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Abstract for "Women of Afghanistan: Feminine Identity in the Unforgiving Hindu Kush"

Afghanistan resides near the bottom of the vast majority of human development indicators. The prevalence of contraceptive use is 10 percent. For every 100 men that can read, there are only 29 women that can read as well. This is all the more concerning when it is considered that the *total* literacy rate in Afghanistan is only 28 percent. Possibly the most alarming is the fertility rate. The average births Afghan women will experience in their lifetime, as of 2008, is 7.7. What goes on during a women's life that causes these startling statistics?

In this paper, I plan to go deeper than Western perceptions permit. I will look not just at religion and its implications on women's issues but also at the geography, language, and social standing that makes Afghanistan and by association, Afghanistan women, different than any other Muslim, mountainous, or poverty-stricken region. To simply use the feminine identity of the West as a measuring stick would be a great disservice to the women there. The intent of this piece is to explore what being a woman is to the people of Afghanistan.