

Prevalence of Child Marriage in India: A Study of the Enforcement Prohibition of Child Marriage Act

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ABSTRACT

Early marriage is a global phenomenon. Globally more than 60 million women ages 20-24 were married before they reached age of 18 years. Although, the extent of child marriage varies substantially between countries, about half of the girls who were affected live in South Asia. The prevailing socio cultural value system, economic hardship, educational and economic backwardness, poverty, non-effective enforcement of legislations, laws and policies etc. are the main factors for prevalence of high rate of child marriage in African and South Asian countries. Child marriage is a persisting harmful traditional practice, rampant in many parts of India and the incidence of it is highest in the States of Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Present paper purports to examine the prevalence of child marriage in India and the enforcement of The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

Introduction

The practice of marrying girls at a young age is a worldwide phenomenon however; this is most common in Sub-Saharan Africa, South East and South Asia including Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The problem of child marriage is widely spread across the country however; it is most common in northern, eastern and western India. The states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Assam, Orissa and Gujarat have witnessed a high rate of the prevalence of early marriage in India. There are multiple reasons for the prevailing of the practice of child marriage. Socio-cultural, economic and historical reasons are identified as the main contributors of the child marriage. Cultural traditions, practices, customs, community, caste and ethnic pressures, educational and economic backwardness, poverty and ineffective enforcement of legislation and laws are the main reasons for prevailing high rate of early marriage in India. Government and non-government agencies are making serious efforts to curb the practice of child marriage however; a large numbers of child marriages

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are being performed on pious occasions in different parts of the country. This is a cause of concern for the policy makers, administrators and development activists as the practice of child marriage undermines the efforts for achieving developmental goals and particularly ensuring the child rights and reducing maternal and child mortality and morbidity. Against this view point, present study has been carried out in five states of India to assess the current situation and causes of child marriages and also to examine the implementation of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

Objectives of the Study

Main objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyse the various socio-economic and cultural factors leading to child marriage in the selected states;
- To assess the prevalence and incidence of child marriages, specially related to the girl child, in the selected states;
- To identify variables influencing early marriages and early pregnancy in the selected states;
- To assess the impact of early marriages and early pregnancy on health, education and society at large;
- To review the existing constitutional and legal measures prohibiting child marriage and their enforcement;
- To examine the view perception of parents regarding their values, traditions and attitudes related to early marriage and early pregnancy;
- To examine the role of Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2006 in controlling the social problem and also to examine the problems, constraints and difficulties in effective enforcement of the Act.
- To suggest measures for effective enforcement of Child Marriage Prohibition Act and addressing the issue of child marriage and early pregnancy.

Research Methodology

Present paper is based on a major research study conducted by Pt. G. B. Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development, Lucknow under the auspices of Planning Commission, Government of India during 2012. The present study is empirical in nature and based on mainly primary data collected through field survey. The field survey has been conducted in the states of *Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh*. We have selected a sample of about 10000 persons, including parents, victims of child marriages (both boys and girls), representatives of CBOs/ NGOs/ SHGs/ Panchayats/

civil societies and officials and non-officials. The field survey has been conducted with the help of structured interview schedules. The filled in interview schedules were thoroughly checked, edited and processed with the help of SPSS package for drawing out results, inferences and conclusions.

Prevalence of Child Marriage in India

Early marriage is a global phenomenon. Globally more than 60 million women ages 20-24 were married before they reached age of 18 years. Although, the extent of child marriage varies substantially between countries, about half of the girls who were affected live in South Asia. The prevailing socio cultural value system, economic hardship, educational and economic backwardness, poverty, non - effective enforcement of legislations, laws and policies etc. are the main factors for prevalence of high rate of child marriage in African and South Asian countries. Child marriage has been found more prevalent in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Central America. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 8 countries have more than 50 per cent of women experiencing child marriage while 5 of top 20 hotspot countries for child marriage were reported in West Africa. Child marriage is a global problem. Child marriage, generally defined as marriage before the age of 18 years, is not limited to any one country or continent. 10 countries have particularly high prevalence rates, with one half to 3/4th of girls marrying before their 18th birth day. The prevalence rate of child marriage was reported significantly high in Niger, Chad, Mali and Bangladesh. Although, most countries have passed laws declaring 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage, the laws are not effectively enforced and socio-cultural, economic realities perpetuate this practice. Certain risk factors such as poverty, low levels of education, and backwardness are directly correlated with higher rates of child marriage. The practice of marrying girls at a young age is most common in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, in the Middle East, North Africa and other parts of Asia, marriage at early age is common among those living traditional lifestyles. There are also specific parts of West and East Africa and of South Asia where marriages much earlier than puberty are not unusual, while marriages of girls between the ages of 16 and 18 years are common in parts of Latin America and in pockets of Eastern Europe. The prevalence of early marriage has been reported significantly high among girls as compared to boys. The high prevalence rate of child marriage has been reported in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa such as Niger, Mali and Burkina faso while Bangladesh and Nepal in South Asian countries witnessed a high rate of prevalence of child marriage.

Child marriage is a persisting harmful traditional practice, rampant in many parts of the country and the incidence of it is highest in the States of

Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The fixing of the legal age of marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys has not prevented the continuation of early marriages. Nor has the Child Marriages Restraint Act, legally in force since 1929, been effective in restraining the practice. Education is recognized by the Constitution of India as a fundamental right for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Early child marriage denies this basic right to the girl child. Factors like poverty and puberty combine to make the girl a school dropout and pushed into early marriage. The dropout rate among girls is highest at the elementary level often because of early marriage. The lack of proper and complete education renders girls incapable of acquiring any skill that can empower them. Needless to say, lack of education also affects reproductive behaviour, use of contraceptives, health of the new born child and proper care and hygienic practices. Every year of education added strengthens a mother's ability to nurture and care for her children.

In India, child marriage is a centuries old tradition, where children as young as two to three years were often married or given away in marriage. However, in traditional societies in spite of early commitment of children into wedlock, marriages were not consummated till children were much older and were perceived to be able to understand the responsibilities intrinsic to marriage. Over time, giving children in marriage has turned into a major social evil entailing issue of child rights, dowry, and sexual abuse, among others detailed above. Some of the emerging trends in child marriage have far-reaching adverse consequences in the life of a child. For example, child marriages have come to be used as a means to traffic young girls and women into the sex trade and labour both within the country and outside. Children are married, trafficked and sent to work in places like Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Kolkata. Imbalance in the sex ratio in some states is emerging as a reason for trafficking of young girls for the purposes of marriage. In states with very low sex ratio, there is a tremendous shortage of marriageable girls, resulting in the need to buy young brides from other states. In some cases, these girls may be forced to serve as a wife to two or three brothers in the same family.

Age at marriage is an important indicator for measuring empowerment of women. During 2001, the mean age at marriage among females was reported 18 years while this was reported 23 years among males. Mean age at marriage among females was reported low in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh while mean age at marriage among females was reported significantly high in Goa, Nagaland, Kerala, Manipur, Mizoram, Punjab, Chandigarh, Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim. The gap in the mean age at marriage between male and female was reported high in Assam, Karnataka, Pondicherry, Tripura, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa (Table 1).

Table 1
Mean Age at Marriage During 2001

State/Union Territory	Female	Male	Gap in Age at Marriage	Years above/ below legal age	
				Female	Male
Andaman & Nicobar Island	19.6	25.4	5.8	1.6	4.4
Andhra Pradesh	17.5	22.5	5.0	-0.5	1.5
Arunachal Pradesh	19.6	23.8	4.2	1.6	2.8
Assam	19.7	25.7	6.0	1.7	4.7
Bihar	17.2	20.6	3.4	-0.8	-0.4
Chandigarh	20.0	23.5	3.5	2.0	2.5
Chhattisgarh	17.6	20.9	3.3	-0.4	-0.1
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	18.8	21.5	2.7	0.8	0.5
Daman & Diu	19.4	22.9	3.5	1.4	1.9
Delhi	19.2	23.1	3.9	1.2	2.1
Goa	22.2	27.4	5.2	4.2	6.4
Gujarat	19.2	22.1	2.9	1.2	1.1
Haryana	18.0	21.6	3.6	0.0	0.6
Himachal Pradesh	19.1	23.8	4.7	1.1	2.8
Jammu & Kashmir	20.1	23.7	3.6	2.1	2.7
Jharkhand	17.6	21.8	4.2	-0.4	0.8
Karnataka	18.9	24.9	6.0	0.9	3.9
Kerala	20.8	27.1	6.3	2.8	6.1
Lakshadweep	19.1	25.0	5.9	1.1	4.0
Madhya Pradesh	17.0	20.4	3.4	-1.0	-0.6
Maharashtra	18.8	23.5	4.7	0.8	2.5
Manipur	21.5	25.5	4.0	3.5	4.5
Meghalaya	20.5	24.8	4.3	2.5	3.8
Mizoram	21.8	25.3	3.5	3.8	4.3
Nagaland	21.6	25.7	4.1	3.6	4.7
Orissa	18.9	23.9	5.0	0.9	2.9
Pondicherry	20.0	26.4	6.4	2.0	5.4
Punjab	20.5	23.4	2.9	2.5	2.4
Rajasthan	16.6	19.9	3.3	-1.4	-1.1
Sikkim	20.2	24.2	4.0	2.2	3.2
Tamil Nadu	19.9	25.5	5.6	1.9	4.5
Tripura	19.3	25.6	6.3	1.3	4.6
Uttar Pradesh	17.5	20.1	2.6	-0.5	-0.9
Uttaranchal	18.5	23.0	4.5	0.5	2.0
West Bengal	18.4	24.5	6.1	0.4	3.5
India	18.3	22.6	4.3	0.3	1.6

Source: Census, 2001.

During 1991 and 2001, the proportion of child marriage in the selected states has been more or less same, without any significant variation. During

1991, the proportion of child marriage was found significantly high in Bihar followed by Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh while it was found low in Gujarat and Orissa. Similarly, during 2001, the proportion of child marriage in these states remained the same without any significant change. Even in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Gujarat and Orissa, the proportion of child marriage has slightly increased as compared to 1991. However, the proportion of child marriage sharply declined in the state of Bihar (Table 2).

Table 2
Proportion of Child Marriage in the Major States

<i>State</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2001</i>
Uttar Pradesh	53.3	53.0
Rajasthan	57.2	57.1
Bihar	61.2	60.3
Maharashtra	38.5	38.8
Madhya Pradesh	52.9	53.0
Chhattisgarh	—	51.8
Jharkhand	—	61.2
West Bengal	53.0	53.3
Gujarat	33.1	33.5
Orissa	36.1	36.3

Source: Census Report, 1991 and 2001.

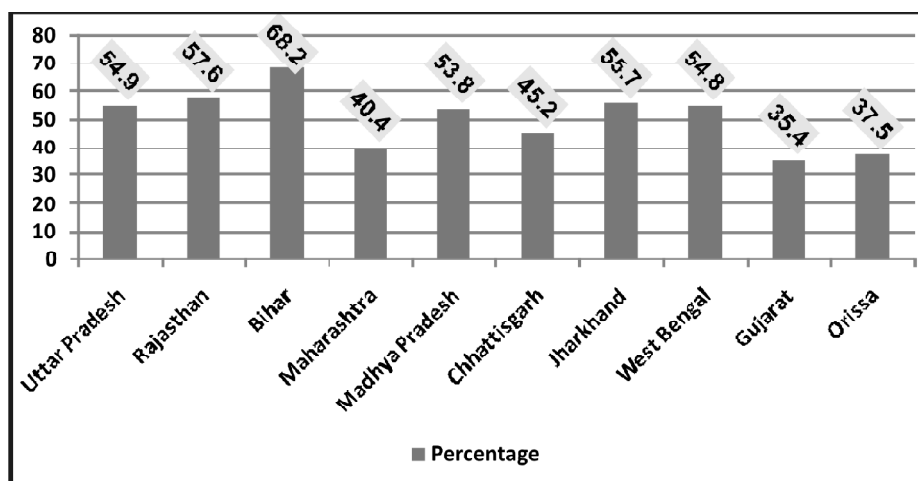
As per DLH Survey, 2007-08, the proportion of child marriage was reported significantly high in Bihar (68.2 per cent) followed by Rajasthan (57.6 per cent), Jharkhand (55.7 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (54.9 per cent) and West Bengal (54.8 per cent). This was reported comparatively low in Gujarat (35.4 per cent) and Orissa (37.5 per cent) (Table 3).

Table 3
Percentage of Women Currently Married Before 18 Years in the Major States

<i>State</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Uttar Pradesh	54.9
Rajasthan	57.6
Bihar	68.2
Maharashtra	40.4
Madhya Pradesh	53.8
Chhattisgarh	45.2
Jharkhand	55.7
West Bengal	54.8
Gujarat	35.4
Orissa	37.5

Source: DLHS, 2007

Chart 1: Percentage of Women Currently Married Before 18 Years in the Major States



As per National Family Health Survey, the proportion of child marriage has reduced during 2005-06 as compared to 1992-93. During 1992-93, the proportion of child marriage in the state of Madhya Pradesh was reported 73.3 per cent which declined to 64.7 per cent in 1998-99 and further to 57.3 per cent in 2005-06. Similarly, the proportion of child marriage has significantly declined in the state of Maharashtra and Orissa while in the state of Bihar and Gujarat, there has been increasing trend during 1992-93 and 1998-99 however, it declined significantly in 2005-06 (Table 4).

Table 4
Percentage of Women Currently Married Before 18 Years According to NFHS Survey

State	NFHS-1 (1992-1993)	NFHS-2 (1998-1999)	NFHS-3 (2005-2006)
Uttar Pradesh	63.9	62.4	58.6
Rajasthan	69.5	68.3	65.2
Bihar	69.1	71.0	69.0
Maharashtra	53.9	47.7	39.4
Madhya Pradesh	73.3	64.7	57.3
Chhattisgarh	—	—	55.0
Jharkhand	—	—	63.2
West Bengal	56.4	45.9	54.0
Gujarat	33.4	40.7	38.7
Orissa	45.5	37.6	37.2

Source: NFHS Surveys.

As per NFHS 2005-06, child marriage has been found more prevalent in rural areas as compared to urban areas. This shows that laws for prevention

of child marriage are effectively enforced in urban areas as compared to rural areas. Another factor for prevalence of high rate of child marriage in rural areas may be socio-cultural value system and economic backwardness. The high rate of prevalence of child marriage was reported in Jharkhand, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (Table 5).

Table 5
Percentage of Women Married before 18 Years

<i>States</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>
Bihar	60.3	65.2	37.3
Chhattisgarh	51.8	60.3	25.4
Gujarat	33.5	37.9	27.3
Jharkhand	61.2	71.0	33.6
Madhya Pradesh	53.0	62.0	31.1
Maharashtra	38.8	48.9	28.9
Orissa	36.3	38.7	24.3
Rajasthan	57.1	65.7	35.8
Uttar Pradesh	53.0	61.1	30.0
West Bengal	53.3	62.6	31.5

Source: International Institute of Population Sciences (2006), NFHS-3.

The mean age at marriage has increased from less than 15 years prior to 1961 to around 18 years in 1981 and is likely to increase in the coming years. Still there is a large variation in child and adolescent marriages across the states. Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh have witnessed a large number of child and adolescent marriages while Kerala, Punjab have higher age at marriage. Moreover, 75 per cent of the total married women in the age group of 10-14 years come from large northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These few states also contribute as much 51 per cent of the total married women in the next age group of 15-19 years. The data on early motherhood in India reveals the percentage of women who were married before 18 years. India figures stand at 44.5 per cent. The state-wise incidence of early marriage and motherhood is shown in Table 6.

As per survey of DLHS 2007-08, the prevalence of child marriage is showing a declining trend in India, however, this has been found still high in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. However, the prevalence rate of early marriage has declined significantly if we compare the rate of prevalence of child marriage during 1980s and 1990s (Table 7).

Table 6
Incidence of Early Marriage and Motherhood

<i>India/States</i>	<i>Percentage Women 20-24 Years Married Before 18 Years 2006</i>			<i>No. of Ever Married Mothers Below 15 Years of Age 2001</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	
India	44.5	52.5	28.1	296,790
Andhra Pradesh	54.7	61.4	41.2	12848
Arunachal Pradesh	40.6	39.8	42.5	267
Assam	38.0	41.3	23.3	7045
Bihar	60.3	65.2	37.3	31665
Chhattisgarh	51.8	60.3	25.4	4060
Delhi	21.2	41.1	61.6	2348
Goa	11.7	7.8	14.6	127
Gujarat	33.5	37.9	27.3	12300
Haryana	39.8	42.8	33.3	7605
Himachal Pradesh	12.3	12.2	13.6	7605
Jammu & Kashmir	14.0	17.1	4.9	5159
Jharkhand	61.2	71.0	33.6	5713
Karnataka	41.2	49.4	28.0	11822
Kerala	15.4	19.4	9.2	3504
Madhya Pradesh	53.0	62.0	31.1	16211
Maharashtra	38.8	48.9	28.9	15672
Manipur	12.7	13.2	11.7	349
Meghalaya	24.5	28.1	15.6	458
Mizoram	20.6	25.0	16.9	115
Nagaland	21.1	23.7	14.6	464
Orissa	36.3	38.7	24.3	8565
Punjab	19.4	20.4	17.7	8387
Rajasthan	57.1	65.7	35.8	21156
Sikkim	30.1	34.5	15.9	129
Tamil Nadu	21.5	26.1	17.2	15896
Tripura	41.0	41.7	37.8	728
Uttar Pradesh	53.0	61.1	30.0	73408
Uttarakhand	22.6	24.7	16.3	1987
West Bengal	53.3	62.6	31.5	27082

Source: International Institute for Population Sciences, 2006, National Family Health Survey-3, 2006.

Table 7
Child Marriage in India

<i>State</i>	<i>Women of 20 to 24 Years to Married Before 18 Years (per cent)</i>
Uttar Pradesh	54.9
Haryana	28.0
Bihar	68.2
Uttarakhand	19.7
Jammu & Kashmir	24.6
Jharkhand	55.7
Chhattisgarh	45.2
Madhya Pradesh	53.8
Punjab	15.5
Chandigarh	21.8
Delhi	24.2
West Bengal	54.7
Orissa	37.5
Sikkim	30.6
Meghalaya	34.3
Assam	40.0
Arunachal Pradesh	26.2
Manipur	24.7
Mizoram	23.7
Tripura	43.6
Kerala	15.5
Tamil Nadu	24.0
Pudduchery	17.4
Goa	19.1
Karnataka	50.2
Andhra Pradesh	51.9
Maharashtra	40.4
Gujarat	35.4
Daman & Dev	22.1
Dadara & Nagar Haveli	44.9
Rajasthan	57.6
Andman & Nicobar Island	24.5

Source: District Level Household Survey, 2007-08, Government of India, New Delhi.

Discussion of Research Findings

Parents

- Most of the parents were found belonging to Hindu communities however; the proportion of Muslim parents was reported significant in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. About half of the respondents were from OBC communities while about 1/3rd respondents were from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Thus, most of the respondents were from lower castes. This shows that child marriage is more pronouncing in the lower castes of the society.

- Majority of the respondents were from labour and peasant class. However, about 12 per cent respondents were from rich classes. Most of the respondents reported that their main occupation is agriculture, labour and petty business. Thus, child marriage is found more concentrated in lower economic classes of society.
- Majority of the respondents reported that they are from joint families. The main occupation of their families has been reported to be agriculture, labour and petty business. About 2/5th respondents were from lower class while 31 per cent respondents were from lower middle class. Thus, only a negligible proportion of respondents were reported to be from upper class and higher middle class.
- Majority of the respondents reported that they are married however; about 22 per cent respondents were widowed. Majority of the respondents were from the middle age group i.e. 35 to 50 years.
- Majority of the respondents were found educationally backward. About 43 per cent respondents were illiterate while slightly less than 1/3rd respondents reported that they are metric pass. Thus, child marriage is found to be concentrated among the educationally backward families.
- The main reasons for early marriage were reported to be traditional custom, demand of dowry, safety and security problems of girls, pressure from relatives and family members. Cultural tradition is the single most important factor for early marriage as more than 1/4th respondents reported this. This was found more pronouncing in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.
- Majority of the respondents reported that *Gauna* was performed just after marriage. However, about 14 per cent respondents reported that *Gauna* was not performed just after marriage. The main reasons for non-performing of *Gauna* just after marriage were reported to be related with study of children, cultural practice and waiting for auspicious occasion. More than 2/5th respondents revealed that married boys/girls are cohabitating with spouse.
- Most of the respondents reported that they provided RCH services such as ante-natal care, natal care and post-natal care to the expectant young mothers. However, the proportion of respondents who accepted the provision of RCH services such as natal care and post-natal care was reported to be low.
- Less than 1/4th respondents reported that they are aware of the Child Marriage Prohibition Act. Thus, more than 3/4th respondents were found unaware about the enforcement of Child Marriage Prohibition Act. About

30 per cent respondents accepted that child marriage violates human rights of children. Similarly, the awareness about the programmes and schemes for the empowerment of adolescent girls has been reported to be low.

- About 12 per cent respondents reported that their children discontinued education after marriage. The reasons for discontinuation of education were reported to be pressure from community, lack of permission from in-laws and spouse.
- Most of the respondents reported that early marriage of children increases the household responsibilities and financial burden.

Victims of Child Marriage

- Majority of the respondents were female while 2/5th respondents were male. Majority of the respondents were Hindus while about 1/3rd respondents were from Muslim community. Most of the respondents were from the lower castes such as OBCs, SCs and STs.
- Most of the respondents were reported from the labour, peasant and business class. They were mainly from joint families. The main occupation of their families was reported to be labour, agriculture and petty business. Thus, most of the respondents were from lower class, lower middle class and middle class.
- Most of the respondents were from the age group of 19 years and above. More than 2/5th respondents were from age group of 19-21 years while about 36 per cent respondents were above 22 years. Thus, about 6 per cent respondents were from the lower age group i.e. less than 15 years.
- Most of the victims of child marriage reported that their educational levels are low. About 19 per cent respondents revealed that they are literate only.
- About 70 per cent respondents revealed that they have heard about adolescence. Most of them are also aware about the correct age of adolescence. They also know the physical and psychological changes during adolescence.
- Majority of the respondents reported that their *gauna* has occurred just after marriage. However, about 37 per cent respondents reported that their *Gauna* was not occurred just after their marriage. The main reasons for non-performing of *Gauna* were reported to be studying of spouse, self studying, non-earning of spouse and waiting for auspicious occasion.
- Majority of the respondents reported that they are cohabitating with their spouse. Most of the respondents reported that their consent was sought

before marriage. However, about 15 per cent respondents reported that they were forced to marry. The decision of their marriage was taken by mainly father while other members of the family and relatives have their say in the decision making process.

- Majority of the respondents reported that they are experiencing changes after marriage. These changes are mainly in terms of increased household responsibilities, increased status in family and also deterioration of health and nutrition.
- About 1/3rd respondents reported that they discontinued education after marriage. The main reasons for discontinuation of education include increase in family responsibilities, lack of permission from parents and in-laws and also from spouse.
- The main reasons for early marriage were reported to be non-availability of good match later on, better adjustment at in-laws house and the perception that girls are *Paraya Dhan* (girls are others' property).
- Almost all the respondents reported that nobody try to stop their marriage. However, they are of the view that effective enforcement of legal age of marriage, family counseling and tracking to resist social pressure for early marriage, compulsory registration for marriage are some of the most effective measures for averting early marriage.
- More than half of the respondents revealed that they were pregnant. The age of spouse during first pregnancy has been reported to be mainly after 19 years however, about 6 per cent respondents revealed that married girls were pregnant during the age group of 13 to 18 years. About 30 per cent respondents revealed that they experienced pressure for early pregnancy. However, about 3/4th respondents were found aware about the consequences of early pregnancy. They were also found aware about the family planning method. However, a large proportion of respondents could not receive RCH services during pregnancy. Even a large proportion of respondents revealed that they delivered babies at their home with the assistance of untrained *Dai*.

Officials and Non-Officials

- Majority of the respondents were reported to be male. Most of the respondents were found belonging to SHGs, Village Panchayats, NGOs/ CBOs and government officials.
- The main reasons for early marriage were reported to be poverty, economic hardship, illiteracy and educational backwardness as well as prevalence of traditional value system.

- Most of the respondents reported that they provide counseling and organize societal campaign for prevention of child marriages while government officials reported that they also arrest and warned the parents for arranging child marriages.
- About 2/3rd respondents reported that *Gauna* is performed just after marriage. However, cultural practice, studying of spouse, and waiting for auspicious days are the main reasons for non-performing of *Gauna* just after marriage.
- Majority of the respondents are of the view that reproductive and sexual health services are not available to young mothers. They are also not satisfied with the quality and outreach of RCH services to young married girls.
- Lack of legal awareness, low pressure from civil societies, inactiveness of local police and low level of community pressure are some of the measures reasons for ineffectiveness of the enforcement of Child Marriage Act. However, ASHA workers, school teachers, NGO representatives, SHG members and *Anganwadi* workers may play a critical role for averting child marriages. Similarly, the schemes and programmes for empowerment of adolescent girls may promote the right age of marriage besides attitudinal and behavioural change for delaying marriage.

Policy Measures

- It is imperative to improve law enforcement mechanism in India. Early marriage cannot be eliminated over night and therefore monitoring of the implementation of existing child marriage laws needs to be strengthened and a protective mechanism should be established for individuals reporting child marriages. The effective enforcement of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 must be ensured with strong political and administrative will power.
- It is imperative to create an enabling environment through an integrated strategy of enhanced education opportunities for girls, combined with improved enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and interventions to curb child marriage practices. Mass media approaches may have a demonstrated impact on young people's knowledge, attitudes and behavior. The potential for media has been harness in many countries to provide educational entertainment to adults, adolescents and children. Media approaches are most effective when coordinated as part of an integrated intervention. The media may also play an essential role in community sensitization and changing social norms related with practice of child marriage.

- In those districts where the high rate of child marriage is prevailing, setting up special Cells is required. These special Cells may conduct the study regarding the prevalence of child marriage, loop holes in implementation of legislation and laws, administrative challenges for effective implementation of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, and implement intervention strategies in collaboration with civil societies and government agencies.
- International agencies should launch programmes for behavioural change. Donors and programme planners should support programmes that work to change the attitude that perpetuate child marriage. These programmes must involve community based organizations, adolescents and community leaders to achieve greater gender equality and behavioural change.
- A completely new strategy based on a holistic approach of awareness, incentives, education, nutrition and enforcement need to be worked out to protect the rights of the girl children. Women should have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care, which should go beyond the reproductive health to take into account their vulnerability to various endemic, infectious and communicable diseases. The social and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases also need to be tackled from a gender perspective.
- There is a need to hold government accountable for enforcing the legal age of marriage for both boys and girls. The child marriage prevention Act should be effectively enforced to prevent early marriages. There is need to focus on adolescent girls living in difficult circumstances. Effective enforcement of Juvenile Justice Act and rehabilitation of such girls is required.
- Adolescent girls need specific policies to address specific sectors like education, health, family welfare, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, sports, etc. An integrated and holistic development programmes for empowerment of adolescent girls are needed. Adolescents in different circumstances like adolescent with disabilities learning disorders, adolescent sex workers, children of sex workers and street children need more visibility in policies.
- Effective and efficient administration of Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes and other schemes oriented for empowerment of adolescent girls should be ensured while the coverage of such schemes is to be extended. The proposed scheme -Rajeev Gandhi National Scheme of Empowerment of Adolescent Girls should be launched immediately with wider coverage and budgetary support.
- Reproductive and sexual health programmes are to be designed keeping in view of rights to health care services, right to information about

prevention, reproduction, transmission of diseases, right to healthy life, nutrition, education, creation and freedom from violence and abuse. More emphasis is required for counseling sensitization, education, and improving the health care services to meet out the emerging needs of reproductive and sexual health to the adolescent girls.

- Marriage cum pregnancy counseling may be promoted through improving community participation, integrated schemes of child development, immunization and nutrition. Life Skill Education is imperative to increase mental abilities and promote mental well being and competency of young girls as they face the realities of life. Redesigning population education and life skills programmes of the government to reach out to adolescents in school and out of school is essential. Counseling and group education to respond to anxieties, fears, information gaps, stress, anger, aggression, depression, loneliness and related mental and emotional needs for the well being of adolescent girls is also called for.
- There is a need to address the issue of sexuality within adolescents and sensitize them about the human rights of women and children. Appropriate NGOs could be asked by the educational institutions to carry out such target-oriented advocacy in schools, colleges, etc.
- There should be a proper monitoring mechanism along with a set of parameters, indicators and guidelines to ensure that the cash incentives are disbursed to the intended beneficiaries on time in a hassle free manner. The concerned ministry or department needs to issue directions to the banks and post offices for opening the zero balance accounts to the beneficiaries. The concerned departments and ministries also need to finalize operational guidelines besides effective publicity of the schemes.
- The compulsory registration of marriage is imperative as there is no law requiring registration of marriages throughout India. Thus, enforcement of such legal provision is likely to pressurize parents for delaying marriage.
- Awareness and enforcement of law must be strengthened to discourage child marriage practices. In order to create awareness and sensitization of government enforcement agencies, orientation and training programmes need to be organized for sensitizing the officials of government enforcement agencies. The elected representatives and community-based workers including development activists also need orientation and training regarding the legal provisions and policy related information for promoting delayed marriage.

- Legislation is necessary to prevent child marriage but it is not sufficient to foster behavior change. Thus, policy makers need to enforce existing laws that increase the age of marriage to 18 years for girls and develop more stringent penalties for parents who arrange for their children to be married.
- There is need to launch a nationwide campaign for prevention of child marriage. There is a need for awareness and sensitization programmes including media campaigns for creating an environment of delaying marriage and empowering adolescent girls.
- Increasing girl's access to and motivation for schooling and attaining higher education is a key intervention strategy for delaying age at marriage. However, government schools must be improved both in terms of educational infrastructure and quality education. Scholarships and other financial incentives may be provided to the poor families for attaining secondary and higher education to their daughters. Promotion of girl's schooling should include attention to special vocational and livelihood training directed at increasing girl's income earning opportunities.
- In India, there is strong tradition of collective action and community organizing for social change. The women SHGs and associations need to be encouraged to take collective action for delaying marriage and also preventing child marriage. The SHGs and women associations may play an important role in motivating the girls and their families concerning the continuation of schooling and can also take active part in campaigns against child marriage.
- Safety and security of girls is of prime important. The vulnerable and poor families are the potential victims of trafficking and therefore, effective implementation of Immoral Traffic Prevention Act along with effective implementation of *Ujjawala* scheme is called for prevention from immoral trafficking and rehabilitation of trafficked victims.
- Child marriage interventions are most effective when they are based on evidence related to the risk factors for child marriage. Policy makers should ensure that girls stay in schools during adolescence and acquire economic and livelihood skills.
- It is also suggested that the current practice of extravagance on the marriage and its related ceremonies should be discouraged with the imposition of ceiling of expenditure during the marriage ceremonies.
- There should be special watch on the pious occasions such as *Akha Teej*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, etc. during which large number of child marriages are

being performed. This may be possible through scanning of cultural and social practices in the region by the civil society organizations while compilation of information from the community leaders, development functionaries, representatives of PRIs and community based organizations may be ensured to prepare a roadmap to prevent the practice of child marriage.

- More research is needed to understand how the situation and needs of married adolescents differ from those of married adults and unmarried adolescents.