

Analysis of the Significant Increase of Gender-Based Violence During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Conflict Zone: the Case of Afghanistan

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Abstract

Since it was recorded for the first time in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019, the number of cases of coronavirus infections around the world has been increasing every day. WHO further declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. This pandemic certainly has direct implications for the country's condition, especially concerning issues of women and children. As one of the worst-performing countries in providing gender-based protection, Afghanistan has shown a significant increase in the number of gender-based physical, sexual, and psychological violence during the pandemic. By applying the structural violence and neopatriarchy approaches, this article conducted an in-depth analysis of the problem formulation of why Afghanistan experienced a significant increase in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research results revealed that the patriarchal culture rooted in the constitution, competition in the legal system, and erosion in government institutions are some of the structural factors that have led to a significant increase in the number of gender-based violence in Afghanistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above factors have also caused several policies passed by the government during the pandemic that severely discriminated against women and children.

Keywords: Afghanistan, COVID-19 Pandemic, Gender-Based Violence, Policy, Neopatriarchy, Structural Violence

Abstrak

Sejak tercatat pertama kali muncul di Wuhan, China, pada akhir tahun 2019, jumlah kasus infeksi virus corona di seluruh dunia semakin meningkat setiap harinya. WHO selanjutnya menyatakan COVID-19 sebagai pandemi global. Pandemi ini tentu memberikan implikasi langsung terhadap kondisi negara, terutama yang berkaitan dengan isu perempuan dan anak-anak. Sebagai salah satu negara dengan kinerja terburuk dalam memberikan perlindungan berbasis gender, Afghanistan menjadi salah satu negara yang menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan terhadap jumlah angka kekerasan fisik, seksual, dan psikologis berbasis gender selama pandemi. Dengan mengaplikasikan pendekatan Structural Violence dan Neopatriarki,

artikel berikut akan melakukan analisis mendalam terhadap rumusan masalah mengapa Afghanistan mengalami peningkatan signifikan terhadap kasus kekerasan berbasis gender selama masa pandemi COVID-19. Hasil dari penelitian berikut kemudian menunjukkan bahwa budaya patriarki yang mengakar dalam konstitusi, persaingan dalam sistem hukum, erosi dalam kelembagaan pemerintah menjadi beberapa faktor struktural yang mendorong terjadinya peningkatan secara signifikan terhadap jumlah kekerasan berbasis gender di Afghanistan saat pandemi COVID-19 berlangsung. Faktor-faktor diatas juga menjadi penyebab beberapa kebijakan yang disahkan pemerintah saat pandemi sangat mendiskriminasi perempuan dan anak-anak.

Keywords: Afghanistan, COVID-19, Gender Based Violence, Policy, Neopatriarki, Kekerasan Struktural

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is widely recognized as a country with a rich history, culture, and stunning landscapes. Unfortunately, on the other hand, Afghanistan is also known as a country with political dynamics and prolonged war. This situation has placed Afghanistan close to acts of violence, especially against women and children. Cases of gender-based violence against women have deep roots in Afghanistan's long history. It started with the outbreak of armed conflict in 1978, which had devastating effects on women—followed by the Mujahidin period 1992-1996, marked by brutal wars that destroyed all aspects of Afghan life (UNAMA & OHCHR, 2009). The Mujahidin period even severely limited women's rights and freedoms. Torture, sexual violence, forced abductions, forced marriages, and trafficking of women occur massively. The period of gender-based violence against women continued with the emergence of the Taliban and the consolidation of their

power in most countries in 1996. With a firm interpretation of Sharia law, many problems further marginalize the existence of women. The Taliban government is also known to be very harsh on women and girls. Systematic discrimination and strict restrictions on women's rights and obligations became commonplace during this period (Choudhury, 2016).

The decades of armed conflict and political turmoil have increasingly put women and girls in Afghanistan in a dangerous situation. War creates insecurity and encourages violence, including the marginalization of women and organized sexual crimes, and inhibits women's participation in the public sphere in Afghanistan. Also, the war has destroyed property and infrastructure, increasing women's death and injury rates. At the same time, the number of sexual harassment and extreme attacks, such as rape and murder of women, has also been increasing. Research by UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in

Afghanistan) even stated that rape crime occurs every day in all parts of the country (Matilda Carlsson, 2016). Women and children are even at high risk of experiencing rape in homes, communities, detention facilities, and other public places. Reports of several cases also prove that rapes are even committed by powerful authorities, such as armed groups, criminal gangs, and individuals holding positions of power in countries that especially enjoy impunity.

Meanwhile, the political situation and the prolonged conflict that indirectly affected the economy had brought women in Afghanistan far from being prosperous. It is even difficult for women to meet their personal needs, health, and even access to food. This situation has also far removed the involvement and contribution of women in the public and political sphere (Samar, 2019).

The phenomenon of gender-based violence toward women has subsequently become commonplace in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it seems neglected. In addition, women and children are labeled as having a prolonged human rights deficit. Some researchers think that traditional practices and conservative interpretations of social norms are the factors behind the neglect of the sad phenomenon of gender-based violence in Afghanistan. However, some researchers, on the other hand, also said that Afghanistan does not have a uniform legal system, and the weak implementation of laws and agreements has significantly contributed to exacerbating gender-based violence. In the end, several actions have been initiated by both the government and international entities to reduce the number of gender-based violence in Afghanistan (Kandiyoti, 2007, pp. 185-188)

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in

2001, the Afghanistan Government has initiated efforts to promote human rights, especially against women and children. The government has also begun to design a legislative and institutional system that will specifically oversee the fulfillment of women's rights. Among them are the establishment of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Women and Gender Affairs, the Human Rights Unit, and the passing of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) through a Presidential Decree in 2009 (Qazi Zada, 2021, pp. 258-259)

In addition, the government has also started to open up and coordinate with international institutions. One of the actions carried out by organizations that help solve gender inequality is WFWI or Women for Women International. WFWI is an INGO organization that can deal with gender injustice (Mosse, 1993). Concerning that, 2002 was the first time WFWI had implemented a program in Afghanistan, tasked with providing educational and training resources to increase the confidence and capacity of women experiencing discrimination. Moreover, an international organization, namely WFWI, is one way to overcome the failure of the Afghan Government to address discrimination against women and protect women's rights in the country. The policy above can be an important achievement of the Afghan Government, civil society, and women's rights activists to eradicate violence against women in Afghanistan. However, these measures are still not considered effective in responding to gender-based violence against women in Afghanistan.

The condition of gender-based violence was further exacerbated when the

COVID-19 pandemic occurred at the end of 2019. Since it was recorded for the first time in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019, coronavirus infections worldwide have been increasing every day until now. In March 2020, WHO then declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Worldometers noted that until April 26, 2021, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the world was 147,780,699. Besides, the pandemic has succeeded in influencing the dynamics of all aspects of a country's life, including Afghanistan. UNDP also reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had slowed Afghanistan's economic growth by exposing structural and resource gaps (Martin & Parto, n.d.)

On the other hand, the facts above align with the increasing cases of gender-based violence. The recommended health protocol in handling COVID-19 that prohibits community mobility has resulted in 87% of Afghan women experiencing at least one form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence in the domestic realm. COVID-19 also has negative consequences for financial well-being due to the sporadic closure of borders. It then causes many women to lose regular sources of income, access to food sources, and health. Reports of sexual violence, harassment, kidnapping, forced marriage, to murder are also increasing. Up to 97% of female respondents whom Oxfam recorded said that gender-based violence had increased since the COVID-19 outbreak was indicated in Afghanistan (Cousins, 2020)

The percentage of data and facts presented above show that most women in Afghanistan are still considered helpless and dependent on social structures of power and order. The constitution has not fully guaranteed human rights. Thus, through the following research, the authors

conducted an in-depth exploration of why there has been a significant increase in gender-based violence in Afghanistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, on the other hand, policies and agreements have been continuously implemented to protect and guarantee the rights and obligations of women in Afghanistan, this research also analyzes the existence of the government facing this significant spike in cases of violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence against women is not hard news to hear from Afghanistan. It is evidenced by a study written by Jenevieve Mannell, Gulraj Grewal, Lida Ahmad, and Ayesha Ahmad. In their article entitled *A Qualitative Study of Women's Lived Experiences of Conflict and Domestic Violence in Afghanistan*, the authors described women's life experiences regarding conflict-related violence in Afghanistan. The conflict in Afghanistan exposes women to the loss of patriarchal support and domestic violence; the cause is that the conflict makes the poverty factor unavoidable so that some families choose to sell drugs as an economic driver; it is what then triggers the breakdown of family relations and positions of Afghan women as victims domestic violence (Mannell et al., 2021).

The problematic condition of Afghan women has also been mentioned in an article entitled *Women's rights and 'righteous war': An argument for women's autonomy in Afghanistan* by Gillian Wylie. In this article, Wylie explained that Afghanistan was once the country with the lowest UNDP gender index in the world. This data is in line with the fact that Afghan women have high illiteracy rates, poor school enrollment, short life expectancy, and high maternal mortality rates. In this

generally poor situation, there are still two million women whose lives are no less apprehensive, namely the group of women who have become widows due to war (Wylie, 2003).

Furthermore, the violence and injustice experienced by women in Afghanistan do not happen accidentally. In an article entitled *Care Seeking Patterns Among Women Who Have Experienced Gender-Based Violence in Afghanistan* written by Sonya Stokes, Andreea L. Seritan, and Elizabeth Miller, it is explained that the military and political instability that takes place in Afghanistan has increased gender inequality, which then embedded in the ethnic, religious, and tribal traditions. In addition, through national legislation, the Afghan Government has imposed restrictions on women's behavior and established conditions that justify family violence and other forms of harassment. Afghan women who commit violations under this law must face severe consequences ranging from imprisonment, corporal punishment, and even the death penalty. On the other hand, to reduce the increasing number of violence against women, the government has also implemented a counter law prohibiting GBV. This law is on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW). This law was passed in 2009. In this regard, EVAW criminalized 22 acts of violence against women, including forced prostitution and child marriage. According to the AIHRC (Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission), more than 4,000 cases have been prosecuted under this law. In addition, a growing number of decisions are issued by local courts each year. Unfortunately, the 2011 review of the United Nations found some shortcomings in EVAW. The main drawback is that violence against women is still under-

reported widely due to cultural attitudes and practices that hinder public discussion of GBV and possibly the reluctance of local institutions to intervene if it is considered a family matter (Stokes et al., 2016).

Moreover, according to Javed Bahri in his article entitled *Western Gender Policies in Afghanistan: Failing Women and Provoking Men*, another factor increasingly detrimental to women in Afghanistan is the fact that while efforts are being made to promote gender equality and rights and improve the conditions of women in Afghanistan by the international community, the authors observed that these efforts have not been successful. Instead of assuring women are entitled to equal rights, these international communities are provoking educated Afghan men to take a more defensive and conservative position (Bahri, 2014).

Some of the articles above have succeeded in providing an overview of the dynamics of violence against women in Afghanistan. Several previous studies have also illustrated that conflict, high military intensity, and the critical role of government intervention are factors in gender-based violence, especially against women and girls in Afghanistan. However, none of these previous studies have detailed observations on gender-based violence against women and girls in Afghanistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Afghanistan has become one of the countries in the spotlight because of a significant increase in gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this article conducted an in-depth exploration of increasing gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan by elaborating the analysis using a structural approach to violence and

neopatriarchy.

RESEARCH METHOD

In analyzing the increase in gender-based violence in Afghanistan during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors used two approaches: structural violence introduced by Johan Galtung and neopatriarchy. In his research related to *Violence and Peace*, Galtung explained that peace and violence are tied to one another so that stability can be considered a condition of non-violence. Galtung also said that there are many variations regarding typologies and types of violence. In addition, Galtung agreed that violence exists when humans are being influenced so that their bodily and mental realization is under their potential completion. Moreover, violence is always destructive, and violence studies always talk about violence and the legitimization of that use. However, Galtung then said that the above definition is still very narrow, so it needs a broader meaning and reasoning (Galtung, 1990, pp. 168-169).

Galtung then gave a definition related to *Cultural, Direct, and Structural Violence*. Galtung explained that culture is not an entity or cultural system as a whole but only aspects of culture. Symbolic aspects in society such as religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, and formal science can be used as tools to justify or legitimize direct and structural violence. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look right or not a

mistake in committing violence in the community. Direct violence itself can be categorized as murder, injuring or losing lives, giving threats, and isolation in socialization, defined as cultural internalization and detention (Galtung, 1990).

Meanwhile, structural violence is all forms of repression and exploitation by actors with authority. Structural violence is also described in conditions of injustice created by a system that causes humans to be unable to fulfill their basic needs (Galtung, 1990, pp.292-294). Galtung deepened the explanation by emphasizing that structural violence is shown by a sense of insecurity caused by certain institutions due to authorize policies that harm certain groups. Even more, structural violence leaves a mark not only on the human body but also on the mind and soul. Besides, Galtung gave several examples of structural violence, including exploitation, institutionalized adultism, ageism, classism, elitism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, and sexism.

Galtung also described the relationship between these three types of violence as a triangle of violence within strata or levels of violence.

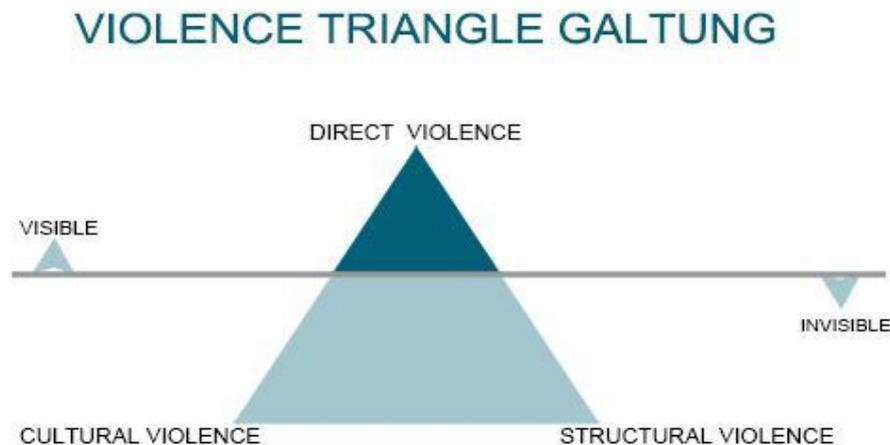


Figure 1. Triangle of Violence by Galtung

In the triangle of violence above, it can be seen that cultural and structural violence is in the category of invisible violence, while direct violence is more visible. Judging from the nature of cultural violence, then, in the end, it can become direct or structural violence when this cultural violence continues to develop in the community. Galtung stated that in the triangle above, direct violence is defined as an event, structural violence is described as a process of ups and downs, and cultural violence is characterized as a constant. The cycle in this triangle of violence can be started from any direction of violence.

To identify structural violence, Galtung said that it is necessary to pay attention to the following points. First is the subject or person who acts in violence. The subject is an essential point in analyzing violence. Second, the object or the injured party. It relates to the party who is a physical or biological victim of the act of violence. The third is action and impact. The fourth is motivations or encouragement, described by Galtung into two forms: intended and unintended (Galtung, 1969, pp. 171.). Fifth is the approach to taking action or policy. Galtung then explained -

both positive and negative approaches (Galtung, 1969, pp. 172)

As previously explained, the authors also employed a neopatriarchal approach apart from the structural violence approach. Patriarchy is a practice that has existed in the life of the world's people from various walks of life. The patriarchal practice is usually characterized by the dominance of the male role. This practice is a socio-political system, asserting that naturally, men have greater and superior power than women and have the right to maintain that power and control to suppress women. In this case, Hook (2013) explained that it is done through the internalization of norms through the socialization process in society. These norms are then used to control and exploit women. According to Hook, both men and women have the same role in strengthening patriarchy in society (Habiba et al., 2016).

At first, patriarchy was a traditional social system, but then a new discourse about patriarchy emerged, focusing on discussing how patriarchy was perpetuated in new ways in the family through women. New actors who support maintaining these patriarchal values are women who pressure other women to perpetuate their power,

which can directly maintain patriarchal practices in the family. This form of power called neopatriarchy is a different and new concept related to the hierarchy of household power, which is detrimental to women in many ways. One of the many outcomes is domestic violence due to conflicts of interest in controlling power. Neopatriarchy is also a new form of governance of women in the family, which is functioned through various types of violence to suppress women's identity and create dependency in the family (Habiba et al., 2016).

Hisham Sharabi was the first to use the term neopatriarchy, which he mentioned in his book in 1988. The meaning of neopatriarchy is a new form of government. The term was used by Sharabi to describe the relationship between modernity and patriarchy in the context of the Arab world. Sharabi then discussed further the stages of patriarchy from a historical and structural point of view in the Arab world. In addition, Polder and Wells (2004) and Berendt (2010) explained that patriarchy is not a permanent phenomenon because it reinvents itself after a certain period in capitalism and society's cultural or social setting. Here, religious beliefs also play an important role because they support patriarchy's functioning, which then helps patriarchy reinvent itself in a modified form, namely neopatriarchy (Yoyo, 2018).

In this article, the authors then used qualitative methods with data collection techniques through library research. It is where the data collected were secondary data sourced from libraries, journals, articles, electronic media, and websites. Furthermore, another method that the writers used was the descriptive method. This method clearly described the analysis of a significant increase in gender-based

violence during COVID-19 in the conflict zone in Afghanistan. The data obtained through qualitative methods were then classified, summarized, analyzed, and concluded to describe the situation related to the previously described problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Responses and policies implemented by the Afghan Government

The report in 2014 uncovered that 50% of Afghan girls were married or engaged by the age of 12, although the percentage of girls married at the age of 16 was almost 60%. It also stated that around 80% of Afghan girls were forced to marry men much older than their age, namely men in their 60s. Families in Afghanistan have reasons behind this imposition. One of them is the feeling of insecurity due to the war going on for approximately three decades. This insecurity is caused by the risk of kidnapping and rape, which are quite frequent.

Furthermore, the exchange of Afghan girls to solve problems is also not hard to find in Afghanistan. Another reason is that widespread poverty across the country has led many families to marry off their daughters to avoid the expense of caring for them (Nasimi, 2014).

On the other hand, little is known about the treatment by local and national laws of serving women in Afghanistan, which is less pro on women. As quoted from an article written by Sonya Stokes, Andreea L. Seritan, and Elizabeth Miller, the Afghan Government enforces a policy on women's behavior. The law also stipulates conditions that justify domestic violence, marital rape, and other forms of harassment. Afghan women who violate these laws can be subject to sentences ranging from imprisonment, physical prohibition, and even death (Stokes et al.,

2016).

Further, gender inequalities embedded in local ethnic, religious, and tribal traditions underlie the inequality of treatment of men and women in Afghanistan. To reduce the increasing number of violence against women, the Afghan Government has also legalized the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, known as EVAW. EVAW, which was passed in 2009, classified 22 acts of violence against women into criminal cases. These actions include forced prostitution, forced self-immolation, and underage marriages. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) also revealed that this law has resulted in at least 4,000 cases of violence against women being prosecuted and made the number of local court decisions related to the same cases increase each year. Unfortunately, another fact is quite disappointing. The United Nations, in its 2011 review, found that violence experienced by Afghan women was still under-reported widely. Concerning this, Afghanistan's cultural attitudes and practices hinder public discussion regarding GBV.

Another thing that has also contributed to underreporting the cases of violence against women is the possibility that local institutions are reluctant to interfere in matters considered family matters. Then, the enforcement of the EVAW law was also hindered by the government, which simultaneously provided support for laws defending the use of violence against women. In this case, the Afghan Ministry of Justice acknowledges the inconsistencies that have occurred, but the solutions proposed have not been able to solve the problem (Stokes et al., 2016).

Protection of women during a pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered the world into an uncomfortable situation, and Afghanistan is no exception. In this country, the COVID-19 pandemic also has an alarming effect. The pandemic has made poverty conditions even more serious and decreased healthcare access. The pandemic also has an impact on women. Increased domestic violence and reduced access to schools and medical care are some of the consequences that Afghan women must face amid the pandemic. A researcher from the Afghanistan Analysts Network or AAN revealed that Afghan women also deeply felt the loss of their personal space, which was already limited before the pandemic. In addition, the increase in the workload without pay has made their mental health condition worse. In addition, UN Women reports that many countries worldwide have experienced increased violence against women and girls by more than 25%. However, this figure only shows the cases that have been reported, considering that lockdown policies in various regions make it difficult for women to find help. Furthermore, a report from Oxfam in April 2020 stated that COVID-19 is a new threat to Afghan women. The report also uncovered that COVID-19 had had a bad impact on women's rights in Afghanistan; the existence of social norms has obstructed women's access to health care; the number of domestic violence and economic inequality has continued to increase (Hossaini, 2020).

During a pandemic, getting the figure of increased violence against women is quite difficult, considering that many offices supporting women in the face of violence were closed during the lockdown policy. This condition then causes many cases of domestic violence to go unreported. Besides, the AIHRC reported

increased violence against women and girls during the lockdown period that began in late March. The Global Protection Cluster, a network of non-governmental organizations, also said in May that gender-based violence in Afghanistan was rife, made worse by measures to control the spread of the virus. In particular, the stress experienced by male heads of households who lost employment and livelihood opportunities is the reason for violence at home against their wife and children (Hossaini, 2020).

More broadly, the pandemic has exacerbated the already poor school education in Afghanistan, compounded by warnings of worsening conditions of poverty and hunger. The World Bank has also described a decline in economic growth and income, rising inflation, and an alarming poverty rate in Afghanistan. The rate of decline would reach 72% by 2020. Also, the charity Oxfam has put Afghanistan on its list of ten points of extreme hunger. About 11.3 million people are food insecure, and about 41% of children are malnourished. Poverty and hunger related to COVID-19, compounding the disruption caused by the conflict, makes the prospects for education for many children look very bleak. In addition, "Save the Children", a non-profit organization ranks Afghanistan as one of 12 countries at extreme risk of increasing school dropouts and widening learning inequality. According to the International Labor Organization, it is feared that families hit by economic hardship due to the pandemic have to send children, especially boys, to work. The United Nations also warns that the same risk for girls is being married off when they are very young, including to prospective grooms, whom the family would not consider under normal circumstances.

These, namely men, are much older or even already have wives. In this regard, marrying girls is considered to reduce the number of children who have to be fed and generate family income in the form of dowries (Network & Kazemi, 2020). From these explanations, it can be seen that the protection of women in Afghanistan during the pandemic is still lacking, even worse than before.

Analysis of structural violence against policies and actions implemented by the Afghan Government

There are several factors behind the high level of gender-based violence in Afghanistan. However, in the focus of this discussion, by integrating the concept of structural violence, the authors explored factors related to the systems and structures created by certain authorities that have triggered a significant increase in cases of gender-based sexual violence in Afghanistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the structural violence analysis is identified through several vital points. First, subjects or actors can be individuals or certain authorities. Galtung himself explained several types of actors who could be said to have committed structural violence. The subject is identified when committing acts of violence in a structure where the subject has a higher position than the object. In this case, the country, namely Afghanistan, is the party in the highest hierarchy in a system. Hence, the state has full authority to form a framework or policy to make objects or inferior parties comply with the resulting system. As a party with complete control, Afghanistan also makes a policy that requires those under it to comply.

Nevertheless, institutional erosion and the fact that Afghanistan does not have a uniform legal system have allowed the

ruling party to indirectly harm other parties, in this case, the women and girls in Afghanistan. One weakness of the legal system can be seen from the obscurity of the explicit provisions in the 1976 Criminal Code, which criminalize rape, the freedom of judges to interpret the law, and jurisprudence in adjudicating cases. Furthermore, court officials dismiss violence cases against women as a severe crime that has exacerbated gender-based violence during this pandemic. On the other hand, data have shown that many powerful officials, security officers, police, and soldiers have become actors in this situation as perpetrators of violence against women (Kandiyoti, 2018).

Second, the object or party is the victim in the case of structural violence. Galtung stated that things do not have to be directly affected by violence to be categorized as injured. In this case, Galtung also interpreted the insecurity that arose. Individuals and groups in a system or structure can be classified as objects of structural violence. In the research, women and girls in Afghanistan are the objects of structural violence by the Afghan Government due to weak policies or laws that have put the parties mentioned above in danger. Women and girls in Afghanistan have also been injured physically, sexually, and psychologically, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Attorney General's Office on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) department, and the AIHRC in July 2020 said that there had been a significant increase of 56% compared to previous years in cases of gender-based violence, especially against women in Afghanistan. It was reported that 127 cases of extreme violence have occurred. It includes rape, death due to physical abuse, suicide and

other serious physical violence (AfghanistanAnalystNetwork, 2020).

The third is action. Galtung explained that violence could occur if a difference or imbalance is found between the actual and potential realization by the subject of violence. Actual realization is a subject's ability to regulate his actions to overcome a phenomenon. Meanwhile, potential in the context of violence is a possibility of perceived violence. Violence will emerge if a high level of potential is not balanced with a high level of actualization.

Furthermore, there are two levels of violence: latent and manifest. Latent is a situation that does not indicate violence, but violence will likely occur. Meanwhile, the manifest shows a problem where the existing violence can be observed so that as long as the violence takes place, it will be seen clearly and realized as an act of violence.

In the case of increasing gender-based violence in Afghanistan during COVID-19, the potential for violence occurred because the subject, in this case, the Afghan Government, did not carry out the actual realization as it should. Rooted in the ununiform legal system dynamics and the lack of harmony and conformity with existing laws and regulations have rationalized discriminatory acts and are detrimental to women's rights in Afghanistan. Another factor can also be observed from the judicial system, which was designed to disadvantage women because of the trap between constitutional rights, cultural boundaries, and religious law. The dynamics that stem from this constitutional contradiction and ambiguity are further exacerbated by the increasing wave of COVID-19 infections in Afghanistan. The government, which has marginalized the position of women, does

not take into account the situation and condition of women and children while facing the adverse impact of the pandemic. Women and children in the primary position as the most vulnerable groups due to the negative consequences of the pandemic, be it social, economic, or political, are also not given appropriate and adequate protection actions.

Fourth, the aftermath of the Afghanistan policy later encouraged an increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic, namely the physical and psychological impacts on victims. Galtung explained that physically injured due to violence would limit the space for human movement. The impact of physical violence can be caused with or without tools, such as by using body parts. In the case of Afghanistan, reports have shown that physical violence against women has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women, 2020). Sexual harassment, assault, rape, and murder are commonplace. When people are required to be indoors, their movements are restricted, unemployment and poverty increase and the health and protection systems weaken. The impact of all of this is felt more by women and girls in Afghanistan because they have the potential to experience greater acts of violence. Women trapped with their partners in the house because of COVID-19 face a higher risk of domestic violence, and in some cases, they get physical violence such as injuries since they try to escape from violent relationships, and some of them are killed by their partners. In addition, in several other cases, immunosuppressed women are ridiculed by their violent partners (UNDP, 2020).

WHO has said, "*The fundamental driver is deep, deep, deep gender inequality*" and reported that about 90% of

women in Afghanistan had experienced at least one form of violence, be it physical, sexual, or psychological. According to data from The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, there are approximately 3,000 Afghans who attempt suicide every year, and 80% of them are women (Baskin, 2008).

Meanwhile, regarding the psychological impact on victims, Galtung described psychological violence as a form of mental violence that can affect an individual's life. However, it will be more difficult to identify. Psychological violence works by attacking the soul of each individual, which will then affect a series of behaviors. In turn, it will endanger the individual's mental health. In the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the lack of government efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in Afghanistan has caused many women in Afghanistan to experience stress, excessive anxiety, and worry about their lives. They feel life is under intense pressure. Other impacts on their mental are that it, in turn, can lead to suicide when women feel they have no life options left (Cousins, 2020).

Fifth is motivation and approach. In his writing, Galtung described motivation or encouragement in two forms: intended and unintended (Galtung, 1969, pp. 171.) Intended occurs when the subject clearly intends to commit violence deliberately. Meanwhile, unintended is violence that occurs accidentally or is not accompanied by the intention to hurt. Here, the approach is to take action or policy. Galtung then explained it in two forms: positive and negative approaches (Galtung, 1969, pp. 172.) A positive approach is explained when there are subjects who take action, hoping that they will get a reward for what they do. In comparison, the negative approach is an effort made by the subject

to respond to something considered detrimental so that it needs to be given a punishment. In this case, a negative approach is needed to limit the motion and potential of the object so that this approach is taken to prevent the object's action.

Based on Galtung's explanation, the Afghan Government's policies regarding gender-based violence fall into negative approaches. The Afghan Government has long been trying to limit women's rights, where they do not get a proper scope of life. A deeply rooted patriarchal culture, the fact that Afghanistan does not have uniform laws, and the weak implementation of laws have led to policies that directly or indirectly discriminate against women in Afghanistan. In this regard, Afghan society is a patriarchal society where men control all major agencies and parliaments. Conversely, women do not get their rights and freedoms in social life (Yoyo, 2018).

Much of the causes of discrimination and oppression of women in Afghanistan are linked to traditional practices and customs that have long been believed in the country. One example is the practice of *Pashtun*. *Pashtun* is a male elder who has the right to determine a woman's marriage and how much the bridegroom will pay for the bride's father. The male elder also has a hand in suggesting the sale of women to marry and has the right to kill women as punishment for committing sexual harassment. This ritual is in the name of existing customs and social norms with the term "*honor killings*". All ethnic groups in Afghanistan have practiced these norms and values. This traditional practice also has deep roots throughout Afghan society and is one of the strongest sources of violence and discrimination experienced by Afghan women. Therefore, almost all women in Afghanistan live hidden and

isolated from the outside world (Nasimi, 2014).

The extreme violence experienced by women in Afghanistan is also considered an acceptable tradition, taking into account the materiality of wealth and power. It is done to maintain the political, social, cultural, economic, religious, and ethnic systems they have run. Maintaining this tradition provides opportunities for men, both legally and illegally, to lead and exploit the black market, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. According to them, empowering women will rob them of their actions, and men should share the benefits with women. The criminal acts committed by men are done to safeguard and maintain their status quo. Men in Afghanistan also know that they can act brutally without thinking about the punishment they will get. Here, the Afghan Government cannot be relied on when it comes to women's rights issues in their country, and they have even become enemies of women's rights. During the reign of President Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, they often rejected the demands of women activists to have full participation in peace; in that era, women's rights were often ignored (Barr, 2020).

The phenomenon of gender-based violence in Afghanistan is not only assumed to occur because of structural factors alone. The authors also believe that neopatriarchal conditions also influence this phenomenon in Afghanistan. As explained, neopatriarchy is a product of the interaction between modernity and traditional patriarchy, which is intertwined with religion and taken over by the state to strengthen its power. In a neo-patriarchy society, patriarchy is not weakened but modernized. In the case of Afghanistan, the patriarchal culture has been rooted in the people's traditions. Patriarchy is

considered a social center where men have authority over everyone. As a result, women and children tend to be assimilated into the concept of property and belong to men (Moghadam, 2002, pp 20-21).

Along with society's historical and structural development, the phenomenon of patriarchy in Afghanistan has also experienced a shift towards neopatriarchy. Neopatriarchy gives rise to a form of oppression of women in the family. In Afghanistan, the neopatriarchal phenomenon can be seen from the formulation of laws relating to women and families and marriage to polygamy. This family law then becomes a trigger for conflicts of interest in controlling power in the household. This condition is also believed to trigger an increase in gender-based violence, especially in the family. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women's access and space for movement were increasingly limited. Women are spending more and more time at home. When violence occurs, they also have difficulty finding protection. In addition, patriarchy and neopatriarchy have the same goal: to oppress and marginalize women's positions. Therefore, it can be said that the phenomenon is one of the factors that cause the issue of gender-based violence, especially against women and girls in Afghanistan, to occur and continue to increase.

CONCLUSION

Not only known as a country with tremendous natural and cultural wealth, but Afghanistan is also known as a country with political dynamics and prolonged war. These conditions have placed Afghanistan close to acts of violence, especially against women and

children. Gender-based violence against women has become commonplace. Even though several initiatives have been carried out by implementing policies to protect women, cases of violence against women still occur massively. The situation has worsened since the first cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in Wuhan at the end of 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has then succeeded in affecting all aspects of life in Afghanistan. The consequences of the social to economic factors have again put women in a dangerous situation. The structural violence approach has succeeded in showing that the patriarchal culture pervading the realm of the constitution, competing legal systems, and institutional erosion have become some of the many structural factors that caused violence against women in Afghanistan to increase significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, policies and efforts previously implemented, such as the EVAW law, have not fully protected women. Through structural violence, the factors previously mentioned have succeeded in creating injustice conditions and all forms of repression against women, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is evidenced by data showing that 87% of Afghan women experienced at least one form of physical, sexual, or psychological violence in the domestic realm. The number of sexual harassment, oppression, assault, and murder cases also increases every day.

The condition of women and girls again became the center of attention when the Taliban succeeded in

occupying Kabul on August 15, 2021. In the following weeks, the Taliban issued a statement saying they pledged to respect women and ensure that the Taliban would impose a more moderate Islamic government. The Taliban has promised to encourage women to return to work, allow girls to go to school, and push for a reduction in gender-based violence. However, many community groups and observers are skeptical of the Taliban's statement. The takeover of government by the Taliban is still a shockingly awful thing for women. Based on experience, they stated that it would be challenging and impossible for the Taliban to change the living spaces of women and children. Thus, it can be ascertained that for several periods in the future, women and girls will still be in the same zone or even worse.

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