

Running Head: GIRLS' SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL IN AFGHANISTAN

The influence of traditions and cultural norms on girls' school withdrawal in
Afghanistan: A qualitative study of maternal accounts

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“Once you educate the boys, they tend to leave the villages and go search for work in the cities, but the girls stay home, become leaders in the community, and pass on what they’ve learned. If you really want to change a culture, to empower women, improve basic hygiene and health care, and fight high rates of infant mortality, the answer is to educate girls.” ~ Greg Mortenson, January 22, 2009, p. 209

“Educate a boy, and you educate an individual. Educate a girl, but if you educate a community.” ~ African proverb

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Abstract

Girls' withdrawal from school is posing a major challenge to female literacy in Afghanistan. The aim of this research was to examine the influence of Afghan traditions and cultural norms on girls' school withdrawal by parents or guardians in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province. To achieve this aim the accounts of 12 mothers with daughters pulled out of school were obtained through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via the theoretical lens of Existentialist Feminism and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model. The findings suggest that in order to address the problem of girls' withdrawal from school in Khinjan, the informal communication networks that reinforce the tendency of parents/guardians, especially male ones, to withdraw the girls from school should be influenced by communication channels in the district. Grounded on Paulo Freire's concept of dialogue for liberation, it is recommended that credible members in the community should initiate and engage in a transforming dialogue about education of girls, with Khinjanis.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Girls' withdrawal from school, also known as dropping out of school, has been increasing in the secondary and higher secondary school system in Afghanistan (Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008; Strickland, 2008). Among other reasons, Afghan traditions and cultural norms are identified as one of the key contributing factors on this matter (Burch, 2004; Hunte; 2006; Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008; Strickland, 2008). This thesis is a qualitative research project on mothers' explanations of the decision to withdraw their girls from school in Afghanistan.

Background

The practice of school dropping out, especially among girls, is a global issue (Alika & Egbochuku, 2009; Crighton, 2005; Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010). Dropout refers to a student who enrolls in school but leaves before completion of a full grade or leaves school after studying a few grades (Crighton, 2005; OECD, 2002 & UNESCO, 2005 as cited in ESP, 2007; UNESCO, 1984). A comprehensive definition of a school dropout was presented by Morrow (1987) who stated:

A dropout is any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absences, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrolment in another state-licensed educational institution. A student death is not tallied as a dropout (as cited in ESP, 2007). Crighton (2005) argued that this definition is not applicable in every context. Likewise, ESP (2007) claimed that there is not a common understanding of the term across countries. In Afghanistan, for example, according to the Ministry of Education's policy, a dropout could be a temporary or permanent absentee (as cited in Jackson, 2011). A

temporary absentee is a student who does not attend school for most or all of an academic year. A permanent absentee is the one who is absent for one to three academic years. Their names appear in the school enrolment list for three consecutive years after their nonattendance (Jackson, 2011).

Historically, school dropping out was first recorded in the 20th century when high school education formally began in the early part of the century (Austin, Cartin, O'Neil, & Sansone, 2008). School dropping out became an issue of concern in the early 1960s in the United States of America when an increasing trend of dropping out was noticed in high schools. At that time the term dropout referred to a student who would leave school before getting a high school diploma (Dron, 1996 as cited in Gonzalez, Kennedy, & St. Julien, 2009). Boys' school dropping out was associated with personality problems and mental instability while girls' dropping out was not recognized as an issue (Austin et al., 2008). Over the course of time the extent and motives for school dropping out have varied around the world with poverty being the predominant reason (Crighton, 2005; ESP, 2007; Walker, McGregor, Himes, Williams, & Duff, 1998). UNESCO (1948) studied school dropping out in China, India, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Sri Lanka and Thailand. This research found that the intensity of dropping out and grade repetition, which UNESCO (1948) referred to as wastage, varied from country to country, but was higher among girls than boys in the surveyed countries.

Crighton (2005) conducted an international overview of school dropping out and non-attendance in Eastern Europe (Latvia and Slovakia), Central Asia (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan), South East Europe (Albania), and Mongolia. The results indicated a net enrolment rate of 90% in primary school in each country with 10% of school age children being out of school, which, Crighton points out, is a considerable percentage of out of

school children in these countries. At the primary level, there was a slight gender difference in favour of boys (e.g. more boys stayed in school), but this difference either became equal or favoured girls at the lower secondary and upper secondary school. The difference remained in Tajikistan with only 45% of girls attending school at the lower and upper secondary levels compared to 48% at the primary level (Crighton, 2005). Based on this study the most prominent reason for school non-enrolment, irregular attendance and dropping out in these countries was reported to be poverty: families either could not afford school supplies for their children or the children were needed to join the workforce. Crighton (2005) noted that a second reason for school non-enrolment, irregular attendance and school dropping out was lack of motivation, particularly in western countries. A survey of the Program for International Student Assessment in 2000 revealed that 35 to 40% of the students in Belgium, Canada, France, Hungary, Italy and the United States of America, respectively who were in school had also expressed a lack of motivation for school.

In East and South African countries, meanwhile, the percentage of school dropping out is high and equal among boys and girls in primary education (Crighton, 2005). By grade four a quarter of students have dropped out of school. Starting in the fifth grade the drop out rate increases for girls more than for boys because of early marriage and pregnancy (Crighton, 2005). According to Crighton (2005) the main reason for boys dropping out of school was to enter the labour market.

In Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, the Baltic nations, and [Central] Asia, students drop out or are dismissed from school for various reasons. According to UNESCO (2006), the dropout rate is high in India and Bangladesh as well, but a gender distinction was not made (cited in Hunt, 2008). In grade one, it is 14.6% in Bangladesh,

and 14.4% in India. The dropout rate decreases in grade two, with 4.4% for India and around 10% for Bangladesh. In Nepal, the dropout rate is 7 to 10% in all the grades (Hunt, 2008).

Studies have shown that the non-completion of school, especially in the primary levels, has the same consequences as non-enrolment: it negatively impacts the economic and social life of the student and of the state as a whole (Crighton, 2005). Poverty and unemployment repeat themselves from one generation to the next. Besides, poor children excluded from the education system face health problems and are left behind in all areas of development (Crighton, 2005). If they enter into the professional work environment, they earn less than high school and university graduates. In the United States, 56% of dropouts were jobless in 2000 in contrast with only 16% of graduates (Austin et al., 2008). A follow-up study of 812 girls who had dropped out of school found, 10 years after, that female dropouts tended to have more children, had a lower socioeconomic status and experienced higher rates of divorce and separation than girls who stayed in school (Hathaway, Reynolds, & Monachesi, 1969).

The impact of an education system on non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropping out of students is considerable. High demand from students, school structure such as higher teacher student ratio, lack of care for students, crowded classrooms, unqualified teachers, poor school environment and teaching materials are among the major contributors to non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropping out from school (Natriello, n.d.; Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt, 2010). In Afghanistan the education system has had a pattern of progress and serious setbacks during the course of its history (Wirak, Hayat, Nilson, Tenga, & Thyness, 2005). Historical evidence indicates that education for girls almost did not exist in Afghanistan before King Amanullah's

governance in 1919 (SIO, 2007). Prior to 1800, when a formal education system was not in place, boys were taught by Mullahs, who are the religious leaders in mosques (SIO, 2007). Formal education began in Afghanistan in 1903 with the establishment of the Habibiya School, which was a boys' school. The Ministry of Education was founded in 1922 during King Amanullah's presidency. A dramatic improvement took place as the King introduced modern education to Afghanistan. Education was considered important for nation building and the overall progress of the country. The first high school for girls, named Masturat, was established in 1921 by Queen Soraya, King Amanullah's wife (Sadat, 2004). After the Second World War the Afghan constitution declared education compulsory for girls and boys in 1935. In 1975, about 780,000 pupils were enrolled in primary school; one in seven of whom was a girl. However, by 1980, 89% of Afghans aged 25 and older had no schooling and only 0.3% had a basic education (UNDP Human development report as cited in Wirak et al., 2005).

Every Afghan government has used the education system and especially the school curriculum to achieve their objectives (Wirak et al., 2005). For example, during the communist regime in Afghanistan (1978-1992), religion was not reflected in the curriculum (SIO, 2007), and this omission outraged religious groups. Thus, after the fall of the communists (Soviet backed regime) in 1992, "religiously-inspired" Mujahideen resisted modern education and girls' education as well (SIO, 2007). During the Taliban regime (1996-2001), basic rights of Afghan women and girls, including their access to education, were denied (Qazi, 2009). Men's schooling was mostly restricted to religious studies. According to HTAC (2012), in 1996 Afghanistan had the highest rate of illiteracy in Asia for both genders. Moreover, during the civil war considerable school structures

were used as military positions and, as a result, were the target of attacks and were destroyed (SIO, 2007).

Wirak et al. (2005) state that the school enrolment rate differs drastically for boys and girls in every part of Afghanistan today. In Kabul, as an example, enrolment is 92% for boys and 81% for girls. In Herat and Badakhshan Cities, the enrolment rate of girls is higher than boys. In Badghis and Zabul, however, only 1% of the girls are enrolled in school. Similarly, in 2003 only 2% of the girls were at school in Urzgan Province and there were no female teachers (Wirak et al., 2005). A *Back to School* campaign by the government of Afghanistan increased school enrolment of both genders from 900,000 in the year 2000 to 6.2 million in 2009 (Jackson, 2011), which was an enormous gain. More particularly, girls' enrolment rose from 5,000 under the Taliban to 2.4 million up until 2011 (Jackson, 2011). This figure is unprecedented in the history of Afghanistan.

The news on girls' and boys' enrolment in school in the post-Taliban period is inspiring. However, there is a disturbing difference between the enrolment figure and the retention rate of girls at schools in Afghanistan (Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008). Records show that in 2009, 22%, or 446,682 female students, were either absent during the academic year or were long-term absentees (Jackson, 2011). Withdrawal of girls from school happens at all levels of the education system, but it is more drastic after the primary level (Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008). As in many other countries, an increasing concern that the education system of Afghanistan is now facing is a high dropping out rate, which is even higher among girls than boys, and in rural areas more than in cities (Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008; Moghadam, 1994; Tembon, 2008). All the studies referenced in this paper call the phenomenon examined in this study as "school dropping out," but since the population that is studied in this research is withdrawn from school

(Burch, 2004; Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008; Mansory, 2007; Strickland, 2008), the term “school withdrawal” will be used instead of “school dropping out” hereafter.

There is a considerable gender gap in enrolment and retention at school in Afghanistan (Islam, 2007; Jackson, 2011; Jones, 2008). In a research study conducted in 17 provinces (19.2% urban and 80.8% rural), Jackson (2011) found that the ratio of girls to boys withdrawing from school was 0.63 (63 girls for 100 boys) at the primary level to 0.48 and 0.38 at the secondary and high school levels respectively. The gender ratio in enrolment is 1:2 in favour of boys. In rural Afghanistan where 75 to 80% of the population resides (ANDS, 2008; Maletta, 2008; Metzger, 2011; UNDP, 2011), boys' enrolment in secondary school is ten times higher than that of girls (Jones, 2008). Furthermore, the retention of boys is twice as high as that of girls. The rate at which boys became absentees (temporary and permanent) in 2009 was 11% (799,822) versus 22% for girls (446,682) (Jackson, 2011). These data prompt the question of why girls who enrol in school tend not to complete their studies.

Researchers have suggested several factors to explain the withdrawal of girls from school in Afghanistan. Among the reasons presented are the distance a girl must travel to reach school, household poverty, early marriage, low quality of education at schools, security threats, harassment of girls who attend classes, and tradition and cultural norms (Islam, 2007; Jackson, 2011). Although all these factors are important, the present thesis focuses on tradition and cultural norms and their influence on perceptions of parents/guardians who withdraw their daughters from school in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province. Further, the viewpoints that hinder girls from getting a full education will be sought in order to understand the parents and guardians' reasoning and action. One girl quoted in Jackson's research stated, “distance is just an excuse for conservative

attitudes” (2011, p. 18). This research will seek to explore these underlying “conservative attitudes” about girls’ education that might make parents withdraw their daughters from school.

The key decision-makers in the withdrawal of girls in general are the male parent and elder brother(s) (Hunte, 2006), and in their absence, an uncle(s). These men are influenced by community elders or a religious leader called Mullah, or other men in the community. Nevertheless, decision-making is different in every household (Jackson, 2011). Since Afghanistan is a male-dominant country, women’s voices, especially at the grassroots, are not often heard. Unlike women holding social or political positions in big cities, rural women do not have access to a platform and the resources to make their voices heard (Desai, 2011). Dr. Berit von der Lippe said that the voices of women were kept silent on purpose for it served the interests of those in power (as cited in Kristin Engh Forde, 2010). This research intends to project mothers’ voices and include their perceptions of the influence of culture and traditions on withdrawal of their daughters from school. Paulo Freire (1993) explained that in order to help with the liberation of men and women who are oppressed, it is necessary to seek their perceptions and knowledge of their current and ideal situation through dialogue instead of presenting them with the solution. Listening to and trusting those voices that have not been heard is essential when one wants to help with their liberation. This research aims to accomplish this goal.

Theoretical Foundation

This research is a phenomenological study and is guided by Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Model, Existentialist Feminism Theory and Paulo Freire’s concept of dialoguing with the oppressed to help them achieve freedom. Hofstede (2011) defines

culture as, “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p. 1). In like manner, since communication is a process that increases commonality by sending and receiving messages (McQuail, 2010), it influences the “collective programming” of people’s minds (of a particular group) to be diffused and shared and thus shaping their attitudes and behaviors. In order to examine the culture of human societies Hofstede analyzed the cultures in six categories: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism (IDV) versus Collectivism, Masculinity (MAS) versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Long-Term (LTO) versus Short-Term Orientation, Indulgence versus Restraint (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

Power Distance is “the difference in power between two individuals, with one holding high power and the other low” (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 88). According to Mooij and Hofstede (2010) in a culture where the PDI is high, social hierarchy is an important component of people’s social life. Everyone is assigned value based on his or her social status. Hofstede (1983) asserted that individuals possess unequal power in societies with great PDI and in these societies people tend to avoid disobeying the authorities. In high PDI societies, gender inequality, and the denial of girls’ rights to education tend to exist (Cheung & Chan, 2007).

Mooij and Hofstede (2010) define Individualism and Collectivism as “people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty” (p. 88 & 89). Based on Hofstede (1983) in societies with greater IDV, individual rights are important and respected, whereas in collectivist societies people act in groups or bigger communities. Personal choices and needs are considered less important, and so people have less control over

their personal lives (Cheung & Chan, 2007). The emphasis is given to group norms and structures (Triandis, 1995).

Masculinity is “the extent to which the goals of men dominate those of women” (Harvey, 1997, p. 134). According to Cheung and Chan (2007), a wider gender difference is encouraged in societies with high MAS, as men are expected to be tough and women modest; men are encouraged to reach high levels in their careers, while women are not, and at times stopped from improvement. The opposite situation exists in feminine societies or societies with low MAS.

Uncertainty Avoidance is “the extent to which future possibilities are defended against or accepted” (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89). Cheung and Chan (2007) argue that societies with UAI are resistant to new ideas and to change. A society with high UAI is conservative and has “a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity and its people feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations” (Hofstede, 1983 as cited in Cheung & Chan, 2007, p. 163). In societies with low UAI people are open to ideas, diversity and change (Cheung & Chan, 2007).

Hofstede (2011) explained that Long-term Orientation links with Confucianism and thus refers to hard work, persistence, saving, hierarchy and sense of shame. Short-term Orientation stands at the opposite end. It refers to “reciprocating social obligations, respect for tradition, protecting one’s ‘face’, and personal steadiness and stability” (p. 13). Societies with LTO believe in sharing the household responsibilities while societies with Short-Term Orientation believe in ordering the tasks to others. Long-term oriented societies’ attitude toward traditions is that traditions are prone to change according to the situations. On the opposite end, short-term oriented societies are inclined to preserving the traditions.

Indulgence versus Restraint refers to whether the culture of a society allows the individuals to satisfy their basic desires, called Indulgence, or deters them, called Restraint. In indulgent cultures people have a sense of control over their lives. On the opposite end, restraint cultures lack a sense of control over life. Speech right is important in indulgent cultures, but it is not as important in restraint cultures (Hofstede, 2011). In indulgent cultures more people are happy with their lives while in restraint cultures less people are happy and less value is given to relaxation (Hofstede, 2011). In wealthy indulgent societies the sex norms are less strict than in wealthy restraint societies.

Existentialist Feminism Theory, another theoretical lens to look at the issue of girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan, claims that the perception of men about women causes them to want to control and manipulate women (Rosser, 2005). This theory states that it is not the biological difference of women that causes them to become *the Other* to men, but the values the society puts on the face of this difference (Rosser, 2005). In her book *the Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1953) explains that from the very childhood girls and boys are encouraged to maintain distinct gender based behaviors and roles. Day to day communication practices pass the gender roles on to the younger members of the community or society and perpetuate the culture that encourages superiority of one gender over another. Thus, communication has an obvious role in diffusing and keeping the gender roles and behaviors in existence.

Existentialist Feminism Theory's explanation of the society's perception of women as inferior relates to Afghan society. As described in the following chapter, views of women and girls' as inferior in Afghan society causes their denial of rights. Equally, it is inferred from this theory that the reason girls' education compared to boys is not adequately valued is because they are considered inferior and anything related to them

less worthy.

Research Questions

The existing research addresses the following questions:

- 1) How do mothers perceive girls' education after puberty?
- 2) How do they account for their daughters' school withdrawal?
- 3) What are the communication implications of the findings of this research for addressing the problem of girls' withdrawal from school in Afghanistan?

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative research design to investigate the effects of tradition and cultural norms on parents'/guardians' decision to withdraw their daughters from school. Qualitative research is used to study the perspective of an individual or group on "a social or human problem" (Creswell 2009, p. 4). Qualitative research comprises creating research question(s), collecting data from the field, analyzing the data inductively "from particulars to general themes," and interpreting and reporting on the material (Creswell 2009, p. 4). Kothari (2004) highlighted that in behavioural sciences where the aim is to discover the motive for an action, qualitative research methodology is of importance.

A phenomenological approach has been employed in this study. A phenomenological approach is used to comprehend the perceptions of a group of people about a phenomenon of which they are the actors or experience in a particular situation (Lester, 1999). Smith (2008) referred to it as the study of a phenomenon that is consciously experienced. Dubose (2010) explains that in phenomenological research the researcher usually conducts an open-ended interview with the participant to obtain his or her interpretation of a particular experience based on how they perceive it. The current

research applied a phenomenological approach, because it deals with the phenomena of culture and traditions and specifically explores the effects of Afghan culture and traditions on girls' school withdrawal in Khinjan.

A semi-structured interview technique was used to obtain data. The participants were 12 mothers from the general population in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province. The reason Khinjan was selected as the research site in this study is because firstly it is a rural area and, secondly Khinjan was a rather secure area in terms of collecting the data over a prolonged period of time. Thirdly, anecdotal evidence from residents had suggested that in this district the cultural and traditional obstacles prevented girls from continuing education more than other factors.

Structure

The thesis includes five chapters. In the first chapter, the introduction, the research problem of girls' withdrawal from school in Afghanistan is explored. As well, the questions on mothers' accounts concerning withdrawal of girls from school are described. Further, the potential contribution of this research to girls' education within Afghan society is explored.

The second chapter talks about the background of the withdrawal of girls from school in Afghanistan. Available major literature related to the research problem is analyzed. Gaps in the previous research and the assumptions underlying the current research are pointed out. The theoretical framework, through the viewpoint of which this empirical research is conducted, is developed in this section.

The third chapter, which is the research design and methodology, discusses why an empirical, qualitative study of the subject was selected as the research methodology and why alternatives were rejected. In the fourth chapter, the themes that were discovered

during the data collection are explained and illustrated with some examples from the interviews. In this chapter the significance of the themes is discussed and the findings are related back to the literature.

The fifth and the final chapter compares the data with the theoretical framework. It further summarizes the overall project, and provides inferences on tackling the problem of girls' withdrawal from school in Khinjan District, which could be applicable in regions with similar challenges all around the country. References and annexes are provided at the end of the paper.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the theoretical lenses that have guided the present research. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model and Existentialist Feminism Theory have framed the research questions and interpreted the responses. This chapter will review these two theories plus the key literature on the research issue.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model

Geert Hofstede studied the cultural attitude of nations exhibited in attitudinal data collected by IBM from their staff in 71 countries between 1967 and 1973. The data consisted of 117,000 questionnaires from the participants (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Because the number of participants from 40 nationalities was higher than others, the researcher was able to make a stable comparison of the dimensions in these nationalities. The four dimensions listed below emerged from Hofstede & McCrae's analysis of the data. Later on, the fifth dimension was added from Michael Minkov's (2000) World Values Survey and the sixth dimension was added by Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov in 2010 (Hofstede, 2011).

Power Distance. PDI refers to the difference in power exerted by authorities in relation to people (Cheung & Chan, 2010). It also refers to the unequal distribution of power among individual persons in a society, in a community or in a family, and the extent at which this distribution is expected and accepted by them (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede and McCrae (2004) stated that power is predominantly at the core of any society, but in societies with high PDI, where a large gap exists between those who have power and those who do not, the less powerful accept the status quo and do not resist. According to Hofstede and McCrae (2004) a society's level of power distance could be

determined from viewing whether children of households are obedient or treated as self-reliant individuals. Children in societies with high PDI tend to be obedient and in societies with low PDI, they are likely to be independent.

In a high PDI society hierarchy is seen as unavoidable inequality of the social ranks. Status is valued (Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) and men tend more to exert influence on women (Cheung & Chan, 2010). The salary difference is very unequal for people of different positions. In a low PDI society hierarchy is seen as difference in roles of individuals in different positions, and the salary difference is not as significant. In a high PDI society subordinates are expected to take orders, but in a low PDI society subordinates' opinions are valued and obtained in decision-makings. In terms of political power, in a society with high PDI corruption takes place often and corrupted officials get away with it by hiding their actions. In contrast, in a society with low PDI corruption seldom happens and officials who have been involved in it lose their positions. Considering the religion, in a high PDI society there is a consideration of hierarchy among priests, while in a low PDI society religion emphasizes the equality of the followers (Hofstede, 2011). The education system in a high PDI society applies teacher-centered approach, but in a low PDI society the education system applies a student-centered approach (Hofstede, 2011).

Individualism versus Collectivism. Individualism (IDV) defines a culture where people take care of themselves and their immediate family members (McCrae, 2004). Self is important in individualistic societies as well as personal beliefs, goals, and accomplishments (Cheung & Chan, 2010). In contrast, collectivist society defines a culture where people not only care about themselves, but also their distant relatives and people in their community (McCrae, 2004). In collectivist societies people tend to think

and decide in groups, and personal concerns are less important. Hofstede (2011) has asserted that in an individualist society the ties are rather loose, but in a collective society “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) that continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty, and oppose other in-groups” (p. 11).

Some of the other variances between individualist and collectivist societies are that in an individualist society individuals identify themselves as “I.” The right to privacy is maintained. Work is given priority over relationships. If violating the norms, one feels guilty. The purpose of education in an individualist society is “learning how to learn” (Hofstede, 2011). On the other side, in a collectivist society people identify themselves as “we.” “Belonging” overshadows the privacy rights. Relationships are more important than work. If individuals violate the norms, they feel ashamed.

One of the fundamental differences of individualist and collectivist societies is the relationship of self in connection with the others. In an individualist society others are considered as individuals, whereas in a collectivist society others are divided into in-group and out-group. Similarly, in an individualist society individuals decide about their votes, while in a collectivist society the decision about the votes is made in groups (Hofstede, 2011). According to Hofstede (1991) modern and developed societies tend to become more individualistic while traditional and poor societies remain collectivist.

Masculinity (MAS) versus Femininity. A key distinction between masculine and feminine societies is the extent to which men’s and women’s values differ (Cheung & Chan, 2010; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Hofstede’s study of IBM staff revealed that women’s values do not vary greatly across the nations. Men’s values differ in feminine versus masculine societies. In feminine cultures people are usually modest and less harsh.

Women are often caring and modest in both masculine and feminine cultures, but tougher in some masculine societies. Men are assertive in cultures with high MAS; they are modest and caring in feminine societies.

Key defining features of a masculine society, according to Hofstede and Mooij (2010), “are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life” (p. 89). Cheung and Chan (2010) explained that in a masculine society men are encouraged to achieve high rankings, as there is a pressure on men to succeed. Women are not encouraged, and if they reach high levels, they are considered to be immodest. In some masculine societies there is even resistance against women securing leadership roles (Hofstede, 2011).

Other differences of a masculine and a feminine society are that in a masculine society the emotional and social roles' discrepancy is large between women and men. Work is given more value over family. When growing up boys are taught to not cry, but fight back, while girls are taught to not fight back and that it is okay if they cry. In a masculine society religion centers on God or Gods. Sex is seen as “a way of performing” (p. 12) and fathers decide on how many children his spouse and he should have. In a feminine society the emotional and social roles' discrepancy is not large between women and men. Balance is given between family and work life. Girls are boys are taught not to fight back, but they both may cry. The religion centers on human beings. The attitude toward sex is that “sex is a way of relating.” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12) and mothers decide on the number of children her spouse and she should have.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI). Uncertainty means facing unexpected and unorganized situations (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). According to Hofstede (2011) “unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual” (p. 10).

Societies that are fearful of unpredictable situations inflict strict laws and regulations. The ideological philosophy of such societies is to believe in absolute truth, in other words the belief that “there can only be one truth and we have it” (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004, p. 62). In relations to politics, the public is viewed as incapable towards the authorities (Hofstede, 2011). In education, the teacher is seen as the one who is “supposed to have all the answers” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). In a society with high UAI uncertainty is taken as a threat that must be fought and avoided. People have a higher stress level and often use emotions and inner motivations to respond to situations. Such a society has rather poor health and general well being. People maintain their jobs even if they do not like them. People are emotionally dependent on rules and predictability (Hofstede, 2011). They are vulnerable when faced with challenges and new situations.

The opposite exists in cultures with low or weak UAI. Uncertainty is seen as part of life and not confronted as a threat. The religious philosophy is based on “empiricism and relativism” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). In politics, people are viewed as capable towards the authorities. In the education system, it is fine if the teacher does not have the answer. People usually have lower level of stress and they do change jobs. People are not dependent on law and order. They are open to new situations and embrace any risks involved. Their actions are based on logic rather than emotions (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). The “different” is not perceived as dangerous, which is the case in societies with high UAI (Hofstede, 2011).

Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation. Hofstede (2011) named this dimension after encountering Michael Harris Bond's *Confucian Dynamism*. The major characteristic of a long-term orientated culture is “perseverance and thrift” (p. 13). Societies with Long-Term Orientation (LTO) accept that traditions change and are

adaptable with the change of situations. According to Hofstede (2011) such cultures have a positive attitude towards learning from other cultures. In terms of household tasks members share the tasks. A sense of shame is also attached to LTO.

In contrast, Short-Term Orientation defines cultures where traditions are respected and preserved. Serving others is one of their main values. Consumption of goods is more prevalent in short-term oriented cultures. People tend to have national pride. In short-term oriented cultures household tasks are done through imperatives and the economic growth is poor (Hofstede, 2011). The difference of long-term and short-term oriented societies in regards to their perception of good and evil is that long-term oriented societies perceive that good and evil change according to circumstances; short-term oriented societies' believe in steadiness of good and evil. Long-term oriented cultures believe in flexibility of the personality of a good individual based on circumstances, while short-term oriented cultures believe in the firmness of one's personality.

Indulgence versus Restraint. This dimension is the newest in Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model. Indulgence and Restraint refer to a culture's attitude towards fulfillment of basic needs and enjoying life. Indulgence indicates a society that allows fulfillment of basic needs whereas Restraint indicates a society that controls the fulfillment of basic needs by ordering restrictive social codes (Hofstede, 2011).

An indicator of societies with Indulgence is that individuals want to have control over their lives and value leisure. Freedom of speech is of importance. In wealthy countries with Indulgence sexual norms are less restrictive. Obesity is higher in wealthy countries and, at the same time, more people commit to sports. More people tend to be happy and remember their positive emotions. In societies with Restraint individuals believe that it is not in their hands to control their lives. The number of very happy people

is low and they often do not tend to remember their positive emotions. Freedom of speech is not of much value. Among the educated population, the birth rate is low, opposite to societies with Indulgence. Wealthy countries with Restraint culture have low obesity and restricted sexual norms and fewer people commit to sports compared to Indulgent countries. The number of police per 100,000 persons is higher than societies with Indulgence (Hofstede, 2011).

In regard to the categorization of countries from the viewpoint of the abovementioned dimensions, Hofstede's (2011) findings from the survey of 76 nations showed that PDI was "higher in East European, Latin, Asian and African countries and lower in Germanic and English-speaking Western countries" (p. 10). The same research showed that UAI was "higher in East and Central European countries, in Latin countries, in Japan and in German speaking countries, lower in English speaking, Nordic and Chinese culture countries" (11). IDV was high in developed and western countries, and Collectivism was high in less developed and Eastern countries. Japan has a middle position between IDV and Collectivism. In terms of Femininity versus MAS, Hofstede (2011) reported that,

Masculinity is high in Japan, in German speaking countries, and in some Latin countries like Italy and Mexico; it is moderately high in English speaking Western countries; it is low in Nordic countries and in the Netherlands and moderately low in some Latin and Asian countries like France, Spain, Portugal, Chile, Korea and Thailand. (p. 13)

From a LTO and Short-Term Orientation point of view, East-Asian countries Eastern and Central Europe rank high in Long-term Orientation. United States of America, Australia, Latin American, African and Muslim countries rank high in Short-term Orientation.

South and North-European and South Asian countries belong to the middle level. Finally, Indulgence is higher “in South and North America, in Western Europe and in parts of Sub-Sahara Africa” (p. 16). Restraint is higher “in Eastern Europe, in Asia and in the Muslim world. Mediterranean Europe takes a middle position on this dimension” (p. 16). This research has used all dimensions except for Indulgence versus Restraint.

The application and influence of communication and culture (and traditions) on one another show that they are inextricably linked to each other. The word communication originated from Latin word “communis” means to make common or to share (Patnaik, 2008; Nixon, 2013). Different sciences provide a number of definitions to communication, some widely accepted of which are: Kar’s (1975) definition states that communication is “all those planned or unplanned processes through which one person influences behavior of persons” (p. 5). Newman and Summer defined it as, “an exchange of facts, ideas, opinions or emotions by two or more persons (as cited in Patnaik, 2008). Yet, in *Mass Communication Theory* McQuail (2010) stated that communication is “a process of increased commonality or sharing between participants on the basis of sending and receiving ‘messages’” (p. 552).

Likewise, culture has many definitions, one of which is “the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings” (Useem & Useem, 1963, p. 169). Culture is also defined as “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization” (CARLA, 2013, para. 1). Tradition on the other hand, has been defined as a socio-cultural practice, which withstands over a period of time, e.g. long-termed such as Buddhism or Catholic carnival or short-termed such as annual occasions that are celebrated or family traditions (Shoham, 2011).

These definitions demonstrate that culture and tradition, and communication have united relations, as communication is involved in perpetuating and disseminating the behaviors, attitudes and practices (culture and traditions) among people and from one generation to another. In a like manner, the common behavior, attitudes and practices shape the communication of group of people.

Thus, to help transform the day-to-day communication that will lead to transformation of culture, Paulo Freire (1993) raises the need for a dialogue with the people. In order to liberate the oppressed from the oppressive forces, Paulo Freire (1993) has suggested the idea of taking a cultural action, which would involve dialoguing with the oppressed, listening to and convincing them of their responsibility for their and the oppressor's liberation. His concept in like fashion can be applied to transform the day-to-day communication patterns among people, thus changing their attitudes, behaviors and practices.

Existentialist Feminism Theory

Existentialist Feminism Theory explains that there are misconceptions existing in society around women, especially among men, and that these restrict women's rights. The theory claims that it is not because of the biological difference that make women *the Other* or *the Second Sex* to men (de Beauvoir, 1949/1953), but the perceptions that men associate with this difference (Rosser, 2005). An instance mentioned by Rosser (2005) is the technology market where men get high paying jobs as engineers and technicians, whereas women get low paying jobs as workers, because society assigns them tasks based on their gender difference. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1953), the founder of Existentialist Feminism claimed that, "one is not born a woman, rather, one becomes, and is forced to become, a woman" (p. 273). Allen (1989) clarified that existing political,

economic and educational conditions are the reasons why a woman becomes a woman. de Beauvoir (1949/1953) argued that femininity and masculinity, one seen as object and the other subject, are socially constructed and not biologically determined for men and women. Describing how women consider themselves subordinate and accept the social injustices, de Beauvoir (1949/1953) stated “women exist – and are only conscious of themselves in ways that men have shaped” (Huges & Witz, 1997, p. 49). She declared that in patriarchal societies women are devalued because of their bodies, while men do not face this issue.

Beebe and colleagues (2011) explain that cultural conventions determine our behavior and perception of self. For this reason, behaviors and roles are labeled as feminine and masculine. Such cultural conventions also contribute to determining superiority of one gender over another, and viewing of women as *the Second Sex* or *the Other* (de Beauvoir, 1949/1953). Communication practices create and recreate the traditional roles and cultural norms among people, in formal and informal ways, thus affecting the gender roles and sustaining the traditional roles of male and female (Beebe et al., 2011). Gender roles in turn influence the communication practices around gender and behaviors and roles of male and female. de Beauvoir (1949/1953) believed that from childhood girls and boys verbally and non-verbally communicate about their expected gender-based behaviors and roles and the cultural boundaries defined for their genders. The perception of men and women about each other is thus shaped from their childhood. For the same reason, men and women grow up viewing the female gender as *the Second Sex* or *the Other* to man, who could be subject to the will of men whether to be given rights or denied them. This explains well the denial of girls' right to full education in Afghanistan.

de Beauvoir (1949/1953) suggested that one way for women to confront the perception of themselves as object is to gain financial independence by working outside the home and earning an income. Further, she suggested that women should claim their identity, and be knowledgeable and dynamic. Women should not accept being described as who they are by others, but define their selves by themselves. de Beauvoir's (1949/1953) final suggestion was that women should be aware of the expectations of the society from them. Women should become autonomous selves, rather than shaping their bodies and faces, and altering their actions the way expected of them.

Factors in Girls' Non-completion of School in Developed and Developing Countries

Education is a central means to pass accumulated knowledge from one generation to the next, thus equipping humans with the ability to live better lives and understand their environment. Education has economic and social benefits (Arrow et al., 1997; Cooray & Potrafke, 2010; Malerich, 2009; McMahon, 1999; Tembon, 2008). These economic benefits include development of labor market and industries, economic sustainability (UNESCO, 2006) and reduced poverty (Blakely, 1997). The social benefits of education include noneconomic impacts such as peaceful living, improved health of people and the environment (Arrow et al., 1997) and a decrease in criminal activities (Iacobucci & Tuohy, 2005). Thus, education contributes to important outcomes.

The role of educated women in the development of any society is as important as that played by educated men. Women contribute to economic growth on the one hand (Arnold, 2008; Cooray & Potrafke, 2010; Herz et al., 1991; Mihirinie, 2008; Tembon, 2008), and the establishing of healthy families (Cooray & Potrafke, 2010; Herz et al., 1991) and raising of well-educated children on the other (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Vaughan, 2010; UNICEF, 2004 as cited in Alika & Egbochuku, 2009). According to

Jackson (2011), an infant's mortality rate declines 5 to 10% for each year its mother has studied at school. Providing education to girls contributes significantly to poverty reduction as well (Herz et al., 1991; Tembon, 2008) and helps decrease the rate of domestic violence (Jackson, 2011).

Given the significance of education, gaining it has been a universally accepted human right, and completion of an elementary education has been compulsory in every country in the world since 10th December 1948, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Donegall Pass Community Forum, 2006). In order to ensure access to this right, a proper framework has to be in place including community responsiveness to children's education, provision of sufficient food, and health care and housing for children (Spring, 2008). More importantly children have to be protected from "exploitive labor and physical abuse" (Spring, 2008, p. 2). Spring (2008) described that the right to education means that individuals around the world should have access to schooling irrespective of their cultural, political and religious affiliations or social situations.

A major challenge confronting girls' education around the globe, which is a focus of this research, is their dropping out of school at an early stage, otherwise known as school withdrawal. Crighton (2005) studied the nonattendance and dropout of girls and boys in Albania, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mongolia, Slovakia, and Tajikistan, which are countries in transition¹ as listed by CIA *Factbook*. He found that poverty was the primary common reason for "non-registration, non- or irregular attendance, and drop-out" (Crighton, 2005, p. 3). Crighton referred to a 2004 UNICEF survey in which it is declared that among 44 million children living in post-Soviet communist countries, 14 million live

¹ As defined by the International Monetary Fund, a country in transition is one that is moving from a centrally planned economy into a market economy. Further information is available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/appendix/appendix-b.html>

under the poverty line. Crighton (2005) emphasized the need for the provision of free education for all, stating that in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which are developed and developing respectively, 13 out of 20 countries charge fees for school even though they have committed to universal free education. Except for the Netherlands and New Zealand, all countries in the European Union, which are developed, do not charge school fees. Crighton (2005) further presented the findings of the surveys of the Drop-Out (DO) project² in Bulgaria and Moldova. He confirmed that poverty was the main reason for non-completion of school among children. The second common factor for dropping out in these countries was students' lack of motivation towards school. In Latvia, his work showed that students face "frustration and lack of self-esteem" in grade four. Their non-attendance increased in grade six and reached the highest level in the first six months of grade nine. A teacher's attitude towards students, especially if the students belong to a minority group such as Roma, highly increased the dropout of both genders in this country (Crighton, 2005).

Crighton (2005) stressed the regulation of compulsory education, specifying that the employment age should be raised, children under 18 years of age should not be imprisoned for crimes, and that the marriage age for girls should be increased, in order to reduce school dropping out. His national and international survey (2004) showed that in 25 countries there was "no specified age for compulsory education." In 33 countries there was no youngest age identified for getting jobs. Children started working as young as their parents wanted. In 44 countries, girls would get married at a very young age. In 125 countries children as young as 7 to 15 years old were imprisoned for crimes. As Crighton

² DO (Drop-Out) project as specified by Crighton (2005) is a survey project of school dropout and non-attendance in Albania, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mongolia, Slovakia, and Tajikistan, which was conducted between 2004 and 2005.

(2005) argues, compulsory education must be enforced to make sure that children are at school at the time they should be, rather than in the labour market, being married or in prison.

When investigating the developed world, Crighton (2005) found that in the European Union, Portugal had the highest rate of school dropout. However, the reasons were not discussed, nor was gender disparity. In the United Kingdom, with a new regulation replacing the 1999 School Attendance Target, school dropout did not seem to be a major issue. In 2001, 1.5 million children had dropped out of school from secondary level in the United States. Nonetheless, the situation has changed over time. In 23 states the dropout rate declined and in 17 states it increased since then, with Arizona being the highest with a 17% rate. In 10 others it did not change. In 1999, the dropping out factors between both genders in Latin America (Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil) were recognized to be the quality of education, poverty, and academic failure. In Mexico, 78% of the pupils between the ages of 13 to 15 were enrolled in secondary education, and 71.7% of the pupils between the ages of 15 to 19 had completed secondary education in 2004. Again, gender disparity was not discussed in these surveys. From this literature it appears that there is not a high gender difference in dropping out rate of children from school in the developed world.

The Forum for African Women's Education (FAWE) conducted a statistical survey on school dropping out in 13 countries in East and South Africa in 2000 (as cited in Crighton, 2005). Poverty was identified as the most prevalent factor for the dropout of girls and boys. The dropout rate was high in grade one, and by grade four a quarter of students would be out of school. In grade five the dropout of girls would increase, because they were working at home, marrying and having children, while boys' dropout

was due to having to economically support their families. Lack of motivation and low quality of education at schools were among other reasons. FAWE (2000) concluded that extreme poverty tends to target girls' education in terms of non-enrolment and early withdrawal in African countries (as cited in Crighton, 2005).

Unesco (1984) published a report on dropping out in primary school in China, India, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Sri Lanka and Thailand. According to this report the number of children at school age in this region was 390 million in the 1980s, among which 15.4% were out of school. Around 31.9 million would dropout from primary level each year. The report recounted the poor socioeconomic status of the families who withdrew their children often, girls from school. The quality of education and the school environment were among other factors causing school dropping out in these countries. This report explained that in South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, where the significance of education for girls is not fully understood, there is a lower enrolment and higher dropout rate of girls compared to boys. Geographical location is yet another factor affecting dropout rates. There is a higher dropout rate in mountainous places since traveling from one place to another is difficult. Referring to South and West Asia the report stated that, "in general, countries with high dropout rates have high repetition rates, inadequate school provision, low female enrolment, and disparities of drop-out between urban and rural children" (Unesco, 1984, p. 25).

Earle and Roach (1989) pointed to the socioeconomic situation of the household being in a minority group along with low parental education as common factors for school dropping out of both genders in United States of America. They asserted that household poverty affects girls more than boys. Other factors for girls include having a lot of siblings and a mother with lower education. They added that school related factor

of dropping out for both boys and girls were “low academic achievement and low self-esteem” (p. 8). However, for girls it is more the socialization factor such as being less assertive, cognitive difference boys and girls are taught, “curricular selections that often leave girls without the prerequisites for higher-paying jobs and careers” (p. 8). French (1969), who conducted a study of school dropout in the United States, called school dropping out an intellectual loss of the society, as society fails to nurture the minds that possess high intelligence and that could be efficient members. His research showed that 55% of the dropouts were girls, and the major reason was early marriage and pregnancy. Interestingly, while this conclusion was drawn four decades ago in the United States, the same case exists in the developing world at the present period of time.

Difference in Dropout Factors between Developing Countries and the Muslim World

Lewis and Lockheed (2007) stated that 60 million girls aged between 6 and 11 are out of school in developing countries. Around three quarters of this number are from minority groups such as ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial or others. Since the 1960s there has been a considerable improvement in terms of girls' enrolment in primary schools in the developing world, and yet the families of the excluded groups, who are poorer as well, still tend to prevent their girls from going to school or withdraw them at the primary level (Lewis and Lockheed, 2007). Moreover, the chances of girls being deprived of education in countries with various ethnic groups and languages are higher (Lewis and Lockheed, 2007). A poor quality school environment, including damaged classroom walls, improper sanitary system, and an absence of teachers and a lack of school textbooks cause girls' early school dropout according to these authors.

Unesco (1984) reported that ethnicity and socioeconomic conditions are influential factors affecting students' school dropout in particular girls, such as “the

Scheduled group in India³, Muslim minorities of Sri Lanka and ethnic minorities of Viet Nam” (p. 16). Unesco (1984) stated that the higher dropout rates belong to the estate areas, the Tamil Language speaking areas other than Jaffna and Muslims. In these areas girls drop out of school because the social and religious customs do not support their moving out of the house after puberty. According to Unesco (1984), in Sri Lanka the low economic class in the rural agricultural areas have the highest school dropout rate of children in the country.

Cooray and Potrafke (2010) conducted research on whether political institutions or culture and religion are the main cause for gender inequality in education. They studied the enrolment ratio of boys and girls at all levels of school from the World Bank database, which included 157 countries between 1991 and 2006. Some countries' data were only available from 2005 or 2007. The results showed that culture and religion are the top factors causing gender inequality in education. The inequality mostly existed in Muslim countries. Girls' school enrolment at all levels was the lowest in South Asia and Africa. In high-income countries and former communist countries gender equality was higher. The greater gender inequality in education in many countries was at the higher secondary level. Also, in some countries where the culture and religion dominated, democracies had not been able to fulfil their promise (Cooray & Potrafke, 2010).

Cooray and Potrafke (2010) asserted that in developing countries, whether they are democratic or not, girls and boys ratio is vastly different. For instance, in countries such as Afghanistan, Chad and Yemen, there was a high level of discrimination against girls' education. These countries were repressive with a lower level of practiced

³ The Scheduled Casts and Scheduled Tribes in India are rural socially and economically deprived groups in India. More information is available at: <http://www.c-s-p.org/flyers/9781847186065-sample.pdf>

democracy. In contrast, Qatar, as an autocratic Islamic country, had greater gender equality in education. Cooray and Potrafke (2010) concluded that modernization promotes democracy and changes the culture that would encourage gender equality. Equally, religion and culture affect the extent of democracy, which is the case in many Muslim countries.

Burch (2004) declared that Muslim countries have excessive gender inequality in education. She pointed to the culture and social practices of these countries that discourage women's rights. She referred to fundamental interpretations of the Islamic Sharia⁴ and stated that in order to improve the situation Muslims must reform their interpretations of Islamic conduct and culture. Some of the Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, Morocco, Mauritania, Djibouti, Egypt, Niger, and the Syrian Arab Republic have ratified CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) and CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) although with some restrictions of one or both conventions. The restrictions are not against girls' education but nonetheless affect their social inclusion, which in turn affects their access to education as they grow up. In Islamic cultures girls are assigned household responsibilities from a young age such as taking care of their younger siblings and helping with cleaning and cooking around the house. In less developed Muslim countries such as Chad, Eritrea, Nigeria, Tanzania, Yemen, Mali, Ethiopia and Uganda, to name a few, girls' early marriage is of more value than their education. In Uganda an uneducated

⁴ Sharia or Sharia Law is Islamic way of living. Further information is available at: <http://sharia-law.info/>

girl's bride price⁵ is higher than an educated girl, which means an educated girl is seen as having lost her "culturally treasured virginity" (Burch, 2004, p. 53).

Afghanistan's Unique Case

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and has a population of 30,419,928 (CIA *Factbook*, 2012). According to the CIA *Factbook* (2012), it is one of the 40 least developed countries in the world, which United Nations defines as economically impoverished countries with low literacy rate and under a 1000 dollars per capita annual income. Afghanistan is dependent on donor aid, and has a 35% unemployment rate, as recorded in 2008 (CIA *Factbook*, 2012). The Afghan Ministry of Economy (2010) published, *Poverty Status in Afghanistan*, which states that 36% of Afghans (9 million people) are under the poverty line, and half of the population is vulnerable to low income. 36% of Afghans cannot fulfill their basic needs. The ministry's report further stated that the level of poverty is geographically complex and varied in Afghanistan. It is lower in the south where poppies are cultivated and there is much conflict, and it is higher than average in the north. Generally the rural areas of Afghanistan make up 84% of the poor class in the whole country.

Jackson's (2011) study revealed that poverty is the leading factor for girls' non-enrollment in school and school withdrawal in Afghanistan. Of those interviewed in her research, 42% confirmed this, including the girls, their parents, teachers and school officials. In poor families, children are expected to work outside or to beg in order to supplement the household income. In some households girls are expected to help with inside labor such as the farm or carpet weaving. Besides, it is up to individual households

⁵ Bride Price is the amount of money a bride's family receives from grooms' at the time of marriage. It is a practice in Islamic countries. Further information is available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/09/magazine/09BRI.html?_r=0

to provide stationery, uniforms, often notebooks and even textbooks for their school-going children. This makes parents reluctant to let their children, especially girls, attend school. In IHRC's report (2009), 2.4% of girls and 9.6% of boys cited this as a reason for school dropout.

Hunte (2006) conducted a study on household decision-making concerning school enrollment in Afghanistan. She stated that poverty and the "fear of negative social pressure" result in withdrawal of girls from school (p. 2). Yet some families take the risk to let their daughters complete school at least up to the primary level. Even in households where education is seen as a way to help with the economy of the family more boys but fewer girls are allowed to gain an education.

Jackson (2011) stated that poverty, further combined with harmful cultural norms and traditional practices, has an even more negative effect on Afghan girls' access to education. Girls are married very young (as young as 14 or younger), and they often do not continue their education after marriage. Girls are married young because a bride price provides a high income for the family, although for only one time. Further, it is culturally expected in Afghanistan that girls be married younger. Of those interviewed by Jackson, 39.4% referred to early and forced marriages as a cause for girls' withdrawal from school. Jackson (2011) affirmed the fact that it is not just one factor, but an interaction of different factors, that cause withdrawal of girls from school in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has endured civil conflict and violence for nearly three decades from 1979 to 2001 (Oxfam Intl. et al., 2009). It is an on-going war region according to some international and local analysts (Jones, 2008; Oxfam et al., 2009). Jacques de Maio, the head of International Committee of the Red Cross for South Asia, shared that despite improvements in every area of Afghans' lives, the security situation remains alarming in

many parts of the country (Huffpost, 2012). For example, the United Nations (2010) reported a 66% increase in security incidents in 2010, compared to 2009. Insecurity caused by Armed Opposition Groups (AOG), local warlords, militia and foreign forces has a huge negative impact on the situation in general, and on girls' education in particular. In Jackson's research (2011), approximately a third of the interviewees (32.4%) pointed to insecurity as a barrier towards girls' education. The interviewees cited "local conflicts and harassments" (including kidnapping) and the attacks and threats of the Taliban as the trigger of insecurity and fear. Insecurity causes both non-enrollment and early withdrawal from school. As well, 23.7% of the interviewees were concerned about the sexual security of the girls, and this explained their avoidance of school and male teachers. Jackson (2011) declared that even if parents and their daughters wish that girls could complete their education, poverty, insecurity and "fear of negative social pressures" would hinder them (p. 11).

Aziz's (2008) study, entitled *A progress report on women's education post Taliban Afghanistan*, pointed out that the Taliban placed bombs and landmines in girls' schools. They released night letters threatening families to stop their daughters' education. The Taliban used schools, especially girls' as "soft targets". Almost half of the schools in the southern province of Helmand were burnt down. Teachers received threats to stop teaching and girls were warned that acid would be sprayed onto their faces if they kept attending school. In September 2006, the government pronounced that 200,000 girls were withdrawn from school because of such physical attacks and threats (Constable 2006: A10 as cited in Aziz, 2006). Besides the Taliban, Aziz mentioned that local warlords involved in opium cultivation and drugs dealing also had a hand in burning down girl schools, killing teachers, and issuing warnings banning the mixed education of

girls and boys.

In her research, Hunte (2006) provided an analysis of the factors that affect parents' decision to withdraw their children, especially girls, from school in Afghanistan. She claimed that in some households, in the urban parts especially, the supply factor is not taken into account in regard to whether children should go to school, but more the demand factor. In the rural parts of the country, the socioeconomic position of the household plays an important role in regard to the demand factor. According to Hunte (2006) "Many households struggle to make ends meet, and the education of their children must fit in with the broader considerations of the family unit" (p. 4). At other times the children are expected to bring income to the family. Among 50 children who were interviewed in Hunte's research (2006), not segregated by gender, half of them were earning an income. A third of boys went to school and worked for money. Girls, on the other hand, wove rugs to make income for the household and did not attend school.

Hunte (2006) further discussed the role of tradition and culture on girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan, affirming that the social pressure that girls should be sheltered in the house to preserve the honor of the family caused their withdrawal from school. She referred to "the power of gossip" (p. 5) that would bring shame to girl's immediate and extended family if she joined school, because the community where they lived would disapprove of girls and women's presence outside the home, in the society. In this case even if parents wanted their daughters to be in school, they withdrew them usually after primary school and before they reached puberty. The long distance from school and the presence of male instructors and scarcity of female teachers, combined with the demands on girls to do chores and the negative comments of people about girls' schooling, all result in their school withdrawal. To some, this act was interpreted as to be

in accord with Islamic teachings. The gossip could also come from people whose children had never been to school and who feared other households would get ahead of them if their children gained an education and earned an income.

Nonetheless, the same factors exist in other developing countries with less or more intensity. A UNICEF report (2005) showed that Afghanistan has had less improvement in gender equality in education among South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh (as cited in Jones, 2008). Since 50% of school aged children are out of school in Afghanistan (The World Bank report, 2005), the country needs to do much more to reach to the level of other South Asian countries. Jones (2008) stated that in Baghlan Province the girls' enrolment is higher in schools where there are female teachers. Some girls have been reported to withdraw from school even at grade ten due to the lack of female teachers. Jones suggested that if girls are to be enrolled in higher secondary levels of school in which the instructors are mostly men, more number of girls should complete school so they can become high school teachers.

Afghanistan is in a unique situation because of the growth of religious indoctrinated ideology during the Taliban regime. Based on Katzman (2012), the Taliban created the Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and the Suppression of Vice strictly to punish crimes, including watching television and following the western media. Women and girls were banned from leaving their houses except for serious health issues. The Taliban clearly impacted the culture of people by banning arts and education for girls and to a considerable extent for boys. In Bamyan Province, the Taliban blew up the two Buddha statues⁶ that they perceived to be idols. According to National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction (2005), it was estimated in 2001 that the adult literacy rate in

⁶ More information is available at:

http://www.idb.arch.ethz.ch/files/corfu_isprs5_buddha.pdf

Afghanistan is 36% and 21% for women, which is the lowest among countries of the region such as Pakistan, India, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Indonesia. The ban on women's education and implementation of restrictive educational curriculum indeed left succeeding generations with work to do for Afghanistan to catch up with the world.

Afghan society and its education system exist based on a religious ideology with highly placed cultural and traditional values. When Islam came to Afghanistan in the eighth century, the cultural, social and political lives of the people changed deeply. Being an ethnically diverse country with no natural geographical borders, religious beliefs are the strongest national identity of Afghans (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007). Nonetheless, Islam has been politicized and radicalized in Afghanistan, during the Taliban regime in particular (Katzman, 2012).

Yet, removal of the Taliban "did not change the mindset of traditionally conservative Afghanistan in which women are viewed as men's possessions" (Lee, 2009, p. 55). Jackson (2011) noted that girls' access to education is often denied because of traditions and community norms. The issue of distance from school is related to these norms. When girls reach adolescence, based on cultural norms and traditions, they should not travel far away from the house alone. As Jackson put it, far away is not defined precisely. Among her research interviewees, 10.9% were concerned about the street harassment girls face on their way to school because it is far. The girls who were interviewed, however, believed that distance is used as a pretext to prevent them from education. If girls go to school, it is possible that other villagers would consider their families less honorable.

One of the obvious cultural barriers that comes in the way of girls' education is

early/forced marriage. Poor families marry their daughter at a younger age to get a higher bride price. Some girls are able to continue their education after marriage, but more often they are not allowed to do so (Jackson, 2011).

Moghadam (1994) stated that because less value is given to education in Afghanistan, especially for girls, girls' school enrolment is 5-10% and their dropout rate is high. There is a 28% girls' dropout rate by the end of the first year, 53% by the end of the second year, and 81% by the end of the fourth year (Moghadam, 1994). Once they reach puberty, or even earlier, customs demand that girls should stay more confined at home, to do the housework and prepare for marriage. One reason is the conservative attitudes that prevent girls from stepping outside the house. Also, families cannot relate education with their daughters' future. Religious knowledge, considered important, is taught to younger girls by Mullahs (religious leaders) in mosques (Moghadam, 1994).

On the other hand, virginity of girls is given a high value in Afghan society, and so are the rumors that circle around a girl's virginity, which Hunte (2006) referred to as people's talk (p. 5). Educated parents, even if it is only the male parent who is educated, tend to give less value to rumors (Hunte, 2006). Nonetheless, the National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction (2005) report has asserted that one reason early marriage happens is to make sure that girls do not engage in premarital sex. Their husbands reject girls who are found not to be a virgin on the night of marriage. Their families are extremely ashamed of this. For this reason, the movement of girls outside the house including going to school and having contact with men, is strictly controlled.

A key issue in regard with girls' education is the Afghan education policy. The National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction (2005) report noted that one of the main reasons that education in Afghanistan is facing difficulty is due to the politicization of its

policy throughout the country's history. Several regimes used the education system, and especially girls' education, to implement their political and ideological agenda.

According to this report, in the 1960s and 1970s the Afghan education system became a battlefield between the religious ideologists and communists. After the communist coup, the education system continued to be an object of dispute. The government worked hard on increasing students' enrollment in schools, creating adult education programs, and forcing rural women to get an education. Further, it sent 50,000 students to Russia to pursue their studies. The Mujahideen regime that followed destroyed a major part of the progress achieved by the communists. In the Mujahideen's period (1992-1996), education suffered even more than before. They entered military and war terms in school textbooks. There were hardly any schools in rural Afghanistan (Shorish, 2011). Teachers were killed and schools were destroyed.

The Afghanistan People's Democratic Party's secular education policy increased students' access to school, including girls. In 1990, 20% of girls were enrolled in school, which is an incredibly high number (Jones, 2008). Due to the collapse of the regime in 1993, however, this figure dropped to 13.2%, which was the state 15 years back (Jones, 2008; National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, 2005). That means the education system in Afghanistan rolled back 15 years of progress. By 1996 and 1997 (during the Taliban) girls' education was banned and the female schools' number dropped to 2% and boys' schools changed to *Madradas*⁷ (National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, 2005). In 2003, according to the Minister of Education, 80% of schools had been destroyed or partially damaged (National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, 2005).

Afghanistan's 2011-2013 education Interim Plan (IP) reported that there are seven

⁷ Madrasa (plural Madrasas) is Arabic word, which means religious school.

million students now enrolled in schools, out of which nearly one million (15%) are permanently absent. The school enrolment rate of girls has increased from 674,000 in 2002 to 2.4 million in 2009, although 60% are still out of school. It is stated in the Interim Plan that, “shortage of female teachers, local traditions, discrimination against girls, insecurity in some regions, and lack of girls’ schools near their homes are among the obstacles to girls’ enrolment” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 17). It also mentioned a preference for male education among the households and early marriage of girls as causes of low enrolment and high withdrawal rates.

The Interim Plan of the Ministry of Education (2011-13) incorporates five programs designed to help the Afghan Ministry of Education to improve the basic education access and quality for Afghan children, and contribute to Millennium Development Goals for global education. Its programs are: General and Islamic Education; Curriculum Development, Teacher Education and Science and Technology Education; Technical Education; Literacy; and Education Governance and Administration. The General and Islamic Education focuses on basic education including girls’ in rural areas. This program has added *Access to education in deprived areas*, which helps with increasing girls’ school enrolment and retention through improving the quality of education and teacher trainings. The IP’s aim is to promote NESP II (National Education Strategic Plans) goals through a set of “bound and focused” activities. Two of its activities, which are related to girls’ education, are:

- Increase enrolment in formal education by 1.8 million to nine million (7.8 million in basic education with 40.3 percent being girls, and 1.1 million in upper secondary) with a focus on rural areas; and,

- Improve access, as well as retention and completion rates, for girls, Kuchis⁸, and children with special needs. (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 4)

The general objective of the Interim Plan related to girls' schooling by the end of 2014 is:

- Increased enrolment in formal education by 1.8 million to nine million (7.8 million in basic education with 40.3 percent of these being girls, and 1.1 million in upper secondary) with a focus on rural areas.
- Improved access, as well as retention and completion rates, for girls, Kuchis, and children with special needs. (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 68)

To achieve this goal the ministry must “relocate 1,200 qualified female teachers to 200 rural schools to facilitate access and retention of 24,000 girls to secondary education”

(Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 68). The Interim Plan's program one and three are strictly about increasing the school enrolment and retention of girls. They are explained below:

Program one. This program includes the launching of campaigns on girls' schooling, building more schools to reduce the walking distance from home to school, recruitment and deployment of female teachers from cities to rural areas, launching of community-based-education and accelerating learning classes, and rebuilding girls' schools to make them girl friendly. One of the other objectives of Program one is to decrease the school dropout rate to 3% and grade repetition to 11%. Interim Plan aims to “increase enrolment to 10 million (8.7 million in basic education and 1.3 million in upper secondary) with increased access to education for girls, *Kuchis*, working children and children with special needs” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4).

Program Three. This program consists of launching campaigns for girls' school

⁸ Kuchis are a minority nomad group from South and East of Afghanistan. More information is available at: <http://www.minorityrights.org/5444/afghanistan/kuchis.html>

enrolment, “introduction of vocational fields more relevant to female interest, and establishing district TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) schools to be easily accessible for girls” (Ministry of Education. 2011, p. 67).

NESP II includes five-year educational objectives and strategies, from 2010 to 2014. It follows on NESP I to develop education’s quality and access. One of its objectives is that by 2014, 10 million students should be enrolled in schools and the number of schools should increase to 16,500. By 2014 “the net enrolment rate of girls and boys in Basic Education will increase to 60% and 75% and gross enrolment to 72% and 90%, respectively” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 3).

With consideration of the barriers towards girls’ schooling in Afghanistan as well as the Afghan government’s education policy for tackling the issue, it is essential to define the Afghan culture and traditions in order to understand their relationship with attitudes towards girls’ education.

Afghan Culture and Traditions

Hofstede (2011) defined culture as a collective term that reflects “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (p. 3). A main variable that changes cultures from traditional to modern is the level of progress of a particular geographical domain. As explained in Afghanistan’s National Development Strategy (2006), Afghan culture is “a code of honor, symbolized by the behavior of women (p. 92, as cited in Tapper, 2008). It is as well noted that while this means grave respect for women, it could also lead to women’s subjugation (ANDS, 2006 as cited in Tapper, 2008). A woman is a *namoos*, “the honor and dignity of a man” as *The Other to self*, which is man (Mehran, 2011, para. 2). In a report for international development prepared on human security and livelihood of rural Afghans (2002-2003) it was mentioned that

rural Afghan women attribute their major problem in making a livelihood to culture, with a lack of access to employment and education as being other important barriers. Tapper (2008) defined Afghan culture in three themes:

- High Culture, which constitutes literature, music and arts, etc.,
- Traditional Values, which is the customary practices and beliefs, and
- Institutional Culture, which refers to “the way of working” of an institution such as the government, e.g. culture of impunity, culture of guns.

Since culture is not static (Hofstede, 2011), the current definition of Afghan culture could possibly change. Because of the prolonged civil war the focus of the progress has been shifted from High Culture to Traditional Culture.

According to Glassie (1995), tradition is the “creation of the future out of the past” (p. 1). He made a distinction between tradition and history by clarifying that history is a compilation of the material from the past, or in other words history is the presentation of the past to the future, in written or oral form. Glassie (1995) explained that a tradition goes extinct when it is replaced by another tradition and the latter is more powerful than the former. Afghan traditions consist of good and harmful practices transferred through generations. A good tradition Saifora (2010) spoke about is hospitality. In addition, she pointed out that the harmful ones include sacrificing women in response to the faults of close and extended male family members; and the inclination of Afghans to belong to and prefer their particular ethnical and tribal interests.

An Introduction to the Research Site

Khinjan District is one of the 15 districts of Baghlan Province, located in the southern part of Baghlan, in the Hindu Kush Mountains. It is the home of 29,600 villagers; 14,500 women and 15,100 men (Matthews, 2012). The capital is the town of

Khenjan. Its ethnic distribution is “around 85% Tajiks and the remaining 15% are Pashtuns, Hazaras and Uzbeks, each of them forming 5%” (Afghan biographies, 2011, para. 1). According to the Summary of the District Development Plan of Khinjan (2008), there are 73 villages in this district. Inayatullah Amini, who is a data analyst, in the Ministry of Education reported that the number of schools in 2011 were 21, classified by gender there are:

1. Five primary schools: one for girls and four both genders mixed,
2. Eight secondary schools: two for girls, one for boys and five mixed, and
3. Eight higher secondary schools: two for girls, four for boys and one mixed.

There were 3,092 girls enrolled in primary school, 922 in secondary and 265 in higher secondary, compared to the number of boys, which was 3696 in primary school, 1,585 in secondary and 868 in high schools. The number of permanent female student absentee was 1,302 and the number of permanent male student absentees was 1,107 (Amini, personal communication, September 26, 2012).

According to Khinjan District Development Plan (2008), the literacy rate in Khinjan District was 5% for women and 10% for men in 2008. The rate of school dropouts/withdrawal is not publicly shared; thus, the statistics could not be provided. However, the literature and researcher's own observations suggest that the rate of withdrawal of girls from school in Khinjan District, as in every other rural area, is high in primary and secondary levels, and probably highest in higher secondary.

Rationale for the Study

A number of factors, such as insecurity, household poverty, poor education supply, traditions and cultural norms that restrict girls and women combine to cause withdrawal of girls from school in Afghanistan. Researchers have referred to the latter

factors as social pressures and community norms. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory explains the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. This framework is used to examine the issue of withdrawal of girls in Afghanistan. Existentialist Feminism explains that women's behavior and lives are linked to their physical existence. Similarly, the perceived notion that "boys' education is more important than girls", is the result of considering women as inferior because of their sex. A study of cultural and traditional perceptions helps to unravel this topic further.

This qualitative research is conducted through acquiring actual perspectives of mothers on the impact of Afghan culture and traditions on girls' withdrawal from school, and whether these factors have any influence on their decision to withdraw their daughters from school. Therefore, this research provides an understanding of the role of Afghan culture and traditions in perceptions of women and girls in Afghan society, and why girls' right to education is being denied.

This research contributes to knowledge development in the domain of girls' education in Afghanistan, a critical social issue for the post war reconstruction of this country. The findings of this research will help in understanding the underpinnings of the decision of parents, especially male parents or guardians, to withdraw girls from school. As well, it will help unravel the reinforcing causes of women's social exclusion and denial of rights in Afghan society, in particular the right to equal access to education.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This section describes the research design, data collection tools and data analysis strategy used in this thesis. A discussion of the study sample is provided, as well as a justification of why narrative analysis was employed for this study and not other approaches.

Research Design

An empirical research method has been used to explore the accounts of mothers of the impact of Afghan tradition and cultural norms on the withdrawal of girls from school in Khinjan. According to Moody (2002), in empirical research, observation or data collection is utilized to answer the research questions. It is usually applied in a research area with a defined theory in order to test the theory and develop it further.

This research has applied a qualitative phenomenological approach. It has reported on and analyzed the research participants' perceptions of the influence of the social phenomena of culture and traditions on girls' school withdrawal in Khinjan. Bullington and Karlsson (1984) defined phenomenology as "the systematic investigation of subjectivity" (p. 51) about a lived experience. Waters (n.d.) stated that the purpose of phenomenological research is to study a phenomenon through the individuals' "lived experience". An account of their lived experiences of the phenomenon could be obtained through interviews, self-report or artistic forms of expression such as poetry, narratives, art, etc. (Waters, n.d.). Bullington and Karlsson (1984) claim that, "the aim of phenomenology is to study the world as it appears to us in and through consciousness" (p. 51). Thus, individuals' accounts are subjective since their perceptions of the reality and their experiences are independent, built on their worldview (Husserl, as cited in Bullington & Karlsson, 1984). In this sense, phenomenology is opposite to "objective"

sciences, which aim to present the objective reality of the world. This approach makes sense when applied to obtaining the views of mothers in regard to withdrawal of their daughters from school, which is a lived experience.

Ethical Considerations

The qualitative phenomenological approach of this study required field interviews with the participants. In addition, the lack of an advanced communication technology in the field made it impossible for the researcher to conduct online interviews. Therefore, the researcher traveled to the field in October 2012. Approval of the Research Ethics Board and the Office of Risk Management of the University of Ottawa (Annex 5) were obtained for this trip and the field interviews.

Sampling

The study participants were selected based on snowball and convenience sampling. Snowball sampling was originally founded to access the “hidden” or “hard to reach population” (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997, p. 790). It could be used as an informal way of discovering research participants or as a more formal way (Snijiders, 1992 as cited in Faugier and Sargeant, 1997). In this non-random sampling technique the number of research participants grows by asking current participants to identify other potential participants to the researcher. The problem of bias could be great in snowball sampling in terms of selecting some participants and excluding others.

Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the sample is chosen from the population based on their availability or convenience of the researcher (Ross, 2005). In this type of sampling it is assumed that the target population is homogenous, meaning “there would be no difference in the research results obtained from a random sample, a nearby sample, a co-operative sample, or a sample gathered in

some inaccessible part of the population” (Ross, 2005, p. 7). However, the problem of bias is likely in this technique, because the readily accessible participants of the target population may be less diverse in their circumstances and opinions than the entire population. Hence, the significant opinions among the whole population maybe missed entirely or underrepresented in the part of the target population the researcher has access to (Ross, 2005).

Since first-hand information on households that had withdrawn their daughters from school was not available, the researcher engaged in a conversation with local residents to identify mothers whose daughters had been withdrawn from school. This involved three interviews with the participants, a visit to the main girls' school of Khinjan District and a meeting with the school principal. The principal provided a list of the households whose daughters were withdrawn from school in different villages, mostly from higher secondary school. The remaining nine interviews were with mothers identified from the list, subject to availability of the mothers. Interviews were conducted in October 2012.

The interviewees were illiterate except for one who was self-educated and was working for a vaccination project in the village. The participants ranged in age from 35 to 70 years old.

Based on information previously known about Khinjan District and information gathered during conversation with local residents, it was clear that there was no major security issue such as civil war or presence of the Taliban in the District that would prevent the education system from functioning. The literature indicated that in rural Afghanistan of which rural Baghlan Province, Khinjan District being part of is not an exception, a combination of security, socioeconomic, cultural and traditional factors were

probably the main reasons explaining non-enrollment and withdrawal of girls from school (Guimbert, Miwa, & Nguyen, 2008; Jackson, 2011; Malerich, 2009).

Data Collection Method and Procedure

Using an in-depth semi-structured interview technique, twelve mothers of daughters withdrawn from school in different grades, but mostly during their higher secondary education, were interviewed. The interview guide included ten initial questions and some probing questions. Interview participants were residents of the following villages: Darwaza (three participants), Markaz (two participants), Bostaan (two participants), Qolak (one participant), Alimeerak (three participants), and Malkhaan (one participant). The researcher visited participants in their houses at their convenience. In order to protect their privacy, pseudonyms have been used to refer to the girls who were withdrawn from school and their mothers who were interviewed in this study.

The interview sessions ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. The original intent was to audiotape the interviews but, except for one participant, the women did not agree to be audiotaped; thus they were recorded in written format. Because Khinjan had been a frontline in the civil wars and the war against the invaders during the three decades from 1970 to 2000, people were afraid of their identity being disclosed in any way. The researcher was told that if the information the villagers gave were used against warlords in any way, the participants would be in trouble. It was also mentioned that in 2011 a journalist had broadcast women's interviews from a radio in Bamyan Province, without obtaining the women's consent. Therefore, people were unwilling to have their interviews taped.

Not being able to tape the interviews was a limitation to this study. However, in order to ensure the reliability of the data collected and their analysis, a peer review of the

data analysis was done by a fellow researcher. She has work experience in the field of education in Afghanistan and is familiar with the context of this research. As well, she is well informed in qualitative research.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of this research. It has been defined as “‘being conscious of ourselves’, ‘centring analysis upon oneself in a situation’, and turning back on oneself” (Lipp, 2007, p.18). According to Lipp (2007) for researchers to achieve reflexivity they need to become conscious of their ideologies and that how they could influence their research. In order to avoid having the researcher’s biases influence her interpretations of the interviewees’ responses, the researcher acknowledges herself being a feminist, in particular in her perspectives on gender inequality in Afghanistan and in Khinjan. These biases are the result of researcher’s first hand experience of gender discrimination as a woman, and having witnessed the gender-based violence against women in Afghanistan. The researcher realizes that these biases may be present throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in three steps using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a strategy for categorization of data in qualitative research. It helps the research to form themes out of data. Whether it is a method by itself or not, researchers have argued it. Thus, it is often used with other data analysis methods such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, and case study. In Thematic Analysis the data is structured into codes, words or phrases (Foundations of qualitative research in education, 2008).

The data analysis followed the approach used by Terrion (2013) in her study of the experience of recovery capital in recovering substance abusers in post secondary education. In her study Terrion conducted a qualitative investigation of the issues and

challenges facing students in recovery at university. Given that the purpose of her study is similar to the current study, her approach seemed helpful in terms of developing results from the inquiry of the research issue.

Specifically, the first step of data analysis involved open coding, to create categories that would address the researcher's central concern: how mothers speak about traditions and cultural norms in terms of their own, their husband's or any other guardian's decision to withdraw their daughters from school. In this type of coding the data are coded line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph to find any datum related to the research (Coyne & Cowley, 2006). In the first phase the interview transcript was reviewed and any statement that reflected the research questions was labeled as a category. Categories are "simply coded data which seem to cluster together" (Stern, 1980 as cited in Coyne & Cowley, 2006, p. 506). In this initial stage of data analysis 22 categories emerged from data. In the next stage, the categories were clustered to identify a limited number of relevant themes. For this purpose the categories were constantly compared so as to merge the similar ones together. This resulted in emergence of five main themes. In the third and final step, the data were reviewed to search for statements that would connect to any of the central themes. These were categorized as subthemes or subcategories of the main themes.

Chapter Four: Results

Five themes emerged during the analysis of the interview data. Each theme was broken down into two to four subcategories based on thematic analysis. This chapter explains these themes and, subsequently, each theme is followed by an explanation of the subcategories. Direct quotes from mothers who were interviewed are provided to further clarify the subcategories. In order to respect the confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used to refer to girls whose mothers were interviewed for this research. Annex 3 presents detailed information about the interviewees' daughters withdrawn from school in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province.

Theme 1. Negative Attitudes Towards the Education of Girls

Negative attitudes were defined as assertions regarding the uselessness of education for girls due to their gender. This theme divulges the negative attitudes of family and community members towards the education of girls. Any reference to the following indicators in particular implies this theme:

- Beliefs about insignificance of girls' education after puberty
- Gossiping and making falsehood about schoolgirls
- Generalizing the unconventional behavior of some schoolgirls, to all of them
- Encouraging girls' school withdrawal out of animosity
- Beliefs that girls' marriage is more important after puberty compared to their education

These negative attitudes seem to be one of the major reasons for withdrawal of girls from school. Moreover, they are the reason for families and community members' reluctance

to make efforts to help remove or lessen the barriers towards education of girls in the district, such as street harassment and lack of transportation.

Subcategory 1. Male family members' misconceptions. Interviews with mothers revealed that they believe male family members have many misconceptions about girls' education and that these mainly centered on the benefit of education for girls. Family members, men in particular, were reported as showing a lack of awareness about the educational benefits of schooling for girls. A common belief seen in the data is that a girl's main responsibility is to learn how to do housework and prepare for married life, which includes taking care of her children, husband and in-laws, and managing relationships with extended in-laws. The belief is that education has no major role to play in these responsibilities. Two examples illustrate this perception. In one village, called Markaz-e-Khinjan, Rana was taken out of school in grade 11 when she was 18 years old. She said:

My son told his sisters "do the housework. That will benefit you in your future [after marriage]. School has no benefit for you."

Safa, from Bostaan Village, who is in grade 11, was withdrawn from school by her father when she was 14 years old. Safa's mother stated that her deceased husband did not approve of Safa going to school. He withdrew Safa from school when she was in grade 7.

According to Safa's mother:

My husband was an old-fashioned person. He used to say, "what is in a girl's education? There is no benefit in a grown up girl's education."

Raihan, from Alimeerak-e-Baalaa, was withdrawn from school in grade 8, in 2010. Her mother said that her uncles wanted Raihan to leave school, but her mother resisted.

Raihan's father tried twice to withdraw Raihan from school. Raihan's mother re-enrolled her back the first time, but could not help the second time, because this time Raihan was

engaged at the age of 19, and her grandfather was also against her education. However, Raihan's fiancé and now husband was happy for her to continue her studies. Her mother said:

Raihan's husband's uncle used to say, "our daughter-in-law [Raihan] should serve us, rather than getting an education."

Farha from Darwaza was withdrawn from school in grade 8, at the age of 20. Her sister, Gulnar, was withdrawn from school when she was in grade 9 at the age of 18. Farha and Gulnar's mother narrated that their brother said to Farha and their family:

Which girl has so far held a position [in the government, from rural], so that she [Farha] would [with gaining an education]? Seeta [a relative who used to live in the village] could become someone only after she went away from Khinjan area.

A major misconception of male family members' towards girls' education seemed to be not linking the impact of girls' education to their personal lives as well as future married life, even if it is not for them to get employed. From instances such as girls being advised to learn the housework instead of going to school, it shows that often times girls' education might be considered a barrier towards girls' preparation for their future married life.

Subcategory 2. Community attitude. Given the collective lifestyle of Khinjanis, how the community perceives girls' education definitely impacts girls' schooling, even if their own family approves of it. This subcategory delves into some of those negative attitudes. One example of the damaging effect of community attitude manifests in the form of rumoring about schoolgirls. Nida, who is from Darwaza, was withdrawn from school in her mid grade 8 at the age of 16. Her mother protested against people's "badmouthing", saying:

Her [Nida's] cousins are backwards. There is family animosity [among the community]. People think nobody should get ahead of us. They make [fake]

stories [against girls who go to school].... [Some] girls bring cell phones to school. They have boyfriends. People think that all girls are that way.

Any rumor in the villages gets spread quickly, in this case about the schoolgirls. For instance, Rana's mother related that there is a lot of 'gossip' about girls in the village.

She said:

We all approved of Rana's education. Her brother came from Iran, and said that she shouldn't go to school. Her father approved of her education. Her brother had heard things from his friends about the schoolgirls. His friends stand close by to girls' school.... Her brother from overseas called and said, "let her [Rana] go to school." Men in the area said, "don't let her go to school." Women in the area said, "don't let her go to school." There is a lot of talk about girls.... Her brother who came from Iran says, "I wish we were in the city, so my sisters could get an education. I don't want to hear anything about my sisters."

Farha and Gulnar were withdrawn from school in grade 8 and 9 at the age of 20 and 18 respectively. Their mother has basic literacy skills and is a breadwinner to the family along with her husband. She believed that unawareness of people is the reason for discouraging girls' education in Khinjan. She said:

It is the effect of people's closed mindedness.... If my son had a mind, he would have said, "whatever people say I won't buy. Until I haven't seen my sisters being corrupted; talking and flirting with boys, I won't believe it."

Farha and Gulnar's mother used a proverb to make her point. She said:

Because of one evil person the whole city of Rome is burned.... If someone [referring to girls] is bad, they can be bad at home too.

She disapproved of judging schoolgirls by a few who play around at school and flirt with boys over the phone. It should be noted that in Khinjan, chatting with men other than relatives is not common and considered inappropriate for girls and women.

When asked if there is any threat from Taliban in the area, she said:

There isn't any threat from Taliban, but some families are worse than Taliban. Uncles and relatives are worse than Taliban.

She complained about gossiping, saying that:

We withdraw our daughters because of people's gossip.

In another interview, Mehr's mother said:

It would be better if there were schools in every area. Schoolgirls wouldn't get labeled because of others' faults.

She was referring to girls in other villages that share the same school with girls from Darwaza.

Zoya's mother explained community attitude as in the following:

People say a girl should learn how to pray and observe fast, and that is enough.

In another account, Safa's mother said this:

My husband did not allow my daughters to continue school because of people's gossip. He used to tell my daughters "if people say [bad] things about you, shall I then kill you or myself?"...After my husband passed away, my daughter didn't re-attend school, because of people's talk.

When asked about decision-making, Safa's mother said:

Everyone is on their own. But people do interfere in each other's lives.

In the Village of Qolak, Nima was withdrawn from school by her uncle in grade 9, when she was 18 years old. She died six months later. As her mom narrated she was doing self-study at home for a long time. Her sister Laala, left school in grade 3 the same year, because her father had a mental illness and her mother needed help with the housework. She was 14 years old then. Nima and Laala's mother spoke about the general attitude of the community, and its attitude towards girls' education. She said:

In the city, everyone minds his or her own business. In the village, people make stories about you. In Khinjan, they attach [fake] stories to you. Wherever it is rural, it is dirty. People say "how is it possible that somebody gets ahead of us. Now see, we will make rumors about you."

Nima and Laala's mother expressed her outrage against people who make scandals and falsehoods about schoolgirls, saying:

People who are illiterate, who haven't ever smelled humanity, make stories [against schoolgirls]. The illiterate ones say "a girl who goes to school, what immoral things she must be doing there?"

Nariman, who studied in Alimeerak-e-Baalaa, was withdrawn from grade 8 when she was 16 years old, in 2012. Her sister, Nazi was withdrawn from grade 3 at the age of 18.

When speaking of the factors affecting the withdrawal of girls from school, her mother said:

People are not optimistic about girls' education.

During an interview, Raihan's mother mentioned that people talk behind each other's back. She continued:

...When one person withdraws his daughter from school, he encourages others to do the same.

The majority of the participants commented on this category. They spoke about the fact that often the villagers, and in one case, themselves did not view education of girls any beneficial or good. It is important to point out that the reason some girls reported in this research were in grade 8 or 3, in their 16 or 18 years of age was because of the ban on girls' education during the 5 years of Taliban regime (1996-2001) and the turmoil in Mujahideen's regime from 1992 to 1996 that left many girls out of school.

Subcategory 3. Religious beliefs around girls' puberty. Religion is a fundamental guide to people's lives in the rural areas of Afghanistan. As most of the villagers are illiterate, they seek their religious knowledge from religious leaders, called Mullahs. In the interview sessions, the perceptions of religious leaders around girls' education were probed. In one account, Nida's mother said that when the Taliban's regime was about to collapse, the Taliban resisted against the central government in Khinjan area for a long time. She added:

People are Talib-y (Talib-like). Girls are not supported. The majority of Mullahs say that don't let girls be in school.

Ghazal's mother spoke about religious leaders preaching against girls' education. Ghazal is a resident of Markaz-e-Khinjan. She discontinued her education in 2012, at around the age of 17 or 18 when she was in her mid grade 9. According to her mother she dropped school after she was engaged. Her mother's account of religious leaders' attitude towards the education of girls was:

In 1389 [2010] and 1390 [2011] Mullahs used to preach against girls' education. They used to say that, "women shouldn't get out of the house, or go to shopping." They don't do it anymore.... Only in disputes we consult with the elders and Mullahs.

Raihan's mother explained the religious beliefs around girls' puberty. She said:

Mullahs say that if a girl doesn't marry soon, it is sin; after every menstrual cycle it is like as if you killed someone or raped someone. Every month a child is lost.... Mostly Mullahs preach that, "don't keep girls [at home] beyond 17 or 18. They [the government] build more schools, why don't they build more mosques?"

She added further that:

...Mullahs preach against not observing of hijab; that those without hijab are buying [themselves] the hell's fire.

The perceptions around and expectations from girls after puberty affect their schooling and whole life as well. This subcategory explained some of those perceptions as spoke of by the interview participants.

Subcategory 4. Influence of illiterate relatives. Illiterate relatives often encourage the girls' parents/guardians to ban their grown-up girls from school. For example, Nida's mother recounted:

Nida's cousins are illiterate. There is animosity among families. They think others shouldn't get ahead of them. They gossip. Families are illiterate.

Speaking of the relatives who encourage withdrawal of girls from school, Farha and Gulnar's mother said:

Daughters of those who say don't let your girls go to school, are very young now. They say "when our daughters reach puberty, we will also withdraw them from school."

She added:

Most families don't want other families' children to get ahead of their children. So when a girl gets taller, they say don't let her go to school. When she reaches puberty, they say marry her off.

Mehr's mother narrated how her relative's influence caused withdrawing Mehr from school:

My aunt's grandson told me "why did you allow the girl to go to school?"...Sometimes people make rumors out of grudge. Sometimes the girls are bad. Everywhere, they [people] talk about them. My husband had no objection about Mehr's schooling. My relatives are strict. They say a girl should get religious lessons and that is it.

Nariman and Nazi's mother recounted that in the decision to stop Nariman from going to school her husband was influenced by his nephew. She said:

My brother-in-law who came from overseas used to say that girls should get an education ...But my husband's nephew injected in him that there is no benefit in Nariman's school going.

It is revealed from the interviews that often times relatives who have withdrawn their own daughters from school envy if their relatives' daughters attend school and move forward.

Theme 2. Family Honor and Conflict Avoidance in Family

Family honor refers to the value bestowed to the male family members' reputation in their social circle. In particular this value embraces female family members' manners and behavior and how others might judge these as honorable or dishonorable. Family honor explains the importance of honor and shows how parents favor girls' staying at home to evade any harm to their honor as being among the reasons for withdrawal of girls from school.

Conflict avoidance in family is defined as actions to withdraw girls from school in order to prevent conflict in the family over the education of girls. Specifically, if some members agree and some disagree, girls will have to stop attending school. Yet, in some cases where a dispute occurs among villagers, there is a fear of girls becoming the target for revenge, such as kidnapping or harassment. Therefore, their families ban them from attending school. References to the following indicators specifically are categorized below to explain this theme:

- Guardians' fear of loss of honor if girls run away
- Avoiding rumors about girls to avoid loss of family honor
- Withdrawing a girl from school as a way to resolve family disputes over her school going

Subcategory 1. Elopement for marriage. This subcategory describes the fear that girls might flee from their family to marry their boyfriend/lover, which results in bringing shame and negative reputation to their families. It is suggested in the data that attendance at school offers more of an opportunity for elopement. The fear of such an act obliges the parents/guardians to withdraw the girls from school. Ghazal's mother reported about a schoolgirl who fled with her lover in Sar-e-Chawk-e-Khinjan Village. Her family withdrew other girls of the family from school. She said:

Afghanistan is destroyed in the name of religion and honor. The government did not take control [of eloping of girls]. Breaking up engagement is a scandal. Her fiancé left to Dubai. She escaped the house out of anger, got engaged for the second time, and broke up with the first one. Her family withdrew other girls from school. ...Once a girl escapes from home, other girls quit school or their families withdraw them.

Rana's mother said that three girls ran away from home in 2012 and two in 2011. In another account she said that three girls from home and one schoolgirl ran away. These actions resulted in families withdrawing their daughters from school. She said:

In Turkaan they withdrew girls from school because of girls' running away [from home].

About the cause of girls' withdrawal from school, Farha and Gulnar's mother pointed to other girls' "rebellious behavior" and elopement with a boyfriend. Her son became suspicious of his sisters, so he withdrew them from school. She said that many girls fled from school:

At one time, a lot of girls eloped... Some schoolgirls as well eloped. People become suspicious.

Mehr's mother, who herself withdrew her daughter from school, said:

The schoolgirls in this area were pulled out of school, [because] schoolgirls were fleeing with boyfriends.

Speaking of when it is proper time for a girl to marry she said:

When a girl is 20, she should marry.... Keeping a young girl [at home] is troublesome. If people gossip, how will I know if that is right or wrong. When Kashef's daughter ran away from home, it defamed all the schoolgirls. The male [family member] hears something, he says when there is a scandal about some girl, there will be scandal about my girl too.

Nima and Laala's mother said that because of other girls fleeing from school, parents ban their own daughters from going to school. She named one of her neighbors who withdrew their daughter, after Kashef's daughter who was in 11th grade, fled with her then boyfriend. She said:

Just because of girls' elopement, we withdrew our daughters from school. We feared our defamation.

Sara's mother from Malkhaan said quite the same story:

Kashef's daughter fled away. People withdrew their daughters from school out of fear.

Girls' escaping home is one side of the problem, which causes them to quit school. It further results in withdrawal of more girls from school, as their guardians fear their escaping from home and ruining their family's reputation. On the number of girls who

eloped from house in recent years women had varying accounts. One of them said that in their area three girls eloped in 2012 and two in 2011. Another mother reported that in 2010 one schoolgirl eloped from home and in 2011 two of them eloped from home. There was not an official record available to confirm either of these accounts.

Subcategory 2. Families' fear of loss of honor. Women are the symbols of honor of men in Afghan culture (Mehran, 2012). Any rumor or any other cause that affects this value is avoided. Harassment of girls is considered as a violation of the honor of male family members. As a result, girls are being prevented from attending school. For example, Ghazal's mother narrated that a man would harass a villager's daughter on her way to school constantly. Because this father's honor was being violated he had to withdraw his daughter from school. She further said that one reason girls are withdrawn from school is if they do any "misconduct." Sanam's mother stated that Sanam had to quit school because she did not want to get defamed for other girls' fleeing from school. When it comes to reputation, people prefer to have their daughters and sisters quit school rather than getting defamed.

Subcategory 3. Conflict avoidance. In some households, some members approve of girls' schooling and some do not. In order to avoid conflict in the household and violence, girls leave school. They are also encouraged by their mothers to quit school in order to keep the family environment peaceful. At times family members, who agree with girl's education, give up to save the relationships. For example, Rana's mother recounted that Rana's father and one brother approved of her education, but one brother did not. She was pulled out of school as a result of this conflict. Similarly, Farha and Gulnar's mother said that her husband was for Farha's education and her son was against it. When they argued over this issue, her mother encouraged Farha to drop school to maintain peace in

the family. When it comes to family welfare and peace, family members encourage saving the relationships over girls' education.

Theme 3. Distance from School

Distance from school refers to the remoteness of school from the households who have school-going children. The theme explains that some houses are at great geographical distance from girls' school. Girls from these households might have difficulty getting to school or perhaps might be harassed while traveling to school. Family members further fear that their girls might get raped on the way to school, which harms the girl and dishonors the family. Similarly, if a girl gets caught in a trouble such as flood, it dishonors the family. Any reference to the following indicators signify this theme:

- Long wait for transportation
- Long hours of commute by walk
- Sexual harassment of girls at the station and on the way to school
- Fear of girls' getting kidnapped on the way to school

Subcategory 1. Distance from school and lack of transportation. The distance of some participants' houses was far from girls' school. Their daughters had to travel by car. For example, Nida's mother said that long distance from home to school is a problem. She said:

Girls rented a car [together]. It could not be on schedule. Girls have to wait for an hour for a car. Boys throw comments at them [at the station].

Mehr's mother referred to the lack of vehicle for girls to take them to school. She said:

They didn't have transportation. Sometimes they would have money to pay for transportation and sometimes not.

Zoya's mother said that when Zoya had to stop attending school, her younger sister stopped going to school as well, because she could not stop a car and travel alone to

school. Safa's mother also affirmed that one of the reasons for asking her to leave school after studying for 6 years was lack of transportation. Safa would walk to school. Her mother said:

There was little transportation. Traveling alone for them [as a girl] was a problem. Nariman and Nazi's mother said that there is lack of transportation and the school is far from their home. She said:

Nariman and Nazi's father said, "If there were transportation [for them], I would have let girls to go to school.

Raihan's mother explained her concern that their area, Alimeerak, is a flood zone and the school is far away. If the girls are out in flood, and anything happens to them, the family gets dishonored. She also said that there is 4 hours of lessons at school and the girls spend 2 hours commuting to school and back home. Likewise, Sara's mother said that they did not have means of transportation so girls could not come to Khinjan downtown to school. According to her it costs them 50AFs per day to send their daughters to school, which is over a 1000AFs per month. She said that if they had their own car, it would make it much easier to bring girls to school. In sum, a lack of nearby schools and distance from school and lack of easily accessible transportation made it hard for girls to commute to school. Families prefer to withdraw their daughters from school rather than going through such difficulty.

Subcategory 2. Sexual harassment in the way to school. Mothers seemed to be concerned first about safety of their daughters in public transportation and second, about the walk to school because there is risk of girls falling victim of sexual harassment. For example, Rana's mother said:

...Boys set in front of the stores [close to school]. They throw comments at schoolgirls.

Nariman and Nazi's mother confirmed the harassment by saying:

Vulgar boys harass the girls. They stand in girls' way and tease them. The ways are clear.

Safa's younger sister avoided school because a driver was harassing her, until finally her mother convinced her to ignore the harasser and continue her studies. Clearly, sexual harassment of girls in the way to school and even at close distance to school is one of the causes for discouraging girls from school and families banning their daughters from attending school.

Subcategory 3. Kidnapping and lack of government's active presence in the district. Girls can get kidnapped when there is a tribal dispute such as if a male family member weds a girl without her family's consent, the girl's family forces to take a girl from the man's family as a revenge, and marry as *baad*. This comes to the level of abduction of girls at times. Or in another instance, if two groups fought with each other, they ban their girls from school because the parties might kidnap girls of the opposite party, such as in recent conflict of Hazara and Salangi in Khinjan District in 2012, many girls from Salangi side (as reported to the researcher) were banned from school for many days for the fear of getting kidnapped. Complaining about the government's not attending to sexual harassment issue, and disputes amongst the villagers as a barrier towards girls' school going, Ghazal's mother said:

When a girl is kidnapped, and taken as *baad*, the government doesn't punish the perpetrators. The perpetrators should be hanged.... The government doesn't investigate. If there is a problem, or animosity rises, they [people] withdraw the girls from school.

It seems that kidnapping is not a major and widespread problem in the district. However, the fear of it has quite an adverse effect on girls' schooling, but does not necessarily cause withdrawal of many girls from school as elopement does.

Speaking of the security and governments' control, Rana's mother said:

After the fight between Salangi and Hazara, now every Khinjani [resident of Khinjan] has gun, knife and rifle in their houses.

Participants are concerned about the harms of the social unrest on girls. Girls could get raped or kidnapped in such an environment. Since the government's presence is not active, the villagers cannot get help. Therefore, they prefer restricting their girls' movement by banning them from school.

Theme 4. Favoring Marriage and Family Roles over Education

Favoring marriage and family roles over education implies that girls' marriage and learning the household chores are considered more vital than their education. The traditional rural lifestyle requires girls to do the housework and help their mothers with taking care of the younger siblings. When they cannot manage the housework and their studies at the same time, and do not get support, they leave school. Any reference to the following indicators in particular signified this theme:

- Parents not rejecting proposals from relatives
- Parents' accepting marriage proposals for daughters even if early
- Favoring marriage of girls over the age of 18 and 20
- Girls' not being allowed to get a job after marriage
- Having to quit school after marriage

Subcategory 1. Early and/or forced marriage of girls. Girls are married early or by force because if the marriage proposal is from a relative, the girls' parents do not want to turn it down. Or because parents value marriage, they do not want to lose the proposal in case their daughters remain single. However, the basic reason for this seems to be religious, as explained earlier in Theme 1. Subcategory 3. There is a tradition called "shekam kheshi" which requires that when friends or relatives are expecting babies, they

promise to each other that if their babies were of the opposite gender, they will marry them to each other. This is done to strengthen the ties. Ghazal's mother said that although there is not "shekam kheshi" in the village anymore, relationships are nevertheless important. She said:

Relationships are important. People do not reject the marriage proposals of their daughters from relatives. [If you don't accept the proposal] you can't look at your relative anymore.

Farha and Gulnar's mother shared her thought on girls' marriage age, and her own daughters' early marriage. She said:

A girl should get married when she is 23. My daughters married early.... Gulnar was in school when she got engaged. Her fiancé was in Iran. Her in-laws said that they will not make the wedding soon. Her fiancé came back 2 or 3 years earlier than that they were supposed to marry. He said that if he goes back to Iran he would not come for 5 or 6 years. So, the families had to make the wedding. And after marriage, Gulnar said that it is embarrassing if she goes back to school [studies with girls].

Mehr's mother shared how they marry off their daughters:

If we receive proposal for our daughters when they are younger, we don't accept. We engage our daughter and ask in-laws to make the wedding 4 or 5 years later.

By "younger" she probably meant younger than 18 years old. When asked about her view on girls' marriage age, Zoya's mother said:

When a girl reaches puberty and is able to differentiate the good and the bad, we marry her off. She should be over 18.

Raihan's mother said that contrary to her view that Raihan should continue school, Raihan's father was interested in marrying her off. According to Raihan's mother, he did not take his children's education seriously. He did not even think that Raihan's in-laws should be a good family. She said she was afraid that if they did not marry Raihan with her now husband, the other proposals might be worse. That was when they engaged her with her then fiancé when she was in grade 7, at the age of 19. According to her mother,

Raihan's father could not say no to his relative's marriage proposal to his daughter. In some instances both men and women seemed to prefer their daughter's marriage over their education, and in some cases it was only the male guardian.

Subcategory 2. Traditional rural lifestyle. Decision-making on family issues is complicated. Decision makers often include more than parents, with brothers, extended family members, and at times elders and religious leaders being involved. Collective decision-making is preferred where the elders in an extended family consult about an issue, and make decisions. However, decision-making is different in every household. It does not include all of the mentioned parties in every decision-making in every household. Yet sometimes some relatives try to influence the household decisions. For example Nida's mother said:

Nida's father makes decisions. His cousins interfere. My son has more right in decision-makings.

By "more right" she meant that her son has a stronger voice than others in the family.

Rana's mother also affirmed that in some households boys have more decision-making authority than every other member. With respect to the household decision-making, Farha and Gulnar's mother said:

Our chair is my husband. My son has more power in decision-makings.

Zoya's mother said that Zoya's grandfather and uncle make decisions. Zoya's father is dead. According to Nariman and Nazi's mother, in their family their uncles (from the mother's and father's sides) are involved in family decisions. The girls' father has mental illness. Sanam's mother said that while making decisions, she consults with elders, such as her husband's cousins. Her husband has passed away. As revealed from the interviews, households' decisions are not only made by parents and family members, but sometimes

it includes more individuals from the extended family. It is also revealed that not everyone has the same voice in the family.

Subcategory 3. In-house roles of girls. These roles include doing the housework along with the mother and taking care of the younger siblings. Families are often big. They include uncles, their families, grandmother and grandfather, from the father's side. When girls cannot manage the housework and their studies at the same time, they leave school. Or sometimes families prefer them to attend to the housework and not school. For example, one of the reasons Nida was pulled out of school was because of the housework. Farha and Gulnar's mother said:

Gulnar had to leave school, because her sister-in-laws were too young to do the housework. Her mother-in-law was not good in housework either. Her brother-in-laws wife wouldn't work. So she had to.

Similarly, Zoya's mother said:

Zoya could not manage the housework and her studies. So she left school.

Nima and Laala's mother said that after Nima died, Laala left school because her father had mental illness and she had to help her mother with the housework. It is clear from the data that the in-house roles of girls, and their student life can conflict with each other. Most of the households prefer their daughters to manage the housework. It eventually causes them to drop out. One participant discussed the fear of women getting ahead of men as a reason to encourage them to withdraw girls from school. According to Farha and Gulnar's mother:

Farha and her brother were in a competition with each other. Farha was more intelligent than him. So he withdrew her, out of the fear that she would get ahead of him.

In this case the in-house roles of girls become a pretext for the dominant male family members to restrict girls to the house and suppress them.

Subcategory 4. Discouragement of girls' employment after marriage. Girls' roles after marriage are the same as their roles in their parent's house, and often more. The priority is always the in-house work and as women are not able to manage big families and a job outside the home, they are advised to focus on the housework rather than the job. For example, Ghazal's mother stressed that girls are not allowed to work after marriage in saying:

Ghazal's sister-in-law's daughter was educated. After she got engaged, she could not get a job.

By "educated" she was referring to high school education. Rana's mother shared that a girl in their village had a high school education, and her husband was educated too. But after their marriage her brother-in-law's wife and mother-in-law did not allow her to get a job. Expressing her view about education of girls, Mehr's mother said:

It is good that girls know how to read and write. [But] girls don't get out of the house after marriage.

Zoya's mother shared her view and story of a girl in the village, who had to quit her job after marriage:

It's good if a girl or woman works outside the house.... Dewa went to school. She taught at school for a few years. Her mother-in-law would do the housework. People and her in-laws started talking behind her back. She quit teaching and stayed at home.

Families link the main benefit of education with employment and financial gain. Because girls are not allowed to work outside the house, especially in an office setting, after marriage, this makes their parents reluctant to let them complete school. No schooling is equal to no job. In this sense, this creates a vicious circle that obstructs girls' schooling and, in addition, their chances at getting a job.

Theme 5. Maternal Lack of Influence and Power

Maternal lack of influence and power is defined as the level of participants' involvement in their household decision-makings. Specifically, it focuses on their power to influence their daughters' schooling. This theme reveals that mother's role in schooling of girls is insignificant. They often either lack voice in the family, and so are ignored when decisions are being made around girls' education, or they lack awareness about the benefits of girls' education, and do not encourage their education. Some women voluntarily give their decision-making right to the male family members. Any reference to the following indicators were labeled as maternal lack of influence and power:

- Mothers not being listened to in household decision making
- Mothers' opinions not being included in the decision making process
- Their own choice to submit to male family members' decision
- Mothers hopelessness about girls' education and thus not pushing for it

Subcategory 1. Lack of voice in the household decision-making. When asked who makes decision in the family, the answers showed that in most households women are not consulted nor listened to. For instance, while Nida's mother had a positive view about education of girls, she named her husband and son as decision-makers in the family, but not herself, and thus giving up her influence on Nida's schooling. Similarly, Rana's mother, who approved of Rana's schooling, said that her sons have more of a decision-making role in the family. Farha and Gulnar's mother also was for education of her daughters, but could not help with Farha's staying in school because her son decided to withdraw Farha from school. She has some basic literacy skills herself. On the benefit of education for girls, she said:

...I earn an income. When I go somewhere, or want to buy something, I don't have to stretch out my hands to my husband and ask for money.

Likewise, Mehr's mother said:

The decision-making [role] is with men. They consult with women, but women give [back to] them the right to make decisions.

Safa's mother said:

I am illiterate. It is like I am blind. I like for my son and daughter to study.

According to her when her husband prevented Safa from school, she had no power to help. Again in reference to the impact of illiteracy, Nima and Laala's mother pointed to the importance of the education of girls:

We are like blinds. We can't read the signs.

Nariman and Nazi's mother said that she has a positive view about education of girls, but her husband, who is a strict person, withdrew Nariman from school. She said:

If my husband says don't go shopping, we can't go.

About decision making in her family, Raihan's mother said:

I am not being consulted about anything. My husband makes decisions.... There is less understanding between us.... I am afraid of the consequences of my decisions, so I submit to his decisions.

She expressed her view on education, saying:

Because of illiteracy people buy bad quality stuff, and bad quality medicine.... A woman's life can be difficult without financial independence.

Sara's mother said that her husband is the one who makes the final decision in the family, but according to her he does consult with her. They consult her brother as well.

Some women are unaware of their decision-making role in the family. Or if they are, they are not confident enough to use their voices. As well, their fear of getting blamed if things go wrong discourages them from being actively involved in decision-making in the household.

Subcategory 2. Mother's pessimism related to girls' education. Some mothers were discouraged to support their daughters' education due to the fact that there is lack of "female" jobs in the district and restrictions on women on the other hand. Thus, their daughters' education will not lead to their financial gain. Mehr's mother, who had an influence on withdrawing Mehr from school, stated that she believed education of girls was of no use. She went on to say:

Which young girl has completed grade 12? Even if she does, she ends up staying at home. When a girl reaches puberty, she gets married. Her [my daughter's] authority will not be with me anymore.... I think she [any girl] should stay at home, and do the housework. Still, it depends on men.

Zoya's mother as well did not seem quite optimistic about girls' education. As described by her mother, Zoya had to leave school because of the housework. She was studying in grade 10 and was around 17 or 18 years old. Her mother said:

I think it is enough for a girl to learn how to read and write. There is nothing in it for her.... There is no benefit in a girl's education. They [the in-laws] do not allow her to work when she is married. Out of 100 in-laws, even one of them is not happy that a woman should work. In-laws say that if a woman works outside the house, she doesn't work inside.

Mothers' accounts as above show that because girls' education does not create financial benefit, it makes mothers reluctant to support their daughters' schooling, and at times they are the ones to pull out the daughters from school, such as Mehr's mother.

Some factors that are not cultural and beyond the scope of this study, were brought up by the participants during some of the interviews. They are mentioned below, and do not belong to any of the above themes or subcategories.

One of such factors was low quality of education, which was brought up by Zoya's mother; and Nima and Laala's mother. Zoya's mother stated that the quality of education is low. Nima and Laala's mother said that the quality of education in Nima's current school was not good, when she quit it.

Raihan's mother referred to poverty as a problem. She said:

People are poor. They only see their near future. [Some] people withdrew their sons from school to work [and earn money]. In Kawa, people gain an education. They've made some progress.

Sanam's mother said that her granddaughter (from her other daughter) who is older than Sanam has never been to school. It was the civil war time and there were no schools open. She also mentioned about poverty as the reason for her daughter's non-completion of school. She said that she could not afford school supplies for Sanam. From the narratives about the non-cultural factors causing girls' school withdrawal it is therefore deduced that the non-cultural factors combined with cultural factors and rural lifestyle become robust barriers against girls' schooling.

An interesting finding was that nothing was mentioned about lack of female teachers. It seemed that in this part of the province the issue of lack of female teachers were solved to the extent that it was not a cause for withdrawal of girls from schools.

This chapter reflected the interview data, which were chunked down and presented in the form of themes and subcategories. Mothers' accounts provided an insight into the research's main inquiry, which was to understand the impact of traditions and cultural norms on girls' withdrawal from school in Khinjan District.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of traditions and cultural norms on girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan. It sought to capture the accounts of mothers whose daughters were withdrawn from school. Specifically, the following questions were asked:

- 1) How do mothers perceive girls' education after puberty?
- 2) How do they account for their daughters' school withdrawal?
- 3) What are the communication implications of the findings of this research for addressing the problem of girls' withdrawal from school in Afghanistan?

This chapter aims to present responses to the abovementioned research questions based on the research findings. As well, the theoretical framework, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model and Existentialist Feminism Theory, will be used to explain and understand the findings.

Question 1: How Do Mothers Perceive Girls' Education after Puberty?

Parental attitude towards the education of their children has an important impact on children's school enrollment, retention and academic accomplishments (Medinnus, 1962; Weir, 2000; Samal, 2012). For instance, Weir (2000) reported that in rural Ethiopia, which is a developing country, parental attitude towards children's education is influenced by consideration of their children's character formation along with the socioeconomic status they will gain in the future and the support this will enable them to offer their parents. Nonetheless, these attitudes vary along gender lines; parents are less enthusiastic about their daughter's education, because after marriage girls tend to move in with their in-laws. Any financial gain they enjoy as result of education will not benefit

their own parents. Such attitudes are not unheard of when it comes to the barriers towards education of girls in developing countries.

The findings of this research suggest that there is a tension in mothers' perceptions about the education of girls. Some reported it as being important while others stated that girls did not need education. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants saw the significance of education for girls. Their reflection on their own personal lives included negative experiences as a result of their own lack of education. The women equated illiteracy with blindness and gave accounts of the benefits of education such as financial independence, understanding written information, and being able to buy the right medicine. These results indicated participants' understanding of the positive impacts of education in girls and women's lives. At the same time, they reflected on traditional values; perceptions of danger; the religious perceptions around girls' puberty that places pressure on parents to marry off their daughters before they even complete school; the hostile social attitude towards movement of young girls outside the house revealed in the form of harassment; discouragement and lack of jobs for women. In general, the majority of the participants seemed to have contemplated and were convinced to a great extent of the benefit of education as a path for independence and freedom.

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1993) reflected on the role of education as a facilitator of freedom. He stated that, "an act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human" (p. 56-57) and, "education is the practice of freedom..." (p. 81). He suggested that the oppressed ought to create a mindset based on which their circumstance is transformable. This mindset is necessary for their attainment of freedom. Freire argued that in the act of freeing themselves—through education—from oppression, the oppressed not only free themselves but the oppressor(s) as well. Freire

(1993) opposed the *banking model* of education where the learners' minds are stuffed with the information the educator wants them to retain. Instead, he emphasized *problem-solving education* where learners learn to critically inquire and to solve real life problems. This assertion conforms with the view of mothers who acknowledged the independence aspect of gaining an education, and saw it as sight through which women and men could observe and comprehend their world.

The findings also suggest that a few women were not well informed about the benefits of education for girls and rather believed in the traditional norms. A mother's accounts which said that keeping a young girl at home is difficult and that girls should get married by 20, showed mother's disconnect with her daughter and womanhood. One mother's assertion that they marry girls off after puberty, "when she is able to differentiate the good and the bad...but should be over 18." while she had withdrawn her own daughter from school at an even younger age and low grade of school, is expressive of a traditional outlook about the appropriate age for marriage of girls. One mother suggested that there are few girls who have completed high school and that even a girl stays in school, "she ends up staying at home." This example points out the lack of female role models as a result of the barriers in their way that have been discussed up to this point.

These assertions explain the fact that apart from the financial benefit of education, some mothers fail to see the consciousness raising aspect of education that would help their daughters learn to make better choices in their lives, bring up healthy children, and morally and financially support the family beside their husbands. Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1953) discourages passivity of women and emphasizes the significance of women

in increasing their consciousness and understanding the value of autonomy. In this sense, education of girls is key, even if it does not lead to formal employment.

Yet, another group of participants was unsure and demotivated by the cost they were paying for their daughters' education. The pressure from male family members, relatives, lower quality of education in schools in rural, and sexual harassment girls face out of the home, deterred women from supporting their daughters' education. However, they did acknowledge the significance of girls' education. Their complaints were about the fact that people make falsehoods and rumors about schoolgirls. The *fear of girls' elopement*, as stated by some mothers, signifies a deeper issue of a lack of trust and communication between parents/guardians and their daughters around matters such as falling in love or marrying ideal boyfriends. Culturally, discussions on such issues are considered taboo, and girls and boys are supposed to abide by their parents' choice of spouse for them. Consequently, the fear of girls' elopement with a would-be boyfriend/lover causes parents/guardians to withdraw them from school.

The findings indicate that mothers' perceptions about girls' education were mixed and affected by environmental factors. Some mothers did perceive girls' education to be important and some perceived it as an unnecessary risk not worth taking.

Question 2: How Do Mothers Account for Their Daughters' School Withdrawal?

Mothers referred to several factors as the causes of their daughters' school withdrawal in Khinjan District. One of the factors prominently mentioned was male family members' hostile attitude towards girls' education and the perception that education is of no use for girls after they have reached puberty. According to Hofstede (2011) an indicator of high power distance index (PDI) culture is that the more powerful exert power over less powerful and prevent them to access power. A potential motive for

the hostile attitude towards the education of girls could be that since education is a means to gain independence and power, girls are discouraged from accessing it after a certain grade. This motive becomes stronger especially when male family members are not educated themselves. An educated female member would mean a powerful woman in the family.

One participant's account was that although she thinks girls should learn how to read and write, the final decision rests with men. Hofstede (2011) argues that in high power distance cultures the less powerful often accept and expect being inferior and this is part of what enables the powerful to have control over them. Inequality becomes a status quo. Further, some women said that they seek advice from male relatives as well as elders and religious leaders when making decisions. An Existentialist Feminism view of this matter reveals that because Khinjan, as almost anywhere in the country, is a male dominant region, women are not involved in the society directly and only receive information from men, they evidently trust men for their opinion, also because they see their gender as inferior.

When studied from an Existentialist Feminism perspective, the perception that "education is of no use for girls" expressed mostly by men and some women points out the fact that because of perceived biological differences, women's access to certain rights such as the right to education is considered unimportant. This theory explains that "it is not the biological differences themselves, but the value society assigns to biological differences between males and females that has led woman to play the role of *the Other*" (Rosser, 2005, p. 6). Owing to having different biological features than men, women are assigned certain roles such as giving birth, being caregivers to their children and working

at home, but not other roles such as becoming a breadwinner to the family or advancing in social positions. Therefore, it is believed that education will not serve their future role.

Some participants narrated that they lack voice in the household and they are not listened to in decision-makings. One of them pointed to a lack of confidence that made her submit to her husband's decisions who is more powerful. Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) describes that in cultures with high PDI it is in the interest of those who already are powerful to look as powerful as possible. That is why men use influence on women and suppress their voice to look more powerful themselves. The issue of power has also been pointed out by Existentialist Feminism Theory. It claims that the perception of women as *the Other* or *the Second Sex* has led men to overshadow and control women. Existentialist Feminism criticizes the role of women assigned by society, which is subordinate to men and that women are obliged to obey men whether in the role of father, brother or husband.

One of the major factors discussed by the participants was that girls are not allowed to work outside the house after marriage, and so families withdraw their daughters from school since they do not see any point in their school completion. The collectivist lifestyle of the rural requires girls to live with their in-laws after marriage. They cannot handle the housework and job at the same time. From an Existentialist Feminism point of view, because women are not expected to hold a job and thus a position in society, their role is restricted as a mother and a caregiver. Hofstede's Masculinity versus Femininity Dimension explains that in Masculine cultures women are not appreciated for being an achiever. In this case, being a housewife, a mother and an employee at the same time makes them achievers. A non-cultural factor involved in this

problem is a lack of both female jobs and childcare for children of working mothers in the district.

Participants narrated that besides being concerned about girls' safety while they commute to school, they worried about the negative impact of a recent issue on their daughters' school attendance: girls' elopement. On the one hand, they were concerned if their daughters eloped with an ideal partner, which would severely damage the family's reputation. On the other hand, they wanted to avoid labels on their daughters as immodest. The negative community attitude towards girls' education and girls' elopement had scandalized all school-going girls. Since women and girls in Afghan culture are regarded as being part of men's honor (Tapper, 2008; Mehran, 2011), male family members would get harmed the most in this case. In her book *the Second Sex* (1949/1953), from an Existentialist Feminism point of view, Simone de Beauvoir argued that a woman is seen as the inessential *Other* to man. She exists only in relation to the *self*, which is man, and from childhood is taught that she is inferior and has to serve the *self*. That being said, *the Other* should in no way harm the *self*, and when *the Other* is suspected to act against the desire of the *self* it is subjected to confinement. This is why girls are being withdrawn from school and kept at home as a solution to prevent their elopement for marriage.

An underlying concern around modesty is that it has a link with the virginity of a girl. An immodest girl is perceived as a girl, who behaves against the social norms; who flirts with men and even whose virginity is questionable. Since the virginity of girls before marriage is of a high value, parents try to avoid any scandal around it. Girls are not wanted if they are not a virgin. de Beauvoir (1949/1953) discussed this when she argued

that girls are expected to prepare themselves for after marriage, part of which is their virginity.

Regarding their daughters' marriage, participants stated that if proposals come from their relatives, parents could not reject. One participant said that the ties are important. Due to the collectivist lifestyle of Khinjani, the ties between kin are valued and marriage is one way to sustain it. Even if it costs a girl to leave school, her parents usually do not reject the marriage proposal. Hofstede's Collectivism versus Individualism explains that in collectivist cultures choices or preferences of individuals are less important than those of the group. Belonging and acceptance in social circles are important. Members of a clan or family win this acceptance "in exchange to their loyalty" (Hofstede, 1983, p. 62). This conforms with Khinjani parents marrying off their daughters to relatives to continue the ties.

A probable factor related to the withdrawal of girls from school and marrying them off is the fact that the backlash in girls' education during the civil war (1992-1996) and Taliban regime (1996-2001) led to some girls being way behind in their school education. For example some girls would be in grade 7 at the age of 19. This meant that parents would have to wait more than five years for their daughter to complete high school to marry her. As a girl's age increases, this can potentially decrease her chances of marriage. Therefore, parents prefer to get their daughter engaged and withdraw her from school to prepare for marriage.

Mothers frequently reported that extended relatives would interfere in their lives and encourage parents to withdraw their daughters from school. They cited the illiteracy and jealousy of the relatives as a reason for this interference. On a deeper level it can be said that the relatives resist girls' education, because according to Mooij and Hofstede

(2010) in high UAI cultures people do not tend to welcome change, and experiment and advancement, both of which are linked with ambiguity and change, make them distressed. Strict rules and structures are put in place to avoid uncertainty as a result of change. Also, taking Hofstede's Masculinity versus Femininity Dimension into account, girls' progress through education and their future involvement in social life will make them equal to men, and equality is not desired in a masculine society with high PDI. Individuals who have not educated themselves perhaps see education of girls as a threat because it may result in the equal status of men and women in their community and the independence of women. In high PDI societies independence is assumed to belong to a few and the less powerful should depend on them. Also the collectivist nature of the rural in Khinjan makes families prone to interference by relatives in their familial issues and to the likelihood of being influenced by them. People tend to follow the behaviors of their neighbors and relatives so that they are being accepted in the community.

According to some mothers, Talib-y conceptions and strict relatives were opposing girls' education, especially since rumors around girls' elopement for marriage were being spread in recent years; this further affected the attitude of such relatives towards girls' movement outside the house. Hofstede (2011) inferred that in cultures with high UAI people are inclined to be "more emotional and motivated by inner nervous energy" (p. 11). A probable explanation of the situation is also that the government is not active in Khinjan District. Its role has been invisible in dealing with the cases of elopement, sexual harassment, and kidnappings and in creating strategies to control them. The frustration of being pressured by relatives, hearing the rumors about schoolgirls, witnessing girls elope for marriage, or getting sexually harassed and defamed afterwards, leads male villagers to try to take charge themselves to help resolve the situation in their

way. They put restrictive rules in place on girls' movement outside the house including banning them from school and employment.

Mullahs play the role of moral guides in people's lives in the district. From the accounts of mothers it appeared that the majority of Mullahs either do not have a positive attitude towards girls' education in particular after puberty, or if they do not reject it completely, they do not do advocacy for it. According to one participant, Mullahs used to talk about codes for women and girls' manners including banning them from school. Although they stopped after receiving a notice from the government, these spiritual leaders still do encourage parents to marry off their daughters after puberty. A key issue is that such religious perspectives around girls' puberty have not been updated or refused to be challenged. According to Hofstede (2010) cultures with high UAD usually avoid being challenged by new ways of understanding the world. In particular, such cultures are inclined toward indoctrination of religious beliefs. Most people's religious faith is based with certainty even without sufficient research. In her criticism of how society at her time viewed girls, Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1953) expressed that due to social construction of womanhood a girl's ultimate destiny is marriage. The findings of this research showed that de Beauvoir's assertion is close to reality in regards to attitudes around girls' marriage in Khinjan District where their education is seen as a less important choice. The advice of Mullahs in particular compels parents to try to marry off their daughters soon after puberty.

Participants talked about conflict avoidance that results in withdrawal of girls from school and the fear of kidnapping as a result of tribal and family disputes. In both cases, girls are victimized. They are unwittingly the point of conflict and they inevitably become the solution for the conflict. Mishra, Behera and Babu (2012) pointed to the fact

that society paints the picture of girls as “self-sacrificing, self-pitying and submissive” beings (p. 46). They avowed that the socialization process within society shapes gender roles and infuses in girls to believe in their own inferiority to men. Since the society and girls and women themselves believe in the inferiority of the female gender, their rights and welfare comes second in conflict resolution. In case of kidnapping in tribal or family disputes, sometimes girls fall the victim of the tradition of *baad* where a girl is married to the opposite side of the dispute by force to end the animosity. This indicates that the perception of females as inferior brings them down to the level of an object that is given to the opposite party to apparently end the conflict.

An influential factor on girls' education is the mother's perceptions of girls' education. It was revealed that not all of the mothers had a positive view about the education of girls after puberty. A few in particular believed in the traditional role of women and girls and expected their daughters to be married sometime after puberty when they know the good and the bad, according to mothers. From Existentialist Feminism perspective women accept their roles and pass them on to the next generation of women through communicating with them about their assigned roles and expected behaviors. In this case, the mothers failed to see the positive impact of education on their daughters' lives. Their sources of information and influence are male family members, neighbors, relatives and women from other villages who are uneducated like them. They often do not have contact with the outer world outside the district.

It is noteworthy that the villagers have ignored the role of education in helping girls to become better mothers, wives and effective members of the community. Girls are preferred to help with the housework and taking care of the younger siblings. One of the participants mentioned that villagers look at what is close to them and do not think about

the future. Mooij and Hofstede (2010) stated that in cultures with Short-term Orientation people think about their near future and work towards it, whereas in long-term orientated cultures people plan not only for their near future, but also set long-term goals and invest in them. Clearly, for the development of both society and humanity education is a long-term goal, which a few participants in this study failed to see.

According to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensional Model, Khinjan ranks as a Collectivist, high Masculine culture, with high Power Distance, and Short-term Orientation. Since the basic cultural and traditional principles are the same throughout the country (Banbury, 2013; Guimbert, Miwa, & Nguyen, 2008; Lee, 2009; Strickland, 2008), this rank could relate to whole Afghanistan with some regional differences. From an Existentialist Feminism point of view the perception of girls and women as *the Second Sex* plays a dominant role in girls' school withdrawal and abandonment from active social participation.

The research findings suggest that part of the cause for withdrawal of girls from school is the negative attitude of male family members and the community towards girls' education and this is rooted in broader harmful cultural perceptions around girls, especially after puberty, along with Afghan traditions and religious doctrines that value girls' marriage, and not their education. Non-cultural causes revealed from the findings of the research were distance from school, poverty, quality of education at schools and the government's not addressing the security and educational needs of Khinjan District including investigation and tackling of kidnappings, sexual harassment and elopement of girls from school.

Question 3: What are the Communication Implications of the Findings of this Research for Addressing the Problem of Girls' School Withdrawal in Afghanistan?

The accounts of the participants denote that the informal communication networks have an important influence on shaping the attitudes and behaviors of people regarding the education of girls. Consequently, these networks contribute to perpetuating the oppressive practices. Such informal communications include sharing rumors and gossips about schoolgirls. Situated on Freire's (1993) concept of dialoguing with the oppressed, the same communication networks could to be used to alter the communication patterns among Khinjanis and to encourage them to become advocates of education for girls.

Paulo Freire presented his renowned concept of dialoguing for liberation in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1993. He (1993) defined dialogue as "the encounter between men [and women], mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (p. 88). Clearly, he emphasized the element of participation in dialogue.

Freire (1993) defined oppression as "any situation in which "A" objectively exploits "B" or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person" (p. 55). He further stated that, "such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human" (p. 55). A key point he identified was that the oppressed must be engaged "in reflection on their concrete situation..." (p. 66), because this process would liberate them. According to Freire (1993) genuine reflection causes action. To truly engage in their liberation, the oppressed should be trusted for their opinion and logic. Finally, the lack of confidence and willingness of the oppressed to depend on the powerful must not be taken advantage of. Freire called the dependence urge, or willingness to depend on the powerful, an oppressor technique.

To apply Freire's concept to the issue of girls' school withdrawal in Khinjan,

given that communication perpetuates the current situation, the research suggests that the local leaders, teachers and principles, and other respected Khinjanis initiate a dialogue with parents/guardians who have withdrawn or are on the verge of withdrawing their female family members from school. Further, the elders, religious leaders and respected members of the community need to address the harms of girls' withdrawal from school and encourage equal education of girls and boys in their public talks and initiate a dialogue from there on. As some members of the community are more receptive than others, these opinion leaders can influence their network of friends and families through communication. The research participants' accounts indicated that there are individuals in the community, especially among women, who are open to change, and want the rest of the community to maintain a positive and respectful attitude towards school going girls, and do not envy or harass them.

Freire (1993) states that an efficient liberating act is "a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed" (p. 68). The oppressed should act for their liberation not because they have been labeled as oppressed by some revolutionary leader, but because of their own consciousness of their situation and the inner desire to set themselves free. Freire (1993) believed that the transformation should be carried not *for* the oppressed, but *with* the oppressed. In the context of this study, the local leaders and teachers should pursue a constant dialogue with the public in regard to the education of girls. It should be an on going and enthusiastic effort to reform the negative aspects of culture and traditions by people for the betterment of their own lives. It is noteworthy that the researcher does not consider the study population as oppressed, but believes that all men and women who have been suppressed from learning and growing, under the egoistic regimes, are oppressed.

On the liberation of women and men, Freire (1993) pointed out that the oppressed ought to take responsibility for their struggle for liberation. Freire and de Beauvoir agree at one point when they declare that women and men should interpret their world through a dialogue and not that one group interprets the world on behalf of the other. Essential for a dialogue to take place, as Freire (1993) pointed out, is faith in those with whom one dialogues to liberate them, love for humankind, and humility (Freire, 1993). Freire stated that trust is built in the process and that “false love, false humility, and feeble faith in others cannot create trust” (p. 91). He noted that dialogue is initiated by hope. Without hope, no dialogue can exist. Lastly, he mentioned that critical thinking is an essential element of a dialogue in which women and men seek their re-humanization. One must try to understand the oppressed interpretation of reality and their perceived ideal situation. The solution in the form of a program or strategy should not be presented based on what the leadership thinks would help the oppressed. Freire (1993) stated that, “It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 96).

This is why it is most effective when the motive for change and advocacy for it stems from within the community. Credible community members, who understand the benefits of gaining an education and believe in girls' education after puberty, could create a space for dialogue with people about how they perceive girls' education and how they could possibly be convinced of the importance of girls' education for the households in the district, and for themselves, their husbands and children.

According to the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the first phase of breaking the oppression requires measuring the consciousness of the oppressed and the oppressor, including their “behavior, view of the world, and ethics” (p. 55). In the second phase,

action is taken to free the oppressed and the oppressor. Freire (1993) stated, "In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted" (p. 54). In order to help the oppressed with their liberation a dialogue should be conducted with them based on the level of their understanding of the reality. Initiating any action to liberate the oppressed without a dialogue with them is, in fact, objectifying them, because "it is to lead them into a populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated" (p. 65). In contrast, the purpose of liberation is to help the oppressed women and men to become fully human again as is the basic status of their existence.

In Afghanistan Mullahs (religious leaders) have a distinct influential position in rural and, to a great extent, throughout the country. Continuous dialogue with them and through their channel with people about the significance of girls' education in their personal and married lives as well as moral and economic development of the country will positively contribute to decrease of girls' school withdrawal. One proposal in particular is that the prominent religious scholars of Afghanistan should be approached and asked to contribute to solving the issue of girls' withdrawal from school. One approach could be to issue an *Ijtehad* to the Afghan nation on access of girls to education (Mayar, personal communication, August 20, 2013). *Ijtehad* is one of the two main principles of Islam. It is "intellectual endeavor to seek the solutions of day to day matters" (Jafri, 2012, para. 1). This means that Muslim jurists who are knowledgeable about religion seek solutions to daily life problems deduced from Quranic instructions and guidance of *Sunnah*⁹. Their solutions are put into practice among Muslims

⁹ Sunnah is "primary source of law taken from the sayings, actions and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad" (para. 2). More information is available at: <http://www.islaamnet.com/whatissunnah.html>

afterwards. Hence, since 99 percent of Afghan population is Muslim (CIA *Factbook*, 2013), an *Ijtehad* could help increase access of girls to school and their retention at school. The issuance of an *Ijtehaad* as a reference in the dialogue of the local and religious leaders with the people about the education of girls, is assumed to positively change the communication patterns among people.

Regarding the change in cultures Hofstede (2011) declared that cultural dimensions shift between the poles over the course of time. That is to say that cultural values change in a society with changes in the economy, literacy level, politics, and social structure (Wu, 2006). Cheung and Chan (2007) suggested that in a culture with high MAS, high PDI, and low IND, such as that of Khinjan, there should be a strong drive to trigger the change of cultural values, given that Khinjan also has a short-term orientated culture. Cheung and Chan (2007) recommended that it is critical to communicate to people that the illiteracy of women and girls has a vast negative impact on the economy and development of a country. According to these authors a general improvement of human rights, which is concerning about equal rights and the dignity to all citizens without regard for their gender, color and sexual orientation is necessary in the developing world to reduce gender inequality in education. Improvement of equal rights in every area of life creates gender equality in education and an expectation of equality. In the context of Afghanistan, women and men are equal according to their constitutional rights; the deeper problem lies in the implementation of this law and changes to the nationwide attitude towards equality of genders since the law differs from the learned religious beliefs of the people.

A key barrier to girls' education is the high Collectivism Index in Khinjan. A shift toward an IND is a change that could benefit girls' completion of school. Cheung and

Chan (2007) proposed the increase of IDV as a resolution to girls' retention at school. In IDV cultures, individuals have the freewill to choose their actions and account for them. There are no or little interference of people in each other's familial affairs. If the culture changes toward an increase of IDV, Khinjanis will be less likely to push their relatives to withdraw girls from school; they will mind their own business. People in IDV cultures have the right to make their own decisions without having to conform to the community (Cheung & Chan, 2007).

According to Cheung and Chan (2007) in low PDI and MAS societies more women secure seats in parliament, who in turn can impact the gender balance in education as well as other areas of life. Low MAS and PDI mean that equal rights and treatment of women are more accepted and expected (Cheung & Chan, 2007). Low MAS and the opposite, feminine culture encourages gender equality from the very first years of a man and woman's lives. There is less "emotional and social role differentiation between the genders" in a feminine society (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). Mothers and fathers are nearly equally engaged and responsible for their children's education. In LTO cultures people take their long term growth and prosperity into account and design their education system to serve that purpose. On that matter, girls' education cannot and must not be ignored. It appears that gender inequality in education would be reduced if the Afghan culture were to shift moderately if not steadily towards Femininity, Individualism, low Power Distance, and were to become more of a Long-term oriented society.

Existentialist Feminism suggests that to confront the issue of perceiving the female gender as *the Other* or *the Second Sex* women should increase awareness about themselves and start seeing themselves apart and independent. On a rather radical level de Beauvoir believed that, "everything about women written by men ought to be suspect

for these men were at the same time the judge and the litigant” (Buytendijk, as cited in Allen, 1989, p. 456). Taking this feminist opinion into account, to a less radical level in the Afghan context, it can be said that women need to become more aware of themselves and define their being from their own points of view, not from what they have been told about femininity throughout the years. Being suppressed from using one’s voice and having freedom of choice is different from actually *not* using their voice or making decisions on their own behalf; it is like having rights but not using one’s rights, which can make one vulnerable to a loss of rights to the more powerful. Women should understand this and make efforts to establish their role in the family, especially when it comes to their daughter’s education. Not participating in household decision-making and expressing their voice makes them so-called “invisible women” (Allen, 1989).

Cheung and Chan (2007) stressed the political might and the gender equality policies in all areas of life to increase retention of girls at school after the primary level. As argued by Cheung and Chan, compulsory high school education for both genders through the country can significantly reduce withdrawal of girls from school. The Afghan Education Interim Plan 2011-13 declared that Afghanistan Girl’s Education Initiative (AGEI) has planned on developing a communication strategy to promote enrollment and retention of girls in schools. This strategy is expected to be completed before the end of 2013 and put into practice. In terms of school withdrawal, one objective of the strategy aims to decrease the dropout rate in public schools to 3% by 2014. Given that the sociopolitical situation of Afghanistan has not been favorable from the time when this strategy was made, the implementation of this objective is challenging indeed. One objective of the Education Interim Plan (2011-13) has been to “strengthen the participation of parents and local elders in the management of schools through the establishment and training of

school *shuras*¹⁰ for all general schools” (p. 68) and it intends to build trust with the community and parents. However, as far as this research finds there has not been such a program formally implemented in Khinjan District.

Besides the efforts of informal communication channels to dialogue with people about the education of girls, it is suggested that advocates from the Ministry of Education (MoE) should approach parents, especially the mothers of girls who were withdrawn from school, and dialogue with them about this problem to seek joint solutions. This dialogue should be ongoing until the problem of girls' school withdrawal is solved entirely. School management meetings with the parents should be put in place in public schools. It will draw the attention of the parents to the fact that school management cares about their children's education, and education of their children is important for themselves, their family and society.

Studies have placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of parental engagement, their level of education and income on children's education (Medinnus, 1962; Weir, 2000; Samal, 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Houtenville & Conway, 2007; Carter, 2002; DFE, 2010; Erlendsdóttir, 2010; Chevalier, Harmon, O'Sullivan & Walker, 2005; Paton, 2012). They all settled on one common point: that parents' active involvement and encouragement of their children in their academic work does have a huge impact on children's success. Paton (2012) even suggested that parents' efforts on their children's education have a higher impact than school. Parents' attention to their children's education—including providing them with sufficient support such as not having them to devote all of their time to housework though needed or required by the traditional life—is crucial. This way parents would help with their children's nurturing

¹⁰ Shura (plural Shuras) is an Arabic word, which means consultation and is referred to consultation or discussion with people on issues that impact them. (Burnei, 2010)

and future evolution.

Limitations

This study faced some limitations. The first limitation was that due to the insecurity and Afghan cultural norms, which do not allow a woman to travel and stay in a place by herself, the researcher was not able to travel to other rural districts of Baghlan or another province to collect data and compare the findings of different rural areas. She could only conduct interviews in Khinjan District.

The second limitation was not having been able to obtain male parents interviews. The reasons were that they were either unwilling or unavailable. They were not willing because culturally it was not deemed appropriate for a girl to interview men. Furthermore, they felt intimidated by discussing about the research's topic. The researcher suspects that because they were not familiar with opinion sampling, they perceived the interview session as an investigation about withdrawal of their daughter(s) or other female family members from school. They were not available because they would be at work during the hours the interviews were conducted.

Conclusion

This research has examined the accounts of Afghan mothers on the influence of cultural norms and traditions on girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan. The findings suggest that Khinjanis' perceptions of women and girls influenced by traditions and cultural norms do affect girls' non-completion of school and early withdrawal. Their perceptions become common and are perpetuated through their informal communication networks. This research presented an opportunity to project Afghan mothers' voices on the one hand, and reflect on the effects of cultural norms and traditions on rural Afghan female students' deprivation from a complete high school education on the other hand.

Therefore, this research provides a representation of the not so visibly heard voices and makes them heard. It further contributes to knowledge building in area of girls' rights and education.

The power of the informal communication patterns such as gossip and rumors are so strong that they hamper the access of girls to their right of education. Such communication networks must be altered by the credible local Khinjanis to form a more positive communication about education of girls. Paulo Freire's (1993) concept of dialoguing for liberation can be applied in terms of initiating a dialogue with ordinary Khinjani parents/guardians on the significance of education for girls. A similar empirical research that would include male and religious leaders' accounts in regard to this subject will help in attaining first hand knowledge about their perceptions. This would help in designing an effective targeted communication strategy to address the problem of girls' withdrawal from school. The researcher's informal talk with some of the girls who were withdrawn from school proved that their insights were rich in terms of their take on culture and tradition, and their passion for knowledge. Due to the time constraints and limitations of the current research, the researcher was not able to include the withdrawn from school female student's accounts. She suggests that it will help if these young women's accounts are included in this discussion.

The researcher strongly believes that withdrawal of girls from school is not just a familial issue since it negatively affects the whole country, and that these young Afghan women must not be ignored and left out of the education system. The researcher calls on the educated Afghan elites to engage in a positive and peaceful dialogue as they encounter Afghans who are against the education of girls, for when the informal communication practices are changed, it alters attitudes and behaviors, and a cultural

change happens. Moreover, it is emphasized that the political will for equalizing gender rights and including women and girls in all areas of life is incredibly necessary. For Afghanistan to move towards peace, progress of economy and culture, and to reach the level of the developed world it is critical that both girls and boys have access to and obtain a sufficient level of education. Without this, the common dream for the prosperity of Afghanistan might remain a dream.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Coding Scheme

1. Negative attitudes towards the education of girls

Refers to family members' and community members' assertions around uselessness of education for girls because of their femininity.

Subcategory 1. Male family members' misconceptions about girls' education.

- "Girls' education is of no use"
- "Housework is more important"
- Serving in-laws after marriage
- "Don't get a position anyway"

Subcategory 2. Community attitude.

- Falsehoods and rumors about schoolgirls
- "People's close-mindedness"
- "Some families worse than Taliban"
- "Schoolgirls get labeled..."
- Gossip about schoolgirls
- "They think girls do immoral things at school"
- Encouraging others to withdraw daughters

Subcategory 3. Religious beliefs around girls' puberty.

- "People are Talib-y"
- Mullahs against girls' education after puberty
- Marriage after puberty encouraged by Mullahs

Subcategory 4. Influence of illiterate relatives.

- Illiterate and jealous relatives encourage girls' school withdrawal
- "Apart from religious no more education is needed for girls"

2. Family honor and conflict avoidance in family

Family honor is defined as reputation of male family members that mainly include the conducts of female family members. Conflict avoidance indicates that in disagreement on girls' school going in the family, girls drop out to avoid domestic dispute and violence.

Subcategory 1. Elopement for marriage.

- Avoiding the rumors of elopement about their girls
- Suspicious on girls
- "Keeping a young girl is difficult, better marry them off at 20"
- Kashef's daughter's elopement made people fearful

Subcategory 2. Fear of loss of honor.

- Harassment of girls violate honor of male family members
- Any misconduct of girls cause their school withdrawal

Subcategory 3. Conflict avoidance.

- Father agrees with girl's education but brother doesn't

3. Distance from school

Distance refers to remoteness of school, which makes girls' commute hard. Their commute by walk takes more than an hour, and they face sexual

harassment in the way to school. Or they have to wait long for a car since there is lack of transportation. They get harassed at the station too.

Subcategory 1. Distance from school and lack of transportation.

- Long hours of commute
- Lack of transportation for girls
- Harassment when traveling or walking alone

Subcategory 2. Sexual assault in the way to school.

- Harassment of girls on the way to school and near school
- Boys stand in front of the stores and harass girls

Subcategory 3. Kidnapping and lack government's active presence in the district.

- Abduction of girls and *baad* marriage in family disputes
- Fear of girls getting abducted in tribal conflicts
- Govt. not punishing the perpetrators of kidnappings

4. Favoring marriage and family roles over education

This theme refers to valuing girls' work inside the house and taking care of the younger siblings over their education.

Subcategory 1. Early and/or forced marriage of girls.

- "Father liked for his daughter to marry no matter with who"
- Not rejecting proposals from relatives
- "When a girl reaches puberty.... we marry her off"

Subcategory 2. Traditional rural lifestyle.

- Collective decision making; including extended family members
- Relatives getting involved in decision-makings

Subcategory 3. In-house roles of girls.

- Helping with the housework and taking care of the younger siblings
- Not supporting a girl, and the housework expected from her

Subcategory 4. Discouragement of girls' employment after marriage.

- "Girls don't get out of the house after marriage"
- "Girls who had high school education ended up not working after marriage"

5. Maternal lack of influence and power

Maternal lack of influence and power refers to mothers' lack of voice in household decision-makings and especially around girls' education. They either lack awareness about the benefit of girls' education or confidence to use their voice, or both.

Subcategory 1. Lack of voice in the household decision-making.

- Mother approved of daughter's education but could not help
- "The decision-making role is with men"
- Husband controls over the daughters and wife
- "A woman's life could be difficult without financial independence"

Subcategory 2. Mother's pessimism about girls' education.

- "When a girl reaches puberty, she marries"
- In-laws not allowing girls to have a job

Annex 2: Info sheet about the number of high schools, female students and the dropouts in 2011/1390

Number of schools in Khinjan District									Total
Boys			Girls			Mix			
Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	
0	1	4	1	2	3	4	5	1	21

Number of students in Khinjan District									Total
Primary			Secondary			Higher Secondary			
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
3,696	3,092	6,788	1,585	922	2,507	868	265	1,133	10,42

Permanent absentees in general education in Baghlan Province		
Male	Female	Total
30,282	19,108	49,390

Permanent absentees in general education in Khinjan District		
Male	Female	Total
1,107	1,302	2,409

Source: Inayatullah Amini, Data Analyst at the Ministry of Education September 26, 2012. The above sheet was obtained through a personal communication.

Annex 3: Info about girls withdrawn from school in Khinjan District whose mothers were interviewed for this study- data collected in October 2012

No	Name	Village	Withdrawn by grade	Age withdrawn from school	Year withdrawn from school
1	Nida	Darwaza	Mid 8	16	2012/1391
2	Ghazal	Markaz-e-Khinjan	Mid 9	17/18	2012/1391
3	Rana	Markaz-e-Khinjan	After 11	18	2012/1391
4	Farha Gulnar	Darwaza	After 8 After 9	20 18	2008/1387 2009/1388
5	Mehr	Darwaza	After 8	15	2011/1390
6	Zoya	Bostaan	After 10	17/18	2011/1390
7	Safa	Bostaan	After 7	14	2007/1386
8	Nima Laala	Qolak	After 9 After 4	18 15	2010/1389 2010/1389
9	Nariman Nazi	Alimeerak-e-Baalaa	After 8 After 3	16 18	2012/1391 2008/1387
10	Raihan	Alimeerak-e-Baalaa	After 8	20	2009/1388
11	Sanam Jannat	Alimeerak-e-Payeen	After 6 After 2	13 11	2007/1386 2005/1384
12	Sara	Malkhaan	After 10	16	2010/1389

Annex 4: Questionnaire for Mothers with Daughter(s) Withdrawn from School

Interview no.

Date:

Pseudonym:

Age:

Occupation:

Village:

- 1) When and how did you decide to withdraw your daughter from school? Please tell me the whole story.
 - a) How old was she?
 - b) In which grade was she studying when you withdrew her from school?
 - c) Who decided that she shouldn't go to school anymore?
 - d) What were the reasons?
- 2) Do you think it is important for girls to have an education? To which level do you think girls should be educated: primary, secondary and tertiary school or higher?
 - a) How about education of girls after puberty?
 - b) What is your opinion about equality in education?
- 3) What factors do you believe play a role in the withdrawal from school of girls in this village?
- 4) How are decisions, including those about your daughter's education made in your family?
 - a) Who, in your family plays the key role in decision-making?
 - b) What is your role in the household decision-makings?
 - c) Who does your husband often listen to most often while making household decisions?
- 5) How do you assess/see the influence of Afghan culture and tradition on girls' education?
- 6) At what age do girls usually marry in this village? What is your view of this?
- 7) What is your opinion about girls and women working outside the house?
- 8) Do you know about other parents in this district/village who allow their daughters to go to school (after puberty)? What do you think of them?
- 9) How is the security situation in this area?
 - a) Would you receive threats from the Taliban if you allowed your daughter to go to school?
 - b) Would you receive threats from other groups or perhaps individuals? If so, which groups or individuals?
- 10) May I know about your level of education?

Thanks very much for your participation in this interview!

Annex 5: Ethics Approval

File Number: 08-12-07

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/01/2012



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice
Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Jenepher	Lennox Terrion	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Diba	Qayuome Hareer	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher

File Number: 08-12-07**Type of Project:** Master's Thesis**Title:** A Qualitative Study of Parental Accounts of the Impact of Tradition and Cultural Norms on Girls' School Withdrawal in Afghanistan

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
10/01/2012	09/30/2013	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:
N/A

File Number: 08-12-07



Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/01/2012

Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Kim Thompson

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Annex 6: Research Consent Form**Consent Form**

Title of the Study: The influence of traditions and cultural norms on girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan: A qualitative study of maternal accounts

You are invited to participate in a research study called "The influence/effects of traditions and cultural norms on girls' school withdrawal in Afghanistan: A qualitative study of maternal accounts" which will be conducted by Diba Qayuome Hareer as part of her master's thesis project.

You are welcome to ask questions and share concerns before giving consent for the interview and at any stage in the interview.

Purpose of the Study: This research aims to explore the effects of cultural norms and traditions on withdrawal of girls from school in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province. It aims to study this factor from the perspective of mothers whose daughters were withdrawn from school from any level of high school.

Procedure: The interview session will last 45 minutes to one hour at your house or at any other location at your convenience. The researcher will audiotape the interview session and take notes if necessary. The interview includes open-ended questions, which means the participants are encouraged to provide details for the answers.

Risks: Participation in this interview is voluntary. However, it will likely require the participant to recall some of their sad experiences such as poverty, discomfort and violence inflicted due to insecurity, oppression and social issues they face in the community where they live. Apart from these emotional effects, the interview will not cause any other risk to the participants. In order to minimize this risk the researcher will try to avoid asking questions about traumatic experiences of the participants. She will also minimize the risk by asking the participants what their ideal situations are related to the issue under the investigation.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will help to shed light on the issue of girls' school withdrawal in Khinjan District of Baghlan Province. Girls' education has an economic and social benefit for the Afghan families, Afghan society and the girls themselves. Therefore, understanding the issues related to their discontinuation of a high school education is important.

Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher assures you that the information you provide in the course of interview will remain confidential. The interview data will be used only for the purpose of this research and possibly for future researches conducted by researcher. Except for the researcher and her supervisor other people will not be given access to the data. The information you provide during the interview will not be discussed or shared in anyway outside the interview session. Each participant's identity will be regarded as anonymous, which means participants will not be identified by their names but by codes and/or pseudonyms in the report of the interviews. No personal information about you will be revealed in the research process and in the final outcome unless you

agree. You may be quoted in the final research paper. If so, your village name will be included as well.

Conservation of data: The researcher will conserve the data collected from your interview in a secure place at her residence in Ottawa. The interview will be audiotaped, probably run into a CD as well and transcribed. A copy of the sources produced from the interview such the CD, audiotape and transcribed interviews will be kept at the University of Ottawa campus with the research supervisor. The researcher will save the interview data for a minimum period of six to eight years from the date of interview, so that the material could possibly be used for her future researches.

REB approval: The Research Ethics Board of University of Ottawa has approved this research interview. If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research at (+1) 613-562-5387 or email to ethics@uottawa.ca

The address is: Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5.

Voluntary Participation: You are under no obligation to participate. If you participate, you could withdraw from the study at any stage and/or choose to not answer any question if you do not want to. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be removed.

Participation Consent: The researcher explained me the content of this form and addressed my questions and concerns. Hereby, I acknowledge that I understand the purpose of this study and voluntarily agree to participate in this interview. If I have any questions in the interview process, I may contact the researcher and/or her supervisor. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

Note: If the interviewee cannot sign (is illiterate or has a physical disability) the researcher will obtain and record their verbal consent.