

# **Perspectives on Attitudes and Behaviors of Pashtun Women in Pakistan and Afghanistan**

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## 1. The Pashtun People

This paper will compare the results from national surveys conducted in 2007 and 2012 in Afghanistan and Pakistan, focusing on the responses of Pashtun women in those countries. The origins of the Pashtun people of Afghanistan and Pakistan are unclear to historians, but Pashtuns nonetheless share a strong sense of shared ancestry from a single man (whose descendants organized themselves into an intricate network of tribes) and shared values. Pashtuns are distinguished from other groups in the region by their language and their adherence to Pashtunwali, a moral code that predates the introduction of Islam to the region. Pashtunwali encompasses several principles including honor, revenge, freedom, and chivalry,<sup>1</sup> including many restrictions on the behavior of women. Although Islam is closely intertwined with Pashtun identity, the values of Islam and Pashtunwali differ in many respects. Furthermore, while the Taliban leadership is Pashtun, there are deep discrepancies between the restrictions imposed on women by the Taliban in Afghanistan, principles of Pashtunwali, and Islam as it is understood by the majority of Muslims. These differences are beyond the scope of this paper. However, recognizing their existence is essential to understanding this account of the lives of Pashtun women and its limited applicability to understanding the lives of Muslim women worldwide.

This paper will examine the attitudes and behaviors of Pashtun women on either side of the Durand line. The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which slices through the heart of the region populated mainly by Pashtuns, is highly porous and the cultural ties between Pashtuns on either side often transcend national identity. However, events in the recent history of Afghanistan and Pakistan have led to differences in the everyday lives of Pashtun women despite similarities in the norms that govern their societies. In Afghanistan, the traditional restrictions on women of all ethnicities were compounded by the Wahhabi-influenced Taliban rule that extended across the country between 1996 and 2001, and persists to the present day in many parts of the southern and eastern regions of the country, with profound effects on their access even to basic services such as health care and education. Another difference is economics. With a per capita GDP of \$501.47, Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries.<sup>2</sup> Pakistan's per capita GDP lags behind that of many of its neighbors but is over twice as high as Afghanistan's at \$1,019.<sup>3</sup> Differences in governance are even greater. In both countries, the areas largely populated by Pashtuns have historically

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<sup>1</sup> Cathell, John H. US. Department of Defense. Defense Technical Information Center . Naval War College (2009), p. 7, available at <<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA502894&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>>. Accessed April 5, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> "GDP Per Capita (Current US\$)". The World Bank (2010), available at available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>. Accessed April 15, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

resisted control of the government in the capital. However, while Pakistan faces serious challenges in establishing stability, its influence over the country is still stronger than that of the Afghan government beyond Kabul. Afghanistan has throughout its history been a highly decentralized society and the recent decades of unrest have posed additional challenges to connectivity and development. These differences have profound effects on the safety and welfare of women in both countries as the data will illustrate. While women living in remote villages in either country may have standards of living that are virtually indistinguishable, on the whole Pakistani women live in more prosperous and stable society with greater access to services and, by some measures, greater personal freedoms.

## **2. Methodology**

### **a. March 2007**

#### **i. Pakistan**

This survey was conducted for D3 Systems, Inc. by Gallup Pakistan. Interviews were conducted in person, among a random national sample of 2,065 Pakistani adults March 17<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The survey used stratified, multi-stage selection procedure in four provinces and the Islamabad Capital Territory. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which have a population that is almost entirely Pashtun, were not included in the sample. Approximately 3.2 million people lived in FATA according to the 1998 Census, comprising about 2.4% of the country's population.<sup>4</sup> In total there were 102 Pashtun women interviewed in this survey.

#### **ii. Afghanistan**

This survey was conducted for D3 Systems by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) in Kabul, a subsidiary of D3 Systems Inc. in Vienna, VA, USA. Interviews were conducted in person, in Dari or Pashto, among a random national sample of 2,346 Afghan adults March 7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

Half the sampling points were designated for male interviews, half for female interviews. Male respondents were interviewed only by male interviewers, female respondents only by female interviewers. Residences were selected within each settlement by random route/random interval and respondents were selected within residence by Kish grid. In total there were 502 Pashtun women interviewed in this survey.

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<sup>4</sup> "Population by Province/Region Since 1951". Population Census Organization Pakistan (1998), available at <http://www.census.gov.pk/Statistics.htm>. Accessed April 17, 2012.

## **b. February/March 2012**

### **i. Pakistan**

This 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 Pakistani adults March 19<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The survey used stratified, multi-stage selection procedure. As in 2007, the sample included the four provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory and excluded the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In total there were 133 Pashtun women interviewed in this survey.

The results for this survey have a margin of sampling error of  $\pm 2$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

### **ii. Afghanistan**

This survey was conducted for D3 Systems by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) in Kabul, a subsidiary of D3 Systems Inc. Interviews were conducted in person, in Dari or Pashto, among a random national sample of 2,018 Afghan adults during January 24-February 3, 2012. Half the sampling points were designated for male interviews, half for female interviews. Male respondents were interviewed only by male interviewers, female respondents only by female interviewers. Residences were selected within each settlement by random route/random interval and respondents were selected within residence by Kish grid.

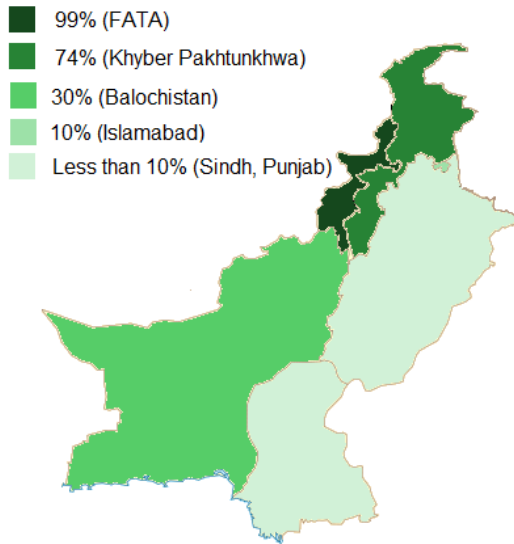
The survey used stratified, multi-stage selection procedure. Of the 129 districts initially drawn in the sample, 16 were inaccessible on security grounds and 7 were inaccessible due to transportation problems. They were randomly replaced with other districts within the same province. At the settlement level, 33 of the 264 selected locales were replaced: 4 could not be located or were in the wrong district, 12 were inaccessible on security grounds, and 17 could not be reached for weather or other reasons. These were randomly substituted with settlements in the same districts. This is a customary number of settlement-level replacements in our national surveys of Afghanistan. Also, in a limited number of locations female interviewers could not work and that is the only way ACSOR can reach the female population. In particular women could not be interviewed anywhere in Paktika, which accounts for 1.7 of the country's population (approximately 3% of the population of Pashtun women as determined by the 2007 survey responses) and interviewing women was limited to a single urban district in Zabul (representing 2% of the Pashtun women surveyed, compared

with the 12% represented in Zabul in 2007). In total there were 383 Pashtun women interviewed in this survey.

The survey had a contact rate of 80 percent and a cooperation rate of 93 percent for a net response rate of 75 percent. The impact of clustering on the sample produces an estimated design effect of 1.39, for a total margin of sampling error of 2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level confidence level.

### 3. Population Characteristics

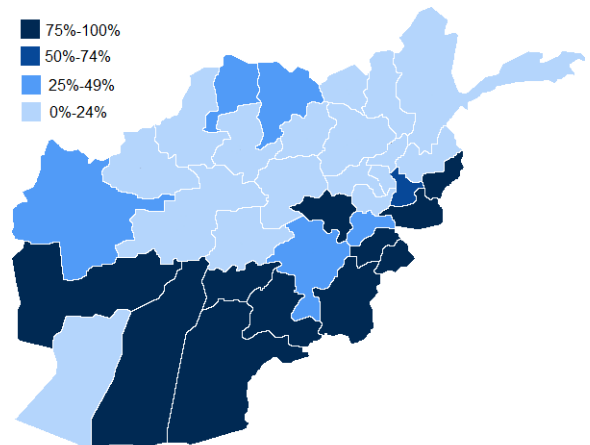
The largest population of Pashtuns lives in Pakistan where they comprise 15% of the total population<sup>5</sup> (and 14% of the respondents interviewed in 2012). This is far smaller than the largest group, Punjabis, who form about 45% of the population<sup>6</sup> and have comprised the majority



of the country's ruling elite. The official count of Pashtuns in Pakistan likely excludes roughly one million Afghan refugees who have settled in the country, a large percentage of them Pashtun. They form the majority of the population in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.<sup>7</sup> Sixty-seven percent of the Pashtun women interviewed in Pakistan in 2012 live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

smaller in absolute terms than the population in Pakistan, but it is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, with about 42% of the population.<sup>8</sup> Pashtuns in Afghanistan have ruled the country for much of its history to the present government led by President Hamid Karzai and their influence over all levels of government is

The Pashtun population in Afghanistan is



<sup>5</sup> "Population by Mother Tongue". Population Census Organization Pakistan (1998). available at <http://www.census.gov.pk/MotherTongue.htm>. Accessed April 22, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Country Profile: Pakistan". Library of Congress. Library of Congress Country Studies on Pakistan (February 2005), available at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Pakistan.pdf>. Accessed April 5, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> "Country Profile: Afghanistan". Library of Congress. Library of Congress Country Studies on Afghanistan (August 2008), available at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>. Accessed April 5, 2012.

considerable. Consistent with figures drawn from outside sources, in the 2012 survey Pashtuns comprised 40% of the sample in Afghanistan. Pashtuns form the majority in 12 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. Seventy-two percent of Afghan Pashtun women in this survey live in provinces where the majority of residents are Pashtun (the figure is likely higher, since as noted above women could not be interviewed in Paktika which is nearly all Pashtun).

Afghan Pashtun women are slightly more likely to live in rural areas. Eighty-three percent of Afghan Pashtun women live in villages compared with 78% of the total population. Afghanistan has few paved roads and infrastructure limited by security and decades of war so travel for a rural woman is more likely to be dangerous and inconvenient, and thus limited to emergencies. On the other hand, the data and literature review suggest that women living in areas where they are surrounded by family members may have greater freedom of movement within the community, if not necessarily beyond its borders.

Pakistan has a larger urban population, and the distribution of Pashtun women in Pakistan is slightly more rural the population as a whole: 66% of the national population lives in villages (compared with 70% of Pashtun women only) and 13% of Pakistanis live in the major metropolitan areas of Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore compared with 8% of Pashtun women.

#### **a. Education**

Seventy-seven percent of Afghan Pashtun women interviewed are unschooled, with an average education level of 1.8 years (compared with 2.6 years among non-Pashtun women). Among respondents who completed less than 13 years of formal education, 34% said their family did not allow them to continue (similar to the figure for non-Pashtun women whose education was curtailed). Sixteen percent said their family had needed them to work in the home, 14% said there had been no school available, and 10% said their family did not have enough money. Of the Afghan Pashtun women who said there had been no school available, 52% were of school age during the Taliban regime lasting from 1996 to 2001 when all girls' schools were closed. For several years following the U.S. intervention the Taliban continued to discourage girls' education, sometimes violently, in areas they controlled but some sources suggest they are no longer actively opposing it.<sup>9</sup>

Pakistani women have much greater access to education, with Pashtun women actually reporting the second highest average education level (6.9 years) of any ethnic group (6 years for all Pakistani women, 8.9 years for Muhajir women). Of the Pakistani Pashtun women who did not

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<sup>9</sup> "Afghan Taliban 'end' opposition to educating girls". BBC News (January 11, 2011). Accessed April 22, 2012 at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12188517>.



complete at least 13 years of education (n=129), the largest percentage (31%) said the reason was that their families did not allow them to continue followed by 26% who said they had insufficient funds to continue.

Corresponding with their low levels of schooling, Afghan Pashtun women are more likely to report that they have fewer rights than men when it comes to education: 38% say they have fewer rights, compared to 30% non-Pashtun women (n=603). Diversity could affect Afghan Pashtun women's access to services, particularly education. A girl in a mixed community may have a greater chance of having the opportunity to go to school if demand from other families means that girls' schools are available; while a girl in a homogeneous community may be barred from education even if her family is willing if there is insufficient support in the community for a girls' school. A larger sample size would allow more accurate analysis of these figures on a provincial level, but other social factors may also be in play. When Pashtun families are living among strangers rather than within their kinship networks, the pressure to adhere to the Pashtunwali principle of *purdah* (gender boundaries) is often greater.<sup>10</sup> Consistent with these results, among Pakistani Pashtun women, women in the mixed province of Balochistan nearly all (93%) say they have fewer rights than men when it comes to education, while only 30% of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa say they have fewer rights than men to education. Among non-Pashtun Pakistani women, 35% of women say Pakistani women have fewer rights than men when it comes to education.

#### **b. Income**

Most Afghans surveyed (34%) reported that their income falls between 5,001 and 10,000 Afghanis per month (about \$100-\$200), which corresponds to the figure reported by Pashtun women only. Fewer Pashtun women report the very lowest level of income (2,000 Afghanis or less, or about \$40) - 4% of Pashtun women say they fall within this category, compared to 11% of all respondents.

In Pakistan, only 2% of respondents (male and female) report their household income is less than \$55 per month (under 5,000 PKR- Pakistani rupees) and 19% of respondents say their household income is under \$100 per month (about 9,000 PKR). Like Afghan Pashtun women, Pakistani Pashtun women are less likely to report that their family's monthly income falls within the lowest bands. Only five percent report that their household income is less than \$100 per month.

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<sup>10</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, *Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: University of Yale Press, 1995), 24 cited in Palwasha Kakar, "Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women's Legislative Authority", Islamic Legal Studies Program at Harvard University (2004) (p. 5), accessed April 6, 2012 at <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf>.



In keeping with their lower incomes compared to Pakistani women, Afghan Pashtun women are more likely to live in large households headed by farmers. Women do not commonly work outside the home in either country. In 2012, 95% of Afghan Pashtun women were housewives (not working outside the home) from 89% in 2007. Of the Afghan Pashtun women who are not heads of households, 24% said the head of their household farms their own land and 18% said the head of household is a skilled worker.

Ninety-one percent of the Pakistani Pashtun women interviewed are housewives and the remaining 9% are students. Pakistani Pashtun women's households are headed by skilled laborers (26%) and small business owners (17%). Few report that the head of their household is an agricultural worker (1%) or farm owner (6%).

The average household size for an Afghan Pashtun family is 10, while non-Pashtun women report an average household size of about 8. The average household size for a Pakistani Pashtun woman is 8, while non-Pashtun Pakistani women report an average household size of 7. The average age of marriage among Afghan Pashtun women was 21 in 2012, consistent with the findings from the previous wave in 2007. This is about the same as the average for non-Pashtun Afghan women. Seventeen percent of Afghan Pashtun women were under eighteen when they married compared with 7% of Pakistan Pashtun women. The average age of marriage for both Pashtun and non-Pashtun women in Pakistan is 21.

#### **4. Attitudes and Behaviors**

##### **a. Media Use**

Radio is the main source of news for 50% of Afghan Pashtun women followed by television (20%) and friends or family members (19%). But while it is still dwarfed by radio listenership, one of the most dramatic trends in the data is the increase in popularity of television. This change is significant because studies suggest a correlation in some environments between the introduction of cable television to a community and changes in women's favor in gender attitudes.<sup>11</sup> Access to television in many Pashtun areas of Afghanistan is limited by irregular electricity as well as Taliban edicts against television viewing. However, television has grown as the main source of news for Afghan Pashtun women from 11% in 2007. The growth in television viewing comes largely at the expense of radio, which fell from 65% in 2007. The latter may explain the greater popularity of television among non-Pashtun women, 37% of whom name it as their preferred source of news. Many Pashtun women rarely attend public religious events or services so these are not a major source of news within this group, with 3% getting

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<sup>11</sup> Jensen, Robert and Emily Oster, "The Power of TV: Cable Television and Women's Status in India." (2007), available at <http://home.uchicago.edu/~eoster/tvwomen.pdf>. Accessed April 24, 2012.

news from religious leaders or going to mosque. Three percent of Afghan Pashtun women say they don't follow the news.

The contrast with Pakistani Pashtun women is stark- 87% say television is their main source of news, with just 4% saying their main source is radio and 4% saying their main source is print (news or magazines). Pashtun Pakistani women are actually more likely than non-Pashtun women to be television viewers. Like Afghan Pashtun women, Pakistani Pashtun women rarely get news from religious leaders or gatherings with only 3% saying this is their main source for news.

### **b. Personal Satisfaction**

Pakistani Pashtun women are generally more optimistic about the future than their Afghan counterparts, likely reflecting the uncertain security situation in Afghanistan. Of the Afghan Pashtun women who have school-aged daughters in the household, 69% believe their daughter will have a better life than them. Among Pakistani Pashtun women with school-aged daughters (n=64), 77% believe their daughters will have a better life than them.

When asked about one change that would make their lives happier the highest response from Afghan Pashtun women was for more education followed by better health at 26%. In 2007, the responses were 25% and 18% respectively. Twenty percent mentioned more money in 2012 (compared with 38% in 2007) and 12% said a better house. Eight percent said no change to their life was necessary. Non-Pashtun meanwhile gave "more money" as their preferred change (30%), and only 2% said no change in their life was necessary. The responses of Pakistani Pashtun women were divided between more money (22%), a better education (21%), and a better house (21%). Ten percent said they would like better health. Fourteen percent said no change is necessary, compared with 5% of non-Pashtun women who say the same. This may be the result of higher incomes among Pakistani Pashtuns- 40% of non-Pashtun women in Pakistan said more money would make their lives happier.

### **c. Women's Rights**

Sixty-two percent of Afghan Pashtun women believe that they personally are entitled to the same rights as men in the country (28% "strongly agree" compared to 37% of non-Pashtun Afghan women women). Twelve percent "strongly disagree". Fifty-four percent believe that their country is closing the gap in inequality between men and women (4% believe no gap exists). In Pakistan 56% of Pashtun women agree that they personally are entitled to the same rights as men in the country and the gap between Pashtun women who "strongly agree"-28%- and non-Pashtun women who "strongly agree" is even wider, with 43% of non-Pashtun women "strongly" agreeing that they personally are entitled to the same rights as men.

Afghan Pashtun women are more likely than other Afghan women to report that they personally have fewer rights than men. Sixty percent of Afghan Pashtun women say they personally have fewer rights than men when it comes to participating in politics (33% equal rights, 6% more rights), 53% believe they have less access to employment (compared to 43% among non-Pashtun Afghan women), and 55% believe they have less protection from violence (compared with 50% of non-Pashtun Afghan women). Thirty-eight percent believe they have fewer rights when it comes to access to education (compared with 30% among non-Pashtun Afghan women), 34% believe they have fewer rights regarding access to health care (compared at 27% of non-Pashtun Afghan women), and 33% believe they have fewer rights when it comes to making decisions about reproductive health.

Pashtun Pakistani women feel that women have equal rights to men in many areas. Forty-eight percent of Pakistan Pashtun women say women have fewer rights than men in their country when it comes to participating in politics compared with 36% of non-Pashtun women. Forty-two percent of Pakistan Pashtun women say they have fewer rights regarding access to education (compared to 35% of non-Pashtun women). The gap in response regarding access to employment is consistent with the absence of Pakistan Pashtun women from the workforce- 60% say they have fewer rights than men in accessing employment, compared with 42% of non-Pashtun women. Pakistan Pashtun women have greater confidence in women's equal rights to protection from violence- 56% say they have equal rights as men when it comes to protection from violence, compared to 28% of non-Pashtun women. Pakistan Pashtun women are also more likely to say they have equal rights to access to healthcare than non-Pashtun women (65% say equal rights, compared to 54%) and decisions regarding reproductive health (65% compared with 49%).

Twenty-three percent of Afghan Pashtun women have been a member of a group promoting women's rights (compared with 13% of non-Pashtun women). Of those who have not, 53% would be "somewhat" or "very interested" in participating if there was such an organization (compared with 63% of non-Pashtun women who had never been members of this kind of group). Membership in such organizations is less prevalent among Pakistani Pashtun women, with only 10% of Pakistan Pashtun women reporting participation. Of those who have not (n=114), 60% say they would be very or somewhat interested. Only respondents in living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had ever been members of an organized group promoting women's rights.

#### **d. Voting behavior**

Thirty-eight percent of Afghan Pashtun women who were eligible to vote in the last national local election did so (from 49% in 2007) and 34% of eligible Afghan Pashtun women voted in the last local election. Fifty-seven percent of non-Pashtun Afghan women voted in the last election. Voting is more widespread among Pakistan Pashtun women and voting behavior is

similar to non-Pashtun women, with 58% and 62% of eligible female voters saying they voted in the last national election respectively. The gap is wider for local elections, with 48% of Pashtun women in Pakistan saying they voted in the last local election compared to 60% of non-Pashtun women. In Balochistan no eligible woman surveyed, regardless of ethnicity, reported that she voted.

#### **e. Dispute Resolution**

The type of dispute resolution system operating in a community can have serious implications for women. In some Pashtun communities women and girls are exchanged in marriage between families to settle conflicts, a practice that is officially illegal in Afghanistan but is still in place particularly in areas where there are not state courts to administer formal decisions and penalties. Furthermore, there are legal practices disadvantageous to women on many issues including rape, custody, and other issues in both countries. The most common organ for legal dispute resolution in Afghan Pashtun women respondents' communities are the tribal elders (43%), followed by the state courts (26%). Other resources for resolving legal issues include the community (13%) or the local imam or mullah (8%). Eight percent of Afghan Pashtun women said there is no legal system in their community. Sixty-four percent of Afghan Pashtun women "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" that women in their district have access to a legal system that treats both men and women equally.

State courts are more prevalent in the communities where Pakistani Pashtun women live, with 44% reporting that state courts are primarily in control of resolving legal issues in the area (49% in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) followed by tribal elders (33%, 59% in Balochistan), the community (18%) and the local imam or mullah (3%). Sixty-one percent of Pashtun women in Pakistan and 56% of non-Pashtun Pakistani women say that they "somewhat" or "strongly agree" that women in their district have access to a legal system that treats both men and women equally.

#### **5. Household Finances**

Data about decisions regarding household purchases offer insights into Pashtun women's mobility outside the home and influence on everyday matters. Ten percent of Afghan Pashtun women interviewed in 2012 say they decide what purchases are made to meet daily household items (compared with 9% of non-Pashtun women) compared with 14% of Pashtun women in the and 16% of non-Pashtun women in 2007. In 2007 over half (58%) of Afghan Pashtun women said their spouse made the decisions about purchasing daily household items compared with 22% of Pakistan Pashtun women. In 39% of Afghan respondents' households in 2012 these decisions are made by the respondent's spouse, and 23% of respondents say the purchasing is directed by another male member of the household. In most Afghan Pashtun respondents' homes savings

are controlled by the spouse (33%, from 44% in 2007) or another male relative (17%). Ten percent of Afghan Pashtun women control their own savings and 10% have none.

Pakistani women have greater control over household purchases and savings. Twenty-three percent of Pakistan Pashtun women say they decide what purchases are made to meet household needs like food, clothing, and cleaning supplies. Twenty-three percent say decisions are made by the spouse, consistent with the findings in 2007. Twenty-four percent of respondents say these decisions are made jointly, 14% say they are made by another male member of the household, and 15% say they are made by another female member of the household. Most Pakistan Pashtun women say their savings are controlled by their spouse (26%), jointly, 21%, another male member of the household (21%), or another female member of the household (15%). Seventeen percent of Pakistan Pashtun women say they control the household savings themselves and none said they have no savings.

## **6. Healthcare**

Afghanistan's maternal mortality rate of 1,4000 out of every 100,000 live births,<sup>12</sup> the highest in the world and over twice the average among other low income countries, make the country one of the unhealthiest places on earth to be a woman. Most Afghan Pashtun women meanwhile say they have "very adequate" or "somewhat adequate" access in their area to general healthcare (64%), pediatric care (55%), and prenatal care (50%). Slightly less than half say they have adequate access to post-natal care (48%) and women's health services (47%). Access to these services among all Afghan women is similar with the exception of pediatric care. Forty-five percent of non-Pashtun Afghan women report that adequate pediatric care is available in their area.

Public health statistics indicate that the care available to Pakistani women is considerably better with 260 maternal deaths out of every 100,000 live births.<sup>13</sup> Thirty-nine percent Pakistani women give birth attended by a trained medical professional, compared with 14% in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> Pakistan Pashtun women rate the health care in their area more highly than non-Pashtun women by at least five percentage points for every type of healthcare measured. Seventy-seven percent rate their access to general healthcare services as "very" or "somewhat adequate", 68% say their access to pediatric care is adequate, 72% say their access to pre-natal care is adequate, 65% say their access to post-natal care is adequate, and 71% say their access to women's health services is adequate.

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<sup>12</sup> "World Statistics 2011". World Health Organization (2011) p. 58, available at [http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world\\_health\\_statistics/EN\\_WHS2011\\_Part2.pdf](http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world_health_statistics/EN_WHS2011_Part2.pdf). Accessed April 17, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 92.



## **7. Changes Since 2007**

By some indicators the lives of Pashtun women in both countries have improved since the 2007 survey. Pakistani Pashtun women have made gains in literacy, with the rate of illiteracy falling from 37% to 17%. The change in literacy rates among Afghan Pashtun women was not significant. Although the literacy rate among non-Pashtun Afghan women between the ages of 18 and 24 is much higher than the literacy rate among non-Pashtun women as a whole, suggesting that they have benefited from the availability of girls' schools, illiteracy is relatively constant between age groups among Pashtun women indicating that younger women have not had significantly better access to education than their older peers despite greater availability nationwide.

Both Pakistani and Afghan Pashtun women assumed greater control over household finances over the past five years. This development has not coincided with a noticeable increase in employment among Pashtun women so other possible factors could include greater mobility and greater exposure to mass media and advertising. The increase in television viewing is dramatic in both countries. The percentage of Pashtun women who say television is their main source for news has risen from 11% to 37% in Afghanistan and from 49% to 88% in Pakistan in the past five years.

Afghan Pashtun women voted in smaller numbers in 2012 than they had in 2007: 49% in 2007 compared with 38% five years later. The deteriorating security situation in many Pashtun areas of Afghanistan is the most likely cause, although growing disaffection with the national government is also a probable factor. Like the obstinately high level of illiteracy among Afghan Pashtun women, this change suggests that many of the barriers to greater participation by Afghan Pashtun women in public life will not be easily overcome.

## **8. Future Research**

In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, access to Pashtun women is limited in many of the areas where they are most densely concentrated. There will be opportunities for more detailed and extensive analysis when (or if) access to these locations improves. Although these results give the impression of women whose ability to control their lives is very limited, the reality is far more complicated. While it is not unheard of for Pashtun women to leave their homes just a few times a year or less, many of these women live in large joint families where they may be able to exert considerable influence without venturing beyond their own walls. Further research, both quantitative and qualitative, of how Pashtun women interact with their families and communities, would deepen comprehension of a culture that is still widely misunderstood by outsiders.

The data suggested some differences in response between women in mixed and predominantly Pashtun communities but the samples in both countries was too small to allow more detailed analysis. A larger sample size would also allow greater study of whether residence in a homogenous Pashtun community correlates to greater of freedom of movement and access to services than residence in a mixed community.

The dramatic growth in television viewership in Afghanistan poses many possibilities for future study if conditions allow this trend to continue. Regression analysis examining relationships between television viewing and attitudes towards women's rights, among both men and women could illuminate whether the availability of television in an area leads to changes in gender attitudes and behaviors. Further research about the programs women watch with their children or other family members could give some insights into the messages and themes that appeal to them and that may affect the thinking of members of the household.

Finally, while many Afghans supported repeal of Taliban policies such as prohibitions on girls' education and female employment after the fall of the Taliban regime, these and other gains continue to be contested. If conservative factions within the country take on greater power within the government, there may be growing pressure on the country's leadership to return to some of the restrictions of the previous era. If the security situation does not improve, popular support for organizations that advocate for restrictions on women but also promise safety and stability may increase. Further studies of this population as settlement negotiations progress may illustrate whether Pashtun women are becoming more willing to sacrifice their own freedoms for the promise of a safer environment for them and their families.