EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REFLECTIONS ON GENDER, PATRIARCHY, AND PEACE

Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Afghanistan
**About This Study**

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Afghanistan includes quantitative and qualitative research with men and women aged 18 to 59. The nationwide study and its dissemination were coordinated by Promundo and UN Women, with financial support from UN Women and Global Affairs Canada.

**About IMAGES**

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) is a comprehensive, multi-country study on gender norms, gender-equality policies, household dynamics, caregiving, fatherhood, intimate partner violence, sexual diversity, health, economic stress, and many other topics, including men's and women's attitudes, practices, and realities alongside each other. Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women created IMAGES in 2008. As of 2018, IMAGES and IMAGES-inspired studies have been carried out in more than 40 countries, with more studies planned or underway. IMAGES is designed for male and female respondents aged 18 to 59 and is carried out together with qualitative research to map masculinities, contextualize the survey results, and provide detailed life histories that illuminate quantitative findings. The questionnaire is adapted for each country and region, with approximately two-thirds of the questions being standard across settings. For more information, see: www.promundoglobal.org/images.

**Promundo**

Founded in Brazil in 1997, Promundo works to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. Promundo is a global consortium with members in the United States, Brazil, Portugal, and Democratic Republic of the Congo that collaborate to achieve this mission by conducting cutting-edge research that builds the knowledge base on masculinities and gender equality; developing, evaluating, and scaling up high-impact gender-transformative interventions and programs; and carrying out national and international campaigns and advocacy initiatives to prevent violence and promote gender justice. For more information, see: www.promundoglobal.org.

**UN Women**

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports United Nations member states as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and it works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, programs, and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality. For more information, see: www.unwomen.org.

**Global Affairs Canada**

Global Affairs Canada manages Canada’s diplomatic and consular relations, promotes the country’s international trade, and leads Canada’s international development and humanitarian assistance. For more information, see: www.international.gc.ca.

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**Suggested Citation**


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Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Afghanistan
Afghanistan has a deep and remarkable cultural legacy spanning more than 4,000 years, but recent decades of war and civil unrest have created broad challenges that touch every aspect of Afghan society. This complicated narrative includes definitions of masculinities and femininities, as well as with patriarchal power at all levels of society, presenting persistent and multifaceted threats to Afghan women: intimate partner violence, honor killings, and other harmful cultural practices such as baad (giving away women to settle family or tribal feuds) and badal (families exchanging women and girls), among many others. These threats sit alongside women’s and girls’ limited access to education, financial independence, and political participation – as well as ongoing security challenges limiting mobility and broader participation in public life – all of which heavily constrain the lives of Afghan women.

Against this backdrop – of a rich legacy alongside strict patriarchy, of brave legislative advocacy alongside persistent conflict – arrives the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) Afghanistan, an innovative countrywide survey intended to provide a comprehensive baseline from which to assess potential shifts related to masculinities, gender equality, and violence against women and girls. IMAGES Afghanistan is a wide-ranging effort combining three methods of data collection: (1) a nationally representative household survey involving 1,000 male and 1,000 female participants; (2) life story interviews with men recognized as demonstrating more gender-equitable forms of masculinity; and (3) focus group discussions with both men and women across the country. The survey includes a core set of questions drawn from the international IMAGES questionnaire, as well as questions specifically adapted for Afghanistan.
KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, IMAGES Afghanistan findings paint a picture of simultaneous conflict and courage, tradition and resistance, all leading to a varied landscape of gender-equality attitudes and practices.

The data show complex relationships between demographic and experiential factors and views on gender roles and norms (and gender equality). In most cases, however, women’s views are meaningfully more equitable than men’s. For example, two-thirds of men surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that “women in Afghanistan have too many rights”; nearly a third of women agreed with this idea as well. A great many men, and some women, uphold rigid ideas about gender roles, violence, women’s public lives, and masculinity. Notably, 72 per cent of women in the survey agreed that “a married woman should have the same rights to work outside the home as her husband,” as compared to only 15 per cent of men.

IMAGES Afghanistan data also show that older men demonstrate greater gender equality than younger men, even when accounting for the influence of other key demographic and childhood influences. Young men in Afghanistan face a particular confluence of threats to their sense of identity, particularly their sense of achieving socially recognized manhood. In a time of high financial insecurity, young men struggle to achieve the social expectation that they provide economically for their families. In a time of ongoing political instability and insurgency, young men likewise struggle to achieve the role of “protector” of their families. IMAGES evidence suggests that young men, facing these challenges to their rigidly defined masculine identity, may be grabbing hold of rigid gender divisions in other spaces in their lives.

Additionally, women and men broadly disagree about women’s suitability to be public leaders, although men’s and women’s notions about which public roles are most acceptable for women mirror one another. As with other topics in the survey, women held much more gender-equitable attitudes than men. Fully 65
per cent of men agreed, for instance, that “because women are too emotional, they cannot be leaders,” as compared to only 29 per cent of women. Women’s and men’s responses did broadly reflect one another, however, when it came to identifying which public roles are least suitable for women. All respondents were particularly unlikely to support the idea of women in the roles of police officers, judges, soldiers, and religious leaders. In the focus groups, participants painted a picture of a society in which women are broadly discouraged from working outside the home, or from leaving the home at all. Women also described how they must adhere strictly to community traditions to make working outside the home viable. As one young woman from Kandahar province put it, “She must be covered while going outside the house, and no one should hear her laughing.”

In order to shift this mixed landscape of social norms about gender equality and women’s rights, policymakers and programmers should:

• Complement legislative progress on women’s rights and gender equality with public-awareness campaigns to help men understand why such changes are necessary and to help them see the benefits to themselves – and to everyone.

• Introduce discussions about more equitable masculinity into religious-training and secular-education curricula alike, as well as into progressive religious media and other avenues of religious education, to help men and women better understand the possibilities for gender equality that are inherent to Islam.

• Identify and engage with progressive religious figures to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality at all levels of society.

• Support the creation of youth-led campaigns and activism targeting young men and young women to promote gender equality in the country.

• Build on existing literature, art, and cultural expressions that already include messages of equality and positive masculinities, and partner with mass media, social media, children and youth media producers, and other artistic producers to include messages about changing norms related to gender and masculinity.
When it comes to the inner workings of domestic life, parenthood, and childcare, IMAGES respondents in Afghanistan show a mixture of rigid beliefs alongside more progressive ones.

Reflecting on their fathers’ role in childcare, respondents were likely to recall a figure who played with them and looked after them in general terms, but not someone routinely involved in washing, cleaning, cooking, and helping with homework. No more than 5 per cent of respondents reported that their fathers sometimes or often washed clothes or cleaned the sitting rooms, for instance, while approximately 80 per cent reported that their fathers played with them. Respondents also recalled childhood homes in which fathers or brothers reigned supreme in terms of financial decisions.

Not unlike the dynamics in their childhood homes, household work in respondents’ marital homes tends to be divided on a strictly gendered basis. Women do the vast majority of household work in Afghanistan. The division of household work was highly mixed in the qualitative research. On one hand, many men said that they see domestic work as integral to being a good wife and that they do not have time for any housework because their focus is on supporting their families financially. On the other hand, many men also said they “pitch in” sometimes with housework, even while ultimately viewing it as their wives’ responsibility. All respondents agreed that men who do domestic work are commonly viewed as dishonorable.

More gender-equitable practices can pass from one generation to the next, however, and IMAGES data from around the world have demonstrated how children who grow up in more gender-equitable homes — with a father involved in household work and childcare — are more likely to emulate these behaviors as adults.

In order to more fully and rapidly realize true equality in unpaid care work and domestic work, policymakers and programmers should:

• Challenge and eliminate gender stereotypes regarding the social, political, and economic roles of men and women in school texts and curricula, as well as implement school-based gender-transformative education for boys and girls. Implement campaigns and school-based efforts to reach boys and girls at younger ages about sharing care and domestic work.
• Create protocols and train health providers to engage men as more involved fathers in the public health system, the workplace, and early childhood development programs.

• Build on existing evidence-based parent-training programs to encourage and support parents – both mothers and fathers – in raising sons and daughters equally, in practicing nonviolent childrearing, and in advocating for legislation that bans all forms of violence against children.

• Engage men in programs and platforms that are informed and driven by United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” This includes working with men proactively, as well as holding them accountable for their roles in accomplishing this goal; in eliminating all forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against all women and girls; and in supporting women and girls’ full social, economic, and political equality.

Marriages in Afghanistan can be marked by men’s controlling behaviors and intimate partner violence, as shown by the very high prevalence of economic, emotional, physical, and sexual violence in these relationships.

The vast majority of ever-married respondents in the study reported controlling dynamics in their relationships, whereby the husband needs to know where his wife is at all times and is the sole decision-maker of when she can leave the house. Additionally, 80 per cent of women reported ever experiencing one or more forms of physical intimate partner violence included in the study, and nearly one in five women reported being subjected to sexual violence by her husband. While women were more likely to report experiencing all forms of violence than men were to report perpetrating them, men were not shy about sharing the various forms of violence they use against their wives. These data demonstrate the unidirectional, prevalent, and multifaceted nature of men’s use of intimate partner violence against their wives in Afghanistan.
At the same time, attitudes rejecting intimate partner violence were common among qualitative research participants. Some men reject violence in relatively paternalistic terms, suggesting that women need men’s protection rather than abuse. Others offered more positive, aspirational ideas, calling on husbands and wives to discuss conflicts together peacefully. In addition to raising their voices against violence, many shared ideas for solutions. Participants spoke to the importance of teaching society the rights of women. Women in particular voiced that laws on domestic violence must be implemented more effectively. Other solutions focused on education, women’s economic participation, and involvement of religious leaders. Some participants mentioned that men do not trust violence-prevention messages from non-Islamic sources, like United Nations agencies. Instead, they said, eliminating violence should be taught through an Islamic lens.

IMAGES also documents respondents’ views on harmful practices such as honor killings and bacha-bazi, the practice of keeping young boys for sexually exploitative purposes. About one in 10 respondents were aware of a case in which a woman was killed for being perceived to bring shame to the family just within the last year (i.e. honor killing). Nearly a quarter of men and women in the study believed that most people in their community would approve of such a killing; 20 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women approved of this practice themselves. While this demonstrates that a significant majority of the population rejects the practice of honor killing, the levels of approval are still noteworthy. Additionally, even as IMAGES respondents reported low levels of approval for bacha-bazi, significant proportions of men shared direct knowledge of this practice occurring in their community. For example, 159 of 1,000 men in the quantitative study shared that bacha-bazi had occurred within their community in the last year alone.

In order to better prevent and respond to all forms of intimate partner violence and harmful practices, policymakers and programmers should:

• Invest in and scale up community-based interventions that change violence-supportive norms, as well as engage community and religious leaders in both preventing intimate partner violence and holding men who use this violence accountable.
• Pilot-test and evaluate integrated violence-prevention efforts, such as those that promote women’s rights (including women’s economic empowerment) together with sensitization activities for their husbands and other male relatives.

• Implement curricula on the prevention of gender-based violence for young men and young women, employers, and teachers in schools and workplaces.

• Provide psychosocial – and other forms of – support for children and youth who witness or experience violence in their homes.

Additionally, IMAGES results affirm the extreme traumas, risks, and challenges of daily life in Afghanistan and also the resiliency of the country’s people.

A preponderance of respondents, both male and female, reported various adverse experiences directly linked to the many years of invasion, insurgency, conflict, and war in the country. Experiences such as living as an internally displaced person or refugee, facing bombardment, being robbed, and witnessing beatings are among the most common such experiences among study participants – with, for example, 41 per cent of men and 37 per cent of women reporting that they had been an internally displaced person or refugee due to conflict.

However, facing the extreme hardships and constraints of life in Afghanistan, respondents’ views of their own health and well-being underscore their resilience. Vast majorities of both men and women rated their own physical health and well-being as “good” or “very good” compared to others of the same sex and age. Only 5 per cent of men and 10 per cent of women reported that their physical health is “bad” or “very bad” in comparison with peers their age. The study also measures more informal sources of support, particularly focused on mental health concerns such as sadness, disappointment, and frustration. In Afghanistan, many respondents reported that they do not seek out this help; indeed, only 68 per cent of men and 54 per cent of women said that they had done so, leaving 32 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women seeming to bear their sadness and frustration on their own.
A swift end to all violent insurgency and political conflict in Afghanistan is an unwavering goal. Until this goal is realized, in order to help mitigate the broad effects of ongoing conflict, policymakers and programmers should:

- Screen men and women for mental health concerns and exposure to violence and trauma and provide gender-specific psychosocial and trauma support for men and women, including group, individual, and community-based therapy, building in particular on existing coping strategies.

- Build on the potential of men’s connections to their children and involvement as fathers to mitigate the effects of conflict, displacement, and insecurity.

- Engage those men who show positive coping skills and who are “voices of resistance” to conflict and violence, including gender-based violence, as mentors and peer promoters for other men and boys.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

By examining rigid gender norms, men’s disproportionate power and control, and an array of violent behaviors toward women and girls in Afghanistan – all with an awareness of the contextual complexities of this particular country – IMAGES Afghanistan seeks to inform new waves of violence-prevention and gender-equality advocacy and programming.

The recommendations provided in the report align with existing government commitments and strategies, as well as with a vision for a world free of violence and gender-based inequalities. At the same time, the voices amplified in this study demonstrate that the vision of a more equal, less violent world is neither impossible in Afghanistan nor externally imposed. Instead, the seeds for this future exist within the people of Afghanistan, their positive interpretations of their own traditions and culture, and their courage to seek – and realize – a transformed future for the coming generations.