
Primary School Students' Mental Wellbeing at Schools Considering the Current Situation in Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the mental wellbeing of children in primary school in Afghanistan during periods of political instability, specifically focusing on the Taliban's takeover of power in 2021. The study addresses the complex obstacles encountered by children, such as gender-based limitations on education, financial difficulties resulting in child labor, restrictions on personal independence, and changes in educational objectives, through the use of qualitative interviews conducted with teachers and students from different regions. The findings indicate significant impacts on the mental well-being of students, characterized by gender inequalities, financial difficulties, and limited liberties. Teachers also face obstacles such as evolving rules and financial hardships, which can impact their mental health. The evaluation also emphasizes the lack of supportive programs and healthcare services in Afghan schools. This research offers valuable perspectives on the experiences of students and instructors, which can help address the mental health crisis affecting primary school children in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Child labor; Student's Mental Wellbeing; Current Situation; Education Shift; Conflict Zones Mental Wellbeing; Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of global education, it is important to put elementary school students' mental well-being first. To be well means to have a positive emotional state and enough life skills. Positivity entails things like feeling good about yourself, realizing your potential, taking charge of your life, and making and maintaining positive relationships with other people. It's a permanent condition that fosters individual and social progress (Ruggeri et al., 2020). Most of the time, seeing the consequences of war is not easy in a country like Afghanistan. Decades of war and instability have impacted the fact that different generations experience different human crises in this country, including mental well-being.

In 2021, when the Taliban took over Afghanistan, there were many internal crises, such as a changing education system, banning women from education and work, freedom, immigration, poverty, a lack of health support, the liberty of expression, and many more challenges directly affecting the mental and physical wellbeing of children and students. Afghanistan is currently experiencing a complex situation characterized by uncertainties in society and politics, amidst ongoing changes. In this context, the mental health of primary school students becomes a significant worry because the conditions they're growing up in greatly shape their early years (Qazizada, 2024).

According to the United Nations, the Taliban stopped women from working, prevented women from studying and teaching at universities, and prohibited the majority of girls from attending high (Fetrat & Human Rights Watch (Organization), n.d.). From this perspective, it is said that in some families in Afghanistan, mothers and females were the only breadwinners of their family. Besides, changing the education system and transforming both the female and male expert teachers and hiring inexpert teachers or shifting male teachers with females in primary and secondary schools cussed the mental well-being of students, especially primary students. Because this generation is not mentally capable of coping with the uncertainty.

As stated by the United Nations' experts (2023), even if the ban has been violated, we are concerned about the quality of education for both girls and boys. Alarming reports from secondary schools for boys indicate that religious instructors have replaced qualified teachers, curriculum changes have been implemented, and the range of topics offered has been narrowed.

As reported by the BBC in 2021, some disappointed Afghans are selling their daughters and organs to survive, while others are giving their starving children medications to make them sleep. Millions of people are on the verge of famine in the second winter after the Taliban gained control. Accordingly, children in Afghanistan are made used to laboring at home, on the streets, in fields, in mines, and shops. Many children are living with the fear of violence or early marriage. Too many are imposed on doing adults' responsibilities and many others give up on their education due to forced work. The primary data show that between January and March of the ongoing year 2023, 143 Afghan children were either killed or maimed due to the explosive devices in the war zone area, which were inaccessible previously. But these children went there to collect the scrap metal to sell (*Afghanistan - A Children's Crisis: UNICEF Afghanistan Representative Fran Equiza's Remarks at the Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General*, 2023).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 7 million children in Afghanistan need health assistance. If Afghanistan's healthcare system is not adequately funded, the WHO Alert warns of grave repercussions (*Afghanistan's Health System Suffers Critical Underfunding, Calls for Donor Support*, 2023). Moreover, the financial

meltdown and years of conflict have dangerously impacted the mental and psychological well-being of children. Parents have reported to Save the Children that they have noticed unsettling behavioral changes in their children, such as uncontrollably wailing nightmares, aggression, and self-harm, as a result of the violence and the current financial strain on their family(“*She Would Hit Her Head on the Wall Continuously*”: *Afghanistan on the Brink of Mental Health Catastrophe as Children Pushed to the Limit* | *Save the Children International*, n.d.).

Considering the previous studies and reports, this research aims to assess the effect of the current situation on the overall well-being of students at primary schools in Afghanistan and explore the influence of teachers' behavior on primary school students' well-being in the current situation. In addition, to understand in what ways the teacher's behavior and current changes in Afghanistan affect students' well-being in primary schools, the main goal of this study is to look into the different things that affect the emotional states of Afghan elementary school children. We will talk about the current state of the country, the environment, and how schools work. Our goal is to find the most important factors and make suggestions for how schools can better help young kids with their mental well-being. This study will answer these two questions: To what extent has the current situation in Afghanistan affected the well-being of students at schools in Afghanistan? How do teacher behaviors influence the well-being of primary school students in the current situations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Situation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a nation that has endured almost four decades of internal and external conflict, insecurity, and instability. The ongoing situation in Afghanistan significantly impacts the lives of the whole population. According to the study of(Lee et al., 2022), this critical period began when President Joe Biden announced the removal of U.S.-allied forces from Afghanistan. Afterward, on August 15, 2021, the Taliban regime took over Afghanistan and announced a new government. After 20 years of internal and external effort, capacity building, and attempts at development, once again this country was left behind due to the second movement of the Taliban. When the Taliban came to power, things rapidly started changing.

A ban on female education, a decrease in the economy, health issues, unemployment, immigration, and many other human crises threatened people in Afghanistan. After the Taliban seized power, all international cooperation and aid funds have stopped, including fundamental services such as primary health care. Moreover, the economy was nearing collapse. Besides, food prices started increasing, and people are struggling with widespread hunger(Safi et al., 2022)

After the Taliban took over Afghanistan two years ago, the country's economy collapsed, leaving 28.8 million people in need of immediate assistance a 60% increase from the year before. More than 50% of people live in poverty and over 90% of them depend on humanitarian help. Women and children have been disproportionately affected by the economic crisis; they account for about 80% of the population that is in need. Rising hunger as a result of the circumstances has pushed mothers to take their kids to work, which has sharply increased the amount of child labor (*Afghanistan: An Entire Population Pushed into Poverty* | *International Rescue Committee (IRC)*, 2023).

It is estimated that 8 million children in Afghanistan, or one in three, will face critically high rates of hunger in the upcoming year. Communities are more vulnerable

during the cold winter months because of continuing issues including drought, earthquakes, and economic hardships. According to the worldwide hunger monitoring system, there will be more people going through crisis or emergency phases of hunger in the winter. By March 2024, over 15.8 million people more than one-third of the population will be facing severe food insecurity. 7.8 million Of them are helpless youngsters who bear the burden of these misfortunes. The situation is made more difficult by the fact that thousands of Afghans have been returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran since September. The nation has seen three consecutive reductions in food assistance this year, which has made situations worse (*One In Three Children In Afghanistan To Enter 2024 Facing Crisis Levels Of Hunger | Save the Children International, 2023*).

Afghan women are grappling with profound financial and mental challenges amid escalating Taliban restrictions, economic turmoil, and poverty. Those heading households and young women bear the brunt of strict decrees, enduring harassment and violence as consequences. Economic opportunities, particularly in urban areas, are scarce, heightening obstacles for women operating businesses. The ban on beauty salons further diminishes income sources. Displacement worsens vulnerability, compounding economic hardships and restricted movement. Mental health is taking a toll, with elevated rates of anxiety and depression. Women's influence in decision-making has dwindled, constrained by shrinking spaces for social connections and educational opportunities. The overall situation intensifies gender inequality and poses a barrier to Afghanistan's long-term development(Nations et al., 2023).

Student's Mental Wellbeing at School

Mental health, as defined by the World Health Organization, refers to the capacity to effectively manage everyday difficulties, maintain a positive self-perception, perform effectively in a professional setting, and contribute constructively to society (Dow & Gaffy, 2015). 50% of mental health illnesses occur before the age of 14, and it is estimated that 10-17% of people aged 4 to 17 meet the criteria for a mental health issue. Global policymakers have acknowledged the role of schools in supporting children's mental health. However, there has been a disproportionate focus on researching mental health in secondary schools, with less attention being given to primary schools. In addition, children with mental health concerns experience higher levels of school absence. There is a significant connection between persistent mental health issues in children and increased rates of violence, using drugs, unemployment, suicide, social dysfunction, and worse quality of life in adulthood. These factors have also been associated with inferior academic achievements (Darling et al., 2021). Beyond all, another research stated that not only students are experiencing mental problems but Teachers are also experiencing mental health issues (Edwards et al., 2021).

The school climate, or the environment in schools, has an impact on students' lives in several ways. A school's behavior, academic performance, and socio-emotional development can all be positively impacted by a positive atmosphere in the school, which includes both physical and social aspects. Having encouraging classmates during the years of primary school is essential for the general well-being of the students. While difficulties with mental health are associated with feeling less safe and engaged at school. Additionally, when students enter their second year of secondary school, interaction with others continues to be important for their mental health. Moreover, social support, feeling connected to the school, and feeling safe at school are all linked to mental well-being. Additionally, a safe and encouraging learning environment at school, together with strong

relationships with fellow students, is essential to children's well-being throughout their many educational phases (Lester & Cross, 2015).

Poor mental well-being can restrict concentration, reduce motivation, and hinder the attainment of academic objectives. In addition, poor mental health among students can have a substantial impact on the occurrence of suicidal thoughts and self-harm. Further, previous studies also suggested a likely correlation between students' mental health and factors such as race, gender, age, and financial stress (Defeyter et al., 2021).

Students Mental Wellbeing in Conflict Zones

War is a significant element that profoundly impacts mental well-being, particularly in countries engaged in long-term conflicts. The ninth year of conflict in Syria has left millions of Syrians suffering from enormous tragedies as it has affected all parts of life. People who had a traumatic event during the Syrian war showed an increased incidence of post-traumatic Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Various factors influence the growth of mental problems in kids and teens. The mental well-being of teenagers, including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and behavioral problems, is linked to their socioeconomic level (SES). Furthermore, parental education is an additional contributing element. Nevertheless, there was no increased genetic predisposition to mental problems observed in cases of parental consanguinity. Moreover, among the 1369 pupils in Syria, 53% experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 62% exhibited problematic anger. Approximately 46% reported having fair or lower overall health, whereas 61% experienced serious or moderate mental health issues. Merely 9.3% refrained from reporting any exposure to war-related factors. The experience of war had a significant effect on the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger, and health-related quality of life (HRQL), but did not influence the academic performance of students. (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Kakaje et al., 2022).

Over 50% of Palestinian adults exhibit symptoms of depression, and a significant proportion also experience anxiety and worry, according to a study on the mental well-being of Palestinians during a turbulent period of political conflict. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between quality of life (QoL) and mental wellness outcomes. The findings found an inverse relationship between quality of life (QoL) and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Furthermore, there were significant associations between stress, anxiety, and depression. Sociodemographic characteristics such as educational level, gender, area of residence, and age are identified as significant determinants of mental health outcomes (Bdier et al., 2023).

Countries with low or middle incomes contribute to 80% of the global mental disease burden. On a global scale, approximately one out of every three individuals experience a mental disease at some point in their lives, which negatively impacts their mental well-being. Furthermore, in 153 nations with low or middle incomes (LMICs) where 85% of the global population lives, more than 80% of Mental Health Disorders (MHDs) take place. Moreover, by 2030, depression will be ranked as the third and second leading cause of disease burden in countries with low or middle incomes (LMICs), and middle-income countries, accordingly, Factors contributing to the significant mental health burden in many LMICs encompass hunger, low incomes, joblessness, lack of education, increasing urbanization, internal migration, changes in lifestyles, younger population demographics, and discriminatory practices targeting specific population subgroups (Javed et al., 2021).

Afghanistan is a middle-income country that has endured four decades of war, encompassing multiple generations. After the Ghani Government's collapse, the available

data suggests a decrease in the psychological and social well-being of children in Afghanistan. A recent study conducted in 2021 examined the prevalence of depression among 10- to 12-year-olds entering rural primary schools in Badakhshan, Ghazni, and Takhar provinces. The findings were concerning, as they indicated that 52% of the children experienced depression, with 2.6% of them suffering from serious forms of the condition. In addition, almost every youngster displayed indications of anxiousness, with 23% demonstrating severe symptoms. A study conducted with 376 high school pupils in Kabul found that about half of them (51.6%) matched the requirements for a possible diagnosis of PTSD, while 48.9% had symptoms of sadness and 45.2% showed signs of anxiety (Alemi et al., 2023).

A total of 450 people received invitations to participate in a study. The study included 376 young adults, with an average age of 16.4 years, comprising 42.6% girls and 57.4% boys. The study revealed that psychiatric problems exposed 28.2% of these adolescents to significant risks, with approximately half of them meeting the criteria for probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression (48.9%), or anxiety (45.2%). Girls were significantly more vulnerable, with 47.5% exposing themselves to substantial risk, compared to 13.9% for boys. Female subjects demonstrated a significantly greater likelihood of experiencing PTSD (79.4% vs. 31.0%), sadness (79.4% vs. 26.4%), and anxiety (78.1% vs. 20.8%)(Ahmadi et al., 2022).

The prolonged socioeconomic and health challenges faced by Afghanistan over several decades have failed to satisfy the fundamental requirements of children, leading to a significant negative influence on their mental well-being. This impact is evident in the high prevalence of diseases such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression among children in the country (Qamar et al., 2022).

The significance of this study is to assess, understand, and explore the effects of current political changes and instabilities on the mental health and well-being of primary school children and inform strategies and education management systems to prioritize the mental health and well-being of primary school children. The mental health and well-being of students is the most important part of the education system, which needs timely action and planning. Therefore, this research intends to contribute to the data gap in this area to protect children from further stress, trauma, and other forms of mental health-related issues.

Child Labor

Child labor has been a terrible problem for a long time, especially in poor countries. Back in the 1800s, kids as young as 14 were made to work long, hard hours in factories and mines, and things didn't get much better in the 1900s. Families were hit hard by diseases and exploitation, and many children suffered. Even though we've made progress in schooling and making money, child labor is still a big issue. Millions of kids are still forced to work, some even becoming slaves or being sold into terrible situations like trafficking. This shows us how urgent it is to do something to protect kids and give them the chance to grow up safe and with opportunities. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which started in 1989, was a big step in recognizing that kids have rights just like adults. But as long as children are working in dangerous conditions and missing out on being kids, it's up to all of us to keep fighting until this problem is gone for good(Radfar et al., 2018).

Around 160 million youngsters work as children worldwide, endangering their future chances and general well-being. It deprives children of their childhood and fundamental rights and is fueled by economic challenges that are made worse by crises

like COVID-19. It frequently results from illness, unemployment, or financial difficulties in the family. It puts kids in dangerous jobs that harm their growth and well-being. There are dire repercussions, from mental and physical abuse to exploitation and even death. Children who are migrants or refugees are more vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking because of their background in violence or poverty. Beyond the obvious risks, child labor feeds the cycle of poverty and marginalization by preventing access to education and maintaining social inequality. This is especially true for girls, who must shoulder extra responsibilities in juggling work, school, and family duties (Child Labour | UNICEF, n.d.).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative research that investigates the mental well-being of boys and girls in primary schools in Afghanistan, taking into consideration the current situation. Our primary objective is to prioritize the mental well-being of students in public schools, ranging from first grade to sixth grade. Furthermore, the participants in this study were selected from various provinces of Afghanistan, including urban towns and remote areas. I had connections in these regions that facilitated the process of locating suitable volunteers. Both the teacher and the students actively participated in this investigation. I employed Purposeful sampling to select a total of 16 respondents, consisting of four teachers and the remaining individuals being primary level children. I gathered my data by conducting semi-structured or in-depth interviews using the WhatsApp program. In addition, each participant was questioned for 20 minutes.

The participants in this research were from regions where the languages spoken by teachers and students differed. Some of them were not even familiar with Dari and Pashto, which are the national languages of Afghanistan. Therefore, I employed thematic analysis to examine and interpret the data. The data analysis involved multiple stages, including the translation of the data from local languages, as well as from Dari and Pashto, into English. Performing data cleansing through the use of color coding, and creating organized Excel spreadsheets to facilitate the analysis of the main findings.

FINDINGS

Conducting interviews with students and teachers in elementary schools located in Afghanistan, where the Taliban is running, I have discovered that both children and teachers are experiencing mental health issues. This study indicates that the present circumstances are impacting their overall well-being.

Students

Upon analyzing the interviews, it became apparent from the data that students in Afghanistan are facing a range of obstacles. Notable issues include gender-based restrictions on education, economic constraints resulting in child labor, limitations on personal freedom, and a shift in educational priorities. The difficulties are harming the student's well-being and educational experiences.

Gender-Based Educational Restrictions

A significant number of female students are experiencing greater vulnerability due to limitations on their education, and many are openly expressing unhappiness with the present Taliban administration. Currently, girls are only allowed to attend elementary school until the 6th grade. Upon finishing the 6th grade, students are prohibited from enrolling in secondary schools, courses, or other private educational institutions due to age limitations and bans enforced by the Taliban. In contrast, guys do not encounter any such limitations. Moreover, within the same family, brothers are afforded the privilege of pursuing school while girls face limitations. The government's restrictions on girls' education align with a bias towards boys' education in specific households, demonstrating a clear prioritizing of educational possibilities for boys.

In metropolitan settings, where online education is easily accessible, certain families allocate resources, such as smartphones and internet access, primarily for the benefit of boys. However, girls may also make use of these resources with the permission of their brothers. Unfortunately, in rural regions, both male and female students face a significant obstacle in the form of limited access to online education, which especially affects girls. Furthermore, the research includes participants of both genders, from 1st grade to 6th grade, who are experiencing mental distress as a result of the limitations placed on girls' education. Particularly those students in the 6th grade exhibit a greater sense of hopelessness. In addition, some girls are struggling to pass each subject and are fearful of advancing to the 6th grade. They perceive the transition to 6th grade as the final phase of their educational journey. Male primary kids have favorable access to schooling. However, while considering mental well-being, female relatives, limitations, mothers, sisters, and other individuals encounter their specific mental challenges.

"I have graduated from 6th grade. I and my brother leave the house every morning, he for school and I for taking the animals to the fields"(Participant).

"I was the best student in my class; I dreamed of becoming a pilot, but now I will stay as a housewife for the rest of my life" (participant).

Financial Challenges and Child Labor

Following the Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan, the financial situation of the majority of families and children went through significant changes. Presently, Afghanistan has a limited number of male family members who are employed. Under the previous administration, individuals of both genders were employed. Most of the women in the household were the primary earners, either through military service, teaching, working in hotels, or other forms of employment. Regrettably, in contemporary times, only males can engage in employment, and the task of securing a job is arduous, despite the absence of job opportunities in Afghanistan. Furthermore, there exist families in Afghanistan who lack any kind of financial support from within their own family. Upon witnessing their circumstances, children experience immediate emotional distress, which subsequently leads to the development of mental disorders.

Currently in Afghanistan, a significant number of elementary school students, regardless of gender, engage in labor at a quite early age to support their families. Nevertheless, these children lack the mental and physical maturity to assume duties, yet circumstances push them to forget their childhood and engage in labor. Additionally, children have to work at car maintenance locations, automobile cleaning locations, and bakeries, and engage in selling goods on the sidewalk. Furthermore, young girls who are now enrolled in elementary school can engage in work outside of their houses to support

their families. The female students allocate half of their day to attending school, while the rest of the day is dedicated to engaging in street food selling.

“I am in 5th grade and work in a mechanic shop after school; mostly, I am not able to even attend school due to extra work and tiredness” (participant).

Restrictions On Freedom

From a broader perspective, "freedom" means the condition of being unrestricted, liberated, or independent in one's behaviors. In Afghanistan after 2021, males and females lack freedom, both in academic settings and in their personal lives. The Taliban exercise complete dominion over the lives of people. The adolescent guys are forced to wear Islamic clothes and are prohibited from having diverse hairstyles. If individuals fail to comply, the Taliban administers harsh punishments. Furthermore, it is mandatory for girls, even the 6th-grade students, to wear a long black dress (known as Chapan) and a mask when they leave their homes. As reported by a participant from Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan is no longer safe for girls, the Taliban have recently been gathering all young girls from the streets, accusing them of violating the acceptable dress code known as (Hijab). In addition, the Taliban engage in sexual harassment, and as a result, girls who are released often commit suicide.

Afghan youngsters have experienced a challenging life over the past four years. Children, who lack the necessary mental development to fully understand or handle the situation, struggle with physical demands, child work, the fear of losing family members, and the experience of suffering hunger while being kept at home like slaves. In addition, children often struggle with thoughts of their parents' possible murder as a result of the Taliban's violence during their duty in the military of the former government.

"In the past, we used to go on vacations with the family, but for the past three years, my father has been concealing his identity as a police officer to stay safe. My sister cries at home, my mother has stopped teaching, and I feel like our house has turned into a small cage filled with various distressing voices at night." (Participant).

Shift In Education Focus

In Afghanistan, the effects of the Taliban on education are not limited to girls; boys are also being negatively impacted. Their regulations are seriously disrupting the educational system as a whole. Eliminating female educators not only creates a void, but it also encourages unskilled teachers to fill it, which lowers the standard of instruction. In certain schools, they are even eliminating electives like civics, sports, and the arts. This implies that vital information is being missed by the students. Many are concerned that the cumulative effect of these changes will be to deprive a generation of children of a quality, comprehensive education.

Primary schools still have the same curriculum as they had in the previous government. They changed the focus from the modern system to the Islamic system. For example in republic time every morning, there was a school assembly, or before starting class students sang the anthem or poems but currently it is replaced with the Islamic "Naat,". Moreover, they stopped celebrating Teacher's Day or other special days which include songs and music. Totally school environment changed and no entertainment programs are at school anymore which discourages students from studying by interest.

“My mother forced me to go to school, I lost my interest because we do not have a future to study hard or to be happy we study to just graduate from 6th grade”.
(Participant).

Teachers

Conversations with teachers in Afghanistan reveal that their mental well-being is a significant concern. The challenging circumstances, such as shifts in educational objectives, are impacting their emotional state. This study highlights the critical importance of providing support to teachers in managing their mental well-being among the changing demands of their profession and the evolving educational priorities.

Crisis Of Mental Health In Afghan Primary Schools

The students in Afghanistan are currently experiencing significant mental and physical pain. As per the educators in Kabul, a minimum of 12 students experience fainting attacks daily while at school. A significant number of the students are experiencing depression. Teachers are instructing in the classroom, while students are physically present but intellectually distracted. In addition, the student population, encompassing both male and female students, is steadily declining, with only a small number of students regularly attending classes. Upon inquiry from the school's staff, families cited different illnesses and nocturnal problems as the causes of their children's absences. Furthermore, additional families express concerns with their daughters' disappointment, resulting in their refusal to attend school. They hold the belief that schools only provide education up to the 6th grade, leading to a lack of hope for the future and consequently resulting in their absence from grades 4 and 5.

There has been a noticeable shift in students' behavior. Certain students are now engaging in work activities both before and after their lessons. As a result, when they arrive for their classes, they appear tired and lacking energy. Additionally, they exhibit reduced communication with their classmates and friends. Furthermore, teachers have seen the symptoms of mental health in their students. Students are hopeless for the future, exhausted, depressed, anxious, and overthink. Moreover, students nowadays talk less, both with teachers and their friends. Besides, in their free time, instead of playing with each other students sleep in classes. Accordingly, some teachers, who play the role of mothers, and a teacher at school are complaining about the scary nightmares of their children and the isolation of their students.

Teachers have admitted that their conduct towards kids has transformed. Given the present circumstances, teachers are adopting a more soft approach towards primary students who, due to their young age, are psychologically and physically vulnerable and are facing a greater amount of challenges. Furthermore, students are distancing themselves from their families and teachers as a result of the physical and psychological pressure. Consequently, students never request academic assistance; instead, they want financial aid from teachers.

Teacher's Mental Health

Teachers' identities have been destroyed since the Taliban assumed control. Wearing uniforms is prohibited by the Taliban's regulations. The Taliban prohibits the use of colorful clothes, permitting only the wearing of black, full-length skirts and masks. Teachers face environmental pressures. During the route from home to school,

individuals are frequently stopped by the Taliban who check their clothes. Furthermore, every teacher is dealing with financial difficulties, as the Ministry of Education fails to supply schools with stationary, leaving teachers responsible for funding their own salaries. Furthermore, Teachers are not only grappling with financial challenges, but they are also experiencing mental distress.

Taliban conduct unexpected checks of schools and students without prior notice, even when teachers are present. Regardless of whether it happens twice daily or more frequently, instructors must be prepared to handle the situation as long as they are present at school, which can be unpleasant for them. According to the instructors, financial difficulties push them to keep working in their teaching profession; otherwise, they become exhausted by the circumstances, the atmosphere, and the daily responsibilities. Conversely, instructors are facing the additional responsibility of managing familial challenges and being actively engaged in the lives of the students they teach, particularly those in the sixth grade. Upon instructing them to refrain from attending school, they are crying with great sincerity. Observing students express their familial difficulties daily serves as a means for teachers to overcome the circumstances.

Shift In Teachers' Education Focus

In the current situation, even the Ministry of Education is sliding. The work cycle is changing; there is no education quality at all. In previous governments, experts worked, but now the Taliban have hired their people, who have no idea about working in higher education. More than that, the Taliban have made Islamic studies mandatory for teachers. Besides, teachers every day for an hour before school have to attend Islamic classes. In the end, teachers will be evaluated by the Taliban, which is not satisfying for teachers.

"We are studying (سيرة النبي) or the "Biography of the Prophet" or "Life of the Prophet every morning like primary students and at the end Taliban take a paper best exam which we are not happy with this "(teachers).

Lack of Supportive Programs and Healthcare in Afghan Schools

During the interviews performed with teachers and students in Afghanistan, a significant discovery was made - there is an obvious absence of training or fun activities designed to promote happiness among students and teachers. The educational environment fails to implement essential steps to address the well-being of its members. A serious issue is the lack of healthcare professionals, including psychologists, nurses, and doctors, at schools of learning. The absence of such services exposes students to possible risks, particularly when they become sick, as there is no immediate availability of medical aid or even fundamental first aid.

DISCUSSION

This research addressed two questions: to what extent do the current situations in Afghanistan affect the well-being of students? And how teacher behaviors influence the well-being of primary school students in current situations. This research has found the answer to these questions: during the current political issues, not only students are struggling with mental health, but teachers are also struggling with mental well-being. Furthermore, the situation in Afghanistan had a physical and psychological impact on primary school students, both boys and girls. The main challenges that both teachers and

students are facing are: educational restrictions, Educational Restrictions especially for females in 6th grade who are strongly surfing; financial challenges and child labor; restrictions in terms of freedom; and shifting education focus from modern to Islamic for both teachers and students.

Moreover, most of the students at primary schools in Afghanistan have symptoms that show they are mentally not well; more precisely, in the current situation, none of the schools in Afghanistan have a psychologist or a primary counselor in terms of mental health to give basic advice to students. However, teachers, despite not being mentally well themselves, still have good behavior with students, which is not enough.

According to the literature by Deyter et al. (2021); McLaughlin et al. (2012; Kakaje et al. (2022; Darling et al., 2021). The school environment affects kids' conduct, academic performance, and social-emotional development. A positive physical and social environment can improve these features. Primary school kids' well-being depends on encouraging their classmates. Poor mental health in students increases suicide and self-harm thoughts significantly. Mental illness is not genetically predisposed, contrary to popular perception. This challenges assumptions and emphasizes the necessity of investigating additional causes of students' mental health issues for effective intervention and assistance.

Considering the literature to decrease these challenges in Afghanistan primary schools, the Ministry of Education should first pay particular attention to students' and teachers' well-being. In addition, each school should at least have a counselor with a psychology background to give training and motivate students and teachers at least once a week. Secondly, teachers must be more engaged with students, build hope in them by telling motivational stories, and show them resilience. Besides, instructors should bring students together and create friendships among students, where all primary students are isolated. Lastly, there was a lack of research on students' mental well-being in Afghanistan. This research suggests further research in terms of students' mental health.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the psychological well-being of elementary school students in Afghanistan against the backdrop of the Taliban's rise to power in 2021. The research uncovers a web of challenges faced by young children in Afghanistan today, including gender-based barriers to education, economic hardships driving early engagement in child labor, and constraints on personal freedoms. Through an analysis of the experiences of both male and female students, the study reveals a poignant narrative of mental anguish and waning optimism, particularly evident in the restricted educational opportunities for girls beyond the sixth grade.

At the same time, the study turns its attention to the teachers, exposing the complex network of difficulties they face. Teachers, who play a crucial role in the educational system, are under constant stress due to the Taliban's checks and balances, shifting educational priorities, and student's obvious mental health issues. The investigation of teachers' mental health issues, which result from financial hardships and a changing work environment marked by the imposition of Islamic studies, enhances the story even more.

The study highlights the alarming lack of healthcare services and supportive programs in Afghanistan's educational institutions in the face of these severe obstacles. The system's inadequacy in addressing the mental health of educators and learners becomes evident. It becomes clear that the combination of financial difficulties, restrictive rules, and socio-political unrest has had a significant negative impact on

Afghanistan's educational system, with ramifications for the mental health of students attending its primary schools.

Ultimately, this study represents a wake-up call for quick and thorough treatments. It promotes a more sophisticated approach that aims to address systemic issues while simultaneously acknowledging the immediate psychological anguish that elementary school students and staff experience. To create an atmosphere that is supportive of the overall health of Afghanistan's primary school system, the call for action includes the necessity of supportive programs, the integration of mental health services, and a reevaluation of educational priorities.

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