

Criminalisation Of Child Marriage

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Abstract:

Child marriage remains a pervasive violation of human rights, disproportionately affecting millions of girls worldwide. In response to this grave concern, many countries have embarked on the path of criminalizing child marriage, recognizing it as a serious offense with legal consequences. This abstract delves into the significance, challenges, and implications of criminalizing child marriage as a crucial step towards safeguarding children's rights.

The abstract begins by contextualizing the issue, highlighting the prevalence and harmful impact of child marriage on individuals, families, and communities. It underscores how child marriage perpetuates cycles of poverty, gender inequality, and violations of human rights, robbing children of their childhood, education, health, and future prospects.

Next, the abstract explores the rationale behind criminalization, emphasizing the need for legal frameworks that explicitly prohibit child marriage and impose penalties on perpetrators. It discusses the importance of legal accountability in signaling societal condemnation of the practice, deterring potential offenders, and providing justice and recourse for survivors.

Moreover, the abstract examines the challenges and complexities associated with criminalization, including issues of enforcement, access to justice, and cultural resistance. It acknowledges the limitations of legal measures alone in addressing the root causes of child marriage and underscores the importance of complementary interventions, such as community mobilization, education, and economic empowerment.

Furthermore, the abstract analyzes the role of international cooperation and collaboration in advancing efforts to criminalize child marriage, emphasizing the need for coordinated action across borders to address this global issue effectively.

ABBREVIATION

AICTE	All India Council for Technical Education
AP	Andhra Pradesh
ANC	Antenatal Care
ASHA	Accredited Social health Activist
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CMPO	Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Children
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DNA	Data not available
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HH	Household
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IPC	Indian Penal Code
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of Legislative Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NEP	National Education Policy
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Class
PCMA	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences

PPS	Probability Proportionate to Size
PRI	Panchayat Raj Institution
PWDVA	Protection Women from Domestic Violence Act
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SI	Structured Interview
SLI	Standard of Living Index
ST	Scheduled Tribe
ToT	Training of Trainers
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VCPC	Village Child Protection Commiee



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Child Marriage is a violation of mortal rights that disproportionately affects girls. Anyhow of the fact that the frequency of child marriage has reduced encyclopedically, it still affects one out of every five girls in the world moment (UNICEF 2020). Child marriage among girls is anticipated to be six times more likely to do than among boys encyclopedically (UNICEF Press Release 2019). It has a direct impact on the good and the health of a girl. A child bridegroom's odds of getting a teenage mama are relatively high, and complications during gestation are the leading cause of mortality among adolescent girls (UNFPA 2020). In the Indian environment, as per Census 2011, there are 12.15 million wedded children in India of which 8.9 million are girls. rearmost released National Family Health Survey (NFHS)- V, (2019- 21) India Fact distance indicates a drop in the frequency of child marriage, dwindling from 26.8 in 2015- 16 to 23.3 in 2019- 21, yet there are significant interstate and intrastate variations. before, NFHS- IV (2015- 16) stated that further than half (52) of wedded adolescent girls reported to getting mated at an early age. The same round of NFHS also indicated that 43% wedded girls in the age group of 15- 19 faced controlling gets

initiatives by their partner, and one in five wedded adolescent girls aged 15- 19 have endured physical, sexual or emotional in the marriage relationship. Despite amended legislation on setting 18 times as the legal minimum age for girls, India is home to a considerable number of children, particularly girls get married. While the reasons for child marriage vary extensively depending on terrain and culture, overtly and gender inequity tend to play a significant part everywhere. Other factors that appear to be important contributors to child marriage are societal morals and conceptions about gender places. India is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which is to achieve gender equivalency and empower all women and girls', specifically men on the elimination of all dangerous similar as child, beforehand and forced marriage (thing 5, SDGs). Enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is an affirmative step towards such a direction. In a corner judgment by the Supreme Court in Independent Allowed vs Union of India Writ Petition (Civil) No. 382 of 2013, the apex Court read down Exception (2) to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to hold that sexual intercourse by an adult joker with his minor woman, with or without her concurrence, would amount to rape. Prior to this judgment, intercourse between a man and his woman, still, didn't constitute rape, if the woman was over 15 times of age. thus, the judgement protects the interests of wedded adolescent girls and seeks to further discourage the practice of child marriage in India. Despite these numerous legal vintles and structures, child marriages do in India, and the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) 2020 statistics shows that 785 child marriages cases were registered under the PCMA, an increase from the former time. Hence, it's essential to find solutions within communities. Given these statistics, it becomes imperative to study individualities, communities and state stakeholders together in order to identify the core reasons why, despite several initiatives by public and private players, India continues its struggle to end this grim mortal rights violation. I'm pleased to partake with you this empirical study that aims to validate similar enterprises. The findings are indeed more significant given that the data was collected during COVID- 19, when accessible child protection services and

mechanisms were at a daises II, adding the liability of child marriage cases. The study was conducted in four countries U ar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. CRY – Child Rights and You is seeking to bridge the gap between systems and communi es through its programming ac vi es and advocacy discourses and sweats in icing a safe and healthy nonage for all children, par cularly girls. We believe that reaching out to the community during these delicate epidemic mes is cri cal for icingchild protec on and preven ng child marriages. Our approach is grounded in in- depth analysis and comprehensive vulnerability mapping in order to help those in dire need. In this respect, our programmes include factors of community mobilisa on and agency structure among other effects. The programmes are intended to ameliorate collabora on and engagement with state systems and governmental swaystu ons. Our approach to change is centred on a socio- ecological paradigm grounded on the generalities of ttone’ society’, and system’. Our harmonious sweats at the community positionover times were suitable to successfully forestall multitudinouschild marriages in our programme areas through colorful ini a ves. We believe that empirical substantiationis vital in bringing child marriage to the van of public debate. CRY explosively believes that child marriage is a mortalrights viola on issue; its impacts are intergenera onal and directly affectthe status of educa on, health, nutri on and poverty of a society and na on. icing good health and nutri on of girls, comple on of 12 times of training, vacuity of life skill educa on and opportuni es for advanced educa on have a poten al to break this vicious cycle of intergenera on malnutri on and poverty. Addi onally, enabling girls to complete their secondary educa on increases the liability of their children being educated- therefore facilita ng las ng change across rubrics ons.. ith this, I unfeignedly hope that this report will serve as an effec ve resource for policymakers, influencers and prac oners in social development arena to address the issue of child marriage and to excludethe prac ce that significantly impacts the overall development of a child, par cularly girls of our country.

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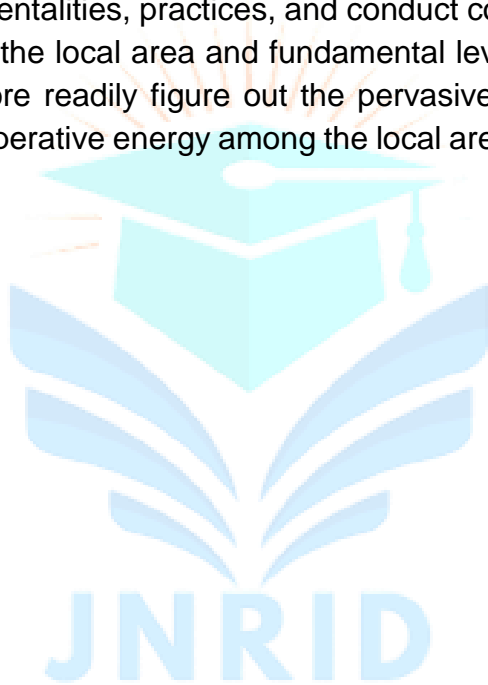


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Child marriage has a large number of suggestions for the kid, family, local area, and society all in all. As per studies, youngster marriage adversely affects kids' wellbeing, instruction, and self-improvement, as well as exposing them to close to home, physical and sexual viciousness. Younger relationships affect a country's monetary turn of events. The Assembled Countries perceive that finishing youngster marriage can prompt the accomplishment of eight of its manageable improvement objectives (SDGs), to be specific, no destitution, zero appetite, great wellbeing and prosperity, quality instruction, orientation equity, decent work and financial development, decreased disparities, harmony, and solid instincts. Internationally, the commonality of kid marriage among young ladies is probably going to be multiple times higher than the pervasiveness of kid marriage among young men (UNICEF official statement 2019). The insights are characteristic of what young relationships inappropriately mean for young ladies. The most noteworthy commonality of youngster marriages detailed by 20–24-year-olds is among the South Asian Relationship for Local Participation (SAARC) nations; the most noteworthy in Bangladesh, followed by Nepal, Afghanistan and India (UNICEF 2020). UNESCO's added information on young ladies' schooling uncovers that 11 million young ladies might very well always avoid school because of the on-going pandemic (UNESCO 2021). Another such result would be an always expanding rate of kid marriage in the pandemic and the financial emergency brought about by it. It has been anticipated that the pandemic could prompt an additional 13 million instances of kid marriage over the course of the following ten years (World Financial Gathering 2020). Over ongoing years, India has shown significant advancement in diminishing rates of kid marriage. The Public Family Wellbeing Overview (NFHS-IV) 2015-16 has shown a significant decrease in the predominance of kid marriage, declining from 47% in 2005-06 to 27% in 2015-16. The most recent NFHS-V (2019-21) demonstrated that near one in each five for example 23.3% ladies matured 20-24 years hitched before 18 years old. Despite this, youngster marriage is implanted in the social texture, and there are pockets of the country with a high grouping of the training. India is committed to accomplishing the SDGs, one of which is to 'accomplish orientation uniformity what's more, engage all ladies and young ladies', explicitly referencing the end of all unsafe practices like kid, early and constrained marriage (Objective 5, SDGs). Institution of the Forbiddance of Youngster Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is a confirmed step towards such a direction. With this, the Insurance of Youngsters from Sexual

Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) was instituted to shield kids from offenses of rape, lewd behavior and porn and to give a kid accommodating framework to the preliminary of these offences. The POCSO Act thinks about no exemptions, even in instances of marriage, in contrast to the Indian Reformatory Code (IPC). Any sexual activity with anybody younger than 18, be it through the fellowship of marriage or a common family, will be deserving of regulation. Despite having regulations and guidelines set up, to a significant extent, for example, each third young adult young lady in the age bunch, of 15–19 years is hitched, and consistently wedded juvenile young lady has brought forth a kid (Lal 2015). As indicated by the most ongoing South Asian Segment and Wellbeing Studies (2014–2018), 41% of ladies in India were hitched before the age of 18, compared with 69% in Bangladesh (Sco 2020). Given these insights, it becomes basic to concentrate on people, networks, and state partners together to distinguish the center motivations behind why, notwithstanding a few drives by open and confidential players, India keeps on combating this dreary basic liberties infringement. This study is expected to record exhaustively the local area's information, mentalities, practices, and conduct connected with kid marriage, as well as drives taken at the local area and fundamental levels to challenge youngster marriage rehearses to more readily figure out the pervasive drivers of kid marriage in India and the possible cooperative energy among the local area and government reaction to check this issue.



Methodology

The exploration was conducted in 40 townlets of eight blocks from four sections in the countries of Andhra Pradesh(AP), U ar Pradesh (UP), Maharashtra and Odisha(See Annexure 1). For the purposes of this study, a mixed- system approach was espoused with both quan ta ve and qualita ve data collec on ways. An exhaus ve office review of the available literature was performed in order to triangulate the findings. The quan ta ve check tools were administered to homes with males and ladies aged 20 – 24 times who got married before the legal marriage age(18 for girls and 21 for boys) and with the in- a endance head of the ménage. This study enlisted the par cipa on of 969 homes and 1938 par cipants. In addi on, concentrate group conversations (FGDs) were conducted with community members and adolescent boys and girls to gain a be er understanding of

the issues at hand. In- Depth Interviews(IDIs) were also conducted with a range of vill and quarter officers. crucial Findings Grounded on the collected informa on, the salient findings of the study are as follows

- Lack of or limited educa onal opportuni es, par cularly for girls, forces them to drop out and puts them at threat of child marriage The study findings indicate that lack of educa onal opportuni es due to issues of availability, vacuity and affordability pushes girls to drop out of academy, leaving them vulnerable to child marriage. Also, girls' educa on con nes to be underrated in comparison to boys' educa on.
- The prac ce of child marriage is more prominent among lower socioeconomic strata of society The findings reflect the repliers' socioeconomic status and indicate that child marriage is more current among the poorer strata of society. piecemeal from being a tradi on, poverty is one of the most burning underpinning causes of child marriage, which is associated with certain socially marginalised communi in society.
- Lack of understanding of the nega ve consequences of child marriage contributes to the prac ce's continuity Child marriage is s ll regarded as an important custom in the society for 59 of parents parents in- law. Only a small frac on- 16 of parents parents in- law and 34 of child misters consorts are apprehensive of the nega ve consequences of child marriage.
- Perceived no ons of women's honour con nue to be a decisive factor in child marriage Besides reasons similar as lack of educa onal and employment opportuni es, fear of girls eloping/ having a love affair ' adulterous coitus surfaced as one of the dominant reasons why parents prefer to marry off their daughters as soon as they reach puberty(substantially between 15 and 17 times of age). Also, lower dowry, women's honour ', easier to find consorts and easier adapta on by girls in new house holds are reasons behind choosing child marriage.
- Family and peer pressure significantly contributes to the continuity of child marriage prac ce Parents, rela ves and peers ply substan al influence to the decision of marriage at a youthful age. A lot of pressure is applied by people to cleave to common community customs and tradi ons.
- mischievous goods on reproduc ve and sexual health of child marriage are seen in terms of teenage gestation In terms of the me gap between gravidity, further than half of the women repliers- child misters(51), who had at least two children, stated that the gap between their first and alternate child was lower than two times, and 59 of child misters had teenage gravidity. The findings indicate that child marriage has a mischievous impact on girls' sexual and xii reproduc ve health(SRH), as the maturity of them come maters at an youthful age, pu ng them at threat of high- threat gravidity.
- A considerable propor on of child misters aren't suitable to pierce sexual and reproduc ve healthcare pre and post gestation Only 195 child- maters got all four Antenatal Care check- ups; 38 of these maters didn't admit any informa on about the need of these antenata check- ups; and 42 weren't permi ed to visit health facili es alone. nearly half of them(49) were ignorant of the pitfalls associated with early gestation. roughly three- fourths(72) of these women didn't have a say-so in contracep on use, and roughly half(51) were ignorant of womanish sterilisa on. This has a nega ve impact on the

health of both matters and new-borns, as seen by a rise in motherly mortality, neo-natal mortality, malnutrition and other complications.

- A significant proportion of adolescent mothers had low-birth weight babies. In this study, 17 and 16 of child mothers reported having a low birth weight for their first and alternate child, respectively. Beforehand fatherhood is associated with an increased threat of neonatal death and stillbirth, low birth weight babies, malnutrition (suppressed, wasted and light) babies and morbidity and mortality in children and babies. Adolescent girls who come pregnant have poor nutrition and health, which increases the threat of foetal, perinatal and motherly death and disability.

- The practice of child marriage further restricts girls' mobility. According to the findings of the study, around one-fourth (23) of child mothers indicated that they had little or no authorization to visit their parents. Child mothers were also not allowed to go out and socialise with their peers in 44 of the cases. Child mothers weren't allowed to leave the house alone in 34 of cases. This could jeopardise the internal, social and emotional well-being of these women.

- COVID-19 has a substantial impact on child marriage. The epidemic might have escalated the number of cases of child marriage. According to duty liaisons and community members in AP, UP and Odisha, further child marriages have been observed since the epidemic, and it led to adding vulnerabilities exponentially. In Maharashtra, still, there was a distinction in the responses of duty liaisons and community members, with duty liaisons asserting that cases had dropped but community members, particularly adolescent girls, responding that in some clusters, people still manage to arrange child marriages in lesser figures than ahead. These findings indicate that public health extremities similar as afflictions and other calamities have a significant impact on the adding vulnerabilities, putting numerous children, particularly girls, at threat of marrying at an early age.

- Challenges in systematic responses at the village position are a major roadblock in combating child marriages. At the time of this study, there was no or limited functional village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) in the study townlets. Child Marriage Prohibition Officers were part of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) in Maharashtra and UP, although only a many of the responders were apprehensive of them. As a result, strategies designed to combat child marriage at the village position were lacking. This impedes the implementation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and leaves room for child marriage to continue.

- The use of legal remedies relating to child marriage is limited due to lack of knowledge or mindfulness of those remedies. Over half of responders (parents-in-laws and child mothers/consorts) were ignorant of the legal minimal age for marriage. The vast majority of child mothers (96) were ignorant of the POCSO Act. In comparison to child consorts (29), a sizable proportion of child mothers (49) were ignorant of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Additionally, further than half of them stated that the dowry system was still in use in their community even though it was a punishable offence.

- Lack of community participation in a village to combat child marriage practices results in underreporting of child marriage frequency. Only a small chance (7) of community members had ever expostulated to a child marriage in their village. One of the significant

obstacles to ending child marriage is that these events go unreported. The study demonstrates how community members are spooked of the consequences of going against the community and acting as a snitch. This was a major manacle for police officers' sweats to help child marriages. The findings suggested that indeed Panchaya Raj Ins tu on(PRI) members don't report similar incidents to the police.

- It's delicate for community members to use vittles of systemic mechanisms and applicable government schemes, if they're ignorant of them Community members demanded mindfulness of structural systems to help child marriages. For illustration, only 19 of child misters were apprehensive of the VCPC, 9 of the Child Marriage Prohibi on Officer(CMPO), 25 apprehensive of the Women Helpline number, and 19 of CHILDLINE. Addi onally, the maturity of child misters(97) were ignorant of anynon-governmental organisa on/ tone- help group(SHG) working in their community to help child marriages. Lack of mindfulness among community members, par cularly women, results in low resistance and repor ng of child marriages by community members. Further, girls are unfit to seek backing in situa ons where they're needed. As a result, without sufficient mindfulness, government programmes and sweats are inapproachable to these low- income homes. Without educa onal and employment opportuni es, girls in these house holds face an increased liability of child marriage.

- The prac ce is so hardwired in the community's social structure that duty liaisons face difficul es in carrying out their responsibilities regarding child marriage preven on The responses of duty liaisons similar as police officers, Child Welfare Commi ee(CWC) members, CMPOs and DCPU officers revealed the lack of coopera on from community members(both in repor ng and preven on) as their topmost challenge. also, PRI members were reported to be unsupport ve. To carry out their responsibilities effec vely, it's cri cal that community members work with duty liaisons, and so the need to sensi se them is cri cal.

- The lack of community understanding of the repor ng medium is also a contribu ng factor to the low repor ng of cases The findings revealed that only 31 of parents parents in- law and 26 of child misters consorts were apprehensive to whom prevalence of child marriage should be reported. The findings indicate that the maturity of repliers are ignorant of the repor ng process, which may contribute to low case repor ng. compass of community between community and government systems An essen al missing link was that of community position alert that might come with the implementa on of the VCPC accreditation. There's a significant gap in community mindfulness of the government protec on systems in place. During the study, no sways tu onal medium was reported through which community and government stakeholders could communicate and match on the issue of child marriage(piecemeal from monthly shops reportedly arranged by police officers). Ac ve community members' resistance to frequentness of child marriage in their community as well as repor ng similar incidents to applicable government officers is cri cal to comba ng child marriage. As a result, it's pivotal that the two stakeholders maintain an pieces onal communica on channel. In this aspect, successful VCPC pieces onalisa on can make a substan al contribu on since it can give a pla orm for the system to connect with the community.

RECOMENDATIONS

Given that the challenges and reasons for child marriage differ by sections and societies, responses must be acclimatized to the original and contextual position and simple with colorful central and state government programs and programmes.

- Strengthen Awareness juggernauts about the implications of child marriage Engaging in mindfulness juggernauts and work shops, and educating people at the village position on reproductive and sexual health and child marriage prevention would help the existent, the community and the national frugality by perfecting situations of literacy, survival and protection of the girl child.

- crusade to raise public mindfulness of government initiatives and other systemic response mechanisms This must be addressed by developing effective communication and community engagement juggernauts, both at the academy and community situations, to produce mindfulness. One conceivable solution would be to publish these schemes on the reverse cover of free handbooks for children. Sessions/ shops in seminaries to raise mindfulness about similar initiatives and other protection mechanisms similar as CHILDLINE and Women Helpline should be made obligatory and conducted periodically.

- Increase access to seminaries for girls It's well conceded that keeping girls in academy is one of the utmost effective remedy dropped out after marriage. Hence, public provisioning of secondary seminaries that cleave to the distance morals set for the same will play a critical part in lowering academy dropouts, and as a result, preventing child marriages¹. likewise the implementation of affiliated vitals under the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 must not be boosted

- Use SHGs as a catalyst to combat child marriage The study's findings indicated that, despite the fact that nearly half of womanish replies were members of a SHG, mindfulness of child marriage remained low. SHGs can act as change agents by educating women in SHGs about legal vitals and recommended actions to take in the event of a child marriage. Not only can all SHG members report and intermediate if there's an circumstance of child marriage in their townlets, but they can also help to raise mindfulness among other community members.

- Initiate sustained sweats to palliate poverty and social inequality to substantiate supporter reduce child marriages According to the findings, the maturity of child mistresses consorts are from lower socioeconomic strata of society. Additionally, it's well proved that poverty and socioeconomic inequality complicate child marriage prevalence. Poverty and social inequality are inextricably linked to social morals. therefore, sustained sweats are needed to palliate poverty and social inequality through equal job opportunities and other initiatives, so that homes don't face income poverty and can form opinions in opinionsish interests of their children, particularly girls.

- Strengthen village-position child protection mechanisms It's imperative to strengthen village-position child protection mechanisms similar to VCPCs, which are specifically designed to help expand the child protection space, offer children a voice and insure decision-making power. VCPCs can play a critical role in community alert and may serve as a ground between Dispatches and government agencies similar as the DCPU, CWC and others.

Priority should be given to establishing effectiveness. VCPCs in all townlets. State and quarter support is essential to making the VCPCs serve, and PRI members should be involved, encouraged and covered to insure the VCPCs perform effectively. DCPU or any other competent child The protection agency/ department must assume responsibility for establishing VCPCs and assessing its functional readiness within a certain timeframe. Original non-governmental associations may also play a crucial part in this. Confluence of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, with other Concerned ministries and departments may be explored in order to insure the conformation and durability of the operation of VCPCs and the monitoring mission of the recently formed VCPCs.

- Device medium to cover substantiations and snitchers of child marriage At the present, one of the most significant impediments to precluding child marriage is the underreporting of these incidents. This is reflected in the NCRB data(2020), which indicated that only 785 child marriages were recorded in India under the PCMA(2006),. Members in the community are spooked of coming forward and informing the applicable authorities about similar events. therefore, original Prison-governmental associations, and other institutions should be encouraged to report child marriage while maintaining their obscurity. also, it's critical to cover substantiations and snitchers in order to convert community members to repel child marriages more constantly.

- give necessary coffers to children from vulnerable homes to make online education accessible to them With COVID- 19 negatively impacts children's education and puts them at threat of dropping out of academy, particularly girls. Due to a lack of access to online classes, the state and/ or central governments must formulate schemes to encourage low- income homes to pierce necessary coffers(smartphones and the internet) for their children's education to continue via digital medium. There's need to launch a crusade to increase digital knowledge among preceptors and scholars in pastoral areas. and increase access to internet by enforcing models like setting up public data services(TRAI 2017).

- Educate children about systemic response mechanisms(system-specific and governance) in place by creating friendly and age-applicable IEC material information on child rights, child protection, equipping children with Information related to grievance requital and helplines similar CHILDLINE, Women Helpline numbered. are extremely ¹ important in erecting children's mindfulness as well as the use of response mechanisms. Educating children from a youthful age about these would insure lesser retention and increased mindfulness among them.

- Strengthen conversations around SRH at Vill position Since child marriage tends to immortalize the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and increase health pitfalls for the mama and her children, open discourses on SRH in forums similar as Village Health, Sanitation, and Nutrition Day are essential to erecting a deeper understanding of the subject. Specific discourses with maters groups and adolescent groups, and

¹ The RTE Act defines the neighborhood school distance norm as 1 km walking distance from the habitation of a child at the primary level (class 1 to 5) and within 3 km walking distance for upper primary level (class 6 to 8). Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) specifies that secondary schools should be within a distance of 5 km of a habitation while a higher secondary school should be within 7-10 km.

engagement with boys and men will enable breaking adolescent walls and ameliorate community interface with the primary health system.

- produce Central Guidelines for Child Marriage While variations in State Rules are necessary since they're in response to nuances particular to the environment of the state, creating common minimum guidelines at the Central position under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, would help bring equality to systemic response and grease smoother perpetration of the legislation.

Way forward

Child marriage negatively impacts children and girls in many ways. To address this issue, it's essential to identify gaps in the being community and systemic response to child marriage and explore possible community between the two. An essential missing link set up in this study is that of community- position alert that might come with effective perpetration of VCPC accreditation. The study findings also reflect that there's a huge gap in the mindfulness position of the dispatches pertaining to government protection systems, instruments in place and institutional medium. Another major hedge linked was the underrepresentation of the prevalence of child marriage by community members in the fear of being castaway by society. have resistance of community members towards incidents of child marriage in their community and reporting similar incidents to the applicable government officers is essential in abridging the practice of child marriage, and hence it's important to have an functional communication channel between the two stakeholders.



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a mortal rights violation. Girls pressed into child marriage are more likely to come pregnant when they're in their in nonage, adding the threat of complications during gestation or parturition. These complications are the leading cause of death among aged adolescent girls. Child marriage has numerous particular, socio-artistic and profitable ill- goods on health, education, growth and development of children. The United Na Nations Convention on the Rights of Children(UNCRC) 1989, Composition addresses about the right to be defended from violence(Articles 19 and 34), and protection from violence extends indeed to family members, and especially children who mustn't suffer ill- treatment or sexual or physical violence. Composition 24 of UNCRC also contains provision that bear governments to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children '. While the frequency of child marriage has dropped worldwide, the practice still affects one in every five girls moment(UNICEF). 2020). Encyclopedically, the frequency of child marriage among girls is likely to be six times advanced than the frequency of child marriage among boys(UNICEF 2019). The statistics indicate how child marriages erroneously affect girls. Child marriage affects other aspects of a child's development, similar as the right to express, development and education, developing full eventuality, protection from all forms of abuse and dangerous traditional practices. It has a direct impact on the good of a child and girls ' health. The probability of a child bridegroom turning into teenage mama is extremely high, and complications during gestation are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls(UNFPA 2020). It's estimated that, in developing countries, 9 out of 10 child misters end up pregnant during nonage(ibid). . lid marriage isn't a one- off rights violation; it triggers and exacerbates a cycle of disadvantage. It leads to large- scale violations of girls ' rights to education and health; exacerbates girls ' threat of constricting Sexually transmitted infections(STIs); including HIV, and increases girls ' vulnerability to multiple forms of violence(Plan International 2013). . lie the factors contributing to child marriage are known to differ across topographies and societies, poverty and gender inequality feel to play a bigger part everywhere. The frequency of child marriage tends to be advanced among girls with low situations of Educa on. And hence, encyclopedically, 25 million child marriages have been averted in the last decade due to accelerated progress in increased rate of girls ' education(UNICEF 2018). Along with this, there has been an increased investment in colorful by governments across the world in adolescent girls and generating mindfulness about child marriage³ Despite progress, numerous families marry their daughters off to reduce the profitable burden on ttthemselvesNFPA 2020). Other major contributors to child marriage seem to be prevailing social and artistic morals

and conceptions in society² around gender places and the threat of gestation outside marriage (marriage (NICEF 2020).

Global script

Child marriage has been a current practice at different points in the history of nearly all societies around the globe. Indeed, in the 21st century, child marriage has remained a global reality (Nour 2009). It's believed that child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries. presently, the loftiest frequency rates of women in the age group 20 – 49 times are reported upon entering marriage before 18 times are in West and Central Africa (52), Eastern and Southern Africa (40) and South Asia (37) (UNICEF). Table 1 below shows the region-wise frequency of child marriage across the globe.

TABLE 1: Prevalence of child marriage across the world

Child marriage (%) - By region			
Region	Female		Male
	Married by 15	Married by 18	Married by 18
East Asia and Pacific	1	8	DNA
Middle East and North Africa	3	17	DNA
South Asia	8	29	4
Sub-Saharan Africa	11	35	4
Eastern and Southern Africa	9	31	5
West and Central Africa	13	39	4
Least developed countries	12	38	6
World	5	20	DNA

Child marriage is a moral rights violation. Girls pressed into child marriage are more likely to become pregnant when they're in them in nonage, adding the threat of complications during gestation or parturition. These complications are the leading cause of death among aged adolescent girls Child marriage has numerous particular, socio-artistic and profitable ill- goods on health. education, growth and development of children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children ((UNCRC) 1989, Composition addresses about the right to be defended from violence (Articles 19 and 34), and protection from violence extends indeed to family members, and especially children who mustn't suffer ill- treatment or sexual or physical violence.

Composition 24 of UNCRC also contains a provision that bears governments to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children'. While the frequencies child marriage has dropped worldwide, the practice still affects one in every five girls' moment (UNICEF). 2020). Encyclopedically, the frequency of child marriage among girls is likely to be six times higher than in the frequency of child marriage among boys (UNICEF 2019). The statistics indicate how child marriages erroneously affect girls. Child marriage affects other aspects of a child's development, such as the right to express, development, and education, developing Ing all eventuality, protection from all forms of abuse and dangerous traditional practices. It has a direct impact on a child's and rills' health. The probability of a child bridegroom turning into teenage mama is extremely high, and complications during gestation are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls

² <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage#readmore-expand> 3

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/childmarriage.aspx>

((NFPA 2020). It's estimated that, in developing countries, 9 out of 10 child misters end up pregnant during nonage(*ibid*).

Child marriage isn't a one-off rights violation; it triggers and exacerbates a cycle of disadvantage. It leads to large- scale violations of girls' rights to education and health; exacerbates girls' threat of constricting Sexually transmitted infections (STIs); including HIV and increases girls' vulnerability to multiple forms of violence (Plan International 2013). While the factors contributing to child marriage are known to differ across topography and societies, poverty and gender inequality feel to play a bigger part everywhere. The frequency of child marriage tends to be advanced among girls with low situations of education. And hence, encyclopedically, 25 million child marriages have been averted in the last decade due to accelerated progress in increased rate of girls' education (UNICEF 2018).

Along with this, there has been an increased investment in colorful by governments across the world in adolescent girls and generating mindfulness about child marriage³ Despite progress, numerous families marry their daughters off to reduce the profitable burden on themselves (UNFPA 2020). Other major contributors to child marriage seem to be prevailing social and artistic morals and conceptions in society around gender places and the threat of gestation outside marriage (UNICEF 2020). Global script Child marriage has been a current practice at different points in the history of nearly all societies around the globe. Indeed, in the 21st century, child marriage has remained a global reality (Nour 2009). It's believed that child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries. presently, the loftiest frequency rates of women in the age group 20 – 49 times are reported upon entering marriage before 18 times are in West and Central Africa (52), Eastern and Southern Africa (40) and South Asia (37) (UNICEFUNICEF). Table 1 below shows the region-wise frequency of child marriage across the globe.

While the age at marriage is rising throughout the world, with the singular age at marriage being lesser than 18 in the vast maturity of countries across the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, will report the loftiest rates of child marriage frequentness across the world(Singh and Sa Child marriage()) by region womanish manly Married by 15; Married by 18 Married by 18 East Asia and Pacific 1 8 DNA Middle East and North Africa 3 17 DNA South Asia 8 29 4 Sub-Saharan Africa 11 35 4 Eastern and Southern Africa 9 31 5 West and Central Africa 13 39 4 Least developed countries(12, 38) World5/20 DNA Source UNICEF global databases, 2020(Last update February 2020) Note DNA Data not available 4 It was estimated that further than 14,000 teenage girls came pregnant during the Ebola outbreak, including 11,000 who were in academy³ previous to the extremity(Mason 2016). . Indian script Child marriage has remained a burning problem in Indian society. According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), " child marriage means a marriage to which either of the parties is a child." By description, a child refers to an individual " who, if a joker, has not completed twenty- one times of age, and if a womanish, has not completed eighteen times of age." Whereas generalities similar as early marriage' and forced marriage' aren't defined in Indian justice.

³ For more information: http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/India.pdf

By the 19th century, the practice of child marriage had come a wide miracle across the country (Heimsoth 1964).

In India, despite amended laws championing 18 times as the legal minimal age at marriage for ladies, a substantial proportion, i.e., every third adolescent girl in the age group of 15 – 19 times is wedded, and every alternate wedded adolescent girl has given birth to a child (Lal 2015). In 2017, 7 of Indian women married before the age of 15 (Soc 2020). According to the most recent According to the South Asian Demographic and Health checks (2014 – 2018), 41 of women in India were married before the age of 18. compared to 69 in Bangladesh (ibid). The frequency of child marriage has dropped significantly in NFHS- IV (2015- 16), falling from 47.4 in 2005 – 06 to 26.8 in 2015- 16. According to the most recent round of NFHS- V (2019 – 21), according to the India Fact distance, 23.3 of women aged 20 – 24 are wedded before the age of 18.

Nine countries and UTs have state numbers that are advanced than the public normal, with West Bengal beating the list, with 41.6 of women aged 20 – 24 marrying before the age of 18. Bihar came near with 40.8. Tripura (40.1), Jharkhand (32.2), Assam (31.8), Andhra Pradesh (29.3), Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (26.4), Rajasthan (25.4) and Telangana (23.5) were the other countries with numbers more advanced than the public normal (23.3). Madhya Pradesh was close to the public normal (23.3)

4. crucial motorists and determinants of child marriage

While the practice of child marriage started eons ago, there are multitudinous factors (social, artistic, profitable and gender places) that will fuel this tradition and practice, some of which are bandied in this section.

The expansive literature on child marriage has associated many factors that affect its decision. Child marriage rates tend to be advanced among ménage in low- and middle-income countries that have smaller coffers and openings to invest in indispensable options for girls (education and vocational training, to name a many). This tends to produce a double burden on the girls where the attainability to acceptable coffers adds onto the ménage decision regarding their marriage. Poverty and the burden of marriage-related charges are generally reported reasons for the practice of early marriage (Santhya, Haberland and Singh 2006). Parents may assess the costs and benefits of marriage and decide to marry their daughters beforehand if they're seen as a profitable burden. Fiscal deals around marriage contribute to this practice. as well. In some cases, families may gain lesser fiscal quantum for the youngish misters.

This tends to act as a motivator for families to take the decision of marrying their daughters before the legal age of 18 times. In circumstances where dowry is practised (the bridegroom's family provides means to the bachelor's family), a youngish and lower educated bridegroom may bear a lower dowry, which would encourage parents to marry daughters at a youngish age (Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton and Quen n 2015). Educational nonalignment Multiple studies have set up that women's education position is the most significant negative determinant of child marriage. The more advanced the position of education, the lower the rate of child marriage. Women with secondary and advanced education were significantly less likely to be married-off as children than those who had no formal education (Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying).

But a girl's education is impeded by both the limited educational openings for girls in pastoral areas and the perceived value of a girl's education in a community. Lack of educational openings extends beyond formal academy structure to informal educational structures and vocational training programmes for girls as well, making it delicate for girls to learn chops that may be useful for earning income, further discouraging parents from transferring their daughters to academy as there seems to be no return on investment in their education (Pandey et al., 2019). Encyclopedically, maternal ignorance and lack of mindfulness are also considered major causes that promote child marriage. In general, parents with no or low situations of education fail to understand the negative consequences of child marriage on their youthful daughters (poor health, lower education, and social privation) and have limited authority to go against traditions and uphold their own particular opinions (Goli 201721).

Ensuring that adolescent girls stay in academy, return to academy or admit vocational training not only improves their life chances but also has wider societal benefits. UNESCO predicts that furnishing all girls with primary education in low- and middle- income countries will reduce child malnutrition by 1.7 million (Emillion (TeraGlobal Monitoring Report 2013)...Openings Women's Women who were engaged in unskilled labor were significantly more likely, as were those who were engaged in professional jobs were less likely to be married-off as children as compared with their jobless counterparts (Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying). 201417). Working experience exposes women to innovative ideas and morals that can discourage early marriage. Also, employment may give the fiscal the fiscal coffers to allow the holdback of marriage and a profitable incitement for parents to encourage their daughters to remain single during the economically productive period of youthful majority. But in practice, in numerous communities, girls don't generally work outside the home; rather, they've numerous domestic liabilities domestic liabilities to attend to like ménage their youngish or their youngish siblings, and/ or working on family land/ business. There are many opportune eses for girls as there are many types of jobs, astronomically speaking, in similar communi es. Girls generally aren't allowed to go outdoors, and this restriction on mobility further hampers their chance of getting paid work (Pandey work (Pandey et al. 2019)...Social background and artistic practices CRY's report (2020) on child marriage in India states that girls between 10 and 19 times of age account for 75 of all the total wedded children in India (13.04 million out of 17.26 million). Multiple studies have shown that the liability of child marriage is significantly advanced among pastoral women than their civic counterparts. Also, CRY's report shows that 75 of all wedded.

Children aged 10–19 years predominantly reside in rural areas, with 13.02 million out of 17.26 million. Moreover, married girls within this age group in rural regions account for over half (57%) of all married children in India. The study also showed a marginal increase of 0.23% in the number of married girls aged 10-19 years from 2001 to 2011, whereas marriages among boys have risen by 19% during the same period.

Muslim girls living in rural areas are at a higher risk of child marriage, reflecting the socio-cultural norms of Muslim and rural communities. The most vulnerable girls typically come from poorer families with little or no education and live in rural areas. Although there are slight differences among religious groups and castes/tribes, these are minimal,

suggesting that religion and caste do not significantly influence the incidence of child marriage (UNICEF 2019).

Societal pressure to conform to traditional norms is often cited as a reason for early marriage. These norms are deeply ingrained in parents, while neighbors and other community members exert explicit pressure on parents to marry off their daughters young (Santhya, Haberland, and Singh 2006:10). These traditional practices, along with underlying cultural and local religious practices, render child marriage a sacred practice in the eyes of its practitioners (Planning Commission 2014). Some communities undervalue women, believing that a girl's sole achievement in life is to marry, bear children, and raise them. Consequently, they prioritize educating boys and pay less attention to girls, who are then more susceptible to early marriage or unintended pregnancies (UNICEF 2020).

1.3.5. Perceived notions of safety and women's honor

Another significant factor driving early marriage in traditional societies is the perceived notion of safety and women's honor. Another significant reason for marrying girls at an early age in traditional societies is to prevent premarital sex. Societies like those in India place a high value on virginity before marriage, leading to practices designed to 'protect' a girl from unsanctioned sexual activities. Parents worry about their daughters' sexual safety, such as the fear of harassment, and are concerned about them exploring their sexual or romantic feelings, like engaging in premarital sex or eloping. Child marriages are also believed to reduce dowry amounts and preserve the chastity of girls, which is linked to family honor (Girls Not Brides, 2021). The tradition of having a virgin bride may result in girls marrying young to prevent any opportunity for them to act on their sexual desires. Should any such 'improper' event occur, it could have severe repercussions for the girl and her family's reputation (Santhya, Haberland, and Singh 2006:10). As a result, parents, guardians, and society often impose numerous mobility restrictions on girls and prefer to marry them off as soon as possible (Kamal, Hassan, Alam, and Ying 2014).

1.3.6. Spousal Characteristics

The likelihood of child marriage increases significantly when husbands have no formal education or only limited education compared to those with higher education (ibid:15). Another important spousal characteristic is the age gap between the bride and groom. Child marriage is much more prevalent among women whose husbands are at least 10 years older than among those with a smaller age difference (Raj 2010:4).

1.3.7. Other Factors

The sex ratio imbalance is also a significant factor contributing to the occurrence of child marriage. The skewed sex ratio and the shortage of girls of marriageable age increase the demand for child brides. The sex ratio imbalance in India is primarily due to sex-selective abortion, which is still widely practiced despite the ban on sex determination and sex selection. This leads to a situation known as 'the marriage squeeze' — an asymmetry in the availability of potential spouses; this situation, where potential bridegrooms

outnumber potential brides, often leads to a reduction in the female age at marriage. In the case of a bride shortage, poor parents often marry off a young daughter for attractive offers or concessions from older bridegrooms (Goli 2017:22).

Low autonomy in decision-making due to insufficient life skills, including decision-making, problem-solving, negotiation, and critical thinking skills, is another reason propelling participants to early marriage. According to a study involving young girls from communities where child marriage is common, the girls reported that marriage was an opportunity for them to meet some of their social, emotional, and sexual needs. The social needs that propelled them to early marriage included the need to receive respect, serenity, and independence. The participants believed they could achieve personal independence through marriage and by acquiring their spouse's identity. Satisfaction of emotional needs was another reason persuading participants to consider early marriage. They also believed that marriage could give them a sense of being loved (Montazeri 2016).

1.4. Impact of Child Marriage

Most literature on child marriage comes from empirical studies focusing on girls in developing countries. From a gender perspective, child marriage is less prevalent among boys, leaving girls as the primary focus of discussion.

1.4. Impact of Child Marriage

Most research on child marriage comes from empirical studies focusing on girls in developing countries. From a gender perspective, child marriage is less common among boys, leaving girls as the primary focus when discussing the consequences of child marriage (Greene, Perlson, Taylor, and Lauro 2015)⁴. The physical repercussions of child marriage are predominantly experienced by girls, such as early pregnancy (Jensen 2003).

Education, while influencing the age at first marriage, is also significantly impacted. Postponing the age of marriage for girls affects their educational level, which in turn affects health, labor force participation, child health outcomes, etc. Women with higher education levels tend to marry later, and conversely (Manda 2005; Delprato 2015). Numerous studies suggest that promoting girls' education is a key deterrent to early marriage (Kalamara 2016; Loaiza 2012; Lee-Rife 2012). A multi-country study aimed at understanding the relationship between girls' education and early marriage discusses the benefits of education and delayed marriages in terms of increased self-efficacy, such as values, the ability to realize goals, and awareness of human rights; enhanced life skills; better household management; and improved economic development (Raj 2019). Girls who are out of school are more at risk, and early marriage itself becomes a barrier to continuing education post-marriage due to childbirth and child-rearing (Lloyd 2008).

Girls married in childhood often do not receive full education and generally lack the skills and knowledge to create viable job opportunities, leading them into an intergenerational

⁴ <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Engaging-Men-and-Boys-to-End-the-Practice-of-Child-Marriage1.pdf>

cycle of poverty. Child marriage also leads women to have children earlier, further diminishing their participation in the labor force and adding to the economic strain on the family.

Child marriages negatively impact girls by pressuring them into sexual activity before they are physically and mentally prepared, often with little knowledge of their rights. Such marriages contribute significantly to adolescent pregnancies, which hinder girls' education and upward mobility and are linked to severe health risks, including gender-based violence.⁵

Moreover, child marriage detrimentally affects girls' mental health, increasing the risk of depression and suicidal tendencies, largely due to its association with various forms of gender-based violence, such as forced marriage and intimate partner violence.⁶ (Population Council and IIPS 2008). Early marriage disrupts educational attainment and leads to frequent employment interruptions due to childbirth and the disproportionate time required for childcare, pushing girls into low-paying, unstable jobs (ICRW 2018). The impact on lifetime earnings is substantial, with early marriage reducing earnings by over nine percent. Ending child marriage has been linked to generating additional resources in earnings and productivity. For example, halting child marriage in Bangladesh could result in additional earnings of \$4.8 billion (about \$15 per person in the US) annually. Given the scale of the issue, India could significantly boost its GDP by ending child marriage (ibid).⁷

Child grooms also face the challenge of adult responsibilities they may not be ready for. Early marriage precipitates early fatherhood, increasing the pressure to provide for a family and truncating educational and employment opportunities. According to UNICEF, approximately 115 million boys and men globally were married as children, with one in five, or 23 percent, experiencing this fate.⁸

1.5. International Instruments

A variety of national and international legislation and legal mechanisms have been implemented to eradicate the harmful practice of child marriage. India has ratified nearly all international conventions on human rights that pertain to child marriage and the protection of the youth. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Convention on the Rights

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/end-child-marriage>

⁶ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-and-health/>

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/115-million-boys-and-men-around-world-married-children-unicef>

⁸ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. It defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

of the Child (CRC) (1979)⁹, and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography¹⁰ (Singh 2017). Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that marriage should be entered into only with the free consent of the intending spouses. Article 16(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III), asserts that men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.¹¹ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty and protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030 (UNDP). India is committed to achieving the 17 SDGs and the 169 associated targets, which comprehensively cover the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development, focusing on ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions (NITI Aayog). One of the targets under Goal 5—'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'—explicitly mentions eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage. Ending child marriage also achieves other child welfare targets interlinked with the social practice of underage marriage. For example, another target under Goal 5 (Target 5.2) is to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including sexual exploitation. Goal 4 speaks of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030; (Goal 4.1 states that 'by 2030, ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education; all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and education). This is usually curtailed in the event of child marriage.

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2016) is part of a global effort to prevent girls from marrying too young and to support those already married as girls in 12 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East where child marriage rates are high. India is among the 12 nations that will be the focus of a new multi-country initiative by the UN to end child marriage and to help protect the rights of child brides, whose number could reach one billion by 2030.

The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) adopted a Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in August 2014. It aims to reform legislation, improve access to services, and empower children through advocacy and monitoring. Important steps are taken towards ending child marriage. This approach offers guidance to countries and sub-national entities to develop their own strategies to eradicate child marriage.¹²

1.6. National Laws

⁹ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly abbreviated as the CRC or UNCRC) is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. More information on the convention can be accessed at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention>

¹⁰ More information on the Protocol can be accessed at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/opscrc.aspx>

¹¹ More information on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be accessed at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

¹² For more information, please follow the link at <http://www.unicefrosa-progressreport.org/childmarriage.html>

Various laws, policies, plans, schemes, and strategies have been initiated and established by the Government of India to combat practices and cultural norms that promote child marriage (Press Information Bureau, 2020). Some of these policies directly address the issue of child marriage, while others contribute indirectly.

Eleventh and Twelfth Five Year Plans¹³: The Eleventh Five Year Plan, concerning child marriage, advocated for the "compulsory registration of marriages and verification of age at the time of marriage." The Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) emphasized the role of Panchayats in enforcing the registration of births, deaths, marriages, and migration to impact issues like trafficking and child marriage and to enable Panchayats to concentrate on eradicating violence against women and girls and achieving universal education. Both plans focus on reinforcing the implementation mechanisms of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001¹⁴: This policy declares that "Interventions such as the spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage, and special programs like Balika Samridhi Yojna (BSY) should influence the delay of marriage age so that by 2010, child marriages are eliminated." It also provides for the health and education, as well as the social and economic well-being of women.

National Youth Policy, 2003 and the subsequent National Youth Policy, 2014-17¹⁵: The policy focuses on the diverse and multiple needs of youth, highlighting 11 priority areas and multidimensional actions with specific strategies to address issues faced by adolescents, such as child marriage and child labor.

National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC), 2005 and 2016: This plan, akin to the National Population Policy, aims for 100% registration of births, marriages, deaths, and pregnancies by 2010, the elimination of child marriage by 2010, and the prohibition of the sale of children and all forms of child trafficking, including for marriage. While the 2005 action plan identified twelve key areas, one being the 'complete abolition of child marriage,' the 2016 action plan focused on reducing the incidence of child marriage, especially among girls, aiming to lower the prevalence rate of child marriages to 15% by 2021.

National Policy for Children, 2013-18¹⁶: The policy acknowledges that anyone under the age of 18 years is a child, aligning with the UNCRC. Adhering to the constitutional mandate and the UNCRC's guiding principles, it shifts from a 'needs-based' to a 'rights-based approach.' It identifies four priority areas: survival; health and nutrition; education and development; and protection and participation. The policy advocates for the convergence of various stakeholders and coordination across different sectors and

¹³ For more information on five years plans, please follow the link at <https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/plans/planrel/fiveyr/index5.html>

¹⁴ For more information on Balika Samridhi Yojna, follow the link at <https://wcd.nic.in/womendevlopment/national-policy-women-empowerment>

¹⁵ For more information National Youth Policy 2003 and 2014, follow the link at: https://www.rgniyd.gov.in/sites/default/files/pdfs/scheme/nyp_2014.pdf

¹⁶ For more information on National Policy for children, follow the link at https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/npcenglish08072013_0.pdf

governance levels, recognizing that a child's needs are multifaceted and thus require the collaboration of multiple sectors to promote collective action.

The National Plan of Action to Prevent Child Marriage in India (2013)¹⁷: is a thoughtfully designed document with clear objectives. Its goals include enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, and associated laws and policies that deter child marriage; enhancing access to quality education and vocational opportunities; initiating community mobilization and outreach programs to alter social norms and attitudes; developing the abilities and capacities of adolescent girls and boys; gathering data and initiating research to guide programming and interventions; and establishing monitoring systems for adolescents. Each goal is accompanied by specific objectives, along with outlined strategies, stakeholders, and indicators.

To execute these policies, the government has introduced various schemes aimed at effective intervention to foster community growth and diminish or eliminate cultural practices that victimize children, particularly girls, by exposing them to the risk of early marriage.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006:¹⁸, aims to prevent child marriages by imposing stricter penalties, including rigorous imprisonment for up to two years and/or a fine of INR 1 lakh. The Act defines a child as a male under 21 years of age and a female under 18 years. A minor is someone who has not reached the age of majority according to the Majority Act of 1875. Provisions are in place for the maintenance of the girl child, with the husband responsible for maintenance if he is of legal age. If the husband is a minor, his parents are obligated to provide maintenance. The legality of a child marriage is voidable at the discretion of the involved parties. However, if consent is obtained through fraud or deceit, or if the child is lured away from their lawful guardians for the purpose of trafficking, the marriage is void. The Act also stipulates the appointment of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), whose duty is to prevent solemnization.

¹⁷ For more information on National Plan of Action to Prevent Child Marriages in India, Follow the link at https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/National%20Plan%20of%20Action_0.pdf

¹⁸ For more information on Prevention of Child Marriage Act, 2006, follow the link at <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2007-06.pdf>



METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN



Methodology and design

A mixed-method approach was utilized for this study, employing both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection. All tools and guidelines were translated into regional languages, namely Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, and Oriya, and subsequently verified for consistency and validity against the English versions.

2.1. Study Respondents

The survey tools were administered to selected respondents. According to the inclusion criteria, households with males or females aged 20–24 who were married before the legal age of marriage (18 for girls and 21 for boys) were surveyed, along with the attending head of the household.¹⁹

Table 2- types of respondents

¹⁹ The study follows NSS's definition of 'head of the household' wherein the person in formal charge of the management of the household is the head of the household. He or she need not necessarily be the principal earning member of the household, but the customary head of the household decided on the basis of tradition. More details can be accessed on:

http://www.mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/concepts_golden.pdf. In case this person was not present at the time of the survey, the eldest member of the household present was interviewed.

Quantitative Component	Qualitative Component
a. Households with male/ female aged 20-24 who got married before the legal age of marriage. b. Head of the household	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Adolescent girls Adolescent boys Community members (women) Community members (men) In-depth Interviews (IDIs) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) official Child Welfare Committee (CWC) member Police station official Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)

2.2. Sampling design

The primary indicator for calculating the sample estimation was the `percentage of women aged 20–24 years married before 18 years` according to NFHS-IV (2015-16) data across four states (AP, UP, Odisha, and Maharashtra) to gauge the prevalence of child marriages. The sample calculation utilized a formula with a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a design effect of 1.37 (considering a cluster size of 20). Consequently, the survey aimed to cover 900 households or 1,800 individuals.



Table 3: Planned sample distributor (state-wise)

State	Key Indicator	Sample of child brides /grooms	Sample of parents	Total Respondents	%
Andhra Pradesh	% of Women aged 20-24 years married before 18 Years	210	210	420	23.3%
Uttar Pradesh		240	240	480	26.7%
Odisha		185	185	370	20.6%
Maharashtra		265	265	530	29.4%
Total		900	900	1,800	100%

2.2.1.2. Qualitative Sample

In accordance with the objectives of the study and the adopted methodology, qualitative data was gathered from various stakeholders,

including community members and government representatives/duty bearers. These interactions helped develop

insights into the underlying factors, processes, practices, and systems influencing the practice of child marriage. Stakeholders

at the community, village, block, district, and state levels were included in the study. This multidimensional

approach ensured the viewpoints of all stakeholders were captured to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted as part of the qualitative component.

2.3. Sample Selection

Securing an appropriate sample size is critical for achieving thematic saturation of the study, which aimed

To do so by covering 40 villages from eight blocks across four districts in all four study states.

2.3.1. Selection of Districts and Blocks

Districts in each selected state were chosen based on the criteria of the decadal child marriage growth rate in each district and the

presence of CRY's programs. At the block level, two blocks were randomly selected from each of the four study districts, totaling

eight blocks.

2.3.1.1. Selection of Villages

Initially, the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method was proposed for selecting five villages per block from the list of all villages in the block. A mid-course correction in the methodology was deemed necessary by the study team during the field work inception stage, upon realizing that the practice of child marriage was more prevalent in certain villages than others. Therefore, for the purpose of selecting the final clusters, a list of 10 villages with a high prevalence of child marriage from each selected block was obtained from the local implementers. Once the villages were selected, the total sample was distributed proportionately across the selected villages based on their respective populations.²⁰

2.3.1.2. Selection of households (listing exercise)

A Household (HH) listing exercise was conducted to identify all the eligible households (i.e., households with women or men aged 20–24 years who got married before the legal age). A complete enumeration of all the households in the selected clusters was carried out after the segments were marked. Basic information was collected to classify research participants who met the necessary prerequisites. Thus, a sampling frame was created with all the households that had members who fit the inclusion criteria. Households were then randomly selected from this set.

2.4. Sample coverage

²⁰ The list of all the villages (along with the sample collected) has been added in the annexure of this document

The data collection process lasted four weeks, starting on December 13th, 2020, and concluding on January 4th, 2021.

2.4.1. Quantitative data

Table 4 below presents the sample that was first proposed based on statistical significance and that was ultimately achieved within the study's scope. Both the head of the household present at the time of the survey (parent or parent-in-law) and the eligible men or women were interviewed from each of these households. An additional sample was collected from each of the states in case some observations had to be discarded during data analysis due to incompleteness.

Table 4: Actual Sample interviewed

State	Sample of child brides /grooms	Sample of parents	Total Respondents	%
Andhra Pradesh	2246	246	492	25.5%
Uttar Pradesh	246	246	492	25.5%
Odisha	193	193	386	20.0%
Maharashtra	284	284	568	29.0%
Total	969	969	1,938	100%

2.4.2. Qualitative Data

Qualitative tools were administered to multiple stakeholders. Diverse information was collected from a range of respondents (community members and duty bearers). A summary of the total sample covered using qualitative interviews is presented in Table 5 below. It should be noted that in both Maharashtra and UP, the same individual was reportedly responsible for conducting operations as both the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO).

Table 5: Tally of qualities sample conducted

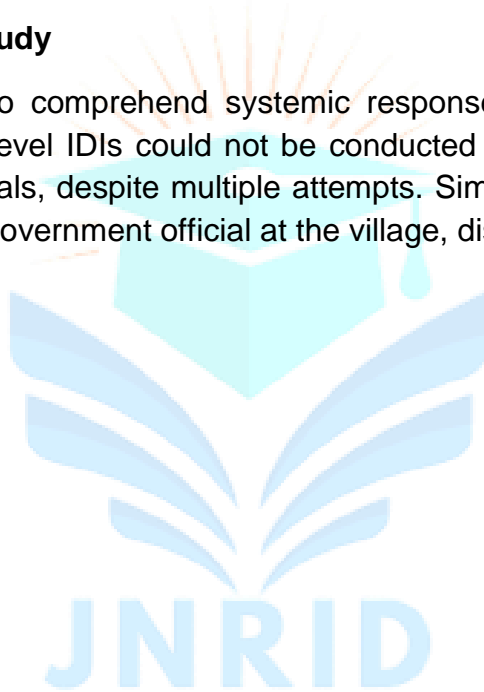
Respondent Groups	Research Tool	AP	UP	Odisha	Maharashtra
Adolescent girls	FGD	1	1	1	1
Adolescent boys	FGD	1	1	1	1
Community members (women)	FGD	1	1	1	1
Community members (men)	FGD	1	1	1	1
VCPC members	IDI	-	-	-	-
DCPU Official	IDI	1	-	-	1
CWC member	IDI	1	1	-	1
Police station official	IDI	1	-	-	1
CMPO	IDI	1	-	-	-

2.6. Ethical Considerations

A multi-stage ethical approach was adhered to, aligning with the key respondents of the study. To this end, a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) of three experts was established. They provided ethical guidance for the study and assumed the de facto role of the Research Ethics Committee (REC). Their responsibilities included approving research protocols and tools for disseminating, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing processes to protect the best interests of the study's respondents. A comprehensive risk mitigation plan (Annexure 2) was developed to address any additional challenges, particularly those concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. As the study spanned multiple states, field teams were briefed on the importance of cultural sensitivities across different regions. Written consent was secured from all participants to document their voluntary participation in the study. In instances where respondents were uncomfortable providing written consent, verbal consent was obtained prior to initiating the survey. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and the final datasets were stripped of any personal identifiers.

2.7. Limitations of the Study

While the study sought to comprehend systemic responses to child marriage at all governance levels, state-level IDIs could not be conducted due to the unavailability of relevant government officials, despite multiple attempts. Similarly, in Odisha, it was not possible to interview any government official at the village, district, or state level.





SOCIO ECONOMY OF THE RESPONDENT

SOCIO ECONOMY PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENT

This section describes the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The information may assist in customizing any future interventions. The interview schedule was administered to the head of the household present during the interview (parent or parent-in-law) and the respondent aged 20–24 years who got married before the legal age. 969 households and 1938 respondents were covered. [Refer to sample coverage in Table 4, Chapter 2].

3.1. Social profile

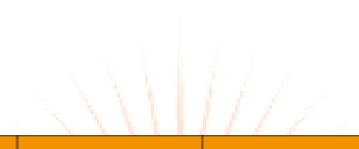
Table 6 indicates that in terms of gender composition of the in-attendance head of the household, women constituted about 75 percent of overall respondents (727 women and 242 men). In total, 657 child brides (68%) and 312 child grooms (32%) were interviewed (Table 7). Most of the child grooms (47%) were from UP. This aligns with Census 2011 data which indicates that UP has the highest concentration of married adolescent boys in the age group of 10-19 years (19.24%)²¹

Table 6 reveals that the sample consisted mostly of Hindu households (73%), followed by 18% Christians (almost all from Odisha), 5% neo-Buddhists (all from Maharashtra), and 4% Muslims. Regarding social groups, literature indicates that child marriage²² is more prevalent among socially marginalized classes such as Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Class (OBC) (Srinivasan, Khan, Verma, Giusti, and Theis 2015; United Nations Children's Fund 2019; Pandya and Bhandari 2015). The study's findings corroborate this association, as while 22% of the sampled households belonged to the general category, the remaining 78% were from socially disadvantaged groups (30% SC, 20% ST, and 28% OBC). State-wise variations were also noted in terms of social groups. While 99% of General category households were from the states of AP and Maharashtra, three-fourths of the SC households were from UP and Odisha. Only 1% of the sampled households in both UP and Odisha were from the general category.

²¹ This study refers to girls married before the legal age of 18 years (in India) as child brides

²² This study refers to men married before the legal age of 21 years (in India) as child grooms.

TABLE 6- PROFILE OF HOUSEHOLD



	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender of the parent/parent-in-law										
Male	37	15%	67	27%	56	29%	82	29%	242	25%
Female	209	85%	179	73%	137	71%	202	71%	727	75%
Total	246		246		193		284		969	
Religion										
Hindu	240	98%	217	88%	19	10%	229	81%	705	73%
Muslim	3	1%	29	12%	0	0%	9	3%	41	4%
Christian	3	1%	0	0%	174	90%	0	0%	177	18%
Jain	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1%	2	Neo-
Buddhist	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	44	15%	44	5%
Others	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	246		246		193		284		969	

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Social Category										
General	100	41%	2	1%	1	1%	114	40%	217	22%
SC	26	10%	106	43%	101	52%	52	18%	285	30%
ST	66	27%	37	15%	90	47%	3	1%	196	20%
OBC	54	22%	101	41%	1	0%	115	41%	271	28%
Others	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	246		246		193		284		969	

TABLE 7- GENDER WISE SAMPLE OF CHILD BRIDE/GROOM

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	88	36%	148	60%	15	8%	61	21%	312	32%
Female	158	64%	98	40%	178	92%	223	79%	657	68%
Total	246		246		193		284		969	

Age at Marriage

The sampled households reflect the continued practice of child marriage across generations. In contrast, the age at marriage for fathers or fathers-in-law surveyed (Table 8) shows that nearly two-thirds (65%) were married before turning 18 years old. However, the study did not verify whether these respondents married before the legal age of 21,²³ suggesting that some of the remaining 35% might also have been child grooms. Moreover, 90% of these respondents confirmed that their wives were married to them before the age of 18.²⁴

TABLE 8- AGE AT MARRIAGE

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age at marriage										
Young Adolescent (10-14)	24	12%	45	25%	37	27%	75	37%	181	25%
Middle Adolescent (15-17)	174	83%	129	72%	96	70%	122	60%	521	72%
Adult (>=18)	11	5%	5	3%	4	3%	5	3%	25	3%
Total	209		179		137		202		727	
Spouse's age at marriage										
Young Adolescent (10-14)	0	0%	12	7%	0	0%	1	0%	13	2%
Middle Adolescent (15-17)	147	71%	109	61%	102	75%	168	84%	526	72%
Adult (>=18)	61	29%	54	30%	32	23%	32	16%	179	25%
Don't Know	1	0%	4	2%	3	2%	1	0%	9	1%
Total	209		179		137		202		727	

Table 13: Age at marriage (father/father-in-law)

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age at marriage										
Young Adolescent (10-14)	1	3%	8	12%	10	18%	17	21%	36	15%

²³ Men aged 20-24 were surveyed under this study

²⁴ NFHS reports median age of marriage for the cohort aged 25-49 years



ROLE OF COMMUNITY NORMS

ROLE OF COMMUNITY NORMS

One imperative viewpoint of people's conduct is that it is often impacted by what other individuals do and what other individuals think

ought to be done. When conduct is affected in that way, it is called a 'social norm' (Bicchieri 2006). Hence, it is essential to

get it the practices that advance and support the practice of child marriage, the inclinations and convictions communities

still have.

Within the taking after sections, both quantitative and qualitative devices are utilized to survey communities' favored age at marriage

for young ladies and boys, the predominance of child marriage as a social custom and the rationale for continuing with this practice.

4.1. Hole in favored and regular age at marriage

A later consider over the rural blocks of a couple of states in India found that numerous guardians still favored to induce their girls

hitched amid their high school a long time (generally between 15 and 17 a long time of age). They contemplated that this age was perfect as young ladies were

'mature' by this time and usually completed as much tutoring as guardians considered sufficient (Pandey, Saxena and Melnikas 2019).

Respondents within the display consider cited comparable inclinations. Approximately 60% of parents/parents-in-law reacted that their community still favored young ladies to wed some time recently the age of 18. This inclination was relatively more articulated within the

state of UP (75%).

The ponder attempted to get it the genuine practice related to child relational unions within the community. When inquired around the usual age

at which children get hitched within the community, a relatively huge number of individuals reacted that it is ordinarily underneath 18 a long time

for young ladies. In general, 85% of parents/parents-in-law affirmed that young ladies more often than not get hitched before they turn 18. In Maharashtra, this

proportion was the most elevated within the case of young ladies (91%), taken after by UP (86%).



4.2. Child marriage as a significant cultural custom

The continued significance of child marriage as a social tradition in some communities is another reason why the practice of child marriage continues to exist, in addition to the many reasons that are frequently mentioned as contributing to its continuation (discussed in detail in Chapter 1 and stated in the following section) (Ghosh 2011).

The relevance of child marriage as perceived by the study's respondents. According to 59% of parents and parents-in-law, child marriage is still regarded as a significant cultural tradition in their area. In UP, three-fourths of the respondents held the same opinion. But when child brides and grooms were asked the same question, the proportion of responders who believed that child marriage was still a respectable tradition were down by 31 percentage points. The Chi-square test verified that there was a statistically significant difference (95% CI, $\chi^2=82.47$, $p < 0.01$) in the opinions of the two groups of respondents. The generation gap between the two groups of respondents may have something to do with this divergence in perceptions of what matters to the community. This is a positive sign that the obligatory and socially acceptable norm of child marriage is eroding year by year.

But according to both groups of respondents—44% of parents/parents-in-law and 45% of child brides/grooms—it was more crucial for girls than for males to marry young. Thus, even across generations, child marriage remains a gendered issue.

Regarding the adverse effects that child marriage may have on both boys and girls, child brides and grooms were relatively aware of these effects; of them, about one-third (34%) acknowledged that there were drawbacks to child marriage, compared to just 16% of parents and parents-in-law.²⁵

We further questioned individuals who acknowledged—including those who were unconcerned—that child marriage had unfavorable effects and asked them to list them. The majority of respondents were aware of the potential health hazards connected to adolescent pregnancy (78% of parents/parents-in-law and 85% of child brides/grooms). The report's Chapter 5 goes into more depth on this. Results from focus group discussions also suggest that community people are aware of these health dangers. The majority of them mentioned that child marriage and teenage pregnancy together increase the risk of both mother and child mortality as well as low birth weight in the offspring. If women marry before age of eighteen, there is a danger of low birth weight, a risk to the mother's life throughout the pregnancy, and mental stress." – Kandhamal, an Odisha community member, is a man.

In addition, as a negative outcome of child marriage, 70% of child brides and grooms and 57% of parents and parents-in-law reported a higher risk of domestic violence, exploitation, and abuse. Additionally, compared to those who marry after the age of 18,²⁶ child brides are nearly twice as likely to have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence, according to certain studies (Kidman 2016; ICRW 2014). Girls face pressure to perform all the work, both mentally and emotionally, and from their in-laws to

²⁵ The detailed report can be accessed at: http://rchiips.org/pdf/india_report_dlhs-3.pdf

²⁶ Low birth weight (LBW) is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as weight at birth less than 2500 g (5.5 lb). More information can be accessed at https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/globaltargets_lowbirthweight_policybrief.pdf

perform better at work. Their responsibilities have increased. In-laws occasionally subject a female to mental anguish." - Parbhani, a male community member from Maharashtra

43% of child brides or grooms discussed this topic, despite the fact that just 28% of parents thought that girls' child marriages would be worse off if they dropped out of school. Roughly one-third of both groups of respondents said that girls' post-marriage livelihood opportunities were limited.

4.3. Factors contributing to the ongoing practice of child marriage

It is well known that a wide range of variables lead to the practice of child marriage. It encompasses, but is not restricted to, socio-cultural elements like religion, conventions, traditions, perceptions of gender roles, and community pressures, as well as household-level elements including low financial position, children's educational status, employment status, and parental characteristics. (Kamal, Hassan, Alam, and Ying 2014; Santhya, Haberland, and Singh 2006; Mourtada 2017; Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton, and Quen 2015).

Both groups of respondents in this study gave comparable explanations for why young marriage occurs in families. Table 25 presents the views of child brides and grooms regarding the reasons behind girls getting married before turning 18. The most often mentioned reasons were that it is simpler for girls to find grooms when they are young (66%), and that it is easier for them to adjust to their new households (57%). A smaller dowry is also needed for younger (and less educated) brides, encouraging parents to marry their daughters at a younger age (by 50%). Peer or relative pressure came in second place (41%). The pressure to follow accepted communal practices was also evident in the qualitative data.

"Relatives, neighbors, and other locals put pressure on parents to marry off their daughters when they reach a specific age. By the early teens, they begin disparaging females' character and reputations if they aren't married. - Parbhani, a male community member from Maharashtra

According to 26% and 25% of child brides and grooms, respectively, the two main reasons for child marriage are fear for a girl's safety and fear that she will have a "love affair." Parents' concern of their daughters running away or engaging in premarital sex was the most often mentioned cause during focus group discussions (FGDs) with both teenagers and community members. They felt that the girl's reputation as well as the reputation of her family would suffer greatly if something 'improper' of this kind occurred."There are child marriages as a result of when we delay marriage, our children go on to have extramarital affairs. - Kandhamal, an Odisha community member who is a man

Girls are viewed as a burden by some. The nation's soaring rate of rape cases has parents alarmed. In addition, they worry that their girl would run away and wed someone else, damaging their reputation in the community. Boys and girls engage in sexual relationships,

which is frowned upon in society. - Parbhani, a female community member from Maharashtra

In addition, over 24% of child brides and grooms report that the community believes it would be harder for girls to find a spouse if they don't get married young and much harder if they continue their education and become overly qualified. Adolescents clarified this argument in qualitative interactions.

Some claim that it's simpler to marry off an illiterate female and your marriage won't have any issues. However, because educated ladies expect to marry an educated man, it is difficult and takes time for them to be married. - A teenage girl from Parbhani, Maharashtra

"Yes, they say that if a girl completes graduation, studies law, medicine, etc., or speaks English, then she expects to marry an equally educated boy, and this makes finding a husband harder for her." - Parbhani, a teenage lad from Maharashtra

"More education makes a female more difficult to marry since a more educated spouse will have to be selected for her. Parents will need to make sure the husband has a solid career and provide a larger dowry. Intercaste marriages occasionally need to be arranged as a result of these problems. - A teenage girl, Chiroor (AP)

A small percentage of the child brides and grooms (19%) who responded to the poll also mentioned that their parents' inability to afford to send their kids to an education ultimately caused them to get married while they were young.

"The main reason behind child marriage of girls is poverty, and due to this reason, children don't get an education." - Chandauli, a female community member (UP)

The study looked at the community's motivations for getting boys married when they were still in their teens in addition to girls. Table 26 presents the reasons that child brides and grooms have given. Certain factors, such as peer pressure and family pressure (reported by 64% of child brides and grooms), the ease with which young boys might locate a wife (53%) and the dread of having an affair (48%), were also mentioned by girls. One significant factor that surfaced in the case of males was the perception that having an early urge to have a "family of their own" (37%) and begin earning to support the family (29%), made them more responsible (mentioned by 61% of child brides/grooms). This rationale is triangulated using qualitative findings.

Boys are more likely to marriage, and their enthusiasm in learning is minimal. They marry young because they think that after a certain age, no girl's parents will offer their daughter to a boy. - A man from Chandauli (UP), a community member

"Lads who marry young have increased responsibilities and a hectic lifestyle. There's no other explanation for it. - Chandauli, a female community member (UP)

In contrast to the concern expressed by 13% of child brides and grooms about being 'over-qualified,' the absence of educational resources also contributes to child marriage among both genders. "We have to go to a school which is 7 km away after class VII, which is extremely difficult as there is no good transportation system in place," an AP lad adds. As a result, the majority of boys and girls quit school. Parents worry that since they aren't in school, their children will just goof around and ruin the reputation of the family by getting into relationships. Children are therefore married off as soon as they graduate from high school.

- Chi□oor, a teenage kid (AP)

Despite the fact that child marriage has becoming less common as a custom, for many people, it has remained an important societal standard over time. People in multiple communities still prefer to marry their daughters when they are still in their adolescent years, usually between the ages of 15 and 17. This is because of perceived norms regarding women's honor, safety, and a host of other factors. (mostly between 15 and 17 years old). Among this group of people, there is still a lack of awareness regarding the potential social, mental, and economic effects of child marriage.

Here's more information about their significance:

1. Shaping Perceptions and Behaviors:

- Community norms play a central role in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to marriage, gender roles, and the value of girls within a particular society or community.
- Norms that condone or promote child marriage may stem from deeply entrenched cultural beliefs, traditional practices, and socio-economic factors, influencing individuals' decisions and actions regarding marriage.

2. Perpetuating Gender Inequality:

- Community norms often reinforce gender inequalities by prescribing rigid roles and expectations for girls and boys, women and men.
- Norms that prioritize the perceived value of boys over girls or dictate that girls should marry early to preserve family honor can perpetuate harmful practices such as child marriage, denying girls their rights to education, autonomy, and self-determination.

3. Enforcing Social Control:

- Community norms serve as a mechanism for social control, regulating individuals' behavior and interactions within a community.

- Norms surrounding marriage, family honor, and sexuality may be enforced through social sanctions, stigma, and ostracism, compelling individuals to conform to established expectations or face negative consequences.

4. Facilitating or Hindering Change:

- Community norms can either facilitate or hinder efforts to address child marriage, depending on their alignment with efforts to promote gender equality, human rights, and child protection.
- Norms that prioritize girls' education, delay marriage, and empower women and girls can create an enabling environment for change, whereas norms that perpetuate discrimination and inequality may impede progress.

5. Opportunities for Intervention:

- Addressing child marriage requires engaging with and challenging harmful norms within communities, promoting alternative narratives, and fostering dialogue and reflection.
- Community-based interventions that involve religious and traditional leaders, elders, parents, and other influential stakeholders can be effective in shifting social norms and attitudes towards child marriage.
- Creating spaces for open discussions, awareness-raising campaigns, and peer-to-peer education initiatives can challenge misconceptions, debunk myths, and empower individuals to question and resist harmful practices.

6. Cultural Sensitivity and Respect:

- While challenging harmful norms, it is essential to approach communities with cultural sensitivity, respect for diversity, and recognition of the strengths and resilience of local traditions and customs.
- Efforts to address child marriage should be guided by principles of cultural relativism, acknowledging that meaningful change must emerge from within communities and be rooted in locally relevant solutions.

7. Intersectionality and Multiple Identities:

- Recognizing the intersectionality of identities and experiences within communities is essential in understanding the complexities of norms surrounding child marriage.
- Norms may intersect with other forms of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, and disability, shaping individuals' vulnerabilities and agency.

8. Socialization and Transmission:

- Community norms surrounding marriage and gender roles are often transmitted through socialization processes within families, schools, religious institutions, and other community settings.
- From a young age, individuals learn about expected behaviors, roles, and responsibilities within the context of marriage and family life, internalizing and reproducing these norms as they mature.

9. Sources of Resistance and Resilience:

- While some community norms may perpetuate child marriage, others may serve as sources of resistance and resilience against the practice.
- Norms that prioritize girls' education, empower women and girls, and promote gender equity may provide a foundation for challenging and changing harmful practices such as child marriage.

10. Role of Traditional and Religious Leaders:

- Traditional and religious leaders often play influential roles in shaping community norms and values, as well as interpreting religious teachings and traditions related to marriage and family life.
- Leveraging the influence of these leaders can be instrumental in promoting alternative interpretations of religious texts, advocating for the rights of women and girls, and challenging harmful practices like child marriage.

11. Collective Decision-Making and Consent:

- Community norms may influence collective decision-making processes related to marriage, where families, clans, or communities collectively decide on marital arrangements for their members.
- In contexts where child marriage is prevalent, pressure to conform to community norms may override individual agency and consent, particularly for young girls who may have limited autonomy in decision-making.

12. Cultural and Economic Factors:

- Cultural and economic factors often intersect with community norms to perpetuate child marriage. Norms may dictate that girls' primary role is as wives and mothers, reinforcing their economic value within households and communities.
- Poverty, dowry practices, and bride price traditions may further incentivize child marriage, as families may see marrying off their daughters at a young age as a means of economic survival or social advancement.

13. Generational Shifts and Changing Dynamics:

- Community norms surrounding marriage and gender roles are not static and may evolve over time in response to changing social, economic, and cultural dynamics.

- Generational shifts, urbanization, access to education, and exposure to alternative perspectives through media and technology can contribute to changing attitudes and behaviors within communities regarding child marriage.

14. Collaborative Approaches and Community Empowerment:

- Effective interventions to address child marriage recognize the importance of collaborative approaches that engage communities as partners in the process of change.
- Empowering communities to identify their own priorities, strengths, and solutions fosters ownership and sustainability in efforts to challenge harmful norms and promote positive social change.

15. Holistic and Contextualized Responses:

- Addressing child marriage requires holistic and context-specific responses that take into account the complex interplay of factors influencing community norms and practices.
- Interventions should be tailored to the specific needs, priorities, and realities of communities, drawing on participatory approaches, local knowledge, and cultural insights to foster meaningful and sustainable change.

16. Social Status and Prestige:

- Community norms may equate early marriage with social status, prestige, or adherence to cultural traditions, leading families to marry off their daughters at a young age to enhance their social standing or reputation within the community.
- In some communities, child marriage may be seen as a rite of passage or a symbol of maturity for girls, reinforcing the belief that marriage and motherhood are the primary roles and aspirations for women.

17. Patriarchal Power Structures:

- Patriarchal power structures within communities often perpetuate norms that prioritize male authority and control over women and girls, including decisions related to marriage and family life.
- Norms that reinforce male dominance and control may limit girls' agency and autonomy, making them more vulnerable to early and forced marriage and hindering efforts to challenge the practice.

18. Social Pressure and Expectations:

- Social pressure and expectations within communities can compel families to conform to prevailing norms surrounding marriage, even if they personally oppose the practice.

- Fear of social stigma, ostracism, or judgment from peers, relatives, or community members may influence families' decisions to marry off their daughters at a young age, overriding concerns for the girls' well-being and future prospects.

19. Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes:

- Community norms often reinforce gender stereotypes and expectations that limit girls' opportunities for education, personal development, and autonomy.
- Norms that prioritize boys' education, restrict girls' mobility, or assign them domestic responsibilities from a young age perpetuate inequalities and contribute to the prevalence of child marriage by limiting girls' agency and choices.

20. Interplay with Economic Dynamics:

- Economic dynamics within communities, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities, intersect with norms surrounding child marriage.
- Economic hardship may drive families to marry off their daughters at a young age as a means of reducing financial strain, securing dowry payments, or transferring economic burdens to the husband's family.

21. Influence of Media and Globalization:

- The influence of media, globalization, and external influences can shape community norms and attitudes towards child marriage.
- Exposure to alternative perspectives, information campaigns, and media representations that challenge traditional norms and highlight the negative consequences of child marriage can contribute to shifting attitudes and behaviors within communities.

22. Role of Education and Awareness:

- Education and awareness-raising efforts are critical for challenging and changing harmful norms surrounding child marriage within communities.
- Providing access to quality education, particularly for girls, can empower individuals to question traditional beliefs, challenge gender stereotypes, and make informed choices about their futures, reducing their vulnerability to child marriage.

23. Community Resilience and Adaptation:

- Communities demonstrate resilience and adaptability in response to changing social, economic, and environmental contexts, including efforts to address child marriage.
- Engaging with community strengths, resources, and resilience can foster innovative approaches to promoting gender equality, protecting children's rights, and challenging harmful norms within communities.

24. Long-Term Behavior Change:

- Addressing child marriage requires sustained efforts to promote long-term behavior change within communities, shifting norms and attitudes over time.
- Interventions should focus on fostering critical thinking, empowering individuals to challenge harmful practices, and promoting alternative narratives that value girls' education, autonomy, and well-being.



IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE

IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The impacts of child marriage on females are multifaceted and are covered in full in Chapter 1. This Chapter examines the general implications of child marriage on girls' educational attainment, livelihood opportunities, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), although there are many more social and psychological effects of the practice.

5.1. Educational attainment level (as well as educational hurdles)

According to published research, there is a significant correlation between female literacy, other development indices, and marriageable age. The relationship between education and child marriage is bidirectional. Research indicates that females with lower educational attainment are more likely to get married as children, and girls who marry as children are more likely to drop out of school (World Bank 2017; Birchall 2018; Sekine and Hodgkin 2017; Ghosh 2011; Ghosh, Mohan and Kar (2010). According to the NFHS-IV survey, women who have completed 12 years of education or more are likely to marry substantially later than other women. The median age at first marriage for women in the 25–49 age range is reported to have increased from 17.2 years for those without any education to 22.7 years for those with 12 years or more of education.

A summary of the educational status of child brides and grooms surveyed for the study is provided in Tables 27 and 28. According to the study's findings, 18% of child grooms and 50% of child brides had never completed their formal education.

Class V was completed by 13% of all child brides, class VIII by 13%, and class X by 18%.

Six percent of the women that were left had completed secondary education. In all, 76% of child brides attested to their spouse's attendance in school. Similar to the child brides in the survey, a larger proportion of child grooms—25%—completed their secondary and higher secondary education, but none of them continued on to graduate or post-graduate studies. Of the child brides who had ever attended school, just 14% claimed to have been able to continue their education after marriage.

For many years, one of the main causes of teenage school dropouts has been child marriage (Wils 2019; FHI 2013).

The District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS) report⁵³ states that for 0.2% of males and 4.5% of girls, marriage was the cause of their school dropout. In addition to child marriage, a number of other factors have been linked to girls, particularly those that result in school dropout. A few of them include households' preferences to spend money on their boys' educations rather than their girls' (Tilak 2020; Pandey et al. 2019).high education costs, including opportunity and out-of-pocket expenses (Chanana 2014);

inadequate learning while in school and a lack of school distance and safety as well as deeply ingrained gender roles surrounding 'restricting girls mobility' and 'protecting her chastity' once girls reach puberty (FHI 2013); lack of parental support for education in rural areas, as well as a lack of qualified/competent teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and ineffective school administration (Wodon, Montague, Nguyen, and Onagoruwa 2018).

At the time of the interview, 55% of the female respondents in the study who identified as "child brides" were employed. Approximately 37% of the participants engaged in unpaid domestic work, whereas 6% stated they were jobless. There were variations by state, with over half of the respondents in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (51% and 56%, respectively) limiting their response to home tasks. Among those who were employed, the vast majority were laborers in agriculture. This may be related to women's low educational attainment, which limits their work opportunities.

Societal Attitudes and Behavioral Change:

The criminalization of child marriage can catalyze broader societal attitudes and behavioral change. By codifying societal norms into law, criminalization sends a clear message that child marriage is unacceptable and unlawful. Over time, this can lead to a shift in cultural perceptions, challenging deeply entrenched beliefs and practices that perpetuate child marriage.

Additionally, the enforcement of criminalization laws can serve as a catalyst for community mobilization and advocacy efforts. Civil society organizations, grassroots activists, and religious leaders may collaborate to raise awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage and promote alternative social norms that prioritize the rights and well-being of children.



Challenges and Limitations:

Despite its potential benefits, the impact of criminalization is not without challenges and limitations. One of the primary challenges is the effective enforcement of criminalization laws. In many contexts, law enforcement agencies may lack the resources, training, or political will to effectively implement and enforce these laws. This can result in a gap between legal provisions on paper and their practical application in communities.

Moreover, criminalization may inadvertently drive child marriage further underground, making it more difficult to detect and address. Families and communities may resort to clandestine ceremonies or informal unions to evade legal scrutiny, thereby circumventing the intended deterrent effect of criminalization.

Intersectionality and Contextual Factors:

The impact of criminalization is shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and geography. Vulnerable groups, such as girls from

marginalized communities or rural areas, may face disproportionate barriers in accessing legal protections and support services. Therefore, effective interventions must be contextually relevant and sensitive to the unique needs and challenges faced by different populations.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of criminalization may be contingent upon complementary measures addressing underlying drivers of child marriage, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and gender inequality. A holistic approach that combines legal reforms with socio-economic empowerment programs and educational initiatives is essential for creating lasting change.

1. Health Risks

Child brides confront a myriad of health risks stemming from early pregnancy and childbirth. The physiological immaturity of adolescent girls predisposes them to complications during pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Obstetric fistula, a debilitating condition characterized by urinary or fecal incontinence, often occurs in young brides who give birth before their bodies are fully developed. Moreover, infant mortality rates are higher among offspring born to adolescent mothers, underscoring the intergenerational health consequences of child marriage.

2. Education

The nexus between child marriage and educational attainment is profound, as early marriage frequently truncates girls' educational trajectories. Forced to abandon school to assume familial responsibilities, child brides are deprived of essential learning opportunities critical for personal development and empowerment. The erosion of educational prospects perpetuates cycles of poverty and reinforces gender disparities, impeding progress towards achieving universal education and gender equality.

3. Economic Impact

Child marriage engenders dire economic consequences for affected individuals and communities. The premature transition into marriage often precludes girls from pursuing higher education and gaining vocational skills, relegating them to low-paying, menial jobs or household drudgery. Economic disenfranchisement perpetuates cycles of poverty and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication.

4. Violence and Abuse

The specter of violence and abuse looms large in the lives of child brides, who are disproportionately vulnerable to various forms of exploitation within marital relationships. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse are endemic, perpetuating cycles of trauma and victimization. The absence of legal protections and social support exacerbates their vulnerability, perpetuating cycles of violence and subjugation.

5. Psychological Impact

The psychological toll of child marriage is profound, exerting a corrosive influence on mental health and well-being. Confronted with the loss of autonomy, agency, and personal aspirations, child brides grapple with feelings of despair, anxiety, and depression. The absence of social support networks exacerbates their sense of isolation and marginalization, compounding their psychological distress.

6. Social Isolation

Child brides endure profound social isolation, severed from familial, peer, and community networks that underpin social cohesion and support. The erosion of social ties exacerbates feelings of loneliness, alienation, and disenfranchisement, perpetuating cycles of social marginalization and exclusion.

7. Inter-generational Impact

The inter-generational ramifications of child marriage reverberate across familial and societal spheres, perpetuating cycles of poverty, inequality, and social marginalization. Offspring born to adolescent mothers are more likely to experience poor health outcomes, limited educational attainment, and economic deprivation, entrenching cycles of inter-generational disadvantage and vulnerability.

8. Legal and Human Rights Implications

Child marriage represents a flagrant violation of fundamental human rights principles, including the right to education, health, bodily autonomy, and freedom from exploitation and discrimination. Legislative reforms aimed at abolishing child marriage and safeguarding the rights of girls are imperative, as are concerted efforts to challenge entrenched cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality.

9. Reproductive Health

Child marriage significantly impacts the reproductive health of young brides. Early pregnancy and childbirth increase the risk of maternal mortality and morbidity, particularly in regions with limited access to healthcare facilities and skilled birth attendants. Adolescent girls are more likely to experience complications such as eclampsia, postpartum hemorrhage, and sepsis, underscoring the critical need for comprehensive reproductive health services to mitigate these risks.

10. Fertility and Family Planning

Child marriage often results in early and frequent childbearing, contributing to high fertility rates and large family sizes. The inability to control fertility perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits opportunities for women's empowerment and economic advancement. Access to family planning services is crucial in enabling women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and exercise autonomy over their bodies and futures.

11. Legal and Policy Frameworks

The effectiveness of efforts to address child marriage hinges on robust legal and policy frameworks that prioritize the rights and well-being of girls. While many countries have laws prohibiting child marriage, enforcement remains weak, and legal loopholes persist. Strengthening legal protections, raising the minimum age of marriage, and implementing stringent penalties for perpetrators are essential steps in combating this entrenched practice.

12. Cultural and Social Norms

Cultural and social norms play a pivotal role in perpetuating child marriage, often reinforcing patriarchal attitudes and gender inequalities. Deep-rooted beliefs regarding the value of girls' chastity, the role of women in society, and the importance of early marriage as a means of preserving family honor contribute to the persistence of this harmful practice. Addressing underlying cultural norms requires sustained efforts to promote gender-equitable attitudes, challenge harmful practices, and engage communities in dialogue and reflection.

13. Economic Implications

Beyond individual households, child marriage has broader economic implications for societies at large. The lost potential of girls who marry early translates into diminished productivity and human capital development, stifling economic growth and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Investing in girls' education, healthcare, and vocational training yields significant returns in terms of improved health outcomes, increased earning potential, and enhanced social and economic development.

14. Child Rights and Advocacy

Advocacy efforts aimed at ending child marriage are integral to mobilizing political will, raising public awareness, and galvanizing action at local, national, and international levels. Amplifying the voices of survivors, empowering youth advocates, and engaging with policymakers and community leaders are essential strategies in advancing the rights of children and combating entrenched practices of child marriage.

15. Intersectionality and Marginalization

Child marriage intersects with other forms of marginalization, exacerbating vulnerabilities based on factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and geographic location. Girls from marginalized communities, including indigenous populations and ethnic minorities, are disproportionately affected by child marriage and face compounded barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and legal protections. Intersectional approaches are critical in addressing the intersecting inequalities that underpin child marriage and ensuring that interventions are inclusive and equitable.

RESPONSE AND GAPS OR CONVERGENCE BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SYSTEM

RESPONSE AND GAPS OR CONVERGENCE BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND SYSTEM

Child marriage is a deeply entrenched issue with profound implications for the lives of millions of girls around the world. It is a complex phenomenon influenced by a myriad of factors, including cultural norms, economic conditions, and systemic responses. In this comprehensive exploration, we will delve into the community and systemic responses to child marriage, identifying gaps and convergences between them, and examining strategies to address this harmful practice.

Community Response:

- **Norms and Traditions:** In many societies, child marriage is deeply rooted in cultural norms and traditions. These norms often dictate that marriage is the appropriate path for girls once they reach puberty, perpetuating the cycle of child marriage. Social pressure to adhere to these practices can be significant, making it challenging for individuals to challenge or resist them.
- **Protection and Control:** Some communities view child marriage as a means of protecting girls from perceived social risks, such as premarital sex or unwanted pregnancies. Additionally, child marriage may be seen as a way to control girls' behavior and sexuality, ensuring adherence to patriarchal norms and preserving family honor.

a. **Perceived Benefits:** In some communities, child marriage is perceived as a means of protecting girls from perceived social risks, such as premarital sex, pregnancy outside of marriage, or exposure to harmful influences. Families may believe that marrying off their daughters at a young age will safeguard their chastity and ensure their future security.

b. **Control of Female Sexuality:** Child marriage is also used as a means of controlling female sexuality and enforcing gender norms within communities. By marrying off girls at a young age, families can exert control over their behavior, limiting their autonomy and independence. This control reinforces patriarchal power structures and perpetuates gender inequalities within communities.

- **Economic Factors:** Poverty is a significant driver of child marriage in many communities. Families facing economic hardship may see marrying off their daughters at a young age as a way to reduce financial burdens or gain economic benefits, such as dowry payments or securing alliances with wealthier families.

a. **Financial Considerations:** Economic considerations often influence decisions regarding child marriage within communities. Families facing economic hardship may see marrying off their daughters at a young age as a way to reduce financial burdens or gain economic benefits. Dowry payments, bride prices, and other financial incentives may motivate families to marry off their daughters early, particularly in contexts where girls are perceived as economic liabilities.

b. **Poverty and Vulnerability:** Poverty increases the vulnerability of girls to child marriage by limiting their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Families living in poverty may view child marriage as a way to alleviate financial strain or improve their economic prospects. However, early marriage often perpetuates the cycle of poverty by limiting girls' education and economic potential, trapping them in a cycle of dependency and disadvantage.

- **Empowerment Initiatives:** Despite the prevalence of child marriage, there are also community-led initiatives aimed at empowering girls and challenging harmful practices. These initiatives often involve education campaigns, community dialogues, and the establishment of support networks for at-risk girls. By providing

girls with knowledge, skills, and support, these initiatives aim to increase their agency and autonomy.

a. **Education Campaigns:** Education campaigns play a crucial role in raising awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage and promoting alternative perspectives within communities. By providing information about the risks and consequences of early marriage, these campaigns empower girls and their families to make informed decisions about their futures.

b. **Community Dialogues:** Community dialogues provide a platform for discussing the root causes and consequences of child marriage and exploring strategies for prevention and intervention. By engaging community members in open and honest conversations, these dialogues challenge harmful norms and promote collective action to address child marriage.

c. **Support Networks:** Support networks for at-risk girls offer a safe space for girls to seek assistance, share their experiences, and access resources. These networks provide emotional support, practical assistance, and referrals to services such as education, healthcare, and legal aid. By connecting girls with supportive peers and adults, these networks help build resilience and empower girls to assert their rights.

Systemic Response:

- **Legal Frameworks:** Many countries have laws in place to prohibit child marriage and protect the rights of children. However, the effectiveness of these laws can vary widely due to factors such as enforcement mechanisms, legal loopholes, and cultural resistance. Strengthening legal frameworks and improving enforcement mechanisms is essential for addressing child marriage at a systemic level.
- **Healthcare and Education:** Improving access to healthcare and education is critical for addressing child marriage. By ensuring girls stay in school and have access to healthcare services, systemic efforts can help delay marriage and empower girls to make informed choices about their futures. Education also plays a crucial role in challenging harmful gender norms and promoting gender equality.
- **Social Services:** Systemic responses to child marriage may involve the provision of social services aimed at supporting at-risk girls and families. These services could include economic support, counseling, and protection services designed to address the root causes of child marriage and mitigate its harmful effects.
- **Policy and Advocacy:** Efforts to address child marriage at a systemic level often involve policy advocacy and international cooperation. Organizations and governments work together to develop and implement policies aimed at ending child marriage and promoting gender equality. Multilateral initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide frameworks for global action and accountability on child marriage.

Gaps and Convergence:

- **Information and Awareness:** There may be a gap between community knowledge and awareness of the harmful effects of child marriage and systemic efforts to disseminate information and raise awareness. Bridging this gap requires targeted education and communication strategies that are culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate.
- **Access to Resources:** Disparities in access to resources such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities can create a disconnect between community needs and systemic responses. Efforts to address child marriage must prioritize equity and inclusion to ensure all girls have access to necessary resources, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Balancing cultural sensitivity with the need to challenge harmful practices is essential in addressing child marriage effectively. Interventions must be rooted in an understanding of local contexts and engage with community leaders, religious institutions, and traditional authorities to foster dialogue and promote change from within.
- **Policy Implementation:** Even in settings where laws exist to prohibit child marriage, implementation can be challenging due to factors such as corruption, lack of resources, and resistance from traditional or religious leaders. Closing the gap between policy and practice requires sustained advocacy, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability measures to ensure effective enforcement of laws and policies.

6. Intersectional Considerations:

- Intersectionality highlights the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression and discrimination, emphasizing the need for responses to child marriage that address multiple dimensions of inequality.
- Efforts to combat child marriage must recognize and address intersecting factors such as poverty, ethnicity, disability, and geographic location that compound vulnerabilities for marginalized individuals.
- Intersectional approaches ensure that responses are inclusive, equitable, and sensitive to the diverse needs and experiences of affected populations, including those who may face multiple forms of marginalization.

7. Transparency and Accountability:

- Transparency and accountability mechanisms are essential for monitoring progress, assessing impact, and holding stakeholders accountable for their commitments to combat child marriage.
- Both community and systemic responses should prioritize transparency in decision-making, open dialogue with stakeholders, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing grievances.

8. Empowerment of Marginalized Communities:

- Empowering marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities, indigenous groups, rural populations, and displaced persons, is essential for addressing disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and protection from child marriage.
- Interventions should be tailored to the unique needs and experiences of marginalized communities, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are respected.

9. Sustainable Funding and Resource Allocation:

- Sustainable funding and resource allocation are critical for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of efforts to criminalize child marriage.
- Both community-led initiatives and systemic reforms require adequate funding to implement programs, train personnel, provide support services, and sustain advocacy efforts over time.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Child marriage is a social phenomenon with devastating consequences, particularly for girls. It violates their rights to health, education, and autonomy, perpetuating cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Criminalization of child marriage, through legal prohibition and imposition of penalties, is a critical step in addressing this harmful practice. This expanded discussion will delve into the rationale for criminalization, provide detailed recommendations for its implementation, and explore the potential challenges and benefits associated with this approach.

1. Rationale for Criminalization:

Child marriage is a gross violation of children's rights, fundamentally undermining their well-being and future prospects. By enacting laws to criminalize child marriage, governments aim to achieve several objectives:

a. Protection of Children's Rights:

Children have the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment that allows them to reach their full potential. Child marriage deprives them of this right by forcing them into premature unions, often with significant age disparities and power imbalances. Criminalization sends a clear message that child marriage is illegal and unacceptable, reaffirming the state's duty to protect the rights of its youngest citizens.

b. Prevention of Harm:

Child marriage exposes children, particularly girls, to a host of physical, emotional, and psychological harms. Early pregnancy, maternal mortality, domestic violence, and limited access to education and economic opportunities are just a few of the devastating consequences. By criminalizing child marriage, governments seek to prevent these harms from occurring and create a safer environment for children to grow and thrive.

c. Promotion of Gender Equality:

Child marriage perpetuates gender inequality by disproportionately affecting girls and reinforcing harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Criminalization of child marriage is a critical step towards promoting gender equality by challenging patriarchal structures and empowering girls to assert their rights and autonomy. By criminalizing child marriage, governments signal their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, laying the foundation for broader societal change.

d. Legal Accountability:

Criminalization holds perpetrators of child marriage legally accountable for their actions, ensuring that they face consequences for violating the law. By imposing penalties on those who engage in or facilitate child marriage, governments send a strong message that such behavior will not be tolerated and will be met with legal consequences. Legal accountability is essential for deterring future violations and providing justice for victims of child marriage.

2. Recommendations for Implementation:

Implementing criminalization of child marriage requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, capacity building, access to support services, and monitoring and evaluation. Here are detailed recommendations for each aspect:

a. Enactment of Legislation:

Governments should enact comprehensive legislation that explicitly prohibits child marriage and sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls. Legislation should also include provisions for penalties for those who engage in or facilitate child marriage, including fines, imprisonment, and other appropriate sanctions. It is essential that laws are clear, enforceable, and reflective of international human rights standards.

b. Awareness and Education Campaigns:

Alongside legislative measures, governments should implement awareness and education campaigns to inform communities about the harms of child marriage and the legal consequences of engaging in or facilitating it. These campaigns should target key stakeholders, including parents, religious leaders, and community members, to change attitudes and norms surrounding child marriage. Education is essential for raising awareness and promoting behavior change within communities.

c. Capacity Building and Training:

Governments should invest in capacity building and training for law enforcement officials, judicial personnel, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage. Training should focus on identifying and responding to cases of child marriage, protecting victims, and holding perpetrators accountable. Capacity building is essential for strengthening the justice system and ensuring that laws are effectively enforced.

d. Access to Support Services:

Governments should establish and strengthen support services for victims of child marriage, including shelters, counseling, legal aid, and healthcare. These services should be accessible, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive, addressing the specific needs of girls who have been affected by child marriage. Support services play a crucial role in providing assistance and protection to victims and empowering them to rebuild their lives.

e. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Governments should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and impact of laws criminalizing child marriage. This includes collecting data on prevalence rates, reporting mechanisms for cases of child marriage, and tracking progress towards ending the practice. Regular evaluations should inform policy and programmatic interventions to address gaps and improve outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are essential for ensuring accountability and measuring the effectiveness of interventions.

3. Challenges and Benefits of Criminalization:

While criminalization of child marriage offers significant benefits, it also presents challenges that must be addressed:

a. Challenges:

i. **Cultural Resistance:** Criminalization may face resistance from communities where the practice is deeply rooted in tradition and culture. Cultural beliefs and norms surrounding marriage and gender roles may hinder efforts to change attitudes and behaviors towards child marriage.

ii. **Legal Enforcement:** Enforcing laws prohibiting child marriage can be challenging, particularly in contexts where law enforcement agencies are under-resourced or corrupt. Lack of awareness, capacity, and political will may undermine efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and provide justice for victims.

iii. **Access to Justice:** Victims of child marriage may face barriers to accessing justice, including stigma, discrimination, and lack of legal support. Marginalized groups, such as rural and indigenous communities, may be particularly vulnerable to child marriage and face additional obstacles in seeking redress.

b. Benefits:

i. **Deterrence:** Criminalization serves as a deterrent to potential perpetrators by imposing penalties for engaging in or facilitating child marriage. Legal consequences send a strong message that child marriage is unacceptable and will be met with punishment, thereby deterring individuals and families from engaging in the practice.

ii. **Protection of Rights:** Criminalization protects the rights of children, particularly girls, by providing legal safeguards against child marriage. By enacting laws that prohibit child marriage and impose penalties on perpetrators, governments affirm their commitment to upholding children's rights and protecting them from harm.

iii. **Promotion of Gender Equality:** Criminalization of child marriage promotes gender equality by challenging patriarchal norms and empowering girls to assert their rights and autonomy. By criminalizing child marriage, governments signal their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, thereby contributing to broader efforts to achieve gender justice.

Conclusion:

Criminalization of child marriage is a crucial step towards addressing this harmful practice and protecting the rights of children. By enacting legislation, raising awareness, building capacity, providing support services, and monitoring progress, governments can effectively combat child marriage and create a future where all children can thrive free from the harms of early and forced marriage. While criminalization may face challenges, its benefits in terms of deterrence, protection of rights, and promotion of gender equality make it a necessary and essential measure in the fight against child marriage.

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END NOTE

The criminalization of child marriage represents a critical step towards safeguarding the rights and well-being of children worldwide. By enacting laws that explicitly prohibit the practice and impose penalties on perpetrators, governments send a clear message that child marriage is a violation of human rights and is incompatible with international legal standards. However, the effectiveness of criminalization relies not only on the existence of laws but also on their enforcement, access to justice for survivors, and complementary efforts to address the root causes of child marriage.

The response to criminalization of child marriage requires a holistic and coordinated approach that integrates legal reforms, community mobilization, prevention programs, victim support services, and international cooperation. Bridging gaps and fostering convergence between community and systemic approaches is essential for maximizing impact, ensuring sustainability, and upholding the rights and dignity of all children.

As we move forward in our efforts to combat child marriage, it is imperative to prioritize the voices and experiences of those most affected, empower communities to drive change from within, and address intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality. By working together, we can create a world where every child has the opportunity to grow up in a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment, free from the harms of early and forced marriage.

Furthermore, the criminalization of child marriage must be accompanied by comprehensive measures to address the root causes and underlying drivers of this harmful practice. Poverty, gender inequality, lack of education, and discriminatory social norms all contribute to the perpetuation of child marriage. Therefore, efforts to combat child marriage must include interventions aimed at promoting gender equality, increasing access to education, improving economic opportunities for families, and challenging harmful cultural beliefs and practices.

Moreover, the success of criminalization efforts depends on the active participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, religious and community leaders, and international partners. Collaboration between these stakeholders is crucial for ensuring that laws are effectively implemented, survivors receive the support they need, and prevention strategies are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of communities.

In addition, sustainable funding and resource allocation are essential for sustaining efforts to combat child marriage in the long term. Governments and donors must prioritize investment in programs and initiatives aimed at preventing child marriage, supporting survivors, and promoting gender equality. This includes funding for education, healthcare, legal services, and economic empowerment programs targeted at girls and women.

Lastly, while the criminalization of child marriage is a significant step forward, it is not a panacea. Ending child marriage requires a multifaceted and sustained effort that addresses the complex socio-economic and cultural factors that contribute to its persistence. By working together and remaining committed to the cause, we can create a future where every

child can grow up free from the harmful effects of early and forced marriage, and where their rights and dignity are fully respected and protected.

