls stop going to school because we could not find a female teacher. We had a male teacher there, even though he was an elderly man, a lot of the girls still got out because of that. At the time, I didn't know that, I had the director there, and then I asked him, how can you allow that? You know our mission, that I will do anything, even if I have to pay double for a woman, and that I want a female because this is the whole purpose of making the school there, and the girls are not coming because they are older and we don't have a female teacher there. And then he said, OK, he is going to look in the city and put paper everywhere to find a female teacher. I said even if I have to pay double. It's the same thing when we go to the clinic, we had a male doctor, and a lot of the woman, they are not comfortable being seen by a male doctor.

**Ryan:** Women who have gone and gotten an education, say there are all these women who go to university in Kabul, is there a willingness to then come back to the village and teach, or do these women try to find jobs in the bigger cities and things like that?

**Dr. Bahrami:** That is a very good question. The more you are in the big cities, you will have some security. I mean there are still bombs and things but if you go to the periphery, in the

country, almost everybody tries to bribe. Especially for a woman to go from the city to the country would almost be impossible. The best way to solve this problem is, like what we did through AWAKEN, go and bring the education to them there. Let the local girls get educated. For example, in Jalalabad city, I don't think, it would be very difficult for the girls to go to even Bistro district, which is maybe 5 miles. It would be difficult for them or they are unwilling because of whatever issue, culturally, to go and teach. So if you find the teachers at that village, educate them, some of these girls will go to Jalalabad, live there, get educated there, the girls have roots in the village, they have a family there. That is the only way I could see. The other thing I think, on a governmental level, is I think we continue to have a struggle, and that struggle will not resolve until we go through some pain and hurting and to have more woman educated. This cultural boundary will not resolve because I think if there are more woman, more mothers educated, eventually it will rub off on their father and their husbands and on the society because women have a lot, even though women are suppressed, but still women have a lot of power inside the house. Eventually, I want my girls to be educated. It is really painful, in my own family there, I have a bunch of nephews, probably 100 nephews and nieces. The nieces, the girls are much smarter, much more intelligent, much more willing to go to school. And the boys are very naughty and irresponsible. That is the truth.

*Break*

**Bibi:** I think I heard on NPR that more girls are going to school.

**Tim:** Yes, more women are going to college here in the States.

**Bibi:** Yes, yes. But that is the system, send your girls to school, that is where these teachers are coming from. If you don't educate your girls, how do you expect to have female teachers? And we need to invest in this now for the future.

**Natalie:** When you have gone and talked to the girls, have you like talked to them about being teachers?

**Bibi:** Oh yes, most definitely. I have encouraged them. When I go to the school, there are hundreds of kids, and they all come out to me. There is a picture of me standing in a crowd of hundreds, I was trying to talk to them, and they were excited to see me because they knew I

started the school for them. So I would ask them, what do you want to be, trying to encourage them. Who wants to be a teacher for example, and all the girls would raise their hands. Who wants to be a doctor, and all would raise their hands. And I try to go to different fields, just to encourage them. That is the hope, to have the roots and foundations of education. That is what I believe is the key to life. Not only educating women, I mean we focus on the girls, but I think educating the family, the husband, is very important. I think the whole family needs to be educated. The parents need to be educated to understand the importance of education because if you do educate a woman for example, no matter how much she tries, if the husband is not supportive, or he does not have the education mentality, the poor lady is going to sit at home no matter what. I mean, at least she will be able to encourage her children for the future. But for things to be well-rounded, it must be the whole family.

**Ryan:** With AWAKEN, maybe when you were starting the school or just in operating the school, how much support or resistance do you get from the local government or the councils or the people?

**Tim:** Or the nongovernmental people who might be unsupportive of the idea?

**Bibi:** I think that personally, it is a blessing that my older brother, who works for the government, was that connection, when we had some issues when the land was donated to us. There is a bunch of land that my father and another leader own in that village. They donated the land. And we said we are going to build a school, there were some uh...you know villages are normally run by the elder, there is no government or security, there is somebody in charge, the elderly normally have a big say...

**Dr. Bahrami:** They call it Malik, the elderly...

**Bibi:** Yes. There were some people that resisted; they were like, why are we here to do this? What we did was get those people involved and being a part of it. I am not doing this for myself, I have no other motive but your motive, what your dreams are and what you wish to have in this area for your children, and then explain to them, we had a meeting inviting the elderly and explaining the situation why we are doing this, AWAKEN is not doing it for AWAKEN, AWAKEN is doing it for you, what do you guys want to do? Getting them involved and taking partnership in this made a big difference. In the beginning we had some resistance even having

the school there. What we did was we told the director to make sure that they all agree on the paper too. A lot of them cannot write, but they can put their thumb. Everybody signed, the elderly, they agreed before we even built the school. See, that was the advantage. There are a lot of situations when you see a big problem, and people say, Oh, I want to do this for you, some of this mentality, some of the United States, we have that unfortunately. Because that is why Greg Moterson was so successful, he built hundreds of schools, even though there was some, what do you call it, discrimination against him?

**Dr. Bahrami:** Negative information.

**Bibi:** Negative information recently about him unfortunately, but he was so successful because of that. He just went and visited families like this and was a part of their situation and understood the woman, the children, and the individuals in the villages and what they want, what they need. And he would act accordingly, and that is why he was so successful. And some people when they do it, they burn the school. Thank God, it has been twelve years and we have never had that kind of negative reaction. We have just a little against the school, like they took their girls out of school because we don't have a female teacher at a certain point or something happened on the way to school because they still have to walk. Some of these small, small issues, but no big issues.

**Tim:** You said that there have been some times where there have been issues with girls getting harassed on the way to school?

**Bibi:** Yes, because in the village, there are a lot of stones, and sometimes boys will pick them up and try to hit the girls. That has happened.

**Dr. Bahrami:** What Bibi said, we are from the same village area. I think that, as far as the authority, there is no resistance from them. And I think the leaders as well, they were very ready because they didn't want their children to go far away for school. I think that the only problem that Bibi is referring to is we are from that village, and we are helping them, there is always suspicion. You know, like the Bahramis, do they have some extra motive to build the school for them, you know, something like that. Thank God we don't, but a lot of people, when they do something, there is something else in it, something behind it. So people are suspicious. Then they found out that we had no desires of anything of our name, our fame, we just want the school.

**Bibi:** Yes and also, we told them that once the school was built, it would be given to the Ministry of Education. It's not like we run it because if we ran it on our own, they would not be licensed on the next level. It has to be through the Ministry of Education. We give it to them, we follow their rules. And just as a little incentive we try to support the teacher to make sure there is a female teacher and that it runs.

**Dr. Bahrami:** And that school, when we actually began, they were sitting on the floors. Then we came up to sixth grade, then ninth grade, and now it is a high school. We do need more rooms for them though.

**Bibi:** Yes, we added 4 more rooms once we went from 6th grade to 9th grade, but now because it is going to 12th grade, we probably need more rooms. It is very populated, and people are interested and that is the blessing, but once you start something, there may be some resistance, but once they see the advantage and that you are really doing it for them, people are interested. Just look how rapidly, in just a few years, our school has grown, more than tripled.

**Tim:** So the government controls the curriculum?

**Bibi:** Basically.

**Tim:** Do they have, and this is just for as we are thinking about our recommendations, this was something that we shot around, do they have any cultural education or exchange type classes? Do they teach about how other people around the world live, their cultures? Is that part of the curriculum, because that was something that we saw might help, not saying that this is better than that, just saying this is New Zealand's culture, etc.? Is there anything like that, because we thought that would help with the underlying issue of opening people's minds to other cultures.

**Ryan:** Other cultures, but also gender.

**Tim:** Yes, talking about how gender roles are in the U.S.

**Bibi:** I don't know, the school curriculum is mainly like they teach history and geography.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Yes and actually even in the older days, there is much more, I don't know how in-depth it is, but there is teaching about other cultures. I don't know how modernized it is, talking

about how the woman has come up, but they do teach it some. So to answer your question, they do, but how dated they are, I don't know.

**Tim:** I would agree with you Bibi that education is important, because as you talked about earlier, it isn't just about educating the girls, it is about educating the boys too. We don't just want the boys to be smart, we want them to know, hey, these girls can be pretty darn smart too, and that they can do it too. You want that education of the children, because then, when they come up, they will be at least a little bit less like the previous generation. And so that is how you approach it generationally, doing incremental change.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Yes. Also, another important part, because we are discussing this, there is a lot of communication, like Bibi said, with the local people. I have had several discussions, even arguments with Bibi's father. Bibi's father always will want his wife or his daughter to go to a female doctor. I say ok, female doctor, I agree with you, but God will not suddenly drop angel doctors from the sky. Where do these female doctors come from? Where do these female professors come from? Where do these female teachers come from? They come from sacrifices. You need to send your children, you need take the risk, you need to send your girls school to become a teacher, to become a doctor, to become engineer, to become a social worker.

**Bibi:** Yes, my father was one of the community leaders, of the conservative group.

**Dr. Bahrami:** So I think the government does a poor job, and outside NGOs do a poor job. They do not understand the culture. They really don't. They see this as important. Ok, if it's important, you cannot just shove this importance to the society. You have to know the character of the society and you have to know the type of the society, the religiosity. But here, it is more cultural, because in our religion, it says both man and woman should be educated. It's obligatory to be educated.

**Bibi:** It is very clear on that.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Yes, so it is really cultural. And the government does a poor job to work with these leaders and educate them. Listen, these will become teachers, and next year then you will have a woman teacher, woman doctor, woman engineer, and woman vaccinator, so they will be coming to your house.

**Bibi:** Yes, I think gradually that is happening. Using my father as an example, when I brought my father here to the United States, he was very conservative. I mean, it was how he had grown up, I don't blame him. All your life you have lived this way. That's your lifestyle, this is what you know is the right thing, you are the leader. Everybody respected him so highly for his opinion and that's how it was. I mean, that is how he was. And even when I was bringing him here, my husband asked why I was bringing him here because he is a very, very strong individual, like ten guys could not even touch him. But my husband asked why are you bringing him here because he is going to see all different people, people who are not covered, who aren't religious, and he is very, very religious, and he might cause us a problem here. I said no, he is going to be fine. We just have to give him the opportunity. You can't just say, these individuals are this way; no, I don't believe in that, you have to give them the opportunity. I brought him here for medical treatment, I thought he would be against me driving him everywhere. A woman driving a man?

**Dr. Bahrami:** It was a shock for him.

**Bibi:** It is a huge deal.

**Bibi:** But then I took my father everywhere; to the doctor, because I had to do everything. My husband has to see patients, and then comes home, he didn't know about the appointments I was making or where I was taking my father, he was busy. I had to do it all, and my father never said anything. I took him everywhere, I did everything, I didn't offer anything, and I didn't say anything. Sometimes, I would argue with him, but he was fine. I mean, he was so impressed, I would take him to the store, and buy things, and if I didn't like them I would take it back, and the store would say thank you so much. Back home, if you get out of the store, they will not take it from you. All these positive things, we have good and bad in every society. But what he imagined, what he had heard, unfortunately the media portrays the U.S. to the world negatively. He was crying. He said daughter, I did not imagine how you live your life here. He would see my children coming home and praying. He would have to force his children to pray in Afghanistan. My kids, how they have been brought up is a blessing. They come home and know what is expected of them. They do their prayers, they do all their studies, I don't tell my children to do homework; they know to do it. Thank God. They worry about it, not me. When my father saw the whole situation, he was just blown away. So giving him this opportunity, opening his mind

and his heart, his vision and opinion was changed totally, what he thought about the U.S. He was so impressed. So in terms of education, he saw my personal example. I am the only child among 16 children who he has benefited out of this. The whole family has benefited out of my little education, out of my opportunity that God brought me here to this society. How much benefit the whole family has gotten! If that's not enough, then too bad. I think though that it has made a difference in his life. I mean he is still conservative in certain areas.

**Tim:** Well that's ok. You can be conservative, that's not a problem.

**Dr. Bahrami:** He was actually very impressed by American culture though because we have very good relationships with our neighbors. Besides, he saw the politeness of the people, and the willingness to serve. I mean, he became an ambassador of American culture there. People would say, you are so brainwashed by America. He would tell them, listen, how these people are here talking about prayer, in America, people do it. Like your neighbors will come, people will help. The kindness. You go to the doctor, the nurses will take care of you.

**Bibi:** He saw the practical lifestyle here, and he is educated about the religious part, I mean, this is what people should be doing. Even the Muslim or any, Christian, whoever, that is what the society should be. And that is why he was so impressed because of all the good actions here.

**Tim:** I think that is a perfect example of this idea of cultural exchange. From hearing you guys talk about really working with the elders of a community, and the people there, to make sure you are communicating to them that this is about their needs and them being a partner in it. That idea combined with this idea from your father, Bibi, coming over here and obviously having a positive experience here. Even going there, if I were to go there, I would understand the culture infinitely more than if I just read about it. Immersing yourself in a culture is always going to have that kind of effect. So, I think combining these ideas, we kind of get something we could work with in terms of a recommendation of having this cultural exchange and having people, maybe a leader from a community where there is going to be a school go somewhere else, it doesn't have to be the U.S., just somewhere where there is universal education, to just recommend to the government to facilitate this kind of cultural education; and also to the NGOs operating there, to be that partner. Because it sounds like that is why you have had so much success. Partnering with people and also the support, you know, that you said your dad became a

proponent of you and was also an important person in the community. That definitely helped pave the road for your success. So I think these two things are important, and they should be part of our recommendation.

**Bibi:** Yes, having them as a partner removes many of the obstacles that could occur and is very, very important.

**Dr. Bahrami:** You are very right, Tim, I think what happens is if you ask each of those leaders individually, each one would want their children, their daughters, to have a nice life. What happens is because of the cultural issue; they cannot transition or translate that want into reality. They want to have that good life, and they must ask how can this good life come? You have to have sacrifices.

**Bibi:** Yes, it's a struggle. I've been here 26 or so years, and trying to even work with our family is a struggle.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Her brothers resisted.

**Bibi:** Yes, I have a brother here who is resisting sending his girls to get an education. Six girls and two boys, and he was saying to focus on the boys' education, and I said no, the girls as well. I mean, you sacrifice anything that God has brought you here, it's an opportunity to have your children educated. The society offers an education. I mean it's there too, but unfortunately, when they came from that system to here, they went to 6th or 7th grade, but that is like kindergarten here. The education level there is very, very poor. They had to learn a lot to catch up to at least be getting a passing grade. But anyway, that's the situation. I think you got the point. In order to be successful in anything, whether here or anywhere, you have to, there is a very wise saying that I should memorize, teach me to...

**Tim:** Is it about the fish?

**Bibi:** Yes.

**Tim:** Give me a fish and I'm not hungry today, teach me to fish, and I won't be hungry tomorrow? Something like that?

**Bibi:** That is one thing, but there is something else. Involve me and I will remember forever, something like that. Then we come to the marriage part. The marriage is unfortunate, but again that has to do with education. What it is, the society, they are lucky to go through 6<sup>th</sup> grade as girls; they are very lucky to get through high school. If they are more than lucky, they will go to college, a very small percentage. And what it is, the early marriage becomes like, something the girls can look forward to after 6<sup>th</sup> grade. They are sitting at home at 15, and some of them are ready to get married. And the society doesn't let them go to school, when they see she is tall and she has developed. Even my daughter, she is 12, back in Afghanistan people would be coming to ask for her to get married. She is 12 years old, but the lack of education, she is a big girl, she is developed, she has gone through puberty, that is it. That is how they get involved. But the reason is some of the girls; they don't have much say, especially in the rural area. But there is nothing else for them except helping their mom cooking and cleaning and washing or whatever. There is nothing that they look forward to. Marriage, of course, for all of us is a big deal in life. But that is like the one thing that they look forward to. That is why the education is not there.

**Ryan:** You said that they are helping their mother cooking and cleaning, but then they may be thinking they could be doing that for their own family. Why are you still at home? You know.

**Bibi:** Right, so you can have your own house and you can start to have kids. There is no birth control, which again is lack of education. Then they have babies every year, and then there is the poverty situation, it's just a vicious cycle. That is why I say the key to life is education.

**Dr. Bahrami:** I think if you look at the education part and what Bibi said, if you take an example, like I remember in college and also the forced marriages. A lot of the time now in the villages, a lot of the time by force or the parents deciding, girls don't say much. That is how it is. I think obviously there is a culture issue, but it is being changed by education. So for example, if the girls are going to high school, even like my daughter, she is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and if they weren't educated, they would say she is ready to marry, but if she is going to school I think parents, even if they are not educated, let her finish at least high school. And if they are a little bit more educated, maybe college. By then, hopefully when people go to college, by then, they meet people. And then boys and girls both go to their parents, so there is change. But I think in villages and also a lot of cities, education is not there, vision is not there, that vision of a better quality of life will come with education. Nobody can really process that because the educational

system is not there. Early and arranged marriages, I think, 99 percent is lack of education and also cultural. But the cultural part can be broken by education. Because, when the girls, they get to college, even 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, nowadays they will say, no, I am not going to marry, and the parents will listen. They will say I am going to finish my high school. Parents are kind.

**Bibi:** Of course, all parents want the best for their children.

**Dr. Bahrami:** So the early marriage and the forced marriage is all intertwined.

**Bibi:** Yes, I mean obviously the parents will try, as a cultural thing. Like even here, I would do the same for my children because I love them so much; try and find a family that fits ours, and try to find the best for their child. Some of them might not be given a choice, but they will trust their parents. Like even my son who is in medical school, Mom, I trust you, you can find me someone you think will work for me, and I can just meet her. I have no problem with that. But there are some who will say, regardless of education level or where they live, no, I don't like this person, I don't like this family. And the parents listen. It is common both ways. Does that answer your question?

**Tim:** Yes, about marriage. You said though that one of the reasons that they get married early is that they don't have much else to do. Does AWAKEN offer some sort of outreach? Because it is amazing to educate people, of course, but education is life long, you don't just graduate from "education." Like when I graduated from law school, my education doesn't stop there. This has been very educational. You learn all of your life. And opportunities to learn are important. That is something AWAKEN is, an opportunity for them to be educated. So I guess my question is, what kind of outreach does AWAKEN have or do you think that AWAKEN could have because if they could come to the school and participate, then that would give the girls something to do.

**Bibi:** Yes, we do the vocational center. For example, some will go to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and then go home, but we have the vocational center. This is one of the big opportunities that I want to give to these girls, that they can learn to do something more with their life. They can learn to sew, and basically get normal education. So women can come back to learn to read and write or learn about hygiene. We educate them about pregnancy and life and all those things. And that is such an incentive for all these young girls, they come there because we give them a sewing machine when they complete the 6 month course, and that is a huge deal for them to come and receive the

sewing machine. They own their machine, and that is a big deal, and a lot of the girls are coming to get those. They don't own much. It is a basic life in the village, you know, survival matters. And I think that is one of the things that AWAKEN is helping, maybe not directly. We go from one village to another to make it convenient. Like usually 30 to 35 women will attend. And some girls work in the clinic, some assisting doctors and nurses, and some do cleaning.

**Tim:** I think that helps with not only providing the opportunity, but also getting past the cultural mindset of, OK, you have turned 15 so this is what you as a woman will do, in part, because there is nothing else out there. And you having these opportunities to come back and get a sewing machine, you know, the woman can be economically part of the society. That will help change people's mindset about what the role of women is.

**Bibi:** It helps with self-sufficiency and independence.

**Natalie:** So there are adult women coming back and taking classes?

**Bibi:** Yes.

**Dr. Bahrami:** There is also a night school for people already in the workplace and some other things for them. Obviously though, this is only offered in the big cities. There is very little in the rural area.

**Bibi:** And that is why I wanted to start one.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Vocational training is great, but you also want to emphasize, in your recommendation, that culturally, whatever you do should be taken to the people. That is the only thing that will work. For example, she talked about the vocational center opening a sewing machine class in that village, even for them traveling one mile, because many of them are having many children, is far because they have to find someone to take care of their children. When people have 8, 9, 10 children, they have to take care of them, and that is all they know. So hopefully education will help people understand that they should have smaller families.

**Bibi:** Yes, so, whether or not the husband says it is ok, if the people have to travel far, it is not practical because they have to find someone to watch their children in the other village. That is why, what I try to do, I put myself in their shoes. I cannot just criticize them. For instance, it is

criticized that educational opportunities are not being given to women there, but the opportunity is not being given to men either. Even though we are focusing on girls, we have so many males who are affected, too. In terms of getting into a university, the number is very limited. If only a few men are getting into the university, and the men are typically responsible as the breadwinner, religiously and culturally. What I am saying is, since the men are obligated to earn for their family, then I would rather send my husband to the university than myself. I am already busy with my children being a mother. Me going and leaving my husband to run the house, I would not even trust him to do it right. That is another thing. We don't know what is happening. We don't know how many opportunities there are for everyone in general.

**Tim:** How many opportunities there are for higher education?

**Bibi:** Right, for higher education. There are few. It is very, very hard to get in.

**Dr. Bahrami:** And job wise too. Because suddenly, they open so many schools and private university, when these people graduate there are few jobs. There needs to be more vocational training. I think they are doing some, but not enough. So people are graduating, and then they think, where are the jobs? Especially when the Americans leave, where are the jobs? So people may be demonstrating, and I don't know.

**Bibi:** And there is a lot of corruption too unfortunately, everywhere. And getting in to certain university, so-and-so's son might get accepted, but not my son who is even trying twice as hard.

**Tim:** And he might even have higher qualifications.

**Bibi:** Exactly. And that is unfortunate, and something I cannot accept, but it is there.

**Dr. Bahrami:** That is what we talked about last time, Tim, with the Pashtun and the Farsi.

**Tim:** Right. I remember. I guess to use that as a transition, the professors who came over from Afghanistan, have they talked about their experience here much? Was it a positive experience?

**Bibi:** Oh yeah, one of them left a message the other day. They gave a presentation before they left, but we were not there. Overall, their experience was very positive.

**Tim:** Great, I think that, you talk about having the people involved, and even with the universities, this kind of all flows together. Because maybe you take someone who graduated over there, and you bring them over here for three months to experience things. Or they can go elsewhere.

**Dr. Bahrami:** Yes. One of the things that I remember, they really saw the work ethics and the responsibility of the professors. How the professor really goes out of their way to help their students. Back home, the cultural overall is rough, so the people are rough. But here they saw the professors going out of their way and they were impressed. The second thing, they were impressed with how much they learned in the three months even with traveling. The actual journalism, how much they learned about the principal of journalism, how to respect, how to be non-bias, and forget about your religiosity and group, and then the hardworking part. So those factors were very impressive.

**Bibi:** Because back home, you may not even have a book, and then the professor comes, boom, boom, boom, and it is expected. There is no interaction, there is just a lecture.

**Tim:** Do you have internet?

**Bibi:** No, unfortunately not.

**Tim:** I would love to help do that.

**Ryan:** Why is that? What has to happen?

**Bibi:** The power is the major thing.

**Bibi:** We had thought about having a sister school here in the U.S. and having our kids Skype with the kids here.

**Tim:** And that goes back to the idea of a cultural exchange.

**Bibi:** Yes.

**Tim:** And that is good for kids in the U.S. too because I think we can all agree that people being exposed to other cultures is good for people everywhere, not just for people in Afghanistan.