Taliban move to ban women training as nurses and midwives ‘an outrageous act of ignorance’

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<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/dec/06/taliban-afghanistan-ban-women-training-nurses-midwives-outrageous-act-ignorance-human-rights-healthcare>

The Taliban’s ban on Afghan women attending nursing and midwife courses has been condemned as “an outrageous act of ignorance” by human rights organisations.

The official decree detailing the ban has not been shared publicly, but several [media reports confirmed](https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-women-education-taliban-medical/33224073.html) that the order was announced at a meeting of the Taliban public health ministry on Monday and communicated to training institutes soon after.

Nursing students and medical trainers from Kabul and the provinces confirmed to the Guardian that they had been informed by their institutes that their courses had been suspended.

“I was preparing for a test on Monday night when I received a message from my teacher about the closure of the institute,” said Sahar\*, a 22-year-old nursing student.

“I couldn’t stop crying,” she said. “This was my last hope.”

A group of female students in Herat province gathered at the governor’s office in Herat on Thursday to protest at the closure of health science institutes, chanting “We will not give up our rights” and “Education is our right.”

Another medical student and activist from Kabul said: “A society without female doctors or medical workers is doomed.”

International agencies and human rights organisations joined Afghan women in criticising the ban and raised concerns about women’s rights to education and the impact on women’s access to healthcare.

Samira Hamidi, an Afghan activist and campaigner for Amnesty International, said: “This is an outrageous act of ignorance by the Taliban, who continue to lead a war against women and girls in [Afghanistan](https://www.theguardian.com/world/afghanistan). This draconian action will have a devastating long-term impact on the lives of millions of Afghans, especially women and girls.

“In a country like Afghanistan, where people are bound to traditional and cultural practices, women in most parts of the country are not allowed to be checked or treated by a male doctor.

“With this ban, it will mean there will be no more midwives, nurses, female lab and medical personnel to serve female patients,” she said.

Heather Barr, at Human Rights Watch, said: “If you ban women from being treated by male healthcare professionals, and then you ban women from training to become healthcare professionals, the consequences are clear: women will not have access to healthcare and will die as a result.”

Maternal healthcare in Afghanistan was precarious even before the Taliban takeover, and the country ranked among the lowest for maternal safety, with 620 women dying for every 100,000 live births in 2020, compared with just 10 in the UK, according to the [World Health Organization](https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sh-sta-mmrt?view=trend&geos=WLD_AFG_GBR).

According to data from UNFPA, the United Nations’ reproductive health agency, Afghanistan needs an additional 18,000 skilled midwives for Afghan women to get adequate care.