Afghan women deprived of rights under Taliban face mental health issues

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The past 2½ years have been “very tough” for 28-year-old Maryam Maroof Arvin, as she has been “deprived of all her rights” under the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Arvin was a master’s degree student in a private university in Kabul in December 2022 when the Taliban, the de facto government of Afghanistan, barred women from universities.

“It has created in me a feeling of depression. I am under mental and psychological pressure, and I feel very angry,” said Arvin who dreamed of becoming a politician to raise the voices for Afghan women.

A U.N. report, released in September 2023, stated that under the Taliban, who seized power in 2021, the mental health of women in Afghanistan deteriorated.

According to the report, more than two-thirds of women in Afghanistan reported “feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression” between April and June.

“Women spoke of psychological issues, including depression, insomnia, loss of hope and motivation, anxiety, fear, aggression, isolation and increasingly isolationist behavior, and suicidal ideation,” the report stated.

The Taliban have steadily imposed repressive measures against women in Afghanistan, banning them from the workplace, secondary and university education, long-distance traveling without a close male relative, beauty salons, gyms and public parks.

Arvin said that she can’t believe that all her freedoms and two decades of gains in women’s rights were lost in the past 2½ years of the Taliban’s rule.

“I wish it was a dream. And I could wake up and go back to the university,” she said.

Before the Taliban’s takeover, about 3.5 million girls out of roughly 9 million students were going to school. Thirty-three percent of about 450,000 students enrolled in universities were young women.

About 30% of the civil servants and 28% of parliamentarians in [Afghanistan were women](https://projects.voanews.com/life-under-the-taliban-tale-of-two-eras/#part-5).

Mawloda Tawana, an Afghan women’s rights activist, told VOA that the exclusion of women from the workplace and society adversely affected most women’s psychological and emotional well-being.

“Women are locked up at home, and the unhappiness and frustration from this could promote domestic violence and suicide attempts,” said Tawana.

Media outlets also reported a surge in suicides by women in Afghanistan. The Taliban have not published any data on suicide rates, and they have prohibited Afghan health officials from providing information on the topic.

Sahar Fetrat, a researcher with the Women’s Rights Division at Human Rights Watch, or HRW, told VOA that women’s mental health in Afghanistan has deteriorated because of the repressive restrictions imposed on them.

“Women feel as if they have essentially been banned from participating in life. They have become stripped of basic rights, such as receiving health care,” said Fetrat.

In a report released in February, HWR said the health care crisis in Afghanistan has “disproportionately” affected women.

“The Taliban’s restrictions on women’s freedom of movement and employment with humanitarian and other organizations have gravely impeded women and girls’ access to health services, while bans on education for women and girls have blocked almost all training of future female health care workers in the country,” stated the HWR report.

Fetrat said the international community should acknowledge and understand the gravity of the situation.

She says the world must listen to the Afghan women and other individuals who have risked their lives to share their messages.

“Women in Afghanistan are fighting for their basic rights,” said Arvin, urging the international community to stand behind them.