



Militarised Masculinities in Afghanistan



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What is the history of war and conflict in Afghanistan?

War, violence, and upheaval have been everyday realities of life in Afghanistan for the last 40 years. This period of violence has included the Soviet occupation, the Afghan Civil War, the US-led invasion and war against the Taliban and, most recently, the evacuation and withdrawal of US forces.

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What do we mean by militarised masculinities?

Four decades of war and armed conflict in Afghanistan have shaped and constructed masculinities that place heavy emphasis on warriorship, dominance and control, abuse, and violence – particularly violence against women and girls. At the same time, there is also an emphasis on masculine attributes which require men to be “protectors” of women and their homeland.

While these masculine attributes do exist in Afghanistan, it is important to note that they are not representative of *all* Afghan men, a false narrative often perpetuated by Western media. In any event, militarised masculinities must be addressed and changed to advance feminist peace, freedom, and justice for all Afghan people.

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What are key elements and attributes associated with militarised masculinities in Afghanistan?

- ▶ Militarised masculinities inevitably create environments which limit women’s agency and increase the likelihood that the human rights of women and girls are oppressed and their human rights violated. Barriers to education, gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and forced marriages are among the highest in the world in this country where women also represent 80 per cent of deaths by suicide.
- ▶ Militarised masculinities are nuanced, plural, fluid, and intersectional. They vary from city to city or region to region.

- They are shaped by structural and individual factors such as conscription, military training, the proliferation of weapons, job stress, land dispossession, the ability to live up to social expectations of manhood, as well as individual factors such as age, education, socio-economic status, ethnicity, location, and religion.
- US foreign policies targeted at Afghanistan have been steeped in violence, destruction, imperialism, and military intervention. Thus, with its same emphasis on violence, dominance, aggression, warriorship (being brave soldiers), revenge (following the 9/11 events), and protection of women, the US-led military occupation of Afghanistan has shaped and constructed militarised masculinities in non-Afghan men as well.
- According to the **SIPRI Arms Transfer Database**, sixteen states, including NATO member states, supplied weapons and equipment to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2020. During this period, the United States supplied 74 per cent of Afghanistan's weapons, followed by Russia, the second largest supplier, responsible for 14 per cent of imports. The distribution of these weapons to men has increased the lethality of men's violence and strengthened the association between men, masculinities, and the ownership of guns.
- The country's long-standing institutionalised patriarchal values and structures and strong adherence to Pashtun honour codes and Islamic piety have also played a role in defining what is masculine and feminine and what is appropriate for each.
- Honour and militarised masculinities have relevance in Taliban jihadi ideology as well. In the presence of occupying forces, protection of family and land, revenge, suicide, and martyrdom are revered as ways for men to live or die with honour.



What is WILPF's focus concerning militarised masculinities?

Working in close collaboration with WILPF Afghanistan and international human rights organisations, WILPF is focused on ensuring the rights of Afghan women and girls, advocating for refugees and those seeking to evacuate, and securing peace and humanitarian aid for a country in turmoil.

WILPF Afghanistan is devoted to working with women, men, and young people to advance the role of women in Afghan society, promote peace-building, and develop women's active social, economic, and political participation for a future of inclusion and prosperity.

Actions and Recommendations

- Drone strikes, surveillance, and special operations which fuel violence and militarised masculinities should be prohibited and end everywhere.
- Militarised masculinities must also be addressed both within Afghanistan and in the countries that waged the war and occupation.
- Addressing militarised masculinities in Afghanistan and invading and occupying forces and countries should include engaging men and boys in deconstructing and redefining masculinities; community dialogues; seminars and training; and psychosocial support programs.
- It should also require confronting the institutions of militarised masculinities, such as the military and police, reducing their budgets and prioritising investments in all forms of equality and social justice and specific communities including women's groups; LGBTQ+; racialised minorities; and people with disabilities.
- Transforming gender norms also requires confronting and challenging narratives perpetuated in popular culture, mainstream media, and by the military itself.

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