# “Surviving Our History”: A Qualitative Examination of Continuous Traumatic Stress in a Sample of Afghan Women

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Sandra M. Newton

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**Abstract**

For decades, Afghanistan has been considered among the most dangerous places to be a woman. While attention in the psychological literature to Afghan women's experiences has increased during the past 20 years, Afghan women's voices are rarely privileged within this body of literature. The present study qualitatively explored the nature of threats to Afghan women. This study also aimed to explore the extent to which Kaminer, Eagle, and Crawford-Browne's (2016) conceptual framework for continuous traumatic stress resonated with Afghan women's lived experiences. A sample of 105 Afghan women identified by pseudonyms wrote a total of 345 nonfiction pieces; an additional 23 pieces were written anonymously. All were participants in the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP). From a total of 816 nonfiction works, 368 were selected through the application of five inclusion criteria. Data were analyzed through a two-stage process comprising an initial inductive thematic analysis of the essays and stories and subsequent mapping of emergent themes onto Kaminer et al.'s description of continuous traumatic stress. Forty-four themes contained within 12 domains were extracted from the data. The results, further grouped into three overarching areas, provide nuanced descriptions of threats to Afghan women as: 1) gender-based and pervasive across vital dimensions of personal and societal functioning; 2) primarily experienced as continuous, layered, and interactive, thereby making them dynamic in nature; and 3) profoundly impactful on Afghan women's well-being. Findings suggest substantial congruence between the traumatic conditions many Afghan women experience on a continuous basis and Kaminer et al.'s characterization of continuous traumatic stress. Results also suggest *continuous traumatic oppression* further captures Afghan women's experiences of structural forms of

gender-based violence that are inherently dehumanizing. Practice implications include honoring (as opposed to pathologizing) ways Afghan women adapt to contexts of continuous trauma and supporting their adaptive, proactive ways of coping with ongoing traumatic stress and/or oppression. Research recommendations include the need for further study of writing as an effective method for coping with exposure to continuous traumatic stress and continuous traumatic oppression.

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Walking among demonstrators—notably, many of them women—in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 2015, activist Selay Ghaffar described the scene to VICE news anchor Isobel Yeung: "These are all the voices of all those silent women who [men] always wanted to keep inside the house, not being active in other parts of life. But today, they gather here to raise their voices against injustice, against the crimes happening against women and against humanity in Afghanistan" (Yeung, Walsh, & Osterholm, 2016). Advocating for human rights and the empowerment of women across Afghanistan, protestors called for change with a sense of urgency.

Women in Afghanistan face complex and intersecting threats to their physical integrity and psychological well-being, across multiple domains of living, often on a daily basis. Long considered one of the most dangerous places to be a woman (Anderson, 2011; see Appendix A for additional background information on conflict in Afghanistan from 1979 to the present), Afghanistan, and the lived experiences of the women who reside there, have begun to receive increased attention in the psychological literature during the past 20 years.

Presently, there is a growing body of literature (reviewed in the following section) that provides insight into the frequency and type of traumatic events commonly experienced by Afghan women, the extent to which war-related and/or chronic traumatic stressors contribute to their psychological suffering, and the prevalence and characterization of psychological distress among women in Afghanistan. While there are several notable exceptions (e.g., Luccaro & Gaston, 2014; Omidian & Miller 2006; Rostami Povey, 2003), research on Afghan women's psychological sequelae has been primarily quantitative in nature and focused on the mental health correlates of Afghan

women's exposure to war-related events and/or the difficult social and economic conditions that characterize daily life in Afghanistan. Notably, a number of the foundational studies on mental health in Afghanistan contain significant methodological limitations, such as the use of quantitative instruments not validated in Afghan contexts (e.g., Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2006; Scholte et al., 2004).

Currently, there remains a critical need for nuanced understandings of Afghan women's experiences. A central aim of the present study was to qualitatively explore the nature of threats to Afghan women. This study also aimed to explore the extent to which Afghan women's experiences resonated with a conceptual formulation of traumatic stress as continuous, noting the incongruities between Afghan women's experiences in contexts of ongoing trauma and psychological constructs that categorically orient trauma in the past.

**Overview of Traumatic Stress among Women in Afghanistan**

After nearly forty years of protracted warfare and civil conflict, societal instability, and mass internal and external displacement of Afghan citizens (Sayed, 2011), war-related traumatic stress and loss of life are clearly among the sources of threat to women (Amowitz, Heisler, & Iacopino, 2003; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004; Scholte et al., 2004; Wildt et al., 2017). In their nationally representative survey of nondisabled and disabled Afghans, Lopes Cardozo et al. (2004) found 62% ($n$ = 407) of respondents had experienced at least four trauma events during the previous ten years. Scholte et al. (2004) found 91% ($n$ = 491) of female respondents living in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan (a region where the Taliban have long had a strong presence) had experienced four or more traumas, with 56% ($n$ = 299) experiencing eight to ten

traumatic events during the past ten years. Nearly 10% ($n$ = 51) of female respondents had experienced eleven or more traumas. While the onset and duration of the trauma events were not assessed in either study, findings clearly suggest a majority of women in Afghanistan have experienced multiple traumas over the course of several years.

Exploring the type of trauma events Afghan women experience, Scholte et al. (2004) found close to or over 70% of 542 women surveyed had experienced the direct effects of armed violence, including being close to death, having to flee, experiencing recent bombardments by Coalition forces, or being exposed to shelling/rocket attacks from mujahideen or former Soviet Union forces. Notably, the most prevalent traumatic events experienced by women in Scholte et al.'s (2004) study were more indirect in nature, and included having no access to medical care (85%) and experiencing a lack of food (79%). Lopes Cardozo et al. (2004) similarly found lack of access to medical care (55% and 67%), lack of food or water (56% and 59%), and lack of shelter (44% and 68%) were the most prevalent traumatic experiences of nondisabled ($n$ = 699) and disabled ($n$ = 100) Afghans, respectively. Further, Wildt et al. (2017) used the Afghan War Experiences Scale (AWES; Miller et al., 2006) to measure exposure to war-related violence and loss among a predominantly female sample (86%, $n$ = 70) in a primary care setting in Kabul. Among female participants, they found that, in advance of war-related stressors of an ostensibly more "direct" nature such as rockets landing on respondents' houses (35%) or the death of family members (36%), respondents had experienced war-related material losses including becoming a refugee (68%), losing property and wealth (54%), and losing family income (51%). These studies suggest that in addition to overt

forms of war-related violence, Afghan women have endured—at even greater rates—war-related traumas that are distinctly socioeconomic in nature.

Numerous studies have provided additional insight into sources of adversity that are continuous in nature and located within the social, economic, and political conditions of everyday life for women in Afghanistan. Miller et al. (2008) explored "daily stressors" in Afghanistan, which is a construct they described as the "stressful social conditions [related to] the indirect effects of prolonged organized violence" (p. 629). Miller et al. (2008) offered this construct as a starting point for exploring stressors beyond those that are overtly war-related, though they subsequently acknowledged the term "daily stressors" is overly inclusive and therefore conceptually problematic (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Environmental concerns (e.g., pollution and roadblocks), financial hardship and unemployment, illiteracy, health concerns, and social isolation were among the top daily stressors for a sample of Afghan women residing in Kabul. Additionally, Panter-Brick and colleagues (Panter-Brick, Eggerman, Mojadidi, & McDade, 2008) and Miller et al. (2008) concurrently found domestic violence, social isolation, overcrowding at home, health, and feeling unsafe outside the home were specific domains of "daily stressors" in which women reported higher mean levels of ongoing stress than men.

Several studies identified widowhood as a source of continuous adversity, citing the isolation and marginalization widows, as well as divorced and separated women, experience in Afghanistan (Luccaro & Gaston, 2014; Omidian & Miller, 2006; Rostami-Povey, 2003; Trani & Bakhshi, 2013). Related, marginalized demographic and socioeconomic characteristics in an Afghan context, such as being a single mother, elderly, disabled, an ethnic minority, unemployed or impoverished, or uneducated, were

also identified as continuous sources of stress and vulnerability (Trani & Bakhshi, 2013). A 2008 survey of 4700 households by Global Rights underscored the ubiquity of gender-based violence, finding 87% of Afghan women had endured some form of psychological, sexual, or physical abuse (including forced marriage) at least once (Nijhowne & Oates, 2008). Qualitative investigations of Afghan women's experiences also identified and described ways in which inter-familial violence against women, sexual violence, and a culturally-ingrained, systemic devaluing of women and women's rights lead to continuous, pervasive suffering and inequality of Afghan women (Luccaro & Gaston, 2014).

Research consistently shows the severe toll on women's mental health from continuous and multidimensional traumatic stressors, experienced alone, and in concert with explicit forms of armed violence (Panter-Brick et al., 2008; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004; Miller, Omidian, Rasmussen, Yaqubi, & Daudzai, 2008; Rostami Povey, 2003; Scholte et al., 2004; Trani & Bakhshi, 2013; Wildt et al., 2017). Afghan women generally experience greater levels of psychological distress, at higher rates of prevalence, in relation to Afghan men (Amowitz et al., 2003; Panter-Brick et al., 2008; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004; Miller, Omidian et al., 2008; Scholte et al., 2004; Wildt et al., 2017). In a nationally representative survey of Afghans (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004), the prevalence of nondisabled Afghan women with symptoms indicative of anxiety, depression, and PTSD was 83.5%, 73.4%, and 48.3%, respectively. Depression and PTSD symptoms were even higher among disabled women (83.5% and 55.3%, respectively).

Among women in Nangarhar province, Scholte et al. (2004) found high levels of anxious and depressive symptomology for 78.2% ($n$ = 422) and 58.4% ($n$ = 314) of

respondents, respectively. Approximately 32% ($n$ = 171) of female respondents in the eastern province met symptom criteria for PTSD. Higher exposure to traumatic events was generally associated with higher rates of distressing psychological symptoms (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004; Scholte et al., 2004). For their sample of men and women living in a Taliban-controlled area in Afghanistan, Amowitz et al. (2003) drew from Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province. The researchers found 78% ($n$ = 158) of women met criteria for Major Depression and 65% ($n$ = 132) experienced suicidal ideation at the time of the study. These rates were significantly greater than the prevalence of Major Depression and suicidal ideation among women in a non-Taliban-controlled area in Afghanistan, which were 28% ($n$ = 53) and 18% ($n$ = 31), respectively. Moreover, the majority of women surveyed in Jalalabad directly attributed the marginal quality of their psychological (as well as physical) health to the effects of Taliban policies toward women (Amowitz et al., 2003).

In Kabul, Wildt et al. (2017) found war-related trauma, as well as traumatic experiences not directly attributable to war, contributed significantly to psychological distress (11% of their sample). In an earlier study, Miller et al. (2008) found level of exposure to daily stressors was a stronger predictor of women's mental health outcomes (including depression, general distress, and impaired functioning) than was direct war exposure. Subsequently, Miller and Rasmussen (2010) have suggested daily stressors partially mediate the effect of war exposure on mental health. Interestingly, Miller et al. (2008) found war-related experiences and daily stressors contributed equally to levels of PTSD symptoms among women. The researchers suggested *non-war related traumatic stressors* (specifically, domestic violence and sexual assault), that are of an ongoing

nature and widespread in Afghanistan, may help explain the degree to which daily stressors contributed to PTSD symptom levels.

Further research suggests women encounter continuous stressors across numerous other dimensions of Afghan society to the detriment of their psychological and physical health. In their exploration of the physiological markers of stress, Panter-Brick et al. (2008) not only found unequivocal gender differences in all dimensions of well-being but also identified a collection of "family stressors" that significantly elevated diastolic blood pressure among a sample of university-enrolled women (but not their male counterparts). Trani and Bakhshi (2013) found that women's marital status is a significant source of vulnerability: widowed and divorced women were 12 times more at risk of experiencing mild or moderate levels of mental distress disorders compared to married women.

With myriad threats to Afghan women's well-being identified in the extant literature, Trani and Bakhshi's (2013) research is notable in that it exhibits ways in which threats are intersectional and recursive, demonstrating that traumatic (and potentially marginalizing) stressors threaten the mental health of people who are already socially vulnerable. A number of qualitative investigations have further captured the complex relationships among traumatic stressors, describing, for instance, how the effects of poverty and unemployment appear to contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence (Luccaro & Gaston, 2014), while economic dependence on abusers and lack of education about Afghanistan's formal court system prevent women from reporting domestic violence (Moylan, 2015). Investigations such as these help elaborate the findings of studies that identify overtly war-related and/or chronic traumatic stressors and their

effects, thereby supporting nuanced understandings of Afghan women's lived experiences.

An exploration of Afghan women's narratives provided further insight into characterizations of psychological distress in Afghanistan, highlighting the salience of culturally grounded idioms of distress (Miller et al., 2009). The most prominent expressions of suffering included: "*jigar khun* (grief or dysphoria related to painful life events), *asabi* (a blend of nervousness and anger resulting from stressful life conditions or traumatic events), *fishar-e-bala* (a state of feeling overwhelmed), and *fishar-e-payin* (having diminished energy and motivation)" (Omidian & Miller, 2006, p. 17-18). Notably, Miller et al. (2009) found culturally specific expressions of distress, as well as scores on a measure of depression, were more highly correlated with war-related traumatic stress than were scores on a measure of PTSD. Furthermore, while the researchers found PTSD had adequate construct validity in an Afghan context, they reported a lack of strong support for the clinical utility of PTSD as a construct (Miller et al., 2009). To this end, Miller et al. (2006) found that women used indigenous expressions of distress (defined above) more frequently than they did terms of PTSD symptomology to describe war-related trauma. Miller et al. (2009) further found PTSD symptoms had a very modest impact on psychosocial functioning relative to other forms of distress, while noting that it is impairments in psychosocial functioning (rather than experiences of emotional distress coupled with adequate functioning) that tend to lead Afghan women to seek support. These researchers concluded that PTSD has limited salience among Afghans, and clinical interventions that are psychosocial in nature would

be more beneficial than treatment approaches that narrowly focus on war-related PTSD symptoms (Miller et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2009).

**PTSD as a Problematic Framework in Afghanistan**

Miller et al. (2006) are not alone in challenging PTSD as a construct for measuring psychological distress generally and in Afghanistan specifically. Numerous researchers and clinicians working in areas affected by ongoing violence have questioned whether PTSD is the appropriate conceptualization for characterizing psychological distress experienced by individuals exposed to ongoing danger (Diamond, Lipsitz, & Hoffman, 2013; Eagle & Kaminer, 2013; Lykes, 2013; Stevens, Eagle, Kaminer, & Higson-Smith, 2013). Concerns about the validity of PTSD derive in large part from the temporal location of the trauma in the *past*, when, for many individuals and communities, trauma is *continuous* (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). Wildt et al. (2017) voiced this precise concern, writing that as a Western construct of traumatic stress oriented in the past, PTSD "may not apply in a country such as Afghanistan where armed conflict has been the norm for decades and across generations, the political situation is complex and ever changing, and a peaceful future is unpredictable if not inconceivable for the population" (p. 82).

Clearly, the temporal incongruities between the theoretical construct of PTSD and the reality of ongoing experiences in traumatic environments suggest the construct's limitations. Stevens et al. (2013) point to additional problematic assumptions underlying PTSD when applied in contexts like Afghanistan (e.g., "enduring traumatic stress symptoms are maladaptive 'false alarms' conditioned by previous experiences, and recovery entails reworking these 'false alarm' responses in a relatively safe current environment") (p. 76). Wildt et al. (2017) suggest there may be ways in which Western

concepts of distress and disorder (e.g., characterizing traumatic stress symptoms as "maladaptive false alarms") do not aptly capture community adaptions to prolonged conflict. Reporting from a private neuropsychiatric hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, de Rond (2016) suggested as much, writing that some PTSD symptomology such as "hyper-arousal, vigilance, and anxiety are not considered particularly abnormal here. PTSD is nowhere because it is everywhere" (para. 18). Van Ommeren, Saxena, and Saraceno (2005) suggested clinicians who narrowly pursue PTSD-focused interventions while working in contexts characterized by traumatic stress may be out of step with community needs, and run the risk of effectively harming the individuals and communities they intend to serve.

**Continuous Traumatic Stress**

There is an evident need for a psychological construct that includes "traumatic events as well as less intense chronic stressors [that] better capture[s] the range of stressful social and material conditions" (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 1387) existing in Afghanistan. Indeed, *continuous traumatic stress* (CTS; Straker and The Sanctuaries Counselling Team, 1987), a construct that describes contexts wherein traumatic stressors exist "in the present and are continuous with stressors in the past and future" (Straker, 2013, p. 214), may offer a framework that conceptually aligns with the traumatic conditions, and the effects thereof, characterizing Afghan women's experiences. CTS was introduced into the psychological literature in 1987, when Straker and others in South Africa were attempting to provide therapeutic services to victims of ongoing political violence in a repressive social context (Kaminer, Eagle, & Crawford-Browne,

2016). The traumas clients experienced were not only in the past but also in the present, and future traumatization was a realistic anticipation (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013).

Since its introduction, CTS has resonated in South Africa and among trauma researchers in other parts of the world (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). In fact, Ayoughi (2013) recently quantitatively explored dimensions of CTS in an Afghan context, concluding that Afghan women indeed report high levels of distress while enduring unsafe living conditions and exposure to potential traumatic stress. Ayoughi (2013) noted, however, that because the construct has yet to be operationalized, CTS could not be quantified (only approximated). Despite numerous calls for its elaboration, CTS currently has no formal definition, and the construct's parameters, validity, and utility remain underdeveloped (Ayoughi, 2013; Eagle & Kaminer, 2013; Higson-Smith, 2013; Kaminer et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2013**).**

Primary to the debate concerning an agreed-upon definition of CTS are issues of the conceptual model's scale and differentiation from other forms of traumatic stress. Straker (2013) argued CTS should be considered an overarching concept of traumatic stress that "simply involves multiple extreme stressors that are current and encompassing" (p. 215). As such, Straker (2013) suggested that other formulations of complicated trauma, such as ongoing traumatic stress response (Diamond, Lipsitz, & Hoffman, 2013), cumulative traumatization (Cloitre et al., 2009), and multiple traumatization (Williams et al., 2007) would fall under a CTS umbrella if the sources of trauma existed in the present and were continuous in nature.

In contrast, Eagle and Kaminer (2013) argued "the construct of CTS offers an important and distinct vantage point from which to understand particular kinds of trauma-

inducing contexts and their impact" (p. 96). Adding emphasis within their original text, Kaminer et al. (2016) suggested a constellation of conditions that distinguish CTS, conceptually, would include "*multiple violent events across different contexts over a period of months or years* . . . [involving] *multiple perpetrators* . . . [containing] *objective sources of danger in the present and a realistic possibility of future threat or harm* . . . [with an] *ambient violence that forms a backdrop to daily life* . . . [and] *a fundamental failure of societal protections*" (pp. 5-6).

Drawing on three case studies from their work in South Africa that reflect the mental and physical health effects of living in CTS contexts, Kaminer et al. (2016) highlighted five common experiences arising from exposure to CTS: 1) constant vigilance to realistic threats in the environment; 2) prioritizing the navigation of current dangers to maximize safety, for oneself and one's loved ones, in the present; 3) avoidance behaviors to reduce risk of harm (which often negatively affect daily functioning); 4) emotional distress (such as prominent feelings of fear, rage, distrust, and dysphoria); and 5) physiological and/or somatic symptoms (p. 6). They also noted stress from external factors, such as economic deprivation and social marginalization, often occurs in contexts of CTS.

Straker (2013) and Kaminer et al. (2016) generally agree that CTS describes trauma conditions and contexts rather than locating the condition within an individual. CTS researchers also agree the construct is a necessary alternative or supplement to PTSD, a construct generally reflecting "global north" research that positions exposure to traumatic stress in the past (Steven et al., 2013). Researchers have wrestled with the extent to which individual and/or community responses to CTS are adaptive or

pathological (Eagle & Kaminer, 2013). Kaminer et al. (2016) suggested that while responses (e.g., avoiding behaviors) are often adaptive in a survival sense, they may have maladaptive effects (e.g., experiences of chronic isolation in the case of avoidant behaviors) that are clinically significant and warrant intervention. CTS as a concept is gathering traction (Straker, 2013); yet, experiences of trauma exposure and trauma impact in CTS contexts, including unique responses to CTS from various sociocultural contexts, and considerations for treatment in CTS conditions need elaboration (Ayoughi, 2013; Eagle & Kaminer, 2013; Higson-Smith, 2013; Kaminer et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2013).

### Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it sought to qualitatively explore Afghan women's written narratives in order to provide nuanced insight into the nature of threats to women in Afghanistan. Second, it sought to explore the extent to which *continuous traumatic stress* resonates with Afghan women's experiences; this examination aimed to further elaborate CTS as a construct, while also enhancing understanding of Afghan women's experiences from a contextual location that privileges the present and future, along with the past.

## Methods

### Sample

The sample comprises Afghan women participants of the Afghan Women's Writing Project (AWWP) who published nonfiction stories and essays through the AWWP website. Founded by Masha Hamilton, a writer from the United States, AWWP is a nonprofit organization based in New York. The expressed mission of AWWP is to

support the voices of women in Afghanistan. Central to AWWP's support for Afghan women writers is its facilitation of a writing mentorship program. The program operates as a predominantly online creative writing workshop that creates space for women from across Afghanistan to share their work in an online group setting. Participation in AWWP activities is voluntary. Due to safety concerns, recruitment of female participants in the writing workshop occurs through word-of-mouth communication. A predominantly U.S.-based group of women (numbering over 150, to date) with expertise in writing voluntarily serves as online workshop facilitators. Texts generated by AWWP writers are composed in English and regularly published online at the AWWP website. Topics for the stories and essays may be self-generated by AWWP writers or reflect responses to workshop writing prompts.

**Procedures**

Following approval for exempt status by the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board, nonfiction stories and essays were obtained from the Afghan Women's Writing Project website. Nonfiction works published between July 2009 and September 2016 were downloaded from the AWWP website. A total of 815 unique texts —the entirety of the nonfiction stories and essays published on the AWWP website as of March 2017—were initially considered. Essays consisting of multiple parts that were originally published online as separate texts were condensed and counted as single narratives, reducing the number of nonfiction pieces from 815 to 784.

The collection of nonfiction works was further refined using inclusion criteria developed by this investigator following an initial reading of the texts. Derived directly from this study's two major research questions, the inclusion criteria were: 1) the text is a

work of nonfiction; 2) the story is primarily about life in Afghanistan; 3) women's experiences are addressed in the text (specifically or indirectly in the context of societal functioning); 4) the work describes or discusses threat of harm; and—to help establish accountability for, and the veracity of, reported content—5) narratives are accounts of the story's author, someone known to the author, or reactions to a woman's story as described in the media. A total of 368 nonfiction texts met all five criteria. Figure 1 contains a flowchart illustrating text selection.

Due to the risk of harm women writers face in Afghanistan, AWWP writers publish under pseudonyms and remove other identifying information from their nonfiction works prior to publishing. Nonfiction texts are occasionally published on the website anonymously in order to further reduce the threat of harm to their authors. Available data indicate a sample of 105 Afghan women identified by pseudonyms wrote a total of 345 nonfiction pieces (Range = 1-13, median = 2). A total of 23 pieces were penned anonymously.

Notably, the collection of essays considered within this study reflects a limited representation of women's lives in Afghanistan, privileging dimensions of threat, violence, and trauma. As indicated in Figure 1, a total of 324 nonfiction pieces were excluded due to lacking discussion or description of threat. This study's narrow scope, therefore, prevents many dimensions of Afghan women's lives—such as experiences of profound joy, connection, and vitality—from being illuminated. It is imperative that this study's findings are read with such limitations in mind.

**Data Analysis**

This study's author conducted the data analysis. Drawing from the theory-driven process used by MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brun (2012), this analysis consisted of a two-stage approach that included an initial inductive thematic analysis of the AWWP nonfiction stories and essays followed by a mapping of the data's emergent themes onto Kaminer, Eagle, and Crawford-Browne's (2016) description of *continuous traumatic stress*.

This two-stage analytical approach was chosen due to each methodological step's potential to address one of the study's core research questions. Specifically, themes developed through the inductive analysis described the nature of threats to women in Afghanistan, and mapping revealed the extent to which continuous traumatic stress, as a conceptual framework, characterizes conditions Afghan women experience in the context of their daily lives. Further, this two-stage process allowed for themes to emerge organically from the data through the inductive analysis, ensuring the data would not be constrained by predetermined categories (Layder, 1998). And, similar to MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brun's (2012) experience, the mapping process added value by enhancing the complexity, nuance, and meaning of the initial thematic analysis.

A qualitative methodology uniquely positioned to examine life stories and narrative material (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), the inductive thematic analysis proceeded according to the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). As such, I began the analysis process by familiarizing myself with the data, reading the initial 815 unique nonfiction texts and then rereading them upon narrowing the nonfiction collection according to the inclusion criteria. This phase of the research process took approximately

three months. The remaining 345 nonfiction pieces (and 23 stories written anonymously) were then sorted by author. Where an AWWP author had written multiple works, the nonfiction pieces were considered "chapters" within each writer's collection. As previously noted, the number of chapters within the respective collections ranged from one to 13, with a median number of two chapters in a writer's collection.

Conceptually distinct statements within the nonfiction works became initial codes (Patton, 2002), which I generated and defined by coding ten randomly identified AWWP authors' respective nonfiction collections. The codes were subsequently collated into initial themes based on their conceptual similarity. I then proceeded to code the remaining collections in random order, adding, amending, collapsing, and/or eliminating themes in response to their salience within the narrative data. To minimize the potential for overrepresentation of individual voices within the thematic analysis, each theme was only extracted from each collection one time. I then engaged in the recursive process of reviewing, defining, and naming themes, giving particular attention to the story the data were telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Acknowledging the emotional impact of engaging deeply with a large number of nonfiction narratives describing women's experiences of violence, trauma, and threat, I regularly took breaks from the analysis during the four-month-long coding process. My co-advisors, two doctoral-level psychologists with extensive qualitative research experience, served as auditors for this data analysis. One individual reviewed the thematic structure early in its development and provided "high level" feedback, and the other individual reviewed the illustrative quotes within the context of the refined thematic structure and provided feedback on the analysis. Discrepancies were discussed and modifications were made until consensus was reached.

The process of mapping emergent themes from the inductive analysis onto Kaminer et al.'s (2016) characterization of *continuous traumatic stress* reflected the iterative, theory-driven approach described by MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de Brun (2012). Specifically, I began this process by identifying the primary components of Kaminer et al.'s (2016) description of contexts with a high prevalence of CTS and the effects of living in CTS contexts. I then moved back and forth between the existing characterization of CTS and the emergent themes from the inductive analysis, identifying areas of overlap between the descriptions as well as new considerations for frameworks describing contexts of continuous trauma brought forth by the thematic data. Additionally, this analytical process enhanced my nuanced understanding of the nature of CTS and added depth to the emergent themes by highlighting implicit aspects of CTS contained within the themes that warranted more explicit identification.

**Investigator Biases**

Prior to engaging in the data analysis process, I endeavored to explore my preconceptions and biases related to women's experiences in Afghanistan. To locate myself contextually and interrogate the lenses through which I would be reading Afghan women's nonfiction narratives, I reflected on my identities as white, a United States citizen of European-American ancestries, female, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied, agnostic, and enrolled in a doctoral program in counseling psychology in the midwestern United States. I then identified personal values and beliefs that may have bearing on the analysis and bracketed my biases, which included: 1) a commitment to feminist principles, including support for gender equality and an opposition to systems, institutions, and ideologies that oppress women; 2) a commitment to social justice

generally, and in counseling psychology in particular; 3) personal values and views of mental health shaped by a Euro-Western value system; 4) preconceptions regarding life as a woman in Afghanistan and admiration for AWWP writers; 5) limited personal contact with Afghans and Afghan culture; and 6) value for psychological conceptions of traumatic stress oriented in the present and future.

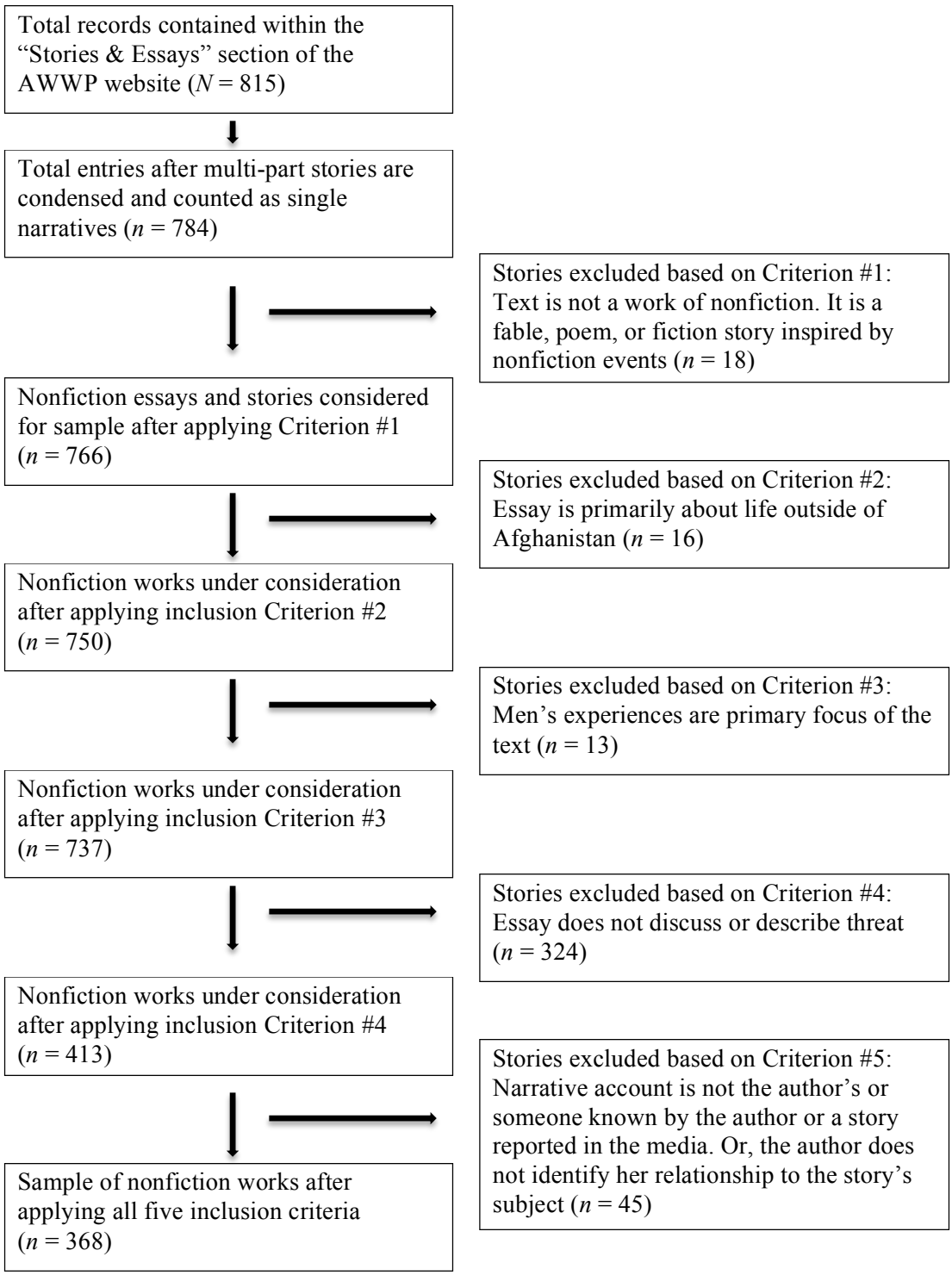


*Figure 1*. Flowchart depicting the selection of nonfiction works.

## Results

AWWP author narratives gave voice to deeply personal, nuanced, and complex descriptions of the nature of threats to women in Afghanistan. While singular in their reflection of each woman's unique experience, the narratives also shared myriad similarities in their accounts of threats to Afghan women. The following section contains descriptions of themes and accompanying illustrative quotations that arose from the narratives as well as broader domains that comprise groups of similarly oriented themes. A total of 44 themes contained within 12 domains were elicited from the nonfiction narratives. Based on their shared characteristics, domains were further grouped into three overarching areas that describe threats to women as: 1) gender-based and pervasive across dimensions of personal and societal functioning; 2) dynamic in nature; and 3) profoundly impactful on Afghan women's well-being. The quotes illustrating each theme were intentionally used with minimal abridgement in order to privilege each author's unique narration.

### Women Experience Threats that Are Gender-Based and Pervasive Across Dimensions of Personal and Societal Functioning

AWWP authors consistently described threats as grounded in a cultural context of structural inequality that subordinates women. The authors described ways in which this inequality manifests in gender-based oppression and violence across dimensions of living, from broadly held cultural beliefs and values in Afghanistan to political, economic, and familial contexts to women's intrapsychic functioning. Seven domains and 27 themes within this area provide an in-depth illustration of threats to Afghan women.

**Domain A: Threats to Women Are Grounded in Fundamentally Oppressive, Patriarchal Ideology**

Authors identified patriarchal ideology as a foundational source of oppression and threat. Themes within this domain describe cultural beliefs and interpretations of religious beliefs that characterize women as inherently lacking and inferior to men.

***Theme 1: Women are inherently flawed.*** Authors described a grounding cultural belief in Afghanistan that women are fundamentally flawed. Freshta K. highlighted the gap between her elemental worth according to Afghanistan's new Constitution and her actual experience in Afghanistan:

> "I belong to that 'slave' category. On the surface I have equal rights, yet beneath I am an unequal creature. I am a woman, whose mere existence is questionable, whose birth goes uncelebrated, whose existence is treated like a crime, if it is acknowledged at all. In some places, a girl is not even counted in the number of children one has" (Freshta K., 2013).

As Arifa conversed with a woman she met on the bus, the woman likened her own existence to sin. Telling this woman's story, Arifa reported:

> "The woman had come to Kabul only for her father's funeral. She told me she did not understand why she was punished all the time, even though her mother told her it was only because she is a woman. 'My father left this world and me with all the disaster and pain in this world. I always wonder to myself if it is a sin to be a woman or a daughter or a wife. If it is so, it has to be a great one because I have been punished and have suffered a whole life with a pain that never diminishes but becomes greater'" (Arifa, 2015, "She Cries in Her Heart").

***Theme 2: Women are inferior to men.*** Many authors discussed a pervasive cultural belief that women are inherently inferior to men. Mariam suggested a broad-based devaluing of women in Afghan society and denial of women's rights have their origins in patriarchy:

> "I agree with my Afghan sister Mahnaz *jan* ["*jan*" being a term of endearment following a person's name, essentially meaning "dear" in Dari] that the root of

> these negative ideas about women is our patriarchal culture, which allows men the authority to see women as insignificant and undeserving of any kind of respect and entitlement. Women and girls are denied many rights and freedoms" (Mariam, 2013).

Shekiba also described the subordination of women in Afghanistan:

> "This is the society that I live in, where being a woman is shameful and women live in disdain or contempt. We should not tolerate it. In this society, everything is based on the desires and demands of men. How is this fair? Women are equal human beings and they should have the right to make their own choices, as men do. No gender should impose its choices on another. From my childhood up to now I have learned that men are more valued than women, and that women must respect and obey the laws of men. Men in the family are more respected even if the male is a boy much younger and less knowledgeable than you. A woman doesn't have the right to plan her future, to choose her spouse, or even to decide whether or not to get pregnant. Women are used to serve and obey the desires of men. Some women are freer than others, but the number of free women is far fewer than those oppressed" (Shekiba, 2015).

Haya also suggested there are contexts in Afghanistan in which women are more empowered and valued, though she noted these are limited:

> "I can share my ideas openly with my family, but at university or at work it is different. My friends and I are not listened to. We are made to accept the men's ideas, just because they are men. Some men think listening to a woman or asking a woman for her opinion is an embarrassment or even an insult to them. They think that if they took the advice of a woman, they would lose respect" (Haya, 2016).

***Theme 3: Interpretations of Islam position women as "less than" men.***

Authors suggested inaccurate interpretations of Islam further contribute to cultural ideology that locates women as inferior to men. Asma described the inaccuracy and self-serving nature of men's interpretations of the Quran:

> "Afghan women live with customs and values that differ from other places. On one hand, we could have better opportunities if men valued our rights as stated in the Quran. Men interpret the Quran based on what they want. The verses seem to say women should stay home and not be seen, but this is not true. It says women have the same rights as men and can work outside the homes. Unfortunately, women have to suffer because of what men choose to decide" (Asma, 2014, "Afghan Girls, Then and Now").

Mahnaz specifically highlighted the role of mullahs (in Islam, a male religious leader or teacher) and atoons (a Muslim female educated in Islamic theology) in reinforcing oppressive ideology:

> "When I went to listen to the sermons of mullahs or atoons (female mullahs), I heard them blame women for society's immorality: 'Be careful what your women and daughters wear when they are outside; if one hair is visible to other men, a woman will go to hell. Her father and husband will also be damned.' The mullahs never said, 'What kind of men are you if you lose your faith as the result of seeing a woman's hair? Behave yourself. Control your eyes and desires. You have a mind. Behave like a human being, not like an animal. Provide a safe place for women so they can work, study, and be part of the society. If a woman can control her sexual desires, why can't you?
>
> Instead, they focused on ridiculous restrictions like requiring women to obtain their husband's permission to pluck their eyebrows, prohibiting women from traveling without a male companion, or wearing nail polish, bright colored, tight-fitting, or delicate clothing. A woman's life was stripped of color along with her human rights. These mullahs were promoting violence against women and perpetuating the patriarchal culture. People frightened of hell and beguiled by the promise of heaven accepted whatever the mullahs said. What hurts me is that such beliefs are instilled in women who grow up believing they are inferior to men. And in men who grow up believing they are superior to women. It hurts to see a woman crying after giving birth to a girl— not out of happiness but sadness. The fathers too, are sad—and sometimes angry at their wives for not bearing a son" (Mahnaz, 2012, "Women Are Not Like Honey").

Sara also described how it can be difficult in Afghanistan to develop a worldview that situates women as anything but subordinate to men:

> "The environment begins to take effect on individuals at birth. People start filling our brains with the idea that males are better than females. I am a product of this society and my mind was filled with the same ideology before I studied in another country, the United States. I blame neither myself nor those women for their beliefs, because there is no other reference point for them. All the evidence we get from religion and our social structure tells us that men are superior" (Sara, 2012).

**Domain B: Threats to Women Are Embedded and Manifest in Cultural and Community Values, Practices, and Traditions**

AWWP authors discussed how women face threats to their physical and psychological integrity, as well as their fundamental sense of personhood, as a result of oppressive values and their manifestation in dehumanizing cultural and community practices. Domain B comprises themes reflecting threats that exist within the culture broadly, and in more localized ways within Afghanistan.

***Theme 4: Denial of basic human rights and acknowledgement of essential personhood.*** Authors described cultural and community values and related practices that deny women their basic human rights and acknowledgement of their personhood. Marzia discussed how oppressive tribal values and traditions often take precedence over more recent governmental efforts to support women's equality:

> "For generations the people of Afghanistan, especially men and elders of the families, have taken away rights from women by following their own way of tradition and local culture. In the last 100 years Afghanistan has had eight written constitutions. But tribalism has always prevailed despite the laws. In 2004, the new Afghan Constitution offered women many new rights: the rights to vote, to travel, and receive an education; to work and become independent; and to ask for justice in the court. But while written in the constitution, in practice neither the authorities nor society often honor these rights" (Marzia, 2013).

An Anonymous author connected a lack of basic human rights to her experience of living in fear:

> "We women must have the right to make our life's decisions. Our purpose is not to be slaves and produce children; but as Afghan women, we belong to and are living in a restrictive society with many oppressive traditions. We have to tolerate many harrowing situations and be patient with every cruelty. We have to be silent when others make the wrong decision for us—forcing us into marriage, not allowing us to get an education, not allowing us to work or spread our voice. Although we feel that the world is intolerable, we have to be patient and live in fear" (Anonymous, 2011).

Zahra M. described the dehumanizing practice of denying women the right to be called by their names in public or by a non-family member:

> "Everybody wants to be respected while alive and to have people remember their good name once they are gone. Unfortunately, in Afghanistan women don't have the right to have a name in society. From the moment an Afghan girl is born up until she closes her eyes forever and dies, no one other than her family ever knows her by her name. I live in a society where the men are very zealous about holding on to their power. If they hear someone refer to their mother, wife, or daughter by name their blood boils. For this reason there have been lots of fights, especially in the villages of the Herat region. Families have fought with each other just because someone referred to a woman by her name. This practice has unfortunately spread to the city and the more literate families, too. Even urban families don't call their own mothers by their names, but rather refer to them by the name of their eldest son. If his name is, say, Ahmed, then his mother is known only as 'mother of Ahmed.'
>
> Family members may refer to a daughter by her given name, but never an outsider. And the practice goes on even after the woman dies. Death notices are never issued for women, nor is anyone ever invited to a woman's funeral. Her name will never appear on her tombstone. Yet men in Afghanistan have many details about them etched onto their own graves. In fact, this practice of rendering women as nameless is nothing short of outright prejudice for which there is no logical or rational reason" (Zahra M., 2012).

Zahra T. illustrated the pushback women receive for advocating for their basic human rights:

> "Every woman who tries to stand up for women's right to education, employment, and equal treatment will leave her home trembling and fearful every day. And then, when she is violated, society will blame her and she will be convicted and jailed. Everyone will wish her dead, and she will regret ever trying to stand up for her rights" (Zahra T., 2015).

***Theme 5: Treating women as property.*** Authors discussed ways in which cultural values and practices dehumanize women by treating them as property. Arifa and Leena G. each addressed this generally, stating, respectively:

> "I wish we could avoid sitting beside the corpses of our sisters, marrying at any age that parents choose for us, working as slaves and being treated as property. I wish I could tell even a portion of the pains and problems of Afghan women in my writing" (Arifa, 2015, "I Don't Want to Be Thirteen").

> "It makes me sad when I think about the girls living in the villages. They are not allowed to go to school. They are treated only as a tool to be used by men, the way the men want them used" (Leena G., 2014).

Freshta K. described how treating women as property is a longstanding practice that exists across ethnic groups in Afghanistan:

> "Women have been traded like goats or cattle for many years in this land. I would take the liberty of calling it a goat business and myself a goat too. A girl child is raised, given water, food and shelter, much as a goat is raised until it has put on a sufficient amount of meat. A girl is raised until she reaches puberty. Then, as the goat is sold, so is the girl. A Kandhari girl rate is 4 lakh (400,000 Afg). In Badakhshan girls fetch 7 lakh. For a Kabuli, the rate may be even higher. This goat selling culture has different names among different ethnicities. Hazara call it *gala*, Uzbek *qalein*, Pashtun *walwar*, Tajik *sheer baha* or *tuyana*. Other ethnicities use other names. I sometimes wonder how it is that all these various ethnic groups managed to sustain their grievances against one another in fights that lasted thirty years, yet when it comes to discrimination against women they are unified in following the same archaic culture. *Sheer baha* basically means that the boy's family has to pay for the amount of milk that a girl has drunk as a child. Alas, I live in a country where I don't even have rights to my mother's milk: even that is a liability that my would-be groom's family has to pay back. So here I am in this land, in this goat market, among a thousand other goats. I, too, am a goat awaiting an unknown fate" (Freshta K., 2013).

In recounting the story of Rukhshana, an Afghan woman who was stoned to death in 2015, Fatima G. describes multiple ways in which men in Rukhshana's family and community treated women as property:

> "I cannot imagine the difficulties the beautiful Rukhshana had to go through when she was forced to marry a man 35 years older. Her life was so difficult that she decided it was worth the risk to escape, but then the community members and her ex-husband forced her to return. To resolve the dispute between Rukhshana's ex-husband and her lover, the young man's sister then was reportedly forced to marry Rukhshana's ex-husband. So that dispute was resolved again at the expense of a girl's life. Another innocent girl was victimized. How can anyone accept this as just? These events show how worthless and meaningless a woman's life and feelings are to those men" (Fatima G., 2015).

***Theme 6: Culture of physical violence.*** AWWP authors consistently discussed how a culture of violence in Afghanistan threatens women's physical integrity. Roqaia

underscored the disconnect between the pervasive culture of violence that often targets women in Afghanistan and the promises leaders have made to support women's rights:

> "[T]he presidential candidates' slogans are impressive and attractive. They talk about women's rights and claim that women's rights are a priority for them, just like in the last presidential election. Yet violence increases day by day. Afghan women have not achieved equality and justice. The culture of violence is normal. An Afghan woman's luck is knit with black yarn. This violent culture is like a nightmare—it's always there and swallows her like a devil. Discrimination and violence have the final word in our country" (Roqaia, 2014).

Pari highlighted women's collective experiences of violence:

> "We Afghan women all have different stories, yet our stories are also often the same. Today, because of media technology, we can watch the evidence of Farkhunda's violent death at the hands of a mob. What if every one of us had a video showing the things that happen to us? We saw Farkhunda beaten, mobbed, killed, and burned. In another province we see women traditionally burned first. Then they die. Throughout Afghanistan, we see young girls escaping from violence at home, and then being sent to prison for escape. The dramatic stories are all around us" (Pari, 2015).

Pari continued this discussion, noting how some mullahs may stoke violence against women:

> "So where does this violence against Afghan women come from? It doesn't exist by itself. It has roots. Someone grows it for us; someone benefits from it. I believe the violence comes from our religious thoughts, as they are being represented by men. It starts in the mosques where the mullah talks about women's issues. When talking about women, the mullah changes his tone of voice, opens his mouth wide to shout, and complains about the behavior of women in Afghanistan. This mullah is not satisfied with the violence women already suffer. He wants to crank it up. So he warns his male congregation in the mosque to exert more control. He chooses what women can wear. He picks his favorite dark color. He encourages the bravery of the people who will beat me, pull off my veil, kill me and burn me" (Pari, 2015).

Elay also pointed to the role that mullahs and elders play in engendering violence against women, noting that such violence is made for public consumption:

> "Only a few minutes before, I was counting the blessings of Afghanistan; now I was watching a story out of Kunduz, where the mullahs and elders had punished three young girls. One girl was beaten in public with a whip for running away

> from her home. The beating had been televised. Two other young women were stoned for adultery. As I watched, my head was exploding in anger. This is not human rights" (Elay, 2010).

Roya suggested violence is learned by girls and boys at an early age in Afghanistan:

> "At the exit gate at the end of Bagh-e Bala road, there were tents belonging to the nomadic Kochis. The children were playing a funny game. More than twelve kids were standing and there was a small girl in front of them, maybe five years old. All the boys had their shoes and sandals in their hands, and one of them commanded 'O za, O za!' Then all the boys ran to the girl and start throwing shoes at her. The boys were happy but the girl seemed even happier. Although the boys were throwing the shoes at her, she didn't look like she was hurt. She looked satisfied, with naughty eyes. It was a new game for me but it taught many things. First, I praised the little girl for daring to play with boys. But second, I wondered, why did the boys throw shoes at her? Do women deserve this? Third, I was sad that there were no toys, no playground. Instead, these children were learning from their parents to beat, insult, and do violence" (Roya, 2010).

***Theme 7: Verbal and non-verbal forms of violence.*** Numerous authors addressed verbal and non-verbal forms of violence against women. Kamilah described how violence is psychological in nature and routinely manifests as insults intended to humiliate and undermine women:

> "In my society women are humiliated in various ways, but one insult you hear often is the phrase seyah-sar. In English it means black head. It is mostly men who use this phrase when they want to pretend women are feeble-minded and don't have the same value as men. It's an old phrase and it makes women feel humiliated" (Kamilah, 2012).

Tamana M. further described the psychological violence women endure:

> "Verbal violence includes the use of ugly words, accusations, repeatedly insulting the wife by saying, 'You are ugly,' or 'I hate your clothes,' or 'I didn't want to marry you, but my family chose you for me,' and other hateful words" (Tamana M., 2013).

An Anonymous writer described how her travel to the United States compounded her experiences of psychological abuse:

> "My travel to the U.S. was another fault added to my black faith. I couldn't defend myself before my in-laws because they thought whatever I said, I

> addressed from the viewpoint of American culture. As I talked, I was censored. I was told to shut up, that I was an Afghan girl" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Grave for My Dreams").

***Theme 8: Sexual violence and harassment in public spaces.*** According to AWWP authors, women not only live in fear of sexual violence, but they are further victimized by a cultural belief that women bear the responsibility for being sexually assaulted. Shekiba described her fear of sexual violence as such:

> "Being a woman in this kind of society is frightening. Some years ago when I was a computer teacher my classes would finish in the evening. I was often frightened that I would be kidnapped or raped while walking home at night. I left my job for that reason" (Shekiba, 2015).

Mahnaz highlighted the relationship between threats of sexual violence and sexual harassment in Afghanistan, noting their mutual grounding in oppressive cultural and religious beliefs:

> "After the fall of the Taliban, Afghan women gained new opportunities to participate in the society. As their freedom and visibility grew, men became more violent. They began to push back by oppressing women even more. Women's growing freedom is seen as a threat to their patriarchal sovereignty. They have constructed new ways to limit the role of women. When I was growing up in Afghanistan, I was taught that men could not be expected to control their powerful sex drives. Cultural and religious beliefs and traditions were used as a tool to suppress women's sexuality. Women were blamed for everything from arousing men with their hair or dress color to provoking rape. Men took advantage of these beliefs to harass women in the streets and accuse them of immodesty. The culture of street harassment became common" (Mahnaz, 2012, "Women Are Not Like Honey").

Furthermore, AWWP authors suggested sexual harassment occurs regularly, if not daily. Raha and Jamila Q. stated, respectively:

> "Street harassment is a big challenge all around Afghanistan. Women in Kabul, after years of war and Taliban rule, are increasingly out in public life now, facing the challenges of street harassment and sexual harassment, catcalls, verbal abuse. If they talk back, they are stigmatized as bad women, yet if they stay silent, it will just continue" (Raha, 2015).

> "In our homeland there is a lot of violence against women. When a woman walks in the street or bazaar men laugh at her and harass her with their eyes. Women must wear clothing to hide from men. They cannot wear the clothes they want. This is a type of violence that women and girls face every day in Afghanistan" (Jamila Q., 2013).

***Theme 9: Culturally defined notions of "a good girl."*** AWWP authors frequently discussed how culturally prescribed notions of "a good girl" exerted significant pressures on Afghan women. Authors generally agreed that to conform to these specific ideals of womanhood would effectively suppress a woman's development of her unique sense of self and her self-expression. Nahida articulated what it means to be "a good girl" in Afghanistan:

> "In Afghanistan, according to social tradition, I have not been a good girl. I was supposed to wear a headscarf when I was nine, but I did not wear it until I was thirteen. I wanted to change the way people think about girls in my society. In Afghanistan, a girl is a good girl when she wears a big, long dress and a huge scarf, sits at home, doesn't talk much, and accepts what her family says. They tell her when something is good or bad for her.
>
> A good girl is one who doesn't ask for her rights, doesn't ask for her inheritance, serves her brothers as her bosses, cooks well, and doesn't have her own name but is called by her brother's or father's name. She always prays five times a day and reads the Quran instead of going to school. She doesn't choose her husband or her future and keeps her father proud by doing all these things. When she marries she sacrifices herself. Age does not matter. Even if she is twelve she is now a woman. She lives in her husband's house with her mother-in-law and father-in-law and she doesn't go to her father's house too much. She gives birth to a boy, not a girl, and quietly tolerates whatever is being done to her.
>
> People have a saying in Afghanistan about a good girl when she gets married. 'The good girl is the one who goes to her husband's house with a white dress and comes out with a white shroud'" (Nahida, 2014).

Sabira added:

> "Women in Afghanistan usually don't have smiles on their faces. They are taught not to laugh; they are told laughing is not right for women. Society says you are not a good woman if you laugh loudly or even smile. You will bring disrespect onto your family, your father and brothers. Society will not respect your father

> because people will say of him, 'you cannot control your wife or daughter'" (Sabira, 2011).

Zahra A. described how pressures to be "a good girl" varied based on context:

> "I grew up in a family where I was treated the same as my brothers, and sometimes even better. My dad, my hero, always wanted the best things for my siblings and me. But we lived in the north, in Kunduz, in a society that did not accept me. It was hard for me to be a good Afghan girl. I couldn't follow the rules, such as wearing a burqa, staying home and doing housework, or skipping school because of a party or guests. In the family I was encouraged to be outspoken, but not in public" (Zahra A., 2013).

***Theme 10: Gossip.*** Authors identified gossip among community members as a common social mechanism that enforces oppressive cultural norms for women. Rahela described how threats of judgment and gossip within her community influenced her behavior:

> "In Afghanistan you cannot speak, laugh, or even smile with men. You cannot have eye contact with them. We could not go out with our brothers because the people would think wrong things about us. The people would say that this girl has relationships with boys: they would never think that maybe the man is a brother or father. I remember when I went out with my brother, I walked behind him" (Rahela, 2010).

An Anonymous author described withholding information about her past in order to avoid community gossip and ridicule:

> "In my class, nobody knows about my past. I have told them nothing because it is Afghanistan and if they knew what happened, they would not respect me. If they knew, I would have to suffer as I did in my home province, where they called me 'the divorced woman'" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Pretty Toy").

Marzia underscored the seriousness of the threat posed by community gossip:

> "My sister's colleague left her job and her entire family had to move so the neighbors would not look down on them because their daughter had a boyfriend. When I saw my sister's colleague in 2010 she told me that she married the man…In Afghan society, if one woman wants to hurt another woman, she will gossip that the woman had an affair with a man other than her husband. Hurtful scandals like this sometimes lead to suicide" (Marzia, 2012).

**Domain C: Oppression Is Enacted through Political Means**

AWWP writers consistently located threats to women within social and legal policies/laws, governmental and tribal courts, and institutions. Authors also described various forms of threat associated with women's political involvement. Domain C encompasses themes that address oppression enacted in political contexts and through political means.

***Theme 11: Systemic disenfranchisement of women.*** Authors described numerous ways in which oppression is institutionalized in Afghanistan. Lima described how bureaucratic practices are misaligned with constitutional rights granted to women in Afghanistan:

> "There is a very famous saying about Afghans about how before they introduce themselves they say: 'I am proud, I am Afghan.' But my question is can I even say that I am Afghan? You might wonder why not. It is because I am a woman and an Afghan woman is not considered Afghan because she does not have a right to an Afghan identity. My evidence: I was denied my Afghan passport until I presented proof that my father or husband have been allowed to get a passport … Day by day, the rules and bad behavior of government bureaucrats are dehumanizing women in this country. Lack of education and the Afghan version of Islam are used as weapons to keep women down. A 28-year-old woman is asked to bring her father, brother, or husband to verify her identity and then her father or husband has to sign that she is traveling with their permission with this passport? I did not believe this" (Lima, 2014).

Shekiba noted how tribal courts disenfranchise women:

> "In remote areas of the country the men in power conduct courts that have no legal basis and credibility and punish people, especially women, for small 'crimes.' They do not follow the constitution of Afghanistan, and they use brutal and inhumane punishments like death by stoning. These men who run these religious 'courts' need to be punished publicly and women's organizations must work hard to defend women" (Shekiba, 2015).

Mahnaz suggested systemic political oppression is rooted in religion:

> "The Afghan system invisibly, but effectively, justifies the oppression of women in the name of Islam. Many of the rules that currently apply to Afghan women

> originated from the holy Quran and various *hadiths*, or sayings, by the Prophet Mohammad. But men have translated almost all the editions of the Quran as well as all the *hadiths*, interpreting them in favor of men. These translations are very important. They form the basis of Afghan laws. For example, the following translations of *hadiths* and the holy Quran have become law:
>
> - Polygamy is a right for men.
> - A virgin girl must have her father's consent to marry.
> - Women inherit half of what men inherit.
> - Two female witnesses are the equivalent of one male witness.
> - Men get custody of the children after divorce, once the children reach the age of seven.
>
> New *hadiths* get generated through interpretation. For example: the holy Quran says a woman should be modest and then mullahs interpret modesty in different ways by quoting something close to the Prophet's sayings to justify their own interpretation. In recent years, *hadiths* have been a tool for men to justify their oppression of women" (Mahnaz, 2012, "Afghan Feminist Thought, Part 3").

***Theme 12: Inequitable treatment.*** Authors detailed pervasive inequities in societal and institutionalized standards as they apply to Afghan women and men. Descriptions of inequitable treatment frequently relate to accusations of adultery and fleeing one's home. Elay discussed the former:

> "Indeed, according to Islam, adultery (*gunahe kabira*) is the biggest sin. But let's make it clear. The girls can't commit those crimes on their own. There must be a man so that we can have the adultery case completed. Where were those men? If you want to punish a girl for adultery, then according to Islam, you have to punish the woman and the man—not just the woman" (Elay, 2010).

Masouma H. highlighted the recurrent incongruity between Afghan law and cultural practice specific to the treatment of women:

> "[United Nations Mandate in Afghanistan] encountered many instances of girls and women who fled their homes to avoid forced marriage or domestic violence, only to be arrested and usually charged and convicted of 'intent to commit *zina*.' This is commonly referred to as a 'moral crime.' But 'running away' and 'home escape' are not crimes under Afghan law or under Sharia law. Even so, law enforcement authorities often arrest and prosecute girls for these moral crimes" (Masouma H., 2013).

Marvah discussed additional inequalities—including revictimization and assault—women

encounter in the Afghan judicial system:

> "In the Afghan judicial system, women and girls accused of 'moral crimes' are ordered to have vaginal tests. These moral crimes often involve women who attempt to report rapes to police, but are then arrested for adultery and women who flee forced marriages and are then jailed for running away from home. Women who are found not to have engaged in adultery are jailed for a crime called 'attempted zina,' which is another term for adultery.
>
> Our courts rely on this test to determine virginity and decide whether a woman has had recent sexual intercourse. The exam is called the Two Finger Test because doctors probe the vagina with two fingers to examine whether the hymen is present. They also try to decide if the vagina is 'lax,' which they say shows that the woman routinely has sex. If the doctor says it is lax, the court assumes she has engaged in intercourse and so she is to be punished … Sometimes even when the vaginal test result is negative, the woman is still subjected to multiple exams. Sometimes even after these exams continue to prove her to be a virgin, she is still accused of the crime called 'attempted zina,' meaning that she was about to have intercourse…Ordering women to undergo vaginal examinations without their informed consent is not only cruel but is a violation of basic human rights and is a form of sexual assault. These exams unfairly affect the court's decision and cause psychological and physical trauma for women" (Marvah, 2015).

***Theme 13: Institutional failures.*** Authors discussed institutional failures—including corruption, a lack of justice, and a failure to protect women—as ingrained forms of threat to women. Yalda N. addressed the intersection of these institutional failures:

> "Every day, we hear of violence committed against women and girls in Afghanistan, but we rarely hear of any punishment for those who commit it. Even when the offenders are jailed, they can be released after only a few days. They pay the police to release them. In Persian it is called *rishwat* and in English it is called a fine. I sometimes wonder how long it is going to continue. Why can't it be stopped?" (Yalda N., 2012)

An author writing anonymously intimated her hopelessness in the face of injustice:

> "Thanks for your efforts but I'm not planning to get a divorce anymore. I don't know what I'm doing, but I can't risk anyone's life. If I go to court, my husband's uncle is a warlord and he will decide my fate. If I escape and go to Kabul, I will have to live my entire life in a safe house where it is like jail. And besides that, then he will go after my new family and he will find them one day just like he found me, and I can't even think of what he will do. I can't ask them

> to live the rest of their lives in a safe house and destroy their lives" (Anonymous, 2015).

Nasima also addressed institutional failure:

> "I am very concerned about our government. Our government in Afghanistan is corrupt. Everyone is concerned about their name and position, so justice is lost in their talk and words. There is no justice. We never see any articles in Afghanistan papers about justice and we never see laws being passed regarding justice for women. This is a concern for all people in Afghanistan. Innocent people are being punished instead of the criminals. Afghan police and authorities use their power against the poor instead of against these criminals with their power and influence. There are so many unaccountable and corrupt people involved in our judicial system that there is no place in Afghanistan that offers justice" (Nasima, 2015).

Masooda R., along with many other AWWP authors, expressed concern about the grievous injustices demonstrated in the mob killing of Farkhunda and the subsequent trials of her murderers:

> "Farkhunda was sacrificed because of people's ignorance. A crowd of Afghans, a mob that included our own Kabul police, the ones who are supposed to protect us, burned her. So of course we want justice. Not only for her, but for ourselves. We all want justice, but who is able to give us justice? Who has the power to stand up against such oppressive violence in our society? I cannot say on my own that our justice system and the courts that tried 49 people for Farkhunda's death were corrupt, but we all saw the videotapes showing the killers carrying out the attack in March. We can't clarify what happened behind the closed doors of the court, but we know there are some people who do not let justice proceed honestly…I don't believe now that Farkhunda's real killers will pay for their actions.
> They should be hanged. It would not help Farkhunda, but it would be a warning to others that we will not tolerate this level of oppressive violence against women. Unfortunately, it is now clear that this will never happen because some of the killers have powerful people behind them. The people who judged the case on the high court are in some ways like those who killed Farkhunda. If they were to punish all of the criminals, then their own faces and secrets would come out and they would lose their high posts, their money and freedom. So they punish some, and let others go" (Masooda R., 2015, "Do We Care Enough").

***Theme 14: Threats to political participation.*** According to AWWP authors, threats to women's political involvement in Afghanistan takes numerous forms. Zakia H.

described how parliamentary actions could effectively reduce women's engagement in the political process:

> "But while the old election laws set aside 25 percent of the seats for women, a few months ago the parliament lowered the quota to 20 percent. Despite many protests by women's rights activists and human rights organizations, parliament changed the quota, saying women needed to compete more equally and 25 percent does not represent the actual active participation in society of women. In Bamiyan, this could mean that only two women will be in the next provincial council instead of three, and it could discourage women from participating in elections in the future" (Zakia H., 2014).

Arifa H. described how involvement in politics may be life-threatening for female politicians in Afghanistan:

> "Several days ago while at work, my colleagues and I heard an explosion near our office. We immediately wondered how many people were killed or injured. And soon enough we learned that a suicide bomber had tried to kill Shukria Barakzai, one of 69 female members of parliament, who was a former journalist and at one time ran a secret school for girls. She received only minor injuries, but three other people were killed, including a young girl. And more were injured, among them Ms. Barakzai's driver" (Arifa H., 2014).

Fariba described risks—both real and perceived—associated with Afghan women's efforts to participate in voting:

> "I learned about women's rights, how to vote, and how to decide whom to vote for. Because of this training, I put my life at risk and voted in two elections, even though there was a rumor that if a woman voted the Taliban would cut off her colored finger. It was frightening and a big decision because sometimes a rumor can become the reality. I went with my brother and my sister-in-law to the elections and I was proud to cast my vote for the person I wanted" (Fariba, 2011, "My Busy Year").

Aysha also discussed how voting brings with it numerous threats to women's autonomy:

> "But there are still places in Afghanistan where women get treated like animals. They can't do anything by their choice. They live like the walking dead. But these women are able to vote and they want to vote. As far as I know, the voting system has become very complicated in the provinces like Kandahar, Helmand, Nooristan, and others. Most of the women get a voting card, but they don't vote for the person they want. Their husbands or other male family members order the women whom to vote for. Such an order must be accepted or

else it will cost them so much" (Aysha, 2014, "Change Starts Here").

**Domain D: Economic Forms of Threat**

Prominently featured among the nonfiction narratives are descriptions of threats to women's educational and occupational pursuits, as well as restrictions on women's access to financial means and healthcare services. Domain D comprises themes detailing these forms of economic violence.

***Theme 15: Employment-related violence and threat.*** Authors frequently discussed threats associated with women pursuing their occupational aspirations, both in the form of direct violence and work place harassment. A group of AWWP authors in Kandahar collectively wrote about the life and death of Malalai Kakar, the first female police officer in Kandahar:

> "Kakar was a woman who worked 15 hours a day, but she would have worked 24 hours a day for her people if she could have. After the collapse of the Taliban, she returned to her job. She was the only policewoman in Kandahar who worked in general security. She had responsibility as the head of the department's Crimes Against Women. She helped manage the women's prison and she became known as someone who listened to the problems of women in Kandahar. She was well known to the media when, in 2008 at the age of 40, gunmen on a motorcycle shot her in the head as she headed to work. One of her sons was with her on the motorcycle and was seriously injured. Taliban took credit for the attack. The police chief of Kandahar said at the time that she had previously received death threats. Her killing was widely condemned and today the legacy of Malalai Kakar lives on and she is known as the first Policewoman of Kandahar" (Kandahar Writers' Group, 2015).

Asma discussed threats to female journalists in Afghanistan:

> "Each year in Afghanistan we lose our talented and young journalists. This is the overt reality; journalists choose this career and they accept the risk. But in 2014 reporters have been the targets of the Taliban and other opponents of elections, democracy, freedom of speech, and women's rights. They don't want Afghan people to know they have rights and freedoms. The Taliban knows the government is unable to find the killers and arrest them. For example, police reported in September 2014 how the Taliban lured a young radio journalist, Palwasha Tokhi, from her home in Mazar-i-Sharif and killed her—because she

> was a female journalist. The Taliban opposes women's freedoms and doesn't want women to appear in public. She was stabbed to death and no one has been punished for her death" (Asma, 2014, "No Arrests Made").

Seeta noted:

> "Ghōr has ten districts, with its capital in Chaghcharan. People in Ghōr love guests and are very hopeful for their future, but with Taliban controlling the area, women like me cannot work there. To do so would mean losing our lives" (Seeta, 2011, "In Ghor").

An Anonymous author described her persistent employment-related harassment:

> "Today I want to take a few minutes to write about what these 'fortunate' Afghan women are going through to earn and feed their families. I work for an international NGO where my position is critical. It is crucial because I supervise Afghan male colleagues who are older than I am and for reasons of their own egos, don't like having a woman as boss. It doesn't suit the dignity and pride of being an Afghan man and it makes them impatient and angry so that they constantly spread gossip and make judgments about me or my personality. Listening to them, you would think I was having endless sexual relationships … Someone told me, "File a complaint." I tried that. I made many complaints, but my superiors don't understand how poisonous this gossip-filled work environment can be. It's a bitter fact that they think these men are needed to implement the program even if they are perverts. They can't just fire them, so instead they tell me to be more patient and be silent. I have been patient for months. But how can I spend all my days being humiliated at work" (Anonymous, 2016).

***Theme 16: Violence, threats, and denial of access to education.*** Many AWWP authors discussed the violence, threats, and obstacles Afghan girls and women encounter related to their efforts to pursue an education. Zahra W. discussed how deadly it can be for girls to pursue an education:

> "In ten days during September 2015 more than four hundred Afghan schoolgirls in six incidents became ill from toxic gas poisonings at their schools. Why? Because in Afghanistan some uneducated people have no respect for women and believe that education is not necessary for girls. They think it's okay to educate boys because they will have to work to earn money, but they think the only role for girls is to marry and have babies."
>
> "These people are so enraged about girls that they will do anything to deter parents from sending their daughters to school. But this kind of thinking is against

> Islam and our Holy Quran, which states: 'Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman.' In recent years, gas poisoning incidents have been reported in girls' schools in many provinces including Kabul, Takhar, Kunduz, Kapisa, Ghazni, Bamiyan, and others, but there were never any conclusive investigations into who was behind them" (Zahra W., 2015).

Mahbooba described the threat posed by the Taliban, even when girls attempted to learn covertly:

> "In Afghanistan during the Taliban time girls couldn't go to school, but I had a teacher who was very kind and she taught us lessons in a dark room where we hid from the Taliban. She always said to us, 'This country needs help. If the women cannot help, the men cannot succeed either.' She had a wish that the country would allow all Afghan girls to study. But one night Taliban came to her house and killed her" (Mahbooba, 2012).

Pari described how the Taliban's mandate that women and girls remain inside the home, with little hope or ability to attend school, threatened her sense of well-being:

> "I was a teenager in the summer in 1998. It was during the Taliban time and it was the most difficult days of my life. I was no longer allowed to go to school and it was not easy to cope with staying at home. Sometimes there would be a knock on the door and we would receive an invitation card. One was for my dear classmate Noria's wedding. One by one, most of my classmates were having arranged marriages. It was very hard for me to accept that I would not see my friends at school again. The desire to go to school was burning at my heart and soul. I thought about it all the time, counting seconds, minutes, hours and days and nights. Thinking did not change anything; I was in a prison without having committed a crime. The four walls of the house were killing me and even when I went outside I wore the burqa with heaviness as if the world was a burden on my shoulders" (Pari, 2016, "Behind the Curtains").

Aida S. added:

> "A girl has so many problems in Afghan society and so little freedom that sometimes I think it is as if they are living in cages. Many girls are not allowed to go to school and if they try and get an education, people harass them" (Aida S., 2015).

***Theme 17: Inequitable inheritance of money and property.*** Authors identified cultural values and practices related to the inequitable inheritance of money and property as a form of oppression regularly experienced by Afghan women. Though Marzila noted

the distribution of her husband's family's inheritance was equitable among his female and male siblings, Marzila noted this is not a typical outcome in Afghanistan:

> "Unfortunately, in my country, the Islamic rule is broadly interpreted like so many other aspects of life. Our males provide the marriage gift on a piece of paper, which always remains in writing. Anything left by the parents and nearest relative is left to male heirs. There is no share for females—not because of Islamic rule, but based on our cultural values. Although we are Muslim, we always follow and respect our cultural values first. In very few cases, male members ask their female relatives to take part in dividing up the inheritance as a formality, but in the end, the female members usually say, 'We dedicate what is meant for us to our brothers or any male member.' If a woman dares to get her share, the male members of the family do not like her anymore and she seems to be against Afghan culture" (Marzila, 2013).

Arezu R. and Emaan each provided examples of ways in which women are deprived of property rights stating, respectively:

> "Today, forty years old, [Golsom] lives in small village in Bamiyan and works hard as a farmer. But she still cannot participate in society because of her malformation. Maybe if she were a man, she could sell her field and have cosmetic surgery. But Golsom does not own the land she works because in Afghanistan, most women are deprived of property rights" (Arezu R., 2016).

> "I have been in Kabul since 2002. Before, I lived in Farah Province with my uncle. I used to go to school there and our family was supported financially by our uncle. We inherited some properties from our father, but after his death, my uncle became the owner while we received only a stipend from him" (Emaan, 2010).

***Theme 18: Inadequate access to healthcare.*** A number of authors discussed mechanisms by which an intersection of oppressive beliefs related to restricting women's pursuit of education and demanding gender-based separation resulted in inadequate access to healthcare for women. Shahida and Sitara conveyed similar accounts stating, respectively:

> "Although everyone can go to a doctor, many people believe that women should not see a male doctor. Since Afghanistan doesn't have many female doctors, many women don't get treatment" (Shahida, 2014).

> "Afghan men will prevent women from studying, and then turn around and insist

> that their wives can only be examined by a female doctor. As a result, women die because there are not enough educated women doctors" (Sitara, 2015).

**Domain E: Family Systems as Sites of Threat**

AWWP authors cited family systems as a primary source of threat to Afghan women. Domain E comprises themes detailing ways in which women are oppressed within familial contexts.

***Theme 19: Forced marriage.*** Authors consistently described longstanding traditions of forced and/or early marriage as dehumanizing. Authors pointed to the primary role of Afghan families in coercing women and girls into marriage. AWWP author N. discussed factors that contribute to forced and early marriage in Afghanistan:

> "There are many examples of early marriages where it is hard to know who in the wedding party is the mother-in-law and who is the sister-in-law because they are almost the same age. These families also misunderstand education for girls. They think if a girl leaves the house, she will learn too much about life and be considered a 'cheap' woman. They think the only important destiny for a girl is marriage. The girls accept early marriage because it is tradition. I wish my pen could draw the feelings of those broken hearts of Afghan girls who are victims of forced marriages. They come from wrong beliefs about our religion, a lack of law enforcement, and the fact that the girls don't know their rights" (N., 2013).

Norwan added:

> "In Afghanistan most of the marriages are arranged and forced. Families decide, and girls are like sculptures, bodies without soul. This is true. They can't decide their future and can't stand up to the mad traditions and wild decisions of their families. Of course forced marriages are never successful and then the families say to the girl that it is your destiny and God gave you this kind of life. They say you must accept it and face it while you are alive and God will reward you in the other world" (Norwan, 2012).

Many authors specifically discussed Afghan families selling or trading girls and women for money or property in the context of forced or early marriage. Leeda told the story of Shafiqa's sale for the purpose of marriage:

> "Her father had also died before she was born and her brothers wanted to engage

> Shafiqa to marry when she was a baby. Her mother delayed marriage until she turned thirteen. About the time she came of age, a forty-three-year-old man named Sakhi was looking for a new young wife and he spoke to her brothers about Shafiqa. He already had a wife and ten children. I have seen him when I go to her neighborhood and visit with Shafiqa. He is very old, with all the children and an angry wife. A lot of times men in Afghanistan marry a second wife because they don't have sons, but this man has sons and wanted a new young wife to show off his wealth. When the brothers heard he was looking for a new young wife, they happily told him how they had a sister and they were ready to give her to him, but they needed to get a lot of money for the marriage. Sakhi was pleased and sent his sister to the house. The brothers engaged Shafiqa to the old man for $20,000. It is more money than is usually paid, but the brothers took the money happily and saved nothing for their young sister" (Leeda, 2015).

An Anonymous author described her own experience of being sold by family for the purpose of marriage, stating:

> "The next day, several relatives arrived at our house. I was not aware at first of what was going on, but then I understand they were at my home to buy me. I was such a pretty toy, a pretty toy to play with. The family that was proposing the marriage was discussing my cost with my father. At that time, I did not know I had any right to say I was not for sale. Finally, they sold me for 6,000 US dollars. This is when my life problems started" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Pretty Toy").

***Theme 20: Family honor.*** According to numerous authors, women experience wide-ranging forms of oppression in the name of upholding "family honor" in Afghanistan. Sofia described making great sacrifices for her family, as well as her tribe's honor:

> "The mullah was called to tie our nikah, our marriage ceremony. Everyone stared at me when the mullah asked if I accepted Wali Khan as my husband. I wanted to reject him; I wanted to say no but I couldn't. My mother cried. 'My sweetheart, I know you are forced to marry Wali Khan but you have to accept him, if only for the sake of your father and family honor.' I was very lonely and there was no one to protect me or support my decision, not even my mother. I had to sacrifice my desires and dreams for the happiness of my family and tribal honor" (Sofia, 2010).

Marzia described the occurrence of honor killings in Afghanistan:

> "The culture of honor killing in Afghanistan has existed for hundreds of years and is still happening regularly today … A young woman from my high school was stabbed and killed by her brothers because she ran away with one of her brother's

> friends. The girl's family did not want her to marry the boy because he was from another city and a different ethnic group. While looking for their sister, the brothers became suspicious of the friend. They beat him until he told them that he had taken their sister to his aunt's home and was planning to bring her to his city and marry her. When her brothers heard this, they stabbed their sister more than twenty times. One of the brothers was arrested by police, but the police also arrested the man who fell in love with the girl. The brothers said they would kill him when he got out of the jail" (Marzia, 2015).

Marvah noted the relationship between a woman's virginity and her family's honor, stating:

> "Virginity is seen as a symbol of a woman's purity in Afghanistan. It represents the 'honor' of a woman. Women are the 'boundary markers of honor and shame' for the family in Afghanistan" (Marvah, 2015).

***Theme 21: Domestic violence.*** Authors regularly discussed the perpetration of violence—in many forms—against Afghan women by their husbands. Sara reported observing a woman being cruelly "punished" by her husband:

> "I stared at Nafisa and thought she was forced to do what she was doing, but since other neighbors showed no reaction to the scene, I wasn't sure. I guessed Nafisa was washing her hair in the bucket. When I asked my friend what Nafisa was doing, she explained that as a punishment her husband forced her to drink the water after washing his dirty clothes" (Sara, 2012).

Humaira recounted the story of Jamila, whose giving birth to baby girls precipitated Jamila's husband's physical violence:

> "After some months, she gave birth to a child. The baby was a girl and Hamed began beating her again. He kicked her out of the home, saying to her, 'Why did you give birth to a girl? Why is she a girl?' Although he kicked her out, she returned home and became pregnant for a second time. Her second child was also a girl. When Hamed saw the new baby girl, he tried to kill his wife with a knife, but he missed. He threw the knife towards her and it hit the wall. The beatings increased every day. She became pregnant again and her third child was also a girl. Hamed left his wife and the children in the house, tried to poison them with insecticides, locked them in the house, and went to work. Jamila survived this incident as well, but each day her life became worse" (Humaira, 2015).

Forced drug abuse was noted as another form of domestic violence, which was endured

by a distressed woman in Storay K.'s narrative:

> "I agreed to listen and while the tears were falling from her face, this woman told me how she had married a man eight years ago and had two daughters. 'From the first days, I was beaten by my husband and he forced me to smoke heroin,' she told me. 'If I refused to smoke, he made me do it anyway. Once he gave me an electric shock to force me to smoke.' She cried while telling me this story. She said she had suffered other violence as well, but she left her husband's house two months ago and now she is living with her parents. She came to the Women's Affairs office because she wanted a divorce" (Storay K., 2013).

***Theme 22: Family violence.*** AWWP authors also described the perpetration of violence and maltreatment of women within broader family systems. An Anonymous author spoke of this, generally:

> "After my father died, the responsibility for me fell to my brothers, who grew up under the Taliban government and were influenced by it. Now I live with three Talibs and I must obey what they say. I am not like a girl in the house, but a slave" (Anonymous, 2010, "I Am For Sale").

Seeta described numerous forms of violence stemming from a woman's extended family:

> "At the Department of Women's Affairs, I was meeting with the director when someone knocked on the door. A young woman with a baby girl entered, wearing warm clothes despite the summer heat. One of her hands was injured. She had no medication and was using her other hand to care for her daughter. She sat and shared her story. 'I have a seven-year-old son,' she said. 'He threw a stone into my brother-in-law's house, and my brother-in-law got very angry and beat me. 'Why did your child do this? It's your fault,' he yelled at me. He broke my hand and would not let me go to the hospital. I used my scarf to protect my hand from pain, but it gets more painful each day. I asked my father to bring me somewhere to help me, so he brought me here.'
>
> The department sent her to a hospital and provided a letter to police asking them to arrest her brother-in-law. It pains me that today an Afghan woman has to care for her baby under these conditions, with one injured hand and no one to help her. She must have been doing the cooking and washing clothes as well. With the violence that has become common in uneducated families, it does not matter if a woman is sick. If an ill woman wants to rest, her in-laws will call her lazy and suggest to their son that he marry again. They will beat her until she gets up to work" (Seeta, 2011, "In Ghor").

Arifa's recounting of another woman's story highlighted ways that sexual violence may

be carried out in familial contexts. The woman described her experience to Arifa:

> "'When I was 15, my family forced me to marry a 34-year-old man and when I refused, they locked me in a room with him for a whole day. He raped me and beat me; I screamed and wanted help, but it seemed like the entire world was dead; nobody came to help me. When they opened the door, the man left and then my auntie came and told me that if I accepted the wedding these things may not happen to me anymore. After that, I accepted the wedding. It has been 15 years and I am living with my husband in Zabul province'" (Arifa, 2015, "She Cries in Her Heart").

**Domain F: Oppression Becomes Internalized**

AWWP authors identified ways in which the pervasive oppression of women in Afghanistan becomes internalized by some Afghan girls and women and subsequently perpetrated against other women. Domain F comprises two themes related to this intrapsychic dimension of oppression.

***Theme 23: Internalized oppression.*** Authors offered insight into some women's internalization of repressive familial and cultural ideologies in Afghanistan by articulating oppressive things women say to themselves about themselves. Basira described how her efforts to help a woman experiencing ongoing domestic violence were subverted as a result of internalized oppression:

> "In Kabul, there is a woman from the Ghazni province named Sharefa. She was forced to drink the water she used for washing clothes. She was not allowed to meet anyone. When my friends and I heard about this we decided to make a plan to meet her. Finally we succeeded. When we met her last year we told her that we could help her to get out of that situation. Sharefa told us, 'I do not want it because I am a woman and it is a shame for me to complain about my husband and his family'" (Basira, 2013).

Pari described the intergenerational transmission of internal dimensions of oppression, explaining how her mother thought she was doing the "right thing" by effectively teaching Pari to hate herself:

> "I can't forget my teenage years when Mom was so afraid when she saw I was

> growing. Every month when I had my period all I wanted was a place to hide from my mom. But the pain and the acne on my face told her everything. I was beaten when she realized I had my first period. These were the most difficult days of my life because I didn't know how to escape from the eyes of Mom or how to stand up against the natural rules. I looked at the sky and asked God, why did you create me a woman? She taught me to hate myself as a human and as a woman. Despite it all, I can't say I don't love my mother. I do love her very much. I know that she is not the only one who grew up to be this way, and she learned these methods from her parents. My mother thought this was the way she could bring up a good child. In this way she thought she was the best mother of the world!" (Pari, 2016, "What is a Good Mother?).

***Theme 24: Lateral violence.*** AWWP authors also described how some Afghan women, experiencing marginalization and an inability to reduce their own experiences of oppression, inflicted violence against other women. Marzia N. discussed lateral violence within the home:

> "Let's ask ourselves: Is it men to be blamed for violating the equality of our rights? Let's trace violence back to its starting point: In a typical religious Afghan family, violence begins with one woman against another woman. The process starts among women: a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law or when polygamist wives fight against each other. Then a man gets involved to finish the argument, and the result is often the life of a woman" (Marzia N., 2014).

Discussing Maryam and her mother-in-law, Gullafroz further described how lateral violence develops within this specific relationship dyad within the family:

> "Her future husband had promised to let her go to school and get an education. But the situation came out differently after the marriage. Her mother-in-law didn't let Maryam go to school. Maryam became a slave for her in-laws. Her other friends and I were no longer allowed by her in-laws to meet her on the weekends. While Maryam's husband was away, her mother-in-law used to treat Maryam like an animal. Maryam was tortured almost to death in front of the neighbors. Nobody objected or said anything against Maryam's mother-in-law" (Gullafroz, 2013).

Shafiqa described that even while having empathy for Zarin, Zarin's aunt participated in her niece's oppression:

> "Her aunt looks quietly at Zarin's tears, thinking how she already knows all this, and how women are powerless in her society, like a piece of material. She knows the desires of women have no place here. They have no right to dream or decide

> their own lives. Despite this, she wants to condemn Zarin and make her go home" (Shafiqa, 2011, "The Marriage Court").

**Domain G: Threats Exist within the Broader Environment Due to Socioeconomic and Sociopolitical Factors**

Most AWWP author narratives addressed, in some capacity, threats to women that exist within the broader Afghan landscape as a result of socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors, including poverty, illiteracy, war, the Taliban, and terrorism. Domain G encompasses themes that address these broad sources of enduring threat to Afghan women.

***Theme 25: Pervasive poverty.*** Authors consistently described poverty in Afghanistan as a source and symptom of persistent violence and threat. Paana discussed poverty in Afghanistan:

> "Half of our population is still struggling to meet their survival needs such as food, clothing, and shelter with security. Half of our people go to bed half hungry or on empty stomachs. We don't desire luxury, Lamborghini cars, diamond rings, silk dresses, name-brand leather shoes, or smart technological houses or facilities. We just want a life with peace, and for small pleasures not to be stolen from us" (Paana, 2015).

Meena Z. discussed the how war, poverty, and external dislocation intersect:

> "I was three years old when I started to become familiar with the world around me. The life I found myself living under was one of bombs, rockets, and bullets. Unwanted war brought the darkest moments to our lives, clothed everywhere with blood, danger, fear and was a huge interruption for the continuation of a new generation's education and several other aspects of their lives. As days passed, our poverty increased and our security situation worsened. This depressing situation forced us to leave our beloved country and emigrate as refugees to neighboring lands" (Meena Z., 2010).

Tamana M. and Sharifa each addressed how poverty increases the risk of harm to women in Afghanistan, writing, respectively:

> "In Afghanistan, a patriarchal culture where men rule according to the old

> traditions would be a sufficient cause of violence on its own, but poverty adds to the problem" (Tamana M., 2013).
>
> "Girls become tools. In Afghanistan, because of poverty, people do not have enough food to eat so they sell their daughters. They don't think about her future. In some provinces, men will sell a daughter or a sister for less than the price of a dog" (Sharifa, 2014).

***Theme 26: Illiteracy and lack of education.*** Numerous authors identified illiteracy and a broader lack of education as threats to the functioning of Afghan society, and to women, specifically. Hila G. discussed illiteracy as fundamentally immobilizing women's progress:

> "The illiteracy of women has paralyzed half of Afghan society. Without education, women cannot take part in political, economic, and social activities that contribute to building the country. It is impossible to make real improvements with only half of a society. One cannot clap with a single hand. Men cannot build the country without women working shoulder to shoulder. Men cannot bring positive changes without the support of women. The failure to educate women has been one of the biggest problems resulting from thirty-five years of war in Afghanistan. For example, today, nine out of ten women are illiterate; only forty percent of girls attend school, and only five percent continue school after sixth grade. War caused many problems for girls, but the worst of it came during the Taliban: girls were viewed as servants, barred from self-improvement. People were focused on fleeing Afghanistan for survival, not on education. The warlords denied women access to an education along with the Taliban. They misused Islam in saying education was illegitimate for women" (Hila G., 2014).

Afsana suggested a predominantly illiterate populace increases the risk of threat to women:

> "I live in a country that is nearly 98 percent Muslim, yet the majority of people do not know about Islam and the Qur'an because about 75 percent of them are illiterate. Among the hundred people who killed Farkhunda, no one stood up and said, 'This is against the law.' It shows that all of them were illiterate. It is a shame our corrupt government has failed for fourteen years to take steps forward to correct these outrages and injustices" (Afsana, 2015).

***Theme 27: Ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan.*** Overwhelmingly, AWWP authors discussed prolonged armed conflict in Afghanistan as calamitous for Afghan

women. Shafiqa and Fariba each described the nature of threats posed by the Taliban, stating, respectively:

> "The Afghan people have faced many challenges in a short period. The Taliban era was the darkest time of our lives. Our fathers, brothers, and husbands were killed or imprisoned while we women didn't even count as human beings. We were treated like property and denied human rights as simple as going out or showing our faces. We had no choice except to live in the shadows like a plant" (Shafiqa, 2011, "Obama's Speech").

> "During their regime, many Afghan women were hit, whipped, and even killed by the Taliban. Women knew that their life was in danger. We couldn't even say what we wanted" (Fariba, 2011, "Hope in the Dark Time").

Zahra M. highlighted the traumatic grief that women bear in the context of war, discussing an explosion attributed to the Taliban:

> "This bomb explosion happened one week ago in Herat, killing nine and injuring 59 people. Not only Sharifa, but more than 40 mothers are mourning because their family members were injured or killed. In Afghanistan, mothers must bear these kinds of family problems. Th[ese] kind creatures—the mothers—who bring happiness and good feelings to our lives, they are the ones who suffer most" (Zahra M., 2011).

Norwan expressed her hope that U.S. forces would remain in Afghanistan amid ongoing threat from the Taliban:

> "We don't want international military forces to leave Afghanistan. We don't want them to abandon us when we are still wounded. The poor, ordinary people of Afghanistan, especially the women of Afghanistan, have been destroyed by war and don't want the wild regime of the Taliban to regain power. We don't want to close the doors on education and knowledge, we don't want to be locked in our houses, and we don't want to see our country become a house of terror again. We are tired of terror, war and blood. We are tired of corruption in every aspect of our lives. We want to live in peace like other people of the world. We still remember America's promises and hope Americans will abide by them" (Norwan, 2011).

Leena G. offered insight into the complexity of ongoing war in Afghanistan, describing the terrible position Afghan residents find themselves in as the Taliban and Daesh (which is the acronym for the Islamic State's Arabic name) vie for power:

> "The local elders have been bombed and blown up. It shocks the human conscience. The lives and property of our residents are not safe because of Daesh and Taliban militants. Daesh kills people and burns their houses. Then the Taliban burns the houses of the poor villagers when they take over an area once occupied by Daesh. The Taliban accuses the poor people of supporting Daesh—when, in truth, they had no choice. The local government watches all this as if it is a game, this two-sided war, waiting to see who will win" (Leena G., 2016).

Surina also described ISIS's violence against Afghan women:

> "But women and children stand in the front line of war, as always, misused and victimized. ISIS misuses children and rapes women. ISIS doesn't stop there; they go a step further and sell the women as their slaves in public markets. They do this to show that they have the power to use women against their targets" (Surina, 2015).

## Threats to Women Are Dynamic in Nature

AWWP author narratives typically depicted threats to Afghan women as multidimensional, intersectional, interactive, and continuous. As such, the domains and themes within this category provide insight into the dynamic nature of threats to women in Afghanistan.

### Domain H: Threats Are Layered and Interactive

Authors consistently described threats as originating from multiple sources and interacting across contexts, which numerous authors noted compounded the risk of harm to Afghan women. Domain H comprises themes reflecting the intersectional nature of threats to Afghan women.

***Theme 28: Multiple threats, occurring simultaneously, across contexts.*** Authors frequently described threats as arising from multiple sources of objective harm, across a number of contexts, often at the same time. Zahra W. described this multiplicity of simultaneous threats:

> "Living in a country that has been devastated by bitter war for more than thirty years is difficult. Children are killed by suicide attacks or roadside bombs, or

> sometimes burnt by acid on their way to school. Before I came to the United States last year with my family as refugees, I lived in Herat Province, where I witnessed girls poisoned at school, along with many kidnappings. Some day I wish to go back to Afghanistan to help women and girls, but I don't know when, or if, it will be possible" (Zahra W., 2016).

Aysha captured the nature of this theme in her response to the writing prompt: "What is one time in your life that you felt isolated from others?":

> "Everyday. When I go to school we get bullied by different people, we get to hear, see, and feel things that can make us commit suicide. You see the dead eyes of the wolf that wants to use you. The hands that want to touch and rape you. The throng that says nothing good, but bad words. The steps the people take in front of you to block your way. To hurt you. When we come home, we must work and deal with family pressure. Many underage girls wed and have to raise kids. But who cares? Work is first, then study. Live the way your parents want. All have expectations of you, who cares what you want? Who cares what you say?" (Aysha, 2014, "It's a Jungle").

Sharifa described the presence of multiple systemic threats:

> "My country lacks security and job opportunities. Afghanistan's corruption and poverty are at high levels. If the current situation continues, we will not have any dreams left for Afghanistan; we will wait for the black days of life" (Sharifa, 2016).

An Anonymous writer noted that among numerous objective forms of threat she experienced simultaneously, the threat she experienced in her workplace was most salient and distressing for her:

> "I feel proud that my good skills are threatening to my Afghan male colleagues who torture their wives and sisters at home and think that all Afghan women are powerless. Fighting forced marriage, fighting harassment inside and outside work, fighting for my education—all of this on top of the fears that Taliban and ISIS could attack anytime and rule over the city—has been manageable. But either I will survive the traps created by my male colleagues, or I will give up at some point. This is my dilemma. I can guarantee that the day I lose my job, I will lose the power of making decisions for myself. My job and my education are my only sword to fight for my rights" (Anonymous, 2016).

***Theme 29: Threat interaction increases women's vulnerability.*** Numerous authors described ways in which the interaction of multiple threats increased women's

vulnerability and risk of experiencing further harm. Shogofa suggested a causal relationship between protracted conflict in Afghanistan and a reduction in women's equality, while also identifying illiteracy as a contributing factor to women's oppression:

> "I am proud of my Afghan culture and tradition, but thirty years of war has had a bad impact on my people and my culture. Our culture was lost during the war to extreme religious ideas, leaving Afghanistan with some rules and laws limiting women's rights, and they need to be changed. Of course our low level of literacy also plays a big part in our not knowing the real culture of our country. But today we live every day with blood and crying. I am away from my country now, but I cry while reading the news. When will it end?" (Shogofa, 2015).

Fatima F. identified how threats originating from three distinct contexts position girls and women to experience threat in the form of forced/early marriage:

> "But there are several reasons why people force their daughters into early marriages. Most prevalent are these: First, there are economic problems, where parents cannot afford the expense of keeping a girl home. Second, there is a cultural poverty, where incorrect customs or traditions overshadow rule of law. And third, the desire for security: parents force their daughters to marry to protect either the family or the girl. During the Mujahideen, families tried to save girls from effects of the war, including murder and rape. One of my relatives lived with elderly parents in that dangerous period. She was twelve when they forced their daughter to marry my fifty-year-old uncle" (Fatima F., 2013).

And Fariha F. told the story of Frishta, whose exposure to threat continually begot further threat:

> "Once a girl in my homeland was a lovely friend. But those were bitter days. From the thirteenth spring, her life was passed. She was like the bird in the sky without feathers. She didn't know in time how they would hunt her and hurt her. Frishta was someone to hurt. Like a broken bird, her father sold her for money to marry an old man. Frishta hated the sight of him. She couldn't get used to her husband, so he beat her. With a hungry stomach and a soul in rags, she spent the days and nights.
>
> One night she broke away in the midnight, ran into the street, and with her hands, she stopped a car. With his eyes the driver of car looked at her. He worried and went on, but after some time, he came and stopped and invited Frishta inside of his car. Like the pack animals, he abused her, and like the used-up thing, left her in life's playground. Frishta didn't know where she should go or what she should do. She didn't know, so she walked alongside the cars on the street, and when she

> neared Kabul, the police followed her. She was arrested by them and sent to Kabul city. Everyone looked at her like she was a killer or thief, but she was only a child counting the days and seconds she spent in jail. Her term ended, and she came out from the prison, alone, without anyone" (Farifa F., 2013).

**Domain I: Time Orientation**

Authors typically framed threats to Afghan women as occurring within a specific dimension of time, whether in the past, present, and/or future. Themes in this domain comprise the predominant time orientations in which AWWP authors described threats.

***Theme 30: Continuous threat.*** AWWP authors overwhelmingly described their experiences of threat as existing in the present and continuous with past and future threat. Asma vividly described her experience of ongoing threat:

> "Thinking about positive changes in every aspect of our lives doesn't mean much when every day I start my day with fear and bad news. Violence against women has increased all over, and is affecting our lives and terrorizing us. The terror is like a steely pounce. Terror like molten iron hits me everyday. Feeling others' fear leaves me hopeless. I don't believe men will ever respect women. It hits me every day. I've lost my hope for justice" (Asma, 2015).

Afsana and Nelab also described continuous gender-based threats, stating, respectively:

> "Farkhunda's attack is unprecedented, but she is not the first woman to face terrible violence in Afghanistan. Every day women face forced marriages, a lack of access to justice, and a lack of access to education" (Afsana, 2015).

> "My land is like my heart. When I think about the past of my country of Afghanistan, I think of the consecutive decades of war, the many innocents, the schools covered with bullets, the girls and women kept away from school and suffering in violence. Even the mountains were in pain. The sky cried at the sight of the war. My heart's blood boils in sorrow. Unfortunately, Afghan women still suffer the same violence as in the past. Hoping for peace and wishing for freedom, we are still struggling" (Nelab, 2014, "My Ideal Dinner Guest").

Beheshta described how the day-to-day experience of gender-based threats takes a significant toll on Afghan women:

> "Our women are not safe from being bothered when they go outside. We are afraid day-by-day of what new event will happen. Sometimes a man will come up

> and walk beside me, or he will block my way and annoy me by hand or his tongue. He tries to make me his victim, physically and spiritually. He harasses me with his jokes and tries to touch my body in crowded places. These are shameless people. We women can't prevent them from bothering us. We want to rescue ourselves from these people and society. But I don't know how. I don't know what is the solution.
>
> Day-by-day we get discouraged because we lose our liberty. These situations are the main cause of depression and fear. Women become frightened by our own society. Most Afghan women suffer from these problems and they resent being in this situation. It is like when a person wants to kill someone with a low dosage of poison for a long time. It kills a person gradually. Women like me are a sacrifice to violence" (Beheshta, 2014).

And Paana questioned when the ongoing violence and oppression in Afghanistan will stop:

> "Absolute barbarianism is going on in the north, south, and every part of Afghanistan as we watch the gradual genocide of our rights and lives. When will we breathe in peace? When we will walk without fear?" (Paana, 2015).

***Theme 31: Women anticipate future threat.*** Authors also frequently described living with the anticipation of future threat. Sharifa captured a sense of imminent threat:

> "We live in a country where we spend every second of life waiting for death. We are not sure what will happen from one minute to the next and sometimes we do not even know what to do because we are not sure that we still will be alive. This is Afghanistan" (Sharifa, 2015, "When Will We Have Peace?").

Shafiqa described anticipating numerous forms of violence and gender-based oppression with the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan:

> "I am not optimistic that our government can provide us with peace and security. Even with the U.S. Army here we cannot get safety. The suicide bombers at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul—a major hotel used by the Afghan government and foreigners—is just the latest example of this security problem. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the incident, which killed twelve people, ending only when snipers on a NATO helicopter shot down the last of the gunmen on the hotel roof.
>
> I expect the security to worsen and civil war to break out among our different ethnic groups. The international forces are keeping them united. After the U.S. soldiers leave Afghanistan, it is likely that other NATO members will also

> withdraw their forces. We will see more ethnic conflict and our army will end up in more fighting.
>
> When security is threatened, living conditions for everyone worsen. The newly freed voices of the women will be silenced. The Taliban will simply come down from the mountains and occupy the country. They can attack each city separately and murder people. Soon after the United States soldiers go home there will be chaos, I fear. I don't think the Afghan army is ready to take the responsibility for Afghanistan's security. And women, tied to cultural and religious bonds, will be repressed once again by the fundamentalist men of the country" (Shafiqa, 2011, "Obama's Speech").

Sveto articulated her fear of future violence following the public murder of Farkhunda:

> "Our country has become a dangerous society. Even I am afraid of going out from my house. After hearing these intolerable news reports and seeing these pictures, I am afraid that the next victim could be another innocent girl. Maybe me" (Sveto, 2015).

Sabira described the threats that women anticipate, both for themselves and their family members:

> "And when Afghan women see one another after many years of migration, instead of smiling, their eyes are tear-filled because they feel lucky to see each other after many years. They feel lucky to be alive and to have found an opportunity to be together. And when they arrive at a new environment, instead of being happy, they cry, because how can they be happy when their families are in danger and not safe? And when they marry, instead of smiling because they are beginning a new life, they cry since they are leaving the home of their parents, and they don't know if they will be happy with this person who they must marry by arrangement, and they have no idea how to start a new family. They are fully afraid of their future" (Sabira, 2011).

## How Women Experience and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, Oppression, and Threat

AWWP author narratives not only illustrated myriad, intersecting, continuous, and gender-based threats women face in Afghanistan, but the nonfiction works also revealed themes describing how Afghan women experience and respond to those threats. The domains and themes within this final category describe the significant and harmful

impact of severe gender-based violence and oppression on women's wellness and functioning, as well as women's adaptive reactive and adaptive proactive responses to ongoing threat in Afghanistan.

**Domain J: Women Experience Significant Harms to Their Physical and Psychological Integrity**

Authors gave voice to numerous ways in which the threats described in previous categories impacted women's well-being. Domain J comprises themes detailing the dimensions of harm to Afghan women's physical and psychological integrity.

***Theme 32: Physical injury and/or death.*** Many authors connected the pervasive oppression of Afghan girls and women to their physical injury and the not uncommon occurrences of attempted and/or completed suicide, murder, and maternal death in Afghanistan. Haya addressed this, stating:

> "If girls were not forced to marry so young, the rate of death during childbirth would be lower. The lives of many young girls would be saved. If girls weren't forced to marry men twenty years older, the rate of suicide would decrease" (Haya, 2016).

Yagana and Rabia J. each drew a connection between Afghan girls dying and forced/early marriage, writing, respectively:

> "At the hospital, we were taken to a room where a 19-year-old girl was lying with tubes coming from all over her body. I sat next to my Mom, who started interviewing the girl's mother first. The mother said, crying, 'My daughter tried to commit suicide because we didn't have money at home and her father tried to make her marry an old, rich man in our village. The man had promised to pay us 50,000 Afghani if we let him marry her. We had to accept this because we had to raise our other seven kids.' I watched my mother write the report. My mother asked, 'How did your daughter try to commit suicide?' The mother replied, 'She ate nails.' We were shocked. 'Why nails?' my mother asked. 'Because in our village we do not have any poison. There are no big buildings to jump from. This was the only option, I guess,' she said" (Yagana, 2009).

> "A few months after the wedding, Sultana was diagnosed with severe anemia.

> You could have predicted what the little soul had suffered—the responsibility of a family at an age when mothers are still running after you with a glass of milk to ensure your health. At age ten, she was cooking for a family of fourteen, washing the clothes of big men with her tiny hands, and cooking on an open fire. She had no choice; these are the rituals for a bride … Sultana's little round face, her cracked bare feet, her cold, fissured hands are flashbacks in my mind. She died a year after her marriage, after suffering from pernicious anemia. But I don't blame infection or bacteria or medicine. I blame the society. I blame the people. I blame this cruel stone-hearted world. Sultana was too weak to fight. She was too gentle to carry that load. The demons had sucked her blood" (Rabia J., 2014).

Zahra W. discussed the circumstances of Saberah's death:

> "She loved a boy in her neighborhood. She could not tell her family because she knew they would kill her. So she ran away with her boyfriend. Soon Saberah's family learned which village Saberah was living in. Her grandfather went to the village and requested that Saberah come back. People in the village made him promise he wouldn't harm her and when he promised, they let Saberah go with her grandfather. When Saberah got to her house, her family and relations beat her. Her uncle acted as the judge and declared that she should die so then her family beat her to death and buried her inside the house. Police arrested four relatives, but Saberah's father escaped" (Zahra W., 2015).

And while AWWP authors described wide-ranging forms of physical injury resulting directly from oppression and violence, Seeta described the horrific injuries of a woman who had been gang-raped by a group of policemen at a checkpoint in the Farah province:

> "This smart, beautiful girl arrived at the hospital in bad condition. She was covered in blood, but locked in chains. She did not have the strength to stand on her feet or walk. She had lost control of her urine due to what she had undergone. The tests at the hospital showed she was not pregnant but had lost her hymen" (Seeta, 2011, "All Here Are Animals").

***Theme 33: Somatic symptoms and psychological strain associated with persistent stress.*** Numerous authors discussed stress-related somatic experiences and psychological strain as a result of enduring continuous stress. Frequently, authors described experiences that included a combination of physical and psychological suffering. Sofia recalled:

> "I cried: 'I am divorced! I am divorced twice!' I pulled my hair. I couldn't bear having the stain of being divorced. Things got crazy for me and I felt like I was losing my mind and my health. I spent nearly three months in the hospital

> suffering from a terrible headache" (Sofia, 2010).

Pari and Asma described their continuous suffering during the Taliban's rule, writing, respectively:

> "The four walls of the house were killing me and even when I went outside I wore the burqa with heaviness as if the world was a burden on my shoulders. Every day was the same. After months and years nothing changed for the better and it was as if I was eating my heart. I developed a bad pain in my stomach. Uncle Zia prescribed his antibiotic course, but it didn't help. One day I told my father I felt a horrible pain and I was afraid it was not my stomach, but my heart … I did not recover and I still have holes in my stomach" (Pari, 2016, "Behind the Curtains").

> "During the time when I should have been in my high school, I had to stay home and do nothing. Just remembering those days, which turned into years, brings tears to my eyes. Those years had a negative impact on my life. My parents suffered too. Our family valued education and freedom; I was allowed to make my own choices just like my brothers. During that time, they told me to do my best to keep busy and forget that I had to stay home as the house girl. Do you imagine that it worked? Of course not! It made me sick. My parents took me to different doctors who all said I was stressed and needed time to recover" (Asma, 2014, "Afghan Girls, Then and Now").

Kamilah described the cognitive depletion associated with the ongoing stress of hearing herself and others called "*seyah-sar* [a derogatory term meaning feeble-minded or weak]";

> "I have thought a lot about this phrase and how and why men humiliate women with it. I ask myself: *Why, in my society, is being a woman a crime?* Lots of questions swarm through my mind, but no one has ever given me an acceptable answer. Sometimes if I think about this too much, my mind stops working and at that point I prefer to go help my mother instead of thinking about the long road with no end to it" (Kamilah, 2012).

Mariam and Leena G. discussed rumination and worry, respectively, and the impact on their sleep, as a result of feeling unsafe:

> "My mind cannot answer all the questions. It is 4 a.m. and I have been awake thinking of all these problems. I hope one day peace will come to our country and we can sleep well and calmly" (Mariam, 2014).

> "People in Nangarhar province are facing so many difficulties this winter with

> both the economy and the insecurity—with the Daesh and Taliban nearby. The economic situation is very bad. I am not sure that I am safe in my home in B. District. My family and I can't sleep at night for worry. This is the reality of our life in an insecure province like Nangarhar" (Leena G., 2016).

***Theme 34: Intrusive thoughts and feelings related to past traumas.*** A small but notable number of AWWP authors discussed re-experiencing past traumatic events in the present. Lima described her recurrent nightmares from trauma she experienced during her childhood:

> "I still have nightmares of the bombing every night from years back during the civil war in Afghanistan. I see myself injured again and again every night because I was injured when I was six years old. Often I ask myself: 'Am I a normal human being now?' I wonder" (Lima, 2011).

Emaan described reliving the moment she witnessed armed violence in front of her university, where she saw a policeman lying on the road injured from a gunshot wound:

> "Now, as I narrate this story, I am reliving the moment and feeling the trauma. I have seen many events similar to this, but I never can forget this one. Every time I talk about it, that policeman's face appears in front of my eyes and I feel guilty for not helping him. His face and eyes were asking for help, a hand to reach his hand, but no one stepped forward; everyone was struggling for their own life" (Emaan, 2011).

Shafiqa described re-experiencing a memory from ten years prior when her brother had censured Shafiqa for playing chess with a boy:

> "This repressed memory swam to the surface, reminding me of how cruel life used to be. I looked at my watch. It was 12:35, so I got up and hurried to class. Before entering the classroom, though, I paused to wipe away my tears" (Shafiqa, 2010).

***Theme 35: Foreclosed development.*** Many authors described the limited capacity, as a result of pervasive oppression and violence, in which Afghan women are able to exercise their personal agency and self-determination and develop as human beings. Norwan writes:

> "Girls and women tolerate violence and accept it as their God-given destiny because they are women. They remain silent and voiceless because if they tell their stories nobody will accept them at home again. With such struggles these women don't actually live; they miss all of life's beautiful moments. There is no doubt that Afghanistan is the worst place for women" (Norwan, 2012).

Beheshta described the day-to-day limitations on women's self-expression:

> "In our society, despite the long years of war and the ongoing bomb attacks in our streets, it is our own people who are the main cause of violence against women. Whether they are young, teenage, or old, people in our society bother women in various ways. My society imposes so many limits, it looks like a jail to me. I am a prisoner day and night. In my society a woman doesn't even have the right to wear her favorite dress. She can't wear the outfit she most enjoys. If it is colorful, stylish or graceful, people stare at her and make fun of her, using their bad language. It's very hurtful to us to have to endure this" (Beheshta, 2014).

Describing how dehumanizing it feels to be able to express so little of her emotional self,

Fahima noted:

> "I am a woman who can raise my voice only to wail and moan in sadness and pain. Most Afghan women have to live with secret burning desires and sacrifice every moment of our lives. We get used to being surrounded by sorrow and tears. The only thing that a woman can do in this society is to wail on about her own pain and troubles. Do only men have the right to be called human in our culture?" (Fahima, 2015).

Aysha added:

> "I have no rights; I cannot study, play, laugh, think, eat, drink, or do anything like I want. I am afraid I will live and die as a puppet" (Aysha, 2014, "It's a Jungle").

Sabira poetically summarized this theme:

> "When an Afghan woman laughs, it is not from the heart. When she smiles, it is always with tears in her eyes. An Afghan woman even celebrates with tears. When something happens to her that is good, even then she cannot laugh, because the wings of her flight have been already cut" (Sabira, 2011).

Numerous authors also described this foreclosure of self-development in terms of the denial of Afghan women's dreams. An Anonymous author conveyed how early in one's life this may occur:

> "My mother put cacao chocolates in front of my uncle's wife, I've been told. Then all the guests in the room clapped. The men hugged my father, and Dad kissed my face. 'Congratulations,' he said. I was one month old. I didn't know anything from this world. But from that day, I was promised to my 10-year-old cousin. Though I was a baby, my father engaged me and dug a grave for my dreams" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Grave for My Dreams").

***Theme 36: Diminished self-concept.*** AWWP authors also identified a diminished self-concept as a dimension of the psychological harm Afghan women experience. Raha, an Anonymous author, and Aida S. each described a diminished sense of self in terms of low self-confidence, writing, respectively:

> "Women who get harassed on the street and never talk about it lose their self-confidence and give up without fighting back" (Raha, 2015).

> "My strength, my power, my voice have been always ignored. I had to tolerate life and hide things inside my heart. My desires, hopes, and wishes stayed unknown and I was passive from the scene of my life. I never had the courage to look others in the eyes or talk back to them" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Grave for My Dreams").

> "Families who treat girls differently from boys are increasing the discrimination and decreasing the self-confidence of girls instead of helping girls escape from the cages" (Aida S., 2015).

Shogofa described having a low sense of self-worth:

> "It was very difficult for me to talk with people. I was just afraid. In class, I knew the entire lesson, but when the teacher asked me something, I didn't have the courage to explain. I felt really badly when other students were laughing at me. They thought I didn't know anything. Because I was silent, I failed at the university. I just hated myself. I was too afraid to even tell people I am Hazara" (Shogofa, 2009).

Masooda R. and Shakila both discussed how an underdeveloped self-concept manifests as limited self-knowledge and/or difficulty fully engaging in one's life, writing, respectively:

> "During wars and disasters all Afghan people suffer, but women suffer most. When the Taliban gained control in the 1990s, women suffered even more abuse. These problems weaken women's morale, making it difficult for them to make

> important decisions about their lives and this is still true today" (Masooda R., 2015, "What Afghan Women Endure").
>
> "Fear drove my life for years. I made a thick cocoon around myself. When I was a young woman, I acted like a child, afraid to speak my mind. When I was 20, I still seemed like a 12 year old, skinny and unsure, afraid of dealing with life's problems" (Shakila, 2011).

***Theme 37: Pervasive experiences of negative emotion.*** AWWP authors consistently described experiencing various forms of deeply felt negative emotion resulting from severe gender-based violence and oppression. Notably, author narratives regularly included expressions of fear, worry, sadness/sorrow, grief, loneliness, guilt, disappointment, disillusionment, powerlessness, hopelessness, shame, exhaustion, anger/rage, and general sense of dysphoria. For example, discussing her deep sense of fear, Zahra T. wrote:

> "Women in Afghanistan cannot even speak their hearts to a family member. As I write now about the problems of women in Afghanistan, my hand trembles. My writing becomes sloppy for fear that one day I will be blamed because I write. Women tremble each time they leave their homes, their heads down, like a criminal" (Zahra T., 2015).

Aysha discussed fear as something that all Afghan women live with:

> "For Afghan women, being Muslim means carrying a sense of death inside all the time. You see stress and depression on the face of every woman you see in Afghanistan. You feel the pain of their broken hearts, each with its own sad story. Happiness is rare. We fear death, but not our own. We fear the deaths of our loved ones. A boy dies only once, but his mother and sisters die every day from the loss, from the memories that cannot be thrown away like paper. When a bomb explodes, every woman in that city watches the door, waiting for her beloved to come back alive" (Aysha, 2013).

Zahra M. described a powerful sense of anger:

> "When I want to complain or ask for something, people say to me, 'Breathing is enough for you. You should be grateful that you are alive, so don't ask anything more.' When I think about these things, my heart fills with hot anger. It is the greatest pain and I don't know how to resolve it" (Zahra M., 2014).

Norwan noted the ubiquity of sorrow among Afghan women, while also noting her own sadness and anger as she composed her story:

> "Every time I write, I decide that this time I am going to write something nice, interesting, funny, and happy. I think, this time, I am going to paint the happiest moments of an Afghan woman's life. I wish there was a happy scene for me to tell. I wish there were scenes of brightness and laughter inside the lives of Afghan females. I search and research—but I find so much sorrow. In writing this story I must eat my tears and anger. I try not to cry, so I can write it for you—for you, dear readers. You would never think human beings could be this wild, that human beings can do such violence to one another" (Norwan, 2012).

Nelab expressed a sense of deep emotional exhaustion, perhaps verging on hopelessness:

> "I am tired and exhausted, but not in a sense of needing to sleep. My heart is tired of beating. My eyes are tired of crying. My mouth is tired of speaking for my rights. My whole body is tired of pain" (Nelab, 2014, "Dream World").

Farida reflected on her persistent experience of dysphoria, noting an unshakeable sense of emptiness:

> "Slowly I realized that something was breaking and disappearing inside me and that it was my happiness and my smile. I was broken by the violence that had been done to innocent Afghan people. I was a teenager, but I felt that I had lived long enough. I felt that I was like a flower put inside a closed glass jar and forced to grow. There was no space. Everything was black and white. Many years passed like this. No violence lasts forever. Every night has its day. Finally the Taliban's cruel regime ended. I got back my freedom. I finished school and university. But something still disturbs me. My cheerfulness did not return completely. I always feel something is empty inside, although I have a smiley face. That smile that appears on my face is not real. This is something that I want to try to overcome. I must break that glass jar and grow again" (Farida, 2011, "My Smile").

***Theme 38: Collective sense of hurt.*** AWWP authors also described a collective sense of pain that is shared among Afghan women. Arifa described her realization about this collective experience of hurt while reflecting on an encounter with a 13-year-old girl who was distraught over her impending forced marriage:

> "She was crying so loudly that my friend Zamira and I felt like our breath was taken away and we began to cry also. It felt like the only thing we could do. We could cry and not argue with her. I understood then that "stranger" is not a word

> between females. The pain in our hearts is the same and we are all familiar with it" (Arifa, 2015, "I Don't Want to Be Thirteen").

Masooda R. further articulated this shared experience, stating:

> "Today we hear so much news about the violence against women by the Taliban, especially in the rural areas of Afghanistan. When we hear these reports, even if we do not know the victims, we feel harmed" (Masooda R., 2015, "What Afghan Women Endure").

Seeta expressed a sense of solidarity with all Afghan women:

> "When I see the problems of my fellow women, my heart breaks. I cannot say that I am free myself until all Afghan women are free" (Seeta, 2010).

**Domain K: Adaptive Reactive Responses to Threats**

AWWP authors described various ways of responding behaviorally and psychologically to be able to survive and function in contexts of continuous threat. Domain K, Adaptive Reactive Responses to Threats, comprises these themes.

***Theme 39: Acceptance of dangerous life circumstances.*** Numerous authors described a sense of acceptance of their dangerous life circumstances as Afghan women. Shogofa Az. offered insight into how this acceptance of living with constant threat might affect one's day-to-day life:

> "I know my dreams are very big but I work hard and continue moving toward my goal. In the mornings when I leave home, I wonder if I will come back home alive, but I am not scared. I say goodbye to my family as if I won't return. And I think about my mother's words: 'Never give up. If you fall down a hundred times as well, wipe your tears and go ahead'" (Shogofa Az., 2014).

Aysha also described an orientation toward living in the present amid uncertainty about the future:

> "My mind is empty. Everything is the same as it was in the past and maybe nothing will ever change. We are facing the same problems my parents faced thirty-seven years ago. We will never be certain what will happen next. If things get worse I may not be able to continue my studies at my university. That's not good news, but I may have no other choice. I don't know if I will be able to write

> for AWWP again or not. Why? Because I am living in Afghanistan, and here you do not know what is waiting for you around the corner. But I will not stop hoping for a better day. I will never stop the search for a better tomorrow. Even if I am uncertain about the future, I will live today the best as I can, as though there is no tomorrow" (Aysha, 2016).

Lima highlighted the tension between continuing to function in her workplace amid continuous violence in Afghanistan and a sense of disconnection that results from carrying on with one's life in such dangerous contexts:

> "This scene reminded me a recent situation at home in Afghanistan when I was working in my office preparing a presentation for the Ministry of Education to approve an education project. With four other competitors for this project, I was worried that I had to make our project the best in order to win approval for my employer and get a promotion.
>
> On the same day five suicide attacks occurred in Kabul city. The insurgents entered the Ministry of Finance and a bank. There was constant firing among police and NATO and the insurgents. I heard the gun shots as if they were next door, but I was busy working. Later during the day, the firing was still going on and I was sitting with some of my colleagues, laughing and discussing our normal issues. At once I felt how cruel we have become. Are we getting used to war? We Afghans are no longer afraid of death. People are dying near every corner of our city, yet we don't even worry about them. I felt how distant people become from humanity when they constantly witness inhuman acts. I was not worried that I could die, I was more worried about my presentation. Is this how human beings should feel? Is this how we should take life for granted?" (Lima, 2011)

***Theme 40: Constant vigilance.*** AWWP authors frequently described maintaining a constant vigilance to ongoing threats from numerous sources. Sharifa discussed Afghans' primary concern with navigating present dangers:

> "These tragic events take their victims from the poor and innocent. The people whose lives are being marked by this war are asking the government to stop their pain and find a solution to eradicate this dangerous way of life. Unfortunately there are no ears to listen and no eyes to see. The situation in Afghanistan is like we say in Persian: *Boz da gham Jan wa Qasab da feker pee*. It means: The goat thinks about its life, and the butcher thinks about how much oil he will receive from this goat. All people think about now is staying alive" (Sharifa, 2015, "The Goat and the Butcher").

Mahnaz described women's constant vigilance and adaptation to threats of violence in

public spaces:

> "Afghan's women's vulnerability to assault is given as a reason to keep them at home. In Afghanistan, girls grow up with the fear of being assaulted in the streets or alleys. They learn to be cautious. When they go shopping, for instance, they go as a group. Girls walk in town with the fear that someone may grab their butt or breasts at any moment. Recent cases of Afghan teenage girls being injured in acid attacks while walking to school have scared many Afghan families. This insecurity feeds doubts about women getting an education or even going outside at all" (Mahnaz, 2012, "Afghan Feminist Thought, Part 1").

Alia noted feeling fearful and having difficulty trusting others in relation to the ongoing threats she has endured:

> "It was August 2015 and I was on my way to school, listening to Akele Tanha, an Indian song that our school bus driver Kaka was playing. I was watching the people in their cars and thinking whether or not they seemed good in character from their faces. When I met their eyes most of them brought a kind of a fear to my heart. They seemed to look at me as an object, not a person who has the right to study or have any other rights. Trusting people is difficult for me after all that has happened in my country. I felt they wanted to hurt me" (Alia, 2015).

Zarmina described her children's safety as her primary concern:

> "My wish is to see peace in my country. As a mother, every day from the time my children leave until they return home my heart is filled with worry. Every day I pray to almighty Allah to keep all people and my children safe. I am sure all mothers feel this way" (Zarmina, 2015).

***Theme 41: Development of self-protective strategies.*** In their narratives, authors regularly described developing self-protective strategies as an adaptation to living with continuous threat. Self-protection often manifested as avoidance or withdrawal, in some capacity, from danger. Pari described how staying silent in contexts of violence and oppression serves an adaptive function, in a survival sense:

> "So many Afghan woman don't even have basic human rights at home; they tolerate physical abuse daily but keep silent. We are not safe at home and we are not safe outside. We are mentally abused by men's eyes on us, their insults, their judgments. Women become the champions of tolerance and superstars of silence. We keep silent because we don't want to die" (Pari, 2015).

Angela noted her decision not to return to school, following the Taliban's removal, out of a sense of fear:

> "When the Taliban were removed from power in Afghanistan after almost five years, most of the schools eventually reopened. My siblings returned to school, but I did not, because I was so afraid of everyone, still thinking that Taliban were close" (Angela, 2010).

Farida and Sofia each described avoiding others, stating, respectively:

> "Everywhere seems cold and cloudy. The wind of violence blows everywhere. The trees, the grass, the flowers seem buried as the white clouds and the snow mix together. I am afraid to be in crowds or around people. Alone-ness, that is my best friend" (Farida, 2011, "The Girl In the Mirror").

> "[Re: Sofia's three-month hospitalization due to a severe headache following her divorce] After I recovered, my family tried to keep me happy, but I did not feel like I could trust them. I stopped meeting relatives and friends, going out or attending parties. I wanted to avoid people who might feel pity for me or who might talk about my ex-husband" (Sofia, 2010).

An Anonymous writer also described engaging in avoidance as a self-protective mechanism, though she noted its negative consequences on her sense of wellbeing:

> "I live in fear. Because I married the man of my choice instead of my cousin, when a knock comes at the door my husband and I don't dare answer. When we leave the house, we only hope we can return in the evening. Covering my face with a black veil, avoiding contact with my friends, hiding myself in public makes me feel alone and mad" (Anonymous, 2010, "A Hope In the Unseen").

**Domain L: Adaptive Proactive Responses to Threat through Agentic Action**

Juxtaposed with reactive responses to threat as described in the previous domain, many AWWP authors illustrated women's proactive efforts to challenge oppressive and threatening conditions within their environments. Themes in this domain include women's adaptive proactive responses to threat through individual and collective agentic actions.

***Theme 42: Subverting oppressive practices.*** A number of authors described

intentionally acting in ways that defied oppressive norms and practices in Afghanistan. Studying in secret was regularly identified as a subversive action. Freshta described the efforts she and her sisters took to continue their studies:

> "I was studying school subjects in a secret school that was far away from our house (one hour walking). I and my young sister, who is in college in the US, would both cover our books in cotton, the same way we cover our Holy Quran so that the Taliban wouldn't know that we were studying. They would think that we were trying to learn only the Holy Quran. We decided that if we were asked by the Taliban, we would tell them: 'We are studying the Holy Quran.' I told my younger sister, who wore boys' clothes, about this, and she nodded. I was afraid maybe my young sister, who was so much younger, would tell them the real fact, but she was so smart, keeping the secret forever" (Freshta, 2009).

Through the course of her medical practice, Nastaran described how she challenged dynamics that support domestic violence:

> "Next to [the patient], I saw an elderly woman. After a brief Salam Alaikum [greeting], I asked the patient to tell me what had happened to her. The mother-in-law replied: her daughter-in-law had injured herself in a fall on the stairs. I wanted the patient to be able to speak to me in private so I pretended to examine her and then told her she would have to come to another room for further examination. The mother-in-law stood up to accompany her, but I stopped her. 'Sorry Mother jan, you should wait here,' I said. 'We will come back in a few minutes'" (Nastaran, 2014).

Mariam described a strategy she and her colleagues often used to subvert the Taliban:

> "In the car with us was a local colleague, a woman named Negar. This is a method we use to trick the Taliban. We have a local colleague in every province who can use the correct dialect and knows the area. Our car stopped and Negar told the gunman we were going to a certain village for a relative's funeral. The gunman said, 'Yes, it is this way. You can go ahead.' Our driver pulled away from the checkpoint, but soon we met another force of Taliban who stopped us and asked the same question: 'Where are you going?' Negar repeated her answer, and we were allowed to continue again, but we were even more nervous. Negar tried to console us and her words made us feel a bit calmer" (Mariam, 2011).

An Anonymous writer added:

> "My brothers think a girl who has a bank account or a mobile phone is a prostitute. I hide my phone and keep it on silent mode when I'm home" (Anonymous, 2010, "I Am For Sale").

***Theme 43: Enacting personal agency.*** A prevalent theme across the narratives related to ways that women enacted personal agency. Frequently discussed agentic actions included acting in a self-determined way, pursuing an education or desired employment, maintaining a sense of hope, enlisting or offering support, and writing. Mahtab conveyed her conviction for empowering women:

> "I vowed that day to strive for education and the empowerment of women. We have the equal right to study and make choices. I will struggle against any obstacles to achieve my goals, and I will ignite a flame inside the heart of women and make this world a better place for them. We shouldn't be the victims of illiteracy and oppression" (Mahtab, 2016).

Madia and Yagana both expressed their career aspirations (which are notably driven by a desire to help others), writing, respectively:

> "I believe the problem with Afghanistan is lack of education. I want to become a teacher. I want to support women's rights and become a teacher who trains other teachers. If I can train forty student-teachers in a class, then each of them will go on to teach forty other students per class. I will be able to help my country in this way. It is not just about surviving the Taliban. Everything in Afghanistan makes me braver and stronger. I will live my life, no matter what happens" (Madia, 2014).

> "Later that day I decided that, God willing, I will fulfill this dream of mine of becoming a lawyer and solving my people's problems. When I become a lawyer, I want to go to these villages that don't have any access to the government, and introduce them to people who can help them. I want to really understand what their problems are, and hopefully take action to truly help them" (Yagana, 2009).

Frozan T. described her commitment to acting in a self-determined way and enacting her agency by passing on her values to her children:

> "I cannot stay in my small home and not go outside and to school. I cannot accept the cruelty of the men. I am not so patient against cruelty and I cannot tolerate the cruelty. I can respect the elder people, but I cannot accept their wrong opinions. I am not strong enough to forget my wishes and dreams for my future. I cannot. I cannot. I cannot … I promise to myself that I will not say these things about the basics of being a good girl, a good person, to my children. I will not say these things are valuable. I will teach them and inculcate in them that being respectful,

> responsible, smart, behaving as a human, being kind toward others and having courage to face problems and working hard are the values in our lives. We should know the value of these things and respect them. I will say to them that they shouldn't be selfish. When they do all these works I think that they will be the best people in the world" (Frozan T., 2014).

Massoma described Rahima's proactive efforts to seek support:

> "'The woman told me there is a network that supports women who have attempted self-immolation, but I did not believe it until I went and saw the reality,' said Rahima. 'I was so disappointed when I saw healthy women with good skin, but after finding out more about burned women and speaking with them I learned many things.' She attended a literacy course for eight months. She learned to sew, and now she can work as a tailor to earn money. Her face does not show grief or disappointment. She said the Afghan Women's Network 'rescued my life and gave me hope for future. Now I do not feel ashamed of myself'" (Massoma, 2011).

Angela conveyed her tenacious belief in herself and her hope for the future:

> "After all the obstacles in my life, I believe in myself. During the Taliban regime, I did not think I would return to school, but now I believe I will find the opportunity to continue my education, as it happened in my life once before. I totally believe that there will be colorful days after black nights" (Angela, 2010).

And Samira and an Anonymous author respectively identified the empowering experience of writing:

> "I tried, but I couldn't become a doctor. Though I failed at that, I found I could write. And then I understood I could heal with my writings" (Samira, 2011).

> "I am someone who had no support, but I never forgot my dream. This can be an encouraging point for other Afghan women who hope for peace in their life. I was blind; now I can read and write so I am seeing. Before this I could just see my surroundings, but now I can see the entire world" (Anonymous, 2015).

***Theme 44: Collective agency.*** Authors also frequently described a commitment to, as well as expressly calling for, the collective empowerment of Afghan women. Marzia N. suggested women's empowerment must be led, collectively and cooperatively, by women:

> "Afghan culture today creates obstacles for us, but when one of us stands up and

> shows that we can mark history again, we see a remarkable change in the perspective of our counterparts and society as a whole. We should not sit back and wait for our rights. First, women need to understand other women, respect one another's rights, and then stand together to bring change. To be united we must stop and think about whether we are a source of violence against ourselves. If we want to change the way women are treated, we have to change our behavior towards one another. No one is going to do anything for women until then. Women must find our values within and then make society respect and accept our values and us" (Marzia N., 2014).

Noting the gender-based oppression and control experienced by her sister's friend, Mariam, Fariba H. called for women's equality:

> "I believe women deserve equal human rights and we must support women for our abilities beyond the home and family. Women are capable and strong and society needs to be able to see this. It is also important that the government address policies to decrease violence and result in fairness for women. Change for Mariam will only start to happen when Afghan people and the government demand that gender violence stops" (Fariba H., 2015).

And Roqaia underscored the collective power of Afghan women's votes and voices:

> "Women should recognize the value of the timing of this election and use this opportunity to show off their abilities to society and the world. We should shout in the darkness and make the world believe us. The world must hear the Afghan woman's voice. It is a voice that has been silent for years with a lock that was clamped on the Afghan woman's mouth. Our goal and dream is for a better tomorrow for all Afghan women. To achieve our goals, we will use our right to vote for our ideal candidate. We will choose our country's destiny and build our country" (Roqaia, 2014).

## Discussion

Thematic analysis of 368 narratives written by 105 Afghan women writers illuminated threats to women in Afghanistan as both systematic and insidious, institutionalized and internalized, profound, dynamic, and staggering in their number and scope. The following first two sections discuss the findings with respect to how they do and do not resonate with Kaminer et al.'s (2016) conceptual characterization of continuous traumatic stress (the most recent and comprehensive CTS framework to date).

These sections are followed by a discussion of study strengths and limitations, practice implications, and research recommendations.

**Continuous Traumatic Stress**

A major research question investigated in this study concerns the extent to which continuous traumatic stress, as characterized by Kaminer et al. (2016), resonates with Afghan women's lived experiences. Based on the themes arising from the author narratives, a case can clearly be made for CTS's congruence with the traumatic conditions many Afghan women experience on a continuous basis.

In their articulation of the construct, Kaminer et al. (2016) define CTS as a constellation of trauma-inducing conditions including (among three additional criteria) the presence of multiple violent events (generally in the form of physical harm or threat). These threats occur across different contexts over a period of months or years, and they involve multiple perpetrators. Themes from the present study suggest Afghan women experience physical forms of violence and/or threat associated with prolonged armed conflict in Afghanistan, as well as harassment (physical, sexual, and/or verbal) in public spaces. Thematic findings also suggest it is not uncommon for women to encounter ongoing physical violence and/or threat in other dimensions of their lives, such as interpersonal violence in the context of marriage and/or family life, physical harm or threat when pursuing employment, education, or political activities, and/or sexual violence through the adjudication of "moral crimes." Frequently identified in author narratives, perpetrators of violence/threat were numerous and varied.

Kaminer et al.'s (2016) third CTS criterion, that violent events contain objective sources of danger in the present and a realistic possibility of future threat or harm, is

reflected in themes comprising the second broad component of the present study's findings. As such, Themes 28 and 29 detail how multiple, objective threats to women exist simultaneously in the present and interact in ways that increase women's vulnerability. Theme 30 describes violence and/or threat as existing in the present and continuous with past and future threat; and Theme 31 specifically speaks to how women tend to live anticipating future (sometimes imminent) harm.

Kaminer et al. (2016) also suggested the presence of ambient violence (the repeated witnessing of injury or threats to others) characterizes a context of continuous traumatic stress. Theme 27, which addresses prolonged armed conflict in Afghanistan, clearly depicts a society overwhelmed by ambient violence. Further, themes addressing the culture of violence in Afghanistan and its specific manifestations across domains of living also convey a sense that violence, witnessed personally or experienced more indirectly (e.g., reading about the mob in Kabul that murdered Farkhunda) create a backdrop of violence in women's daily lives.

The last CTS criterion, a fundamental failure of societal protections, is clearly evidenced in Theme 13, which illustrates how institutional failures such as corruption across levels of governmental functioning not only result in a lack of protection and justice for women but also become a source of systemic threat.

Furthermore, findings from the present study that describe how Afghan women may experience and respond to gender-based violence, oppression, and threat (component three of the thematic findings) indicate a significant degree of resonance with Kaminer et al.'s (2016) description of the mental and physical health effects of living in CTS contexts. Common responses to CTS (as described by Kaminer and colleagues) such as

threat vigilance and a primary preoccupation with navigating present dangers are evident in the present findings, specifically Theme 31 (women live anticipating future threat), and Theme 40, which describes women's constant vigilance to threat as an adaptive, reactive response to violence/threat.

Kaminer et al. (2016) also discussed the commonality of engaging in avoidance behaviors in CTS contexts. They explained behaviors such as restricting one's movement as adaptive, from a survival perspective, though likely detrimental to one's well-being as a result of engendering chronic isolation. Relatedly, Theme 41 describes women's development of self-protective strategies, often in the form of avoidance and/or withdrawal, as an adaptation to living with ongoing threat with potentially negative consequences for one's sense of well-being. Kaminer et al.'s identification of emotional distress and somatic symptoms as common responses to CTS are also apparent in the present study in Theme 37 (pervasive experiences of negative emotion) and Theme 33 (somatic symptoms and psychological strain associated with persistent stress). Finally, Theme 34 reflects Kaminer et al.'s finding that intrusive thoughts and feelings related to past traumas were often experienced by women in contexts of CTS, with reactions to past traumas often coexisting with women's constant vigilance to present and future dangers.

**Continuous Traumatic Oppression**

Despite considerable overlap of the present findings with continuous traumatic stress criteria, several essential dynamics specific to women's experiences in Afghanistan appear to fall outside of Kaminer et al.'s (2016) definition. In their account of violent events experienced in CTS contexts, those researchers described such events (with the exception of traumatic bereavement) as episodes of physical violence or threat. AWWP

authors in the present study spoke to myriad, intersecting forms of violence that include, and extend far beyond, physical manifestations of violence and threat. Indeed, they commonly framed the multiplicity of threats to Afghan women as structural forms of gender-based violence that are inherently dehumanizing. They called attention to specific, institutionalized forms of dehumanization that are consistently enacted upon Afghan women, including the treatment of women as property, forced marriage, the prosecution of women for "moral crimes" (and related institutionally sanctioned forms of sexual assault), severe restrictions on women's movement outside the home, and denial of women's names outside of their families. The AWWP authors suggested that in addition to the effects of living in CTS contexts, as described by Kaminer et al., Afghan women frequently experience significant harms to their sense of human dignity and essential personhood.

The institutionalized nature of the traumatic conditions experienced by many Afghan women suggests, in addition to continuous traumatic stress, *continuous traumatic oppression* (a novel construct offered here by this study's author) may hold conceptual resonance with women's lived experiences in Afghanistan. An assessment of the present study's thematic findings describing "perpetrators" of threat or harm against Afghan women adds support to the conceptual salience of continuous traumatic oppression. Specifically, in addition to individuals (e.g., male, and sometimes female, relatives, and male partners/spouses) and organized entities (e.g., the Taliban, ISIS, the Afghan National Police), beliefs grounded in a fundamentally oppressive ideology that women are innately flawed and inherently inferior to men were cited as foundational sources of threat to Afghan women.

Further, thematic findings suggest conditions of continuous traumatic oppression are maintained through systematic disenfranchisement of women by institutions vital to Afghan society. Notably, AWWP authors called attention to ways misogynistic interpretations of Islam, that intentionally disenfranchise women in social, political, and economic realms, become formalized as Afghan law or adopted through local/tribal customs. Authors also discussed economic/financial dimensions of oppression, particularly severe restrictions on women's access to educational and employment opportunities. They also described political dimensions of women's suppression, such as efforts within Afghanistan's governing legislative body to prevent ratification of legislation supporting basic human rights for Afghan women, and parliamentary efforts to reduce women's engagement in the political process. These actions appear to be focused on limiting women's capacity to challenge structural violence in Afghanistan.

The present findings also elicited eight unique themes describing women's experiences of, and responses to, systemic gender-based forms of threat endemic to life in Afghanistan that are not reflected in Kaminer et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of CTS and its impacts. Theme 32 specifically frames gender-based oppression as traumatic and potentially life threatening, connecting the pervasive oppression of Afghan women and girls to their physical injury and/or death. Theme 35 (foreclosed development) speaks to what is lost in one's life, or the aspects of oneself that are without opportunity to develop, as a result of experiencing longstanding oppression. Relatedly, Theme 36 (diminished self-concept) articulates one of many profound psychological wounds that may arise through prolonged marginalization. Theme 38 describes a collective sense of hurt shared among Afghan women. The acceptance of dangerous life circumstances (Theme 39) is a

noteworthy adaptive reactive response to threat and/or oppression. Finally, Themes 42 – 44, which describe adaptive proactive responses to threat through personal and/or collective agency, reflect courageous actions oriented toward coping with and/or challenging pervasive, gender-based oppression in Afghanistan.

**Study Strengths and Limitations**

The textual body of work by AWWP writers considered herein is noteworthy in that it addresses current gaps in the literature and elaborates upon previous findings by giving voice to nuanced, complex, and often poetic accounts of Afghan women's lived experiences. The investigation of narratives crafted by writers as innate expressions of self—without the framing of an interview or focus group data collection process—situates the present study as unique, even among qualitative studies, and comprises a noteworthy contribution to the discourse on Afghan women's experiences of threat and related psychological sequelae. Additionally, the sheer scope of the threats to Afghan women articulated in the current study, and the depth of detail in their depictions, are significant contributions to the literature.

Themes in the present study illuminate numerous topic areas generally considered taboo in Afghanistan. For example, in Theme 19, AWWP writer Norwan vividly captured the essence and prevalence of forced marriage, writing: "In Afghanistan most of the marriages are arranged and forced. Families decide, and girls are like sculptures, bodies without soul." Notably, perspectives such as Norwan's are generally difficult to ascertain for many reasons, including cultural norms restricting sharing about one's family with outsiders, particularly when experiences may reflect negatively on one's family (Luccaro & Gaston, 2014).

Another notable finding, Theme 3, described misogynistic interpretations of Islam that contribute to the subordination of Afghan women. This theme is particularly noteworthy given how potentially life-threatening it is in Afghanistan to express views that are critical of Islamic religious leaders and their teachings (Osman, 2015). For AWWP women writers, the safety afforded by publishing their works online and under pseudonyms likely enhances the honesty and accuracy they are able to express in their narratives. This innovative form of discourse may create space for challenging oppressive social mores without threat of further harm.

The present study is not without considerable limitations. Many demographic characteristics of the AWWP author sample are unknown; therefore, there is no way to assess how representative this study's sample is of the population of Afghan women. Notably, women who self-select into AWWP writing workshops have some level of English writing literacy, which is unique among Afghans, particularly Afghan women, of whom 83% are illiterate in Afghanistan's national languages (UNESCO, 2017). Additionally, some AWWP authors are represented to a greater extent than others, as a result of writing a greater number of nonfiction works that met inclusion criteria for this study. Another unknown factor that may have affected the findings is which narratives were composed in response to AWWP workshop writing prompts (and what those prompts were), and which were self-generated topics. Some nonfiction works in the sample are specifically directed toward a foreign (if not specifically American) reader, which may influence the narrative presented. Additionally, qualitative data are not intended to be generalized to the population of interest. Thus, generalizability of the findings is limited. Finally, despite efforts to minimize my voice within the data analysis,

my sensibilities as a person and a reader are inherently part of the narrative presented in this dissertation.

**Practice Implications**

Findings suggest an invitation for clinicians working in Afghan contexts (and possibly other environments characterized by continuous traumatic stress and/or continuous traumatic oppression) to recognize the potential for threat to arise from many, varied sources and to explore the salient sources of threat that exist for each client. Considering the conditions described in the thematic findings, it is important for practitioners to acknowledge that many Afghan women have experienced trauma in the past, while facing current and future threat. In addition to validating women's experiences of continuous stress and pervasive oppression, clinicians may provide continuous-trauma-informed care by honoring ways in which women adapt to life in Afghanistan without pathologizing their responses. At the same time, it is paramount that clinicians explore any potential negative impact of women's adaptations on their functioning. Clinicians may work with clients to develop adaptive, proactive ways of coping with ongoing traumatic stress and/or oppression such as connecting with and enacting personal agency in ways that fit their lives. For AWWP writers, maintaining hope, offering and/or receiving support in the context of their relationships with women/networks of women, and writing were effective ways of coping. Further, clinicians may serve their clients by supporting Afghan women's collective agency, and contributing to women's collective empowerment by engaging in client, systems, and/or social/political advocacy.

**Sociopolitical Implications**

To enlarge the context, within the nonfiction narratives considered herein, AWWP women writers clearly articulated their experiences, values, and the social change they would like enacted in the present and future. In particular, AWWP writers advocated for women's equality and the enforcement of constitutional laws supporting women's rights. They called for the elimination of institutional oppression, including the disenfranchisement and inequitable treatment of women. They voiced their support for women's rights organizations, access to high quality healthcare and education for women and girls, women's representation in local and national politics, and forums through which they may share their voices with each other, the Afghan population (more broadly), and the international community. Numerous AWWP writers advocated, both explicitly and indirectly, for Afghan women's experiences and perspectives to have a primary role as national and international forces continue to negotiate the "reconstruction" of Afghanistan following the U.S.-led military invasion in 2001.

**Research Recommendations**

Future studies could replicate and extend the present results. Domains and/or specific themes from this study could be the focus of further qualitative investigations with AWWP writers, as well as Afghan women not affiliated with AWWP. For instance, interviews (conducted verbally or in a written form) with Afghan women could directly address themes aligned with continuous traumatic stress and continuous traumatic oppression to elaborate these constructs further. Additionally, qualitative analysis of the narratives expressed in the context of AWWP's Oral Stories Project, which gives voice to women denied the opportunity to read and write, could further elucidate Afghan women's

experiences in personal and nuanced ways. Finally, the present findings suggest more research is needed on the efficacy of writing as an effective method for coping with exposure to contexts of continuous traumatic stress and/or continuous traumatic oppression.

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# Appendix A

## Historical Context of Conflict in Afghanistan: 1979 – Present

For nearly 40 years, the Afghan people have endured protracted civil conflict, military campaigns by foreign forces, societal instability, and massive internal and external displacement. From 1979 – 1989, Afghan resistance forces (*mujahideen*) engaged in prolonged fighting against a coalition of Soviet and pro-Soviet Democratic Republic of Afghanistan government troops in what became the Soviet War (Sayed, 2011). Subsequent to the withdrawal of Soviet forces, in-fighting among factions of the mujahideen exposed Afghans to seven years of brutal civil war. Over the course of these conflicts, over one million Afghan civilians were killed (Taylor, 2014), and the Afghan population was exposed to repeated rocket fire and bombing, executions, and the placement of thousands of landmines (Physicians for Human Rights, 2001).

From this sociopolitical context emerged the Taliban, a group grounded in an ultra-conservative interpretation of Pashtun tribal culture and ideologically aligned with the radical Deobandi sect of Sunni Islam (Scholte et al., 2004). The Taliban's worldview dictates the enforcement of extreme restrictions on the Afghan people, such as the systematic segregation of men and women, and severe restrictions on women's movement outside the home (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2004); these restrictions systematically limit women's human rights (Physicians for Human Rights, 2001). From 1996 to 2001, the Taliban sustained control of a nation through pervasive fear and repressive violence (Omidian & Miller, 2006). In 2001, U.S.-led coalition forces invaded Afghanistan with the stated goal of ousting the Taliban, citing the Taliban's sheltering of Osama Bin Laden following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the U.S. (Walsh, 2016).

After 16 years of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, with troop levels varying from upwards of 100,000, during a military surge in 2011 (Reuters, 2017), to approximately 8,800 in mid-2017 (Mashal, 2017), security incidents and civilian casualties have been at an all-time high since the UN began recording such statistics in 2007 (SIGAR, 2017). In 2016, thousands of civilians were killed or injured amid ongoing conflict between Afghan government and insurgent forces that included the Taliban and groups affiliated with ISIS (SIGAR, 2017). Public spaces have become notable targets for suicide attacks, including multiple attacks in or near markets ("Deadly motorcycle bomb," 2015; Rosenberg, 2012), at a high-profile funeral in Kabul (Rasmussen, 2017), and at peaceful protests (Rasmussen, 2016). While suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices attributed to the Taliban and other insurgents were responsible for a majority of civilian deaths, the Afghan National Security Forces' indiscriminate artillery fire on civilian-populated areas led to significant civilian casualties, particularly among women and children (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Presently, the Taliban controls more territory in Afghanistan than at any time since 2001 (SIGAR, 2017).

# Appendix B

## Expanded Review of Literature on Continuous Traumatic Stress

### Psychosocial Effects of Living in Contexts of Continuous Traumatic Stress

At present, much of the recent literature on continuous traumatic stress has been conducted in Israel, a country that has experienced recent time-limited wars as well as prolonged periods of violent conflict. Three studies are located, at least in part, in the small city of Sderot, Israel, where, between 2001 and 2008, thousands of rockets and mortars were fired into the city from the Gaza Strip (Diamond, Lipsitz, Fajerman, & Rozenblat, 2010). Further, residents of Sderot regularly experienced gunfire and "code red" alerts indicating imminent threat from artillery fire (Diamond et al., 2010).

Observing various groups of individuals living with continuous trauma in Sderot, Diamond et al. (2010) noted two client groups with consistent, differing presentations of anxious symptomology: those who met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD and those experiencing anxiety in a manner atypical of the PTSD symptom presentation. The latter group of clients reported a gradual increase of anxious symptoms over time and denied re-experiencing/intrusive symptoms (a key marker of PTSD). Instead, they reported fears associated with daily activities that realistically left them more vulnerable to experiencing harm. Diamond et al., (2010) noted clients' avoidance of places and activities were reality-based, or at least within reason, given the ongoing threat of harm. Additionally, their hyperarousal appeared to have adaptive elements, in a survival sense, in the context of persistent missile fire. Further, clients reported that once they were outside of danger zones (e.g., when they went on vacation), they experienced a significant decrease or full remittal of anxious symptomology. The authors distinguished this symptom response

pattern from all existing anxiety-related disorders and proposed an *ongoing traumatic stress reaction* as an alternative framework.

Primarily of an anecdotal nature, the above-described responses to ongoing traumatic stress should be interpreted with extreme caution. Diamond et al. (2010) did not report any demographic data for the participants, nor did they provide any detail about their methodology. While their data are not substantial enough to draw conclusions about ongoing traumatic stress or clients' psychosocial responses to living in contexts of continuous trauma, the authors highlighted a number of factors worth considering. First, it may be possible for anxious symptoms to manifest in ways that are adaptive within dangerous conditions. Second, continuous traumatic stress responses "may be conceptualized as adaptive yet distressing reactions to an ongoing, dangerous situation" (Diamond et al., 2010, p. 20). Their descriptions of an ongoing traumatic stress reaction are in direct alignment with Straker and Moosa's (1994) early observations of continuous traumatic stress.

Pat-Horenczyk et al.'s (2013) study provides further evidence of the distress experienced by individuals living with ongoing threat. Specifically, the researchers measured the prevalence and severity of traumatic stress symptoms among 85 mother-child pairs living in Sderot (the "Continuous sample" group), as well as 177 mother-child pairs living in two cities in northern Israel who had only experienced rocket fire during the 33-day-long Lebanon War in 2006 (the "Past sample" group). Along with a clinical interview about their children, mothers completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) for Preschool Children (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000), which was used to assess children's behavioral and emotional problems. Mothers' exposure to trauma was

measured using a self-report questionnaire from the Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI; Kessler & Ustun, 2004). Nineteen items assessed exposure to traumatic events unrelated to political violence, and five items addressed exposure to political violence. Rather than measuring frequency or severity of the exposure to political violence, the score was only used to identify the type of political violence (e.g., missile attacks). Mothers also completed an author-developed questionnaire created to assess for political violence and traumas specific to Israel; eight items referred to missile attacks and exposure to political violence, and two items referred to prior trauma. Posttraumatic symptoms were measured using the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS; Foa, Cashman, Jaycox, & Perry, 1997), and depression was assessed with the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977), a 20-item, self-report measure of depression in nonclinical samples.

Findings suggest the Continuous and Past samples differed greatly and support the researchers' hypothesis that living in a context of ongoing threat is associated with more posttraumatic stress symptomology among mothers and children compared to those who experienced past violence. Specifically, 44.6% of the children in the Continuous sample met criteria for PTSD, compared with 14.9% of children in the Past group who were diagnosed with PTSD. The children exposed to ongoing violence also had significantly more behavioral problems, including both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Similarly, 45.9% of the mothers in the Continuous sample reported clinically significant posttraumatic symptoms, while 20.7% of mothers in the Past sample demonstrated posttraumatic distress. The researchers concluded an increase in

accumulated stress effectively increases emotional distress, rather than individuals becoming habituated to the ongoing trauma.

Using structural equation modeling to model the relationship between maternal and child posttraumatic distress and children's emotional and behavioral problems, Pat-Horenczyk et al. (2013) found maternal distress was strongly correlated with the child's distress for both the Past and Continuous samples. Notably, however, the researchers found the presence of relational trauma (the co-occurrence of traumatic distress in mother and young child) within the Continuous sample, but not the Past sample. Pat-Horenczyk et al. suggested continuous exposure seems to intensify or compound relational trauma.

These findings offer insight into the extent to which living with continuous traumatic stress decreases psychosocial functioning and contributes to the existence of relational trauma among mothers and children. The data also provide insight into the categories of political violence the children and their mothers experienced. This study is not without its limitations. In addition to the self-report nature of the data, accurately assessing exposure to ongoing violence is a noteworthy limitation. Pat-Horenczyk et al. (2013) acknowledged the prevalence of traumatic events in contexts of ongoing violence likely interferes with individuals' abilities to accurately report on the quantity and intensity of the trauma and their current and past reactions to it. They also acknowledged that simply summing the number of reported events does not adequately reflect their impact. The researchers therefore opted to only measure the *type* of political violence to which mothers and children were exposed rather than the number, intensity, and/or severity of the exposure events. Thus, findings are limited with respect to those dimensions. Ultimately, the researchers were unable to indicate the extent to which

exposure to violence was ongoing or whether the mother-child pairs experienced traumatic stress responses that deviate from PTSD symptomology.

**Ways of coping**. Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel (2009) also studied traumatic stress in an Israeli context, focusing on ways individuals cope in contexts of continuous threat. The researchers described *ways of coping* as basic ways (including those that contribute to well-being, as well as those that are a detriment to it) that people respond to problems. Their sample included 500 students who attended a college situated in an area exposed to continuous threat, primarily in the form of regular rocket fire. Students lived in one of three main localities: the town of Sderot ($n$ = 69), rural settlements adjacent to the Gaza strip ($n$ = 73), and areas outside of the confrontation zone ($n$ = 358).

Similar to Pat-Horenczyk et al. (2013), Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel (2009) measured trauma-related distress levels by assessing posttraumatic symptomology using the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Inventory (Solomon et al., 1993). A modified version of the COPE questionnaire (Carver, 1997) assessed ways of coping, a measure previously used by Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon (2003) to examine coping (related to terrorist attacks) among an Israeli population. Finally, they assessed participants' *sense of belonging* on a researcher-constructed measure based on Itzhaky's (1995) Sense of Belonging Scale. The measure consisted of three items: "I feel a part of the college"; "I like to study at the college"; and "I recommend that others study at the college."

Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel (2009) found 9.5% of the participants in the sample met the criteria for a PTSD diagnosis. Participants who resided in Sderot were disproportionately represented among those diagnosed with PTSD (26% from Sderot versus 6% from each of the other two localities). Further, hierarchical regression analyses

revealed higher levels of PTSD symptomology were associated with low economic status, living in Sderot, being female, and having a high level of exposure to attacks. In terms of coping strategies, high levels of alcohol and medication use and support seeking were associated with high levels of PTSD, whereas low levels of PTSD were associated with a greater sense of belonging to the college and use of acceptance as a way of coping with continuous stress. The researchers speculated that a greater sense of belonging to the college community, acceptance as a coping strategy, and greater economic resources served as protective factors for participants from rural settlements against developing high levels of accumulated stress related to living in a conflict zone. In contrast, Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel (2009) suggested students from Sderot tended to use coping skills that function less effectively as protective factors.

The findings of this study offer insight regarding coping strategies in contexts of ongoing traumatic stress, but they should be considered within the context of several limitations. Generalizability of the results is limited, even with respect to the Israeli college where the study took place, as students living in Sderot and rural settlements were oversampled. In their hierarchical regression results, the investigators also failed to report any data beyond the standardized coefficient (beta) for the variables included in the final regression model. This limits our understanding about the contribution of individual predictor variables (or blocks of predictors) to the variance in PTSD symptomology.

Additionally, the measures assessing ways of coping and sense of belonging appear to lack demonstrated psychometric properties beyond calculations of Cronbach's alpha. The modified questionnaire used to assess ways of coping likely fails to fully capture participants' coping strategies, as several previously identified ways of coping

(e.g., instrumental action, problem solving, distraction, and opposition; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembock, 2007) were seemingly excluded from the survey. Qualitative inquiry into the students' coping strategies would offer a more nuanced understanding of the ways individuals cope with continuous trauma exposure.

Weierstall et al. (2013) also investigated context-specific factors found to be protective against developing PTSD and/or to improve psychosocial functioning. Specifically, the researchers studied *appetitive aggression,* or "the infliction of harm on a victim for the purpose of experiencing violence-related enjoyment beyond secondary rewards like status or material benefits" (Weierstall et al., 2013, p. 139) in a sample of youth offenders in South Africa. Weierstall and colleagues wondered whether appetitive aggression might serve a protective role related to the development of psychosocial dysfunction and the anticipation of future danger within this specific population. The researchers positioned this form of aggression in contrast to *reactive aggression*, which generally manifests in order to avoid experiencing negative emotion (Weierstall et al., 2013).

The sample consisted of 70 males who ranged in age from 13 to 27 years ($M = 20$; $SD = 3$) and lived in one of two urban townships in Cape Town, South Africa. Participants were either ex-inmates or non-incarcerated former youth offenders who were engaged in a community-based intervention program aimed at preventing re-offenses. Previous exposure to potentially traumatic or threatening events and concerns about future threat were measured using the UCLA Trauma Checklist (Rodriguez, Steinberg, & Pynoos, 1999) and items from the Children's Exposure to violence Checklist (CEVC; Amaya-Jackson, 1998), respectively. PTSD symptom severity was assessed using the 20-

item UCLA PTSD Index (Rodriguez et al., 1999), a measure designed to assess PTSD in children and adolescents. This measure's validity for African samples has been previously established (e.g., Hermenau et al., 2013). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman & Scott, 1999) assessed psychosocial dysfunction. This questionnaire has strong demonstrated cross-cultural validity (Mullick & Goodman, 2001); but it was specifically designed for children aged 4 – 16 years. The Appetitive Aggression Scale (AAS; Weierstall & Elbert, 2011) measured attraction to violence and experiences of violence perpetration. Finally, reactive aggression was assessed using the reactive subscale from the Reactive–Proactive Aggression Questionnaire (Raine et al., 2006), the only available measure specifically addressing reactive aggression. All of the measures were administered verbally in the form of a structured interview (Range: 90 – 120 minutes) conducted by a clinical psychologist and a Xhosa interpreter.

Based on multiple linear regression analyses, Weierstall et al. (2013) concluded that reactive aggression is associated with increased psychosocial dysfunction, while participants who engaged in appetitive aggression showed less psychosocial dysfunction. The researchers also postulated that a rewarding perception of violence contributes to a better adaptation to ongoing exposure to threat or violence.

Weierstall et al. (2013) highlighted the crucial role of cultural context in understanding ways of coping and psychological functioning. Notably, in urban, impoverished townships in Cape Town, where gang-related violence occurs at extraordinarily high rates, appetitive aggression may reflect adaptive psychosocial functioning. The researchers also suggested appetitive aggression may have secondary rewards, such as enhancing an individual's status and/or acceptance in their social

environment, which is a noteworthy dynamic in contexts where establishing a sense of safety and security may be particularly challenging. This investigation identified a potential adaptive coping strategy for the sample under study and called attention to the sociocultural implications of such a strategy. Indeed, appetitive violence poses risk to self and others, imprisonment, and perpetuates an historically rooted cycle of violence.

Several limitations of Weierstall et al.'s (2013) study suggest caution in drawing definitive conclusions from their findings. Generalizability of the findings is limited due to the study's narrow subgroup of former youth offenders from two townships in Cape Town, South Africa. Additionally, participant ages ranged widely. Though the researchers noted participant age had no influence on their analyses, age and developmental level may have affected the quality and validity of the data collected. For instance, three of the six quantitative measures used in the study were created specifically for children and adolescents; however, the average participant age was 20.3 years. Length of time since the participants were engaged in violent activity may have also affected the information they reported. As Weierstall et al. (2013) noted, participants may have had some intentionality with respect to how they presented themselves to researchers (e.g., responding in ways that reflected desirable masculine gender norms and thereby inflating their reports of violence, or limiting their disclosure and/or their honesty out of a motivation to successfully complete the intervention program). Relatedly, the researchers did not report when their sample participated in the research (i.e., before, during, or upon completion of the 6-month community-based intervention program). Therefore, the effects of participation in the program on the findings are unknown.

**Summary.** In the studies considered thus far, traumatic symptomology was primarily conceptualized and measured as PTSD, suggesting it is the predominant trauma construct despite its temporal incongruence with the real-life trauma exposure. Even using this anachronistic construct, measurements of traumatic stress symptoms demonstrated that ongoing trauma is associated with decreased psychosocial functioning (Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013; Weierstall et al., 2013). Where researchers attempted to measure ongoing exposure, the methods had several limitations. Nuttman-Shwartz and Dekel's (2009) assessment of exposure to ongoing violence was based on a single item, while Weierstall et al. (2013) essentially used a score for past trauma exposure (e.g., the "trauma load" score) to assume present trauma. In sum, continuous traumatic stress as a construct is limited by current approaches used to measure this phenomenon. Though their evidence was anecdotal in nature, Diamond et al.'s (2010) naturalistic observations of clients' symptom presentations offer the richest insight into the sequelae of living with continuous threat of harm. Their observations of an *ongoing traumatic stress reaction* suggest the need for in-depth examination of the phenomena that extends beyond PTSD constructs.

In both investigations of protective factors in CTS contexts, historical oppression and socioeconomic marginalization contributed to the prevalence of violence to which community members were exposed, creating the context in which individuals employed a variety of coping strategies. The research design common to both studies, however, limits the ability to fully elucidate ways of coping in continuously traumatic environments. In each case, the researchers identified *a priori* specific ways of coping for their population of interest and then quantitatively investigated the extent to which participants used those

coping strategies. Qualitative investigations of coping with ongoing exposure to trauma would likely enhance the elucidation of the CTS framework.

**Intervention Studies**

Responding to the need to further develop a descriptive framework for continuous traumatic stress Higson-Smith (2013) qualitatively explored the nature of traumatic stress – as experienced by torture survivors and perceived by their respective therapists – in a sample of individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa. The study's sample consisted of participants from torture-treatment centers in three locations: Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; and, Yaounde, Cameroon. A total of 15 counseling staff and 14 clients (including both nationals and refugees) participated in the study.

The investigator conducted semi-structured, individual interviews. Interview questions concerned broad themes (e.g., For counselors: their "motivations for torture rehabilitation work . . . approaches to counseling . . . intervention constraints arising in the community" (Higson-Smith, 2013, p. 168), etc.; For clients: "access to services . . . most helpful therapeutic interventions . . . therapeutic relationships" (Higson-Smith, 2013, p. 168), etc.). Interview questions further elicited narratives of clients' and counselors' experiences by prompting interviewees to tell the investigator a story about the topic at hand (e.g., "Tell me the story of how you first came to this center for help?" (Higson-Smith, 2013, p. 168)). Questions about ongoing danger or continuous traumatic stress were not posed directly.

The investigator used a narrative analysis methodological approach to identify both the content and form of themes that emerged from the interviews (Higson-Smith, 2013). As part of the analysis, three key organizing theoretical constructs were identified:

past trauma, ongoing threat, and continuous traumatic stress. Ongoing threat emerged as a significant theme in five of the 15 interviews with counselors and four of the 14 client interviews, eliciting 12 and eight distinct narratives, respectively. Results from the eight client narratives that addressed the nature of continuous traumatic stress in this sample clustered around the following categories: "continued harassment by the original torturers or their colleagues . . . ongoing threat from police, army, and other government offices . . . threat from members of the community and neighbors . . . domestic violence . . . sexual violence (Higson-Smith, 2013, p. 170). Notably, none of the narratives were constructed purely in terms of the past trauma construct. Rather, past trauma was used in combination with the stress-generation construct (two of eight client narratives and six of 12 counselor narratives), and the continuous traumatic stress construct (six of eight client narratives; eight of 12 counselor narratives). Further, two of the narratives integrated all three of the theoretical constructs.

Based on these findings, Higson-Smith (2013) concluded the predominant theoretical approaches to traumatic stress fail to capture the full complexity of torture survivors' realities; which, Higson-Smith (2013) suggests, are a complex intersection of past trauma, continuous traumatic stress, and stress-generating dynamics. Further, the investigator characterized potential outcomes for torture survivors living with ongoing threat, including: 1) emotional collapse leading to life-threatening crisis or paralyzing cognitive distortions; or 2) characterological adaptations to a threatening world, including a pragmatist strategy, a survivalist strategy, or a fatalistic approach that precipitates danger-seeking behaviors. Higson-Smith (2013) suggested torture survivors who face ongoing danger are best served by therapeutic care that flexibly integrates trauma-

focused treatments with psychosocial interventions aimed at increasing torture survivors' safety and support.

A particular strength of Higson-Smith's (2013) qualitative study is its nuanced characterization of the complex nature of trauma experiences for a sample of torture survivors. Another strength is the inclusion of clinicians' perspectives, as they are an underrepresented voice in the current literature. Yet the findings should be considered in the context of a number of limitations. Foremost, themes related to ongoing threat were not present in a majority of the interviews conducted with counselors and clients; instead, the ongoing threat narratives were from a small subgroup of the sample. The subgroup's characteristics and commonalities, if there were any, would be interesting to know. Moreover, the client participants in this study represent individuals who were inclined and able to access therapeutic services, they were in a sufficiently healthy psychological condition to participate in the research, and they were interested in doing so. Finally, qualitative data are not intended to be generalized to the population of interest.

Murray, Cohen, and Mannarino (2013) used case studies to explore the application of a more traditional form of trauma treatment, trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT; Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006), with youth living in contexts of continuous trauma. An evidenced-based treatment initially formulated to treat past trauma, TF-CBT includes: "Psychoeducation, Relaxation, Cognitive Coping, Trauma Narrative and Processing (i.e., gradual exposure), In-Vivo Exposure, Conjoint Parent-Child Sessions, and Enhancing Safety Skills" (Murray et al., 2013, p. 181). Murray et al. (2013) noted concerns from clinicians using TF-CBT that interventions from this therapeutic approach (such as in-vivo exposure) may need to be excluded, or at

least modified, for children and families living in conditions of continuous trauma. Addressing these concerns, the researchers presented case studies illustrating practical strategies learned from three community-based projects that have implemented TF-CBT with clients living in contexts of CTS.

The Children Recover after Family Trauma (CRAFT) project received the most attention in Murray et al.'s (2013) article. Operating within a community center for domestic violence survivors (specifically, the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh), the CRAFT project compared the effectiveness of TF-CBT with traditional child treatment. Murray et al. (2013) reported trauma was often ongoing because many of the women and children maintained, to some degree, relationships the abusive partner. The researchers did not report any demographic data for the CRAFT participants.

Murray et al. (2013) highlighted the following practical strategies through their case study analyses: 1) prioritize safety; 2) enhance engagement; 3) assess real danger versus trauma reminder; and 4) provide advocacy. The researchers suggested that, similar to approaches for treating PTSD, prioritizing safety for CTS clients is paramount. As safety is not an underlying assumption for therapy in CTS contexts (as it typically is when treating PTSD), Murray et al. (2013) found that creating concrete, detailed, and rehearsed safety plans in collaboration with child clients and their caregivers helped to improve safety and establish a greater sense of security. Treatment components that involved exposure therapy in conditions of CTS focused on evaluating the existence of real danger(s) versus overgeneralized trauma reminders, reflecting a modification of the standard TF-CBT to fit the CTS context. Though concerns have been raised about processing past traumas in contexts of ongoing trauma exposure, Murray et al. (2013)

noted it facilitated caregivers' awareness and acknowledgement of the dangerous situations children and adolescents faced, leading to decreased minimization of the danger youth experienced. The researchers also provided case examples wherein child and adolescent clients demonstrated positive outcomes related creating trauma narratives. These outcomes included an increased ability among youth clients to accurately identify particular factors and situations that precipitated specific traumas, thereby increasing their capacity to differentiate between real and perceived dangers, as well as decreased maladaptive cognitions (e.g., self-blame) through enhanced capacities for perspective taking.

Often clinicians modify their treatment approaches, particularly when using evidenced-based treatments such as TF-CBT, to be responsive to the needs and realities of their clients. Murray et al.'s (2013) insights regarding these modifications validate the importance of providing effective and contextually appropriate interventions for youth and families living in dangerous environments. Particularly explanatory are the case studies that augment, via clinically relevant context and details, ways to implement the four strategies outlined for using TF-CBT where CTS conditions are present. Nonetheless, these case study findings should be interpreted and applied cautiously, given the small number of cases and the essentially anecdotal nature of the work. Likely intentionally, limited or no demographic or procedural data were provided about the participants of the CRAFT project or the other community-based programs mentioned in the article. Therefore, it is unknown to whom the findings may be relevant. On an intervention level, the highlighted TF-CBT strategies emphasize the importance of engaging and collaborating with parents to support children's optimal functioning in CTS

contexts. Murray et al. (2013), however, fail to address how TF-CBT might be implemented when children endure conditions of continuous traumatic stress without the presence or support of at least one caregiver. The researchers suggested qualitative research is needed to further explore clients' and clinicians' perspectives on how TF-CBT may be beneficial in conditions of continuous trauma.

Group intervention has also been used in CTS contexts. One notable example is Mpande et al.'s (2013) research on the emotional health and community connectedness of a sample of survivors of political violence and torture from two rural towns in Zimbabwe. Two, three-day, group interventions consisted of the Tree of Life Trauma Healing Workshop, which included aspects of exposure-based cognitive behavior therapy (Foa, Hembree, & Rathbaum, 2007) and testimony therapy (Agger & Jensen, 1990), and a Psychoeducation and Coping Skills Workshop (PACS). Holistic health, stress, trauma, coping skills, self-care, and social support were among the topics addressed in the PACS intervention (Mpande et al., 2013).

Participants in the groups were recruited from two small communities in Zimbabwe with high levels of political violence; group assignment was based on the participant's community membership. A total of 139 individuals participated in the study ($n$ = 79 in the TOL workshop; $n$ = 69 in the PACS workshop). Measures used in the study included the 20-item Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20; Beusenberg & Orley, 1994) and the 28-item Zimbabwe Community Life Questionnaire (ZCLQ), which the investigators developed for the study. Cronbach's alpha for the SRQ-20 was .492, which is low, and reportedly unexpectedly low given the measure's wide use globally. The ZCLQ contains three subscales: Community Engagement, Contribution to the Lives of

Others, and Attitudes Toward Community Healing (internal consistency coefficients for the current study were 0.626, 0.717, and 0.661, respectively). Participants completed baseline measures prior to the workshop and the same measures at a 2-month follow-up. At the time of intake, participants in the TOL group were more likely to report family problems, stressful life events, and personal and financial problems.

Chi-square and *t* tests were used to identify group differences. Analyses indicated the TOL group reported exposure to more types of organized violence and trauma. Women reported greater distress than men, and older people reported greater distress than young people. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was then performed to compare post-intervention outcomes. The ANCOVA statistically controlled for pre-intervention group differences on pretest scores, employment levels, and number of exposure types reported. Results revealed the TOL and PACS treatment groups did not differ significantly on any client outcome measures, with the exception of the PACS participants showing slightly greater improvement on the ZCLQ-Contribution to Lives of Others subscale.

Mpande et al. (2013) concluded effective psychosocial interventions, as well as meaningful research, can be carried out in contexts where political violence and intimidation are ongoing. Related, the researchers noted that a long-term commitment to the communities where the interventions took place had already been demonstrated, which, along with transparency and nonpartisan activities, created a foundation of trust that was necessary for the interventions to occur. They further concluded the minimal differences in results produced by the interventions suggested the specific intervention components may be less important than the many similarities the interventions shared.

These similarities, they noted, may have also been a study limitation. The results should also be interpreted with caution, given the non-equivalency of groups at pre-test, markedly low reliability of the SRQ-20 for this sample, and the possibility of regression toward the mean (which cannot be assessed in the absence of a no-treatment control group). Finally, as Mpande et al. (2013) suggested, post-intervention follow-up at five months (as opposed to two months in their present study) would better illuminate the longer-term effects of group participation.

**Summary.** The methods used to explore interventions with children, adults, and communities experiencing contexts of continuous traumatic stress highlight the developmental nature of CTS as a construct. Perhaps relatedly, each of the three studies discussed the complexity of treating clients with complicated past and continuous trauma. Mpande et al. (2013) highlighted the potential for group interventions to significantly decrease distressing symptomology and increase community engagement for individuals living in communities with high levels of ongoing political violence. Higson-Smith's (2013) narrative analysis of interviews with counselors and their clients offered an outline for a descriptive framework of CTS in torture survivors, in which the participants shared narratives detailing past, as well as present, traumas and threat of harm. Counselors in Higson-Smith's (2013) study endorsed using a multimodal or integrative therapeutic approach with their clients, highlighting the limitations of particular trauma-focused treatments to effectively support clients living in conditions of continuous trauma and/or threat. Murray et al.'s (2013) case study research similarly reflects modifications to an evidenced-based approach to treating past traumas in order to respond effectively to the needs of children and their caregivers living with ongoing domestic violence. Both

Higson-Smith (2013) and Murray et al. (2013) noted the subjective nature of their data, however, limiting the scope of their respective contributions to being more descriptive than explanatory in nature.

### Summary of Continuous Traumatic Stress Research Findings

The data-driven studies considered herein suggest an alarming psychosocial picture for individuals exposed to ongoing danger. Specifically, individuals were found to have high rates of exposure to multiple forms of violence (Kaminer et al., 2013; Mpande et al., 2013), and higher levels of emotional distress, relational trauma, and posttraumatic stress symptomology than individuals who had solely experienced past trauma (Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013; Weierstall et al., 2013). Problematic behaviors were also reported at higher rates among children experiencing continuous versus past trauma (Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013). A number of variables were associated with higher levels of trauma symptoms, including high levels of exposure to violence, low economic status (Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009), and being female (Mpande et al., 2013; Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009).

Protective factors against individuals' developing trauma-related symptomology, even when experiencing high levels of exposure to violence, included accepting the situation and having a sense of belonging to a community (Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009) and engaging in appetitive aggression (Weierstall et al., 2013). Characterological adaptations were also noted as a common response for torture survivors living under conditions of continuous threat (Higson-Smith, 2013). CTS interventions with individuals and groups showed promise for reducing trauma symptomology (Mpande et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2013).

As previously discussed, the studies on continuous traumatic stress considered herein contain numerous limitations. In studies in which data were collected through interview formats, the power dynamics that existed between the interviewer and the participants (Higson-Smith, 2013) and the effects of social desirability and other self-interested motivations may have threatened the credibility of the findings (Kaminer et al., 2013). Though the ethical considerations are significant given the contexts in which CTS research is conducted, the non-equivalency of groups and the lack of no-treatment control or wait-list conditions also represent a threat to internal validity (Mpande et al., 2013). The sample characteristics (e.g., participants were engaged in therapy, self-selected to participate in research, heterogeneous in age, often included only one gender, and were non-specific with respect to identifying ethnicity) limit the generalizability of the findings, or external validity (Higson-Smith, 2013; Kaminer et al., 2013; Mpande et al., 2013; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013; Weierstall et al., 2013).

Additionally, the lack of demonstrated reliability and validity for a number of the measures (as in Nuttman-Shwartz & Dekel, 2009; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013; Weierstall et al., 2013), as well as the difficulties associated with accurately assessing exposure to past and ongoing violence are notable limitations (Kaminer et al., 2013; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2013). With the exception of Mpande et al. (2013), research that quantitatively measured psychological distress used instruments specific to symptom constellations comprising posttraumatic stress disorder. Typically, conclusions about CTS were then drawn by examining correlations between PTSD-related distress and findings from brief instruments measuring exposure to violence. Rather than attempting to understand

present trauma through constructs intended to measure past trauma, a promising direction for future research lies in qualitative exploration of the phenomenon.

## Appendix C

## Summary of Themes and Domains

The following is a summary of the themes and domains (contained within three overarching components) elicited in the present study. The authors named in relation to each theme are the AWWP writers whose illustrative quotes are featured in the text.

### *Component 1: Women Experience Threats that Are Gender-Based and Pervasive Across Dimensions of Personal and Societal Functioning*

#### Domain A: Threats to Women Are Grounded in Fundamentally Oppressive, Patriarchal Ideology

**Theme 1: Women are inherently flawed**
Freshta K., Arifa
**Theme 2: Women are inferior to men**
Mariam, Shekiba, Haya
**Theme 3: Interpretations of Islam position women as "less than" men**
Asma, Mahnaz, Sara

#### Domain B: Threats to Women Are Embedded and Manifest in Cultural and Community Values, Practices, and Traditions

**Theme 4: Denial of basic human rights and acknowledgement of essential personhood**
Marzia, Anonymous, Zahra M., Zahra T.
**Theme 5: Treating women as property**
Arifa, Leena G., Freshta K., Fatima G.
**Theme 6: Culture of physical violence**
Roqaia, Pari, Elay, Roya,
**Theme 7: Verbal and non-verbal forms of violence**
Kamilah, Tamana M., Anonymous
**Theme 8: Sexual violence and harassment in public spaces**
Shekiba, Mahnaz, Raha, Jamila Q.
**Theme 9: Culturally defined notions of "a good girl"**
Nahida, Sabira, Zahra A.
**Theme 10: Gossip**
Rahela, Anonymous, Marzia

#### Domain C: Oppression Is Enacted through Political Means

**Theme 11: Systemic disenfranchisement of women**
Lima, Shekiba, Mahnaz
**Theme 12: Inequitable treatment**

Elay, Masouma H., Marvah
**Theme 13: Institutional failures**
Yalda N., Anonymous, Nasima, Masooda R.
**Theme 14: Threats to political participation**
Zakia H., Arifa H., Fariba, Aysha

**Domain D: Economic Forms of Threat**

**Theme 15: Employment-related violence and threat**
Kandahar Writers Collective, Asma, Seeta, Anonymous
**Theme 16: Violence, threats, and denial of access to education**
Zahra W., Mahbooba, Pari, Aida S.
**Theme 17: Inequitable inheritance of money and property**
Marzila, Arezu R., Emaan
**Theme 18: Inadequate access to healthcare**
Shahida, Sitara

**Domain E: Family Systems as Sites of Threat**

**Theme 19: Forced marriage**
N., Norwan, Leeda, Anonymous
**Theme 20: Family honor**
Safia R., Marzia, Marvah
**Theme 21: Domestic violence**
Sara, Humaira, Storay K.
**Theme 22: Family violence**
Anonymous, Seeta, Arifa

**Domain F: Oppression Becomes Internalized**

**Theme 23: Internalized oppression**
Basira, Pari
**Theme 24: Lateral Violence**
Marzia N., Gullafroz, Shafiqa

**Domain G: Threats Exist within the Broader Environment Due to Socioeconomic and Sociopolitical Factors**

**Theme 25: Pervasive poverty**
Paana, Meena Z., Tamana M., Sharifa
**Theme 26: Illiteracy and lack of education**
Hila G., Afsana
**Theme 27: Ongoing armed conflict in Afghanistan**
Shafiqa, Fariba, Zahra M., Norwan, Leena G., Surina

*Component 2: Threats to Women Are Dynamic in Nature*

**Domain H: Threats Are Layered and Interactive**

**Theme 28: Multiple threats, occurring simultaneously, across contexts**
Zahra W., Aysha, Sharifa, Anonymous
**Theme 29: Threat interaction increases women's vulnerability**
Shogofa, Fatima F., Fariha F.

**Domain I: Time Orientation**

**Theme 30: Continuous threat**
Asma, Afsana, Nelab, Beheshta, Paana
**Theme 31: Women anticipate future threat**
Sharifa, Shafiqa, Sveto, Sabira

*Component 3: How Women Experience and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, Oppression, and Threat*

**Domain J: Women Experience Significant Harms to Their Physical and Psychological Integrity**

**Theme 32: Physical injury and/or death**
Haya, Yagana, Rabia J., Zahra W., Seeta
**Theme 33: Somatic symptoms and psychological strain associated with persistent stress**
Safia, Pari, Asma, Kamilah, Mariam, Leena G.
**Theme 34: Intrusive thoughts and feelings related to past traumas**
Lima, Emaan, Shafiqa
**Theme 35: Foreclosed development**
Norwan, Sabira, Beheshta, Fahima, Aysha, Sabira, Anonymous
**Theme 36: Diminished self-concept**
Anonymous, Raha, Aida S., Shogofa, Masooda R., Shakila
**Theme 37: Pervasive experiences of negative emotion**
Zahra T., Aysha, Zahra M., Norwan, Nelab, Farida
**Theme 38: Collective sense of hurt**
Arifa, Masooda R., Seeta

**Domain K: Adaptive Reactive Responses to Threats**

**Theme 39: Acceptance of dangerous life circumstances**
Shogofa Az., Aysha, Lima
**Theme 40: Constant vigilance**
Sharifa, Mahnaz, Alia, Zarmina
**Theme 41: Development of self-protective strategies**
Pari, Angela, Farida, Safia, Anonymous

**Domain L: Adaptive Proactive Responses to Threat through Agentic Action**

**Theme 42: Subverting oppressive practices**
Freshta, Nastaran, Mariam, Anonymous
**Theme 43: Enacting personal agency**
Mahtab, Madia, Yagana, Frozan T., Massoma, Angela, Samira, Anonymous
**Theme 44: Collective agency**
Marzia N., Fariba H., Roqaia