



Through this social media campaign Maitri is starting a dialogue with men in our community to identify and eliminate the root cause of gender based violence and partner violence.

#EngagingMenAndBoys

1. Tell us your name and a little bit about you, anything you want to share with our readers.

I am Usman Shahid, originally from Lahore, Pakistan. Presently, I am pursuing my Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations at UC. My background includes working as a journalist, freelance writer, and lecturer in journalism and political science. For the past three years, I have been residing in Lahore, where I continue to work and teach while doing freelance work and co-authored a book titled Indo Pak People to People Contact: A Victim of National Insecurities.

2. What is the role of a man to be a good role model for future generations?

As a personal remark, I believe that you have the potential to excel as a responsible citizen, loving husband, caring father, supportive brother, and devoted son. Your primary focus should be fulfilling these roles to the best of your abilities. With a focus on domestic violence, my words are centered around this issue.

To become an excellent human being, it is crucial to start by embodying qualities such as kindness, respect, and equality toward all individuals, regardless of their skin color, caste, region, gender, or belief system. Discriminating behavior has no place in the journey toward becoming a good person.

3. Do you see women around you (school, workplace, family, in community, etc.) facing inequality/injustice? Can you give any examples? What can men do to end that inequality?

In Pakistan, the society is often patriarchal, with men occupying leadership positions and women being expected to follow their lead. This perspective is prevalent among all social classes, not just the uneducated or working-class individuals. Unfortunately, gender-based discrimination is common in the country, and women are often seen as inferior to men. This includes emotional and physical abuse, a widespread problem affecting both women and men, children, and the elderly.

From my personal experience, I have seen instances of gender discrimination within my family and community. For example, some families prioritize feeding their male children over female children because they believe that the male child will grow up to become the head of the household and take care of the parents in their old age. Women, on the other hand, are seen as outsiders who will eventually get married and leave the family.

Another example of discrimination is the way food is distributed during meals. The best cuts of meat are often given to male children, while women are served last. This reflects the belief that male children are a better investment for the family's future.

In conclusion, these are just a few examples of the prevalent gender-based discrimination in Pakistan, and I believe it is important to raise awareness and work toward promoting gender equality in the country.

In my personal opinion, equality between men and women should be a clear and established belief. This starts with the way one is raised by their parents, specifically the way fathers treat their mothers and sisters. The notion of chivalry, where women are considered to be of lesser standing and therefore given extra respect, should be replaced with the belief in equality and shared rights and responsibilities. In Islamic law, men are entitled to more property than women, but I have made it clear to my parents that any inherited property will be divided equally among my three sisters and myself. This is not a favor; it is simply my belief system and understanding of equality. My sisters are often better qualified than I am due to my father's investment in their education and careers. As a father and a man, one can raise a child to understand that even though society may be patriarchal, one should strive to adhere to humanistic values rather than societal norms.

4. Have you witnessed around you a situation where your male friends control their girlfriends, curb their freedom to speak, dress or carry themselves the way they want?

Let me admit, I may have done this on one or two occasions. It wasn't entirely due to my own choice, I probably asked one of my partners to dress up in a particular manner when we meet each other's families. Given that our families are traditional, this behavior could put us in a negative light. Personally, I don't have any objections, but if securing the approval of our families is important, they might judge us based on our appearance and speech. It could prove to be more challenging to convince them that we make suitable partners.

In many cases, people around me engage in certain practices. This is particularly common among those born in the 1980s and 1990s. However, generation Z that grew up in urban areas, and was exposed to international and high-profile local institutions, has a different understanding of many things. They are vastly different from what our society teaches us, and it can be challenging to convince our parents or those of their age that times have changed. We are now part of a global world and are considered global citizens. It's not the same as it was in the 1990s in Pakistan.

I cannot dictate what a woman or my wife does or controls her career. The concept of marital rape is not widely recognized in Pakistan, and it is uncommon for women to prioritize their careers before starting a family. In fact, it is often men and their parents who pressure women to start a family, both mentally and physically. I heard a concerning story from a friend of a friend who once said that a man should slap his wife on the first day of marriage so that she will be obedient to him for the rest of her life. I do not support or condone this behavior, but unfortunately, some people hold such beliefs in Pakistan.

5. If you have seen a public figure being openly controlling/abusive to their partner? Can you give us an example? How did you feel about it? / How do you feel popular media perpetuates and glorifies toxic partner relationship dynamics; can you think of any examples?

It is difficult for me to recall any specific examples at the moment, but our former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has made controversial statements in the past. While I do not believe he intentionally intended to be abusive, he made comments that were not necessary, such as attributing the rise in rape cases in Pakistan to women wearing revealing clothes and the influence of Western culture. As a well-educated man, who spent much of his youth in the UK and is known for his involvement in Western sports such as cricket, his comments hold a lot of weight and influence with his millions of supporters. In a society like Pakistan, which already holds conservative beliefs about women, comments like these can have a significant impact. Recently, a famous actor who recently got divorced has been accused of domestic violence, and this is not an isolated incident, as there have been other cases as well. For example, a man named Abbas was accused of physically abusing his wife, and she filed for divorce, although he denied the allegations. I personally know individuals who have also been in similar situations. This

highlights how comments like those made by Imran Khan can contribute to a negative perception of women and a certain culture and suggest that these actions are acceptable.

It's concerning to see that people still hold onto traditional, outdated beliefs about chivalry, which they claim to be for the protection of women, but in reality, it is a form of control. This has been happening for centuries, and it's time for a change.

I remember some television shows that depict women being abused within families, which, unfortunately, can serve as a catalyst for domestic violence in many Pakistani households. When asked about the reasoning behind this, the directors and producers often respond that it leads to higher ratings as controversial topics are more likely to attract viewers.

These shows often perpetuate harmful stereotypes, portraying women as either villainous or submissive. They depict women as being subjected to all sorts of injustices and portrayed as being worthless or oppressed. Unfortunately, this is what is often portrayed in Pakistani dramas.

6. What is your thoughts about division of labor or household chores in a couple or family situation?

As equal partners, it's important to divide responsibilities equally. If one partner is handling household chores, the other should help with something else. If one is paying for certain expenses, the other should pay for utilities. If this isn't done, it's impossible to consider oneself a global citizen and can be seen as being stuck in the dark ages. When people hear that I do dishes, they sometimes laugh and ask if my partner isn't supposed to do them. In Pakistan, it can be a source of embarrassment for a man to admit that he does household chores like dishes, changing diapers, or doing laundry. This is seen as being poor or dominated by women, which is as bad as being poor. However, as a global citizen, it's necessary to share these responsibilities equally and compensate each other when necessary, as it's a two-way street. If a partner is sick or lazy, the other should pick up the slack.

Gone are the days when women were limited to the kitchen and household chores. By confining them to these tasks, we are neglecting half of our population's potential. Women in Pakistan have proven their excellence and surpassed men in various fields, such as the media industry, where a woman runs the most successful media house. Despite downsizing and budget cuts in media companies, this woman has even provided raises to her employees, whereas others were downsizing. This is significant, as the media industry is typically male-dominated, with male faces being more prominent. It's important to note that there should be no ego issues and that women should be seen as equal partners rather than just being responsible for running the household.

