

Women lose value if their faces are visible to men in public – Taliban official

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Women lose value if men can see their uncovered faces in public, a spokesman for a key ministry of Afghanistan's Taliban government has said, adding that religious scholars in the country agree

that a woman must keep her face covered when outside the home.

The Taliban, who took over the country in August 2021, have cited the failure of women to observe the proper way to wear the hijab, or Islamic headscarf, as a reason for barring them from most public spaces, including parks, jobs and university.

Molvi Mohammad Sadiq Akif, the spokesman for the Taliban's Ministry of Vice and Virtue, said in an interview on Thursday with The Associated Press (AP) that if women's faces are visible in public there is a possibility of fitna, or falling into sin.

"It is very bad to see women (without hijab) in some areas (big cities) and our scholars also agree that women's faces should be hidden," Mr Akif said. "It's not that her face will

be harmed or damaged. A woman has her own value and that value decreases by men looking at her. Allah gives respect to females in hijab and there is value in this.”

Mr Akif, who is the main spokesman for the Vice and Virtue Ministry, did not answer questions about the bans, including whether any of them could be lifted if there were to be universal adherence to hijab rules.

Mr Akif said the ministry faced no obstacles in its work and that people supported its measures.

“People wanted to implement Sharia (Islamic law) here. Now we’re carrying out the implementation of Sharia...All the decrees are Islamic rulings and the Taliban have added nothing to them, he said. “The orders of Sharia were issued 1,400 years ago and they are still there.”

He said that under the current administration men no longer harass or stare at women like they used to do in the time of the previous government. The Taliban government also says it has destroyed the “evils” of drinking alcohol and bacha bazi, a practice in which wealthy or powerful men exploit boys for entertainment, especially dancing and sexual activities.

Women are forbidden from entering ministry premises, some of the guards who were on duty on Thursday told The AP, although there is a female-only security screening hut.

Slogans on concrete barricades praise the purpose of the ministry.

One reads: “The promotion of virtues and the prohibition of vices are an effective means of social order.”

Another says: “The promotion of virtues and the prohibition of vices save society from catastrophe.”

Mr Akif said the ministry relies on a network of officials and informants to check if people are following regulations.

When asked if women can go to parks, one of the spaces they are banned from, he said they would be able to if certain conditions could be met. "You can go to the park, but only if there are no men there. If there are men, then Sharia does not allow it. We don't say that a woman can't do sports, she can't go to the park or she can't run. She can do all these things, but not in the same way as some women want, to be semi-naked and among men."