

# Perceptions & Predictors of Inequality among Afghan & Pakistani Women

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## Abstract

Women Afghanistan and Pakistan bear extreme gender-based restrictions which often deny them access to services and basic human rights. Three multistage cluster samples of Afghanistan (2012 and 2014) and Pakistan (2012) were used to explore (1) the predictors of these human rights and access to services, as well as (2) whether these rights and access to services have changed over time in Afghanistan. The strongest predictor of rights and access to services were geographic factors. In our samples, being an Afghan woman was the strongest predictor of having fewer rights. Living in a rural area was the strongest predictor of perceptions of available services. Pashtun or Shia women reported lower levels of some rights and services. Women who had above modal incomes and some education were more likely to see services as being available. The way in which women in our sample received news had little impact on perceptions of rights; however, women who primarily received their news from television generally saw health services as being more available. Changes in rights and services suggested that when changes did occur, women saw rights and services as decreasing between 2012 and 2014 in Afghanistan. The implications of these findings are discussed.

## Introduction

The people of Afghanistan and Pakistan have endured decades of oppression, poverty, violence, and widespread human rights violations. While living in war-torn countries takes its toll on everyone, the women in these countries also bear extreme gender-based restrictions which often deny them access to healthcare services, education, employment, and political participation as well as basic human rights. These restrictions cultivate daily stressors that can lead to gender-based violence and abuse (Critelli & Willet, 2012; van Mierlo, 2012), serious mental health problems (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010) and even mortality (Parrot, 2011) among women.

Strides have been made in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to establish women's rights and prevent gender discrimination and gender-based violence (Mumtaz, 2005; Parrot, 2011). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was ratified in Pakistan in 1996 and in Afghanistan in 2003. Subsequent laws have been created for the protection of women's rights in both countries and international aid continues to be allocated to enhance efforts for the purpose of creating a better life for girls and women in these countries. Due to these efforts, there is the perception that women's human rights and access to basic needs are being met, or at least that the situation is improving. However, research shows that strong cultural norms and patriarchal societies have hindered progress of this movement to improve women's status in these countries (Mahmood, 2012; Parrot, 2011). Due to the cultural complexities intertwined with new laws and initiatives meant to protect women, it is important that we ask Afghan and Pakistani women to report on their perceptions of inequality and injustice in their daily lives. Our paper assesses perceptions of inequality among Afghan and Pakistani women as well as the strongest predictors of perceived inequality. In order to do this, we asked Afghan and Pakistani women about their access to human rights and basic services as compared to men's access in their respective countries. Questions included items on participation in politics,

access to education, employment, and healthcare services, decisions regarding reproductive health, protection from violence, and access to general and women’s healthcare services (e.g., pre- and post-natal care). We also explore the impact of different media sources on perceptions of inequality in order to examine whether use of Western media is associated with perceived inequality among these women.

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What background characteristics are associated with perceived inequality among Afghan and Pakistani women?
2. What are the strongest predictors of perceived inequality among Afghan and Pakistani women?
3. What (media) sources do Afghan and Pakistani women use to receive news? Does the use of Western media (e.g., television or radio) have a greater influence on perceptions of inequality among Afghan and Pakistani women than the use of more traditional forms of communication to gather news (e.g., word of mouth, mosque)?
4. Is perceived inequality improving among Afghan and Pakistani women?

Three multistage sample surveys were used to answer these questions. These samples were used to answer time invariant questions about access to rights and services (questions 1-3: Afghanistan and Pakistan 2012 samples) and time variant questions about access to rights and services (question 4: Afghanistan 2012 and 2014 samples).

## Methods

### Samples.

The samples drawn for the present study were collected as part of three separate data collection efforts. These surveys were fielded in Pakistan during March of 2012 and in Afghanistan during January through February of 2012 and during March of 2014. Each of these three samples represents a stratified multi-stage cluster sample, where the sampling design implemented results in base weights that are close to one (or self-weighted). As such, only unweighted analyses are reported in this paper. All three samples were of both men and women; however, only data collected from women are presented in the paper.

Both waves of the Afghan survey were conducted by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research under the direction of D3 Systems. Both samples represent a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling procedure, using districts as the primary sampling unit (PSU) and settlements as the secondary sampling unit (SSU). Due to the lack of current census data for Afghanistan, the sampling plans utilized population statistics released by the Afghan Central Statistics Office with assistance from the United Nations and World Food Program for total numbers of residents by region, province, and district. Sampling points were distributed proportionally to population size in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, stratified by urban/rural status. Within strata, districts were sampled using probability proportional to size (PPS) selection. Districts serve as the PSUs. Lastly, simple random sampling (SRS) was used to select villages or neighborhoods, which serve as the SSUs. Within cities, nahias (neighborhoods) were the sampling unit, while in rural areas, towns and villages were the sampling unit. Because there are no reliable population data about settlement sizes, a SRS of all known settlements was used to select the

sampling points. Residences were selected within each settlement by random route/random interval process and respondents were selected within residences by a Kish grid.

The Afghanistan 2012 survey consisted of interviews with 2,018 Afghan adults (1,047 male and 971 female, ages 18+). This survey had a contact rate of 80% and a cooperation rate of 93% for a net response rate of 75% using American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) rate calculations. The impact of clustering on the sample of women produces an estimated design effect of 2.06 with a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 5\%$  at the 95% confidence level. The Afghanistan 2014 survey was conducted with 2,643 Afghan adults (1,340 male and 1,303 female, ages 18+). The survey had a contact rate of 87% and a cooperation rate of 93% for a net response rate of 81% using AAPOR rate calculations. The impact of clustering on the sample of women produces an estimated design effect of 2.35 with a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 4\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

Table 1: Sample characteristics by country and year.

	Pakistan 2012	Afghanistan 2012      2014	
<i>N</i>	968	971	1303
<i>Rural</i>	67%	80%	83%
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
<i>Pashtun</i>	15%	38%	39%
<i>Tajik</i>	0%	31%	35%
<i>Punjabi</i>	50%	0%	0%
<i>Muslim</i>			
<i>Shia</i>	6%	15%	13%
<i>Sunni</i>	93%	85%	87%
<i>Demographics</i>			
<i>Working</i>	5%	8%	5%
<i>Student</i>	4%	4%	5%
<i>Some Education</i>	70%	28%	28%
<i>Married</i>	81%	81%	84%
<i>Above Modal Income</i>	61%	30%	23%
<i>News Source</i>			
<i>Radio</i>	4%	41%	-
<i>Television</i>	80%	31%	-
<i>Word of Mouth</i>	14%	23%	-
<i>Age</i>			
<i>Mean</i>	33.74	33.09	33.19
<i>SD</i>	11.34	11.46	10.78

The Pakistan 2012 survey was conducted for D3 Systems by the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion (PIPO). Interviews were conducted in person, among a random national sample of 2,012 Pakistanis (1,044 male and 968 female, ages 18+). The survey used stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling

procedure. Sampling points were distributed proportionally to population size in each of Pakistan's provinces and stratified by urban/rural status. The number of sampling points for each province was determined by the population distribution of the provinces within the urban/rural strata. The population data used for distribution is from the results of the 1998 Census carried out by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Statistics, Population Census Organization. This is the most recent and updated data in Pakistan. Within strata, districts were randomly sampled using PPS sampling. Districts serve as the PSU. According to official statistics, there are 105 districts that could be potential PSUs in the four provinces. Sixty districts were selected as PSUs in this survey. Lastly, SRS was used to select settlements within districts, which serve as the SSU. Within urban strata, census circles (one step below census blocks) were used as the unit of selection, while villages were used in the rural strata. As precise population data for settlement sizes do not exist, a simple random selection amongst all known settlements was used to select locations. In this survey, 210 sampling points were selected, and 10 interviews were conducted per sampling point. Within each sampling point, residences were selected by random route/random interval process and respondents were selected within residences by a Kish grid. The survey had a contact rate of 72% and a cooperation rate of 84% for a net response rate of 60% using AAPOR rate calculations. When considering only the sample of interest, the design effect was 2.96 for women and the margin of error was  $\pm 5\%$  at the 95% confidence level for women.

As can be seen in Table 1, 968 Pakistani women participated in the 2012 survey, 971 Afghan women participated in 2012, and 1,303 Afghan women participated in 2014. These women represent the sample of interest for all analyses reported. The samples were primarily rural (Pakistan 2012: 67%, Afghanistan 2012: 80%; Afghanistan 2014: 83%) and in their mid-thirties (Pakistan 2012: 33.74, Afghanistan 2012: 33.09; Afghanistan 2014: 33.19). The samples were primarily Sunni Muslim (Pakistan 2012: 93%, Afghanistan 2012: 85%; Afghanistan 2014: 87%). Not surprisingly, the samples differed in ethnic background, with Punjabi (50%) and Pashtun (15%) being the most common ethnicities in the 2012 Pakistan sample and Pashtun (Afghanistan 2012: 38%; Afghanistan 2014: 39%) and Tajik (Afghanistan 2012: 31%; Afghanistan 2014: 35%) being the most common ethnicities in the Afghanistan samples. In all of the samples, the minority of women were working (Pakistan 2012: 5%, Afghanistan 2012: 8%; Afghanistan 2014: 5%) or students (Pakistan 2012: 4%, Afghanistan 2012: 4%; Afghanistan 2014: 5%) and the majority were married (Pakistan 2012: 81%, Afghanistan 2012: 81%; Afghanistan 2014: 84%). There were differences between the samples in the level of education, where 70% of Pakistani adult women were more likely to have had some education (i.e., not indicating that they were illiterate or uneducated) compared with 28% of Afghan adult women (Afghanistan 2012: 28%; Afghanistan 2014: 28%).

## Procedure

All surveys were conducted as face-to-face interviews, where gender-matched interviewing was used in Afghanistan due to cultural considerations. The interviews took an average of 25 to 33 minutes to complete (Afghanistan 2012: 33; Afghanistan 2014: 32; Pakistan 2012: 25). All surveys were conducted in native languages by local interviewers. Back-checking, supervised interviews by field supervisors, and data double entry were used as methods to assure data quality.

## Measures

Among other items, women were asked about their background characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, demographics), the way in which they received news, their perceptions of rights relative to men, and their perceptions of services utilized often by women/mothers.

The background characteristics examined in this paper largely represent forced-choice items, where participants were asked which category best described them. Specifically, participants were asked about their ethnicity, religiosity, their occupation (e.g., working, student, housewife), marital status, age, and income. Creating a comparable income measure across the two samples was difficult based on (1) the item for Afghanistan being in Afghanis and the item for Pakistan being in Pakistani Rupees and (2) due to the forced-response options not corresponding directly when applying the exchange rate at the time of this writing (1 PKR = .57 AFN). We created a crude income measure by examining the modal value across the two countries. Values over 10,000 AFN were coded as above the modal Afghan income for respondents. That is, the modal Afghan response was 2,001 to 10,000 AFN. When we translate 10,000 AFN to Pakistani Rupees, this is roughly 8,568 PKR, which falls in the category of 7,001-10,000 PKR. Values over 10,000 PKR were coded as above the modal income. This variable serves as a crude proxy for income, as it represents being under or at (0) or above (1) the Afghan modal income. Pakistan was normed to Afghanistan incomes, only because Afghanistan served as the larger sample in our data. Whether the residence of each participants was rural vs. urban was also coded.

Women indicated the means by which they received news most frequently using a forced choice item. Based on some proportions being small, we needed to collapse across some categories. The variable reported examines whether participants received their news by radio, television, or word of mouth (friends or family members, mosque/place of worship/religious leader, or community meetings). This item was only asked in the 2012 surveys and not in the 2014 Afghanistan survey.

Rights and services items used an ordinal response format. For rights, participants were asked whether they had (1) fewer rights, (2) equal rights, or (3) more rights relative to men on (a) participating in politics, (b) access to education, (c) access to employment, (d) protection from violence, (e) access to health care, and (f) decisions regarding reproductive health. To examine whether all items were measuring the same underlying dimension, we conducted a principle component analysis. Only one eigenvalue over one was found (2.78), where this first principle component explained 46% of the variance. Also, all loadings on the first component were greater than .64. These items had an acceptable internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha (.77). For services, participants were asked whether they thought (a) pediatrics, (b) pre-natal care, (c) post-natal care, (d) women's health services, and (e) general healthcare services were (1) very adequate, (2) somewhat adequate, (3) somewhat inadequate, (4) very inadequate, or (5) service not available in area. Again, we conducted a principle component analysis on the services items and only one eigenvalue over one was found (3.81), which explained 76% of the variance. Also, all loadings on the first component were greater than .85. These items also had an acceptable internal consistency reliability (.92). Based on these psychometric properties of these items, we created unit weighted scale scores for rights and services by the mean of items comprising each scale.

Table 2: Correlations between background characteristics and women's perceived rights (with standardized regression coefficients).

	Rights (mean)	Participating in politics	Access to education	Access to employment	Protection from violence	Access to health care	Decis. reg. reproductive health
<i>Mean (SD)</i>	1.76(.47)	1.60(.68)	1.79(.66)	1.72(.75)	1.66(.73)	1.86(.65)	1.90(.69)
<i>Afghanistan</i>	-.19**(-.20**)	-.29**(-.24**)	-.03(-.05)	-.14**(-.17**)	-.13**(-.18**)	-.03(-.02)	-.10**(-.12*)
<i>Rural</i>	-.06*(-.04)	.00(.03)	-.01(-.01)	-.06*(-.05*)	-.01(.00)	-.10**(-.10**)	-.05*(-.04)
<i>Ethnicity</i>							
<i>Pashtun</i>	-.09**(-.04)	-.11**(-.07*)	-.05*(-.01)	-.10**(-.01)	-.03(-.03)	-.03(-.01)	-.03(-.01)
<i>Tajik</i>	-.04(.03)	-.13**(-.05)	.05*(.07*)	.02(.07*)	-.06*(-.02)	.03(.04)	-.03(.00)
<i>Punjabi</i>	.13**(.03)	.22**(.05)	.05*(.05)	.11**(.05)	.05*(-.04)	.04(.04)	.05*(-.01)
<i>Muslim</i>							
<i>Shia</i>	-.09**(-.06)	-.14**(-.14)	-.02(-.08)	-.06*(.14)	-.06*(-.39**)	-.05*(.03)	-.05*(.21*)
<i>Sunni</i>	.08**(.00)	.12**(-.03)	.01(-.08)	.06*(.17)	.02(-.35**)	.05*(.06)	.06*(.24*)
<i>Demographics</i>							
<i>Age</i>	.00(-.01)	.02(.01)	.01(.02)	.00(.00)	-.01(-.03)	-.04(-.05)	.02(.02)
<i>Working</i>	-.01(.01)	-.04(-.02)	-.03(-.02)	.03(.05*)	.00(.02)	-.01(.00)	.01(.03)
<i>Student</i>	.03(.04)	-.05*(-.04)	.08**(.10**)	.02(.03)	.03(.05)	.03(.03)	-.01(.01)
<i>Some Education</i>	.05*(-.05)	.08**(-.02)	.00(-.02)	.06*(-.01)	-.01(-.09*)	.02(-.02)	.03(-.03)
<i>Married</i>	-.01(.00)	-.01(-.03)	-.01(.02)	-.01(.00)	-.02(-.01)	.00(.02)	.00(-.01)
<i>Above Modal Income</i>	.03(-.01)	.04(-.03)	.01(.01)	-.03(-.07*)	.04(.02)	.03(.03)	.02(-.01)
<i>News Source</i>							
<i>Radio</i>	-.06*(.12*)	-.11**(.04)	.02(.14*)	-.05*(.09)	-.04(.03)	-.01(.14*)	-.03(.06)
<i>Television</i>	.05*(.07)	.10**(.02)	.00(.11)	.06*(.05)	.00(-.03)	.02(.13*)	.03(.04)
<i>Word of Mouth</i>	.03(.13*)	.02(.06)	.01(.12*)	.00(.09)	.05*(.05)	.01(.14*)	.01(.05)

N=1939; \*\* p<.001, \* p<.05

Table 3: Correlations between background characteristics and women's perceived lack of services (with standardized regression coefficients).

	Lack of Services (mean)	Pediatrics	Pre-natal care	Post-natal care	Women's health services	General Healthcare Services
<i>Mean (SD)</i>	2.56(1.03)	2.59(1.15)	2.57(1.19)	2.63(1.18)	2.60(1.13)	2.39(1.15)
<i>Afghanistan</i>	.02(.02)	.01(.04)	.07*(.09*)	.02(-.02)	.05*(.03)	-.08**(-.06)
<i>Rural</i>	.26**(.25**)	.26**(.24**)	.24**(.22**)	.22**(.20**)	.23**(.21**)	.21**(.22**)
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
<i>Pashtun</i>	-.06*(-.02)	-.08**(-.06*)	-.04(-.03)	-.02(.01)	-.03(-.01)	-.10**(-.03)
<i>Tajik</i>	-.03(.01)	-.01(.00)	-.01(-.01)	-.04(.01)	-.02(.00)	-.05*(.01)
<i>Punjabi</i>	.14**(.20**)	.14**(.19**)	.10**(.20**)	.09**(.14**)	.08**(.17**)	.20**(.20**)
<i>Muslim</i>						
<i>Shia</i>	.06*(.08)	.04(.03)	.06*(-.04)	.07*(.10)	.08**(.26*)	.01(.03)
<i>Sunni</i>	-.05*(.04)	-.03(.01)	-.06*(-.08)	-.06*(.03)	-.06*(.19*)	-.01(.02)
<i>Demographics</i>						
<i>Age</i>	-.06*(-.06*)	-.05*(-.06*)	-.07*(-.07*)	-.06*(-.05*)	-.02(-.03)	-.04(-.06*)
<i>Working</i>	-.03(-.02)	-.04(-.03)	-.02(-.01)	-.03(-.02)	-.04(-.03)	-.02(.00)
<i>Student</i>	-.03(-.02)	.00(.01)	-.02(-.03)	-.01(.00)	-.05*(-.04)	-.03(-.01)
<i>Some Education</i>	-.11**(-.08*)	-.10**(-.08*)	-.11**(-.07*)	-.09**(-.07*)	-.12**(-.07*)	-.05*(-.07*)
<i>Married</i>	.00(-.02)	.00(-.01)	-.02(-.03)	-.01(-.02)	.01(-.02)	.01(.00)
<i>Above Modal Income</i>	-.10**(-.05)	-.08**(-.03)	-.10**(-.03)	-.08**(-.04)	-.10**(-.05)	-.07*(-.06*)
<i>News Source</i>						
<i>Radio</i>	.02(-.10)	.02(-.02)	.03(-.09)	.02(-.1*)	.02(-.15*)	-.03(-.07)
<i>Television</i>	-.12**(-.12*)	-.10**(-.02)	-.13**(-.12*)	-.12**(-.15*)	-.12**(-.18*)	-.05*(-.08)
<i>Word of Mouth</i>	.12**(-.02)	.11**(.04)	.12**(-.02)	.11**(-.03)	.11**(-.07)	.09**(-.01)

N=1939; \*\* p<.001, \* p<.05

## Analysis

We examined research questions one through three using simple Pearson zero-order correlations and ordinary least squares regression. Only the Pakistan and Afghanistan 2012 samples were used for this analysis, such that year was held constant for this analysis. These analyses regressed rights (each individual right and their average) and services (each individual service and their average) on variables representing country (Pakistan=0 vs. Afghanistan=1), rural (1=rural vs. 0=urban), ethnicity (dummy variables representing Pashtun, Tajik, and Punjabi), Muslim denomination (dummy variables representing Shia and Sunni), age, demographic dummy variables (working, student, some education, married, and above modal income) and news source (dummy variables representing radio, television, and word of mouth). These same relationships were examined as zero order correlations. We only interpreted findings if the relationships were significant at the zero-order level and the semi-partial relationship remained significant in the regression analysis.

The examination of differences between 2012 and 2014 was examined by comparing the 2012 and 2014 Afghanistan samples. Initial simple comparisons were made using independent groups *t*-tests on rights (each individual right and their average) and services (each individual service and their average). It could be argued that any differences between the years observed are due to selectivity biases, as opposed to actual change over time in the underlying population of interest. To partially mitigate this alternative explanation, a Heckman (1979) selectivity analysis was conducted by first regressing year of participant for the Afghanistan sample on all of the predictors mentioned in the previous regression model, except the news source variables, using a probit regression model. The model was significant,  $\chi^2(11)=43.01$ ,  $p<.001$ , largely due to the 2014 sample being less likely to be working,  $\chi^2(1)=4.65$ ,  $p=.031$ , more likely to be married,  $\chi^2(1)=9.16$ ,  $p=.002$ , and less likely to be above the modal income,  $\chi^2(1)=13.71$ ,  $p<.001$ . The model was used to produce predicted values and an accompanying inverse Mill's ratio. The latter was used as a predictor in slightly more conservative analyses to adjust time-related differences for selectivity biases using ordinary least squares regression. As will be seen, these adjustments had a minimal impact on the conclusions. All *t*-values were converted to the effect size *r* using the formula reported in Cohen (1988):  $r = [t^2 / (t^2 + df)]^{.5}$ .

## Results

Our analyses examining predictors of women's perceived rights suggested that women in Afghanistan saw themselves as having fewer rights than women in Pakistan. This was the case for all rights examined, except for education and healthcare. Being an Afghan woman was the strongest predictor of perceptions of unequal rights. Rural women saw themselves as having less access to employment and healthcare than urban women. Examining ethnicity, Pashtun women felt they were entitled to less participation in politics, but Tajik women felt they had more access to education. Considering Islamic denomination, Shia women felt they had less protection from violence, whereas Sunni women felt they had greater decision-making with regard to their reproductive health. Not surprisingly, women who were students felt they had greater access to education. The relationships between media sources and perceptions of rights were weak and inconsistent.

Our analyses examining predictors of women’s perceived access to services suggested that country (i.e., Afghanistan vs. Pakistan) had little impact on perceptions of service availability. Rural women saw themselves as having less access to all services about which we inquired. In fact, being rural was the strongest predictor of perceptions of available services. Examining ethnicity, being Pashtun was related to a greater perceived availability of pediatric services. Although partially confounded with country, Punjabi women perceived all services about which we asked as being less available. Considering Islamic denomination, Shia Muslim women saw pediatric services as being less available. Increased age among women was related to greater perceived availability of pediatrics, prenatal care, and post-natal care. Women having some education perceived all services about which we asked as being more available. Being above the modal income was related to women perceiving greater access to general healthcare services. Women more exposed to Western media (i.e., television as primary news source) were more likely to perceive greater access to pre-natal care, post-natal care, and health services.

Table 4: Changes over time in women's perceived rights and lack of services (with effect size *r*).

	Means (SD)		Simple Comparison		Adjusted for Selectivity	
	2012	2014	t	r	t	r
<i>N</i>	968	1301	-	-	-	-
<i>Rights (mean)</i>	1.67(.43)	1.65(.47)	1.10	.02	1.29	.03
<i>Participating in politics</i>	1.41(.57)	1.44(.58)	-1.24	-.03	-1.00	-.02
<i>Access to education</i>	1.76(.61)	1.79(.66)	-.77	-.02	-.52	-.01
<i>Access to employment</i>	1.62(.65)	1.61(.69)	.41	.01	.62	.01
<i>Protection from violence</i>	1.57(.66)	1.59(.69)	-.88	-.02	-.37	-.01
<i>Access to health care</i>	1.84(.64)	1.76(.66)	2.87*	.06	2.75*	.06
<i>Decis. reg. reproductive health</i>	1.84(.69)	1.72(.71)	3.77**	.08	3.46**	.07
<i>Lack of Services (mean)</i>	2.57(.87)	2.75(.93)	-4.59**	-.10	-4.19**	-.09
<i>Pediatrics</i>	2.60(.98)	2.66(1.06)	-1.34	-.03	-.86	-.02
<i>Pre-natal care</i>	2.65(1.04)	2.86(1.11)	-4.54**	-.10	-4.27**	-.09
<i>Post-natal care</i>	2.65(1.08)	2.86(1.13)	-4.37**	-.09	-4.13**	-.09
<i>Women's health services</i>	2.66(1.02)	2.80(1.08)	-3.13*	-.07	-3.02*	-.06
<i>General Healthcare Services</i>	2.30(1.00)	2.56(1.08)	-5.94**	-.12	-5.35**	-.11

\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

Looking at what rights and services were perceived as changing over time, Afghan women’s perceptions of rights and services, if they changed, tended to become worse over time. More specifically, as far as rights, women perceived access to healthcare and playing an active role in their decisions regarding reproductive health as decreasing between 2012 and 2014. Further, women saw their access to pre-natal care, post-natal care, women’s health, and general healthcare services as decreasing between 2012 and 2014.

## Discussion

The results of this study suggest that geographic factors play the strongest role in Afghan and Pakistani women's perceptions of rights. More specifically, being an Afghan woman was the strongest predictor of having fewer rights than men. This finding is in line with the literature which indicates that Pakistan women live in a more stable society with more freedoms and access to services, while the Taliban rule in Afghanistan continues to have a strong effect on women's rights and their access to healthcare and education (Nasrullah & Bhatti, 2012). Afghan women experience extreme cultural and religious barriers to employment, particularly in rural areas. Some improvements have been made in urban areas, but the laws in place to protect women from gender discrimination are not enforced (Parrot, 2011). Further, most of the jobs available to Afghan women (e.g., agriculture, soap making, basket weaving) have little impact on the societal status of women and the pay is very poor (Icheku, 2011). Women in Pakistan today are more actively participating in society, employing their technical skills in all sectors (Shabib-ul-hasan & Mustafa, 2012), and these opportunities for non-agricultural employment have lowered their poverty level and increased their social status when compared with Afghan women (Zakaria & Fida, 2012). Afghanistan has a 25% quota for female seats in Parliament (Baker 2010) while Pakistan has also made significant progress in increasing women's participation in politics, with 33% of seats in government reserved for women, 17% of seats reserved in parliament, and a 5% quota for women in government jobs (Mumtaz, 2005). While promising efforts are being made, both Pakistani and Afghan women continue to face a number of financial, cultural, and geographical barriers to employment and becoming a mainstay in the business world (Afza & Rashid, 2009; Critelli & Willett, 2012; Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Shah et al., 2010).

Women living in rural areas reported greater perceived inequality, and specifically, less access to employment and healthcare. Living in a rural area was the strongest predictor of perceptions of available services, reporting less access to all services we inquired about. Poverty is greater in rural areas, and geographical and physical barriers such as terrain, distance, and resources needed to travel create a gap in services (Afza & Rashid, 2009; Heath 2011). Cultural norms based on patriarchal values also have a stronger presence in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan, which likely also explains the greater perceptions of inequality among women from those regions. In rural settings, local customs are given precedence over national law and the patriarchal norms enforce strict gender discrimination (Critelli & Willett, 2012; Parrot, 2012), including women's role in agricultural duties, a strong feudal family system, and security concerns of parents, which prevent girls and women from seeking education and employment (Mahmood, 2012).

Pashtun or Shia women reported perceptions of lower levels of some rights and services. Pashtun women reported less perceived participation in politics. This may be because Afghan Pashtun women are more likely to live in rural areas, which, as mentioned, are decidedly more patriarchal and traditional with regard to women's role in society (Nasrullah & Bhatti, 2012). Similarly, Nasrullah and Bhatti (2012) found that 77% of Afghan Pashtun women had no education, with 34% indicating that their families did not allow them to go. Alternatively, Pakistan Pashtun women in the same sample reported much greater access to education, reporting the second highest educational level of all ethnic groups surveyed. In our

sample, Shia Muslim women reported perceiving less protection from violence and less access to pediatric services.

Women who had above modal income and some education were more likely to see services utilized by women as being available. This is consistent with research that indicates women in higher social strata are able to pursue more opportunities, have greater access to education, and their husbands and families tend to be less discouraging of women entrepreneurs (Roomi & Harrison, 2010). Women who were older were also more likely to see services utilized by women as being available. This could be based on older women having greater freedom of movement than women of reproductive age (Stites 2011). Or as a similar finding to Manganaro and Alozie (2011), older women may have more conservative views on the topic of women's rights, therefore seeing no issue with service availability.

The way in which women in our sample received news had little impact on perceptions of rights; however, women who primarily received their news from television (i.e., a more Westernized media source) generally saw health services as being more available. It is likely that having access to television can be equated with higher income and also made those women more aware of existing services and resources. If this is the case, then this presents issues related to a "digital divide" between the wealthy and poor and also between those living in urban and rural settings.

Surprisingly, Afghan women saw certain rights and access to services as becoming worse between 2012 and 2014, including less healthcare, less decision-making for reproductive health, less pre- and post-natal care, less general health services, and less women-specific health services. This finding is supported by Chishti's research (2010) on the violence perpetrated by insurgents who continue to try to reverse gains in education among Afghan girls by destroying schools and threatening teachers, students, and families. In addition, women who accept international aid are considered "nation betrayers" by the Taliban and are threatened, intimidated, and sometimes killed for accepting this aid. Chishti (2010) also states that the perception of the newly liberated Afghanistan is not a reality, and concerns of human rights have not been prioritized.

In conclusion, Afghan and Pakistani women perceive unequal rights and access to services as compared to men living in their respective countries. Greater and more consistent efforts need to be made in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to enhance women's rights to education, healthcare, and employment and to increase access to services so that these women can lead healthy lives without daily stressors that impede their physical and mental well-being. Current promising efforts to that end include women-only training in entrepreneurial competencies (Roomi & Harrison, 2010), Non Formal Basic Education (Malik et al., 2010), and women organizations such as Dastak (Critelli 2010), all of which are working to reduce gender discrimination and violence and enhance women's roles in Afghan and Pakistani societies. It is also important for women in these countries to become greater participants in politics and government so that we can begin to see laws that protect women from denial of rights and services implemented and enforced. Women's empowerment is strengthened by education, access to media, health facilities, decision-making related to reproductive health, and the elimination of gender discrimination and violence (Chaudhry et al., 2012).

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