

Video Salons Crack Down

Author: [Mohammad Jawad](#)

Accused of allowing young men to view movies containing sex and violence, local and national agencies join forces to put them out of business.

Through the pink curtain door of a small mud-walled shop hidden away in a back street of central Kabul, a man collects money in the stuffy darkness. Four benches, a television, a CD video player and some pirate films on disc from the bazaar are all that's needed for this small business.

Mehrullah, 18, has owned this typical video salon for two years. He said that between 50 to 60 men come every day to watch their favourite Indian films.

Such salons have become very popular in Kabul and in the provinces since the collapse of the Taleban, when people weren't allowed to watch films.

Parents and government officials want them shut down.

Police began targeting the salons this summer, accusing them of showing immoral movies to boys under age 18, after parents complained to the ministry of culture and the police about the corrupting influence that the films and the salons themselves were having on their children.

In July, the Kabul police shut down six video salons for 5 to 10 day periods, said Abdul Jamil, head of the Kabul police crime department. He said salon owners were warned that they would be taken to court if they continued to show films to minors. The estimated 53 video salons in Kabul are well attended by men and boys.

According to Jamil, video salons typically show films from India, Iran, and America that depict sex, violence, theft, killing and beatings. He said that not only are the films "corrupting" Afghan youth, but the salons themselves have become havens for drug use, gambling and truancy.

Mehrullah denied his shop is guilty of such offences.

"We don't play films with sexual content and don't let children under age 18 enter the salon," he said, adding that there's nothing criminal about his salon and that nothing goes on there that should concern society.

But Shafiqullah, another Kabul video-salon owner, admitted his shop was shut down because he was showing movies to teenagers.

He said 30 to 40 teenagers daily paid 10 afghanis, about 20 US cents, each to watch the films. Shafiqullah said he was upset because he lost income when he had to close. He used to make between 300 to 400 afghanis a day, but now he makes less than 150 a day selling films on CD.

There is no specific law governing the operation of video salons in the criminal code. However, according

to Jamil, police can shut down video salons or threaten the owners with prosecution. He said that this authority comes from a part of the Afghanistan constitution that makes any act counter to the principles of Afghan culture a crime.

Jamil said that showing “immoral” films to minors qualifies as such an offence.

“Everywhere an incident that takes place that is [morally] corrupting, we have the authority to stop it,” he said.

The ministry of information and culture, meanwhile has also decided to get into the act.

“For the healthy mental improvement of youth and children, and in order to end moral corruption such as gambling, betting, and using narcotics - in order to stop all these things we want to establish mini-cinemas instead,” said Ghulam Rasul Yusufzai, cultural deputy at the ministry.

Last month, officials from the ministry of information and culture, the supreme court, the ministry of education, the national intelligence agency, Kabul’s police force, the national guard, the city authorities and the government organisation Afghan Film formed a commission to tackle the video-salon issue.

Abdul Jamil Sarwar, deputy head of Afghan Film, said that the commission this week approved a bill that would close all video salons throughout the country and instead open new, government-sanctioned mini-cinemas to take their place. The bill was expected to be passed by the ministry of justice either this week or next, and will then be sent on to the cabinet of ministers.

Sarwar said the bill would allow anyone to establish a mini-cinema after seeking the new commission’s approval and paying a fee whose amount has yet to be determined. Mini-cinemas would still require approval by the local municipality.

In addition, films shown at these mini-cinemas would first have to be approved by the censors at Afghan Film. The bill also reads that the mini-cinemas would have to accommodate between 100 and 150 people and provide bathrooms and other facilities usually found in larger theatres. Children would not be allowed in during school hours, and films being shown at the standard large cinemas would not be allowed to be shown.

Shawaly, 39, is a government worker who lives next to a video salon. He said he favours shutting them down, “The closure of these video salons is a good thing that has been done. Nothing could be better than this.”

He said he knows some young men who got into the habit of stealing and became addicted to drugs because of these salons.

But Muhammad Tahir, 47, a frequent customer of another Kabul video salon, said he liked it because he doesn’t have a television at home and tickets are less expensive than the big movie theatres, which charge 19 afghanis a time.

He also doesn’t buy the argument that all salons show immoral films.

"No sexy films of any kind are played in this arcade; they are all lying," he said.

Mohammad Jawad Sharifzada is an IWPR staff reporter based in Kabul.

Location: Iraqi Kurdistan

Iran

Afghanistan

Focus: Afghanistan

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/video-salons-crack-down>