

War is Like a Disability

An Afghan Woman Shares Her Story

Roqia Tahiri

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. As you read, pay attention to the words *horrific*, *cooped up*, and *oppressive*. See if you can tell what they mean from the context.
2. Share what you know about Afghanistan. What do you think this article will be about?

We Stayed in the Basement for Safety

I never thought that I had a disability until I began writing on the topic. I didn't realize that my experiences as a child were like a disability. Now I see that those *horrific* experiences of my childhood put obstacles in front of me. They did not stop me from trying to reach my goals. But they did make me who I am today, and thus I want to tell my story.

When I was a young girl, I lived in a world full of war. We could not go to the kitchen to get something to eat because we never knew when the rockets would hit. We could not go to school or go outside to play. We stayed *cooped up* in the basement all the time. Mom and Dad tried to stay positive. They said, "Don't worry, kids. Everything will be all right."

Struggling to Get an Education

As I grew older, the situation got worse. I dreamed of becoming a doctor, but I could not go to school. My situation was a disability for me; I couldn't do anything about it! Finally, my parents decided to leave the area, so we could survive. First, we traveled to a safer province. My father had a heart problem, and he died in that province.

Mom decided to leave the country. We moved to Pakistan, and I continued my studies as much as I could. I found a job after school with a group of women. We taught literacy and health classes to women and girls. The situation



in Afghanistan had become more stable, and so we moved back to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, my mother got cancer and died. This was a great disappointment for me. I didn't know how I could go on.

Back in my own country, I found a job and saved up enough money to go to one of the universities in Afghanistan. From 2017 to 2021, I went to university. I got my own apartment, and I had a good job and salary.

A Government that Is Anti-Woman

But my happiness was short-lived. A big change occurred in our government. The Taliban

came to power. The Taliban is an *oppressive*, anti-humanity, anti-progress, and anti-science government. They were arresting and killing women who were educated and had worked with foreign offices, particularly with the Americans. They interrogated me and asked me, “Why are you alone? Why aren’t you married?” They made me give my apartment to them. I had to leave the area and hide in a different province. I could not work, and I experienced many hardships.

A Visa to the United States

Finally, in March of 2023, I received an email from the U.S. embassy. They informed me that I could get a visa to go the United States. Later, after I did all the paperwork, I left Afghanistan and came to America.

The War and the Taliban Disable Everyone

The war in my country and the *oppressive* government were like a disability for everyone who lived there. There were so many obstacles for us—especially women—who wanted to pursue our dreams. But even with these obstacles, it is possible not to give up and to stay hopeful. It’s like my parents told us when we were hiding in the basement. They said, “Don’t worry, kids. Everything will be all right.”

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the author’s main claim? How does she support her claim?
2. The article on pp. 32-33, “A Collective Wound: Addiction in Native Americans,” makes the claim that colonialism has had a disabling effect on Native Americans. Read that article and compare it to this one. What do the two articles have in common?

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What Do You Think?

The author makes the claim that war and oppressive governments can affect people the same way a disability can. Do you agree? Why or why not? Are there other social, economic, or political conditions that are equivalent to a disability? If so, describe them.

Read further about war and disability:

1. “Mental health consequences of war: a brief review of research findings,” published by the National Institutes of Health (NIH): <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1472271/>
2. “War is a disability policy issue” by Joe Stramondo, published at <https://lifeatlevel.com/2022/03/25/war-is-a-disability-policy-issue/>



Joe Stramondo is an assistant professor at San Diego University and is extremely active in the disability community. Joe uses an Edge 3 Power Wheelchair to maintain his mobility and independence. In his spare time, Joe strives to be the best father he can to his children.