

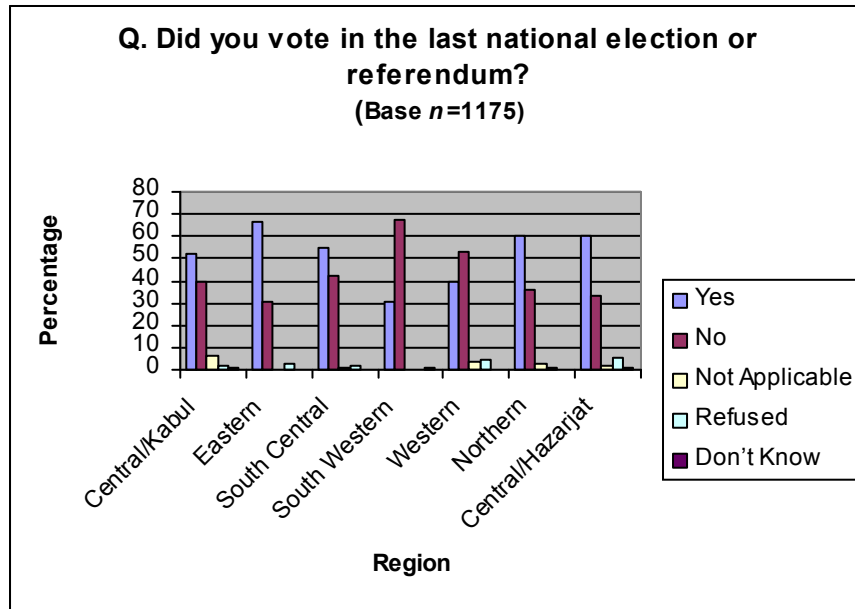
Living Female in Afghanistan
by Karl Feld, Veronica Gardner, and Sweeta Hashimi
D3 Systems, Inc. – May 25, 2008

Survey research has a role to play in providing Muslim women with a public voice where custom and culture do not permit them their own. It can be used to inform and shape empowerment policies from the perspective of each population. The Women In Muslim Countries (WIMC) study¹ is designed to measure women's empowerment in actual daily practice, providing a deep look into the oft-perceived gap between current public policy and empowerment initiatives and actual practice on the personal and local level. The answers are intended to yield a metric for promoting excellence in public policy by informing policymakers on women's attitudes about the affects of policy initiatives, as well as a measure of the degree of effectiveness of those policies.

Afghanistan is perhaps one of the most extreme cases of a country where custom and culture do not permit women a public voice, beginning with interviewing for the survey itself. Interviewing women in Afghanistan is limited to other women accompanied by a male escort. In some places it is restricted to daylight hours in proper attire. Though burdensome, the advantage to this approach is that it eliminates hesitation on the part of the interviewee to share her thoughts.

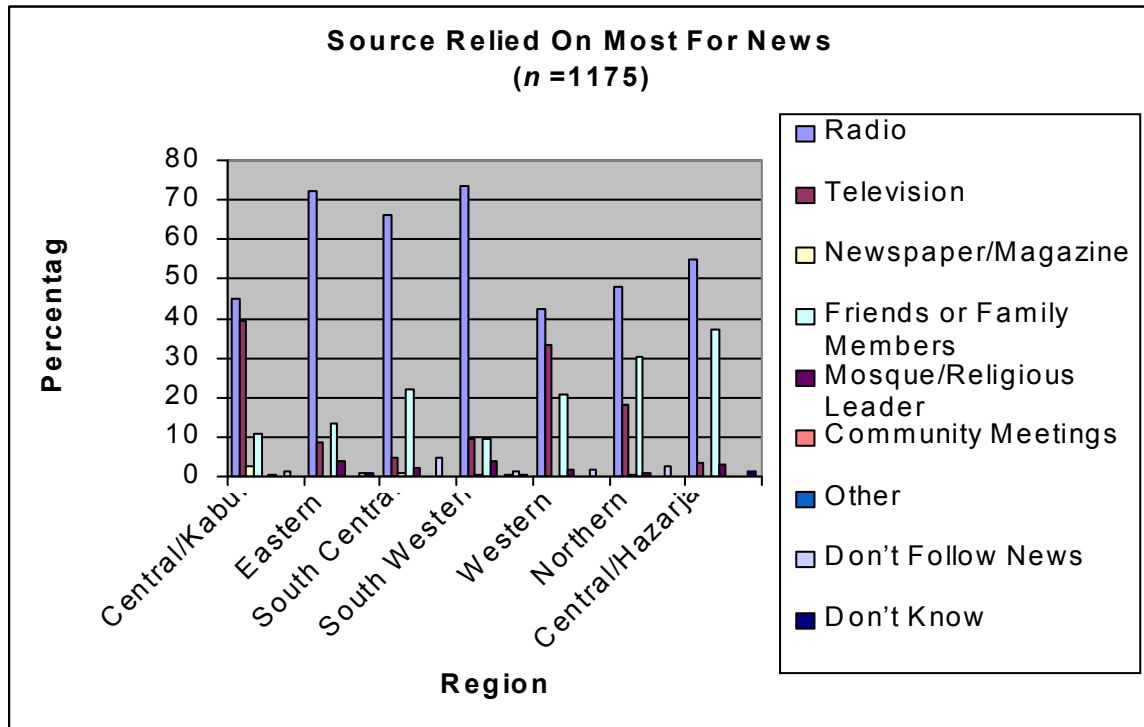
The survey covers many women's issues in Afghanistan. One of the topics of the survey is women's voting behavior in the last elections. The data indicates that slightly over half of women do exercise their right to vote. This suggests that helping women understand their status through survey data might inform an active political involvement in creating change. Majorities voted in most provinces, with the exceptions of the South Western and Western regions. The data also indicates the women with lower incomes have more participation in voting than the women with higher incomes. Women who voted were also more likely to be older and more educated, use the radio as their primary source for news and were more likely to make the purchase decisions for their household needs over their spouse, compared to women who did not vote.

¹ WIMC is sponsored and managed by D3 Systems (www.d3systems.com) and is conducted in 22 Muslim majority countries of the world. Data for Afghanistan was collected from March 7 to 14, 2007 from $n=1175$ women sampled nationwide on a stratified, random basis. Interviewing was conducted face-to-face by native Afghan women.



Women in Afghanistan are also news seekers. Overall, fifty-six percent of women in Afghanistan listen to the radio for news; suggesting that a majority are interested in learning more about events outside the home. In some regions however, such as the Eastern and South Western regions, over seventy percent of women listen to the radio for news. Women who rely primarily on radio for news are more likely to be younger, homemakers, have lower income and live in rural areas compared to women who rely on other sources for news.

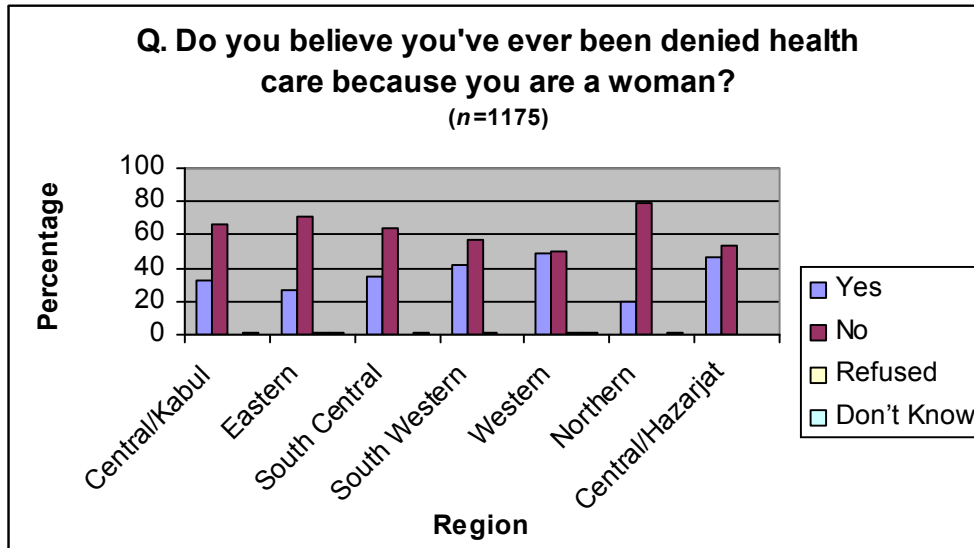
Women in Afghanistan are limited in their options to become informed of national and international events. As most do not work and have little education, they are not well informed about the issues outside their homes. The lack of electricity in the country conspires to limit access to television news. The best option for an Afghan woman to get news about the outside world while at home is radio. It is also the best avenue for reaching them with survey results.



CEDAW Rights

Afghanistan is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The exercise of the women’s rights guaranteed under the CEDAW has been an issue within Afghanistan. Today there are differences in opinion among women with different incomes and education about the role of shari’a in women’s rights and the status of healthcare, media usage, work status, and purchase decisions. These factors also differ across the various regions and ethnicities.

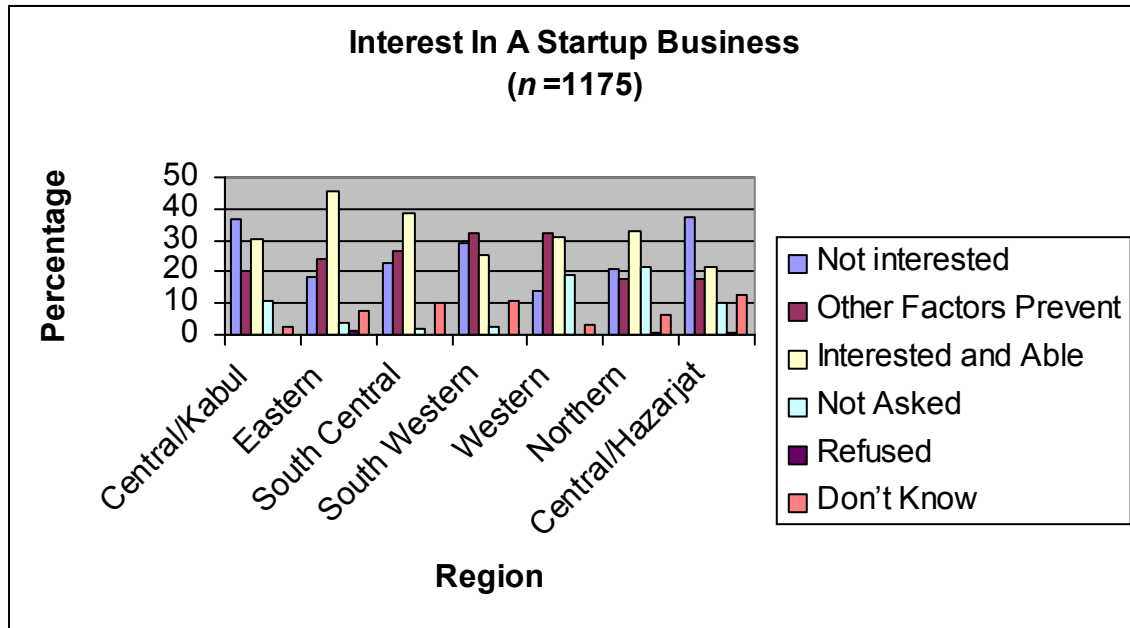
Women have long been faced with healthcare challenges in Afghanistan. According to the survey, one in three women believe they have been denied healthcare due to their gender at some time in their lives. The proportion differs slightly by region of the country. Women in the Western, South Western and Central/Hazarjat regions report this problem more often than women in other provinces.



Seventy-eight percent of Afghan women are homemakers and another ten percent are unemployed. One of the reasons for unemployment is a lack of education. The other is family restrictions. Many families in rural areas do not let their daughters go to school or work outside of the home. Although forty percent of Afghan women are interested in working, twenty seven percent of Afghan women report wanting to work if provided the opportunity, but being prevented by other circumstances in their lives.

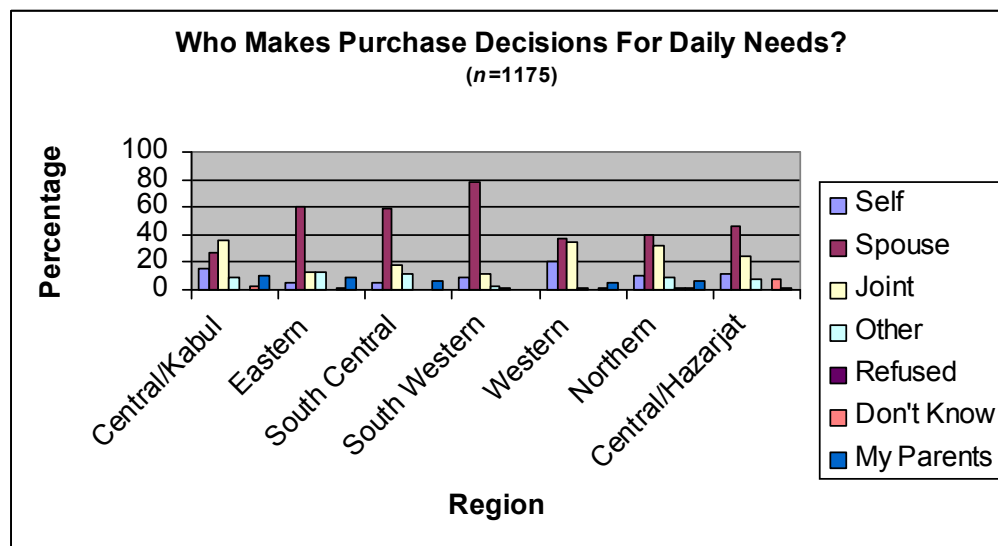
Approximately thirty six percent of women who are not working are interested in starting a business. Afghan women who were interested were more likely to be younger and to make the purchase decisions for their household needs (over their spouse), compared to women who were not interested in a startup business. These women were also *more* likely to vote and *less* likely to feel they were denied healthcare.

Afghan women in the Eastern and South Central regions of the country are also more interested and able to take part in a startup business than those in other regions.



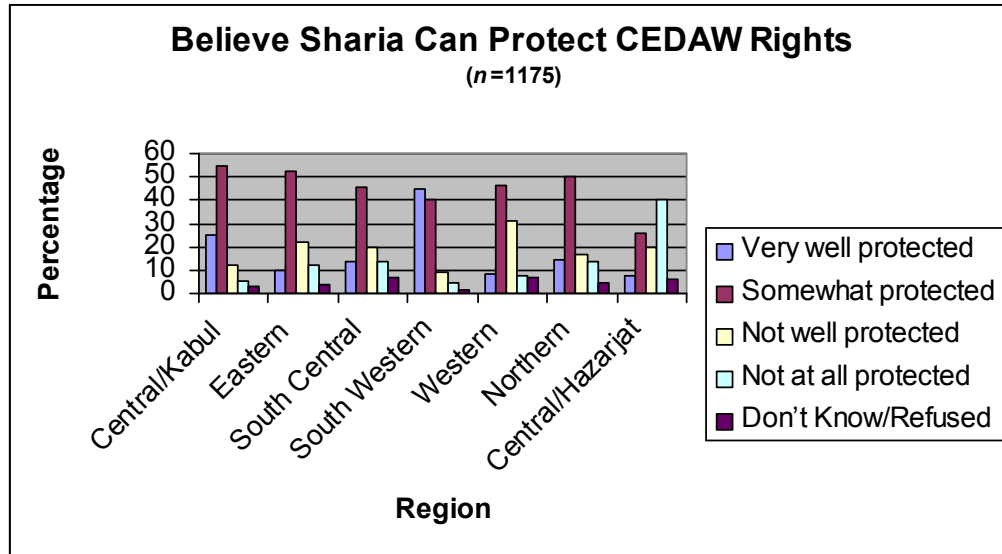
Eleven percent of women in Afghanistan unilaterally make purchase decisions for daily household needs in their lives. Almost half of Afghan women reported that their spouse makes the purchase decisions and over a quarter reported joint-decision making. Women who reported their spouse makes the purchase decisions were more likely to be from rural areas, homemakers, and were less educated than women who reported *they* were the purchase decision-makers.

In some regions decision-making by the male spouse is dominant; for example, in the Eastern, South Central, and South Western regions.



Despite these challenges, the majority of women in Afghanistan do not see shari'a law as inconsistent with protecting or advancing their CEDAW rights. To the contrary, with the

exception of Central/Hazarjat, majorities believe shari'a law can protect their rights to some degree. This suggests that to be effective the advancement of CEDAW-protected rights inside Afghanistan must address consistencies with shari'a law, rather than opposing it outright.



CEDAW-protected rights are realized variably by women throughout Afghanistan. However, the survey results suggest that the basic conditions for advancing them may exist within the society. A significant percentage of Afghan women are news seeking voters interested in income opportunities who believe their rights can be protected under shari'a law. Efforts to advance their condition can build on these survey findings.