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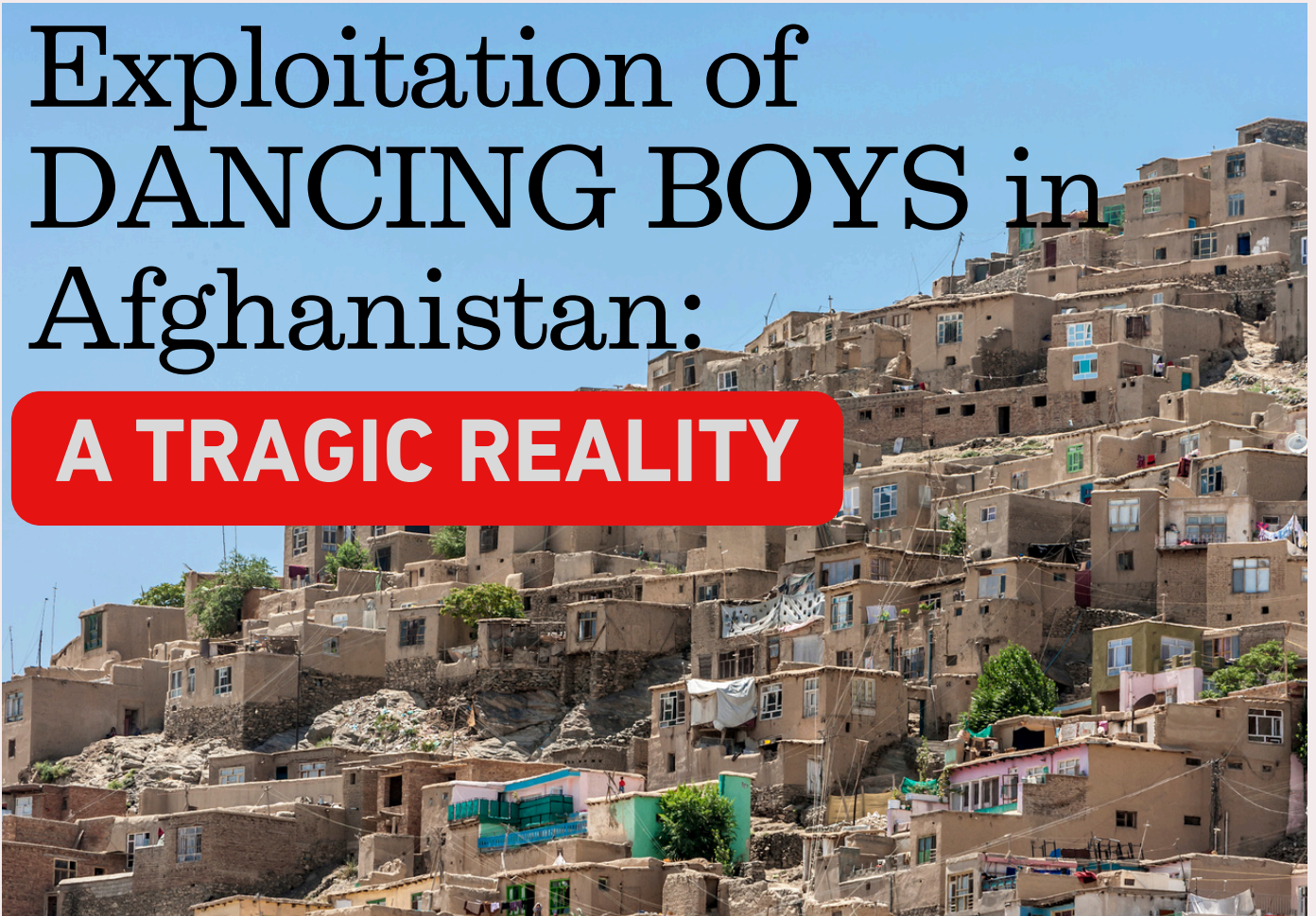
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Exploitation of DANCING BOYS in Afghanistan:

A TRAGIC REALITY



By:
Norashikin Shariffuddin & Leviana Andrew
(norashikin586@uitm.edu.my) & (leviana141@uitm.edu.my)

INTRODUCTION

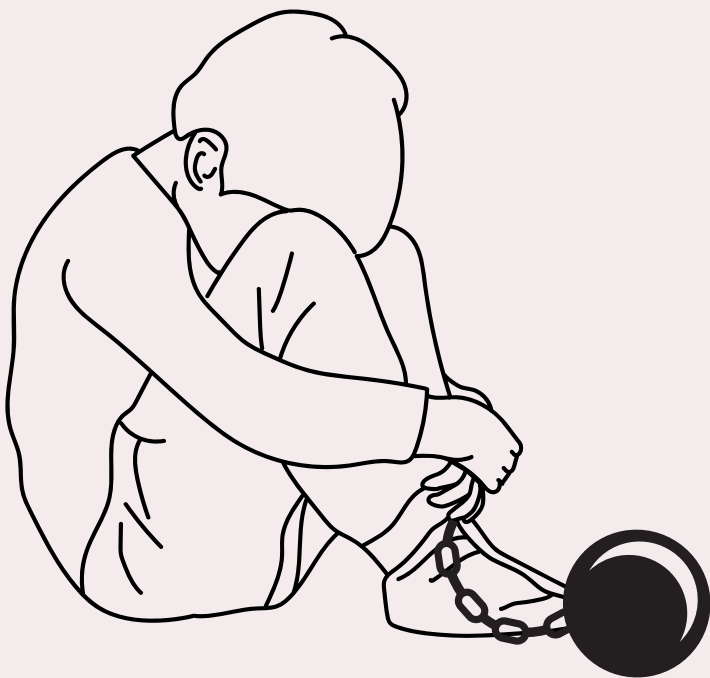
The phenomenon of exploiting young male dancers in Afghanistan, known as bacha bazi, has long been a source of concern, raising important issues with the rights and safeguarding of minors. Despite the challenges, there is cause for optimism and a more promising future through the enforcement of legal protections and the collective endeavours of the entire community to combat this abhorrent practice. (Borile, 2019; Essar et al., 2021). The objective of this article is to share the dark reality of bacha bazi in Afghanistan, together with the existing legal system designed to safeguard them and the urgent need for greater intervention to end it.

EXPLOITATION OF DANCING BOYS IN AFGHANISTAN

Bacha bazi, a deeply rooted cultural practice in Afghanistan, has transformed into a kind of exploitation where juvenile boys are forced to perform dances for the entertainment of adult guys. According to Noman (2016), this type of exploitation often involves sexual abuse, acts of violence, and disregard for the basic rights and dignity of these vulnerable children. They are deprived of their childhood, exposed to physical and emotional stress, and denied protection and stability. Further, this exploitative practice of bacha bazi enables abusers to avoid being held responsible.

LEGAL PROTECTION TO COMBAT EXPLOITATION

Afghanistan has enacted legal measures to combat the exploitation of dancing boys and ensure the protection of children's rights and well-being. The Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW Law) categorises bacha bazi as a grave infringement upon human rights and mandates punishments for anyone who engage in it. Furthermore, Jones (2015) added that the EVAW Law is highly important as a legal instrument in Afghanistan. Founded in 2009, its primary objective is to criminalise different forms of violence perpetrated against women and children, including the practice of bacha bazi. The EVAW Law acknowledges the maltreatment of male dancers as a form of child abuse and establishes sanctions for those responsible, while also implementing assistance initiatives for the victims. (Badinelli, 2019).



In addition, the Law on the Rights of the Child in Afghanistan, enacted in 2004, highlights the significance of avoiding child exploitation, offering assistance to victims, and guaranteeing a secure setting for children to flourish. This legislation highlights the essentials of providing education, healthcare, and social assistance to children while also establishing protocols for reporting and resolving cases of child abuse. (Jones, 2015; Badinelli, 2019; Nisha et al., 2019). However, Noman (2016) highlighted that merely enacting regulations is inadequate without strong enforcement mechanisms and a dedication to addressing the root causes of exploitation.

CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENTS ON COMBATING EXPLOITATION OF DANCING BOYS

Despite the existence of a legal framework, Afghanistan faces ongoing difficulties in protecting performing boys. The victims' reluctance to complain, together with the deeply rooted cultural values that facilitate the tolerance of bacha bazi, presents challenges in effectively addressing this harmful practice. Factors such as fear of punishment, shame, and a lack of trust in the justice system delay the prosecution of perpetrators and the delivery of justice to victims. (Essar et al., 2021).



It is crucial to empower victims of bacha bazi to exercise their rights and seek legal redress to ensure that perpetrators are held responsible and to break the cycle of exploitation. Moreover, Badinelli (2019) suggested that providing the survivors with access to counseling, health care, and vocational training is important in helping them rebuild their lives and secure a hopeful future. By educating a culture that prioritises accountability and justice, we can create a society where the rights of every child are upheld and protected (Borile, 2019).

Education has a crucial role in preventing the exploitation of dancing boys and promoting a culture that upholds and safeguards the rights of young individuals. Thus, Nisya et al. (2019) suggest that sharing knowledge with communities, parents, and carers regarding the dangers of bacha bazi is crucial in creating a safeguarding atmosphere for children. The authors also believed that including child protection and human rights education in the school curriculum could equip children with the necessary information and awareness to identify and report cases of abuse.



Community involvement and assistance are essential for achieving transformation and durable resolutions in the battle against bacha bazi. Community leaders, religious figures, and civil society organisations such as international cooperation, including partnerships with UN agencies and NGOs, can make a significant impact by raising awareness, challenging harmful norms, and providing support to victims (Essar et al., 2021). Badinelli (2019) opined that by fostering communal unity and promoting cooperation, we can create a broader and more protective environment for vulnerable children. Further, Jones (2015) added that by collaborating with international partners, sharing the most efficient strategies, and mobilising resources, we can strengthen our efforts to combat the practice of bacha bazi and protect children's rights. The endorsement and promotion of the global community are crucial in amplifying the voices of victims and bringing about significant change on a broader level.

WISHES FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

To create a society that upholds the rights and welfare of all children, it is important for us to collaborate on abolishing the practice of bacha bazi. This objective can be achieved through the implementation of legislative measures, educational initiatives, community engagement, and global cooperation. Efforts that give priority to prevention, provide support to victims, and hold perpetrators accountable are crucial in establishing a more secure environment for children who are at risk. In the absence of a comprehensive and diversified approach, the exploitation of dancing boys would continue unrestrained, resulting in repeating cycles of abuse and suffering.



CONCLUSION

Considering that the employment of male dancers under the age of 18 in Afghanistan violates human rights, it is essential to take immediate action to intervene and eliminate this practice. This can be achieved through collective efforts, accountability, and a dedication to justice. By doing so, we can improve the situation for young Afghan male dancers and establish a society that is fair, empathetic, and free from the exploitation of dancing boys.



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