

## Quality education for girls in Sistan Baluchestan, Iran

Iran is an Islamic Republic, with only 2% of the population practicing a different religion. It was officially declared as a Muslim Shi'ite country back in 1501 during the Safavid dynasty. Shi'ites, also called Shias (make up 20% of the whole muslim population and most of the Iranian population), are those who believed the prophet Mohammed needed a relative as a successor. (Sawe, B. E. 2019)

Population growth has been decreasing since 2016 and the average household size has too, being 3-4 people the average size of an Iranian family in 2017. (O'Neill, A. 2023) (CEIC. 2018) (Lab, G. D. 2014) (UN DESA. Oct, 2017). For one person, monthly costs are around 400 USD while for a family of four, they are around 1,500 USD. Making it hard for children to have access to education, and making five years the standard time that children are expected to attend school for. (Numbeo. 2023).

In their religion, Friday is a holy day, which is why their weekends are on Thursdays and Fridays, and they hold great importance to family, as they consider it to be the basis of their entire society. (Commisceo Global. n.d.)

Nobody can disagree with the government, for they will be sent to jail for that very reason. (Human Rights Watch. 2020)

Even though there was a time when the hijab was banned, it is now again mandatory for all women to wear one.

On September 13th of last year, a woman called Mahsa Amini was apprehended by the morality police (the one in charge of "enforcing the law for modesty") for wearing her hijab "incorrectly". She fell into a coma while in custody, and died three days later. (Baker, N. 2022).

*Image 1. Protesters calling for justice after Mahsa Amini's death.*



*(Good Morning America. n.d.).*

Not only in Qom (considered to be the most traditional city in Iran), but also in the whole country, women are still expected to be accompanied by a man most of the time. There are several places only men can enter, being the hairdresser's one of the very few places they are not allowed to do so. (Kelly, E. 2018).

The human rights of Iranian women are being violated:

- The age of marriage for girls is currently at 13 years old, having been at 9 just 20 years ago. They can only marry one muslim man, while men can marry up to 4 women from any religion.
- Women are only allowed to divorce their husbands in very specific cases, such as them being: in jail, abusive, addicts or ill. Otherwise, men are the only ones who can request a divorce by simply declaring so.
- Mothers can also easily lose child custody. This can happen if they divorce and remarry, or even if they become widows.
- Women cannot travel outside the country nor acquire a passport without their husband's permission.
- Where the family resides and a woman's job is also chosen by the man of the house according to what he considers appropriate.
- Women can only inherit  $\frac{1}{8}$  of what belonged to the person they're being inherited by, while men can inherit the whole estate.

(Hanna, A. 2020)

Women in Iran experience inequality every single day. Although they have the right to study and attend university, there have been a series of poisonings in girls' schools all across the country since November 2022. More than 1,000 girls have been affected ever since, Qom being where the first poisonings in high schools took place. The symptoms these girls presented, according to the health Minister of Iran, were nausea and weakness, caused by a "mild poison". However, other sources reported that the symptoms included respiratory problems, headaches, heart palpitations and numbness. (United States Institute of Peace. 2023) Only one poisoning had been reported in a boys' school, which is why it has been determined that whoever did this is against girls' education. (Moshtaghian, A. 2023) Some even suggested it was a response to the past strikes for Mahsa Amini's death while in custody, strikes in which many students participated.

According to the government, it is still not known who is responsible for the attacks nor which is the poison being used due to the little amount of time it takes for a poisonous substance to degrade. There were no toxins in the girls' blood according to the testing, and a doctor who had been attending the poisoned girls, thinks an organophosphate agent could be responsible. Some people claim to have witnessed strange objects thrown into schools, yet no firm conclusions were ever drawn. (Bland, A. 2023) The government arrested more than 100 "suspects", causing many people to believe they were using them to mislead parents from knowing who the real culprit is. (Tawfeeq, M. 2023)

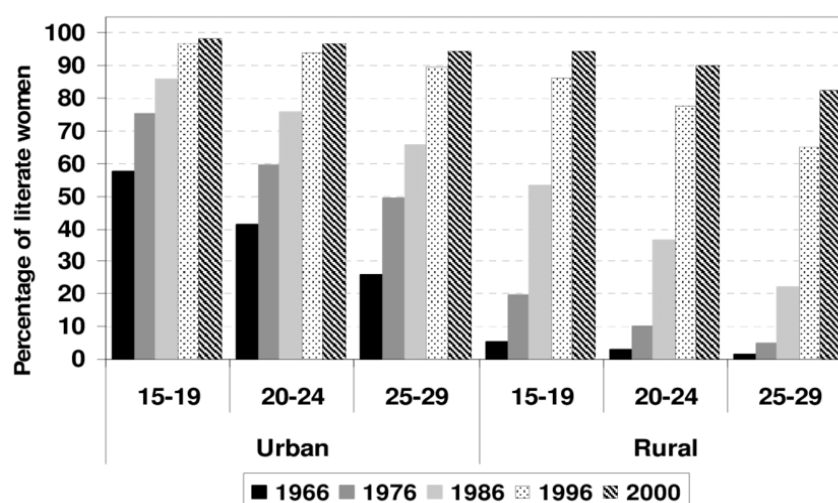
This is only one example of the inequality women in Iran have to face, another one could be the acid attacks around ten years ago. It is not the first time an event like this one takes place, and it will most likely not be the last time either. (Gallion, B. 2023).

The amount of girls that don't go to school is higher than the amount of boys that don't do either. Out of all the Iranian children deprived of education, 75% of them are girls. There is more than one cause to this fact, one of them being the government's intention to promote "family values", claiming that girls' education is unnecessary and that it goes against a woman's role (which is getting married between the ages of 10 and 14, being the bearer of offspring and taking care of the home). Not only that, but they also claim that girls who attend school have a higher chance of getting a divorce and having fertility issues. (Westfall, D. 2018).

Kids are only expected to go to school for five years. For that to be allowed, boys and girls must be taught different things in their classrooms. While girls can only study art and humanities, boys practice sports and are taught about technology and science too. Reinforcing the idea that men are more capable than women. (Moinipour, S. 2022).

The government is afraid of women gaining more political power than what men hold, they believe education for women is a threat. Therefore, they do as much as possible to keep women from going to university. (Oiac. 2020).

*Image 2. Percentage of literate women aged 15-29 by area in Iran, 1966-2000.*



*(Mcdonald, P. 2007).*

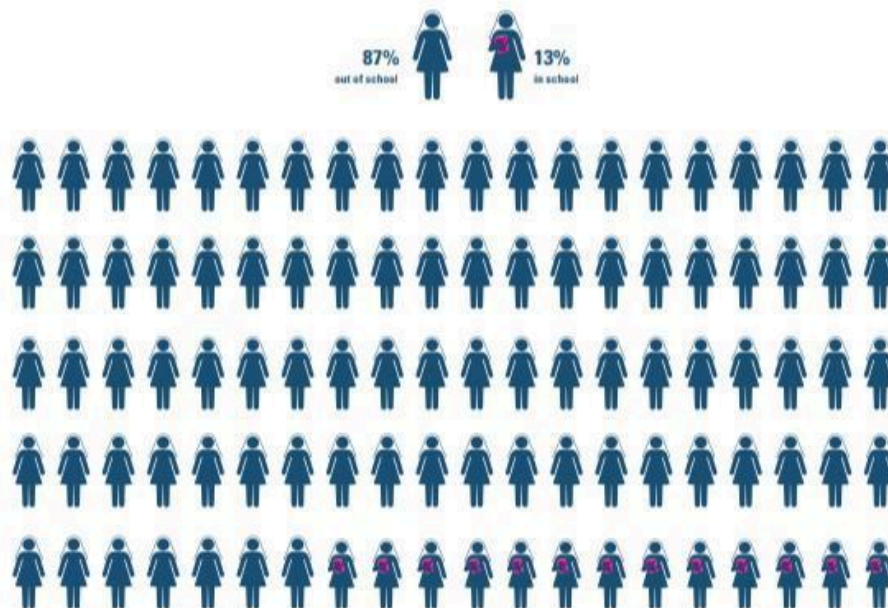
There are many other problems with schools. The first one and biggest one being the lack of budget, causing most of the other problems and making schools hard to maintain. There have been more than one incident inside school facilities in which students' lives have been endangered due to how unsafe they are.

There are no safe heating systems, which increases the possibility of school fires, and it has also been stated that schools in different locations could fall apart due to an earthquake or a strong storm.

School transport is not safe either, as the vehicles are worn out and have caused numerous incidents. (NCRI women's committee. 2019).

Lack of education is an issue that affects girls all over the world. Many things have to be taken into consideration in order to completely solve the problem due to all the causes it has (poverty, culture, lack of laws, child marriage, etc). Therefore, small steps must be taken. It may seem like not much can be done, but small things also count and make us people not indifferent to the issue. Even hosting talks in our own countries in which the problem is addressed would make a huge difference, as not many people all around the world know about it.

*Image 3. Percentage of married girls aged 15-29 by education status.*



(UNICEF. 2022)

Sistan Baluchestan is a province located in Iran where it is hard for children to have access to education. Residents struggle with drug trafficking and having access to water, among other issues. In the rural areas of the province there are barely any schools, which is why many girls have had to stop attending. (NCRI women 's committee. 2020)

My proposal is to support Moms Against Poverty (a non-profit organization that has founded 78 schools in the country since 2008, alongside its Iranian partner "Nikgaman Jamshid", another NGO) by creating funds and letting more people know about its work in order to open more schools in the rural areas of Sistan Baluchestan, where they are required.

Not only has Moms Against Poverty worked in Iran, but they've also worked in 16 other countries. Their mission being to provide children in poor communities with education, healthcare, and food. With all the donations the organization receives, they build and maintain the schools, orphanages, libraries and medical centers. (Moms Against Poverty. 2023).

The new schools to be founded with the support of the organization could be made out of adobe, a construction material that can be made anywhere in the world, formed by sand, clay, hay and in some cases animal manure. This material would be a good option due to its durability and low cost. It would also ensure the students' safety since it keeps warmth inside and cold outside during winter, and it allows the building to stay cool when high temperatures hit. (Arquitectura Bio. 2016) This way the use of a heating system won't be necessary and

school fires will be completely prevented. Providing girls with the safe facilities they need and deserve.

A new teaching method could be established for these schools, allowing girls to study the same things as boys do. The subjects could possibly include history, math, geography, chemistry, biology, and philosophy among others, as well as supporting them to practice a sport they're interested in, such as football and volleyball.

Flexible schedules could also be established so even married girls can attend school. Taking from Saturday to Wednesday as schooldays, and separating girls into classrooms so they can have personalized schedules according to the amount of hours/days they can spend in school.

Always remembering that expressing our support to Iranian women would force the regime to change their ways and support girl's education.

In my own country, there are places where women face as many issues as women in Iran do. Women in Mexico have more opportunities and privileges than Iranian women do, yet there are still countries where young girls lack education, and are sold to men so they can get married. (Hernández, L. 2023). Girls' unequal education is an issue that must be addressed as it does not only affect a few countries in the world.

Even worse, it also causes food insecurity:

According to FAO (The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN), "Global food insecurity and inadequate nutrition are exacerbated by gender inequalities".

Not only food producers, but also women are in charge of nutritional security. However, their efforts are mostly undervalued because of the system we live in.

Women are most vulnerable to food insecurity due to all the inequalities they face, which not only make for women having trouble accessing services, education, employment, and land (among other things), but also food. In 2021, 31.9% of women suffered food insecurity, while 27.6% of men did.

Women without education run more risk of suffering food insecurity since they lack the knowledge to improve it (such as nutritional information and sanitary measures). They are more likely to suffer from anemia, malnutrition, and obesity (among other diseases).

Children whose mothers attended school have 50% more chances of living past the age of 5. Proving once more that women's education is crucial in order to end food insecurity around the world, which cannot be improved without women's participation.

(The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. 2021).

Supporting equal education would lead to the cases of child marriage to eventually decrease and literacy in women to increase. Also leading to girl's empowerment and the end of food insecurity.

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