

Research Article

Empowerment of Working and Non – Working Women: A Psychological Study with Reference to Ara District of Bihar, India

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Abstract: Women in the modern hi – tech society, which is moving very fast under the shadow of population explosion, conflicts, chaos and corruptions, can mould the personality of the adolescents and youth in a proper direction and perspective, provided the women are themselves empowered. Educating the new generation girls and women ready to empowering her with the skills are necessary for economic independence. It is the only long – term solution for the betterment of girls and women in India. By looking at the fact, the present piece of research work was aimed at studying the empowerment of working and non – working women with particular reference to Ara district of Bihar State, India. In the present study one hundred eighty (N=180) women comprising working women (n=80) and non – working women (n=80) were randomly selected from different organizations, namely. Schools, colleges, banks, and houses etc located at in and around Ara district. Total subjects' age were ranged between 25 - 45 years belonging to lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic status groups. Data were collected through questionnaire schedules. Having collected the data, individual scores were obtained for giving statistical treatment. Finally, obtained results revealed the significant difference between the group of working women and non – working women in terms of their degree of perceived reactions on Psychological empowerment. Significant differences were also found in all the dimensions of psychological empowerment viz., 'Self – Efficacy'; Self – Esteem'; and 'psychology of well – being', although working women scored higher degree in all the dimensions of psychological empowerment scale than non – working women residing in Ara district of Bihar, India. Results have been discussed in detail by giving the appropriate reasons.

Keywords: Working and Non-Working Women, Psychological Empowerment, Ara, Bihar, India.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment encompasses some unique elements. First, women are not just one group amongst several disempowered subsets of society (the poor, ethnic minorities, etc.); they are a cross-cutting category of individuals that overlaps with all these other groups. Second, the household and interfamilial relations are a central locus of women's disempowerment in a way that is not true for other disadvantaged groups. This means that efforts at empowering women must be especially cognizant of the implications of broader policy action at the household level. Third, women's empowerment requires systemic transformation in not just any institutions, but fundamentally in those supporting patriarchal structures [1-4].

Empowerment is a critical for holistic transformation. Seeking to enable the women to become

agents of change in their communities, such approach encompasses social, economic, political, and spiritual empowerment within the individual, household, business, and community. In most cases, it has been found that these processes are mutually reinforcing. The empowerment of women at the individual level helps build a base for social change. Movements to empower women as a group increase opportunities available to individual women, and economic empowerment can increase women's status in their families and societies.

In order for a woman to be empowered, she needs access to the material, human, and social resources necessary to make strategic choices in her life. Not only have women been historically disadvantaged in access to material resources like credit, property, and money, but they have also been excluded from social resources like education or insider knowledge of some businesses.

Women's empowerment has been approached with a variety of rationales such as women's empowerment through improved access to educational opportunities, through participation in the political process and through the provision of economic opportunities. While many women work outside the home to support their families and the tasks they perform are exhausting and meagerly rewarded, access to income improves their authority in the home. Given this linkage, it implies that women who are economically engaged are able to make choices for themselves. Working women, regardless of how inferior their position and small their income, have a greater sense of control over their lives and more power and control over resources within the family than nonworking women. A woman who contributes to the family finances is more empowered in decision making. According to a UNICEF report, 'When a woman brings income or assets into the household, she is more likely to be included in decisions on how the resources will be distributed'.

It is important to mention here that history demonstrates that out of all deprived groups in the world women have suffered the most. Their suffering knew no bounds based on culture, race, region or religion. They have been victims of abuse, molestation, violence, rape, poverty, malnutrition, ill treatment – in a word all sorts of deprivation. But until recently, scholarly attention was not focused enough on subjects related to empowerment of women. In the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious Indian sub-continent, women face one or other kinds of problem here and there. Only the dimension differs from state to state, society to society, and place to place. Even in the 21st century women are beaten, considered witches; they are getting stoned for committing sexual activities; honor killing is in practice in many parts of India; and with petty excuses they are tortured and raped while the main perpetrators move freely without any punishment. Further, they are disallowed to use mobile phones; debarred to choose their own dress or profession; have little freedom in marriage and reproductive matters; are restrained to move freely within their locality; are discouraged to participate in political activities; and many women remain starved or half fed. In a word, they are bound in chains of societal taboos and face lots of peculiar difficulties throughout their life.

Moreover, it is generally observed that women are the victims of social, political, religious, and economic subordination and deprivation in Indian society. Also they are treated unequally and cannot participate in democratic activities equally with men. Democracy becomes meaningless and paralyzed unless fifty per cent of its population participates in the democratic decision making processes and joins in the economic, social, and political activities. Therefore, to make democracy sustainable it is necessary that both

women and men should take part in the development activities. Without the active participation of fifty per cent population i.e., women, the development of India is sure to be partial. It can be said that, "Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is" [5]. Thus the women's empowerment has now become an issue not only in India but throughout the globe.

The term empowerment means authorization which refers to entrusted power with which external world can be driven according to the wishes and desires. Power, indeed, is a universal factor for social existence rooted in the world of living experience. If we look for an opening of this kind, we find first of all the idea that power involves causing outcomes despite possible resistance, or, in other words, causality even in unfavorable circumstance. Therefore, individuals or communities who possess empowerment in any life facets have the capacity to cause outcomes in accordance of their motives in that very specific life situation.

Of all, psychological empowerment is one of the most significant aspects which have been prevalent throughout human civilization, but its use for altering and commanding environment is successively at increase with the development of mechanization and cyber world culture. The beginning of the mechanized and cybernetic world culture appeared during the last quarter of the 20th century that is likely to be growing with faster pace of development by the onset of the 20th century.

The present world scenario is witnessing psychological war at all front of life situations arising out of political, social and commercial issues. Because of this challenging reality, it is necessary to develop Psychological Empowerment for effectively competing and influencing the world around to meet the challenges of 21st century.

Psychological empowerment is a mental make-up of being fully confident, self-sufficient and confident in influencing and mastering the situation within the desired framework. Hence, it is the greatest of all worldly forces that can bring success in life endeavors, but real psychological empowerment is not possible unless an individual or community is fully equipped with various worldly requirements that are most likely to strengthen one's psychological empowerment. These areas in which empowerment are necessary to build stronger psychological empowerment include – education, economy, information and other technologies, power, politics etc. Psycho-empowerment is nothing in the absence of the empowerment in the above areas. Hence, strength in these areas strengthens psychological empowerment.

The afore-mentioned forces impinge upon the individuals including women and the community that subsequently inculcate and shape their perception towards oneself and others. Here, what I have to impress upon is that the real perception and feeling of psychological empowerment is not something which can be easily developed. It is an outcome of the process of socialization in which individuals learn style of life through the numerous sources. Parents' education, their thinking pattern, communication style, inter-personal relationship, profession and professional dealings play major and pivotal role in inducing the sense of psychological empowerment in their children especially the male child because in our society, girl child who later becomes women are differentiated so far as their roles are concerned. Since, women in our society are perceived to remain the passive member, hence, there is a greater need to change women's perception as well as the perception of others with regard to women empowerment. It is, indeed, true that the sense of empowerment develops right from the family environment where parents role is of vital importance. Therefore, there is a need to educate parents with regard to their female child to be treated equally with the male child in all spheres of life including education in decision making process and working shoulder to shoulder with male counterparts. Moreover, female child should be taught for their importance in their society that they are not less than any male members. Such family environment will initiate to develop woman potentialities which may lead to act confidently against any odds. Thereafter, there is role of society where women be given equal opportunity in all walks of life. Therefore, the present piece of research is aimed at studying the empowerment of working and non – working women with particular reference to Ara district of Bihar.

Empowerment has both intrinsic as well as instrumental value. "The most common use of the term "empowerment" refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that it more nearly equals the power of the high power group" [6].

According to Sahay [7], "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life". It implies decentralization of power and authority in the deprived, oppressed and powerless people who have not been able to participate in decision making and implementation of policies and programs of both government organizations as well as in societal matters. Empowerment of women is not only essential but also imperative for all round development of a country. The term empowerment has been defined by

Chattopadhyaya [8]. She holds that, "Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all

spheres (social, economic, and political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions". Further the term empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining control over one's own life while supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives" [9]. Goodrich describes empowerment as "a benevolent but unilateral transaction in which one person enhances another's ability to feel competent and take action, that is, enhances another's power-to" [10].

The World Bank also defines the term empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. This process is actions which both builds individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets". [8, 11].

Shiva [12] feels, "Women's empowerment means that women no matter where they are healthy, have enough for their needs, their own survival and that of their family and community, to be able to live with dignity, live and work in safe and caring environment, which allows their growth and holistic development i.e., physically, emotionally, socially, economically." Legal experts and lawyers have viewed and analyzed women's empowerment from their own perspectives. The preamble to the Charter of the United Nations emphasizes upon the member states "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights in the dignity and worth of the human person in the equal rights of men and women" [13]. In an important study Manohar [14] defines women's empowerment in this respect. She envisages that, "The key to women's empowerment is recognition and enforcement of women's human rights." In the light of 'equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the law,' the legal experts want to bring down all kinds of legal discrimination against women. Without the establishment of women's legal rights and human social order women's real empowerment will be a distant dream.

Empowerment of women has been defined by Niroj [15]. She has aptly pointed out that, "being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home. Power also means having women's contribution recognized and valued." On the other hand, Narsimhan [16] was quoted by Aspy and Sandhu in their book - Empowering Women Equity: A Counseling Approach. They delineate that, "Empowerment is the process by which people, organization, or groups who are powerless or marginalized (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) which they exercise, (d) without

infringing on the rights of others and (e) which coincides with actively supporting the empowerment of others in their community.”.

In addition to the above context, it is also important to mention that the psychological component involves women believing that they can act at personal and social levels to improve their conditions [17]. It is an individual's subjective feelings that he or she can determine his/her own life's course [18].

Psychological empowerment is rarely operationalised in empirical research either at household or at community level. Many researchers have opined that psychological empowerment of women may be operationally measured by comprising self-esteem, self-efficacy and psychological well-being dimensions [1, 19].

Even though outside work for women often means a double burden, the empirical evidence supports the notion that access to work increases a woman's economic independence and with it a greater level of general independence is created. As Bandura [20] notes, economic subordination must be neutralized for women to be empowered. The economic component of empowerment requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of financial autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning.

While many poor women work outside the home to support their families and the tasks they perform are exhausting and meagerly rewarded, access to income improves their authority in the home. Working women, regardless of how inferior their position and small their income, have a greater sense of control over their lives and more power and control over resources within the family than nonworking women.

Aims and objectives of the present study

Women are the foundation of a family, society and for that matter the nation. In this paper an effort has been made to discuss the importance of psychological variables viz., for women's empowerment and the role and status of women in the present changing scenario of human life. Basically women constitute an important segment of the society and shape the entire future of the humanity and the nation. It has been rightly said that behind every successful man there is a woman. This indicates that women as an integral part of our society have a vital role not only for rearing and bearing the children, but also for the personality development of our future generation and development of the Nation as whole. Role and status of a woman is related to various variable factors which include the upbringing of the women, personality development, education of the women, family environment, social outlook, surrounding circumstances, political scenario, religious

commands and their interpretation. Nevertheless, the biological and social status of women along with her distinct roles as a mother or sister or daughter on the one hand and wife or mother-in-law, sister-in-law or daughter-in-law on the other hand cannot be ignored.

Women almost in every social set-up play an important role in the economic welfare of the family. She as a mother cares, bothers, loves, showers affection and takes all the pains for the entire family and thereby plays an important role not only as a home maker, home manager but also in maintaining social ties with the relations, friends and neighbors. Thus, the present study is of immense value. A large number of studies on women's empowerment are available but none of the studies are witnessed with regard to working and non – working women with reference to Ara district of North Bihar. This is still an unexplored area. Hence, the present research endeavor will help to understand the women living in Ara district – a well-known district of Bihar State and the whole study will fill the void of knowledge in the area chosen by the present investigator.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the broad aims and objectives of the present study the following hypotheses were formulated for the present empirical investigation:

- There will be no significant difference between working and non-working women in respect to self-esteem dimension of psychological empowerment.
- Working women scores on self-efficacy dimension of psychological empowerment will be significantly high in comparison to non-working women.
- There will be no significant difference in the scores of psychological well-being between working and non-working women.
- There will be no significant difference on overall psychological empowerment scale between the group of working women and non-working women in the Ara district of Bihar, India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

In the present study total sample consisted of two hundred women (N=160) comprises working women (n=80) and Non –working (Housewives) (n=80). All the subjects' age were ranged between the age range of 25 - 45 years belonging to lower, middle, and upper socioeconomic status groups, with educational qualification of 10 and above were randomly drawn from various organizations such as Banks (private & Govt.), Schools, and different houses, etc located in and around Ara Town in Bihar a well-known town of Bihar State, India

Tools & Materials Used

For the present study the following tools and materials were used for gathering information pertaining to the research topic chosen by the present investigator.

1. For measuring empowerment of women – a scale viz., **Psychological Empowerment Scale** developed by Kumar *et al.* [21] was used in the present research work. This is a 4-point scale measuring mainly three dimensions of psychological empowerment i.e., self-efficacy, self-esteem and psychological well-being. This scale consists of 38 items each rated on a 4-point scale response ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Higher scores will represent more psychologically empowered. The self-efficacy scale of the psychological empowerment scale consists of 18 items whereas the self-esteem scale and psychological well-being scales consist of 10 items each. The scale has been found to be high on reliability and validity as author reported.
2. Biographical Information Blank (BIB): **Biographical Information Blank (BIB)**: For tapping information regarding the respondents biographies, a “Biographical Information Blank” (BIB) was also prepared that included age, marital status, salary (basic and gross), qualification,

designation, department, total experience (in years), present experience (in years) and number of dependents and the respondents were requested to furnish these information.

Procedures

The above two test materials viz., psychological empowerment scale, and, biographical information blank were in printed form and were administered individually on all the working and non – working women. All women were assured by taking in to confidence that provided information would be kept strictly confidential and would be used for research purposes only.

Having collected the responses to the items of the scales, they were scored according to the procedure and the individual scores were obtained. Finally scores were given statistical treatment and presented in tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results contained in table – 1 showed significant difference between the working and non – working women in terms of their different dimensions of psychological environment.

Table-1: Showing Mean, SD, and ‘t’ – Value Pertaining to Significant Difference between Working and Non – Working Women in terms of their Different Dimensions of Psychological Empowerment

| Variables | Working women (n=80) | | Non-working women (n=80) | | t - Value | Significance Levels |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|-----------|---------------------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | | |
| Self-Efficacy | 55.34 | 11.73 | 40.32 | 10.07 | 8.63 | .01 |
| Self-Esteem | 29.78 | 6.43 | 24.11 | 6.03 | 6.41 | .01 |
| Psychological Well-being | 32.30 | 7.17 | 26.35 | 5.67 | 5.77 | .01 |
| Psychological Empowerment | 117.42 | 25.33 | 90.78 | 21.77 | 7.08 | .01 |

From the table – 1, it can be observed that there are significant differences between the group of working and non – working women on different dimensions of psychological empowerment, namely, ‘self – efficacy’; ‘self – esteem’; ‘psychological well – being’ as the ‘t’ – values – 8.63, 6.41, and 5.77 respectively has been found significant statistically at .01 level of confidence. The presented results seem to be logical, in the sense that group of working women especially in Ara district of Bihar State scored higher degree of perceived reactions on different dimensions of Psychological Empowerment Scale as it can be seen from the table – 1 that Working women have shown higher degree of their perceived reactions on the dimension of “Self – Efficacy of Psychological Empowerment as the Mean score is 55.34 with an SD 11.73 in comparison to their Non – Working Women (Mean – 40.32 with an SD 10.07), Thus, the proposed hypothesis that ‘there will be no significant difference between working and non-working women in respect to

their self-esteem – a dimension of psychological empowerment’, stands rejected. From the same table, it can also observed that on the dimension of ‘self – esteem’, working women of Ara district of Bihar State have scored higher degree than their non – working as the obtained Mean score is 29.78 with an SD – 6.43, hence ‘t’ – 6.41 has been found significant at .01 level of confidence. Thus, the proposed hypothesis i. e ‘Working women scores on self-efficacy dimension of psychological empowerments will be significantly high in comparison to non-working women stands accepted. Similarly, on ‘psychological well – being – a dimension of psychological empowerment, working women scored higher than their non – working women as the Mean score is 32.30 with an SD – 7.17 in comparison to Non – Working Women (Mean score is 26.35 with an SD – 5.67). Thus, the significant difference has been found at .01 level of confidence. The proposed hypothesis “here will be no significant difference in the scores of psychological well-being between working and non-

working women stand rejected. Schuler & Hashmi [27] found that working mothers acknowledge the joys of combined employment and family responsibilities. When a woman goes out to work, she shakes off the feeling of subordination [22]. Work provides a woman with more self-esteem and to some extent satisfies her need for recognition, freedom, power, independence, and the need for social contacts.

These days women are entering into employment sector not only because of economic compulsion as in earlier times but also because of their desire for self-expression and having an independent

identity and participation in work help them in expressing themselves and creating their independent identity which helps in boosting their self-esteem.

In continuation with these results, it can also be observed from the table – 1 that working women scored higher on overall psychological empowerment in comparison to non – working women especially from where the present research has been carried out. Hence the proposed hypothesis i.e. ‘there will be significant difference on overall psychological empowerment between working women and non-working women, stands also rejected.

Table-2: Showing Comparative Levels of Perceived Reactions on Psychological Empowerment between Working and Non – Working Women Residing in Ara district of Bihar, India

| Levels | Working Women | | Non – Working Women | |
|----------|---------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| | n= 80 | Percentage | n= 80 | Percentage |
| High | 54 | 67.5 % | 41 | 51.25 % |
| Moderate | 19 | 23.75 % | 24 | 30.00 % |
| Low | 07 | 8.75 % | 15 | 18.75 % |

Mean = 117.42 Mean = 90.78

Table – 2 is the extension of table – 1 pertaining to the comparative levels of perceived reactions on psychological empowerment between working and non – working women residing in Ara district of Bihar State. Table – 2 depicts the clear cut picture regarding the perceived reactions on psychological empowerment that 67.5 percent of working women had reported higher degree of acceptability to psychological empowerment in comparison to non – working women who reported 51.25 percent which low as compared to working women, whereas, 30 percent of non – working women had shown moderate level in comparison to working women i.e. 23.75 percent which is low as compared.

Moreover, 18.75 percent of non – working women had shown low degree on psychological empowerment but favorable inclination towards psychological empowerment as compared to working women who reported 8.75 percent only. The levels of the perceived reactions on psychological empowerment presented over here seems to be logical in the sense that working women are much aware about the meaning of empowerment than non – working women who were engaged with their household works but they were found satisfied with their house work. The presented results can also be observed by the following figure No. 1 & 2 separately.

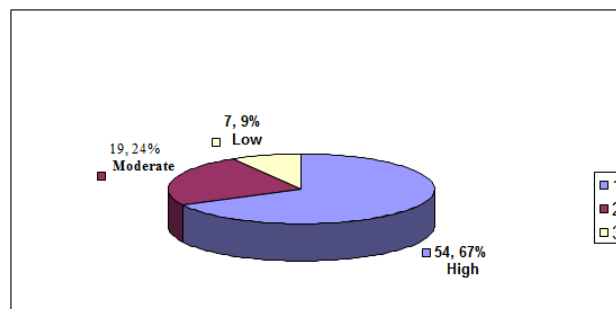


Fig-1: Pie chart showing levels of perceived reactions on Psychological Empowerment of working women residing in Ara district of Bihar, India

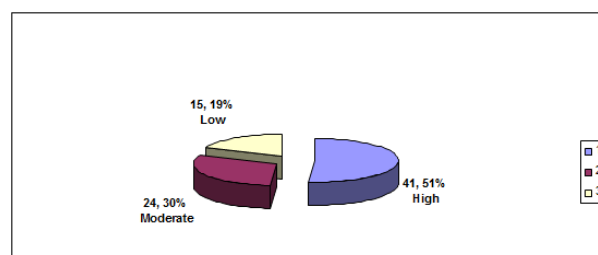


Fig-2: Pie - chart showing levels of perceived reactions on Psychological Empowerment of Non - Working Women residing in Ara district of Bihar, India

The present findings are in consonance with the findings of Menon [23]. According to them, occupying multiple roles is thought to increase the women's chances to learn, to develop self-efficacy and self-esteem, to build social network and open access to informational, instrumental and emotional support, and to buffer life's stresses and strains.

Employment increases self-esteem, instills a sense of accomplishment, and provides more social contacts. One study showed that employment had stronger effects on the health of women who lacked other sources of self-esteem (e.g. women who lacked education) and other social contacts (e.g. women without family roles; Rajput [24]. Many studies underscore the idea that work may have important links to self-esteem and social contacts for women. Playing multiple roles also provides cognitive cushioning and alternative sources of self-esteem and gratification when things go poorly in one's life domain.

One of the main reasons for higher self-esteem among employed women is that women who hold multiple roles may be better at coping or less susceptible to psychological distress, and women who have fewer roles may be more psychologically vulnerable and drop or lose roles. Holding more roles is associated with higher self-esteem and job satisfaction [25-27].

The presents results mentioned above clearly reveals the interpretations that the role of women in the traditional societies was confirmed to the household management based on the traditional values, attitudes and customs, but the family culture in the context of which early socialization takes place is very important factor which later on encourages or discourages her participation in the socio – economic activities of the family and subsequently in the organizational, social and political matters of the society. It is indeed that woman almost in every social set – up play an important role in the economic welfare of the family. She as a mother cares, loves, showers affection and takes all the pains for the entire family and thereby plays an important role not only as a home maker, home manager but also in maintaining social ties with the relations, friends and neighbors.

It is undoubtedly fact that women plays an important role in shaping humanity in the right perspective, but have suffered and continue to suffer in the male dominated society. Women bestow power to the new generation and thereby empower the society and nation in the real sense, but they themselves continue to be helpless and powerless. It is on record that World conference of UN decade for women defined development as the total development including development in the political, economic, social and cultural growth of human beings. World community Rio Earth Summit pledged their commitment to the

empowerment of women, which they believed is central and powerful force in search for safe environment, economic and social justice, survival of all species and the common goal of a healthy planet in which future generation can nourish and flourish. The justification of the finding is the fact that working women are more field independent having more frequent interactions with the people of the surroundings.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the obtained results and its interpretations the following conclusions are drawn.

1. Significance of difference has been found between working and non – working women in terms of their degree of perceived reactions on 'Self – Efficacy' – a dimension of psychological empowerment scale in the Ara district of Bihar State, India.
2. Significance of difference has also been found between working and non – working women in terms of their degree of perceived reactions on 'Self – Esteem' – a dimension of psychological empowerment scale in the Ara district of Bihar State, India.
3. Significance of difference has been found between working and non – working women in terms of their degree of perceived reactions on 'Psychological Well - Being' – a dimension of psychological empowerment scale in the Ara district of Bihar State, India.
4. Significant difference has also been found between working and non – working women in terms of their degree of perceived reactions on overall psychological empowerment scale in the Ara district of Bihar State, India.
5. Working women were found more inclined to psychological empowerment than non – working women.
6. Finally observations have revealed the fact that women are an integral part of our society, hence, the idea of human race can't be conceived without the existence of a woman. Even women in the holy books have been bestowed with a very high status and have been adored with various adjectives. Thus, she is called as mother of the nation and it is also said that education of the mother means education of the entire family.

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