**No 2 Reader Joanna Swift**

Reading

Women died in [an earthquake in Afghanistan](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/10/08/afghanistan-quakes-claim-more-than-2000-lives/) 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,](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/women-and-girls/taliban-rolling-back-rights-afghan-women-girls-32-areas-say/) 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.

More than 2,000 people died when a 6.3-magnitude quake hit western Afghanistan on Oct 7, destroying entire villages. UN relief agencies in Afghanistan said that 90 per cent of the earthquake victims in Herat were women and children.

“Most of the patients were women and children because they were at home when the earthquake hit the province,” Dr Qasem Sadat, a health official at Herat province, told The Telegraph.

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 of Naib Rafi village in Zinda Jan district, the epicentre of the earthquake and where 1,294 people died and 1,688 were injured, 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,” the woman said.

After 24 hours her daughter-in-law, who suffered a grievous spinal injury, was rescued from the rubble next to her daughters. Rescuers from other villages removed the debris to help survivors and pull bodies from the rubble.

The entire village of Naib Rafi, around 300 homes, was destroyed and most of the female residents are now dead.

The influence of Taliban law on the disaster highlights the extent of control the patriarchal system exerts [over the lives of Afghan women](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/06/25/hibatullah-akhundzada-taliban-supreme-leader-womens-lives/), said the female rescuer.