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## Afghan teen receives death threats over talent show

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A 17-year-old Afghan singer says she is receiving death threats for competing on a popular TV talent show.

In Afghanistan's ultra-conservative society, 17-year-old Latifa Azizi is braving threats to pursue a singing career on the talent show "Afghan Star". Sarah Charlton reports.

Latifa Azizi and her family fled their home in the relatively liberal northern capital of Mazar-e-Sharif after she appeared on Afghan Star in November.

Her community was angry with her appearance, saying it was un-Islamic for a woman to sing and appear on television.

She says the family began to receive death threats.

"I am scared. I have received death threats from people after joining this program," she said.

Azizi, who is now in the capital Kabul with her family, says she also suffered at school.

"I went to school the day after my audition aired to take my final exams and my classmates started to shout horrible things and pulled at my hair," she said.

"I ran away crying. Not even my teachers tried to help me."

Azizi says she was eventually expelled. The school's headmaster, Mohammad Kalanderi, denied that when contacted by Reuters, and said she could come back whenever she wanted.

Azizi says she is frightened for her future, but she has no plans to give up her place on the show.

Her father, Sayed Ghulam Shah Azizi, agrees.

"Our family is angry but my daughter had a dream," he said. "What else was I to do but encourage her to pursue it?"

Even in Kabul, Azizi and the only other female contestant receive constant threats.

People follow their cars as they travel to rehearsals to try to discourage them from attending, and issue threats of violence over the phone. 'Moving backwards'

The backlash Azizi faces is not out of the ordinary for Afghan women who become public figures.

Female actors and singers are often harassed, and sometimes beaten and killed.

In a 2009 documentary about Afghan Star, one contestant was forced to leave her hometown of Herat in the country's west after her headscarf slipped to her shoulders during a performance.

During the 1996-2001 reign of the Taliban, women were banned from school, voting and most work. They were not allowed to leave their homes without a man.

Many women's rights have been painstakingly won back since the Taliban's overthrow, but there are fears violence against women is under-reported.

Last year also saw a worrying spike in violence, including several cases of female school students being poisoned.

This has led to fears that, when most NATO-led forces withdraw from the country next year, women may once again be subject to Taliban-style repression and violence.

"Every day that passes by, you're supposed to move forward, but we keep moving backwards," said singer and Afghan Star judge Shahla Zaland, whose mother was also a famous singer in the 1960s.

"The struggles female singers had to overcome 50 or 60 years ago are being faced by these girls today."