

Taxi driver encourages other Afghan women

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.12.15

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Taxi driver Sara Bahai (right) waits for customers in Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of northern Balkh province, Afghanistan, March 3, 2015. For Bahai, becoming Afghanistan's first and only woman taxi driver in living memory was a pragmatic step rather than a brave one. Photo: AP/Mustafa Najafizada

MAZAR-I-SHARIF, Afghanistan — Sara Bahai is a brave woman: She is the only female taxi driver in all of Afghanistan. In her country, women are not supposed to work outside the home.

Bahai took on her unusual job because she loves driving. She also has a large family to support.

She still remembers her first time behind the wheel. "I felt like I was in the sky, and I totally fell in love with driving," she said.

Driving Down Her Own Road

In Afghanistan, many still feel women should not work — except at home. Many men are angered if a woman even dares to go out in public by herself.

Bahai is about 40 years old. She has been following her own path for years. She never got married, because she had to support her parents and other family members. She said she feared a husband would prevent her from working.

With no children of her own, she adopted two boys, both of whom are now in high school. After Bahai's brother-in-law was killed, her sister and seven nieces and nephews went to live with her. She now supports a dozen people.

Some Very Rude Passengers

Bahai drives her cab around the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. The yellow and white car is spotlessly clean. The woven seat covers are sparkly and a good-luck charm hangs in the front window.

"I receive threats from unknown callers who tell me to not drive in the city because I am a woman," she said. "Some tell me that if I continue to work as a taxi driver they will kill me."

She added, "Male passengers are very jealous." Often, they are very rude and even threatening to her.

"I don't care what they think of me, I am not afraid," she said. "I will change the country with whatever ability I have to do so."

Things Are Changing, But Very Slowly

Bahai got her driver's license in 2002. She also knows how to fix cars and now teaches other women to drive.

Ideas about women are slow to change in Afghanistan. However, things are pretty much the same as they always were outside the big cities.

Many Afghans still feel that women should not go out in public without a male relative. Women who step out of their homes alone may get yelled at or worse.

At the same time, millions of girls now attend school. Many are going on to college. It is no longer unusual for women to travel to other countries by themselves, or for them to live alone in big Afghan cities.

"Stand Up For Yourselves"

Rula Ghani, Afghanistan's first lady, is working hard to improve the situation for Afghan women. Since her husband, President Ashraf Ghani, took office in September, she has appeared in public many times to fight for women's rights.

In a speech on Sunday, the first lady said Afghan women "should be respected both inside and outside their homes." They should serve as "doctors, engineers, soldiers, police officers," she said.

Bahai says things are slowly getting better for Afghan women. She sees more and more young women attending school, finishing college and living their own lives.

"They are building the confidence to live independently. Step by step everything is going to be all right," she says. "My message for Afghan women is to stand up for yourselves, set goals and achieve them, and help to make Afghanistan a happy place to live."

Quiz

- 1 The following answer choices include two separate ideas from the article. Which answer includes the two main ideas from the article?
 - (A) Bahai is an unusual woman and things are changing slowly for women in Afghanistan.
 - (B) Bahai has a very clean taxi and she supports 12 people.
 - (C) Rula Ghani is the first lady of Afghanistan and she gives many speeches.
 - (D) Bahai has two sons and she hopes women will stand up for themselves.
- 2 Which paragraph from the article explains why Bahai decided to become a taxi driver and not to marry?
- 3 According to the article, what is one of the reasons why Bahai is taking care of 12 people?
 - (A) Her brother-in-law was killed.
 - (B) Not very many women work outside the home in Afghanistan.
 - (C) Many men get angry if they see a woman walking outside alone.
 - (D) She got a driver's license in 2002.
- 4 Which paragraph in the section "Things Are Changing, But Very Slowly" explains why women may be able to follow Rula Ghani's advice and become doctors, engineers, soldiers and police officers?
 - (A) Bahai got her driver's license in 2002. She also knows how to fix cars and now teaches other women to drive.
 - (B) Ideas about women are slow to change in Afghanistan. However, things are pretty much the same as they always were outside the big cities.
 - (C) Many Afghans still feel that women should not go out in public without a male relative. Women who step out of their homes alone may get yelled at or worse.
 - (D) At the same time, millions of girls now attend school. Many are going on to college. It is no longer unusual for women to travel to other countries by themselves, or for them to live alone in big Afghan cities.

Answer Key

- 1 The following answer choices include two separate ideas from the article. Which answer includes the two main ideas from the article?
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- (B) Bahai has a very clean taxi and she supports 12 people.
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- 2 Which paragraph from the article explains why Bahai decided to become a taxi driver and not to marry?

Paragraph 4:

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- (B) Ideas about women are slow to change in Afghanistan. However, things are pretty much the same as they always were outside the big cities.
- (C) Many Afghanis still feel that women should not go out in public without a male relative. Women who step out of their homes alone may get yelled at or worse.
- (D) **At the same time, millions of girls now attend school. Many are going on to college. It is no longer unusual for women to travel to other countries by themselves, or for them to live alone in big Afghan cities.**