

# Afghan women died in earthquake as they feared Taliban punishment for not wearing hijab

Women died in an earthquake in Afghanistan because they were afraid to leave their homes without their hijabs, it has emerged.

Earlier this month, several dozen women were trapped under rubble in the Zinda Jan district of Herat province and died after they had delayed their escape from collapsing buildings for fear of defying the Taliban's strict laws on head coverings, a female rescuer said on condition of anonymity.

She said the hijab law and another Taliban directive which forbids men from mixing with women who are strangers led to a larger female death toll. It meant male rescuers were reluctant to save women whom they did not know, she added.

UN relief agencies in Afghanistan said that 90 per cent of the earthquake victims in Herat were women and children. Jaime Nadal, the Afghanistan representative for the United Nations Population Fund, told Associated Press that there would have been no "gender dimension" to the death toll if the quake had happened at night. The daytime disaster meant local men were mainly at work while women were home.

An earthquake survivor...said her husband and three daughters were killed in the earthquake. "As the earth started shaking, we rushed outside the house," said Mariam, who has a fracture in her left leg. "My daughters turned back midway looking for hijab and then our house collapsed,"

A man whose wife was killed after racing into her home to

retrieve her hijab told [The Telegraph](#): “Had I not sent her back inside the house to get her hijab she would have been alive, it is all my fault,” said Mr Ahmad.

At Herat’s provincial hospital doctors claimed that in the initial hours following the earthquake, female patients were denied treatment by male doctors. UN women’s agency officials have reported that earthquake-affected women in Herat were deprived of humanitarian aid because of the absence of a “Tazkira” identity card and the necessity of a male “mahram” escort.

Taliban directives women and men who are strangers to each other are not allowed to mingle, so male doctors can be prevented from treating female patients.