

# Child Marriage in India: A Research Study



Child Rights and You  
New Delhi, India  
2021

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# **Child Marriage in India: A Research Study**

**Child Rights and You  
New Delhi, India  
2021**

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Child Marriage is a violation of human rights that disproportionately affects girls. Regardless of the fact that the prevalence of child marriage has reduced globally, it still affects one out of every five girls in the world today (UNICEF 2020). Child marriage among girls is expected to be six times more likely to occur than among boys globally (UNICEF Press Release 2019). It has a direct impact on the wellbeing and the health of a girl. A child bride's odds of becoming a teenage mother are quite high, and complications during pregnancy are the leading cause of mortality among adolescent girls (UNFPA 2020).

In the Indian context, as per Census 2011, there are 12.15 million married children in India of which 8.9 million are girls. Latest released National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-V, (2019-21) India Fact Sheet indicates a decrease in the prevalence of child marriage, decreasing from 26.8% in 2015-16 to 23.3% in 2019-21, yet there are significant interstate and intrastate variations. Earlier, NFHS-IV (2015-16) stated that more than half (52%) of married adolescent girls reported to becoming mothers at an early age. The same round of NFHS also indicated that 43% married girls in the age group of 15-19 faced controlling behaviour by their spouse, and one in five married adolescent girls aged 15-19 have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in the marriage relationship.

Despite amended legislation setting 18 years as the legal minimum age for girls, India is home to a significant number of children, particularly girls getting married. While the reasons for child marriage vary widely depending on geography and culture, poverty and gender inequity tend to play a significant role everywhere. Other factors that appear to be important contributors to child marriage are societal norms and stereotypes about gender roles. India is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', specifically mentioning the elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage (Goal 5, SDGs).

Enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is an affirmative step towards such a direction. In a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court in *Independent Thought 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 male with his minor wife, with or without her consent, would amount to rape. Prior to this judgment, intercourse between a man and his wife, if the wife was above 15 years of age, did not constitute rape. Therefore, the judgement protects the interests of married adolescent girls and seeks to further discourage the practice of child marriage in India. Despite these many legal provisions and structures, child marriages occur 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 previous year. Hence, it is essential to find solutions within communities. Given these statistics, it becomes imperative to study individuals, 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 human rights violation.

I am pleased to share with you this empirical study that aims to document such concerns. The findings are even more significant given that the data was collected during COVID-19, when accessible child protection services and mechanisms were at a standstill, increasing the likelihood of child marriage cases. The study was conducted in four states: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

CRY – Child Rights and You is striving to bridge the gap between systems and communities through its programming activities and advocacy dialogues and efforts in ensuring a safe and healthy childhood for all children, particularly girls. We believe that reaching out to the community during these difficult pandemic times is critical for ensuring child protection and preventing child marriages. Our approach is based on in-depth analysis and comprehensive vulnerability mapping in order to help those in dire

need. In this respect, our programmes include components of community mobilisation and agency building, among other things.

The programmes are intended to improve collaboration and engagement with state systems and governmental institutions. Our approach to change is centred on a socio-ecological paradigm based on the concepts of `self`, `society`, and `system`. Our consistent efforts at the community level over years were able to successfully avert numerous child marriages in our programme areas through various initiatives. We believe that empirical evidence is vital in bringing child marriage to the forefront of public debate. CRY strongly believes that child marriage is a human rights violation issue; its impacts are intergenerational and directly affect the status of education, health, nutrition and poverty of a society and nation. Ensuring good health and nutrition of girls, completion of 12 years of schooling, availability of life skill education and opportunities for higher education have a potential to break this vicious cycle of intergeneration malnutrition and poverty. Additionally, enabling girls to complete their secondary education increases the likelihood of their children being educated - thus facilitating lasting change across generations.

With this, I sincerely hope that this report will serve as an effective resource for policymakers, influencers and practitioners in social development arena to address the issue of child marriage and to eliminate the practice that significantly impacts the overall development of a child, particularly girls of our country.

With faith and hope,

**Puja Marwaha,**  
Chief Executive,  
CRY - Child Rights and You

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**CRY – Child Rights and You**

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# Abbreviations



<b>AICTE</b>	All India Council for Technical Education
<b>AP</b>	Andhra Pradesh
<b>ANC</b>	Antenatal Care
<b>ASHA</b>	Accredited Social health Activist
<b>AWW</b>	Anganwadi Worker
<b>BPL</b>	Below Poverty Line
<b>CBSE</b>	Central Board of Secondary Education
<b>CMPO</b>	Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of Children
<b>CWC</b>	Child Welfare Committee
<b>DNA</b>	Data not available
<b>DCPU</b>	District Child Protection Unit
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HH</b>	Household
<b>IDI</b>	In-Depth Interview
<b>IPC</b>	Indian Penal Code
<b>MLA</b>	Member of Legislative Assembly
<b>MLC</b>	Member of Legislative Council
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NEP</b>	National Education Policy
<b>NFHS</b>	National Family Health Survey
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OBC</b>	Other Backward Class
<b>PCMA</b>	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
<b>POCSO</b>	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
<b>PPS</b>	Probability Proportionate to Size
<b>PRI</b>	Panchayati Raj Institution
<b>PWDVA</b>	Protection Women from Domestic Violence Act
<b>SC</b>	Scheduled Caste
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SI</b>	Structured Interview
<b>SLI</b>	Standard of Living Index
<b>ST</b>	Scheduled Tribe
<b>ToT</b>	Training of Trainers
<b>UP</b>	Uttar Pradesh
<b>VCPC</b>	Village Child Protection Committee

## Background

Child marriage has a multitude of ramifications for the child, family, community and society as a whole. According to studies, child marriage has a negative impact on children's health, education and personal development, as well as exposes them to emotional, physical and sexual violence. Child marriages have an impact on a country's economic development. The United Nations recognises that ending child marriage can lead to the achievement of eight of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, peace and strong institutions.

Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among girls is likely to be six times higher than the prevalence of child marriage among boys (UNICEF Press Release 2019). The statistics are indicative of how child marriages disproportionately affect girls. The highest prevalence rate of child marriage reported by 20–24-year-olds is among the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries; the highest in Bangladesh, followed by Nepal, Afghanistan and India (UNICEF 2020). UNESCO's new data on girls' education reveals that 11 million girls may never return to school due to the on-going pandemic (UNESCO 2021). Another such outcome would be an ever increasing incidence of child marriage in the pandemic and the economic crisis caused by it. It has been predicted that the pandemic could lead to an extra 13 million cases of child marriage over the next decade (World Economic Forum 2020).

Over recent years, India has shown substantial progress in reducing incidences of child marriage. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-IV) 2015-16 has shown a substantial reduction in the prevalence of child marriage, declining from 47% in 2005-06 to 27% in 2015-16. The latest NFHS-V (2019-21) indicated that close to one in every five i.e. 23.3% women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years of age. Despite this, child marriage is embedded in the social fabric, and there are pockets of the country with a high concentration of the practice. India is committed to achieving the SDGs, one of which is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', specifically mentioning the elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage (Goal 5, SDGs). Enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 is an affirmative step towards such a direction. With this, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) was enacted to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography and to provide a child-friendly system for the trial of these offences. The POCSO Act does not consider any exceptions, even in cases of marriage, unlike the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Any sexual action with anyone under the age of 18, be it through the communion of marriage or a shared household, will be punishable by law. Despite having laws and regulations in place, a substantial proportion, i.e. every third adolescent girl in the age group of 15–19 years is married, and every second married adolescent girl has given birth to a child (Lal 2015). According to the most recent South Asian Demographic and Health Surveys (2014–2018), 41% of women in India were married before the age of 18, compared to 69% in Bangladesh (Scott 2020). Given these statistics, it becomes imperative to study individuals, communities and state stakeholders together in order to identify the core reasons why, despite several initiatives by public and private players, India continues to combat this grim human rights violation.

This study aimed to document in detail the community's knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviour related to child marriage as well as initiatives taken at the community and systemic levels to challenge child marriage practices in order to better understand the continued drivers of child marriage in India and the potential synergy between community and government response to curb this issue.

## Methodology

The research was conducted in 40 villages of eight blocks from four districts in the states of Andhra Pradesh (AP), Uttar Pradesh (UP), Maharashtra and Odisha (See Annexure 1). For the purposes of this study, a mixed-method approach was adopted with both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. An exhaustive desk review of the available literature was performed in order to triangulate the findings. The quantitative survey tools were administered to households with males and females aged 20–24 years who got married before the legal marriage age (18 for girls and 21 for boys) and with the in-attendance head of the household. This study enlisted the participation of 969 households and 1938 participants. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with community members and adolescent boys and girls to gain a better understanding of the issues at hand. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were also conducted with a range of village and district officials.

## Key Findings

Based on the collected information, the salient findings of the study are as follows:

- **Lack of or limited educational opportunities, particularly for girls, forces them to drop out and puts them at risk of child marriage:** The study findings imply that lack of educational opportunities due to issues of accessibility, availability and affordability pushes girls to drop out of school, leaving them vulnerable to child marriage. Also, girls' education continues to be undervalued in comparison to boys' education.
- **The practice of child marriage is more prominent among lower socioeconomic strata of society:** The findings reflect the respondents' socioeconomic status and also indicate that child marriage is more prevalent among the poorer strata of society. Apart from being a tradition, poverty is one of the most pressing underlying causes of child marriage, which is associated with certain socially marginalised communities in society.
- **Lack of understanding of the negative consequences of child marriage contributes to the practice's persistence:** Child marriage is still regarded as an important custom in the society for 59% of parents/parents-in-law. Only a small fraction - 16% of parents/parents-in-law and 34% of child brides/grooms - are aware of the negative consequences of child marriage.
- **Perceived notions of women's honour continue to be a decisive factor in child marriage:** Besides reasons such as lack of educational and employment opportunities, fear of girls eloping/having a 'love affair'/premarital sex emerged as one of the dominant reasons why parents prefer to marry off their daughters as soon as they reach puberty (mostly between 15 and 17 years of age). Also, lower dowry, women's 'honour', easier to find grooms and easier adaptation by girls in new house holds are reasons behind choosing child marriage.
- **Family and peer pressure significantly contributes to the persistence of child marriage practice:** Parents, relatives and peers exert substantial influence to the decision of marriage at a young age. A lot of pressure is applied by people to adhere to common community customs and traditions.
- **Detrimental effects on reproductive and sexual health of child marriage are seen in terms of teenage pregnancy:** In terms of the time gap between pregnancies, more than half of the women respondents - child brides (51%), who had at least two children, stated that the gap between their first and second child was less than two years, and 59% of child brides had teenage pregnancies. The findings indicate that child marriage has a detrimental impact on girls' sexual and

reproductive health (SRH), as the majority of them become mothers at a young age, putting them at risk of high-risk pregnancies.

- A considerable proportion of child brides are not able to access sexual and reproductive healthcare pre and post pregnancy:** Only 195 child-mothers got all four Antenatal Care check-ups; 38% of these mothers did not receive any information about the need of these prenatal check-ups; and 42% were not permitted to visit health facilities alone. Almost half of them (49%) were ignorant of the risks associated with early pregnancy. Approximately three-fourths (72%) of these women did not have a say in contraception use, and approximately half (51%) were unaware of female sterilisation. This has a negative impact on the health of both mothers and new-borns, as seen by a rise in maternal 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 brides reported having a low birth weight for their first and second child, respectively. Early motherhood is associated with an increased risk of neonatal death and stillbirth, low birth weight infants, malnutrition (stunted, wasted and underweight) infants and morbidity and mortality in children and infants. Adolescent girls who become pregnant have poor nutrition and health, which increases the risk of foetal, perinatal and maternal 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 brides indicated that they had little or no permission to visit their parents. Child brides were also not allowed to go out and socialise with their peers in 44% of the cases. Child brides were not allowed to leave the house alone in 34% of cases. This could jeopardise the mental, social and emotional well-being of these women.
- COVID-19 has a substantial impact on child marriage:** The pandemic might have escalated the number of cases of child marriage. According to duty bearers and community members in AP, UP and Odisha, more child marriages have been observed since the pandemic, and it led to increasing vulnerabilities exponentially. In Maharashtra, however, there was a discrepancy in the responses of duty bearers and community members, with duty bearers asserting that cases had decreased but community members, particularly adolescent girls, responding that in some clusters, people still manage to arrange child marriages in greater numbers than before. These findings imply that public health emergencies such as pandemics and other calamities have a significant impact on the increasing vulnerabilities, putting many children, particularly girls, at risk of marrying at an early age.
- Challenges in systematic responses at the village level 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 villages. Child Marriage Prohibition Officers were part of the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) in Maharashtra and UP, although only a few of the respondents were aware of them. As a result, institutions designed to combat child marriage at the village level 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 provisions relating to child marriage is limited due to lack of knowledge or awareness of those provisions:** Over half of respondents (parents/in-laws and child brides/grooms) were unaware of the legal minimum age for marriage. The vast majority of child brides (96%) were unaware of the POCSO Act. In comparison to child grooms (29%), a sizable proportion of child brides (49%) were unaware of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Additionally, more than half of them stated that the dowry system was still in use in their community despite the fact that it was a punishable offence.

- **Lack of community-level initiatives to combat child marriage practices results in underreporting of child marriage incidences:** Only a small percentage (7%) of community members had ever objected 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 scared of the consequences of going against the community and acting as an informant. This was a major impediment for police officers' efforts to prevent child marriages. The findings suggested that even Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members do not report such incidents to the police.
- **It is difficult for community members to use provisions of systemic mechanisms and relevant government schemes, if they are unaware of them:** Community members lacked awareness of structural systems to prevent child marriages. For example, only 19% of child brides were aware of the VCPC, 9% of the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO), 25% aware of the Women Helpline number, and 19% of CHILDLINE. Additionally, the majority of child brides (97%) were unaware of any non-governmental organisation/self-help group (SHG) working in their community to prevent child marriages. Lack of awareness among community members, particularly women, results in low resistance and reporting of child marriages by community members. Further, girls are unable to seek assistance in situations where they are required. As a result, without sufficient awareness, government programmes and efforts are inaccessible to these low-income households. Without educational and employment opportunities, girls in these households face an increased likelihood of child marriage.
- **The practice is so ingrained in the community's social structure that duty bearers face difficulties in carrying out their responsibilities regarding child marriage prevention:** The responses of duty bearers such as police officers, Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members, CMPOs and DCPU officials revealed the lack of cooperation from community members (both in reporting and prevention) as their greatest challenge. Similarly, PRI members were reported to be unsupportive. To carry out their responsibilities effectively, it is critical that community members work with duty bearers, and so the need to sensitise them is critical.
- **The lack of community understanding of the reporting mechanism is also a contributing factor to the low reporting of cases:** The findings revealed that only 31% of parents/parents-in-law and 26% of child brides/grooms were aware to whom incidence of child marriage should be reported. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents are unaware of the reporting process, which may contribute to low case reporting.

## Scope of synergy between community and government systems

An essential missing link was that of community level vigilance that might come with the implementation of the VCPC mandate. There is a significant gap in community awareness of the government protection systems in place. During the study, no institutional mechanism was reported through which community and government stakeholders could communicate and coordinate on the issue of child marriage (apart from yearly workshops reportedly arranged by police officials). Active community members' resistance to incidences of child marriage in their community as well as reporting such incidents to relevant government officials is critical to combating child marriage. As a result, it is crucial that the two stakeholders maintain an operational communication channel. In this aspect, successful VCPC operationalisation can make a substantial contribution since it can provide a platform for the system to connect with the community.

## Recommendations

Given that the challenges and reasons for child marriage differ by districts and societies, responses must be tailored to the local and contextual level and interwoven with various central and state government policies and programmes.

- **Strengthen Awareness Campaigns about the implications of child marriage:** Engaging in awareness campaigns and work shops, and educating people at the village level on reproductive and sexual health and child marriage prevention would help the individual, the community and the national economy by improving levels of learning, survival and protection of the girl child.
- **Campaign to raise public awareness of government initiatives and other systemic response mechanisms:** This must be addressed by developing effective communication and community engagement campaigns, both at the school and community levels, to create awareness. One conceivable solution would be to print these schemes on the back cover of free textbooks for children. Sessions/workshops in schools to raise awareness about such initiatives and other protection mechanisms such as CHILDLINE and Women Helpline should be made mandatory and conducted periodically.
- **Increase access to schools for girls:** It is well acknowledged that keeping girls in school is one of the most effective approaches to prevent child marriage. Girls' access to quality education is impeded by child marriage. The findings revealed that 86% of child brides who had ever attended school dropped out after marriage. Hence, public provisioning of secondary schools that adhere to the distance norms set for the same will play a critical role in lowering school dropouts, and as a result, preventing child marriages<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore the implementation of related provisions under the National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 must be intensified.
- **Use SHGs as a catalyst to combat child marriage:** The study's findings indicated that, despite the fact that almost half of female respondents were members of a SHG, awareness of child marriage remained low. SHGs can act as change agents by educating women in SHGs about legal provisions and recommended actions to take in the event of a child marriage. Not only can all SHG members report and intervene if there is an occurrence of child marriage in their villages, but they can also assist to raise awareness among other community members.
- **Initiate sustained efforts to alleviate poverty and social inequality to substantially reduce child marriages:** According to the findings, the majority of child brides/grooms are from lower socioeconomic strata of society. Additionally, it is well documented that poverty and socioeconomic inequality exacerbate child marriage incidence. Poverty and social inequality are inextricably linked to social norms. Thus, sustained efforts are required to alleviate poverty and social inequality through equal job opportunities and other initiatives, so that households do not face income poverty and can make decisions in the best interests of their children, particularly girls.
- **Strengthen village-level child protection mechanisms:** It is imperative to strengthen village-level child protection mechanisms such as VCPCs, which are specifically designed to help expand the child protection space, offer children a voice and ensure decision-making power. VCPCs can play a critical role in community vigilance and may serve as a bridge between

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.

communities and government agencies such as the DCPU, CWC and others. Priority should be given to establishing effective VCPCs in all villages. State and district support is essential to make the VCPCs functioning, and PRI members should be involved, encouraged and monitored to ensure the VCPCs perform effectively. DCPU or any other competent child protection agency/department must assume responsibility for establishing VCPCs and ensuring their operational readiness within a certain timeframe. Local non-governmental organisations may also play a key role in this. Convergence of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj with other concerned ministries and departments may be explored in order to ensure the formation and continued operation of VCPCs and monitoring and empowerment of the newly formed VCPCs.

- **Device mechanism to protect witnesses and informants of child marriage:** At the present, one of the most significant impediments to preventing 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 scared of coming forward and informing the appropriate authorities about such events. Thus, local PRIs, non-governmental organisations and other institutions should be encouraged to report child marriage while maintaining their anonymity. Additionally, it is critical to protect witnesses and informants in order to persuade community members to resist child marriages more frequently.
- **Provide necessary resources to children from vulnerable households to make online education accessible to them:** With COVID-19 adversely impacting children's education and putting them at risk of dropping out of school, particularly girls, due to a lack of access to online classes, the state and/or central governments must formulate schemes to incentivise low-income households to access necessary resources (smartphone/internet) for their children's education to continue via digital medium. There is need to launch a campaign to increase digital literacy among teachers and students in rural areas; and increase access to internet by implementing models like setting up of Public Data Offices (TRAI 2017).
- **Educate children about systemic response mechanisms (system specific and governance) in place by creating child friendly and age-appropriate IEC material:** Information on child rights, child protection, equipping children with information related to grievance redress and helplines such as CHILDLINE, Women Helpline number, etc. are extremely important in building children's awareness as well as utilisation of response mechanisms. Educating children from a young age about these would ensure greater retention and increased awareness among them.
- **Strengthen discussions around SRH at village level:** Since child marriage tends to perpetuate the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and increase health risks for the mother and her children, open dialogues on SRH in platforms such as Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day are essential to build a deeper understanding on the subject. Specific dialogues with mothers groups/adolescent groups, and engagement with boys and men will enable breaking attitudinal barriers and improve community interface with the primary health system.
- **Create Central Guidelines for Child Marriage:** While variations in State Rules are necessary since they are in response to nuances particular to the context of the state, creating common minimum guidelines at the Central level under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 would help bring parity in systemic response and facilitate smoother implementation of the legislation.

## Way forward

Child marriage adversely impacts children and girls in particular in multiple ways. In order to address this issue, it is essential to identify gaps in the existing community and systemic response to combating child marriage and explore possible synergy between the two. An essential missing link found in this study is that of community-level vigilance that might come with effective implementation of VCPC mandate. The study findings also reflect that there is a huge gap in the awareness level of the communities pertaining to government protection systems and instruments in place and institutional mechanism. Another major barrier identified was the underreporting of the incidence of child marriage by the community members in the fear of being out-casted by the society. Active resistance of community members towards incidents of child marriage in their community and reporting of such incidents to the relevant government officials is essential in curtailing the practice of child marriage, and hence it is important to have operational communication channel between the two stakeholders.

# **INTRODUCTION**

Child marriage is a human rights violation. Girls pressed into child marriage are more likely to become pregnant when still in their adolescence, increasing the risk of complications during pregnancy or childbirth. These complications are the leading cause of death among older adolescent girls<sup>2</sup>. Child marriage has many personal, socio-cultural and economic ill-effects on health, education, growth and development of children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) 1989, Article 19 talks about the right to be protected from violence (Article 19 and 34), and protection from violence extends even to family members, and specially children who must not suffer ill-treatment or sexual or physical violence. Article 24 of UNCRC also contains provision that requires governments to abolish *'traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children'*.

While the prevalence of child marriage has decreased worldwide, the practice still affects one in every five girls today (UNICEF 2020). Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among girls is likely to be six times higher than the prevalence of child marriage among boys (UNICEF 2019). The statistics are indicative of how child marriages disproportionately affect girls. Child marriage affects other aspects of a child's development, such as the right to express, development and education, develop full potential, protection from all forms of abuse and harmful traditional practices. It has a direct impact on the wellbeing of a child and girls' health. The probability of a child bride turning into teenage mother is exceptionally high, and complications during pregnancy are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls (UNFPA 2020). It is estimated that, in developing countries, 9 out of 10 child brides end up pregnant during adolescence (ibid).

Child marriage is not 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' risk of contracting 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 geographies and cultures, poverty and gender inequality seem to play a bigger role everywhere. The prevalence of child marriage tends to be higher among girls with low level of education. And hence, globally, 25 million child marriages have been prevented 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 various initiative by governments across the world in adolescent girls and generating awareness about child marriage<sup>3</sup>. Despite progress, many families marry their daughters off to reduce the economic burden on themselves (UNFPA 2020). Other major contributors to child marriage appear to be prevailing social and cultural norms and stereotypes in society around gender roles as well as the risk of pregnancy outside marriage (UNICEF 2020).

## 1.1. Global scenario

Child marriage has been a prevalent practice at different points in the history of almost all societies around the globe. Even in the 21st century, child marriage has remained a global reality (Nour 2009). It is believed that child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries. Currently, the highest prevalence rates of women in the age group 20-49 years reporting entering marriage before 18 years are in West and Central Africa (52%), Eastern and Southern Africa (40%) and South Asia (37%) (UNICEF 2014). The Table 1 below shows the region wise prevalence of child marriage across the globe.

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

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

**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

**Note:** DNA: Data not available

**Source:** UNICEF global databases, 2020 (Last update: February 2020)

In recent times, there has been an increase in the incidence of child marriage amongst families in situations of forced displacement. Out of the world's 7.8 billion people, 20% of women aged 20–24 married before the age of 18, while 5% married before the age of 15. Almost 29% of the girls in South Asia aged 20–24 reported marrying before the age of 18, while 8% were married before the age of 15. The highest prevalence rate of child marriage reported by 20–24-year-olds is among the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries; the highest in Bangladesh, followed by Nepal, Afghanistan and India (UNICEF 2020).

While the age at marriage is rising throughout the world, with the singular age at marriage being greater than 18 in the vast majority of countries across the world, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia still report the highest rates of child marriage incidences across the world (Singh and Samara 1996; Mensch, et al. 2006). In 2020, 21% of women under the age of 18 were married, with South Asia bearing the greatest burden (UNICEF 2020). In South Asia, India and Bangladesh have more child brides than the next 14 countries combined in terms of their burden ranking (Girls Not Brides, 2020).

Presently, with the world being hit by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerabilities among children, particularly girls, have increased manifolds. UNESCO's new data on girls' education reveals that 11 million girls may never return to school due to the on-going pandemic (UNESCO 2021). Another such outcome would be an ever increasing incidence of child marriage in the pandemic and the economic crisis caused by it. It has been predicted that the pandemic could lead to an extra 13 million cases of child marriage over the next decade (Anon 2020). COVID-19 presents a threat against the progress made in the efforts to eliminate child marriage. Ten million additional child marriages may occur as an outcome of COVID-19 by the end of the decade (UNICEF 2021). Pandemic-related restrictions and social distancing make it difficult for women to access healthcare, community support and other social services, exposing them to child marriages, unwanted pregnancies and gender-based violence (ibid).

Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by conflict, climate change and natural disasters as a result of negative 'coping mechanisms' such as child marriage. During the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, the closure of schools and lack of protection for girls contributed to a sharp rise in teenage pregnancy rates, many of whom never returned to school. It is

estimated that more than 14,000 teenage girls became pregnant during the Ebola outbreak, including 11,000 who were in school prior to the crisis (Mason 2016).

## 1.2. Indian scenario

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 contracting parties is a child." By definition, a child refers to an individual "who, if a male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age." Whereas, concepts such as 'early marriage' and 'forced marriage' are not defined in Indian jurisprudence.

By the 19th century, the practice of child marriage had become a widespread phenomenon across the country (Heimsath 1964). In India, despite amended laws advocating 18 years as the legal minimum age at marriage for females, a substantial proportion, i.e., every third adolescent girl in the age group of 15–19 years, is married, and every second married adolescent girl has given birth to a child (Lal 2015). In 2017, 7% of Indian women married before the age of 15 (Scott 2020). According to the most recent South Asian Demographic and Health Surveys (2014–2018), 41% of women in India were married before the age of 18, compared to 69% in Bangladesh (ibid).

The prevalence of child marriage has decreased 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), India Fact Sheet, 23.3% of women aged 20-24 years married before the age of 18. Nine states/UTs have state figures that are higher than the national average, with West Bengal topping the list with 41.6% of women aged 20-24 years marrying before the age of 18. Bihar came close 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 states with figures higher than the national average (23.3%). Madhya Pradesh with 23.1% was close to the national average (23.3%)<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.3. Key drivers/determinants of child marriage

While the practice of child marriage started aeons ago, there are numerous factors (social, cultural, economic and gender roles) that still fuel this tradition/practice till date, some of which are discussed in this section. The existing literature on child marriage has associated a range of factors that affect the decision of child marriage.

### 1.3.1. Financial constraints

Child marriage rates tend to be higher among household in low and middle income country who have fewer resources and opportunities to invest in alternative options for girls (education, and vocational training to name a few). This tend to create a double burden on the girls where the inaccessibility to adequate resources adds onto the household making decision regarding their marriage. Poverty and the burden of marriage-related expenses are commonly reported reasons for the practice of early marriage (Santhya, Haberland and Singh 2006:9). Parents may assess the costs and benefits of marriage and decide to marry their daughters early if they are seen as an economic burden. Financial transactions around marriage contribute to this practice as well. In some cases, families may obtain a greater financial amount for the younger brides. This tends to act as a motivator for

4 For more information: [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/India.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/India.pdf)

families to take the decision of marrying their daughters before the legal age of 18 years. In circumstances where dowry is practised (the bride's family provides assets to the groom's family), a younger and less educated bride may require a lower dowry, which would incentivise parents to marry daughters at a younger age (Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton and Quentin 2015:13).

### **1.3.2. Educational attainment**

Multiple studies have found that women's education level to be the most significant negative determinant of child marriage. The higher the level of education, the lower the rate of child marriage. Women with secondary and higher education were significantly less likely to be married-off as children than those who had no formal education (Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying 2014:15). But a girl's education is impeded by both the limited educational opportunities for girls in rural areas and the perceived value of a girl's education in a community. Lack of educational opportunities extends beyond formal school infrastructure, to informal educational structures and vocational training programmes for girls as well, making it difficult for girls to learn skills that may be useful for earning income, further discouraging parents from sending their daughters to school as there seems to be no return on investment in their education (Pandey et.al. 2019).

Globally, parental illiteracy and lack of awareness are also considered major causes that promote child marriage. In general, parents with no or low levels of education fail to understand the negative consequences of child marriage on their young daughters (poor health, less education and social deprivation) and have limited authority to go against traditions and uphold their own rational decisions (Goli 2017:21).

Ensuring that adolescent girls stay in school, return to school or receive vocational training not only improves their life chances but also has wider societal benefits. UNESCO predicts that providing all girls with primary education in low- and middle-income countries will reduce child malnutrition by 1.7 million (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013).

### **1.3.3. Livelihood opportunities**

Women who were engaged in unskilled labour were significantly more likely, and those who were engaged in professional jobs were less likely, to be married-off as children as compared with their unemployed counterparts (Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying 2014:17). Working experience exposes women to new ideas and norms that can discourage early marriage. Moreover, employment may provide the financial resources to allow the postponement of marriage and an economic incentive for parents to encourage their daughters to remain single during the economically productive period of young adulthood. But in practice, in many communities, girls do not typically work outside the home; instead, they have many domestic responsibilities to attend to, like household chores, looking after their younger siblings, and/or working on family land/business. There are few opportunities for girls as there are few types of jobs, broadly speaking, in such communities. Girls usually are not allowed to go outside, and this restriction on mobility further hampers their chance of getting paid work (Pandey et.al. 2019).

### **1.3.4. Social background and cultural practices**

CRY's report (2020) on child marriage in India states that girls between 10 and 19 years of age account for 75% of all the total married children in India (13.04 million out of 17.26 million). Multiple studies have shown that the likelihood of child marriage is significantly higher among rural women than their urban counterparts. Similarly, CRY's report shows that 75% of all married

children (10–19 years) reside in rural areas (13.02 million out of 17.26 million). Also, married girls in rural areas (10-19 years) account for more than half (57%) of all married children in India. The same study also reflected that the number of married girls (10-19 years) grew marginally by 0.23% over 2001-2011. However, marriages among boys has increased by 19% over the same period.

Muslim girls living in rural areas have a greater risk of child marriage. The higher likelihood of child marriage among Muslim and rural residents reflects their social-cultural norms. Girls who are most at risk are mostly from poorer households, with less or no education, and reside in rural areas. While there are differences between religious groups and castes/tribes, they are small and marginal, indicating that religion and caste may not have a significant impact on child marriage incidences (UNICEF 2019).

Pressure to abide by societal norms is also commonly cited as a reason for the persistence of early marriage. While these norms are clearly internalised by parents, neighbours and others in the community exert overt pressure on parents to get their daughters married at a young age (Santhya, Haberland and Singh 2006:10). These traditional practices, coupled with underlying cultural and local religious practices, make child marriage a sacred practice in the view of the people who practise it (Planning Commission 2014). Some communities generally place a lower value on women and have always believed that the only thing a girl child can achieve in life is to get married, bear children and raise them. As a result of this, they prefer sending male children to school and giving less attention to girls, who are more likely to fall victim to unintended misfortunes such as early marriage or unwanted pregnancy (UNICEF 2020).

### **1.3.5. Perceived notions of safety and woman's honour**

Another important impetus for marrying girls at an early age in traditional societies is that it helps to prevent premarital sex. Many societies, like those in India, value virginity before marriage, and this can manifest itself in a number of practices designed to 'protect' a girl from unsanctioned sexual activities. Parents fear for their girls' sexual safety, i.e., fear of being harassed, and are anxious about girls exploring their sexual or romantic feelings, like indulging in premarital sex and/or their daughter eloping. Child marriages also ensure a reduction in the dowry and chastity of girls, which are linked to the honour of the family (Girls Not Brides, 2021).

The tradition of having a virgin bride may lead to girls marrying at a young age. This occurs in order to eliminate spaces for girls to experience their sexual desires and marry them off before those desires are formed. If anything improper of this sort was to happen, there would be grave consequences for both the girl and her family's reputation (Santhya, Haberland and Singh 2006:10). Consequently, parents, guardians and society impose a large number of mobility restrictions on girls and prefer to wed them off as early as possible (Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying 2014).

### **1.3.6. Spousal characteristics**

The risk of child marriage is observed to be significantly higher when husbands have no formal education or little education as opposed to those with some higher education (ibid:15). Another notable spousal characteristic that matters is the age difference between the bride and the groom. The prevalence of child marriage is significantly more common in women whose husbands have surpassed them in age by 10 or more years than in those whose husbands have surpassed them in age by less than 10 years (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 mainly due to sex-selective abortion, which is still widely practised despite the ban on sex determination and sex selection. This further gives rise to a situation called 'the marriage squeeze'<sup>5</sup> — an asymmetry in the availability of potential spouses; this situation, in which potential bridegrooms outnumber potential brides, often leads to a reduction in female age at marriage. In the situation of a bride shortage, poor parents often tend to 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 for propelling the participants to early marriage. According to a study that involved young girls as participants from communities where child marriage is a common practice, the girls responded 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 were the needs to receive respect, serenity and independency. The participants believed that they could achieve their personal independence through marriage and by acquiring the spouse's identity. Satisfaction of emotional needs was another reason to persuade the participants to consider early marriage. They also believed that marriage could give them the feeling of being loved (Montazeri 2016).

## 1.4. Impact of child marriage

Most of the literature on child marriage is derived from empirical studies focusing on girls in developing countries. From a gender lens, child marriage is not as prevalent among boys, which leaves girls to remain a point of focus when talking about the consequences of child marriage (Greene, Perlson, Taylor and Lauro 2015)<sup>6</sup>. Most of the physical consequences associated with child marriage are borne primarily by girls, for instance, early pregnancy (Jensen 2003).

Education, while determining the age at first marriage, is also a key area of impact. Delay in girls' age at marriage impacts their level of education, subsequently affecting health, labour force participation, child health outcomes, etc. Women with high levels of education tend to enter marriage later and vice versa. (Manda 2005; Delprato 2015). Several studies indicate that promoting girls' education is a key deterrent to early marriage (Kalamar 2016; Loaiza 2012; Lee-Rife 2012). A multi-country study carried out to understand the relationship between girls' education and early marriage talks about the benefits of education and delayed marriages in terms of an increase in self-efficacy such as values, ability to actualise goals and awareness of human rights; increased life skills; improved household management; and improved economic development (Raj 2019). While out-of-school girls are more vulnerable, early marriage in itself acts as a barrier to post-marriage school attendance due to child birth and child rearing (Lloyd 2008).

Girls married as children don't tend to be educated to their full capacity and generally lack the skills and knowledge to create viable job prospects, which pushes them into an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Child marriage also pushes women to have children earlier, further reducing their participation in the labour force and increasing the economic burden on the family<sup>7</sup>.

5 Marriage Squeeze is defined as "an imbalance in the number of men and women available to marry in a particular society". Ravinder Kaur et al. (2017) state that 'rapid fertility decline and availability of sex determination technologies have led to a skewed sex ratio in favour of males.' This impacts the marriage markets of a certain society by causing a marriage squeeze.

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

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

Child marriages have an adverse impact on girls as it pushes them to be sexually active before they are physically and mentally ready, and they have zero or little context about their rights. Child marriage is also a major contributor to adolescent pregnancies, which have a negative impact on girls' education and upward mobility and are associated with serious health risks. One such health risk shows up in the form of gender-based violence<sup>8</sup>.

Apart from these, child marriage adversely affects girls' mental health. Girls engaged or married as minors are at increased risk for depression and suicidal tendencies, in great part due to its link with varying forms of gender-based violence like forced marriage and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Population Council and IIPS 2008). Early marriage not only disrupts a child's educational attainment, it also creates frequent interruptions in employment due to childbirth and the disproportionate burden of time required to care for the child, eventually forcing them into low-paying, unstable jobs (ICRW 2018). The impact on lifetime earnings is huge as a result of girls' being married off early, with a reduction of over nine percent (ibid). End of child marriage has directly been linked to a generation of additional resources, in both earnings as well as productivity. For instance, ending child marriage in Bangladesh could lead to additional earnings of \$4.8 billion per year. Looking at the magnitude of the country and the problem, India is bound to add a large proportion to the GDP as a result of ending child marriage (ibid).

Similarly, child grooms are compelled to assume adult responsibilities for which they may be unprepared. Early marriage leads to early fatherhood, which adds additional pressure to provide for a family, cutting education and job chances short. According to UNICEF, an estimated 115 million boys and men worldwide were married as children, with one in every five children, or 23 million, married before the age of 15<sup>9</sup>.

## 1.5. International Instruments

There have been a variety of national and international legislation and legal mechanisms through which efforts have been made to exterminate the negative practice of child marriage. India has ratified almost all the international conventions on human rights, especially those with relevance to child marriage and the protection of young people. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>10</sup>, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1979)<sup>11</sup> as well as the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography<sup>12</sup> (Singh 2017). Article 10 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights says that marriage must only be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses. Article 16(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly Resolution 217, A (III), states 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<sup>13</sup>. 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, protect the planet

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

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

10 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.

11 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>

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

13 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>

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 and focus 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 acts as a means to achieve other child welfare targets that are interlinked with the social practice of under-age 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 sets of target 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 and 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 as important steps towards ending child marriage. It provides guidance to countries and sub-national entities to develop their own plans to end child marriage<sup>14</sup>.

## 1.6. National Laws

There have been various laws, policies, plans, schemes and strategies that have been initiated and set in place by the Government of India towards combating practices and cultural norms that promote child marriage (Press Information Bureau, 2020). Some of these policies aim to address directly the issue of child marriage, while some of them are indirect contributors.

**Eleventh and Twelfth Five Year Plans<sup>15</sup>** : While the Eleventh Five Year Plan, on the specific issue of child marriage, called for "compulsory registration of marriages and verification of age at the time of marriage", the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) looks at the role of Panchayats that must be increased in enforcing registration of births, deaths, marriages and migration to have an impact on issues of trafficking and child marriage and to equip Panchayats to focus on the elimination of violence against women and girls and achieve universal education. Both the plans aim at strengthening the implementation mechanisms of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

**National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001<sup>16</sup>** : This policy states that "Interventions such as the spread of education, compulsory registration of marriage and special programmes like Balika Samridhi Yojna (BSY) should impact on delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriages are eliminated." This policy also provided for the health and education, as well as social and economic well-being of women.

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

15 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>

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

**National Youth Policy, 2003 and the following recent National Youth Policy, 2014<sup>17</sup>** : The policy aims at emphasising the different and multiple needs of youth while also highlighting the 11 priority areas and multi-dimensional actions with specific strategies to address the issues that are faced by adolescents, like child marriage and child labour.

**National Plan of Action for Children (NAPC), (2005 and 2016):** This plan, like the National Population Policy, aims to achieve 100% registration of births, marriages, deaths and pregnancies by 2010, eliminate child marriage by 2010, and prohibit the sale of children and all forms of child trafficking, including those for marriage. While the 2005 plan of action identified twelve key areas, among which one was the 'complete abolition of child marriage', the 2016 plan of action aimed at reducing the incidence of child marriage with a special focus on girls. The NPAC, 2016 planned to reduce the prevalence rate of child marriages to 15% by the year 2021.

**National Policy for Children, 2013<sup>18</sup>** : The policy recognises that every person who has not attained the age of 18 years is a child, which is consistent with the UNCRC. While adhering to the constitutional mandate as well as the guiding principles of the UNCRC, it reflects a shift from a 'needs-based' to a 'rights-based approach'. It has identified four priority areas, namely survival; health and nutrition; education and development; and protection and participation. The policy calls for the convergence of various stakeholders and coordination across the different sectors and the different levels of governance because it recognises that a child's needs are multi-faceted and therefore require the collaboration of multiple sectors to promote collective action.

**National Plan of Action to Prevent Child Marriage in India (2013)<sup>19</sup>** : This is a well-intentioned and well-crafted piece of document. The goals are as follows: to enforce Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006 and related laws and policies that can discourage child marriage; to improve access to quality education and other vocational opportunities; to initiate programmes that enable community mobilisation and outreach to change social norms and attitudes; to build the skills and capacities of adolescent girls and boys; to collect data and initiate research to inform programming and interventions; and to develop monitoring adolescent girls and boys. Under each of these goals, objectives have been listed out. Within each of the objectives, strategies, stakeholders and indicators have also been specified.

In order to implement these policies, the government has formulated certain schemes for the purpose of effective intervention with the aim of seeing growth in communities and a reduction or way for the elimination of cultural practices that victimise children, especially girls, by making them susceptible and vulnerable to early marriage.

**Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006<sup>20</sup>** : The Act envisages preventing child marriages with enhanced punishments of rigorous imprisonment for two years and/or a fine of INR 1 lakh. It defines a child as a male below 21 years of age and a female below 18 years. A minor is defined as a person who has not attained the age of majority as per the Majority Act of 1875. There are provisions for the maintenance of the girl child. The husband is liable to pay the maintenance if he is a major. In the event that the husband is a minor, his parents would be liable to pay the maintenance. The legal status of a child marriage is voidable at the option of the parties. However, if the consent is obtained by fraud, deceit, or if the child is enticed away from his lawful guardians, and if the sole purpose is to use the child for trafficking or other immoral purposes, the marriage would be void. The Act also provides for the appointment of child marriage prohibition officers (CMPOs) whose job is to prevent the solemnisation

17 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](https://www.rgniyd.gov.in/sites/default/files/pdfs/scheme/nyp_2014.pdf)

18 For more information on National Policy for children, follow the link at [https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/npcenglish08072013\\_0.pdf](https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/npcenglish08072013_0.pdf)

19 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](https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/National%20Plan%20of%20Action_0.pdf)

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

of child marriages, collect evidence for persecution, maintain records and statistics on child marriages and provide the same to the state governments.

The PCMA has definitely been a positive step. The PCMA is much more liberal in its approach. It has elements that, upon application, can make a big difference in the incidence of this practice. The PCMA has recognised the fact that child marriages are a grave human rights violation directed at children and that their incidence in India continues to be appalling.

Under the PCMA, state governments shall implement the law by appointing CMPOs, who are duty-bound to prevent the solemnisation of child marriages, collect evidence and facilitate prosecutions under the PCMA, and to advise and sensitise communities about the harms associated with child marriage. CMPOs may act as 'guardians or next friends' for minor girls seeking decrees of nullity and move the court for orders or injunctions. The PCMA gives the District Magistrate authority to stop mass child marriages by 'employing appropriate measures' and a minimum police force, in addition to authorising all of the powers of the CMPO. The PCMA also states that the state government may make rules for implementing the law (Centre for Law and Research Policy 2018). Nearly all state governments, barring a couple, have made state rules.

**Muslim Personal Law Act, 1937<sup>22</sup>** : The Muslim Personal Law, which was later solidified under the special marriage Act of 1954, states that a girl, no sooner than she attains her puberty or completes 15 years of age, whichever is earlier, is competent to get married without the consent of her parents. This law was in defiance of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 because a lot of cases had been filed which were lost under the precinct of Muslim Personal Law (Indian Penal Code, 1937).

**POCSO Act, 2012<sup>22</sup>** : The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO Act) was enacted to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, and to provide a child-friendly system for the trial of these offences. In the Act, child has been referred to as someone below the age of 18. Therefore, any sexual union with anyone below the age of 18 is considered to be a criminal offence, and any sexual offence committed by the child is also considered to be a criminal offence (Odisha Police, n.d.). The POCSO Act is in direct correlation with the PCMA in that if a man over the age of 18 contracts a marriage with a child and solemnises the marriage, the man will suffer a handsome fine and imprisonment for 10 years. The POCSO Act does not consider any exceptions, even in cases of marriage, unlike the IPC. Any sexual action with anyone under the age of 18, be it through the communion of marriage or a shared household, will be punishable by law. This act has helped a lot of child brides not go through sexual assault at an early age or through gentile mutilation.

**Minority Guardianship Act, 1956:** This Act covers only the Hindu population. The Act states that a minor who is under the age of 18, the natural guardian will automatically become the father, and in his absence, it will be the mother. In the case of an illegitimate child, the guardian would be the mother, and then the father in the absence of the mother (Government Legislative, 1956).

**Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection), 2015<sup>23</sup>** : This is an act that assures that every offender who is a child which is below 18 years of age and in conflict with law should be taken proper care of with every basic need ensuring safety, protection, development and every social re-integration process by adopting a child friendly approach in the adjudication and disposal of

21 For more information on Muslim Personal Law, follow the link at <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2303/1/A1937-26.pdf>

22 For more information on POCSO Act, 2012, follow the link at <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/POCSO%20Act%2C%202012.pdf>

23 For more information on Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, follow the link at <http://cara.nic.in/PDF/JJ%20act%202015.pdf>

matters in the best interest of the child and his/her rehabilitation through the process provided and institutions and bodies established. Keeping this Act in mind, the PCMA also takes into account the child who had contracted a child marriage and provides imprisonment and fine for the adult in charge of the child who was unable to prevent the marriage from taking place or the solemnisation of the marriage from happening until the contrary is proved that it is the child who has contacted the marriage then the child is dealt within under the Juvenile Justice Act.

**Section 375 of Indian Penal Code (IPC)<sup>24</sup>** : Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code defines rape as "sexual intercourse with a woman against her will, without her consent, by coercion, misrepresentation, or fraud, or at a time when she has been intoxicated or duped, or is of unsound mental health, and in any case, if she is under 18 years of age."

**Compulsory Registration of Marriages Act, 2005<sup>25</sup>** : The Act was envisioned in 2005 with the aim to not only prevent child marriages but also to ensure minimum age of marriage for women. Other facets that the act looks are relate to preventing polygamy; notice to prior wives in the event of another marriage; and preventing the practice of men abandoning women after the marriage. The Act also would work towards ensuring that all marriages are registered in their states/UTs.

**The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961<sup>26</sup>** : The Dowry Prohibition Act penalises all parties involved in providing or receiving dowry (directly or indirectly) in the act of marriage. Curbing the practice of dowry ensures the prevention of specific forms of violence against women. Since dowry works as a societal value placed on brides, it is evident that younger brides would attach less dowry/higher bride prices. Prohibiting dowry ensures an effort towards the elimination of such acts.

**Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA)<sup>27</sup>** : PWDVA acts extends to women and children who have been in a domestic relationship with the respondent and claims that they have been subjected to an act of domestic violence. Such violence can be physical in nature, emotionally distressing, verbal, sexual or repeated threats.

Multiple nation-wide schemes to encourage enrolment of girls in primary and secondary education as well as skill development of adolescent girls to ensure more employment opportunities for them (and thus curtailing the practice of child marriage) have also been launched by the Government of India. This includes the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)<sup>28</sup> , Kishori Shakti Yojana (Adolescent Girls Scheme)<sup>29</sup> , Mission Vatsalya<sup>30</sup> , Beti Bachao Beti Padhao<sup>31</sup> , Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram<sup>32</sup> , etc. In addition, Bal Vivah Virodh Abhiyan (Campaign against Child Marriage): a nationwide awareness-raising programme against child marriage was started by the National Commission for Women in 2005. It is focused particularly on the states of Rajasthan, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh with high incidences of child marriage (National Commission for Women, 2005-06).

24 For more information on section 375 on IPC, follow the link at <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-5395-section-375-of-ipc-an-overview.html>

25 For more information on Compulsory Registration of Marriages Act, 2005, follow the link at <http://ncwapps.nic.in/PDFFiles/compMarriageBill.pdf>

26 For more Information on the act, follow the link at <https://wcd.nic.in/act/dowry-prohibition-act-1961>

27 For more information on the act, follow the link at [http://chdsla.gov.in/right\\_menu/act/pdf/domviolence.pdf](http://chdsla.gov.in/right_menu/act/pdf/domviolence.pdf)

28 More information on the scheme can be accessed at [https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/1-SABLAScheme\\_0.pdf](https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/1-SABLAScheme_0.pdf)

29 More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://wcd.nic.in/kishori-shakti-yojana/>

30 More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://wcd.nic.in/integrated-child-protection-scheme-ICPS>

31 More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes>

32 More information on the scheme can be accessed at [https://www.nhp.gov.in/rashtriya-kishor-swasthya-karyakram-rksk\\_pg](https://www.nhp.gov.in/rashtriya-kishor-swasthya-karyakram-rksk_pg)

### 1.6.1. State Specific

The Constitution of India prescribes a federal structure that allows states to draft their own laws on subjects classified as 'state subjects'. There are several state-specific schemes or programmes pertaining to the issue of child marriage that aim to deal with the issue of child marriage directly and indirectly, some of which are mentioned below. Child Rights and You (CRY) conducted a detailed comparative analysis of state-specific rules pertaining to child marriage in 2020<sup>33</sup>.

The Kanyashree programme, launched in 2012 in West Bengal, aims at retaining girls in school to continue their education and prevent them from getting married at a young age. The Girl Child Protection Scheme (1997) of the Government of Andhra Pradesh is aimed at preventing gender discrimination by empowering and protecting the rights of girls through direct investment from the government. Similarly, the Mukhya Mantri Rajshree Yojana, launched in 2016 works towards eradicating child mortality and child marriage in society. This scheme ensures an improved girl child ratio and also promotes girls' education in the state. The Ladli Laxmi Yojana, launched in 2007, aims to bring about a change in society's negative approach towards a girl's childbirth. The key initiatives were to improve the sex ratio, education and health status. Similar objectives are observed in Haryana's Ladli Scheme, which was launched in 2005 and aimed at combating female foeticide and encouraging the proper rearing of girls while also granting them the right to birth and survival. It also aims to boost the decreasing female sex ratio and increase the number of girls. The Sivagami Ammaiyar Memorial Girl Child Protection Scheme in Tamil Nadu was launched in 1992 and is being implemented by the Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department to provide financial assistance to girl children in poor families. The scheme is being introduced to encourage family planning, eradicate female infanticide and support the education of girls in poor families.

### 1.7. Purpose and objectives of the study

Through its programmatic initiatives, CRY is striving to bridge the gap between systems and communities in order to ensure a safe and healthy childhood for all children, particularly girls. To ensure child safety and to prevent child marriages, CRY believes that reaching out to the community during these difficult times of pandemic is crucial. CRY's approach is based on in-depth analysis and detailed vulnerability mapping in order to assist those who are in dire need of support. CRY programmes contain components of community mobilisation and agency building in this direction, among other things. The programmes are designed in order to improve collaboration with state systems and interaction with government agencies. CRY's approach to bringing about change is centred on a socio-ecological paradigm that is based on the concepts of 'self', 'society', and 'system'. CRY believes that empirical evidence is crucial in bringing the topic of child marriage to the forefront. The proposed study seeks to view and understand how the system's mandate and the community's response to the issue of child marriage communicate and converge, seeking to clearly identify the practical underpinnings of overcoming the hurdles in a grassroots setting. The study attempts to highlight and understand key drivers of child marriage that are diverse, complex and interlinked.

Given this discourse, it becomes imperative to study individuals, communities and state stakeholders together in order to identify the core reasons why, despite several initiatives by public and private players, India continues to battle this grim human rights violation.

33 <http://www.cry.ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/bitstream/handle/123456789/136/103%20-%20A%20Comparative%20Analysis%20of%20State%20Rules%20under%20the%20Prohibition%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20Act%2c%202006.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

### 1.7.1. Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are listed below:

1. To outline and understand the systemic response to child marriage - the legal, policy, financial provisioning and mechanisms in place to combat the issue;
2. To document in detail the knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviour related to child marriage and the initiatives that are taken at the community level to challenge child marriage practice and the hurdles in establishing a system to curtail child marriage at the community level;
3. To understand the role of government incentivisation and welfare schemes in the context of child marriage;
4. To map the convergence of community and government systems under the available provisions and practices, and to determine the scope for synergy at both ends; and
5. To understand the impact of the COVID-19 scenario on the practise of child marriage at the community level.

## 1.8. Context to study states

The research was conducted in four Indian states: Andhra Pradesh (AP), Uttar Pradesh (UP), Odisha and Maharashtra.

### 1.8.1. Andhra Pradesh (AP)

As per Census 2011<sup>34</sup>, AP has a total population of over 8.4 crores and a sex ratio of 992. While the state-level literacy rate was recorded to be 67.7%, for females it stood at 59.7%. According to NFHS-V (2019-21) data, 29.3% of women in the state aged 20–24 married before reaching the legal marriage age of 18. In rural areas, the proportion was even higher at 32.9%. 14.5% of men between the ages of 25 and 29 married before reaching the legal marriage age of 21. This is slightly lower than the NFHS-IV (2015-16) data, which showed that 33% of women aged 20–24 years married before the legal age in the state, while 15.8% of men aged 25–29 years married before the legal age.

#### *Study district – Chittoor*

With a population of over 41 lakh, the sex ratio in the district of Chittoor is higher than the state average at 1002. The literacy level in the district is higher than the state average at 72.6% for the total population and 63.7% for females. As per the latest released NFHS-V, Chittoor District Fact Sheet (2019-21), 28.1% of women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years. As per NFHS-IV, 32.1% of women aged 20–24 years in the rural parts of the district were child brides, while the percentage of child brides in this age group stood at 26.6%.

### 1.8.2. Uttar Pradesh (UP)

According to the NFHS-V, UP State Fact Sheet (2019-21), 15.8% of women aged 20-24 years married before the legal marriage age of 18 years, and 23% of men aged 25-29 years married before the legal marriage age of 21 years<sup>35</sup>. From the last round of NFHS-IV (2015-16), there is a 5.3% decrease in the percentage of women aged 20-24 years marrying before the legal age.

34 [https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data\\_files/andhra\\_pradesh/DCOAP-PAPER-1-BROCHURE.pdf](https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/andhra_pradesh/DCOAP-PAPER-1-BROCHURE.pdf)

35 For more information [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/Uttar\\_Pradesh.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/Uttar_Pradesh.pdf)

### ***Study district – Chandauli***

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Chandauli was more than 19.5 lakh people, with a sex ratio of 913. Both the total and female literacy rates in the district were recorded to be higher than the state average at 73.9% and 63.1% respectively. The Latest NFHS-V, Chandauli District Fact Sheet 2020-21 shows a significant reduction in the percentage of women aged 20-24 years getting married before 18 years in the district (17.2%)<sup>36</sup>. As per NFHS-IV (2015-16) data, this district had a higher prevalence of child marriage for both girls and boys. While 33.7% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 years (37.5% in rural areas) married before the age of 18, 43.3% of men between the ages of 25 and 29 years (42.8% in rural areas) married before the age of 21.

### **1.8.3. Odisha**

With a population of over 4 crore, the sex ratio in Odisha stood at 978 as per Census 2011. The total literacy rate of the state is 73.45, while the female literacy rate stands at 64.4%. According to NFHS-V Odisha State Fact Sheet (2019-21), 20.5% of women aged 20–24 and 13.3% of men aged 25–29 years in the state were married before reaching the legal marriage age<sup>37</sup>.

### ***Study district - Kandhamal***

The study district selected in the state of Odisha is Kandhamal. Kandhamal has a population of over 7 lakh people and a sex ratio of 1,037. The literacy rate in the district is 65.1%, and the female literacy rate is 52.5%. NFHS-V (2019-21) data states that 22.1% of women aged 20–24 years and 10.5% of men aged 25–29 years in the district got married before the legal age. As per the latest released NFHS-V data Kandhamal District Fact Sheet, there is a decrease of 2.1% of women aged 20-24 years getting married before 18 years (20.1%)<sup>38</sup>.

### **1.8.4. Maharashtra**

Maharashtra's population was over 11.2 crore as of Census 2011, with a sex ratio of 925. With a total literacy rate of 82.9%, the state's female literacy rate was 75.5%. While NFHS-IV (2015-16) data recorded that 26.3% of women in the age group of 20–24 in the state got married before 18 years of age, the percentage fell to 21.9% in the NFHS-V as per State Fact Sheet (2019-21)<sup>39</sup>. There was only a 0.9 percentage point drop in child marriages among men aged 25–29 years between the two NFHS rounds, from 11.4% to 10.5%.

### ***Study district - Parbhani***

The study district chosen in the state of Maharashtra is Parbhani, a district with a population of over 18 lakh and a sex ratio of 940. The overall literacy rate in this district and the female literacy rate are lower than the state average at 75.2% and 64.23% respectively. Parbhani recorded an increase in the percentage of women aged 20-24 years getting married before 18 years as per the latest NFHS-V Parbhani District Fact Sheet (2019-21) (48%)<sup>40</sup>. Earlier trend according to NFHS-IV (2015-16) showed that the

36 For more information: [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/UP/Chandauli.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/UP/Chandauli.pdf)

37 [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/Odisha.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/Odisha.pdf)

38 [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/OR/Kandhamal.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/OR/Kandhamal.pdf)

39 [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/Maharashtra.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/Maharashtra.pdf)

40 [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5\\_FCTS/MH/Parbhani.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/MH/Parbhani.pdf)

district of Parbhani had almost double the proportion of women married as children. In this district, 44.5% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 years married before the age of 18. This was even higher for women in rural areas (53.3%). In this district, 15% of men aged 25–29 years married before the age of 21 (nearly double the state average).

**METHODOLOGY  
AND STUDY  
DESIGN**

A mixed-method approach was used for the purpose of this study, utilising both quantitative and qualitative techniques of data collection. All the tools and guidelines were translated into regional languages, viz., Hindi, Telugu, Marathi and Oriya, and then verified for their consistency and validity with the English tools.

## 2.1. Study respondents

The survey tools were administered to the selected respondents. As per the inclusion criterion followed, i.e. households with males or females aged 20–24 who got married before the legal age of marriage (18 for girls and 21 for boys) were surveyed along with the in-attendance head of the household<sup>41</sup>.

**Table 2: Type of respondents**

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

## 2.2. Sampling design

### 2.2.1. Sample estimations

#### 2.2.1.1. Quantitative sample

The key indicator used to formulate the count for the sample estimation was the ‘percentage of women aged 20–24 years married before 18 years’ as per NFHS-IV (2015-16) data for each of the four states (AP, UP, Odisha and Maharashtra) to understand the incidences of child marriages in the states. One sample formula was used with a 95% significance level, a margin of error of 5%, and a design effect of 1.37 (for a cluster size of 20). Thus, a total of 900 households or 1,800 respondents were targeted to be surveyed.

<sup>41</sup> 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](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.

**Table 3: Planned sample distribution (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%
<b>Total</b>		<b>900</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>1,800</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2.2.1.2. Qualitative Sample

In line with the objectives of the study and the methodology adopted, qualitative data was collected from various stakeholders, including the community members and government representatives/duty bearers. These interactions aided in the development of insights into the underlying factors, processes, practices and systems that influence child marriage practice. The stakeholders at the community, village, block, district and state level were targeted to be covered in the study. This multidimensional approach ensured that the view-points of all the stakeholders were captured to get an overall understanding of the issue. In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were administered as part of the qualitative component.

## 2.3. Sample selection

Covering an appropriate sample size is extremely crucial in achieving the thematic saturation of the study, and the study aimed to do that by covering a total of 40 villages from eight blocks of four districts across all the four study states.

### 2.3.1. Selection of districts and blocks

Districts in each selected state were selected based on the criteria of decadal child marriage growth rate in each district and the presence of CRY’s programmes. At block level, two blocks were chosen randomly from each of the four study districts. A total of eight blocks were covered.

#### 2.3.1.1. Selection of villages

Initially, Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method was proposed to be used for selecting five villages per block from the list of all the villages in the block. A mid-course correction in the methodology was felt by the study team at the field work inception stage, when it was realised that the practice of child marriage was much more prevalent in some villages while hardly found in others. Hence, for the purpose of selecting the final clusters, a list of 10 villages with high prevalence of child marriage from each of the chosen blocks were procured from the local implementation partners of CRY. PPS was then performed to select five villages from each of the study blocks. Thus, a total of 40 villages<sup>42</sup> were selected.

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

Once the villages were selected, the total sample was distributed proportionately across the selected villages based on their respective population.

### 2.3.1.2. Selection of households (listing exercise)

A Household (HH) listing exercise was carried out 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 conducted after the segments were marked. Basic information was gathered to classify research participants who met the necessary prerequisites. Thus, a sampling frame was obtained with all the households that had members who fit the inclusion criteria. Households were chosen randomly from this set.

## 2.4. Sample coverage

The data collection process spanned four weeks, starting on December 13th, 2020 and winding up on January 4th, 2021.

### 2.4.1. Quantitative data

Table 4 below shows the sample that was initially proposed on the basis of the statistical significance as well as the sample finally achieved under the scope of the study. 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. Some additional sample was collected from each of the states in case some observations had to be dropped during data analysis due to incomplete responses.

**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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>1,938</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2.4.2. Qualitative data

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

**Table 5: Tally of qualitative 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	-	-	-

## 2.5. Data management and analysis

### 2.5.1. Quantitative data analysis

Before data analysis was undertaken, the research teams followed a rigorous data cleaning process to account for duplicate responses and carry out consistency and range checks.

The Structured Interviews (SIs) with 969 households yielded 1,938 cumulative respondents in the quantitative findings. For all the questions in the SIs, a state-wise descriptive statistical analysis was conducted (using SPSS).

### 2.5.2. Qualitative data analysis

The Framework analysis method was used to condense qualitative findings at the community and individual level. It included transcribing qualitative information, getting familiar, developing coding frames, identifying categories and themes, and condensing findings. The framework analysis assisted in understanding the existing social practices and norms pertaining to child marriage that are still prevalent in society as well as the scope of synergy between community and systemic response to child marriage.

## 2.6. Ethical considerations

A multi-stage ethical approach was followed keeping in line with the key respondents of the study. For the same purpose, a Research Advisory Committee (RAC) of three experts was constituted. They provided the ethical insights for the study and also performed the de facto role of the Research Ethics Committee (REC). This included approvals of research protocols and tools for disseminating, implementing, monitoring and reviewing processes aimed at safeguarding the best interests of the respondents in the study. A comprehensive risk mitigation plan (Annexure 2) was prepared to address any additional challenges that were key concerning areas given the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the study covered multiple states, the field teams were inducted on the importance of being mindful of cultural distinctions across different regions. Written consent was obtained from all the participants to record their voluntary participation in the study. In cases where the respondents were not comfortable giving

written consent, verbal consent was sought before initiating the survey. The respondents were informed about the confidentiality of their responses. The final data sets were hence devoid of any personal identifiers.

## **2.7. Limitations of the study**

Although the study aimed to understand systemic responses to child marriage at all levels of governance, none of the state level IDIs could be administered due to the unavailability of concerned government officials despite repeated efforts. For similar reasons, in Odisha, no government official at village, district or state level could be interviewed. However, an attempt was made to draw inferences from the collected limited information to address the research objective. The inferences were substantiated with findings from other studies.

Since marrying girls and boys before the age of 18 and 21, respectively, is illegal, which was known to most households, many people were reluctant to reveal their correct age at marriage. Hence, limited data could be collected during the listing exercise.

# **SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS**

# Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents



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

## 3.1. Social profile

Table 6 shows that in terms of gender composition of the in-attendance head of the household, women comprised about 75 percent of overall respondents (727 women and 242 men). In all, 657 child brides<sup>43</sup> (68%) and 312 child grooms<sup>44</sup> (32%) were interviewed (Table 7). Majority of the child grooms (47%) were from UP. This is in line with Census 2011 data which suggests that UP has the highest concentration of married adolescent boys in the age group of 10-19 years (19.24%) (CRY 2020).

Table 6 shows that the sample comprised most of the Hindu households (73%), followed by 18% of Christians (almost all of whom were from Odisha), 5% of neo-Buddhists (all from Maharashtra), and 4% of Muslims. In terms of social groups, literature suggests that child marriage is more prevalent in socially marginalised 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 Bhanderi 2015). The study's findings support this link, as while 22% of the sampled HHs belonged to the general category, the remaining 78% belonged to socially disadvantaged groups (30% SC, 20% ST, and 28% OBC). State-wise variations were observed in terms of social groups as well. While 99% of General category HHs were from the states of AP and Maharashtra, three-fourths of the SC HHs were from UP and Odisha. Only 1% of the sampled HHs in both UP and Odisha belonged to the general category.

**Table 6: Social profile of the households**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender of the parent/parent-in-law</b>										
Male	37	15%	67	27%	56	29%	82	29%	242	25%
Female	209	85%	179	73%	137	71%	202	71%	727	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Religion</b>										
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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

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

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

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Social Category</b>										
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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

### 3.2. Educational profile

Low level of parental education has been associated with higher risks of child marriage (Singh and Vennam 2016). Table 8 gives a snapshot of the educational profile of the head of household interviewed in the study. About 35% of these head of the HHs surveyed reported that they had never been to school. This proportion was particularly high in the state of UP with reportedly 57% of the respondents stating that they had never been to school. Among total, 21% went to school only till primary level of education. Only 7% of head of the HHs interviewed completed their school education (higher secondary).

**Table 8: Educational profile of head of the HH**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent ever attended school</b>										
Yes	166	67%	107	43%	122	63%	238	84%	633	65%
No	80	33%	139	57%	71	37%	46	16%	336	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Educational status of the respondent</b>										
Uneducated/non-literate	80	33%	139	57%	71	37%	46	16%	336	35%
Primary (till class V)	15	6%	47	19%	28	15%	111	39%	201	21%
Upper Primary (till class VIII)	21	9%	39	16%	54	28%	55	19%	169	17%

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Secondary (till class X)	81	33%	16	7%	34	18%	56	20%	187	19%
Higher Secondary (XI - XII)	43	17%	4	2%	6	3%	16	6%	69	7%
Graduate	6	2%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7	1%
Post Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

### 3.3. Economic profile

Ninety percent of the surveyed HHs reported having a ration card<sup>45</sup> (Table 9). National Food Security Act (NFSA) defines a ration card as a document that identifies HHs that are entitled to buy subsidised food grain through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Most of the HHs (79%) had a below poverty line (BPL) card and the remaining HHs held a card either under Antyodaya Anna Yojana<sup>46</sup> (17%) or Annapurna Scheme<sup>47</sup> (4%) indicating a poor economic standing of sampled HHs.

To measure the economic status of sampled households, Standard of Living Index (SLI) was constructed using the methodology as suggested by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). SLI comprises of 27 items, including consumer durables, agricultural machinery, housing conditions and access to basic amenities (water, light, fuel, etc.). Based on the score, the entire population is divided into three categories wherein the lowest category i.e., those belonging in the low category, represent the poorest of the poor on the above 27 assets. Similarly, the highest category i.e., those HHs that belong to the high category, represents those that are relatively the wealthiest. Those that belong in the middle category therefore represents those HHs that are somewhere in the middle of the richest and the poorest ones. The study attempted to map this SLI score for all the sampled HHs. Based on this score and in accordance with the categorisation as per NFHS-II, the HHs were classified into three groups viz - low, medium and high<sup>48</sup>. Here in this study, all the 27 socio economic variables were not captured, and therefore, the present SLI is calculated based on 20 variables. These variables do not include ownership of house, irrigated land, agricultural land, livestock, main fuel for cooking, source of lightening and separate room for cooking. State-wise variations were observed with three-fourths of the sampled HHs in Odisha having low SLI and only 2% having high SLI. On the contrary, the majority (60%) of the HHs sampled from Maharashtra had a high SLI while 5% HHs from this study state had a low SLI score.

45 Ration cards are an official document issued by state governments in India to households that are eligible to purchase subsidised food grain from the Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act. More information about ration cards can be accessed at: <https://rationcardagent.co.in/>

46 Antyodaya Anna Yojana involves identifying 2.5 crore poorest of the poor families from amongst the number of BPL families within the States and providing them food grains at a highly subsidized rate of Rs.2/- per kg for wheat and Rs.3/- per kg for rice. More details about the scheme are available at: <https://dfpd.gov.in/pds-aay.htm>

47 The Annapurna Scheme aims at providing food security to any male or female above 65 years of age. Under this scheme, 10 Kg of food grains per month is to be provided free of cost to the beneficiary, i.e. senior citizens having little or no regular means of subsistence from his/her source of income or through financial support from family members or other sources. A detailed guide on the scheme is available at: <https://nsap.nic.in/Guidelines/Annapurna%20scheme%20guidelines%202000.pdf>

48 Detailed SLI index scoring done in NFHS-2 can be accessed at: <http://rchiips.org/NFHS/data/india/indch2.pdf>

**Table 9: Economic profile of the households**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Households with ration card</b>										
Yes	171	70%	236	96%	185	96%	282	99%	874	90%
No	75	30%	10	4%	8	4%	2	1%	95	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Type of ration card</b>										
BPL	169	99%	108	46%	170	92%	245	87%	692	79%
Antyodaya	1	1%	109	46%	11	6%	25	9%	146	17%
Annapurna	0	0%	17	7%	4	2%	11	4%	32	4%
Others (specify)	0	0%	2	1%	0	0%	1	0%	3	0%
Can't Say	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>		<b>236</b>		<b>185</b>		<b>282</b>		<b>874</b>	
<b>Standard of Living Index</b>										
Low	100	41%	66	27%	144	75%	15	5%	325	34%
Medium	102	41%	108	44%	45	23%	100	35%	355	37%
High	44	18%	72	29%	4	2%	169	60%	289	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

### 3.3.1. Occupational profile

As shown in Table 10, the majority of households (58%) had the primary earner working as an agricultural labourer. The same was true for all the study states. Overall, this was followed by main wage earner of the HHs being self-employed in agricultural work (16%), non-agricultural labourers (10%), self-employed in non-agricultural work (8%) and private service (7%). Relatively, UP had the highest proportion (22%) of HHs with primary income earner working as non-agricultural labourer and self-employed in non-agricultural work (24%).

**Table 10: Occupational profile of the households**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Primary occupation of the primary earner of the household</b>										
Agricultural labourer	149	61%	91	37%	151	78%	169	60%	560	58%
Non-Agricultural labourer	27	11%	55	22%	2	1%	11	4%	95	10%
Self-employed (Agriculture)	6	2%	24	10%	30	15%	95	33%	155	16%

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Self-employed (Non-Agriculture)	16	7%	58	24%	2	1%	7	3%	83	8%
Service (Private)	44	18%	17	7%	5	3%	1	0%	67	7%
Service (Government)	3	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	0%
Others	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
Don't Know	0	0%	1	0%	3	2%	1	0%	5	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

### 3.3.2. Access to basic amenities

Access to the amenities discussed below in Table 11 have also been accounted for in the SLI score of the HHs. 22% of the sampled HHs had 'pucca' houses whereas 51% and 27% of the HHs had 'semi-pucca' and 'kutcha' houses respectively. Odisha had the highest percentage of households (68%) living in a 'kutcha' house.

The majority of the households surveyed (94%) had access to an improved source<sup>49</sup> of drinking water. This is in tandem with NFHS-V (2019-21) data which states that 95.9% of HHs in India have access to improved source of drinking water.

A little more than half of the HHs (55%) had improved toilet facilities<sup>50</sup>. As compared to other states, highest proportion of HHs with unimproved toilet facilities was from Odisha (82%) followed by AP (52%), UP (33%) and Maharashtra (25%).

**Table 11: Access to basic amenities**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Type of house</b>										
Kutcha	51	21%	57	23%	131	68%	26	9%	265	27%
Semi-pucca	124	50%	147	60%	50	26%	175	62%	496	51%
Pucca	71	29%	42	17%	12	6%	83	29%	208	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Main source of drinking water</b>										
Improved source	245	100%	211	86%	182	94%	283	100%	921	95%
Unimproved source	1	0%	35	14%	11	6%	1	0%	48	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

49 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene defines 'Improved sources' of drinking water to include piped water, boreholes or tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, and packaged or delivered water whereas 'Unimproved sources' include unprotected wells, unprotected springs and surface water.

50 As per WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, 'Improved toilet facilities' include flush/pour-flush toilets, ventilated improved pit latrines, composting toilets and pit latrines with a slab or platform. Unimproved facilities include pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines and bucket latrines.

Thus, child marriage was found to be a phenomenon more common among socially and economically marginalised HHs. Multiple studies over time have discussed poverty to be one of the most pressing underlying cause of child marriage, apart from being a tradition, which could also be correlated with the certain socially-backward communities in the society (Nguyen and Wodon 2012; Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton and Quentin 2015). Thus, targeted policies aimed at poverty alleviation or providing adequate resources to ensure higher education opportunities for girls in economically weaker HHs would significantly reduce the risk of girl child marriage (Paul 2019).

### 3.4. Age at marriage

The sampled HHs reflect the continued practice of child marriage across generations. Table 12 shows that, with the exception of 3% of mothers/mothers-in-law interviewed, all others admitted to being child brides. About 25% of them got married even before turning 15 years old. This was relatively high in Maharashtra, where 37% of female respondents married when they were young adolescents (10–14 years). A contrary trend was observed in the age at marriage of fathers or fathers-in-law surveyed (Table 13). Almost two-thirds of them (65%) got married before they turned 18 years old. The study, however, did not confirm from these respondents if they married before reaching the legal age of 21, so it is quite possible that some of the remaining 35% of respondents were also child grooms. 90% of these respondents confirmed that their wives got married to them before 18 years of age.

**Table 12: Age at marriage (mother/mother-in-law)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Age at marriage</b>										
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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>		<b>179</b>		<b>137</b>		<b>202</b>		<b>727</b>	
<b>Spouse's age at marriage</b>										
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%
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>		<b>179</b>		<b>137</b>		<b>202</b>		<b>727</b>	

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

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

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Middle Adolescent (15-17)	20	54%	36	54%	25	45%	41	50%	122	50%
Adult (>=18)	16	43%	23	34%	21	37%	24	29%	84	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>		<b>67</b>		<b>56</b>		<b>82</b>		<b>242</b>	
<b>Spouse's age at marriage</b>										
Young Adolescent (10-14)	0	0%	12	18%	7	12%	9	11%	28	11%
Middle Adolescent (15-17)	29	78%	49	73%	43	77%	69	84%	190	79%
Adult (>=18)	6	16%	6	9%	5	9%	3	4%	20	8%
Don't Know	2	6%	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>		<b>67</b>		<b>56</b>		<b>82</b>		<b>242</b>	

Tables 14 and 15 show the age at marriage of the surveyed child brides and child grooms, respectively. Of the sampled child brides and grooms, 2% married between the aged 10-14 years, and the remaining 98% were aged 15-17 years at the time of their marriage. While the NFHS-IV (2015-16) data reports the median age at first marriage for women aged 20-49 years to be 19, the median age at marriage was recorded to be 16 years for the targeted respondents in the study. A majority of the child grooms (71%) got married aged 18-21 years, followed by those who got married aged 15-17 years (28%). Only 1% of the child grooms surveyed married before the age of 14. Although the NFHS-IV (2015-16) reports the median age at marriage for men to be 24.5 years<sup>51</sup>, the same was recorded to be 18 years for the surveyed cohort<sup>52</sup>.

**Table 14: Age at marriage of child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent's age at marriage</b>										
Young Adolescents (10-14)	5	3%	2	2%	1	1%	5	2%	13	2%
Middle Adolescents (15-17)	153	97%	96	98%	177	99%	218	98%	644	98%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
Mean age at marriage	16		16		17		16		16	
Median age at marriage	16		16		17		17		16	
<b>Spouse's age at marriage</b>										
Young Adolescents (10-14)	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	1	0%	2	0%
Middle Adolescents (15-17)	16	10%	22	23%	16	9%	1	0%	55	8%
Adults between 18-21	52	33%	66	67%	126	71%	37	17%	281	43%
Adults above 21	90	57%	10	10%	35	20%	184	83%	319	49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	

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

52 Men aged 20-24 were surveyed under this study

**Table 15: Age at marriage of child grooms**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent's age at marriage</b>										
Young Adolescents (10-14)	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	1	2%	2	1%
Middle Adolescents (15-17)	17	19%	55	37%	5	33%	11	18%	88	28%
Adult between 18-21	71	81%	92	62%	10	67%	49	80%	222	71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>312</b>	
Mean age at marriage	19		18		19		19		18	
Median age at marriage	19		18		19		19		18	
<b>Spouse's age at marriage</b>										
Young Adolescents (10-14)	4	4%	28	19%	0	0%	4	7%	36	11%
Middle Adolescents (15-17)	43	49%	109	74%	14	93%	52	85%	218	70%
Adult between 18-21	41	47%	11	7%	1	7%	5	8%	58	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>312</b>	

A cross-tabulation between the age of these child brides and grooms and the reported age of their respective spouses at the time of marriage is presented in Table 16. In most of the cases (45%), both the bride and the groom were below the legal age of marriage, with the child bride aged between 15 and 17 years and the child groom aged between 18 and 20 years. This was followed by minor girls aged 15–17 getting married to boys over the age of 21 (33%). There are provisions specified in the law in cases where a minor is married to an adult. Section 9 of the PCMA (2006) specifies that a male adult marrying a child is punishable under the law with rigorous imprisonment, which may extend to two years, or with a fine, which may extend to one lakh rupees, or with both. Even the POCSO Act does not consider any exception in the case of child marriage, unlike the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Under it, any sexual action with anyone under the age of 18, be it through the communion of marriage or a shared household, will be punishable by law.

**Table 16: Age at marriage of all the couples (child brides and grooms)**

	Boys (aged 10-14)	Boys (aged 15-17)	Boys (aged 18-20)	Boys (aged 21 above)
Girls (aged 10-14)	2 (0%)	28 (3%)	15 (1%)	4 (1%)
Girls (aged 15-17)	2 (0%)	106 (11%)	439 (45%)	315 (33%)
Girls (aged 18-20)	-	9 (1%)	49 (5%)	-

# **ROLE OF COMMUNITY NORMS**

One important aspect of people's behaviour is that it is often influenced by what other people do and what other people think should be done. When behaviour is influenced in that manner, it is called a 'social norm' (Bicchieri 2006). Thus, it is essential to understand the behaviours that promote and sustain the practice of child marriage, the preferences and beliefs communities still have.

In the following sections, both quantitative and qualitative tools are utilised to assess communities' preferred age at marriage for girls and boys, the prevalence of child marriage as a social custom and the rationale for continuing with this practice.

## 4.1. Gap in preferred and usual age at marriage

A recent study across the rural blocks of a few states in India found that many parents still preferred to get their daughters married during their teenage years (mostly between 15 and 17 years of age). They reasoned that this age was ideal as girls were 'mature' by this time and usually completed as much schooling as parents deemed enough (Pandey, Saxena and Melnikas 2019). Respondents in the present study cited similar preferences. About 60% of parents/parents-in-law responded that their community still preferred girls to marry before the age of 18 (refer to Table 17). This preference was relatively more pronounced in the state of UP (75%).

The study tried to understand the actual practice related to child marriages in the community. When asked about the usual age at which children get married in the community, a relatively large number of people responded that it is usually below 18 years for girls. Overall, 85% of parents/parents-in-law confirmed that girls usually get married before they turn 18. In Maharashtra, this proportion was the highest in the case of girls (91%), followed by UP (86%).

**Table 17: Preferred and usual age at marriage of girls (parents'/parents-in-law's perception)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Preferred age of marriage for girls</b>										
Less than 15	0	0%	20	8%	7	3%	0	0%	27	3%
Between 15 and 17	128	52%	165	67%	96	50%	164	58%	553	57%
On completing 18	118	48%	61	25%	90	47%	120	42%	389	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Age by which girls usually get married in the community</b>										
Less than 15	0	0%	23	9%	10	5%	0	0%	33	3%
Between 15 and 18	195	79%	189	77%	148	77%	258	91%	790	82%
After 18	51	21%	34	14%	35	18%	26	9%	146	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

A similar gap in preferences and practice in terms of age at marriage was observed in the case of boys as well. According to half of the parents/parents-in-law, their community preferred to get boys married before they turned 21. However, 69% of them confirmed that boys were married off before the age of 21. State-wise distribution has been given in Table 18.

**Table 18: Preferred and usual age at marriage for boys (parents'/parents-in-law's perspective)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Preferred age of marriage for girls</b>										
Less than 15	0	0%	0	0%	5	2%	0	0%	5	1%
Between 15 and 17	1	0%	111	45%	32	17%	33	11%	177	18%
Between 18 and 20	32	13%	87	35%	99	51%	87	31%	305	31%
On completing 21	213	87%	48	20%	57	30%	164	58%	482	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Age by which girls usually get married in the community</b>										
Less than 15	0	0%	0	0%	3	1%	0	0%	3	0%
Between 15 and 18	1	0%	24	10%	42	22%	28	10%	95	10%
Between 19 and 21	93	38%	173	70%	120	62%	183	64%	569	59%
After 21	152	62%	49	20%	28	15%	73	26%	302	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

Qualitative findings of the study suggest that even though some parents may prefer to get their children married after they turned adults, due to a lack of educational opportunities and financial limitations, they 'have to' resort to child marriage.

Further, when probed during FGDs, the responses of the adolescent boys and girls were different from those of adult members of the community. While almost all the adolescents across the study geographies stated that girls and boys usually get married as children, adult community members, in some cases, insisted that all marriages in their community happen above the legal age of marriage. This difference could be attributed to relatively greater awareness among adults regarding the legal punishments associated with child marriage.

## 4.2. Child marriage as an important social tradition

Apart from the numerous reasons that are often cited as factors that contribute towards the continuation of the practice of child marriage (discussed in detail in Chapter 1 and stated in the following section), it is also the continued importance of child marriage as a social tradition in some communities because of which the practice still exists (Ghosh 2011).

Tables 19-21 outlines the perceived importance of child marriage by the respondents in this study. 59% of parents/parents-in-law stated that child marriage is still considered an important custom in their community. Three-fourths of this respondent group in UP opined the same. However, when the same question was posed to child brides and grooms, the proportion of respondents who felt that child marriage was still a valued custom fell drastically by 31 percentage points. The Chi-square test confirmed that the difference observed between the opinions of the two groups of respondents was statistically significant (95% CI,  $\chi^2=82.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This difference in perception about what is important to the community could most likely be attributed to the generation gap between the two sets of respondents. This is a positive indicator of child marriage losing its significance as a mandatory and socially approved norm with each passing year.

**Table 19: Perceived importance of the child marriage custom in the community**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Parents'/Parents-in-law's perspective</b>										
Yes, it is an important custom	128	52%	185	75%	103	53%	156	55%	572	59%
No it is not an important custom	114	46%	61	25%	88	46%	113	40%	376	39%
Indifferent	4	2%	0	0%	2	1%	15	5%	21	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Parents'/Parents-in-law's perspective</b>										
Yes	44	18%	122	50%	45	23%	62	22%	273	28%
No	179	73%	85	34%	120	62%	178	63%	562	58%
Indifferent	23	9%	39	16%	28	15%	44	15%	134	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

However, both sets of respondents believed that it was more important for girls to get married early (44% of parents/parents-in-law and 45% of child brides/grooms stated this) than it was for boys. Thus, child marriage continues to be a gendered issue even across generations.

In terms of the negative impacts that the practice of child marriage might have on boys and girls, child brides/grooms had relatively better awareness as about one-third (34%) of them recognised that there were ill-effects associated with child marriage, as opposed to only 16% of parents/parents-in-law.

**Table 20: Perceived importance of child marriage (gender-wise) (parents'/parents-in-law's perspective)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>For whom is it more important to get married early?</b>										
Girls	141	57%	93	38%	87	45%	109	38%	430	44%
Boys	25	10%	2	1%	19	10%	34	12%	80	8%
Equally Important	80	33%	151	61%	87	45%	141	50%	459	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Are there any ill-effects of child marriage?</b>										
Yes	53	22%	52	21%	12	6%	37	13%	154	16%
No	192	78%	153	62%	146	76%	196	69%	687	71%
Indifferent	1	0%	41	17%	35	18%	51	18%	128	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 21: Perceived importance of child marriage (gender-wise) (child brides'/child grooms' perspective)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>For whom is it more important to get married early?</b>										
Girls	143	58%	96	39%	92	48%	108	38%	439	45%
Boys	28	11%	4	2%	15	8%	80	28%	127	13%
Equally Important	75	31%	146	59%	86	44%	96	34%	403	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Are there any ill-effects of child marriage?</b>										
Yes	132	54%	60	24%	22	11%	117	41%	331	34%
No	111	45%	160	65%	141	73%	108	38%	520	54%
Indifferent	3	1%	26	11%	30	16%	59	21%	118	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

Those who did recognise (including those who were indifferent) that there were adverse consequences associated with child marriage were further probed to list what these were. The ill-effects cited by the parents/parents-in-law and child brides/grooms are shown in Tables 22 and 23, respectively. The majority of respondents (78% of parents/parents-in-law and 85% of child brides/grooms) were aware of the potential health risks associated with adolescent pregnancy. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 of the report. Findings from FGDs also indicate awareness among community members regarding these health risks. Most of them listed child marriage and, in turn, teenage pregnancy as leading to low-birth weight of the child and a risk of maternal mortality and child mortality. *"If girls get married before the age of 18 then there is risk of low weight of the new-born baby, risk to their own life during pregnancy and also the mental pressure."* – **A male community member, Kandhamal (Odisha)**

Aside from that, 57% of parents/parents-in-law and 70% of child brides/grooms reported an increased risk of domestic violence, exploitation and abuse as a negative consequence of child marriage. Some studies have also estimated that child brides are almost twice more likely to have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence than those married after 18 (Kidman 2016; ICRW 2014). *"There is emotional and mental pressure on girls to do all the work and in-laws also pressurise them to work better. They have more responsibilities. Sometimes, in-laws torture the girl mentally."* – **A male community member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

While only 28% of parents considered dropping out of school as a demerit of child marriage for girls, 43% of child brides or grooms talked about this issue. About one-third of both sets of respondents mentioned curtailed livelihood opportunities for girls post-marriage.

**Table 22: Perceived ill-effects of child marriage on girls (parents'/parents-in-law's perspective)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Risk of early pregnancy, thereby risking both mother and baby	45	83%	71	76%	23	49%	131	86%	270	78%
Increased risk of domestic violence, exploitation and abuse	44	81%	25	27%	21	45%	107	70%	197	57%
No opportunity for girls to work outside	35	65%	39	41%	17	36%	23	15%	114	33%
Risk of sexually transmitted diseases	30	56%	22	23%	23	49%	33	22%	108	31%
Dropping out from school/colleges	24	44%	19	20%	21	45%	34	22%	98	28%
Risk on mental growth	27	50%	26	28%	13	28%	21	14%	87	25%

\*Multiple responses recorded

**Table 23: Perceived ill-effects of child marriage on girls (child brides'/grooms' perspective)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Risk of early pregnancy, thereby risking both mother and baby	129	96%	71	81%	28	54%	154	88%	382	85%
Increased risk of domestic violence, exploitation and abuse	120	89%	41	47%	22	42%	133	76%	316	70%
Dropping out from school/colleges	103	76%	25	28%	25	48%	41	23%	194	43%
Risk of sexually transmitted diseases	117	87%	20	23%	19	37%	33	19%	189	42%
No opportunity for girls to work outside	42	31%	18	20%	16	31%	34	19%	110	24%
Risk on mental growth	23	17%	20	23%	23	44%	18	10%	84	19%

\*Multiple responses recorded

In terms of the ill-effects of child marriage on boys (listed in Table 24), both sets of respondents answered alike. Unlike in the case of girls, dropping out of school or college was seen as the prime impact of child marriage on boys (60% of child brides/grooms stated it). This was followed by having to start working at an early age (51%), increased financial and family responsibility (50%), risk of early parenthood and the increased responsibilities that come with it (39%), mental pressure to earn more (33%) and risk of sexually transmitted diseases (16%).

**Table 24: Perceived ill-effects of child marriage on boys (child brides'/grooms' perspective)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dropping out of school/college	43	32%	68	56%	18	35%	162	92%	291	60%
Start working at an early age	64	47%	79	65%	26	50%	78	44%	247	51%
Increased family/financial responsibility	75	56%	70	58%	26	50%	71	40%	242	50%
Risk of early parenthood and increased responsibilities	44	33%	67	55%	27	52%	49	28%	187	39%
Mental pressure to earn more	50	37%	67	55%	19	37%	23	13%	159	33%
Risk of sexually transmitted diseases	24	18%	6	5%	8	15%	41	23%	79	16%

\*Multiple responses recorded

### 4.3. Reasons for the continued practice of child marriage

Numerous factors that contribute to the practice of child marriage have been extensively documented. It includes, but is not limited to, household-level factors such as poor financial status, children's educational status, work status and parental characteristics; and socio-cultural factors such as religion, customs, traditions, perceptions around gender roles and community pressures. (Parsons, Edmeades, Kes, Petroni, Sexton and Quentin 2015; Kamal, Hassan, Alam and Ying 2014; Santhya, Haberland and Singh 2006; Mourtada 2017).

In this study, both sets of respondents cited similar reasons that lead to children being married young. Opinions of child brides or grooms on why girls continue to be married before the age of 18 have been reported in Table 25. The most commonly cited reason was that it is easier to find grooms for girls when they are young (66%), followed by that it is easier for girls to adapt to their new homes (57%). Younger (and less educated) brides also require less dowry, which incentivises parents to marry daughters at a younger age (50%). This was followed by pressure from peers or relatives (41%). This pressure of abiding by common community practice came out in qualitative findings as well.

*"People living nearby, like relatives, neighbours, etc. pressurise parents to marry off their daughters when they reach a certain age. They start badmouthing girls' reputations and character if they aren't married by the early teens".* - **A male community member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

Fear of a girl's safety and fear of her having a 'love affair' were cited as determinants of child marriage by 26% and 25% of child brides/grooms, respectively. During FGDs with both adolescents and community members, the most talked about reason was parents' fear of their daughters eloping and/or indulging in premarital sex. They believed that if anything 'improper' of this sort was to happen, there would be grave consequences for both the girl and her family's reputation.

*"Child marriage is happening because if we don't marry children on time, then they have love affairs."* - **A male community member, Kandhamal (Odisha)**

*"People consider girls a burden. Parents are scared due to rising rape cases in the country. They also fear that their girl might runaway and marry a guy, which would ruin their reputation in society. Girls and boys get into physical relationships, which is not acceptable in society."* - **A female community member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

About 24% of child brides/grooms also state that the community feels it would be difficult to find a groom for girls if they aren't married early and even more difficult if they study further and get over-qualified. This argument was explained by adolescents during qualitative interactions.

*"Some people say that it is easier to marry off an uneducated girl and no problems arise during the marriage. But it is hard for educated girls to marry off, and it takes time because educated girls have expectations of marrying an educated man."* - **An adolescent girl, 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."* - **An adolescent boy, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

*"It is harder to get a higher-educated girl married because then a higher-educated husband will have to be chosen for her. Parents will have to give more dowry and ensure that the husband is a good job holder. Sometimes, inter-caste marriages also have to be arranged because of these issues."* - **An adolescent girl, Chittoor (AP)**

A few of the child brides/grooms (19%) surveyed also pointed out that parents faced financial constraints in getting their children educated which eventually led them to marry their children at a young age.

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

**Table 25: Reasons to get girls married as a child (child brides'/grooms' perspective)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Easier to find groom for young girls	199	81%	101	41%	89	46%	253	89%	642	66%
Easier for her to adapt to new family	227	92%	96	39%	69	36%	162	57%	554	57%
Less dowry	131	53%	73	30%	67	35%	212	75%	483	50%
Pressure from peer groups/relatives	139	57%	122	50%	89	46%	45	16%	395	41%
Ensures her safety	92	37%	109	44%	41	21%	14	5%	256	26%
Fear of her having affair/getting eloped	26	11%	52	21%	50	26%	111	39%	239	25%
Difficult to get groom if they aren't married early and they get over-qualified	137	56%	47	19%	37	19%	12	4%	233	24%
Extra financial burden on family	21	9%	57	23%	44	23%	66	23%	188	19%
Lack of job opportunities for girls	94	38%	33	13%	21	11%	9	3%	157	16%
Lack of educational opportunities (no school/college)	27	11%	13	5%	5	3%	13	5%	58	6%

\*Multiple responses recorded

Apart from girls, the study also explored the community's reasons for getting boys married in their adolescent years. Reasons reported by child brides or grooms have been presented in Table 26. Some of the reasons were similar to those cited for girls as well, like pressure from peer groups/relatives (cited by 64% of child brides/grooms), ease in finding a bride for young boys (53%) and fear of having an affair (48%). A distinct reason that emerged in the case of boys was the perception of making them more responsible (cited by 61% of child brides/grooms) by having an early push to start a 'family of their own' (37%) and start earning to provide for the family (29%). Qualitative findings triangulate this rationale.

*"Boys prefer to marry, and they don't have much interest in studying. They get married at an early age because they fear that no girl's parents will give their daughter to a boy after a certain age."* - **A male community member, Chandauli (UP)**

*"If boys get married at an early age, then they have more responsibilities and get busy. There is no other reason behind it."* - **A female community member, Chandauli (UP)**

**Table 26: Reasons to get boys married as a child (child brides'/grooms' perspective)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pressure from peer groups / relatives	199	81%	85	35%	86	45%	252	89%	622	64%
Makes him responsible	194	79%	132	54%	117	61%	147	52%	590	61%
Easier to find bride for young boys	205	83%	107	43%	69	36%	130	46%	511	53%
Fear of him having affair/ getting eloped	90	37%	95	39%	108	56%	168	59%	461	48%
Early push to start a family of his own	158	64%	135	55%	42	22%	22	8%	357	37%
Ensures he starts earning	116	47%	102	41%	33	17%	26	9%	277	29%
Can find more suitable girl if he studies and gets over-qualified	45	18%	31	13%	28	15%	25	9%	129	13%
Lack of educational opportunities (no school/ college)	29	12%	19	8%	16	8%	32	11%	96	10%

\*Multiple responses recorded

Contrary to fear of getting 'over-qualified' (cited by 13% of child brides/grooms), lack of access to educational facilities also acts as an impetus to child marriage for both boys and girls. A boy from AP explains:

*"After class VII, we have to go to a school which is 7 km away, which is extremely difficult as there is no good transportation system in place. Hence, most of the boys and girls drop out of school. Since they aren't studying, parents are scared they will just roam around and tarnish the family image by having love affairs. So, children are married off as soon as they discontinue school".*

- **An adolescent boy, Chittoor (AP)**

Even though the importance of child marriage as a traditional practice has declined over time, it still continues to be a significant societal norm for many. Due to perceived notions pertaining to women's honour, safety and a myriad of other factors like financial constraints, lack of access to educational facilities, lack of livelihood opportunities, etc., people in multiple communities still prefer to get their daughters married during their adolescent years (mostly between 15-17 years of age). Awareness regarding the potential social, mental and economic impacts of child marriage remains low among this group of people.

**IMPACT  
OF  
CHILD MARRIAGE**

Child marriage has multi-faceted effects on girls (discussed in detail in Chapter 1). While there are many other social and psychological impacts of child marriage, this Chapter discusses some broad effects it has on girls' educational attainment, livelihood opportunities and sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

## 5.1. Educational attainment level (and barriers to education)

Literature suggests that there is a strong relationship between age at marriage, female literacy level and other indices of development. There is a bi-directional relationship between education and child marriage. Studies suggest that low educational attainment among girls leads to a higher incidence of child marriage, and similarly, child marriage leads to a higher incidence of school dropouts among girls (World Bank 2017; Birchall 2018; Sekine and Hodgkin 2017; Ghosh 2011; Ghosh, Kar and Mohan 2010). The NFHS-IV report also suggests that women who have had 12 or more years of schooling marry much later than other women. As per the report, the median age at first marriage for women aged 25–49 increases from 17.2 years for women with no schooling to 22.7 years for women with 12 or more years of schooling.

Tables 27 and 28 give a snapshot of the educational status of child brides and grooms surveyed in the study. The study findings reflect that while 50% of child brides in this study had never attended school, and the same was true for 18% of child grooms. 13% of overall child brides completed class V, 13% completed class VIII, and 18% completed class X. The remaining 6% of women obtained a higher secondary education. About 76% of overall child brides confirmed that their spouse went to school. Although a higher proportion of child grooms completed their secondary (25%) and higher secondary education (14%), like child brides in the study, none of them went on to complete graduation or post-graduation. Only 14% of the child brides those who had ever been to school said they were able to continue their education after marriage.

**Table 27: Educational profile of child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent ever attended school</b>										
Yes	78	49%	42	43%	93	52%	118	53%	331	50%
No	80	51%	56	57%	85	48%	105	47%	326	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Respondent ever attended school</b>										
Uneducated	80	51%	56	57%	85	48%	105	47%	326	50%
Primary (till class 5th)	13	8%	23	24%	18	10%	29	13%	83	13%
Upper Primary (till class 8th)	15	9%	13	13%	41	23%	16	7%	85	13%
Secondary (till class 10th)	31	20%	1	1%	28	16%	62	28%	122	18%
Higher Secondary (11th-12th)	19	12%	5	5%	6	3%	11	5%	41	6%
Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Post-Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Child brides continuing education post marriage</b>										
Yes, Continued	31	40%	1	2%	3	3%	13	11%	48	14%
No, Did not continue	47	60%	41	98%	90	97%	105	89%	283	86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>42</b>		<b>93</b>		<b>118</b>		<b>331</b>	
<b>Spouse ever attended school</b>										
Yes	110	70%	68	69%	116	65%	207	93%	501	76%
No	34	21%	23	24%	48	27%	13	6%	118	18%
Don't Know	14	9%	7	7%	14	8%	3	1%	38	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Spouse's highest educational attainment</b>										
Uneducated	34	24%	23	25%	48	29%	13	6%	118	19%
Primary (till class 5th)	12	8%	23	25%	18	11%	13	6%	66	11%
Upper Primary (till class 8th)	9	6%	35	39%	62	38%	58	26%	164	26%
Secondary (till class 10th)	52	36%	9	10%	32	20%	104	47%	197	32%
Higher Secondary (11th-12th)	37	26%	1	1%	4	2%	32	15%	74	12%
Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Post-Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>		<b>91</b>		<b>164</b>		<b>220</b>		<b>619</b>	
<b>Continuation of spouse's education post marriage</b>										
Yes	40	36%	0	0%	3	3%	4	2%	47	9%
No	70	64%	68	100%	113	97%	203	98%	454	91%
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>		<b>68</b>		<b>116</b>		<b>207</b>		<b>501</b>	

**Table 28: Educational profile of men aged 20-24 years**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent ever attended school</b>										
Yes	46	52%	139	94%	9	60%	61	100%	255	82%
No	42	48%	9	6%	6	40%	0	0%	57	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>312</b>	

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent's highest educational attainment</b>										
Uneducated	42	48%	9	6%	6	40%	0	0%	57	18%
Primary (till class 5th)	3	3%	34	23%	2	13%	6	10%	45	14%
Upper Primary (till class 8th)	12	14%	54	36%	4	27%	20	33%	90	29%
Secondary (till class 10th)	19	21%	31	21%	3	20%	25	41%	78	25%
Higher Secondary (11th-12th)	12	14%	20	14%	0	0%	10	16%	42	14%
Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Post-Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>312</b>	
<b>Continuation of education post marriage</b>										
Yes	11	24%	11	8%	0	0%	4	7%	26	10%
No	35	76%	128	92%	9	100%	57	93%	229	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>		<b>139</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>255</b>	
<b>Spouse ever attended school</b>										
Yes	31	35%	35	24%	9	60%	30	49%	105	34%
No	40	46%	113	76%	6	40%	29	48%	188	60%
Don't Know	17	19%	0	0%	0	0%	2	3%	19	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>312</b>	
<b>Spouse's highest educational attainment</b>										
Uneducated	40	57%	113	76%	6	40%	29	49%	188	64%
Primary (till class 5th)	8	11%	21	14%	2	13%	7	12%	38	13%
Upper Primary (till class 8th)	1	1%	11	8%	6	40%	8	14%	26	9%
Secondary (till class 10th)	13	18%	1	1%	1	7%	15	25%	30	10%
Higher Secondary (11th-12th)	9	13%	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	11	4%
Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Post-Graduate	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>		<b>148</b>		<b>15</b>		<b>59</b>		<b>293</b>	
<b>Continuation of education post marriage</b>										
Yes	11	35%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	10%
No	20	65%	35	100%	9	100%	30	100%	94	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>		<b>35</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>105</b>	

Child marriage has been one of the major reasons for adolescents to drop out of schools for decades now (Wils 2019; FHI 2013). According to the District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS) report<sup>53</sup>, marriage was the reason for dropping out of school for 4.5% of girls and 0.2% of boys. Apart from child marriage, a plethora of reasons have been documented for girls, in particular, those that lead to girls dropping out of school. Some of them are the preference of households to invest in the education of male children rather than female children (Tilak 2020; Pandey et. al. 2019); high cost of education including the out-of-pocket and opportunity costs (Chanana 2014); a lack of learning while in school and a lack of interest in being in school (Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen and Onagoruwa 2018); 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 (Rachel 2019).

In the study, 55% of female respondents who were 'child brides' were working at the time of the interview. About 37% of these respondents did unpaid domestic work, whereas 6% reported being unemployed. State-wise variations were observed as in the states of UP and Maharashtra, more than half of these respondents (51% and 56%, respectively) were limited to household chores. Of those who were employed, the majority worked as agricultural labourers. This could be attributed to the low educational attainment levels of these women that restrict employment opportunities for them.

**Table 29: Occupational profile of women respondents**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Respondent's current occupational profile</b>										
Agricultural labourer	86	55%	12	12%	92	51%	64	29%	254	39%
Housewife	39	25%	50	51%	32	18%	124	56%	245	37%
Self-employed (Agriculture)	2	1%	1	1%	20	11%	30	13%	53	8%
Unemployed	0	0%	13	14%	28	16%	0	0%	41	6%
Non-Agricultural labourer	10	6%	15	15%	4	2%	4	2%	33	5%
Service (Private)	18	11%	2	2%	1	1%	0	0%	21	3%
Self-employed (Non-Agriculture)	2	1%	5	5%	1	1%	1	0%	9	2%
Service (Government)	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	

## 5.2. Impact of child marriage on sexual and reproductive health of women and health outcomes on children

Child marriage has been negatively associated with the health and well-being of a woman and her child. It leads to early childbearing, which is also linked with poor maternal health outcomes, including pregnancy complications, maternal morbidity

53 The detailed report can be accessed at: [http://rchiips.org/pdf/india\\_report\\_dlhs-3.pdf](http://rchiips.org/pdf/india_report_dlhs-3.pdf)

and mortality, closed-space pregnancies<sup>54</sup> and unwanted pregnancy. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of poor infant and child health outcomes. Such early motherhood, in India and elsewhere, is associated with an increased likelihood of neonatal death and stillbirth, low birth-weight infants, malnutrition (stunted, wasted, underweight) infants, and child and infant morbidity and mortality (Paul 2018; Godha 2013; Adhikari 2009; UNICEF 2006; Mehra 2004; Abdullah 2000; Jejeebhoy 1995). Maternal mortality is the second leading cause of death for adolescent girls aged 15–19 years (after suicide) (WHO 2016). Adolescent girls who become pregnant have poorer nutrition and health, which increases the risk of foetal, perinatal and maternal death and disability by up to 50% (Black et al. 2006). Early marriages also give rise to intergenerational malnutrition as the mothers are mostly from poor households and are generally anaemic or underweight which results in the birth of a child that is underweight or not fit for survival. Even in cases where the child survives, the family's financial situation prevents the child from receiving proper nutrition, and the child suffers from poor health. These children are then married off at an early age and the cycle continues. With no education about sexual health and no means for a healthy diet, the cycle of malnutrition continues and keeps putting both the life of the mother and the child at risk (Paul, Zaveri and Chouhan 2019). The study investigated some of these maternal and child health outcomes.

The majority of the 657 child brides surveyed (63%) had two pregnancies at the time of the survey, while 18% had none (Table 30). 19% of women who had at least one pregnancy had one child, and 81% had two or more children. In terms of the time between pregnancies, more than half of the women respondents (child brides) (51%), who had at least two children, reported a gap of less than two years. This proportion was highest in the state of UP (56%).

**Table 30: Number of children child brides have and age gap between them**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Total number of pregnancies<sup>55</sup></b>										
0	57	36%	8	8%	36	20%	15	7%	116	18%
1	42	27%	1	1%	21	12%	23	10%	87	13%
2	58	37%	80	82%	108	61%	169	76%	415	63%
3	1	0%	7	7%	13	7%	14	6%	35	5%
4	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	2	1%	4	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Total number of children (live births)</b>										
0	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%
1	45	45%	1	1%	24	17%	34	16%	104	19%
>2	56	55%	88	98%	118	83%	174	84%	436	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>90</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>541</b>	

54 Closed space pregnancy refers to pregnancies that do not have sufficient time between two children and thus risking health outcomes for both women and the child.

55 Respondents were asked total number of times they were pregnant. This includes both successful and unsuccessful pregnancies.

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Difference between the age of first and second child*</b>										
≤ 2 years	22	39%	49	56%	57	48%	96	55%	224	51%
≥ 2 years	34	61%	39	44%	61	52%	78	45%	212	49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>		<b>88</b>		<b>118</b>		<b>174</b>		<b>436</b>	

\*Conditioned on women who have more than 2 children

Tables 31 and 32 indicate the minimum proportion of teenage mothers among the child brides in the study. At least 59% of the child brides had teenage pregnancies. This proportion was highest in the state of AP (78%), closely followed by Maharashtra (73%). It is important to note that this is the minimum proportion of teenage pregnancy as the interview schedule only inquired about having a child in the first year of the marriage. Thus, for instance, in the case of a girl who got married at the age of 14, even though she did not have a child in the first year of her marriage, she could still have been a teenage mother if she had a child in the second year of her marriage. Moreover, she could possibly have had multiple teenage pregnancies. This information has not been captured in the study, though.

**Table 31: Child brides who had a child in the first year of their marriage (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	79	78%	51	57%	36	25%	152	73%	318	59%
No	22	22%	38	43%	106	75%	56	27%	222	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

**Table 32: Child brides who had a child in the first year of their marriage (age-wise)**

Age at marriage	Yes		No		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
13	3	60%	2	40%	5
14	6	86%	1	14%	7
15	25	60%	17	40%	42
16	126	60%	83	40%	209
17	158	57%	119	43%	277
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>540</b>

Lack of education and inadequate access to health care (because of impeded mobility as well as residence in rural areas with no local providers) may also account for adolescents' lower use of antenatal care, skilled delivery care and complete infant vaccination schedules (Raj 2010). During FGDs, an adolescent boy explained.

"There are chances of early pregnancy if girls get married at an early age. But they have to submit an Aadhar card and age proof if they want to get admitted to government hospitals, so in that case, they are taken to a private hospital since they are under age. Private hospitals are expensive and not everyone can afford them." - **An adolescent boy, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

Thus, many teenage mothers aren't able to get access to proper health care, which contributes to poor maternal and child health outcomes. Table 33 shows the birth weights of the child brides' children. In this study, 17% and 16% of child brides reported that their first and second child had low birth weight<sup>56</sup> respectively. The highest proportion of child brides from Odisha reported low birth-weight for their children. It is to be noted that these are self-reported, and the birth-weight of the child wasn't cross-checked via the Mother Child Protection (MCP) card. Table 34 shows that 15% of child brides had their first non-institutional delivery. This proportion was yet again the highest in the state of Odisha (23%). Most of the remaining child brides had their first child delivered at a local dispensary.

**Table 33: Weight of children born to child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Weight of the first child</b>										
Less than 2.5 Kg	13	13%	8	9%	37	26%	35	17%	93	17%
More than 2.5 Kg	84	83%	28	31%	89	63%	171	82%	372	69%
Don't Remember	4	4%	53	60%	16	11%	2	1%	75	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	
<b>Weight of the second child</b>										
Less than 2.5 Kg	3	5%	16	18%	24	20%	25	14%	68	
More than 2.5 Kg	53	95%	59	67%	74	63%	143	82%	329	
Don't Remember	0	0%	13	15%	20	17%	6	3%	39	
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>		<b>88</b>		<b>118</b>		<b>174</b>		<b>436</b>	

**Table 34: Institutional birth of children born to child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At home	6	6%	17	19%	32	23%	24	12%	79	15%
At nearby government hospital	5	5%	7	8%	8	6%	25	12%	45	8%
At local dispensary/ clinic	90	89%	65	73%	102	72%	159	76%	416	77%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

<sup>56</sup> 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](https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/globaltargets_lowbirthweight_policybrief.pdf)

Child brides who had at least one child were asked questions regarding maternity care and their awareness pertaining to different aspects of sexual and reproductive health (Table 35-38). Antenatal care (ANC)<sup>57</sup> is essential for the health of mothers and their unborn children. Through this form of preventive health care, women can learn from skilled health personnel about healthy behaviours during pregnancy, better understand warning signs during pregnancy and childbirth, and receive social, emotional, and psychological support at this critical time in their lives (UNICEF 2021).

However, 31% of the 540 child brides who had at least one child did not have regular health check-ups<sup>58</sup> prior to the birth of their first child, and this percentage was comparatively high in Odisha (65%). Of those who did, reportedly, 69% had their check-ups done at a government dispensary or hospital, 19% went to a local physician, and 12% visited a local midwife ('daai'). Nonetheless, 47% of these women who sought health advice did not complete all four ANC check-ups. This is consistent with the findings of the NFHS-V (2019-21), which indicate that 58.1% of mothers in India received at least four ANC check-ups. Overall, only 62% of women received information on the importance of these health check-ups. This was true for only 18% of child brides in Odisha. As per NFHS-IV (2015-16) data, 18.3% of women aged 20-29 years reported getting permission to visit health facilities as one of the major issues in accessing healthcare. As per the study findings, in the case of child brides, 42% of the respondents were not allowed to visit health facilities alone. About two-thirds of child brides in the study states of UP and Odisha (63% and 65%) were denied access to health facilities on their own.

**Table 35: Antenatal care of child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Did they go for regular health check-ups before the birth of the child</b>										
Yes	65	64%	72	81%	49	35%	186	89%	372	69%
No	36	36%	17	19%	93	65%	22	11%	168	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	
<b>Did they have all 4 ANC check-ups?*</b>										
Yes	45	69%	14	19%	27	55%	110	59%	196	53%
No	20	31%	58	81%	22	45%	76	41%	176	47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>		<b>72</b>		<b>49</b>		<b>186</b>		<b>372</b>	
<b>Whom did they go for these check-ups?*</b>										
Local Midwife	32	49%	1	1%	9	19%	1	1%	43	12%
Local Physician	3	5%	3	4%	33	67%	32	17%	71	19%
At government dispensary /hospital	30	46%	68	95%	7	14%	153	82%	258	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>		<b>72</b>		<b>49</b>		<b>186</b>		<b>372</b>	

57 Antenatal care is the systemic supervision of women during pregnancy to monitor the progress of foetal growth and to ascertain the well-being of the mother and the foetus. A proper antenatal check-up provides necessary care to the mother and helps identify any complications of pregnancy such as anaemia, pre-eclampsia and hypertension etc. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India directs to ensure that every pregnant woman makes at least four visits for ANC, including the first visit/registration. This is only a minimum requirement and that more visits may be necessary, depending on the woman's condition and needs. More information on the government mandate can be accessed at [https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/programmes/maternal-health/guidelines/sba\\_guidelines\\_for\\_skilled\\_attendance\\_at\\_birth.pdf](https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/programmes/maternal-health/guidelines/sba_guidelines_for_skilled_attendance_at_birth.pdf)

58 Regular health-checkups refers to attending recommended follow-ups with the medical professionals (as directed by the professionals based on individual needs).

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Did they receive information regarding the importance of such check-ups ?</b>										
Yes	66	65%	65	73%	25	18%	178	86%	334	62%
No	35	35%	24	27%	117	82%	30	14%	206	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	
<b>Are they allowed to visit health facilities alone</b>										
Yes	68	67%	33	37%	49	35%	163	78%	313	58%
No	33	33%	56	63%	93	65%	45	22%	227	42%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

*\*Conditioned on women who went for regular health check-up before the birth of their child*

In terms of being aware of the risks associated with early pregnancy, 51% of child brides said they were. The awareness level was lowest (13%) in the state of Odisha. Of those who did know about any such risks, most of them associated teenage pregnancy with low birth-weight of the child (80%), followed by the mother's being at a risk of becoming anaemic (69%), complications at the time of delivery (63%), high blood pressure of mothers (31%) and premature delivery of the child (24%).

**Table 36: Awareness of child brides regarding risks associated with early pregnancy**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	60	59%	39	44%	19	13%	156	75%	274	51%
No	41	41%	50	56%	123	87%	52	25%	266	49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

**Table 37: Risks associated with early pregnancy (as reported by child brides)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Low birth weight of child	48	80%	19	49%	9	47%	144	92%	220	80%
Mother becoming anaemic	34	57%	30	77%	8	42%	116	74%	188	69%
Complications at the time of delivery	41	68%	17	44%	10	53%	104	67%	172	63%
High BP of mother	57	95%	6	15%	13	68%	9	6%	85	31%
Premature delivery	31	52%	6	15%	6	32%	23	15%	66	24%

*\*Multiple responses were recorded*

Contraceptive methods have a range of benefits other than their primary purpose of pregnancy prevention. Contraception reduces pregnancy-related morbidity and mortality, reduces the risk of developing certain reproductive cancers and can be used to treat many menstrual-related symptoms and disorders (Kavanaugh and Anderson 2013). Social norms that pressure girls to give birth early are compounded by young people's limited access to and awareness of sexual and reproductive health services (Roest 2016). According to the NFHS-V India Fact Sheet, between 2015–16 and 2019–21, the use of modern contraceptive methods by currently married women aged 15–49 years in India increased from 47.8% to 56.5%.

The study findings reveal that this proportion is even lower for child brides. Only 17% of child brides (mothers) in the study reported using any form of contraception prior to the birth of their first child. This proportion was lowest in the state of UP (4%). A little more than one-fourth of these respondents (28%) reportedly had a say in the use of contraception. Again, this participation in the decision-making was recorded by the lowest proportion of child brides from UP (only 1%).

**Table 38: Use of contraception by child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Use of contraception before the birth of first child</b>										
Yes	46	46%	4	4%	18	13%	24	12%	92	17%
No	55	54%	85	96%	124	87%	184	88%	448	83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	
<b>Did they have a say in use of contraception?</b>										
Yes	40	40%	1	1%	16	11%	95	46%	152	28%
No	61	60%	88	99%	126	89%	113	54%	388	72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

According to the findings of the NFHS-IV (2015-16), knowledge of contraceptive methods is almost universal in India (both urban and rural), with approximately 99% of currently married women being aware of female sterilization. However, the study findings reflect that in the case of child brides, this awareness level was low by almost 50%. 49% of child brides reported being aware of male or female sterilisation. The state of Odisha had the lowest level of awareness, with only 2% of child brides reporting knowledge.

**Table 39: Awareness and practice of sterilisation in child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness about male/female sterilisation</b>										
Yes	63	62%	73	82%	3	2%	128	62%	267	49%
No	38	38%	16	18%	139	98%	80	38%	273	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>		<b>89</b>		<b>142</b>		<b>208</b>		<b>540</b>	

*\*Conditioned on being aware of male/female sterilization*

### 5.3. Physical mobility

Child marriage could have an impact on the physical mobility of girls, restricting their ability to interact and socialise with family and other community members. Some aspects of this impact have been shown in Table 40. About one-fourth (23%) of women reported that they hardly ever got permission to visit their parents. Almost three times this proportion (64%) of child brides in UP were hardly or never allowed to visit their parents. One-third of child brides were not allowed to go outside the house alone. This was the case for most of the child brides in UP (58%), followed by Odisha (51%). Similarly, 44% of child brides were not permitted to socialise with friends. The situation was worse for child brides in UP and Odisha, as 84% and 79% of child brides from these study states reported being denied permission to interact with friends outside their house. This could potentially hamper the mental, social and emotional well-being of these women, as it is imperative for the psychological well-being of a person to have their friends and family members around as a social support structure (Steele and Steele 2012; Brannan, Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi and Stein 2013). However, across countries, child brides reported far fewer interactions with family and non-family members, and faced isolation, confinement and inadequate socialisation (Jones et al. 2019). This isolation also limits girls' access to sexual and reproductive health (Jain and Kurz 2007).

**Table 40: Restrictions on physical mobility of child brides**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Permission to visit their parents</b>										
Always	122	77%	12	12%	52	29%	38	17%	224	34%
Often	20	13%	23	24%	112	63%	124	56%	279	43%
Hardly	16	10%	61	62%	14	8%	61	27%	152	23%
Never	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Permission to go outside the house alone</b>										
Yes	133	84%	41	42%	87	49%	172	77%	433	66%
No	25	16%	57	58%	91	51%	51	23%	224	34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Permission to go out and socialise with friends</b>										
Yes	133	84%	16	16%	38	21%	178	80%	365	56%
No	25	16%	82	84%	140	79%	45	20%	292	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	



**SYSTEMIC  
RESPONSE AND  
GAPS OR  
CONVERGENCE  
BETWEEN  
COMMUNITY  
AND SYSTEM**

## 6.1. Reported trend of child marriage and impact of COVID-19

### 6.1.1. Trend of child marriage in last 5 years

The prevalence of child marriage in India has declined over the years. According to the NFHS-III (2005-06) data, 47.4% of women aged 20–24 years married before the age of 18. By the NFHS-IV (2015-16), this proportion had dropped to 26.8%, indicating a significant reduction of 21 percentage points at all-India level. As per the latest NFHS-V, (2019-21), India Fact Sheet, it further decreased to 23.3%.

The study district of Parbhani in Maharashtra, however, still has almost half of the women getting married in their middle adolescent years (15–17 years of age). According to NFHS-IV (2015-16) data, in Parbhani, 44.5% of women (overall) and 53.3% of women in rural areas aged 20–24 married before the age of 18. This is similar to the child marriage rate in India 15 years back (NFHS-III). The District Fact Sheet based on NFHS-V (2019-21) indicated that in Parbhani (48.0%) the percentage of women aged 20-24 years getting married before 18 years has increased from NFHS-IV. A duty bearer in the study district of Parbhani also confirmed that approximately one in two women in the district got married before they turned 18. He elaborated, *"There is no doubt that this ratio (one out of every two) is approximately correct. Child marriages happen here, but there is no information available, and there is no case filed. Most cases of child marriage happen during September to December because that is the time when people start to migrate for sugarcane reaping."* – **A duty bearer, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

In total, roughly one-fourth of respondents stated that there has been no change in the incidence of child marriage over the last 5 years (excluding 2020, i.e., pre-COVID-19) (Table 41). This could be indicative of a high incidence of child marriage in some specific clusters.

In UP, the majority of respondents (53% of parents/parents-in-law and 51% of child brides/grooms) stated that the number of cases has remained constant over time. One of the duty bearers also claimed that, *"The trend has changed over time and such incidents have decreased." Still, many child marriages happen but go unreported. Most of the child marriages occur on the day of Akshay Tritiya<sup>59</sup>."* – **A duty bearer, Chandauli (UP)**

Even one-tenth of both parents/parents-in-law and child brides/grooms opined that the incidence of child marriage had increased. Half of these respondents were from AP.

However, in tandem with the NFHS findings, the majority of both community members and officials from the study districts confirmed that there has been a decline in the prevalence of child marriage over the past 5 years. The relatively highest proportion of respondents from AP (76% of parents/parents in-law, and child brides/grooms) confirmed that it had, in fact, decreased over time. Duty bearers from AP also confirmed the same.

*"Earlier, there were many cases of child marriages in the Chittoor district, but that has decreased over time. The NGO, Gandhi Manav Kalyan Society (GMKS) and local village level CMPOs were and are doing awareness programmes in every village, and due to this, child marriages are decreasing."* – **A duty bearer, Chittoor (AP)**

59 In the Hindu calendar, Akshay Tritiya is considered an auspicious day, and there is no need for a 'Muhurat' on this day. On this day, mass marriages are performed. People who are unable to marry due to financial constraints benefit greatly from these types of mass weddings.

"Child marriage cases are decreasing now due to awareness in society. If anyone wants to get married, they have to get permission from the Mandal (Block) officer, submit age proof and Aadhar cards, and then they get permission certificates." - A police official, Chittoor (AP)

**Table 41: Reported change in incidence of child marriage in last 5 years**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Reported by parents/parents-in-law</b>										
Remained same	9	4%	131	53%	41	21%	76	27%	257	27%
Increased	49	20%	7	3%	15	8%	29	10%	100	10%
Decreased	188	76%	108	44%	137	71%	179	63%	612	63%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Reported by child brides/grooms</b>										
Remained Same	6	2%	125	51%	50	26%	49	17%	230	24%
Increased	53	22%	5	2%	13	7%	29	10%	100	10%
Decreased	187	76%	116	47%	130	67%	206	73%	639	66%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

A majority of the respondents from other study states as well stated that the incidence of child marriage has decreased over the last 5 years (71% of parents/parents-in-law and 67% of child brides/grooms from Odisha and 63% of parents/parents-in-law and 73% of child brides/grooms from Maharashtra). Overall, about two-thirds of the respondents confirmed that there has been a downward trend in cases of child marriages. Most of these respondents credited the increase to the educational attainment level of children in the community for bringing about the decrease in the number of child marriages.

## 6.2. Impact of COVID-19 on incidence of child marriage

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this report, multiple studies point out how COVID-19 has exacerbated the issue of child marriage. Qualitative findings from both IDIs with district-level duty bearers and FGDs with community members indicate an increase in the incidence of child marriages in AP. A duty bearer in Chittoor, AP stated that 43, 63 and 42 child marriages were reported in the years 2017, 2018, and 2019, respectively. Data for such cases reported in 2020 was not available. However, the duty bearer asserted that a greater number of child marriages have been reported since the pandemic. District Fact Sheet for Chittoor based on NFHS-V (2019-21) also asserted that percentage of women aged 20-24 years getting married before the legal age of 18 years increased from 26.6% in 2015-16 to 28.1% in 2019-21. This was triangulated by a police official during IDI, who said

"There was a rise in child marriage cases because we were busy on COVID-19 special duty. I think there must have been at least a two-percentage point increase in the rate of child marriage since COVID-19." – A police official, Chittoor (AP)

In UP and Odisha as well, community members opined that pandemic-related restrictions had no bearing on the incidence of child marriage, and the tradition continued to be practised anyway. During an FGD, a community member explained,

*"COVID-19 has had no impact on child marriage. Those who find a good match and/or want to marry their children do it just like the way it used to be. COVID-19 has no bearing on that decision."* – **A female community member, Chandauli (UP)**

In Maharashtra, however, a contradiction was observed between the opinions of law enforcement agencies and community members. A police official during IDI iterates

*"Yes, cases of child marriage have reduced in the last 6 months because, along with parents, children have become aware of child marriage and its consequences. Because of awareness among children, child marriage can be stopped completely as children oppose to being married at such an early age. We haven't received a single complaint of child marriage during COVID-19 because it was mandatory for Brahmins<sup>60</sup> to take permission from the police for marriage ceremonies."* – **A police official, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

Another duty bearer from Parbhani also reported a decline in the number of child marriage cases.

*"The number of child marriages has decreased in the last six months because during lockdown, police were patrolling all the time, so no one could enter the villages."* – **A duty bearer, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

While some of the participants during FGDs with community members in Parbhani reasoned that the incidence of child marriage had decreased over the past year due to the increased vigilance of the police, FGDs with adolescent girls revealed that in some clusters, people still managed to arrange child marriages in greater numbers than before.

*"More child marriages took place in the village during COVID-19. All marriages took place in the houses only as it was mandatory to get permission from the police before organising any function. There were a few cases of child marriages, and they were done at home due to fear of getting caught by the police. This way, they could save money also."* – **An adolescent girl, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

This reflects a shortcoming in the implementation of systemic norms to prevent child marriages during COVID-19 as people still managed to find a way to organise the weddings. As a few other community members in Parbhani reasoned, *Due to COVID-19 restrictions, fewer guests had to be invited and thus marriages could be arranged at far less expense, which was a huge incentive for many families to get their children married during the pandemic itself."* – **A female community member, Parbhani, (Maharashtra).**

Apart from a direct increase in the cases of child marriage, COVID-19 has also adversely impacted the education and livelihood of communities, making children in the study sites vulnerable to dropping out of school and getting married.

*"Although online classes are available, only a few children are attending them. These classes aren't useful, and we are not able to understand what is being taught. About 80% of the children in the village are not attending any classes."* – **An adolescent girl, Chittoor (AP)**

Similar responses were received by adolescents and other community members during FGDs across all the states wherein inaccessibility to online classes due to financial limitations had led to a loss of education for children in the community.

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<sup>60</sup> Brahmins refer to priests who perform the wedding rituals

*"Yes, COVID-19 has affected education a lot. Online classes are going on but only people who have smartphones can attend them, and those who don't have phones have to face the consequences. They had to borrow it from other people and study at their house, which was very inconvenient and led to missing classes."* – **An adolescent girl, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

*"COVID-19 has affected our education. Schools and colleges are closed due to the pandemic. Online classes have started, but there is no network here, so children miss out on their classes."* – **An adolescent girl, Kandhamal (Odisha)**

According to the qualitative findings, these children are at a greater risk of dropping out of school, making them exposed to the practice of child marriage.

### **6.3. Response mechanisms**

The study undertook IDIs with key duty bearers responsible for preventing child marriages at district level. This includes CMPO, police officials, Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members, and DCPU officials. At village level, the study aimed to conduct IDIs with Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC) members. However, in the majority of the study sites, it could not be conducted. Even the FGDs with community members and adolescent boys and girls reported that community members were not aware of such a committee in their village. Except in Maharashtra, where majorly due to the efforts of CRY's partner organisation 'Sankalp', VCPC was functional in each of their intervention villages. In other study states VCPC could not be ensured during the survey. Hence, limited systemic response at the village level could be documented.

#### **6.3.1. Roles and responsibilities**

Even though the roles of each of these officials are specified in government directives, the officials still enquired about their involvement in preventing child marriages to understand the ground-level functioning of these units.

##### **6.3.1.1. Police officials**

In case a child marriage case is reported, two different approaches were taken by police officials in Parbhani (Maharashtra) and Chittoor (AP). In AP, the police officials reportedly first confirm the information (age proofs) and then give counselling to the girl and boy along their parents. If they are still found on intending to be going against the law, FIR is filed against them. On the contrary, in Maharashtra, the complaint is registered first and the investigation begins thereafter. The child and his/her parents are then produced in front of the CWC. CWC then takes the decision if it is safe for the rescued child to continue living with their parents or should they be sent to child welfare homes. Apart from this, the police officials stated that their responsibilities include creating awareness in villages regarding prevention of child marriages.

*"We conduct awareness campaigns for children in schools. At village level, awareness programmes are conducted for the villagers."* - **A police official, Chittoor (AP)**

##### **6.3.1.2. Child Welfare Committee (CWC)**

Section 31(1) of the Juvenile Justice Act empowers the CWC to be the final authority in disposing cases for the care, protection,

treatment, development and rehabilitation of the children as well as to provide for their basic needs and protection of human rights. CWC therefore has the sole authority to deal with matters concerning children in need of care and protection which includes victims of child marriage (NCPCR 2003). As per the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the committee should consist of a Chairperson, and four other members of whom at least one should be a woman and another an expert on matters concerning children.

In Parbhani, CWC is constituted of five members – three males and two females. In Chandauli, CWC is constituted of one chairperson and three members. In Chittoor, CWC is constituted with one chairperson and two members. Reportedly (by CWC official interviewed in Parbhani district of Maharashtra), prime responsibility of CWC officials is to counsel parents and child once a case of child marriage is presented to them. Once the child is rescued, they are sent to child welfare homes if need be.

*“When a girl or boy is rescued we ask the parents to sign an undertaking before we handover the children to them. If the child refuses to go with parents, then they stay at welfare homes and help them to recover from emotional trauma.” – A CWC member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)*

Similar process was reportedly followed in the study district of AP as well. A Child Welfare Officer was appointed only in the district of Chittoor. His responsibilities include: to coordinate with the police, rescue children in need, providing legal aid to these children and counselling. Post counselling, the information pertaining to the case is forwarded to DCPU, Police department, and Women and Child Development (WCD) officials.

No such mechanism for child rehabilitation is reportedly in place in the study blocks of Chandauli district of UP.

### **6.3.1.3. District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)**

DCPU is a fundamental unit for the implementation of the scheme at district level. The DCPU is supposed to coordinate and implement all child rights and protection activities at the district level<sup>61</sup>.

In this study, DCPUs from study districts in AP and Maharashtra were interviewed. When asked about the responsibilities and practices of the unit, the DCPU officials explained that on receiving a case pertaining to child marriage (mostly via CHILDLINE, Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), the DCPU gets a physical verification of the age of the child, and if they are found to be below the legal minimum age, marriage is stopped in coordination with the police officials. DCPU members also counsel parents. No comprehensive data on the number of households visited, parents counselled, etc. was maintained by these officials. Only a list of all child marriages stopped in their jurisdiction was maintained by them.

### **6.3.1.4. Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)**

As per PCMA 2006, Section 16, all the states are directed to appoint CMPOs who are responsible for preventing the solemnisation of child marriages by taking such action as they may deem fit. Details of their roles have been outlined in the Act. According to the IDI findings, CMPOs are responsible for preventing child marriages at the village level, conducting awareness programs, and counselling parents and children about child marriage prevention. On being informed about a child marriage case, a CMPO is reportedly responsible for first visiting the site and stopping the marriage, informing the police department, reporting to Mandal (block) officials, collecting relevant information from parents and children, presenting the case in front of the CWC, and as per their judgement, if required, sending the child to a welfare home. If children are sent back with their parents, follow-ups are done with them by AWWs, who then give regular updates to the CMPO. Notably, in both UP and Maharashtra, the same official with the DCPU team was responsible for working as CMPO as well.

61 More information can be accessed at <http://dwcd.kar.nic.in:8080/Documents/ICPS%20guide%20line.pdf>

## 6.3.2. Training of the officials

### 6.3.2.1. Police officials

In both the study states wherein police officials were interviewed (Maharashtra and AP), they confirmed that trainings pertaining to the issue of child marriage were conducted at regular intervals for them. The trainings also talked about child labour, bonded labour and crime against women and children. Since COVID-19, the trainings have been held via the Zoom platform. Trainings were usually conducted by district judges or WCD members or organised by some local non-governmental organisation (NGO). The officials found these trainings to be extremely helpful.

### 6.3.2.2. District Child Protection Unit (DCPU)

DCPU is supposed to conduct training and build the capacity of all personnel working in child protection programmes at all levels<sup>62</sup>. In this study, the DCPU officials confirmed that they conduct training for departments like WCD, police, education, health, etc. pertaining to child protection issues, including child marriage. Training and building the capacity of all personnel working in child protection programmes at all levels is one of the key functions of DCPU. These trainings were reportedly conducted twice a year in AP and four to five times a year in Maharashtra. While no such trainings have been conducted since COVID-19 in AP, these are being arranged via online mediums in Maharashtra.

### 6.3.2.3. Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)

CMPO of Chittoor (AP) reported that they also attend district level trainings on issues pertaining to child marriage, girl child harassment, sexual abuse, ragging, etc. These are conducted by senior police officials, WCD officials and NGOs. These trainings are reportedly conducted twice a year.

## 6.3.3. Specific Initiatives by departments/state

### 6.3.3.1. Police officials

Police officials in both Maharashtra and AP confirmed that they had organised workshops at village level and in schools to raise awareness pertaining to the issue of child marriage. At state-level, the DISHA Act<sup>63</sup> is being implemented in AP. As per the official *"The DISHA Act (not amended officially yet) is working well for children and women. Under the Act, a complaint has to be immediately filed, and the culprit needs to be sent to jail within 30 days."* – **A police official, Chittoor (AP)**

## 6.3.4. Challenges faced by duty bearers to prevent child marriages

Most of the duty bearers highlighted non-cooperation from the community members (in terms of both reporting and prevention) as the biggest challenge they face. They explained that some communities still cling to child marriage as an important tradition and thus insist on continuing with it.

62 More information can be accessed at <https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s31ff8a7b5dc7a7d1f0ed65aaa29c04b1e/uploads/2018/03/2018031832.pdf>

63 The Andhra Pradesh DISHA Act 2019 aims to establish exclusive special courts for speedy trial of specified offences against women and children. Details of the Act can be accessed at [https://legislation.aplegislature.org/PreviewPage.do?filePath=basePath&fileName=Bills/PassedBills/English/Eng\\_passbill\\_LABILLNO\\_15\\_16\\_13\\_153\\_v\\_1.pdf](https://legislation.aplegislature.org/PreviewPage.do?filePath=basePath&fileName=Bills/PassedBills/English/Eng_passbill_LABILLNO_15_16_13_153_v_1.pdf)

"Villagers fight with us sometimes when we go to stop child marriage." – A police official, Chittoor (AP)

"The challenge we face is that community people don't admit that it is a child marriage and they keep asking about the informer who has registered a complaint. All community people stop us from taking legal action." – A duty bearer, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

There is a reported lack of support by the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members as well. Almost all the duty bearers stated that PRI members never intervened even when an incidence of child marriage was reported to them. One of the duty bearers elucidated

"No, community leaders and Gram Panchayat don't intervene in the matter of child marriage. They don't provide any information because they don't want anyone to go against them. PRI members have a political agenda in mind to appease the people while a common man is simply scared of being harassed by other community members if they get to know he was the informer." – A duty bearer, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

This leads to the issue of under-reporting of child marriage cases.

"Child marriage happens here, but we don't get many complaints related to it. People solve their issues within the village community and prefer not to register complaints." – A police official, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

## 6.4. Community's response to the issue of child marriage

### 6.4.1. Awareness regarding to whom should the incidence of child marriage be reported

First and foremost, ensuring an active resistance and intervention from the community's end is awareness regarding to whom a person should report an incident of child marriage. Only 31% of parents/parents-in-law and 26% of child brides and grooms responded being aware of to whom should incidence of child marriage be reported (Table 42). Least proportion of respondents from Odisha knew about the same (8%).

**Table 42: Awareness regarding to whom should incidences of child marriage be reported**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Reported by parents/parents-in-law</b>										
Yes	74	30%	68	28%	15	8%	140	49%	297	31%
No	172	70%	178	72%	178	92%	144	51%	672	69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Reported by respondents who were child brides/grooms</b>										
Yes	81	33%	19	8%	16	8%	132	46%	248	26%
No	165	67%	227	92%	177	92%	152	54%	721	74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

Those who did know were asked to list the people to whom they should report a child marriage case (Tables 43 and 44). The majority of both parents/parents-in-law and child brides/grooms (97% and 79%, respectively) recognised the police as the first point of contact in such a scenario. This was followed by informing about such cases to Panchayat members and AWW/ASHA workers. Particularly in Maharashtra, the Panchayat was recognised as the first point of contact to report a child marriage by a sizeable proportion of respondents (95% of parents/parents-in-law and 43% of child brides/grooms). Only 9% of parents or parents-in-law (all from AP) were aware of CMPO. About 16% of child brides or grooms knew that they could contact VCPC in case they came across a case of child marriage.

**Table 43: To whom should the incidence of child marriage be reported (parents'/parents-in-law's response)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Police	69	95%	61	87%	14	100%	145	104%	289	97%
Panchayat	69	95%	10	14%	4	29%	41	29%	124	42%
AWW/ASHA worker	29	40%	25	36%	2	14%	22	16%	78	26%
CMPO	26	36%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	26	9%
NGO	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%

\*Multiple responses recorded

**Table 44: To whom should the incidence of child marriage be reported (child brides'/grooms' response)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Police	75	97%	18	95%	8	50%	94	71%	195	79%
Panchayat	35	43%	0	0%	6	38%	21	16%	62	25%
AWW/ASHA worker	13	16%	8	42%	1	6%	26	20%	48	19%
VCPC	28	35%	0	0%	3	19%	8	6%	39	16%
CMPO	9	11%	0	0%	3	19%	6	5%	18	7%

\*Multiple responses recorded

#### 6.4.2. Reporting incidents of child marriage

Only 5% of parents/parents-in-law and 3% of child brides/grooms have ever objected to a child marriage being held in their neighbourhood (Tables 45 and 46). Other members of the community are reportedly unconcerned, with only 3% parents/parents-in-law and 7% of child brides/grooms reporting that any such effort was made by anyone. This was corroborated by qualitative findings as well. All the participants during FGDs refused to have ever resisted any child marriage. They reasoned, "No one has reported an early marriage because if they do it, then people will cause problems during his/her girl's marriage and will try to break her marriage. They will spread rumours about the girl." – **A male community member, Kandhamal (Odisha)**

As discussed in the previous section, even duty bearers face the challenge of child marriage cases not being reported to them. *“People only register complaints when there is a personal conflict’. Other people in the village make it hard for the informer to live peacefully, and everyone is against the informer. Hence, nobody comes forward and informs us about child marriage cases.”*

– A police officer, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

As per the National Crime Report Bureau (2020) only 785 cases were reported under the PCMA<sup>64</sup>. However, looking at the last three years’ trend, the absolute numbers show an upward trend, i.e., 501 in 2018 and 523 in 2019. This indicates an increasing trend of child marriages in the country, and the absolute figures reflect a significant disparity between the incidence and reporting of child marriage instances, considering the practice's pervasiveness in the country's social fabric.

**Table 45: Community resistance to child marriage (reported by parents'/parents-in-law)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Have you ever resisted to any child marriage?</b>										
Yes	31	13%	5	2%	6	3%	2	1%	44	5%
No	180	73%	163	66%	98	51%	181	64%	622	64%
Don't Know/Can't Say	35	14%	78	32%	89	46%	101	35%	303	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Has anyone in the community ever resisted to child marriage?</b>										
Yes	13	5%	2	1%	3	1%	11	4%	29	3%
No	139	57%	130	53%	79	41%	97	34%	445	46%
Don't Know/ Can't Say	94	38%	114	46%	111	58%	176	62%	495	51%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 46: Community resistance to child marriage (reported by child brides/grooms)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Have you ever resisted to any child marriage?</b>										
Yes	14	6%	4	2%	4	2%	5	2%	27	3%
No	162	66%	150	61%	106	55%	184	65%	602	62%
Don't Know/ Can't Say	70	28%	92	37%	83	43%	95	33%	340	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

64 More information can be accessed at: <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202020%20Volume%201.pdf>

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Has anyone in the community ever resisted to any child marriage?</b>										
Yes	54	22%	2	1%	3	2%	5	2%	64	7%
No	109	44%	132	54%	82	42%	92	32%	415	43%
Don't Know/ Can't Say	83	34%	112	45%	108	56%	187	66%	490	50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

Those who said that any resistance to child marriage was made by them or any other member of the community were further asked about the steps taken by these individuals (Table 47). Similar responses were received from both sets of respondents. A majority of child brides/grooms tried to mobilise the community members to intervene (73%) or tried counselling the child (70%) and/or the parents (59%). Apart from AP, in none of the other states did those who resisted child marriage contact a government official. In AP, however, 42% of child brides and grooms said that local activists were contacted to inform them about the arrangement of child marriage, followed by informing PRI members (37%), police (24%), local politicians (18%) and concerned government departments like WCD/CMPO (3%).

**Table 47: Measures taken by the community (reported by child brides/grooms)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tried to mobilise the community members/ relatives to intervene	49	79%	6	100%	2	33%	3	38%	60	73%
Tried to counsel the child	47	76%	0	0%	4	67%	6	75%	57	70%
Tried to counsel the parents	32	52%	4	67%	5	83%	7	88%	48	59%
Informed community influencers like religious leaders	41	66%	5	83%	0	0%	1	13%	47	57%
Contacted the school / teacher where the child studied	36	58%	1	17%	2	33%	2	25%	41	50%
Informed the PRI members	23	37%	4	67%	1	17%	2	25%	30	37%
Informed local activists (like child rights, human rights etc.)	26	42%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	26	32%
Informed the local police	15	24%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	15	18%
Informed the local politician (like MLC/ MLA/MP)	11	18%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	11	13%

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Informed concerned department like DWCD/CMPO	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%
Informed local media	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%

*\*Multiple responses were recorded*

### 6.4.3. Community members' perspective on effective systemic response to child marriage

AP was the only state where, reportedly, a few community members reported cases of child marriage to some government officials. In AP, of the people who reported a child marriage case to any systemic player (PRI members, local politicians, police, government officials like CMPO), 83% reported that government officials were indifferent and did not consider this a serious issue (Table 48). About one-third of them (37%) reported that government officials contacted were helpful and took immediate action (22%). Qualitative findings reveal that in cases where the police were directly involved, action was immediately taken.

*"Once there was a child marriage happening in the village, and the police stopped it. It didn't make any difference to the mindset of the people living in the village, though."* – **A female community member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)**

*"Once, the police came to know about a child marriage in our village. The police came and took us all to the police station, filed a case against us and sent us to court. We were punished and had to pay a fine to the court. Now everyone is afraid of it."* – **A female member of the community, Chittoor (AP)**

*"Everyone is afraid to report any child marriage because then they and their families will be punished by the entire village. There are no complaints. So how will the police work on it?"* – **A female community member, Kandhamal (Odisha)**

Under-reporting of child marriage cases continues, and it is reflected in the secondary data as well.

**Table 48: Reported reaction of office bearers (reported by child brides/grooms)\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Total	
	N	%	N	%
Indifferent and did not consider this as a serious issue at all	34	83%	34	83%
Was willing to help, but was very bureaucratic	19	46%	19	46%
Tried to pass the buck	18	44%	18	44%
Was helpful and guided me on next course of action, that resulted in stopping of the marriage	15	37%	15	37%
Took immediate action and intervened and stopped the marriage	9	22%	9	22%

*\*Multiple responses were recorded*

In most of the cases where any community member tried to intervene, the marriage happened anyway (72%), and caused enmity between the informant and the parents (50%). Marriages were stopped in only 17% of cases (Table 49).

**Table 49: Reported outcome of such an intervention\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The marriage still happened	43	74%	5	83%	4	67%	4	50%	56	72%
The parents/relatives were prosecuted	36	62%	2	33%	1	17%	1	12%	40	51%
Caused enmity with the parents	33	57%	1	17%	3	50%	2	25%	39	50%
Parents realised their mistake and did not go ahead with the marriage	26	45%	3	50%	0	0%	1	12%	30	38%
The marriage stopped	9	15%	0	0%	2	33%	2	25%	13	17%
Don't know /Can't say	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%	1	1%

\*Multiple responses were recorded

Despite the numerous efforts outlined by duty bearers in the preceding section, 19% of parents/parents-in-law reported that child marriages were arranged (Table 50). In the last year, during COVID-19 itself, respondents witnessed, on an average, two child marriages where the girl was less than 18 years of age, and four cases where boys were less than 21 years of age. The average was highest in the state of Odisha (Table 51).

**Table 50: Do people still manage to perform child marriage despite these laws? (parents'/parents in-law's perspective)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Do people still manage to perform child marriage despite these laws?</b>										
Yes	34	14%	43	17%	36	19%	68	24%	181	19%
No	144	59%	76	31%	76	39%	62	22%	358	37%
Don't Know/ Can't say	68	28%	127	52%	81	42%	154	54%	430	44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 51: Number of child marriage cases in last one year (reported by parents/parents in-law)**

Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<b>Reported number of child marriages in the area in last one year where bride was less than 18 years of age</b>									
2	2	2	1	4	3	2	2	2	2
<b>Reported number of child marriages in the area in last one year where groom was less than 21 years of age</b>									
3	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4

Thus, despite numerous efforts by the government, child marriages continue to be a common practice in some communities. This is mainly due to under-reporting of such cases to the concerned officials because of which timely actions aren't taken.

## 6.5. Gaps in awareness pertaining to systemic mechanisms

Prompt and robust systemic and government-and-community mechanisms are essential to prevent child marriages. In addition, access and awareness among all community members regarding related legal provisions and government protection mechanisms is a must. Hence, it was important to identify awareness, access and compliance pertaining to existing legal provisions and protection mechanisms in place and gaps if any.

### 6.5.1. Awareness regarding legal provisions

#### 6.5.1.1. Legal minimum age of marriage

Tables 52–54 show awareness regarding the legal minimum age of marriage among the study respondents. More than half of the respondents (58% of parents/parents-in-law and 57% of child brides/grooms) were reportedly not aware of any legal minimum age for marriage (18 for girls and 21 for boys). State-wise comparisons reflect that the lowest proportion of child brides/grooms surveyed in Odisha (7%) were aware of such legal provisions. The awareness level was lower amongst respondents who were child brides (38%) than respondents who were child grooms (54%). Overall, of those who did, a higher proportion of child brides and grooms knew the correct legal age for girls (80%) than parents/parents-in-law (71%). An opposite pattern was observed in the case of awareness regarding the legal minimum age of marriage for boys, as a higher proportion of parents/parents-in-law (86%) told the correct age as compared to child brides/grooms (80%). State-wise, respondents from Odisha were considerably unaware of the legal age of marriage for girls.

**Table 52: Awareness of legal minimum age of marriage (parents/parents-in-law)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage</b>										
Yes	74	30%	106	43%	66	34%	159	56%	405	42%
No	172	70%	140	57%	127	66%	125	44%	564	58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for girls</b>										
No	9	12%	0	0%	7	11%	0	0%	16	4%
Wrong Answer	2	3%	32	30%	35	53%	31	19%	100	25%
Right Answer (18 Years)	63	85%	74	70%	24	36%	128	81%	289	71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>		<b>106</b>		<b>66</b>		<b>159</b>		<b>405</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for boys</b>										
No	2	3%	1	1%	4	6%	0	0%	7	2%
Wrong Answer	2	3%	16	15%	5	8%	28	18%	51	12%
Right Answer (21 Years)	70	94%	89	84%	57	86%	131	82%	347	86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>		<b>106</b>		<b>66</b>		<b>159</b>		<b>405</b>	

**Table 53: Awareness of legal minimum age of marriage (child brides/grooms)**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage</b>						
Yes	168	54%	248	38%	416	43%
No	144	46%	409	62%	553	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for girls</b>						
No	5	3%	8	3%	13	3%
Wrong Answer	26	15%	45	18%	71	17%
Right Answer (18 years)	137	82%	195	79%	332	80%
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>		<b>248</b>		<b>416</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for boys</b>						
No	6	4%	5	2%	11	3%
Wrong Answer	10	6%	13	5%	23	5%
Right Answer (21 years)	152	90%	230	93%	382	92%
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>		<b>248</b>		<b>416</b>	

**Table 54: Awareness of legal minimum age of marriage by child brides/grooms (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage</b>										
Yes	80	33%	164	67%	14	7%	158	56%	416	43%
No	166	67%	82	33%	179	93%	126	44%	553	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for girls</b>										
No	7	9%	2	1%	3	21%	1	1%	13	3%
Wrong Answer	5	6%	51	31%	3	21%	12	7%	71	17%
Right Answer	68	85%	111	68%	8	58%	145	92%	332	80%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>164</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>158</b>		<b>416</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding legal minimum age of marriage for boys</b>										
No	4	5%	4	2%	3	21%	0	0%	11	3%
Wrong Answer	1	1%	10	6%	1	7%	11	7%	23	5%
Right Answer	75	94%	150	92%	10	72%	147	93%	382	92%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>164</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>158</b>		<b>416</b>	

### 6.5.1.2. Dowry Prohibition Act

The Dowry Prohibition Act (1961)<sup>65</sup> prohibits the giving or taking of dowry. Since one of the reasons why child marriage is still practised in the country is that for a younger bride less dowry is expected (discussed briefly in Chapter 1 and 4). Enactment of this Act could help in curtailment of such practice and decreasing incidences of child marriages.

Tables 55–57 outline the awareness of study respondents with respect to the practise of dowry. While 57% of child brides and grooms were aware of the Dowry Prohibition Act, the same was true for 38% of parents. According to the study, a lower proportion of child grooms (45%) than child brides (56%) were aware that exchanging dowries is prohibited. In the case of child brides and grooms, the awareness level was highest in the state of UP (89%) and lowest in Odisha (33%). On the other hand, the least proportion of parents or parents-in-law from UP (20%) were aware of the same. However, 52% of child brides and grooms and 59% of parents reported that the dowry system was still in use in their community.

During FGDs with adult community members as well, while most of them were aware of the legal prohibition on the give and take of dowry, almost all of them confirmed that it was an intrinsic part of any marriage.

65 More details on the Act can be accessed at <https://wcd.nic.in/act/dowry-prohibition-act-1961>

"Yes, I know that dowry is a criminal offence, although I don't know the exact punishment for it. But the dowry system has been practised since the ages. If a boy has done MBBS or law, then he will take around 4 lakhs as dowry." - A male community member, Chandauli (UP)

"Yes, dowry is given at marriage in this community. If the dowry is not given, then marriage won't happen. No boy's family will visit a girl's house who refuses to give a dowry." - A male community member, Parbhani (Maharashtra)

"Yes, dowry is given in terms of giving gold, agricultural land and cash. This will ensure that after my daughter goes to her husband's house, she will be safe and won't have any financial problems." - A male community member, Chittoor (AP)

**Table 55: Awareness and compliance with Dowry Prohibition Act (parents/parents-in-law)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Is dowry system still practiced in the community?</b>										
Yes	147	60%	134	54%	104	54%	184	65%	569	59%
No	99	40%	112	46%	89	46%	100	35%	400	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding Dowry Prohibition Act</b>										
Yes	113	46%	50	20%	40	21%	162	57%	365	38%
No	133	54%	196	80%	153	79%	122	43%	604	62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 56: Awareness and compliance with Dowry Prohibition Act (child brides/grooms)**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Is dowry system still practiced in the community?</b>						
Yes	139	45%	366	56%	505	52%
No	173	55%	291	44%	464	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding Dowry Prohibition Act</b>						
Yes	220	71%	333	51%	553	57%
No	92	29%	324	49%	416	43%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 57: Awareness and compliance with Dowry Prohibition Act (child brides/grooms) (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Is dowry system still practiced in the community?</b>										
Yes	77	31%	134	54%	109	56%	185	65%	505	52%
No	169	69%	112	46%	84	44%	99	35%	464	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding Dowry Prohibition Act</b>										
Yes	106	43%	218	89%	63	33%	166	58%	553	57%
No	140	57%	28	11%	130	67%	118	42%	416	43%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

### 6.5.1.3. POCSO Act

As discussed in Chapter 1, under POCSO Act<sup>66</sup>, whoever commits penetrative sexual assault shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than 10 years but which may extend to imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine. Thus, POCSO provisions did provide a safeguard against child sexual abuse, and thus this Act helps to prevent the sexual assault of child brides.

However, only 4% of child brides/grooms and 11% of parents/parents-in-law were aware of the POCSO Act (Table 58). No major difference was observed among the awareness levels of child brides and grooms, since 4% and 6% of them knew about the POCSO Act (Table 59). The lowest awareness was observed in the state of Odisha across both sets of respondents. Even though respondents from AP were relatively more aware of it, the proportion was still low, with only 15% of parents/parents-in-law, and 7% of child brides/grooms stating that they knew what the POCSO Act was.

**Table 58: Awareness regarding POCSO Act (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Parents'/ Parents-in-law's awareness</b>										
Yes	38	15%	28	11%	6	3%	34	12%	106	11%
No	208	85%	218	89%	187	97%	250	88%	863	89%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Child brides'/ Child grooms' awareness</b>										
Yes	16	7%	10	4%	1	1%	16	6%	43	4%
No	230	93%	236	96%	192	99%	268	94%	926	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

66 More details on the Act and its implementation can be accessed at <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/POCSO-ModelGuidelines.pdf>

**Table 59: Awareness of child brides and grooms regarding POCSO Act**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	NN	%
Yes	20	6%	23	4%	43	4%
No	292	94%	634	96%	926	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	

## 6.5.2. Awareness regarding protection systems in-place

UNICEF uses the term ‘child protection’ to refer to prevention and response to violence, exploitation and abuse of children in all contexts. It outlines the importance of child protection systems as it reaches out to the most vulnerable children and help them access vital social services and fair justice systems. Child protection systems prioritise children’s physical, mental, and psychosocial needs to safeguard their lives and futures<sup>67</sup>. Hence, it is important for all the community members to be aware and engage with various child protection systems in-place at regular intervals so as to ensure prevention of child rights violation such as the practise of child marriage.

### 6.5.2.1. CHILDLINE

CHILDLINE 1098<sup>68</sup> is a telephone helpline service of the Ministry of Women and Child Development for children in distress. Studies highlight that CHILDLINE is a pivotal institution that ensures the welfare and safety of children in need as it makes a clear assessment of the services a child needs and provides those services in close collaboration with actors who are already involved in child protection (Khurana 2014). This mechanism could thus prove to be essential in ensuring the curtailment of child marriages.

However, only 19% of child brides/grooms were aware about CHILDLINE (Table 60). The awareness level was slightly higher amongst the child grooms (22%) than the brides (18%). In Odisha, only 1% of respondents had heard about it (Table 61).

Of those who knew, about half of the respondents (51%) knew the correct CHILDLINE number, while the remaining either gave the incorrect number (18%) or did not remember the number at all (31%) (Table 60). In AP, almost all the respondents (94%) who had heard about CHILDLINE knew the correct.

67 More information can be accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/protection>

68 Detailed description of the initiative can be looked up on: <https://www.childlineindia.org/>

**Table 60: Awareness of child brides/grooms regarding CHILDLINE**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Have they heard about CHILDLINE?</b>						
Yes	68	22%	119	18%	187	19%
No	244	78%	538	82%	782	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Do they know the CHILDLINE number?*</b>						
Correct Answer	30	44%	66	55%	96	51%
Wrong Answer	12	18%	22	19%	34	18%
Don't remember	26	38%	31	26%	57	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>		<b>119</b>		<b>187</b>	

*\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew Childline*

**Table 61: Awareness of child brides/grooms regarding CHILDLINE (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Have they heard about CHILDLINE?</b>										
Yes	63	26%	37	15%	2	1%	85	30%	187	19%
No	183	74%	209	85%	191	99%	199	70%	782	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Do they know the CHILDLINE number?*</b>										
Correct Answer	59	94%	3	8%	0	0%	34	40%	96	51%
Wrong Answer	0	0%	15	41%	2	100%	17	20%	34	18%
Don't remember	4	6%	19	51%	0	0%	34	40%	57	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>		<b>37</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>85</b>		<b>187</b>	

*\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew Childline*

### 6.5.2.2. Women Helpline

The Scheme of Universalisation of Women's Helpline<sup>69</sup> is intended to provide a 24-hour immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with appropriate authorities such as police) and information about women-related government schemes and programmes across the country through a single uniform number. It could thus be an essential platform for girls to seek help from in case a child marriage is being arranged for them.

<sup>69</sup> Detailed information on the scheme can be accessed at [https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/WHL\\_G.pdf](https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/WHL_G.pdf)

The study assessed the awareness level of child brides pertaining to the women's helpline number (Table 62). Overall, 25% of child brides (half of whom were from AP) had heard about the Women's Helpline number. Only 4% of child brides in Odisha were aware of it. 58% of women who had heard about it could recall the correct helpline number. Both the awareness level (53%) and the proportion of women who knew the correct number (99%) were highest in the state of AP. But in other study states, it was considerably low. Thus, there is a clear need to increase awareness about such mechanisms in place in order to aid women to seek necessary help in case of any of their rights being violated.

**Table 62: Awareness of child brides regarding women helpline number**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding women helpline number</b>										
Yes	84	53%	18	18%	7	4%	58	26%	167	25%
No	74	47%	80	82%	171	96%	165	74%	490	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Do they know the helpline number?*</b>										
Right Answer	83	99%	2	11%	4	57%	7	12%	96	58%
Wrong Answer	1	1%	9	50%	3	43%	29	50%	42	25%
Can't Remember	0	0%	7	39%	0	0%	22	38%	29	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>		<b>18</b>		<b>7</b>		<b>58</b>		<b>167</b>	100%

\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew about women helpline number

### 6.5.2.3. Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)

Under the PCMA (2006), a CMPO<sup>70</sup> is responsible for initiating all necessary actions immediately upon any information about any child marriage. Even though CMPOs are especially appointed to tackle the issue of child marriage, hardly any people are aware of them. Only 9% of child brides (80% of whom were from AP) were aware of CMPO (Table 63). Of these, 2% knew what the functions of a CMPO are. About 80% (nearly all of whom were from AP) said they know where the CMPO office is. During FGDs, none of the adolescents or adult community members knew about CMPO.

**Table 63: Awareness of child brides regarding CMPO**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding CMPO</b>										
Yes	45	28%	0	0%	2	1%	10	4%	57	9%
No	113	72%	98	100%	176	99%	213	96%	600	91%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	

70 Detailed list of duties of a CMPO can be accessed at <http://wcdodisha.gov.in/content/128/75>

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding functions of CMPO*</b>										
Yes	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	1	2%
No	45	100%	0	0%	2	100%	9	90%	56	98%
Total	45		0		2		10		57	
<b>Awareness regarding where CMPO's office is*</b>										
Yes	44	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	45	80%
No	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	9	90%	11	20%
Total	44		0		2		10		56	
<b>Are CMPO's office functional<sup>71</sup> ? (Reported)**</b>										
Yes	44	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	45	100%
No	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	44		0		0		1		45	

\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew about CMPO

\*\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew where CMPO's office is

#### 6.5.2.4. Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC)

VCPC<sup>72</sup> is a centrally mandated community based group, including government frontline workers, who are primarily responsible for creating and promoting a child-friendly and safe community environment wherein every child's wellbeing, safety and rights are protected. Specific responsibilities of a VCPC with regard to the issue of child marriage include raising awareness among the community members to prevent child marriages and discouraging such practice<sup>73</sup>.

About one-fifth (19%) of child brides knew about VCPCs (Table 64). The highest proportion of women who knew about VCPC were from AP (36%). Overall, only 4% of these knew about their functions. None of the adolescents or community members who participated in the FGDs knew about VCPCs.

71 Functional offices in the study refers to a scenario wherein office is open on work-days and the official appointed is present in the office.

72 More information regarding VCPCs same can be accessed on: [http://wbcwdsw.gov.in/link/pdf/annual\\_report/INDUCTION\\_TRAINING\\_VOLUME\\_II.pdf](http://wbcwdsw.gov.in/link/pdf/annual_report/INDUCTION_TRAINING_VOLUME_II.pdf)

73 More information on VCPC's mandates can be accessed on: <https://cdn.s3waas.gov.in/s3cdc0d6e63aa8e41c89689f54970bb35f/uploads/2018/08/2018081071.pdf>

**Table 64: Awareness of child brides regarding VCPC**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Awareness regarding VCPC</b>										
Yes	57	36%	1	1%	4	2%	64	29%	126	19%
No	101	64%	97	99%	174	98%	159	71%	531	81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	
<b>Awareness regarding functions of VCPC*</b>										
Yes	2	4%	0	0%	2	50%	1	2%	5	4%
No	55	96%	1	100%	2	50%	63	98%	121	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>64</b>		<b>126</b>	

\*Conditioned on whether respondent knew about VCPC

#### 6.5.2.5. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

NGOs play a pivotal role in bringing about social change in society and are key players in providing last-mile service delivery, information, implementation, etc. SHGs are usually informal groups of women who come together as a collective to address issues and mutually benefit from various initiatives. They have proven to be an essential means of alleviating poverty and reducing social inequalities among their members. Both these institutions are pivotal in bringing about change and preventing child marriages.

The respondents in the study were asked if they knew of any NGO/SHG that worked in their area towards stopping child marriages (Tables 65-67). Only 6% of parents/parents-in-law and 5% of child brides/grooms responded positively. Almost all of them were from AP. However, 45% of child brides in the study said they were members of a SHG. None of the child brides from UP were SHG members. It is interesting to note that the awareness of NGO/SHG working on the issues of child marriage is scanty despite around half of them reporting being a part of an SHG. Perhaps this suggests that child marriage as an issue is not being actively taken up by the SHGs. This is a potential area with scope for intervention by using SHGs as a catalyst for ending child marriage practice at village level. Studies have shown that participatory awareness and mobilisation programmes with the help of community led institutions like SHGs can prove to be an important means of combating child marriage (Naskar 2011; G.B.Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development 2015).

**Table 65: Presence of an NGO/SHG that works towards stopping child marriages (state-wise perspective)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Parents'/Parents-in-law's perspective</b>										
Yes	44	18%	1	%	3	2%	7	2%	55	6%
No	202	82%	245	100%	190	98%	277	98%	914	94%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Child brides'/grooms' perspective</b>										
Yes	40	16%	0	0%	1	1%	6	2%	47	5%
No	206	84%	246	100%	192	99%	278	98%	922	95%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 66: Presence of an NGO/SHG that works towards stopping child marriages (child brides and grooms' perspective)**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	27	9%	20	3%	47	5%
No	285	91%	637	97%	922	95%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 67: Participation of child brides in SHGs**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	119	75%	0	0%	41	23%	134	60%	294	45%
No	39	25%	98	100%	137	77%	89	40%	363	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>		<b>98</b>		<b>178</b>		<b>223</b>		<b>657</b>	

### 6.5.3. Awareness regarding government schemes/initiatives

As discussed earlier, ensuring greater enrolment and retention of girls in schools could lead to a decrease in incidences of child marriage. Similarly, increased employability and employment opportunities could incentivise parents to not get their children married as adolescents. Thus, it is imperative for people to be aware of and able to access various government schemes and initiatives aimed at promoting girl child education.

#### 6.5.3.1. Government schemes/initiatives to promote girl child education

About half of the parents/parents-in-law (46%) and one-third of the child brides/grooms were aware of any government scheme/initiative that promoted girl child education (Table 68). A similar proportion of child brides (32%) and child grooms (35%) knew about the same (Table 69). In the case of child brides or grooms, the state of Odisha had the lowest level of awareness,

with only 3% of respondents saying they were aware of any such scheme. Most of the respondents (69%) had heard about 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'<sup>74</sup> scheme, followed by 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan'<sup>75</sup> (66%), 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojana'<sup>79</sup> (41%), 'National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education'<sup>77</sup> (17%), 'Balika Samridhi Yojana'<sup>78</sup> (16%) and CBSE's 'UDAAN Scheme'<sup>79</sup> (15%) (Table 70). A similar pattern was observed in responses from both sets of respondents.

**Table 68: Awareness of government initiatives to promote girl child education (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Parents'/Parents-in-law's awareness</b>										
Yes	86	35%	119	48%	91	47%	147	52%	443	46%
No	160	65%	127	52%	102	53%	137	48%	526	54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Child brides'/grooms' awareness</b>										
Yes	74	30%	74	30%	5	3%	168	59%	321	33%
No	172	70%	172	70%	188	97%	116	41%	648	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

74 **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** is a national campaign that aims to prevent gender biased sex selective elimination, ensure survival and protection of the girl child and ensure education and participation of the girl child. This is a joint initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development and spans across 100 selected districts with low child sex ratio. More information on the scheme can be looked up at <https://wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes>

75 **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** is Government of India's flagship programme for achievement of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://www.aicte-india.org/reports/overview/Sarva-Shiksha-Abhiyan>

76 **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana** is a small deposit scheme of the Government of India meant exclusively for a girl child and is launched as a part of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Campaign. The scheme is meant to meet the education and marriage expenses of a girl child. More information on the scheme can be accessed at [http://www.nsiindia.gov.in/InternalPage.aspx?Id\\_Pk=89](http://www.nsiindia.gov.in/InternalPage.aspx?Id_Pk=89)

77 The objective of the **National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education** is to establish an enabling environment to promote enrolment and reduce drop out of girls belonging to SC/ST communities in secondary schools and ensure their retention up to the 18 years of age. More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://dsel.education.gov.in/nsigse>

78 The scheme of **Balika Samridhi Yojana** was launched on 2nd October 1997 with the objective of raising the overall status of the girl-child and bringing about a positive change in family and community attitudes. The scheme covers up two girls children born on or after 15th August 1997 in a family living below poverty line as defined by the Government of India. A onetime grant of Rs.500/- to mother giving birth to a girl child of B.P.L. families. More information on the scheme can be accessed at [http://megsocialwelfare.gov.in/icds\\_balika.html](http://megsocialwelfare.gov.in/icds_balika.html)

79 **UDAAN** is a project launched by the CBSE to address the low enrolment of girl students in prestigious engineering institutions and the teaching gap between school education and engineering entrance examinations. The effort is to enrich the teaching and learning of Science and Mathematics at school level by addressing the three dimensions of education- curriculum design, transaction and assessment. More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://transformingindia.mygov.in/scheme/udaan-cbse-scholarship-program/>

**Table 69: Awareness level of child brides and grooms regarding government initiatives to promote girl child education**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	110	35%	211	32%	321	33%
No	202	65%	446	68%	648	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 70: Awareness of government schemes to promote girl child education by child brides/grooms\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana	40	54%	66	88%	4	80%	112	67%	222	69%
Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan	39	53%	26	35%	2	40%	146	87%	213	66%
Sukanya Samridhi Yojana	50	68%	21	28%	2	40%	60	36%	133	41%
National Scheme for Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education	46	62%	9	12%	1	20%	0	0%	56	17%
Balika Samridhi Yojana	33	45%	6	8%	3	60%	8	5%	50	16%
CBSE Udaan Scheme	38	51%	5	7%	1	20%	3	2%	47	15%

\*Multiple responses were recorded

### 6.5.3.2. Government schemes to promote jobs for adolescent girls/youth

About 30% of parents/parents-in-law and 25% of child brides/grooms had reportedly heard about any government scheme/initiative that aimed to promote jobs for adolescent girls/youth (Table 71). A statistically significant difference (95% CI,  $\chi^2=71.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was observed amongst child brides and grooms in terms of knowledge regarding such government schemes (Table 72). Similar to the results above, the lowest proportion of child brides/grooms from Odisha (3%) knew about any such scheme. Awareness about such schemes was highest among the respondents from UP. Of those who knew, most of the respondents listed 'Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana'<sup>80</sup> (60%), followed by 'Rural Self-Employment Training Institutes'<sup>81</sup> (51%)

80 **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)** is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented by National Skill Development Corporation. The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://pmkvyofficial.org/>

81 **Rural Self Employment Training Institutes** is an initiative of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) to have dedicated infrastructure in each district of the country to impart training and skill upgradation of rural youth geared towards entrepreneurship development. RSETIs are managed by banks with active co-operation from the Government of India and State Governments. More information on these can be accessed at <http://nirdpr.org.in/rseti/>

'National Rural Livelihood Mission'<sup>82</sup> (46%) and 'Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana'<sup>83</sup> (31%) (Table 73).

**Table 71: Awareness of government initiatives regarding jobs for adolescent girls/youth (state-wise)**

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Parents'/Parents-in-laws' awareness</b>										
Yes	57	23%	99	40%	57	30%	79	28%	292	30%
No	189	77%	147	60%	136	70%	205	72%	677	70%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	
<b>Child bride's/groom's awareness</b>										
Yes	58	24%	103	42%	6	3%	80	28%	247	25%
No	188	76%	143	58%	187	97%	204	72%	722	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>193</b>		<b>284</b>		<b>969</b>	

**Table 72: Awareness level of child brides and grooms regarding government initiatives regarding jobs for adolescent girls/ youth**

	Child grooms		Child brides		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	133	43%	114	17%	247	25%
No	179	57%	543	83%	722	75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>312</b>		<b>657</b>		<b>969</b>	

82 **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM)** was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), Government of India in June 2011. The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor, enabling them to increase household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial services. More information on the scheme can be accessed at <https://aajeevika.gov.in/>

83 **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Vikas Yojana (DDU-GKY)** is a part of the NRLM, tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth. DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families. More information on the scheme can be accessed at <http://ddugky.gov.in/>

**Table 73: Awareness of government schemes regarding jobs for adolescent girls/youth by child brides/grooms\***

	Andhra Pradesh		Uttar Pradesh		Odisha		Maharashtra		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana	22	38%	89	85%	3	50%	36	45%	150	60%
Rural Self Employment and Training Institutes	46	79%	33	31%	2	33%	45	56%	126	51%
National Rural Livelihoods Mission	37	64%	70	67%	3	50%	4	5%	114	46%
Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana	21	36%	47	45%	3	50%	7	9%	78	31%
Employability Enhancement Training Program	29	50%	12	11%	2	33%	1	1%	44	18%
National Employability Enhancement Mission	22	38%	13	12%	3	50%	1	1%	39	16%
Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana	17	29%	20	19%	0	0%	2	3%	39	16%
AICTE Start-up Policy	28	48%	7	7%	1	17%	0	0%	36	14%

*\*Multiple responses were recorded*

**CONCLUSION  
AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Child marriage is a violation of human rights that disproportionately affects girls. Child marriage has multiple adverse personal, socio-cultural and economic repercussions on children's health, education, growth and development. While the prevalence of child marriage has reduced globally, it still affects one out of every five girls today (UNICEF 2020). Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among girls is expected to be six times that of child marriage among boys (UNICEF, Press Release 2019). It has a direct impact on a child's wellbeing and a girl's health. The likelihood of a child bride becoming a teenage mother is exceptionally high, and complications during pregnancy are a primary cause of death among adolescent girls (UNFPA 2020). While the reasons that contribute to child marriage vary by geography and culture, poverty and gender inequality appear to play a larger role everywhere. Other variables that appear to be key contributors to child marriage are prevailing norms and stereotypes in society regarding gender roles. Despite amended legislation establishing 18 years as the legal minimum age for girl marriage in India, a significant proportion, i.e. every third adolescent girl between the ages of 15 and 19, gets married, and every second married adolescent girl has given birth to a child (Lal 2015). Given the fact that nationally representative statistics from the NFHS-IV (2015-16) show a significant decline in the prevalence of child marriage, falling from 47% in 2015-06 to 27% in 2015-16, further declining to 23.3% as per NFHS-V (2019-21) India Fact Sheet, there are significant interstate and intrastate variations.

The objective of this report was to document in detail the community's knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviour regarding child marriage, as well as initiatives taken at the community level to challenge child marriage practices, and map the convergence of community and government systems under the available provisions and practices and determine the scope for synergy at both ends. Furthermore, it sought to comprehend the impact of the COVID-19 situation on the practice of child marriage at the community level. The research was carried out in four states: Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. In the scope of this study, parents/in-laws as well as females and males aged 20-24 years, who married before reaching the legal marriage age, i.e., 18 for girls and 21 for boys, were interviewed. Additionally, an effort was made to document the responses of duty bearers at various levels of governance.

## 7.1. Key Findings

On the basis of the information collected, the study draws attention to the following salient findings.

- **Lack of or limited educational opportunities, particularly for girls, forces them to drop out and puts them at risk of child marriage:** According to the study findings, whereas half of the child brides in this study had never attended school, only 18% of the child grooms had. Only a small percentage of those who had attended school had completed higher secondary school, i.e. completed their school education. Among those who were studying, 86% of child brides and 90% of child grooms stated they discontinued studying after marriage. For decades, child marriage has been one of the leading causes of adolescent dropout. This is owing to a lack of or limited educational opportunities, particularly for girls, and as a result, they drop out. Thus, the study findings imply that a lack of educational opportunities due to issues of accessibility, availability and affordability pushes girls to drop out of school, leaving them vulnerable to child marriage. Also, girls' education continues to be undervalued in comparison to boys' education.
- **The practice of child marriage is more prominent among lower socioeconomic strata of society:** The study found out that the majority of respondents were from socially marginalised communities - SC (30%), ST (20%) and OBC (28%). Similarly, the vast majority of them (79%) were categorised as BPL, 90% of them belonged to households with BPL/Antyodaya/Annapurna card holders and had a low SLI score (34%). These findings reflect the respondents' socioeconomic status and also indicate that child marriage is more prevalent among the poorer strata of society. Apart from being a tradition, poverty

is one of the most pressing underlying causes of child marriage, which may also be associated with certain socially marginalised communities in society. The study's quantitative and qualitative findings imply that children from low-income households are more prone to the practice of child marriage. Financial constraints make education an unaffordable alternative for many girls, causing them to drop out, and as a result, make them vulnerable to child marriage, undervaluing the contribution and participation of girls and limiting their opportunities for growth and stability. Furthermore, younger and uneducated brides are associated with lower dowry, thus poor families marry their daughters during their adolescent years.

- **Lack of understanding of the negative consequences of child marriage contribute to the practice's persistence:** Child marriage is still regarded an important custom in their society for 59% of parents/parents-in-law who answered the survey questions. Only a small fraction of those who responded were aware of the negative consequences of child marriage (34% of child brides/grooms and only 16% of parents/parents-in-law). If they had been informed of the potential ramifications of child marriage, it is possible that it would have played a significant role in their decision to marry.
- **Perceived notions of women's honour continue to be a decisive factor in child marriage:** Aside from reasons such as lack of educational and employment opportunities, fear of girls eloping/having a 'love affair'/premarital sex emerged as one of the dominant reasons why parents prefer to marry off their daughters as soon as they reach puberty (mostly between 15 and 17 years of age). Fear of a girl's safety and fear of her having a 'love affair' were stated as reasons for child marriage by 26% and 25% of child brides/grooms, respectively. The other reason behind choosing child marriage, such as lower dowry with younger girls, emanate from a similar attitude toward women's 'honour'. The most frequently mentioned explanation was that it is easier to find grooms for girls when they are young (66%), followed by the fact that it is easier for girls to adapt to their new households (57%). Younger (and less educated) brides also require less dowry, encouraging parents to marry daughters at a younger age (50%).
- **Family and peer pressure significantly contributes to the persistence of child marriage practice:** Parents, relatives and peers exert substantial influence to the decision of marriage at a young age. It was also revealed in qualitative and quantitative findings (reported by 41% of child brides and grooms for girls and 64% for boys) that there was a lot of pressure to adhere common community customs and traditions. For girls, easier to find groom for a young girl (66%) was one among prominent reason, whereas for boys, it was more about making him responsible (61%).
- **Detrimental effects on reproductive and sexual health of child marriage were seen in terms of teenage pregnancy:** The majority of the 657 child brides (63%) had two pregnancies at the time of the survey. While 19% of women had one child, while 81% had two or more. In terms of the time gap between pregnancies, more than half of the women respondents - child brides (51%), who had at least two children, stated that the gap between their first and second child was less than two years. At least 59% of child brides had teenage pregnancies. The findings indicate that child marriage has a detrimental impact on girls' sexual and reproductive health, as the majority of them become mothers at a young age, putting them at risk of high-risk pregnancies.
- **A considerable proportion of child brides were not able to access sexual and reproductive healthcare pre and post pregnancy:** Only 36% of responders who were child brides and are now mothers got all four AnteNatal Care check-ups. While 38% of these mothers did not receive any information about the need of these prenatal check-ups, 42% were not

permitted to visit health facilities alone. Almost half of them (49%) were ignorant of the risks associated with early pregnancy. Approximately three-fourths (72%) of these women did not have a say in contraception use, and approximately half (51%) were unaware of female sterilisation. Thus, girls who marry at a young age may lack the knowledge, confidence, or financial and other means to seek pre-natal and post-natal care, or they may have restricted decision-making power over pregnancy and childbearing. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the health of both mothers and new-borns, as seen by a rise in maternal 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 brides reported having a low birth weight for their first and second child, respectively. Early motherhood is associated with an increased risk of neonatal death and stillbirth, low birth weight infants, malnutrition (stunted, wasted, and underweight) infants, and morbidity and mortality in children and infants. Adolescent girls who become pregnant have poor nutrition and health, which increases the risk of foetal, perinatal, and maternal death and disability. Early marriages also contribute to intergenerational malnutrition since the mothers are typically from low-income households and are anaemic or underweight, resulting in the delivery of a child who is underweight or not fit for survival.
- **The practice of child marriage further restricts girls' mobility:** According to the findings of the study, around one-fourth (23%) of child brides indicated that they had little or no permission to visit their parents. Child brides were also not allowed to go out and socialise with their peers in 44% of the cases. Child brides were not allowed to leave the house alone in 34% of cases. This could jeopardise the mental, social and emotional wellbeing of these women, as it is vital for a person's psychological wellbeing to have friends and family members who can act as a social support structure for that person.
- **COVID-19 has a substantial impact on child marriage:** According to qualitative findings, the pandemic has escalated the number of cases of child marriage. According to duty bearers and community members in AP, UP and Odisha, more child marriages have been observed since the pandemic, and it led to increasing vulnerabilities exponentially. In Maharashtra, however, there was a discrepancy in the responses of duty bearers and community members, with duty bearers asserting that cases had decreased but community members, particularly adolescent girls, responding that in some clusters, people still manage to arrange child marriages in greater numbers than before. These findings imply that public health emergencies such as pandemics and other calamities have a significant impact on the increasing vulnerabilities, putting many children, particularly girls, at risk of marrying at an early age.
- **Challenges in systematic responses at the village level is a major roadblock in combating child marriages:** At the time of this study, there was no or limited functional VCPCs in the study villages. Only a fraction of respondents (child brides) were aware of the existence of this vital village-level body (19%). CMPOs were part of the DCPU in Maharashtra and UP, although only a few of the respondents were aware of them. As a result, institutions designed to combat child marriage at the village level were lacking. This impedes the implementation of the PMCA, 2006 and leaves room for child marriage to continue.
- **The use of legal provisions relating to child marriage is limited due to a lack of knowledge or awareness of those provisions:** Over half of respondents (parents-in-laws, and child brides/grooms) were unaware of the legal minimum age for marriage. Qualitative findings indicate that while respondents were aware that child marriage is a punishable offence, they were unaware of the specific punishment. The vast majority of child brides (96%) were unaware of the POCSO

Act. In comparison to child grooms (29%) a sizable proportion of child brides (49%) were unaware of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Additionally, more than half of them stated that the dowry system was still in use in their community despite the fact that it was a punishable offence.

- Lack of community-level initiatives to combat child marriage practices may result in underreporting of child marriage incidences:** Only a small percentage (7%) of community members had ever objected to a child marriage in their village as responded by child brides/grooms. One of the significant obstacles to ending child marriage is that these events go unreported. The study demonstrates how community members are scared of the consequences of going against the community and acting as an informant. This was a major impediment for police officers in their efforts to prevent child marriages. The findings suggested that even PRI members do not report such incidents to the police.
- It is difficult for community members to use provisions of systemic mechanisms and relevant government schemes, if they are unaware of them:** Community members lacked awareness of structural systems to prevent child marriages. For example, only 19% of child brides were aware of the Village Child Protection Committee (VCPC); 9% of child brides were aware of the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO); 25% were aware of the Women Helpline number; and 19% were aware of CHILDLINE. Additionally, the majority of child brides (97%) were unaware of any NGO/SHG working in their community to prevent child marriages. Awareness of these protection mechanisms is the first step in ensuring their use, and hence a lack of awareness among community members, particularly women, results in low resistance and reporting of child marriage incidents by community members. Also, girls are unable to seek assistance in situations where they are required. Likewise, over half of parents-in-laws (46%) and 67% of child brides/grooms were ignorant of relevant government education schemes for girls. Similarly, 70% of parents-in-laws and 75% of child brides/grooms were ignorant of government initiatives promoting employment opportunities for adolescent girls/youth. As a result, without sufficient awareness, government programmes and efforts are inaccessible to these low-income households. Without educational and employment opportunities, girls in these households face an increased likelihood of child marriage.
- The practice is so ingrained in the community's social structure that duty bearers face difficulties in carrying out their responsibilities regarding child marriage prevention:** Qualitative findings documenting the responses of duty bearers such as police officers, CWC members, CMPOs and DCPU officials revealed that the majority of duty bearers cited lack of cooperation from community members (both in reporting and prevention) as their greatest challenge. Similarly, PRI members were reported to be unsupportive. Almost all duty bearers indicated that PRI members never intervened even when they were informed of an instance of child marriage. To carry out their responsibilities effectively, it is critical that community members work with duty bearers, and so the need to sensitise them is critical.
- The lack of community understanding of the reporting mechanism is also a contributing factor to the low reporting of cases:** The findings revealed that only 31% of parents-in-laws and 26% of child brides/grooms were aware of whom incidence of child marriage should be reported to. The majority of child brides/grooms stated that it can be reported to the police, but many also said that it can be reported to Panchayat members. Also, reporting mechanism varies from state to state depending on who has been designated to receive complaints as per PCMA state rules. A low percentage (7%) indicated that it may be reported to CMPO. These findings indicate that the majority of respondents were unaware of the reporting process, which may contribute to low case reporting.

## 7.2. Scope of synergy between community and government systems

An essential missing link was that of community level vigilance that might come with the implementation of the VCPC mandate. According to the study findings, there is a significant gap in community awareness of the government protection systems in place. During the study, no institutional mechanism was reported through which community and government stakeholders could communicate and coordinate on the issue of child marriage (apart from yearly workshops reportedly arranged by police officials). Active community members' resistance to incidences of child marriage in their community, as well as reporting such incidents to relevant government officials, is critical to combating child marriage. As a result, it is crucial that the two stakeholders maintain an operational communication channel. In this aspect, successful VCPC operationalisation can make a substantial contribution since it can provide a platform for the system to connect with the community.

### Recommendations

Given that the challenges and reasons for child marriage differ by district and society, responses must be tailored to the local and contextual level and interwoven with various central and state government policies and programmes.

- Strengthen Awareness Campaigns about the implications of child marriage:** A sizable proportion of respondents (71% parents/in-laws and 54% child brides/grooms) were unaware of any adverse implications of child marriage. Engaging in awareness campaigns and workshops educating people at the village level on reproductive and sexual health and child marriage prevention would help the individual, the community and the national economy by improving levels of learning, survival and protection of the girl child. Various State governments have taken initiatives in this direction and documented best practises<sup>84</sup> under the purview of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, including the following: (a) Pledge Against Child Marriage in Nayagarh, Odisha; (b) Digital Guddi Gudda Board (a medium for advocacy), an innovation of the Jalgaon District, Maharashtra; (c) 24X7 Control Room established by Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan to prevent child children; and (d) BBBP Ringtone - Kathua (Jammu & Kashmir), etc. The requirement is to scale up the learnings from these endeavours.
- Campaign to raise public awareness of government initiatives and other systemic response mechanisms:** According to the findings, only a small percentage of respondents were aware of any major national government effort to promote education (33% child brides/grooms) or job opportunities for adolescent girls or youth (25% child brides/grooms). This must be addressed by developing effective communication and community engagement campaigns, both at the school and community levels, to create awareness. One conceivable solution would be to print these schemes on the back cover of free textbooks for children. Sessions/workshops in schools to raise awareness about such initiatives and other protection mechanisms such as CHILDLINE and Women Helpline should be made mandatory and conducted periodically.
- Increase access to schools for girls:** It is well acknowledged that keeping girls in school is one of the most effective approaches to prevent child marriage. Girls' access to quality education is impeded by child marriage. The findings also revealed that 86% of child brides who had ever attended school dropped out after marriage. A wide range of reasons for girls dropping out of school have been well documented in the literature, including a lack of educational opportunities in terms of availability and accessibility of secondary schools (children must travel across long distances), particularly for the girl child, as means of transportation to travel are not readily available, and there are safety concerns. This increases the

<sup>84</sup> For more information: <https://wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes/best-practices>

vulnerability of girls, particularly those from remote and rural areas, to becoming child brides. Hence, public provisioning of secondary schools that adhere to the distance norms set for the same will play a critical role in lowering school dropouts, and as a result, preventing child marriages<sup>85</sup>. Furthermore, the implementation of related provisions under the National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 must be intensified. This includes the establishment of the gender inclusion fund to address challenges related to access and completion of education for girls, provision of free boarding facilities, comparable to those provided by Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, in school locations where students may have to travel a long distance, and especially for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as suitable arrangements for the safety of all children, particularly girls, and the strengthening and expansion of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas.

- **Use SHGs as a catalyst to combat child marriage:** The study's findings indicated that, despite the fact that almost half of female respondents were members of SHGs, awareness of child marriage remained low. SHGs can act as change agents by educating women in SHGs about legal provisions and recommended actions to take in the event of a child marriage case. Not only can all SHG members report and intervene if there is an occurrence of child marriage in their villages, but also can assist to raise awareness among other community members.
- **Initiate sustained efforts to alleviate poverty and social inequality may substantially reduce child marriages:** According to the findings, the majority of child brides/grooms were from lower socioeconomic strata of society. Additionally, it is well documented that poverty and socioeconomic inequality exacerbate child marriage incidence. Poverty and social inequality are inextricably linked to social norms. Thus, sustained efforts should be undertaken to alleviate poverty and social inequality through equal job opportunities and other initiatives, so that households do not face income poverty and can make decisions in the best interests of their children, particularly girls.
- **Strengthen village-level child protection mechanisms:** It is imperative to strengthen village-level child protection mechanisms such as VCPCs, which are specifically designed to help expand the child protection space, offer children a voice, and ensure decision-making power. Priority should be given to establishing effective VCPCs in all villages. VCPCs can play a critical role in community vigilance and may serve as a bridge between communities and government agencies such as the DCPU, CWC and others. State and district support is essential to make the VCPCs functioning, and PRI members should be involved, encouraged, and monitored to ensure the VCPCs perform effectively. DCPU or any other competent child protection agency/department must assume responsibility for establishing VCPCs and ensuring their operational readiness within a certain timeframe. Local non-governmental organisations may also play a key role in this. Convergence of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Rural Development, and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj with other concerned ministries and departments may be explored in order to ensure the monitoring and empowerment of these newly formed VCPCs and to ensure their formation and continued operation.
- **Devise mechanism to protect witnesses and informants of child marriage:** At the present, one of the most significant impediments to preventing child marriage is the underreporting of these incidents. This is reflected in the most recent NCRB data (2020), which indicated that only 785 child marriages recorded in India in under the PCMA (2006). Members in the community are scared of coming forward and informing the appropriate authorities about such events. Thus, local PRIs, non-governmental organisations and other institutions should be encouraged to report child marriage while maintaining

<sup>85</sup> 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

their anonymity. Additionally, it is critical to protect witnesses and informants in order to persuade community members to resist child marriages more frequently. Incentive schemes such as the Jharkhand Mukhbir Yojana 2021<sup>86</sup>, which rewards informants who report child marriage with a financial award of 1000 rupees, could potentially be widely implemented.

- **Provide necessary resources to children from vulnerable households to make online education accessible to them:** With COVID-19 adversely impacting children's education and putting them at risk of dropping out of school, particularly girls, due to a lack of access to online classes, the state and/or central governments must formulate schemes to incentivize low-income households to access necessary resources (smartphone/internet) for their children's education to continue via digital medium; launch a campaign to increase digital literacy among teachers and students in rural areas; and increase access to internet by implementing models like setting up of Public Data Offices (TRAI 2017).
- **Educate children about systemic response mechanisms (system specific and governance) in place by creating child friendly and age-appropriate IEC material:** Information on child rights and child protection, and equipping children with information related to grievance redress and helplines such as CHILDLINE, Women Helpline number, etc. and about agencies as well as utilisation of response mechanisms are extremely important in building children's awareness. Educating children from a young age about these would ensure greater retention and increased awareness among them.
- **Strengthen discussions around Sexual and Reproductive Health at village level:** Since child marriage tends to perpetuate the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and increases health risks for the mother and her children, open dialogues on SRH in platforms such as Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Day are essential to build a deeper understanding on the subject. Specific dialogues with mothers groups and adolescent groups and engagement with boys and men will enable breaking attitudinal barriers and improve community interface with the primary health system.
- **Create Central Guidelines for Child Marriage:** This study was conducted in four states, and reflects varying practices in response to child marriage by designated authorities such as police, CMPOs and so on. While variations in State Rules are necessary since they are in response to nuances particular to the context of the state, creating common minimum guidelines at the Central level under the PCMA, 2006 would help bring in parity in systemic response and facilitate smoother implementation of the legislation.

<sup>86</sup> Jharkhand govt is going to launch Mukhbir Yojana 2021 to curb child marriage. Under this scheme, people who gives information regarding the child marriage plan to the authorities and becomes spy of govt. will get a cash reward of Rs. 1,000. Moreover, all the village panchayats with no case of child marriage in a single year will get Rs. 50,000.



# **ANNEXURES**

## 1. List of villages and sample covered under the scope of study

States (District)							
Andhra Pradesh (Chittoor)				Uttar Pradesh (Chandauli)			
Blocks							
KVB Puram		Srikalahasti		Sahabganj		Chakia	
Villages							
Adavaram	44	Bokkasam Palem	11	Vanbhikhampur	25	Bhikhampur	31
Diguvaputhuru	9	Inagalur	19	Dhannipur	27	Alipur	15
Katrapalle	9	Narayanapuram	31	Dhodhanpur	24	Puranadih	28
Thimmasamudram	31	Ramapuram	6	Magraur	29	Sahamadpur	29
Kalathuru	30	Vedam	56	Rasiya	26	Jogiya kala	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>

States (District)							
Odisha (Kandhamal)				Maharashtra (Parbhani)			
Blocks							
Tumudibandh		Daringbadi		Manwath		Sailu	
Villages							
Gurupada	7	Daringbadi	16	Ambegaon	52	Aher Borgaon	18
Mundigada	22	Dasiketa	24	Mandewadgaon	26	Digrak Bk	18
Kurukudupa	13	Badepanga	18	Bodrawadi	20	Karadgaon	39
Kurtamgada	15	Kadamba	19	Kothla	25	Kawadhan	31
Sirla	33	Siangabali	26	Mangrul Bk	30	Sawangi	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

S. No.	States	Households (Sample)
1	Andhra Pradesh	246
2	Uttar Pradesh	246
3	Odisha	193
4	Maharashtra	284
<b>Total</b>	<b>969</b>	

## 2. Risk and mitigation strategies in context of COVID

Occasions/Activity/Issues	Probable Risks	Risk Mitigation Measures
Interactions amidst the ongoing pandemic	By the virtue of being outdoors, the data investigators are at a higher risk and so are potentially the respondents who interact with them.	<p>Both the investigators and the participants involved in the data collection process were provided with necessary precautionary tools like masks and sanitizers.</p> <p>Checking of the status of Aarogya Setu app. of the investigators and the participants before the start of the data collection process each day.</p> <p>Appropriate distance shall be maintained between the respondents and the investigators.</p> <p>All the investigators were provided with health insurance for the duration of data collection.</p>
Containment/Red Zones	Some of the areas within a particular cluster might be a containment zone due to numerous COVID positive cases	<p>The final delay in the particular study colony might be incurred due to the dynamic nature of the demarcation of these red zones.</p> <p>Government norms of containment zone will be diligently followed.</p>
Team Hiring and Training	Dropout of team members during data collection;	<p>If a person in the team is affected with COVID-19, the data collection will stop for 14 days. If a team member is sick or shows COVID-19 symptoms, he will be asked to quarantine and get tested.</p> <p>The corresponding respondents should be informed if any team member is tested positive for COVID-19.</p> <p>Around 15% extra team members to be trained to address the potential drop-out of data investigators due to reasons pertaining to COVID-19.</p> <p>10 to 15% buffer days have been factored in the work schedule to address such delays.</p>

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