



"WE SIMPLY DO NOT WANT TO DIE"

ASSESSMENT OF PROTECTION CONCERNS AND CASE STUDIES  
OF AFGHAN WOMEN IN NEW SHAMSHATOO REFUGEE CAMP, PAKISTAN

December 2001



## **Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children**

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## **Mission Statement**

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children seeks to improve the lives of refugee women, children and adolescents through a vigorous program of public education and advocacy, and by acting as a technical resource. The Commission, founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, is the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to speaking out on behalf of women and children uprooted by armed conflict or persecution.

The International Rescue Committee, founded in 1933 at the suggestion of Albert Einstein to assist anti-Nazis fleeing Hitler, is among the largest voluntary nonsectarian agencies serving refugees worldwide. The IRC provides assistance to refugees and displaced people in some 30 countries and operates a network of refugee resettlement offices in some 20 cities in the United States.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Introduction

At the end of June 2001, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and International Rescue Committee (IRC) initiated an assessment of the protection concerns of recently arrived Afghan women and girls residing in New Shamshatoo refugee camp, near Peshawar, Pakistan. These women are among thousands of displaced fleeing the combined effects of a three-year drought, a debilitating conflict which is now more than two decades old, and the repressions of the Taliban and Northern Alliance Islamic movements. The purpose of the assessment was to learn more about the problems confronting these women and girls, both in Afghanistan and in New Shamshatoo, and to better understand who they are and why they have sought refuge in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> The information provided in this report will help the international community to secure the protection and livelihoods of Afghans inside and outside Afghanistan.

This assessment was undertaken because the problems women faced *before* September 11 were of concern and more investigation was needed to better understand and address these issues. Since September 11, the situation has worsened, and many of the issues highlighted here remain, particularly regarding women's health care and security. With the situation in Afghanistan in a state of flux, the security of Afghan women continues to be a matter of concern. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is undertaking a small-scale follow-up assessment in New Shamshatoo in January 2002.

The assessment comprised a random survey of 204 female residents of the camp, 11 in-depth case studies of women and girls living in the camp, and 15 interviews with male section leaders and representatives in the camp.<sup>2</sup> Part I includes preliminary findings and recommendations, background information on New Shamshatoo, an overview of the components of the assessment, and more detailed discussion of the results. Part II presents the full text of the 11 in-depth case studies conducted by Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghaddam of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

This report provides insight on the humanitarian situation of refugees and identifies concerns that must be considered in planning and programming for an eventual repatriation. While some refugees will be able and willing to return spontaneously, others, including women-headed households will require specific assistance. The Women's Commission argues that any successful repatriation program must consider the protection concerns women face – some of these concerns are clearly stated by the women interviewed for case studies in this survey.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) anticipates that there is a need for continued emergency interventions and assistance for refugees who continue to cross into Pakistan even as meetings in Europe begin to fashion the broad brush strokes for eventual peace agreements. Given this prognosis, it is critical for the Government of Pakistan (GoP) and

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<sup>1</sup> In designing the assessment, both the Women's Commission and IRC were interested in the protection concerns of women and girls, while IRC also focused on the issue of refugee status.

<sup>2</sup> Although a total of 204 women and girls were surveyed, complete data on their protection concerns is available for 140. (Biographical data exists for all 204.) This discrepancy is due to an error in the way in which the data was recorded on a portion of the surveys. We recognize that this renders the data on protection concerns less reliable, but reiterate that our findings and recommendations are only preliminary and are meant to inform more comprehensive assessments.

UNHCR to address the concerns outlined by women in this report, including the need for registration, adequate healthcare, education, sanitation and shelter. Local organizations, including women's non-governmental organizations, can rapidly expand existing programs to provide this humanitarian assistance.

## **PART I: ASSESSMENT**

### **KEY FINDINGS**

#### ***A. Preliminary Findings Regarding Protection Concerns of Women and Girls in Afghanistan***

- **Women and girls residing in New Shamshatoo have come almost exclusively from Kabul province or provinces north of Kabul (99 percent of those surveyed). 75 percent of those surveyed are *not* Pushtun.**
- **83 percent of women and girls said that if forced to return to Afghanistan, physical insecurity due to ongoing armed conflict and displacement would be an important concern for the whole family.**
- **Male residents of New Shamshatoo reported grave concern about forced conscription of male family members by the Taliban when they were living in Afghanistan.**
- **Female residents of New Shamshatoo reported serious concern about extortion of food and provisions<sup>3</sup> from families by Taliban forces and forced migration by Taliban and opposition forces while living in Afghanistan.**
- **Female residents of New Shamshatoo also reported inaccessible or unavailable health care services and educational opportunities as important concerns while living in Afghanistan.**
- **To be able to move from Afghanistan to Pakistan, many families in New Shamshatoo have taken on significant debts.**
- **Pakistani police at Torkham are committing violence against Afghan women, children, and men when they attempt to cross the border.**

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<sup>3</sup> See Case Study K. The food and provisions referred to here are *not* those provided by the World Food Program and other humanitarian agencies but those produced, gathered, and purchased by families.

## ***B. Preliminary Findings Regarding Protection and Humanitarian Concerns of Women and Girls in New Shamshatoo Camp***

- **19 percent of the females surveyed in New Shamshatoo are widows.**
- **94 percent of the women and girls surveyed had received no education in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> There are limited opportunities for education in the camps.**
- **Deficient health care services and restricted access to health care (due in part to a 5 rupees fee per visit) were reported as important concerns of female residents.**
- **Corruption<sup>5</sup> and inequitable representation were reported as important concerns of female residents.**
- **Harassment and extortion of male family members by police patrolling the camps, other areas of Peshawar, and the North West Frontier Province were reported as important concerns of female residents.**
- **Inadequate food supply was reported as an important concern of female residents in the camps in Pakistan.**
- **Inadequate insect control and insect bites are significant problems in the camps in Pakistan.**
- **The training and occupational opportunities available to women are inappropriate for those women not used to doing nimble-fingered work such as embroidery and tailoring.**
- **The absence of doors and locks on residents' homes and the fact that some families live in tents without even a surrounding wall present serious privacy, security, and mobility problems for women and girls.**

## **BACKGROUND ON NEW SHAMSHATOO**

UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan opened New Shamshatoo refugee camp in December 1999 on the site of an old camp that had closed in 1994.<sup>6</sup> New Shamshatoo is located approximately 40 km to the north of Peshawar. According to UNHCR, in fall 2001 the camp

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<sup>4</sup> The 1995 Adult Literacy Rate for Afghanistan was 46 percent for males and 16 percent for females (Source: UNICEF State of the World's Children 2000)

<sup>5</sup> Corrupt activities mentioned, primarily perpetrated by block leaders, included appropriation of part or all of the various rations intended for camp residents, substitution of friends or relatives into agency lists instead of the intended beneficiaries, and extraction of bribes in order to gain access to agency registration processes for aid provision.

<sup>6</sup> See "About UNHCR Pakistan" at <http://www.un.org.pk/unhcr/unhcr.htm>. The descriptive statistics cited in this paragraph were all taken from this web-page.

houses well over 10,000 families or approximately 52,000 individuals.<sup>7</sup> UNHCR shifted 10,000 families from Jalozei Camp to New Shamshatoo in three phases from October 2000 to January 2001, almost all of whom arrived in Pakistan between September 2000 and January 2001.<sup>8</sup> UNHCR reports that 74 percent of the residents are Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, or Hazara, while the remaining 26 percent are Pushtun; they originate from Baghlan, Balkh, Kabul, Kapisa, Laghman, Parwan, and Takhar provinces. The vast majority are women and children.

### *Biographical Data*

#### Province of origin

**99 percent of the women and girls surveyed indicated that they fled provinces north of Kabul or Kabul province itself.** The primary provinces of origin reported are Parwan (31 percent), Baghlan (19 percent), Kabul (18 percent), Takhar (11 percent), and Konduz (6 percent). The remainder of the provinces reported (less than 5 percent of respondents each) were Balkh, Faryab, Jowzjan, Kapisa, Laghman, Sar-e-Pul, and Nangarhar.



#### Ethnicity

**75 percent of the women and girls surveyed are non-Pushtun.** Consistent with UNHCR's figures cited above, 53 percent of those surveyed are Tajik, 10 percent Uzbek, 6 percent Hazara, 5 percent Turkmen, 1 percent Arab, and only 24 percent Pushtun. These figures suggest that over 75 percent of the female residents of New Shamshatoo do not speak Pushtun as a first language and 15 percent do not speak either Dari or Pushtun as a first

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR staff in Peshawar, interviewed in early July by IRC, indicated that the population of the camp at the time of the assessment was 10,629 families or 51,889 individuals.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR reports that prior to or immediately after the closure of Pakistan's border with Afghanistan on November 9, 2000, 154,000 Afghans arrived in the North West Frontier Province and 18,000 arrived in Baluchistan.

language. Notably, women from more remote areas and women from minority language groups (Uzbeki, Turkmen, Arabic) are unlikely to speak either Dari or Pushtun as a second language because of their social and geographic isolation in Afghanistan.

#### Marital Status

**19 percent of the women surveyed are widows, while 77 percent are married and 4 percent were never married.**

#### Education

**94 percent of the women and girls surveyed had no education in Afghanistan, and only 4 percent have had over 10 years of education.**

#### *Camp Management*

Although the Government of Pakistan's Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR) manages New Shamshatoo administratively as two sub-units (Camp 1 and Camp 2), most camp services and the representative structure are based on four sections or blocs. According to UNHCR staff, within each section one male committee and one female committee (consisting of a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, and treasurer) are supposed to be selected from among the residents of the section. The nomination of candidates and selection process are reportedly facilitated by CAR's social animators, overseen by the CAR District Coordinator for Peshawar, and concluded after conferring with the elders of the section. The intention of the selection process is to identify representatives who are knowledgeable and able to form an effective, functional link between residents and aid agencies. Finally, in addition to the eight primary committee members for each section (male and female), there are reportedly between six and 12 ordinary members in each section who are supposed to work with residents, resolve disputes, and respond to grievances. UNHCR and CAR provide training for the committee members, and the members' performance is monitored primarily by CAR.

Approximately 14 agencies, in addition to UNHCR and CAR, work at New Shamshatoo and provide food, water, sanitation, health services, and vocational training. All activities are coordinated and supervised by UNHCR and CAR.

Most residents of New Shamshatoo were registered to receive rations before being transferred from New Jalozai. However, according to agencies working in the camp, ration tokens, which can be exchanged for food, fuel wood, etc., are distributed to male section leaders based on the number of residents they claim to represent. Residents then go to their section leaders to receive their tokens. Some families with male heads have problems receiving their whole ration because they were non-Pushtun and block leaders were Pushtun.

Health services at New Shamshatoo are coordinated by the Project Directorate of Health (PDH), an agency under CAR that receives its funding from UNHCR. According to UNHCR, PDH oversees all of the health care services provided at New Shamshatoo.

## **FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In general, the findings from each component of the initial phase of the general assessment were consistent, and findings from one component reinforced findings from the others. The primary results are summarized below categorized as *Protection Concerns in Afghanistan* and *Protection Concerns in New Shamshatoo*. When not indicated in the text, the source of the information provided follows in parentheses: Case Studies of Women and Girls (CS), Interviews with Block Leaders and Group Representatives (I), and Survey of Women and Girls (S).

### **Protection Concerns in Afghanistan**

#### **Ongoing conflict**

**83 percent of those surveyed expressed concern about their physical security due to armed conflict if they were to return to their home provinces.**

#### **Displacement**

**80 percent of those surveyed expressed concern about being displaced if they were to return to their home province.** 42 percent said they would be displaced due to drought or economic hardship (including having lost their homes) alone, and 38 percent said they would be displaced because of fighting in their home district alone or in combination with other factors.

#### **Recommendations:**

The Government of Pakistan and UNHCR should recognize that the vast majority of New Shamshatoo's residents may have valid claims to refugee status based on their concerns about physical insecurity in Afghanistan given the ongoing conflict. As such, UNHCR should ensure that all refugees are registered.

The GoP and UNHCR should also carefully consider any repatriation or deportation program at this time, given the severity of the humanitarian crisis and the volatile nature of politics in Afghanistan, and the reality that many of those families that are repatriated will, either entirely or in part, become internally displaced or return to Pakistan.

#### **Forced conscription of men and boys**

**Forced conscription and extortion of male family members were important concerns of Afghan women and girls living in Afghanistan.** Over half of the women interviewed for the case studies stated that forced conscription by Taliban or opposition forces was a problem for them in Afghanistan. Often, they reported, Taliban or opposition forces came to their villages and demanded money or goods in exchange for a male family member's freedom from conscription. These reports were reinforced by the survey data – 28 percent of the women and girls surveyed mentioned forced conscription as a security problem for them while living in Afghanistan. Notably, over 40 percent of the women surveyed in Baghlan, Balkh, and Jowzjan provinces reported forced conscription as a concern, while 40 percent of Turkmen and 45 percent of Uzbek women surveyed reported the same.

These figures suggest that forced conscription had been more frequent in non-Pushtun areas where Taliban forces are seen as an occupying force, especially since more and more Punjabi,

Arab, and Chechen recruits fill their ranks.<sup>9</sup> It may well be that forced conscription is also carried out by non-Afghan Taliban troops. The fate of the men and boys taken for such activities is uncertain as no systematic monitoring of any kind has been in place.

#### Extortion of provisions by Taliban forces and forced migration

**Uzbek and Turkmen women report that Talibs forced families to provide food for them, slowly starving families too frightened to say no to their demands (CS).** Moreover, this assessment indicates that forced migration – prompted by Taliban or opposition forces – from villages where conflict was occurring or about to occur was widespread (CS, I). In the former case fear of rockets or other ordinance incites people to move and in the latter armed gangs from both forces may give villagers a specific amount of time in which to vacate their village. In some cases villagers’ homes are destroyed, either by being burned down or blown up, in front of the owners or after their forced departure. Of those surveyed, 29 percent reported destruction of their home or property while in Afghanistan.

#### Lack of health care services and opportunities for education in the north

**Health care services in northern Afghanistan are severely lacking (CS).** This appears to be especially true of reproductive health care services (CS). The survey data shows that 19 percent of all women reported inadequate services or restricted access to services with percentages slightly higher than the mean in Baghlan, Jowzjan, and Parwan provinces.

**Educational opportunities in northern Afghanistan are insufficient, especially for girls. As noted above, 94 percent of the women and girls surveyed had no education in Afghanistan, and only 4 percent have had over 10 years of education.**

This assessment suggests that the problem lies, in part, in the fact that female education is a low priority for some communities (CS). However, such lack of commitment is not, by any means, universal. As one male group leader from Kapisa noted, the bans on women working outside home and on education for girls have only compounded the typical family’s problems. “Without education, life is like a dark night. We have lots of families that survive off the work of one person, and because women can’t work, they can’t get by in life.”

As a historical matter, families initially shied away from the idea of sending children to schools set up by the “Communists” as they believed that their children would not be good Muslims. Later, fighting broke out and the Mujahideen, local brigands, and now the Taliban have created insecurity in many areas. Families were and still are reluctant to allow girls to make the journey to the nearest schools (if they are located a fair distance away) for fear that their daughters would be raped, abducted, or forced into marriage with a fighter (CS). It also seems that home school systems were not implemented. This means that in many areas there has been no education for girls for almost two decades or, in some cases, even longer.

#### Recommendation:

Our assessment indicates that the health care and educational systems the residents of New Shamshatoo left behind in northern Afghanistan were skeletal, even in times of peace. In recent months, the fighting and insecurity in these regions have greatly limited

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<sup>9</sup> In recent years, Pushtun villages have also started resisting conscription. Outbreaks of violence over such issues have been reported from Khost and from Kandahar, the “home” province of the Taliban.

people's mobility, rendering what few services there were inaccessible. In considering repatriation (voluntary or otherwise), UNHCR and the GoP should recognize that Afghan women, girls, and their families would be sent back to areas where there is effectively no health care or education. As a matter of principle, UNHCR and the GoP should not force Afghans to return to these areas *unless* and *until* access to adequate health care and education can be guaranteed.

#### Abduction of women and girls

**Many Afghan women and girls feared abduction while living in Afghanistan but very few report its occurrence in their own villages or personal knowledge of its occurrence.** While a number of the case study interviewees and the male camp representatives stated that they had heard of abductions occurring in Afghanistan, only three, one of the women and two of the men, reported knowledge of specific incidents. The woman stated that she had seen another woman abducted but did not want to discuss it further. One of the group leaders stated that he knew of a young woman who was forcibly engaged to a Talib, resisted and tried to run away, and was then killed. Another group leader from the Panjshir Valley stated that he knew 50 to 60 families from this region who had suffered a kidnapping. In the survey, 9 percent of respondents mentioned kidnapping or forced marriage as a concern while living in Afghanistan. This data does not, however, distinguish between personal knowledge or experiences of abduction and generalized fears. This under-reporting of specific cases and personal experiences may be related to the fact that the topic is considered taboo. In many cases the survey was carried out in a group setting rather than one-on-one interviews which might have mitigated against reporting.

#### Incurrence of debts to migrate

**Many families in New Shamshatoo take on significant debts to be able to move from Afghanistan to Pakistan (CS).** Financial resources are necessary to pay for transportation, bribes, and fees for smugglers. Families often borrow money from other family members or residents of their village, promising to pay them back once they arrive in Pakistan.

#### Recommendation:

Additional research regarding the debts incurred by families to move from Afghanistan to Pakistan is needed. Also, the aid community should consider that many families in dire need of assistance in Afghanistan may be too impoverished to actually reach the nearest place where they can receive it. Targeted assistance during repatriation will be essential for women-headed households. Also, basic reproductive health supplies including safe motherhood kits should be included in repatriation packages whenever appropriate.

#### Violence at the border

**Pakistani police at Torkham are committing violence against Afghan women, children, and men when they attempt to cross the border (CS).** Afghans and observers report that the police beat people with sticks and are indiscriminate in meting out their blows.

#### Recommendation:

Monitoring of violence against women, children, and men by Pakistani police at Torkham must be a priority of the international community. This will remain imperative during any repatriation.

## Protection and Humanitarian Concerns in New Shamshatoo

### Ethnicity and Language

**The assessment indicates that women and girls residing in New Shamshatoo have come almost exclusively from Kabul province or provinces north of Kabul (99 percent of those surveyed). 75 percent of those surveyed are *not* Pushtun.**

#### Recommendation:

All agencies that work with residents of New Shamshatoo and transmit important messages to them about government policies, distributions, health services, and other issues must ensure that their staff are able to do so in Dari as well as Pushtun. Such agencies must also ensure that their staff can effectively communicate with members of minority groups (primarily Uzbeks and Turkmen) who do not speak Dari or Pushtun.<sup>10</sup>

### Corruption and inequitable representation

**Corruption in the distribution of provisions is common in New Shamshatoo (CS, I).**

The women interviewed in the case studies reported block leaders stealing fuel rations and said they did not know whom to talk to about such problems. The male representatives themselves reported that women often have a difficult time claiming what is theirs by right during distributions and that ration cards are often given to friends or relatives or sold instead of going to the people entitled to them.

#### Recommendations:

UNHCR and the GoP should reject the notion that corruption in New Shamshatoo and other camps is “inevitable.” Instead, they should investigate when and where corruption is occurring, what structural administrative arrangements facilitate or deter corruption, and how they can empower camp residents to protect themselves against it.

UNHCR and CAR should revise the ration distribution system (discussed below) to reduce the power of male section leaders over how rations are allocated among sections of the camp and which residents receive them.

Women residents should have effective recourse to representatives in the camp, preferably women, to whom they can go if they have protection problems or concerns related to the operations of aid agencies, e.g., stolen rations. Residents should be familiar and comfortable with their representatives, and the representatives should be able to speak Dari and at least one of the minority languages spoken in Afghanistan. This could be accomplished by strengthening the current committee system (discussed below) and ensuring that the representatives are known to women in the camp and able to effectively represent their needs effectively.

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<sup>10</sup> The primary languages of Afghanistan are Dari (spoken by Tajiks) and Pushtun. While these two languages are completely different, they do come from the same language group (Indo-European). Uzbek and Turkmen, on the other hand, come from an entirely separate language group (Turkic), and Arabic comes from a separate group once again (Semitic).

### Under-representation of Women

**Ethnic minorities and women are underrepresented in the administrative structure, and the current grievance system is inadequate** (CS, I). The administrative system is composed primarily of one socio-economic stratum of Pushtun- or Dari-speaking males, who are “old hands” in the UNHCR camp system. Representation from other socio-economic groups, e.g., widows, and ethnic groups, e.g., Uzbeks, is non-existent or can easily be swayed to go with the majority. The result is that the needs of underrepresented groups will be unmet and their grievances unheard. Such groups will also be left out of the loop of information systems which enable them to understand and claim their entitlements as in the case of block leaders who are able to steal widows’ rations with impunity. One of the women pointed out that the male Turkmen and Uzbek block leaders encounter problems in resolving their grievances because of language barriers. Of those women surveyed, 34 percent reported problems or dissatisfaction with the grievance systems available to them.

#### Recommendation:

The CAR and UNHCR should adjust the administrative structure of the camp to ensure full representation of women, for example, widow block leaders. Designers of such a structure should also be sensitive to the gender roles of widows in the camp to ensure that timings for activities are convenient. This innovation has already been implemented in one block in Akora Khattak camp by the Afghan Women’s Resource Center and has proven to be an effective way to ensure that widows’ voices are heard and their needs cared for.

### Police harassment

**Residents of New Shamshatoo experience and fear extortion and harassment by the police both inside and outside the camp** (CS, I). Our case studies and interviews with male block leaders contain numerous reports of police stealing or extorting goods and money from shops and harassing ethnic minorities. Residents also report that the police arrest men when they leave the camp area and demand bribes for their release. There also appears to be a general understanding among residents of the camp that they are not allowed to travel or go into Peshawar (I).

#### Recommendations:

UNHCR and other organizations with a protection mandate should set up a discreet system for monitoring incidents of harassment to ensure cases are investigated and prosecuted by the relevant Pakistani authorities. Families, men, and women should have recourse to a responsive system which they can approach when their rights have been violated. Members of the local *shura* (local council) can be elected and trained in this regard or new groups can be set up as appropriate. Groups such as the International Human Rights Law Group should facilitate meetings between the community and the police to try and reduce harassment.

The GoP should not tolerate police behavior that disregards the rule of law and should ensure that its police officers are properly trained, supervised, and disciplined with regard to the issue of discriminatory policing and harassment.

### Lack of doors and locks

**Nearly all of the mud-houses approached during the assessment had only a cloth or sack covering a door, while very few had a wooden door and a lock. Numerous families live in tents without any surrounding wall.** (CS, S, I) Families living within mud-walls often cannot afford to purchase the materials necessary to secure the entryway. This creates security problems by day and by night for women, children, and families. It also hampers mobility for women with no one to care for their children and possessions.

#### Recommendation:

UNHCR and other aid organizations should consider initiating a “door and lock” project to improve privacy, security, and mobility for families. Furthermore, agencies should increase security for families living in tents with no surrounding wall or eliminate this situation completely.

### Inadequate health care services

**Health care services in New Shamshatoo are not meeting the needs of the community, especially minority women: 44 percent of the women surveyed mentioned inadequate or restricted health care services as a concern.** The assessment uncovered a host of reported problems with the health care services in New Shamshatoo. First, clinics allegedly often do not conduct full examinations and diagnoses (CS, I). Instead, they reportedly distribute basic medications and send people away (I). Second, because clinics are closed at night, many people have to go without medical care when they need it (I). Pregnant women reportedly suffer from this state of affairs in particular (I).

Third, the case studies make clear that minority women encounter problems due to language barriers. (In support of this finding, the survey data indicate that over 50 percent of Hazara and Uzbek women consider health care to be a problem.) Women have to attend the clinic with a woman or man to whom they are related who can understand Dari or Pushtun. Access depends on the availability of such a person, the level of importance attached to a woman’s health in terms of taking time to accompany her, willingness to spend money on medication, etc. This means that if a woman does not have access to such a person at the time when the clinics are open, she will not receive medical attention, however serious her condition.

Embarrassment about discussing personal health problems in front of a male relative and a male relative’s having to translate such problems to an unknown female health professional can also present a set of problems and misunderstandings. In this sense, illiterate women from minority groups who do not speak Dari or Pushtun are completely disempowered and will not even benefit from mobile health education teams who conduct their teaching in Dari or Pushtun. Currently, personnel in Pakistan Directorate of Health clinics are mainly Pakistani Pushtun speakers. Considering that 75 percent of the population surveyed were non-Pushtun, this means that communicating health problems is difficult if not impossible and visiting the clinic will be seen as a waste of time.

Fourth, many of the women surveyed stated that the clinics charge a 5 rupees per person fee to access the clinic and that, consequently, they often cannot afford to take their children or

themselves to the clinic when they have a health problem.<sup>11</sup> This fee just to enter the clinic, regardless of the quality of service available, seems to be deterring many women from even attempting to go. While some cost recovery in services for refugees is justifiable, in the area of health care it is essential that those who cannot pay fees (especially children, widows, and the disabled) are identified and exempted from the fees before being deterred.

Finally, the lack of a reciprocal social network that provides childcare and care of belongings so women can leave their homes to seek medical attention is another deterrent to accessing care.

#### Recommendations:

An external, impartial organization, preferably a non-governmental organization or consortium of non-governmental organizations specializing in refugee health should undertake a participatory evaluation of the health care services at New Shamshatoo to determine the nature and extent of the reported deficiencies. After the evaluation, the impartial organization should recommend specific steps to remedy the problems identified.

Health care providers in New Shamshatoo should provide multilingual services that will allow women who speak only minority languages to discuss their health problems in a manner that respects codes of privacy and cultural taboos.

Health care providers in New Shamshatoo should not charge access fees for their services unless the money is being put back into services for refugees. Furthermore, there should be criteria and a standard mechanism in place to identify and exempt vulnerable refugees who are unable to pay fees.

#### Education

**94 percent of the women and girls surveyed had received no education in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> There are limited opportunities for education in the camps.**

#### Recommendation:

Agencies should implement programs – through Afghan women’s NGOs already working in New Shamshatoo – that offer courses for literacy, hygiene promotion, and psychosocial health, thus providing a forum in which women can learn more about their rights and the resources available to them. There should be a particular focus on raising awareness and promoting discussion among women about protection issues and grievance mechanisms. Literacy training is an important part of such efforts.

#### Inappropriate income opportunities

**Many women in New Shamshatoo come from farming backgrounds and do not benefit from opportunities to do nimble-fingered work, such as embroidery, currently offered to them (CS).**

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<sup>11</sup> Although we do not have specific data on the number of women in our survey who were deterred from seeking medical care because of the fee, complaints about the fee and inability to access services were frequently recorded in the survey notes.

<sup>12</sup> The 1995 Adult Literacy Rate for Afghanistan was 46 percent for males and 16 percent for females. (Source: UNICEF State of the World’s Children 2000.)

Recommendation:

Women who come from farming backgrounds and cannot do nimble-fingered work should have appropriate occupational opportunities made available to them, such as livestock rearing or kitchen gardening. These opportunities should be created with the fact that these women are used to doing physical labor in a cooler, drier climate in mind.

Food Security

**54 percent of the women and girls surveyed reported an inadequate food supply or inequitable distribution of food to be a significant concern.**

Recommendation:

Aid organizations should look into projects that enable families living in New Shamshatoo to improve food security by increasing possibilities for families to buy, barter for, or produce food stuffs. This could involve more attention to improving employment opportunities, income generation, and, with due attention to technical requirements, food production projects such as small-scale livestock projects, bee keeping, and kitchen gardens.

Vector control

**Inadequate insect control and insect bites are significant problems in New Shamshatoo (CS).** Insect problems, e.g., malarial mosquitoes, lice, and scorpions, are a serious health issue in the camp.

Recommendation:

Vector control must be addressed by agencies working in New Shamshatoo and treated as a health education issue.

Psychosocial problems

**Women at New Shamshatoo have had experiences and undergone changes that have likely caused many to suffer significant psychosocial problems (CS).** Women interviewed exhibited clear signs of anxiety and depression. More research is required on this issue to determine the most appropriate and effective counseling or assistance strategies.

Very few physical security concerns

**Physical insecurity of women, girls, or other family members was *not* reported to be a concern in New Shamshatoo.** This finding was confirmed by all three components of the assessment. Only one specific incident of physical violence came up in all of the case studies and interviews with male representatives, and only 6 of the 140 women surveyed mentioned physical insecurity of any kind as a concern for them.

This may be due to women's restricted mobility beyond the confines of their homes; however this was not closely examined as part of the survey.

## **ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS AND METHODOLOGY**

The Women's Commission and IRC conducted the initial phase of the assessment in three parts: a survey of 204 women and girls living in the camp; in-depth case studies of women and girls living in the camp; and interviews with male section leaders and group representatives for the camp. Each component focused on eliciting information about particular protection problems faced by women and girls and about the experiences of women and their families, both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. Although we inquired about women's protection concerns if they had to return to Afghanistan, we did not investigate specifically what they would do and where they would go if forced to leave Pakistan.

### *Survey of Women and Girls*

Surveyors interviewed 204 randomly selected women and girls living in the camp.<sup>13</sup> The survey consisted of a series of general questions about protection concerns in three separate time periods – past (in Afghanistan), current (in New Shamshatoo), and future (returning to Afghanistan) – as well as biographical data. The goal of the survey was to encourage the respondents to think about and discuss their security and protection concerns without asking them about specific issues. While the sample is still too small to draw conclusions about the general population with a high level of certainty, we believe the data is instructive and can be used to inform further assessments.<sup>14</sup>

### *Case Studies of Women and Girls*

Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghaddam of the Women's Commission completed 11 in-depth case studies of women and girls in the camp. Each case study included a semi-structured interview about the person's life and experiences in Afghanistan, her journey to Pakistan, and her living situation in New Shamshatoo. The interview techniques ensured that if subjects did not want to discuss certain issues they were free not to do so. Six of the subjects were Uzbek, three were Tajik, one was Turkmen, and one was Pushtun. Specific efforts were made to interview people from the ethnic minority groups of Afghanistan to gain a sense of how their experiences and concerns differ from those of the dominant Pushtun group, who form a minority in New Shamshatoo camp. In addition, more than half of the women interviewed were from northeastern Afghanistan where there has been intense fighting.

### *Interviews with Male Section Leaders and Group Representatives*

Finally, the male leaders of New Shamshatoo's four sections and a sampling of male committee members within these sections were interviewed. Interviewers questioned each representative about his perceptions of the past, present, and future protection concerns of Afghan women and girls in the camp and requested information about specific incidents or problems that had come to his attention.

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<sup>13</sup> To generate the sample, a grid of 755 points was first superimposed on a map of Shamshatoo so that the points rested only on those areas designated as residential. Numbers from the 755 points were randomly selected each day and surveyors sent to conduct two interviews at each point.

<sup>14</sup> See Footnote 2.

## PART II: CASE STUDIES

### Case Study A Village near Taloqan, Takhar

A woman in her forties potters around her one mud-brick room, tidying up and talking to me through her husband and teenage son. She speaks very little Dari, especially when she gets excited. Her daughter sits smiling wanly in a dark corner near the bedding. She has other children who are at school. They had come around six months before from a village near Taloqan, the center of Takhar. The Taliban ordered them to move out.

“The Taliban gave us half an hour to pack up and go. Asmara and Punjabi Taliban came to our village. The Taliban looted our house. We watched the Taliban pile up everything we had bought and made over the years, they put it all in their pick-ups and drove it away. We sat there and watched, frustrated. We could not protest or stop them in any way. At the time, the Taliban were sending people to the front by force, but our oldest son escaped to Faizabad. We heard that they killed old people and we saw them beat people up. We heard about abductions of girls but did not see anything ourselves. We lost all our livestock and the use of land because we were driven away. Two of my sons were killed during a big aerial bombardment, when they were trying to transport our wheat by donkey to Kalafgan. They were killed by shrapnel.”

She is overcome and tears flood down her face and her husband takes over for a while: “Our eldest son had got his qualifications and wanted to go to Tajikistan or China when the fighting started. I was in Taloqan for two months. To get my own firewood or fodder from my village I need to get a piece of paper from the Taliban by groveling and currying favor. Then I had to go through so many checkpoints and get everything searched as if I was the thief and get questioned so many times. I had to leave in the end, I couldn’t take it. Prices in Faizabad, the center of Badakhshan next door, were far too expensive for living. The same for Kabul, we did not have enough money to live there and here (he taps the floor) there is nothing but insects.”

The woman wipes the tears with the back of her hand and resumes her description of what they have been through, even though her husband is talking very fast to her in Uzbek. She turns to him and says, “Even if you kill me, I’ll say what I have to.” She turns back to me: “In Torkham the Pakistani police took all my husband’s money and beat him up. We had to give the children to smugglers to cross them over. They took 100 rupees for each child and they were all badly beaten by police, especially our little girl. She has not been the same since.” The girl sits in the corner throughout the interview, smiling uncertainly but never uttering a single word. Her mother continues: “I kept passing through Torkham gate and the police kept pulling me back by the hair. Finally I hid in the middle of some Pushtuns and got through. Torkham was very bad. The women police officers weren’t too bad at Torkham.”

The father interjects: “I had to shout at my son to make him pass through Torkham gate with the smugglers – the police beat him up so many times when he wanted to cross that he was terrified. We got to Jalozai and set up a plastic sheet like everyone else. Jalozai was OK. Pakistani police took 10 rupees from each family member on the last day when we were coming to Shamshatoo. If we hadn’t paid they wouldn’t have let us come. Here in Shamshatoo if you try to sell something the police take the goods and the money and they only speak Pushtun so we don’t understand. I have a small grocery stall. My wife doesn’t go to the clinic run by Pakistanis because she does not

understand the language. They only give medicine to Pushtuns. My daughter goes to school here – there was no school for girls where we were in Takhar.

“I wouldn’t tie my donkey up in this room where me and my family are living now but we’ve had to swallow our pride and do it. We had plenty of water and here we are constantly on the lookout for the water tanker. We don’t know where UNHCR is to go and ask for anything. We go to our block leader, if there is a problem. We don’t trust the police. Police pick on Uzbeks and Hazaras.”

Their teenage son bursts in: “If you kill us we won’t go back. Taliban are wild animals; we cannot live under them. You can’t walk in the street, can’t talk, your property is not your own. If they suffer losses on the frontline they put everyone in prison, young and old, like they did in Kunduz. I’ve had enough of Afghanistan and all this fighting. We’ll try to go somewhere else.”

His father echoes this: “People will not go back to camps in Afghanistan. You can work in Pakistan.”

The mother places her hands in her lap and says forcefully: “I’ve seen nothing but war for 25 years and now I’ve lost my two sons and my home and everything. I’m not going back.”

### **Case Study B** Qara Bayun Tazanhar Village, Jowzjan

This is one young woman of two working on a carpet loom in a mud-brick room. She cannot speak Dari and is reluctant to talk to me even though the block leader, an old man, has come and offered to translate. Five months ago the men folk heard on the radio in Aqcha that the UN would distribute food in Pakistani refugee camps. They did not have enough to eat and there was a drought so they decided to move en masse. She opens her hands palm upwards: “We have land but there’s no water. We have no money to pay for labor. What should we do?” They had no drinking water left in an area where drinking water has always been a problematic issue. There were no schools and no clinics in their area. There were such services in Aqcha, the nearest town, but that was three hours away. “We were suffering from harassment from thieves at night and Taliban during the day. But there was no abduction of women. The Taliban would say give us a person for the frontline or give us money. So we decided it was better to leave.” They came via Mazar-i-Sahrif, and the route through Bamiyan, crossing over the difficult Hajigak Pass, and on to Kabul. “The Taliban know that people are hungry so they do not bar their way when they are trying to make it out to Pakistan. They did nothing to try and stop us. We paid bribes to the Pakistani police at Torkham Gate. And eventually we came to Shamshatoo.”

The old block leader explains that when the women are ill they have to go to the clinic with men here because they do not understand the language and cannot describe their problems and ailments.

Carpet weaving, a skill they bring with them from Afghanistan, helps them make an income. Neither of the women is literate or has ever received any education. A positive development is that their little girls have started going to school since they arrived in the camp. There are no specific security problems in New Shamshatoo, but police do ask more questions from Turkmen and Uzbek men than from other ethnic groups.

Asked about possible return to Afghanistan, they explain that children only have guns to play with in Afghanistan. “There are no real Muslims any more. People are not frightened of God. Afghanistan should be under one rule, so all the ethnic groups can drink water from one place. It’s different for Pushtuns in Afghanistan today; they have power. If we go back now what can we eat anyway? If they try and force us to go back we will run away in the night.”

**Case Study C** 18 years in Microrayon, Kabul, but originally from Andkhoy

She is a Turkmen woman, around 40 years old with seven children. She is sitting a little distance away from the group of lively Uzbek women we are talking to. She is sitting outside a small tent where she lives with her children. She has a startling appearance, very Russian looking with blond hair and piercing blue eyes but unmistakable Mongoloid features. She tells her story:

“A Ghorbandi man and my husband were partners in business, a shop. My stepson ran away with money from the business. I don’t know where he is. My husband’s partner brought some Taliban from his area, from Ghorband, into the dispute. They were all Pushtuns and my husband Turkmen. They were trying to force him to admit that he had stolen the money and that he knew where the money was. They beat my husband so much with their rifle butts that he died on the spot. This happened in Microrayon Three in Kabul. It wasn’t enough that my husband was dead. They constantly threatened me and my children; they threatened to take my daughters away, and all the time it was: ‘Tell us where the money is. Tell us where you hid the money.’ I am illiterate and I didn’t know where to go and what to do. Without a male family head I felt paralyzed. After some time one of the local power holders who was friendly towards me said he could not tolerate my situation any more. He put me and my children in a taxi very early one morning and sent us to Torkham. I didn’t have any problems coming through. My brother-in-law sold our house in Andkhoy, paid for the burial costs and for our travel costs to Pakistan. We have been living off the remainder of that money. We spin wool and live off rations.”

She has been living with a block of Uzbeks since she turned up in Jalozai, and they watch out for her because they know that she is a widow. She explains that the block leader is a Pushtun man from Khwaje Ghar. He has taken her fuel wood ration by simply stealing her ticket. She does not know whom to talk to about the situation and seems resigned to her fate.

Her story is not unusual; there are many reports of this kind where the Taliban accidentally kill or wilfully execute males from families. The women and children generally cannot go back but sometimes they risk the dangers to check on property or just to check the lie of the land. She did not feel brave enough to try any such tactics as yet. She still does not know the whereabouts of her stepson or the money he stole.

**Case Study D** Jabul Seraj, Shamali, north of Kabul

In the compound are two young women in their twenties. They are well dressed and clean, and sit in their tent while their husbands sit in the tent next door. Their bundles of belongings are stacked up neatly on either side of the tent. One of the children is ill, lying on the tent floor being fanned by his mother.

They explain that lack of work for their husbands who were both tailors and farmers created problems for them. They speak Pushtun so they did not face that much discrimination or harassment from the Taliban and from the Pakistani border guards at Torkham. Men were being taken to the frontlines from their area but, according to their interview, their husbands managed to avoid this. They are both illiterate because there was no school for girls in their immediate area and education was a low priority for their family. They moved to Kabul but their husbands could not find work in Kabul, and the women did not want to work because they had “so many small children.” There were five children in the tent during the interview, with ages ranging from about nine months to seven years old, and another two or three children were coming and going. They came to Jalojai first and then they were moved to New Shamshatoo. They did not know anyone in Peshawar and just waited in Jalojai to see what would happen. They have not faced any security problems. They sit around all day. They cook and clean and wash their children three times a day here because the radio says it’s good to do so. Their only problem is with the clinic because, they say, it is useless. They do a very rapid examination and never give medicine. They gave nothing for the toddler lying on the floor who is obviously ill. Their husbands try and find work. They have had no problems with the food rations.

#### **Case Study E** Aga Tepe Village, Qalaizal District, Kunduz

She is a 24-year-old woman who is Tajik, but her husband is Turkmen. She shows me an injury from a rocket explosion. It is unclear when this occurred but it looks like a childhood injury. Her family died in the same rocket attack when she was small and she was sold as a wife to a Turkmen family and finally married the son.

In Afghanistan they were a farming family. She says she is a housewife. Her husband and she sit side-by-side working on a carpet loom as I talk to them. There was a clinic one hour’s walk from her village which she could use if she was desperate but there were no reproductive health services. There was no girls’ school in the village so she never went to school, and she did not send her daughter to school. There were, in fact, no schools in the village at all, she explains, but it is safer for boys to walk long distances to go to school, impossible for girls. She explains that there was no drinking water and no irrigation water in their area. The land is all dried up and the livestock villagers owned died, was sold or was killed.

They were also caught between aerial bombardment and shelling from tanks. United Front people burned their house down forcing them to move away. Then the Taliban came to their village; they hold it now. Apparently, even the roof beams of their houses have been stolen and the Taliban and United Front have taken over people’s properties. She explains that no fighters from either side touched women or abducted them in her village, but they heard that the Taliban and United Front were taking women by force in other villages.

She and her husband explain that for men and boys there is beating, forced conscription, extortion, and imprisonment back in Afghanistan. There are no power holders of Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik origin that they can go to for protection, to lodge complaints, or to seek advice. They have no recourse to any form of justice in their own area. She says that they are dealing with a foreign occupying force.

Eventually they sold their assets, jewellery, and carpets, to make the journey to Pakistan, to safety and an opportunity to feed the family without fearing for their lives. They took the long and arduous journey via Bamyan. Men's and women's luggage was searched extensively on the way by Taliban soldiers, looking for arms, drugs, or tapes. The Taliban did not steal anything from the luggage they searched. They reached Kabul and assessed the situation. They could not pay rent in Kabul and neither of them was able to find work. They reached Torkham Gate at the border with Pakistan and faced no problems crossing through. At this stage they had nothing left except bedding and clothes anyway. They came first to Babbu in Peshawar and stayed with relatives. Then they tried renting a small house, and finally stayed in a tent in Jalozai. Eight months ago they set out from Afghanistan. Six months ago they arrived in New Shamshatoo.

They have not received any assistance since they arrived but they have two small mud-brick rooms to stay in. They know the block leader – a man from Kunduz. He is a good old man, a former refugee. There is a classification of refugees according to when they left Afghanistan and where they come from. Turkmen and Uzbek block leaders have problems providing for those under their leadership due to language barriers so Pushtuns who understand the language of the Pakistani police and other Pushtun speaking local staff from agencies are always a few steps ahead. The block leader has told them that there is not enough food to reach them. The water supply is close by so she does not travel far to bring water. She has not used the health services yet. They are living by making carpets here. A middleman gives them wool and then pays them for the finished carpets. They would probably go to the police if they had security problems but there have been no specific problems as of yet.

In response to questions about returning, they explain that they have no home to go to. There is no water for drinking or irrigation. Her husband might be conscripted by force if they go back. The young couple explain together: “We simply do not want to die. If we are forced to leave Pakistan, we would like to go to Iran – anywhere where there is a Muslim government. We will be unhappy anywhere where there is war and no opportunity to alleviate our own hunger.”

### **Case Study F Deh Mazang, Paghman**

I have quietly entered a small mud compound with a tent in the middle. I am calling out to make my presence known. A woman lies fast asleep on a wooden *charpoy*<sup>15</sup> with the remains of a frugal breakfast around her. She slowly opens her eyes and sits up. She looks tired and haggard. We begin the interview process: “I am Pushtun and maybe I am in my mid thirties.” But she looks to be in her early fifties. “I have five sons from 15 to four years old. When Afghanistan was liberated after the Russians left we went back to Afghanistan because my mother-in-law insisted. She missed the orchards and fields of Paghman, west of Kabul. You must have heard if you've been here a while how famous Paghman was for being a beautiful place for picnics. Kabul people were always coming for picnics and days out. It was a stupid idea to go back because we had set up a good life in Pakistan. It didn't work out with the drought and the situation in Afghanistan.

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<sup>15</sup> A charpoy is a bed with wooden legs and a wooden or leather body. It is used for sitting, eating, lounging, sleeping, etc.

“We decided that we would try again, back in Pakistan. We have rented our water rights in Deh Mazang. We even had to cut down our orchard in Afghanistan and sell the wood. My father was Pushtun and didn’t send me to school. He was an orthodox man. It seems silly now. I can’t read and write but my brothers went to school.

Once I visited Kabul for some shopping. I was sitting in a taxi and it was a hot day. A Talib with a cable came and beat up the woman next to me in the taxi for having her *burqa* up. I was so scared that I just crumpled up next to her and I couldn’t say anything. I didn’t put my *burqa* up because I had grown up with it, I was used to it. It’s our custom to wear the *burqa*. But the anxiety of watching the Talib with the cable walk up, thinking all the while that he was coming to get me. I can’t cope with that kind of anxiety.

“We had no problems during the journey from Afghanistan and no problems coming through Torkham. We didn’t realize you could sign up to go to Shamshatoo at the border. We went to my sister-in-law’s house. But you must understand that nowadays brother doesn’t know sister and people just look out for themselves. My sister-in-law’s son cooks biscuits. That’s the only income in their house. We came to stay with my sister-in-law but then she encouraged us to go to Jalojai, saying at least we could try for rations there, and from there we were transferred to Shamshatoo. We owe money to a lot of people for moving here, for trying to live here. My children will grow up paying off our debts.

“There are no security problems for us here in Shamshatoo, but we have problems with the fuel wood ration. The other rations are OK. We can buy some things if my husband earns enough loading wood. My family is scattered. I have to thank the Pakistanis for what they have done. Otherwise, a lot of Afghans would be dead by now.

“My sons go to school here. One of them even speaks English. If I knew something I could teach my kids. I don’t work here. I worked such a lot in farming. You should have seen me. I was so energetic in Afghanistan, but here I have nothing to do except to look after my husband and sons. My father visited recently and saw my tent and he wept. He said, ‘My daughter, you don’t seem to have good luck do you?’ I have had no new clothes for a year now. I have had four sets of clothes since the day I got married and these ones I’m wearing I was given by my sister in Kandahar.”

Her child has an extra finger dangling from his hand and he is filthy. She takes her small son who has become vociferous in his demands for his mother’s attention. Her son urinates in the corner of their small yard. He washes his hands from an uncovered water container. He is covered in insect bites and prickly heat rash. She returns with him and continues:

“The clinic here is thirty minutes away and they don’t give medicine. If I leave the compound people will come in and steal what little possessions I have. I’m one woman alone, I have no daughters to take care of household chores. I lost my twins recently, when I gave birth to them in this tent. One was still born and one died later in hospital after eleven days under glass [in the incubator]. I didn’t have enough food or medicine to be healthy enough to carry the twins. A *dai*<sup>16</sup> helped me. I was very ill because the baby had died in my stomach. It was night and suddenly there was blood everywhere. My husband went and brought the old *dai*. I gave birth to the dead

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<sup>16</sup> Traditional birth attendant

baby with great difficulty. My husband was reading the Koran and praying to God, ‘Oh God, I have no money. If this woman needs medical assistance what am I going to do?’ I am very upset. Two babies lost for no reason.

“I’m exhausted today because I stayed up fanning my children all night. Otherwise they can’t sleep, you see. I pleaded and cajoled my husband until he rented some beds because of scorpions. The weather in Afghanistan is much better than it is here. I sometimes faint from the heat and my children and husband have to throw water on me until I come to. If we had a good government and our land was fertile why would we come to this heat? But life is sweet and we don’t want to lose it. There is fighting and there is drought. We’ll have to go back if we’re forced. But we’ll die of starvation. We may go to Iran. My father lives in Shiraz and keeps telling us how Iran is so clean and children are so polite. My father sells vegetables in Iran. Can you imagine an old man selling vegetables, at his age? This is the fate we have all come to and God knows what will become of us.”

### **Case Study G** Mazar area

She is an Uzbek woman in her late twenties. She sits sewing in the corner of the sewing and literacy class and interjects from time to time.

“We left Mazar area after my younger teenage brother was badly beaten by the Taliban. We don’t know why they did it. One day they just did it. It wasn’t any better with General Dostum’s<sup>17</sup> troops, they were more violent and I can tell you stories about times when even putting the holy Koran on a man’s body wouldn’t have saved him from a severe beating. The Taliban were also taking people to the front by force. We had nothing left because of the drought. We were only able to leave because our relatives in Peshawar sent us the money. Otherwise, we could never have left.

“At Torkham, the Pakistanis were giving Uzbeks a hard time. They took all their money and beat the Uzbek men. The Taliban sometimes joined in. I saw one man in Torkham, an Uzbek, and the Taliban started beating him. I don’t know why. His sister threw herself on him to stop the beating. But they beat her too. Then the Pakistani police took his money. He was so ashamed and upset that when he got to Shamshatoo he couldn’t take it anymore. He died of a heart attack.

“I like the literacy and sewing courses. I’m learning something and the teacher is very good. But the health services in Shamshatoo, these Pakistani clinics are very bad. We go there and they just throw medicine at us without any examination or diagnosis and tell us to go away.”

### **Case Study H** Nahreen women

A group of women is sitting outside a mud house. Some spin wool and some idly gaze into the distance. They say they are from Nahreen and that they are Tajik. During the interview they are very interested in livestock on a distant hill. They are discussing excitedly whom the livestock might belong to. Asked why, they say that they are envious because of the livestock they had lost

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<sup>17</sup> Uzbek warlord, heading Junbesh-i Islami, one faction of the Northern alliance headed by Ahmad Shah Massoud.

and because it was their responsibility to look after the livestock back home. Here they do nothing except spin wool or sit around all day long. They can make *kilims* if an agency helps them with materials but they don't know carpet weaving.

Many of them have husbands who have gone to work in Kashmir – the nature of the work is unclear. None have been to school or sent daughters to school in Nahreen, but here some girls go to school and some women have joined adult literacy classes, which they enjoy. There have been no security problems at any stage and no problems with block leaders.

They complain about the health services but have nothing specific to say. There are several malnourished infants playing in the dirt around us. The old men left are building mud huts to help their families escape from the heat. The women tut and comment on how awful it is that men in the twilight of their lives should have to labor building houses and to start new lives under such restricted conditions. But fighting and drought are keeping them away from the lives and livelihoods they have built and lost.

### **Case Study I** Charikar, north of Kabul

A Tajik girl in her twenties, staring seriously in front of her or at the floor. She says in Afghanistan she saw girls abducted in front of her eyes by Taliban soldiers. Pressed further, she stresses that she does not want to talk about it or think about it and clams up. She explains that when she left with her family they were told that there were landmines on either side of the road that they took. Young men were being taken to the front by force. They escaped during the fighting and headed for Kabul but did not stay there. She is content in New Shamshatoo and her family has not faced any problems. She says that they cannot go back to Afghanistan because of the fighting and insecurity for her family.

### **Case Study J** Takhar

She is a very pretty girl in her late teens or early twenties. She is Uzbek and as yet unmarried. “Massoud commanders steal beautiful girls so we are not allowed to even show our faces on the roof of our own houses back in Afghanistan. As a result, we also couldn't go to school. In my area the Taliban took people to the front by force. There was growing insecurity in the area so my father decided to move us all out last winter. We took the Chitral route. It was very cold. I don't remember anything about the route. The womenfolk were covered up and bundled from truck to truck. My father did all the negotiating at checkpoints and with various commanders.”

The route is well known for its dangers. The Qara Kamar or Black Belt is the road from Takhar to Faizabad in Badakhshan. Some of the trucks carrying passengers lose their balance and tumble off the road and into the river far below. There are casualties every year. After Faizabad the road is passable for a few hours and after that there are uneven dirt tracks and rocky river beds. There are numerous treacherous river crossings to negotiate. The road up to the Shah Salim pass is mined. Most people will not risk this route after October or November. The journey is slow and passengers are asked to dismount and remount at many points along the way. For women in *burqas*, in United Front and Taliban areas, climbing in and out of trucks in the cold of winter or the

heat of summer, carrying babies and small children, these journeys are very tiring and undignified. This 'on-and-off' routine also occurs for those taking the route via Bamiyan and the Hajigak pass.

She complains about the health services in New Shamshatoo but does not highlight any specific issues. She says she finds it difficult to see how anyone could justify sending families back when there is fighting in their area. She is attending literacy classes and learning to sew here. As she puts it, "It is like a blind person learning to see."

### **Case Study K Takhar**

She is a young girl in her twenties who talks very fast. "The Taliban force people to cook food for groups of them, you know. They asked my family for chickens and rice and said that there would be eight people to feed. We couldn't afford anything more than rice and broth for eight people. My younger brother took the food to them where they had told us to bring the food. One of the Taliban knocked the dishes out of the tray and onto the floor. He shouted at my brother and swore at him saying, 'Do you think we'll eat this? I'll show you!' and they put my brother in prison with no food for three days. When he came out he was shaken and my family decided it was time to go. People couldn't afford to feed the Taliban and they were slowly starving families who gave them all their food, too frightened to say no. We also took the Chitral route. The Chitrali Scouts held us up at the border in Chitral but they didn't steal from us or abuse us in any way. It was very cold and we were frightened that they would send us back. I am quite happy in Shamshatoo, but the health services here are not good."