

Investigating Psycho-Social Basis of Gender Bias and Domestic Violence in Pakistani Society

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Abstract

Gender bias is a common phenomenon in the male dominating societies existing on the globe. These societies are often found in the poor countries of the world. In past, this imbalance between the genders existed as a norm, but as time passed, many countries of the world got emancipated through training and legislation. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the woman still is weak and depends on men for maintenance and the state also practically does not support women despite the presence of laws. Our study takes a sample from rural and urban areas of the Rawalpindi district in Pakistan. We conducted ethnographic interviews with open-ended questions from 105 women and 9 advocates/ lawyers of women. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, it is revealed that women have to face bias and domestic violence which are initiated mainly because of their gender difference and low social status.

Keywords: Gender Bias; Male domination; Domestic Violence

Introduction

Pakistan comes at number six among the most thickly populated countries of the world and around fifty percent of the population of it consists of women. However, the condition of women all over Pakistan is not satisfactory if we compare it to other countries of the world. According to Aurat foundation's survey on gender-based violence, Pakistan stands at 125th from the total 169 countries as far as the Gender-related Development Index ranking is concerned (USAID, 2011). Gender refers to societal and cultural differences between the two sexes. On the other hand, sex means biological differences. In the present context, if women face any harm which includes threats in public or private life comes under the umbrella term 'gender-based violence'. The power imbalance usually creates this kind of threatening situation where the weak often women are subjected to cruelty. Patriarchy is also one such cause that is linked with the oppression and subjugation of women.

Certain potential factors have been causing the disturbances in the families in Pakistan. These are premarital or extramarital relations, no son or more daughters, caste or class differentiations are the major causes of domestic problems mostly among men and women. The untoward situation created by these factors for women hinders the progress of society and culture and badly affects the evolution of peace and harmony. In the Beijing conference on women held in 2008, the speakers from 189 states tried to identify violence perpetrated against women and it was resolved that efforts should be made to bring equality across the gender. Women are maltreated based on traditions and cultural norms. The other factor is religion. It is massively used as a cover to hide the cruelties perpetrated in the guise of culture and traditions.

Religion is a typical characteristic of Pakistani society. In cities, its misinterpretation is less than that of rural areas. However, the level of extremism is equally there in rural and urban areas. According to Babur (2007) ignorance, irrational beliefs, superstitions, illiteracy, blind trust in religious leaders, and determinism are some of the major issues causing domestic violence. The abundance of illiteracy and poverty gives rise to extremism and dogmatism. If we calculate the average violence, over seventy percent to ninety percent of women in Pakistan are faced with violence

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in the families. Religion is used in such a way that if a woman raises her voice for her rights, she is deemed anti-religion (Margaret, 1992).

If we trace the history of domestic violence and the subservient status of women, the status and place of women as property or slaves has been seen for a long time in Pakistan. They are kept away from the things which could change their ideas and make them a free-thinking person. Most people believe that higher education distorts the character of women and she becomes shameless. So they may be given primary education only. The character of a woman is always in question. It is either good or bad. If she remains inside the four walls and continues serving her father, brothers, and family, she is considered good. If she wants to take part in the family activities and shows her will, she is considered to have developed the signs of disobedience and non-religiousness. It is taken as something against the established culture and customs. According to Pakistani society, culture means utter subservience of women to their menfolk (Hassan, 1995:23). These beliefs in culture and traditions legitimize violence in the homes.

It is a deplorable fact of Pakistani society that men folk control all the aspects of women's life. They act as beasts of burden. They do not have their say. They are supposed to accept whatever has been ordered or decided by the men of their family. The decision-making power always lies with men not women (Hassan, 1995). Their access to education is restricted. They are not often provided basic health facilities. Many families and tribes are living away from cities that deem it shameful to take their women to hospitals where male doctors might treat them. In this way, many women die during childbirth.

Apart from this, there are many cases where women are given gang-rape punishment by local courts as we see in the case of Mukhtaran Mai. She was raped in front of the public. She was not only raped but also compelled to move naked before the crowd (Human Rights Watch Report, 2004, cited in Babur, 2007). Many such cases are daily reported. Moreover, the cases of bartered marriage and *Vanni* [a girl is given to the enemies to settle the dispute] are prevalent in Pakistani society. The main problem is the dependency of women on men. They have no choice but to accept fate. The more the woman is dependent, the more she will suffer. According to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Violence against girls and women—including, honor killings, rape, acid attacks, forced marriage, domestic violence—remains a serious issue in Pakistan, and therefore a majority of the women population is vulnerable to violence (2014:368). There are laws to prevent all these things but these violations are blatantly done in the name of culture and religion. Almost half of the population of Pakistan lives below the poverty line and fifty percent are women as the womenfolk constitute almost half of the total population of Pakistan. In some parts of Pakistan, the feudal marry their daughters with Quraan just to save their property (Rehman, 2009). So the present study will look into the status of women in Pakistani society regarding its treatment of its women.

Significance

The study is significant because:

1. It takes up an important issue regarding the role of women and the treatment meted out to them by their men
2. It shows how women are denied their right to live with freedom,
3. It illustrates the rights of women universally acknowledged but denied to them in Pakistani society
4. How they are not given property share and they are forcibly married.
5. They are denied the right to seek education
6. They are considered to have fewer abilities than men
7. A woman is considered something which is meant to serve the male in the form of father, brother, and finally husband
8. The study is important because it throws light on how these ills can be remedied.

Research Methodology

It is an agreed fact that true representation of data is only possible in qualitative research. It is the specialty of qualitative research that truly reflects the inner culture and not just the apparent things. Qualitative research uses an ethnographic technique to study the culture and people. Therefore, we used ethnography as a method for our research. We think it is the most relevant method which could assist us in researching this sensitive area. It is very difficult to get the true data without going deep into the culture and traditions of the people both in the rural and urban areas. The women of Pakistan

are especially shy and bashful. They do not at once open themselves and explain what they feel. It needs ethnographic fieldwork which explores the culture and its roots.

We, therefore, visited the families of these participants. These people are in one way or the other related to us or our family or the relatives of our friends. So before interviews, we visited their families once or twice to just introduce ourselves. Then we told them our purpose. The women, who by that time were introduced to us, we're ready to respond to our questions. Most of them requested not to show their names. We promised that their names would not be used in the work. So In this way, by using ethnographic interviews, we succeeded in interviewing and getting first-hand knowledge of women who participated in our research.

During our analysis, we squeezed our questions but in the field, we spent a lot of time on each question, and sometimes the discussion was prolonged and led to other questions. We had to face some difficulties in this research. First, it was not ordinary research. It involved women who were linked with honor in our society. So we had to be careful lest we should not be seen with any suspicion. The only advantage was that we went to these families using some reference either of our relatives, friends, or our pupils. Despite these ethnographic challenges, we carried out this research and sought the views of women regarding the treatment and attitude of men toward women.

For our sample, we selected 105 women both from rural areas and urban areas. We selected 29 women from cities which include Murree and Rawalpindi while we selected 76 from rural areas. For rural areas, we selected the rural parts of Murree. We selected three fourth of our sample from the rural area because three fourth of the total population of Pakistan lived in rural areas.

So we used a diary for notes and recorded some of the interviews. But the recording was not much successful as the women being interviewed were reluctant to be recorded. Even if we wrote something before them, they were embarrassed. So we tried to keep things in our memory and wrote that down in our diary after the interview session.

Other than these interviews, we needed data that could give us an idea of the status of women in the eyes of Pakistani law and how they were treated in the courts. For this purpose, we succeeded in interviewing 9 lawyers who had experience of women's cases. It was again not a specific question-based interview but a discussion and analysis of the situation of women in Pakistani society regarding their legal rights and how those rights were denied. I took notes and used that information in our analysis.

Analysis

The study focuses on the status of women in Pakistani society in particular. Here in Pakistani society, a woman has to undergo many pressures from the menfolk. The environment is not conducive for a woman to enjoy her natural rights. This is a general picture of a woman in Pakistani society. However, in the cities, the situation is a little different. The woman of the elite class does enjoy some rights. But when we analyze the section of feudal and landlords, the plight of women is not negligible. Here are certain interview questions which we asked from our participants. After this, we explained the viewpoint of the women advocates regarding the cases of women and the nature of difficulties they face when they have to fight for their rights if some dare to come to the courts for justice.

The interview questions are designed to investigate the inner life of women and how they feel about the treatment meted out to them. Many women were shy to answer the questions. However, they replied to our insistence. The following questions have been asked from the participants. We recorded the answers to these questions. The first question is about the threats a woman receives from her family or any male member of the people around her.

Table 1. Do/did you receive threats from someone from the family Father/ Brother/Husband?

Place	Total women	Threats from father	Threats from brothers	Threats from husbands	Threats from mother in law	Threats from anyone
City	29	07%	8%	35%	5%	0%
Village	76	25%	30%	74%	68%	0%

The participants' answers transpired that most of the threats were from the husbands. In the city, these are 35 percent while in the village the threats are far ahead of the city. In villages, the threats are 74 percent. In the villages, even the brothers are a threat to the sisters. Moreover, these threats are not limited to only men but the women such as the mother law are also hostile to village woman. Husband is also one of the symbols of threats for both urban women and rural women. But the rural woman is more affected. She seems to be more dominated and had less say in the matters of the family.

The table below shows whether the woman received education or they were allowed to go to school or other educational institutions. This shows the attitude of the family toward their woman and whether they are in favor of educating their women or not.

Table 2. Did you receive an education or are you receiving an education?

Place	Yes	No
City	50%	50%
Village	15%	85%

The rural woman is affected more than the city woman when we look at this question too. Here only 15 percent of women were allowed to go to school and study; whereas 85 percent were denied their right to education. However, in the urban areas, 50 percent of the total women were allowed and 50 percent denied. It means in Pakistan there is a great need to give awareness to the people about the education of women. Most of the men in Pakistani society believe that it is not necessary to educate women because they have to be inside their houses, they do not have to do their jobs. According to them, household chores need no education. The other underlying meaning of their talk is that the daughter has to leave the house and it is not profitable to invest in her education because ultimately she will go to another house. It is a very sad phenomenon. However, these days the trend of the people has changed dramatically and they have started giving education to their daughters too.

The following table illustrates the reason behind the low education rate among women in rural and urban areas. As it is a male-dominated society, the male decides about the major issues relating to the family. So the education of daughters has always been an issue in Pakistani society.

Table 3. If you do/ did not receive education, whose fault is/was this?

Place	Parents	Relatives	Parents/relatives all	Society
City	43%	10%	32%	15%
Village	15%	10%	70%	5%

The answer to this question was an eye-opener for the researchers. The urban woman considered her parents to be more responsible for low education. On the other hand, the rural woman held both parents and relatives responsible for their low education. This transpires that when it comes to the betterment and education of a woman, the whole society of males comes together including parents, relatives, and neighbors. They all have their objections. The first objection is within the house and if she is sent, the neighbors and relatives do not approve this action. So this has been a phenomenon in Pakistani society for a long time. But now it has changed to a great extent. However, if we go to the far-off rural areas, this trend and this exercise are still there. The table below determines the decision-making person in their families.

Table 4. Who is or has been the decision-maker in your parents' house?

Place	Father	Mother	Brother	Sister
City	80%	8%	2%	0%
Village	92%	7%	3%	0%

The participants both urban and rural said that the father was the decision-making force in their family and in this way more or less both urban and rural women are equal in saying that their fathers were holding the decision-making force.

The following table illustrates whether the consent of the participants was sought before their marriage.

Table 5. Did you give your consent for your marriage? Did you show your consent?

Place	Yes	No
City	55%	45%
Village	15%	85%

It is customary in Pakistani society that the marriage is arranged by the parents of the couple. The couple may only be informed. The boys have the right to refuse or accept and it is not considered wrong. While these decisions are not opened to the girls, they are just informed and in some families, only formal permission from them is sought at the time of *nikkah* [ceremony of marriage contract] just to formally fulfill the Islamic condition that the girl should have her consent to marry a boy. In urban areas where the education rate is high, a majority of the people consult their daughters for the approval of their marriage plan. However, in the rural areas where the system is not yet developed and the education rate is still very low, the consent of the girls is not sought in the villages. It is like an order which they have to obey. They have not been trained to react and if they do, they are considered

shameless and ill-bred. There is a strong hue and cry over the girls' denial to marry any boy or if she shows her consent to marry anybody else. In both these conditions, the girl has to face a lot of families and social pressure. This leads to so many cases of killings (called honor killings) and also suicides where the girls themselves end their lives to get rid of the daily tension. The following table shows whether the women chose their husband or will choose their husband.

Table. 6 Did/Will you select your husband yourself? Was it possible? Will it be possible?

Place	Yes	No
City	0%	100%
Village	0%	100%

The results of this question are self-evident. As we see in Pakistani society, it is hardly possible for girls to select their husbands. It can be called a very shameful act on behalf of girls to do that. They can receive very severe punishment from their family even sometimes they are killed. So hundred percent of participants said that they had no option of this kind and that they had to submit before the will of the elders in this regard.

The following table shows whether the girls after marriage are satisfied with their husbands or not. We see a mixed trend. However, mostly the women seem to be less satisfied. It was a difficult thing to decipher from the statements of the women who participated in this research. It often happens that women compromise and consider it their fate and hence comfort themselves.

Table 7. Are you satisfied with your marriage?

Place	Yes	No
City	38%	62%
Village	25%	75%

So, most of the women from rural areas said that they were not satisfied with their marriage. It was very hard to get from these women. They could hardly tell what there was in their hearts. They all would say that they are living a happy life. Even in city life, 62 percent of women said that they were not satisfied. 75 percent of women from rural areas said that they were not satisfied with their marriage. So it looks that most of the couples had been made by force and where the will of the girl was not sought. The following table talks about the physical beating of women in Pakistan.

Table 8. Did he ever beat you physically?

Place	Yes	No
City	65%	35%
village	90%	10%

The details show that most of the women whether they belong to city life or rural life have undergone beatings by their husbands. It is very common in Pakistan. The husband is the head of the family dominates and in case of disobedience resorts to beating not only his wife but also the children. Women are often helpless in this regard. Society does not help them. If they come back to their parent's house, they are advised to bear the insult and go back. Society also motivates the girl to mold herself. Nobody asks the husband to change his attitude. In Pakistani society when a girl gets ready to go to the house of her husband the parents advise her to die in that house and not to disobey. So woman, be she daughter or wife faces the same kind of treatment. Males in all positions demand obedience from women. In the case otherwise, she is held responsible for the consequences. She is called a sinner, ill-bred and shameless person. So it is hardly possible that a woman has not received a physical beating in her life once or more than once. The following table illustrates the views of the women whose husbands died very early and how they faced the attitude of the people. The following table gives an idea of how the disparity between males and females exists in Pakistani society. If they eat the same food, it means equality while the trend mostly is that male members eat first and if something is left, the women then eat.

Table 9. Do you eat what your husband or other male members eat or you eat leftover only?

place	Same food	Leftover
City	60%	40%
Village	17%	83%

The above table illustrates the disparity between the two sexes. In cities, it is not as intense as it is there in the rural areas where men are still dominant and try to enslave their women. In cities, the ratio is better as compared to rural areas. On the other hand in villages, 83 percent of women have to rely on the leftover of their male family members. During our interview, I came across an old lady who told me that she ate the leg of the chicken for the first time in the present year. Her son was now

living in a foreign country and they were now well off. Previously she was living in a very conservative and poor family. She said that they did cook chicken in their house but the better pieces of flesh always went to the plates of the male members. Now being old, she was sometimes given the good pieces and her sons did that.

Table. 10 What was the attitude of the people/ relatives/neighbors toward you after the death of your husband (question addressed to some women whose husband died in an accident or embraced sudden death?)

Place	Helpful	Critical	Indifferent
City	20%	65%	15%
Village	25%	70%	5%

The above table shows that after the death of the husband, the woman in Pakistani society becomes helpless unless she belongs to the elite class. She has to be dependent on others' help. A very few people are helpful in real terms whereas the same number of people remain indifferent. A large number of people belonging to family, relatives, neighbors, and society become sarcastic and critical. They start looking at the activities of the woman and dishonor her whenever they get a chance. They find faults with them and leave no occasion to tease them. So the death of a husband leaves a great vacuum in the family system making women lonely and unprotected. Most of the time in the past, these women were forcibly married to the brothers of the late husbands, and only in this way, they were guaranteed to be fed. The following table discusses the compatibility and harmony between husband and wife.

Table 11. Do you remain fearful of your husband or you are on friendly terms with him.

place	Friendly terms	Fearful
City	60%	40%
Village	30%	70%

From the urban sample, 60 percent are on friendly terms with their husbands and 40 percent remain at a distance. From the rural sample, 30 percent said that they were on friendly terms while 70 percent said that they were afraid of their husbands lest they should get angry. So from the discussion with women, it transpires that the harmony which should be there between man and woman is lacking in Pakistani society. The table below shows whether women can mix up with other people and they are allowed to take part in these functions.

Table 12. If you do not give birth to a son what is/was/would be the attitude of your husband toward you.

Place	Angry	Pleased /normal	Angry/Threats for second marriage
City	25%	35%	45%
Village	30%	10%	60%

The table shows the attitude of the husbands if their wives do not give births to sons. This trend is though decreasing yet it is dominant in the villages. People do like to have more sons to increase their strength. For them, the girls are weak and so they cannot be included among the potential successor. The women expressed their views and said that their husbands were angry at their not being able to give the boys. They were not able to understand that it was not the fault of the girl. It is a natural process. In urban areas 35 percent and rural areas, only 10 percent people are satisfied with what they get. The rest of the people are angry and threaten their wives that they would go for their second marriage. The second marriage means the first wife is no more at the helm of affairs and she loses many rights in the house. So it is like a stigma for the first wife if her husband marries the second time. The question below inquires whether women were allowed by their male heads to take part in combined functions.

Table 13. Does/ did he allow you to mix up with other people on special occasions?

Place	Yes	No
City	78%	22%
Village	45%	55%

Most of the women 78 percent from urban and 45 percent from rural said that they were not objected by their husbands to mix up with other people. Twenty-two percent from urban and 55 percent from rural women said that they were not allowed the same. This table represents the suspicions of the husbands on their wives. A lot many do not trust the integrity of their wives so we see a level of trust deficit in the couples. Similarly, some women also do not trust the integrity of their husbands, but the difference is that they are helpless. The man is strong and decision-maker and he

has the whole backing of law, tradition, and religion and he exploits them all to dominate and subjugate women.

The table below shows whether the women taking part in the interview are engaged in some job or they are just housewives.

Table 14. Do/Did you do some job

Place	Yes	No
City	5%	95%
Village	2%	98%

Only five percent from urban and 2 percent from rural women are employed whereas the rest of the women are housewives. They are housewives mostly because they lack education and they are not advised to take up any job. It becomes a matter of honor for the family if women intend to do some job. In most families, employment by women is considered a shameful act for the whole family. It is said that they are living at the earned money of their women showing as if their earning is not worth using. The small numbers of women who do their jobs have a different lifestyle. They are educating their children differently. So a difference can be seen in the eyes of the employed women who are not dependent and can live their lives as they like. The following table illustrates the possible attitude of the husbands if their wives find some jobs.

Table 15. Is/Was your husband in favor of your job suppose you find a job.

Place	Yes	No
City	23%	77%
Village	5%	95%

In city life 77 percent and rural life 95 percent are not in favor of women's job. They want them to be inside their homes. They think that the women must engage themselves in the household chores and raise their children. So according to the statements of the participants the males are still representatives of the old conventional values and norms and they stick to them. A whole load of all this prejudice then has to be borne by women of Pakistani society. The following table shows whether husbands lend a hand in domestic chores.

Table 16. Does/Did your husband help you in your household chores?

Place	Yes	No
City	10%	90%
Village	2%	98%

It is also self-evident in Pakistani society that 90 percent from urban life and 98 percent from rural life said that their husbands never helped them in their daily work. Their husbands just like to do their job outside and then they want to have everything done by their wives at home. So she has to take care of the children, wash clothes, maintain the kitchen, cook food and entertain her husband's guests. If a husband helps his wife in Pakistani society, he is called "servant of his wife"[henpecked] which is a very negative term because a woman is considered a low creature and being a servant of a low creature is a disturbing thing. The following table shows the attitude of the husbands of the participants toward their sons or daughters.

Table 17. Who does/ did your husband pay more attention, to boys or girls?

Place	Girls	Boys
City	45%	55%
Village	20%	80%

In the cities, 45 percent of women said that fathers paid attention to girls and 55 percent said that they paid attention to boys while in the city, 20 percent said that fathers paid attention to girls while 80 percent said that they paid attention to boys. So the ratio is quite high for boys. As a general rule, it is seen that male in the family is given much more importance. The following table shows whether the husband pays attention to the demands and basic requirements of their women. The following table illustrates if the husband fulfills the requirements of his wife.

Table 18. Does/Did he pay attention to your requirements?

Place	Yes	No
City	37%	63%
Village	20%	80%

The table shows that 37 percent from urban and 20 percent from rural women said that they paid attention to their requirements. On the other hand, 63 percent from urban and 80 percent from rural side said that their husbands did not fulfill their requirements. So there is a huge difference

between these two. It transpires from the analysis that the requirements of the women are not properly attended to. They only cooperate when the menfolk want. So being dependent, they have to rely on their husbands for basic things. The following table discusses the legal position where the legal part is to be given to the daughters from the father's property.

Table. 19 Have your parents or brothers given you your share of the property?

Place	Yes	No
City	9% %	91%
Village	4%	96%

Only 9 percent from the urban and 4 percent from rural area women said that they had been given their share in the property. The rest of the female participants said that they were not given the property share. Their property share was either had by their fathers or their brothers. Although according to the constitution of Pakistan and Islamic law, daughters have a property right in Pakistan it is denied and the state also does not assist women. The problem is that laws are there, but they are not implemented. Especially, in the case of women laws are changed and tradition and religion's local version comes into effect. In this way, women are not given their rights and they are handicapped forever because they do not have anything in their hands.

Views of women counsels

I interviewed nine advocates too to find out the legal position of women who come to the court. The first basic thing which comes out is that women who are denied rights hardly reach the court. They do not have enough education or access to move to the court for her right. She accepts her fate as it is and then resigns to it. The lawyers told me that the cases of women are based on *nikkah*-related [marriage contract] or about the possession of children. Most of the time, the man succeeds because he manages the affairs of the courts of Pakistan. Women being weak and uneducated can hardly manage the affairs of the court. So women face a lot of problems. A lawyer said that he happened to see women waiting in the courts daily. This shows their utter helplessness. They come to the court but there is nobody to guide them. So they are exploited by the lawyers and their agents etc.

The poverty factor is very important among the women who come to court. Most of them are very poor. They approach the court for justice in certain issues but what happens that they are not supported even by their own families. Most of the men try their level best to contain the women in their houses by saying that a woman in the court means humiliation and insult for the whole family. Secondly, the people who look at them pursuing their cases in the courts curse their family members saying that they are shameless. They have allowed their women to come to the city and expose themselves. In this way, it becomes an issue of *ghairat* [honor] for the whole family.

Decisions about the issues of women are mostly dealt with by the local courts based on the people of the family to settle the disputes. Here the views of the women are often not sought. Instead, their fathers, brothers, and husbands give their views which will ultimately settle the issues of their lives. These local courts, though not legal are especially working in Pakistan to contain and limit the cases of women to their own families and tribes. Otherwise, the families take this problem as an issue of *ghairat* [honor] if the cases go to the court and women appear before the courts. The issue of "honor" is also associated with women, not men. Men may cheat anybody, elope any girl, go for second marriage, and divorce wives, but they are not considered wrong in society. On the other hand, an act of this kind is associated with "honor" if committed by women and hence deemed punishable. The whole family's honor is at stake when a woman slips. Oftentimes, these local courts punish women at the local level for those sins which may have been initiated by men.

Conclusion

The paper pointed out some gender-related issues and discussed them in the context of urban and rural areas. The intention in selecting the data in this way was to gather representative data which might reflect the general picture of Pakistani society. So the picture which emerged is not according to the generally accepted standards prevalent in the world. As is expected and written in different surveys, reports, and other research articles, the state of Pakistani women is not satisfactory. She is, by and large, denied basic human rights. She has no right to choose the husband of her own choice. Although she has to live a whole life with a partner, the decision of the parents is considered the most important and valuable. She is not often given her right in property and her share is captured by her brothers. So, first fathers, then brothers, and lastly the husbands exploit women. As a result, women have to face many difficulties in coping up with the families of their in-laws. Still, they are compelled to get on with them even if they do not like that.

A slight change is felt in the thinking of people as the trend of education is increasing both in cities and rural areas. Yet the speed of change is so slow that it will take many years to change the mindset of the people.

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