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Empowerment or Exploitation? The Dual Role of Informal Work in Women's Lives in Afghanistan's Carpet Sector Post-2021

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Abstract

This study examines the dual role of informal work in women's lives in Afghanistan's carpet sector post-2021, highlighting both empowerment and exploitation. With formal employment banned, informal work has become a survival strategy for many women.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 20 women working in Afghanistan's carpet industry. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns to discuss the empowerment and exploitation of women in this industry. The findings reveal that while carpet weaving provides women with a source of income and social engagement, it also exposes them to low wages, poor working conditions, and limited career mobility. Many workers experience exploitation due to lack of bargaining power, and the influx of unemployed women has led to further wage suppression. However, some respondents reported gaining skills, and self-confidence, indicating the industry's potential as an economic lifeline despite its limitations. This study advances understanding of women's informal employment in conflict-affected regions, emphasizing the need for better wages, improved working conditions, NGO's and legal support from the government.

Keywords: Carpet industry of Afghanistan, exploitation, informal economy, gender and labour, women empowerment