



FACING CONSTRAINTS AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES:

CHILD MARRIAGES IN TELANGANA STATE

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Centre for Economic and Social Studies
Begumpet, Hyderabad

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Foreword

Child marriage is a cultural practice deeply embedded into the societal norms. The implications of child marriages are enormous and impacting the health, social and economic wellbeing of the girl children. In addition, it is correlating with high rates of sexual violence and abuse.

Along with Governments at Centre and State, several non-governmental organizations, and activists have committed to end child marriages. Indian government also has taken several initiatives to end child marriages. Recently, the ramifications of child marriage have begun to garner international attention among policymakers and governments. The Centre for Economic and Social Studies has also worked to shed light on this challenging issue from a policy perspective through its research as well as publications and disseminations of the findings of the research works.

A research team from Centre for Economic and Social Studies has conducted a study in selected districts of Telangana State and deepened our understanding of child marriage in this report with generous support from the Plan International and Mahita. This report on "*Facing Constraints and Seizing Opportunities: Child Marriages in Telangana State,*" takes a close look at the social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to the practice of child marriages and suggested few advocacy level conclusions and policy implications.

S. GALAB

Director, Centre for Economic and Social Studies

Hyderabad

July 2018

Foreword

Child marriage is one of the manifestations of gender based violence against girls and is a barrier to social and economic development. Although, in the last decade, there has been a significant decline in the prevalence of child marriage in India, few districts of Telangana, such as Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, Medak and Adilabad, continue to be above the national average.

While the state government of Telangana has taken positive and progressive steps to improve the situation for girls through its innovative development schemes aimed at delaying the age of marriage among girls, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts of all relevant actors to implement the policies and programs aimed at promoting equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women in the state of Telangana.

Since 2016, Plan India in partnership with Mahita, under the 'Girls Advocacy Alliance' program in Telangana, is working on addressing child marriage through promotion of secondary education for girls and job oriented vocational training for young women by dialoguing with stakeholders including the state government, Civil Society Organizations, Religious and Community Leaders, young girls and the private sector.

It is in this context that Plan India and Mahita commissioned a rapid sample study with the Centre for Economic and Social Studies [CESS], to understand the magnitude of child marriage and areas requiring attention of all stakeholders. This report "Facing Constraints and Seizing Opportunities– Child Marriages in Telangana" presents the factors contributing to child marriages, the perceptions of stakeholders on child marriages and recommendations for consideration by the government of Telangana to improve situation for girls.

Plan India thanks the Government of Telangana, religious and community leaders, Civil Society Organizations and other individuals who shared their knowledge, perspectives and experiences in the course of the study. Plan India also acknowledges and deeply appreciates the effort of CESS in bringing out this report. We also recognize contribution of Mahita in leading this study with CESS.

Plan India believes that the findings and recommendations of this study will direct efforts of the Government of Telangana, Communities, CSOs and the Private Sector in providing equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women in Telangana.

Mohammed Asif
Director, Program Implementation
Plan India

Foreword

Mahita has been working in the state of Telangana for more than two decades; since then, Mahita emerged as leading grassroots child rights organization in the state of Telangana. Through the years, we have had wide accessibility to communities, government stakeholders, NGOs, INGOs, academic institutions and the larger civil society institutions working in the development sector.

Girls Advocacy Alliance Program was initiated in 2016 both the Telugu states (Telangana and Andhra Pradesh) by Plan India- Mahita to address the gender based violences in the form of child marriages and trafficking while promoting secondary education and job oriented vocational training. The research study, "Facing Constraints and Seizing Opportunities: Child Marriages in Telangana State" will be crucial in steering the collective efforts in the state of Telangana State to address the issue of child marriages in the state. We believe that this research will emerge as a guide to our collective effort in achieving 'Equal Rights and Opportunities for Girls and Young Women' in both the states.

We are truly grateful to Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad for their labors in bringing out the study. Our heartfelt thanks to Prof S Galab for guiding the design of the entire research study. We acknowledge the months long efforts of Prof Vijay and Prof Prudhvikar towards this quality research study.

We are forever indebted to Plan India for their guidance, encouragement and support in our combined undertaking towards this research study. We are forever indebted to Mr. Asif Mohammed, Director- Program Implementation for his valuable direction to our team especially during the course of the research study.

We express our thanks to Ms. Anita Kumar – Senior Program Manager, Plan India for having conceptualized this study. We are thankful for the consistent and valuable inputs from Mr. Tushar Aanchal – Child Protection Specialist, Mr. Madhu Sagili- Programme Manager- Child Protection and Dr. Shalini Prabhata R- Program Manager- Girls Advocacy Alliance. Special thanks to the Lead Partners and NGOs of the Programme in the Districts for their great support extended. Thanks to the entire Girls Advocacy Alliance Team at Mahita, for their commitment and support during the course of the Research Study.

We are sure that the combined constancy and purpose demonstrated by all of us will surely contribute to the realization of Equal Rights and Opportunities for girls and young women in the state of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Ramesh Sekhar Reddy.P
Program Director

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Acknowledgements

This report is based on the research conducted by Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) with inputs from a wide range of literature available on child marriages. It is a part of the joint initiatives of Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA), which is aimed at contributing to equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women and inclusive economic growth in ten countries in Asia and Africa. GAA also focuses on the elimination of violence and economic exclusion of girls and young women, as policy priorities.

The study team from CESS would like to thank the core funders Plan India and Mahita, the collaborating partners in Telangana State.

Prof. S. Galab, Director, CESS and Ms. Anita Kumar, Senior Programme Manager-South, Plan India has conceptualised this report. The lead authors of the report are Prof. S. Vijay Kumar and Dr. P. Prudhvikar Reddy, with analytical support from Dr. P. Usha.

Dr. Shalini Prabhata from Plan India, Mr. Ramesh Reddy, Programme Director, and Ms. Rubina Philip, Manager – Child Protection from Mahita, reviewed numerous drafts and made important inputs.

An initial version of the report was discussed at a couple of internal review meetings in CESS. Participants of these meetings have made many important contributions to the framing and shaping of the report to suit the needs of GAA in Telangana State.

Mr. Srihari contributed to the data management and analysis. The New Concept contributed to the copyediting of the final report.

A core research team has engaged in data collection and the key respondents are from Department of Women Development and Child Welfare, Senior officials from District Revenue Departments, *mandal* level functionaries from Police, ICDS, and Revenue Departments, *ZillaSamakhya* leaders, representatives from NGOs, civil society, print media, medical practitioners and advocates. At the village level, parents, *panchayat* members, religious leaders, community/caste leaders, school teachers, ICDS workers and health department workers also cooperated with the research team during the process of data collection.

Abbreviations

ABAD	<i>ApniBetiApnaDhan</i>
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwifery
AWW	<i>AnganWadi</i> Worker
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESS	Centre for Economic and Social Studies
CMRA	Child Marriage Restraint Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DCS	Division for Child Studies
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GP	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCMA	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
PRI	<i>Panchayat Raj</i> Institution
SHG	Self Help Group
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.
USAIDS	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

Executive Summary

This report is an output of a rapid field study conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Studies between October 2017 and January 2018 in selected districts of Telangana State. This report aims to provide Girls Advocacy Alliance with insights and evidence from the field that they can use to shape their policy level advocacy, make philanthropic investments and design programme focussing on empowering girls and community and ending child marriage. With this roadmap, we believe GAA can make a difference while addressing the issue of child marriages in Telangana.

Context:

India is now seeing a transitional period, with the prevalence of child marriage¹ declining from 47 percent girls married before age 18, in 2005-2006² to 27 percent in 2015-2016. While the change is similar with all states showing a declining trend, the prevalence of child marriage continues to be high in some districts. In Telangana State, where according to NFHS 4, 25.7 percent of women aged 20-24, were married before the age of 18 years (15.7 percent in urban and 35 percent in rural). About 10.6 percent of the women aged 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of NFHS survey.

The factors that are contributing to child marriages are complex and interrelated. Understanding the key driving factors is more important to address the issue at policy level.

¹ According to Indian Law, child marriage is a [marriage](#) where either the woman is below age 18 or the man is below age 21.

² United Nations in India, <http://in.one.un.org/un-press-release/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according-new-unicef-estimates/>

In this process, this study is a part of [Girls Advocacy Alliance](#) (GAA), a joint initiative of Plan Netherlands, Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands and Terre des Hommes Netherlands, which is aimed at contributing to equal rights and opportunities for girls and young women and inclusive economic growth in ten countries in Asia and Africa, with focus on the elimination of violence and economic exclusion of girls and young women, as policy priorities. In India this initiative is led by Plan India in collaboration with Mahita across 6 districts in Telangana and 3 districts in Andhra Pradesh, and Terre des Hommes Netherlands along with Tharuni and Help are implementing the program in 3 districts in TS and 3 districts in Andhra Pradesh.

[Centre for Economic and Social Studies](#), one of the leading research organisations ([Indian Council of Social Science Research](#) Institute, Government of India) has executed this rapid study in Telangana between October 2017 and May 2018.

The core objectives of the study are -

1. Identify the influencers or factors of child marriage within families and communities in the selected districts where child marriages are high and assess the impact of child marriages on child brides;
2. Explore the challenges in enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; and
3. Draw positive role models from Administration, CSO's, religious leaders, elected representatives, communities, media and youth networks to address CM (Case Studies) and provide recommendations for advocacy and policy implications based on experiences from religious leaders, government officials, elected representatives, PRI's, teachers, and community leaders.

Sample Framework –

The study has drawn its sample from Adilabad, Gadwal, Khammam, Sangareddy, Yadadri, Warangal, Vikarabad, Mahabubnagar and Hyderabad districts of Telangana state where child marriages are predominantly high. From each sample district, after discussing with the senior staff of Women Development and Child Welfare Department, 35 key informants³ were selected for interview. Using key informant interview schedule, information has been collected from 315 selected key informants at village, *mandal* and district level. Besides, 36 FGD's (Focus Group Discussions) were conducted with selected stakeholders⁴ at village level.

Research Methodology –

Using mixed methodology, this study has adopted semi-structured interview schedule to collect information from the selected key informants. In addition, to supplement the information collected during the key respondent interviews, FGDs were conducted with the help of structured checklists.

Results –

Synthesised analysis of the study has brought 25 driving factors into the picture. For the purpose of logical analytics, these 25 driving factors were further classified into four categories – (i) Traditions, social norms and beliefs, (ii) Poverty, (iii) Access to secondary Education and (iv) Social pressure. Each of these 25 factors connected to child marriage cannot be examined in isolation. Because each one influences the other factor and is driven by the caste religion, poverty, migration and socioeconomic conditions.

³ At *Gram Panchayat*: *Panchayat Secretary*, *Serpanch*, *Anganwadi* worker, *School headmaster/Teacher*, *Community Leader*, *SHG member* were the KIs. Similarly, at *mandal* level: *ICDS Supervisor*, *CDPO*, *MDO/MRO*, *Police Sub-inspector* and *mandal* samakya leader; at *District* level: *RDO/Joint Collector*, *Chairperson CWC*, *NGO/Child-Line representative*, *concerned staff in WDCW department* and *Zilla Samakya Leaders* are the key informants interviewed.

⁴ Parents, representatives of *Gram Panchayat*, *School teachers*, *Religious leaders*, *Caste council members/Community leaders*, *Health and ICDS functionaries*, *Representatives of SHGs and Youth Clubs*.

In Telangana State, it is evident that traditions and social norms, economic insecurity, lack of access to secondary education and social pressure are the primary drivers of child marriages.

‘Higher the education, higher the dowry’ is the strong belief among most of the poor families in Telangana State. If the girl is well-educated, getting an equally qualified boy is quite difficult. In addition, meeting the cost of higher education for girls is also one of the challenges and hence parents are opting for early marriages where the age of the girl has lesser priority. The next important driving factor is consanguineous marriage, mainly to protect the ancestral property, strengthen the kinships as well as political power within the caste structure. In this context, age of the girl is not of much importance and the only criteria is the biological maturity of the girl. In this scenario, parents are performing child marriages under pressure from grandparents. In few communities, performing child marriage is a routine customary practice.

There are certain social norms, for instance parents prefer to get their daughter’s married before their son’s marriage. Similarly, death of a family member must precede a girl’s marriage. In such a scenario also, age of the girl is not taken into consideration. There is a belief among the rural communities that higher the education, higher the dowry. Due to this, few parents prefer to get their daughters married off as and when they get a good bridegroom and they don’t want to send their girl children for higher education. If the family has more number of girl children, irrespective of their young age, parents opt for child marriages and want to be free from responsibilities. These are the key driving factors classified under traditions, social norms and beliefs.

The cycle of intergenerational poverty also contributes to child marriages. Families with economic insecurity (because of no or less dependable income/ assets) prefer child marriages. For example, in Mahabubnagar district, where

drought is more common, parents from poor families migrate to faraway places, for example to Maharashtra and Gujarat for livelihoods. In such families, to avoid the risks associated with leaving the young girls behind with grandparents, parents prefer child marriages. If both the parents are illiterate, in general their awareness levels are low, and they are unable to understand the consequences of child marriages. Hence, child marriages are common among such families. This factor is again linked to poverty.

Lack of access to secondary education is another top most important issue behind child marriages. In specific geographical areas where secondary education is not accessible, parents don't want to keep girl children unmarried for long in the family. Instead of engaging girl children into other household and livelihood activities, parents prefer to marry off girl children. This is also to avoid male harassment within the school and prevent girls from being harassed while commuting to school or their work place. Lack of transportation to reach secondary schooling, lack of or poor sanitation facilities in secondary schools are also driving factors behind child marriages. Sometimes, academic failure of girl child influences her aspirations about higher education negatively. In such circumstances, she is more likely to drop out from school and alternatively leads parents to prepare for her marriage.

Sometimes, fear of love and elopement, forces the parents to marry off their children at an early age in order to avoid facing caste councils and punishments. In few cases it appears that social and electronic media also influence both young boys and girls to fall in love and elope. In general, child marriage is a common practice among the families headed by women (single parent families). In addition to poverty, pressure from the community, elders and caste leaders force the single parents to encourage and support child marriage of girl.

A number of factors are now known to contribute to the practice of child marriage, including the civil registration system, the lack of legislative framework and enforcement mechanisms, and the existence of traditional and religious laws that support the practice. An effective implementable legal framework, which is supported by financial resources and enforcement mechanisms, provides a protective framework that ensures a girl's right to decide when and whom to marry. It also provides an enabling and supportive environment that will help to guide advocates and activists to mobilise communities to end child marriage.

A summary of the present study highlights that girls from the poorest and socially disadvantaged backgrounds run the risk of dropping out of school or just stopping education at primary level. Government's initiative to support girls from such categories need to have an implementable plan for potential results.

Recommendations

From the above discussions, one can understand the processes which operate at the more remote, societal level; structural factors and social norms, interact with more immediate factors, such as household contexts (poverty, migration, culture, beliefs and social norms) and girls' individual development (access to secondary education), and challenges in enforcing law, thereby leaving the girl child predisposed to the risk of early marriage. It is therefore in this context, that advocacy with key stakeholders is important. Factors contributing to child marriages at different levels in different life courses need to be taken into account.

The implications for policy below, include discussion of possible ways to alleviate and counter some of the societal factors that exacerbate gendered disadvantages during adolescence, and measures to help build the capacity of individuals and families to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

From this study, the following few advocacy points have emerged: –

1. Grandparents and parents were found to have a significantly higher say in deciding upon the child marriages. Sometimes religious leaders, and community leaders also play influential role. Advocacy needs to start from this point by sensitising them on various consequences of child marriages as well legal implications associated with child marriages in Telangana.
2. The authorities need to invest in accessible, girl-friendly and high-quality secondary education to assist and encourage girls to stay in school for longer. Quality of teaching and quality of school environment is more important.
3. Improved access to economic opportunities for young women, so that staying in school and delaying marriage are more worthwhile for girls and their families.
4. Strong and comprehensive social protection systems and support for the poorest households- since poverty is the major factor pushing many families to opt for child marriages.
5. Conditional cash transfers – one of the best options to support the poor families to keep their girl children longer in schools, and support the family in adverse economic conditions.
6. Effective interventions with communities and families (including boys and men) to address social norms and to reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.
7. Encouraging female role models so that girls and their families can envisage positive alternatives to child marriage.

At the policy level, the following key policy points need to be considered-

Law and enforcement mechanism alone cannot help in stopping child marriages. Such practice is often supported by religious leaders, community leaders, caste councils and elders (patriarchal superiors) in the family. Along with strengthening the enforcement mechanism, it is more important to strengthen specific entitlements to address poverty, social norms, traditions and social pressures, which are major factors pushing parents towards child marriages. Following are the policy level factors to be considered:

1. Improve access to quality education and other vocational opportunities. It is essential to increase the number of KGBVs considering the positive impact of this programme in retention and improvement of girl child education. Promote schools as learning environment for girls. Along with this, increase the educational opportunities through scholarships.
2. Extend free and compulsory education up to the age of 18 years, particularly considering the fact that every drop out child is at a high potential risk for early marriage.
3. Skill development is one of the most important factors for the well-being of adolescent girls. Such initiatives will help in stopping child marriages.
4. Initiate programmes to enable community mobilisation and outreach to change social norms and attitudes of the community. Raising community awareness is more crucial in bringing attitudinal change among parents, caste leaders and religious leaders. Involving and improving the capacities of PRIs, community leaders and religious leaders makes a difference towards prevention of child marriages at grass root level. It also imparts strength to the enforcement mechanism.

5. In order to collect data on child marriages, initiate research to create awareness about programmes and interventions. Improvement in systematic data collection, compilation and analysis is important to strengthen the data bank on child marriages. It is also important to initiate evaluations on a regular basis to inform the policy makers.
6. Develop monitoring and evaluation systems for measuring outcomes.
7. Improve systematic coordination, communication and monitoring among those involved in the implementation.
8. CMPOs and Police must be involved for developing state level intervention strategies, effective implementation of PCMA and delivery of services that pre-empt the incidence of child marriages.
9. Develop mechanisms of sharing responsibility of preventing child marriages among different functionaries/structures (PRIs, ULBs, School, PHC, AWC, VO etc.) at the community level and build their motivation and capacities to effectively deliver the desired results.
10. Bring the convergence between enforcement mechanism and organisations working towards ending child marriages and ensure the well-being of girl children. In this context, interdisciplinary coordination with specific responsibilities needs to be laid down.
11. To enforce PCMA 2006 and related laws and policies that can discourage child marriage. The effective implementation of this Act can adopt and enforce state specific rules on PCMA 2006, and improve the capacity of the enforcement machinery, it is important to raise the community level awareness about the Act.

Specific Policy Implications

There are quite a few specific driving factors that are prevailing in the districts. Such factors have to be considered when advocacy planning takes place and action plans are formulated. For example –

1. Poverty is the main cause of child marriages in Telangana State. Particularly poor families are faced with challenges in educating their girl children. This needs to be addressed through conditional cash transfers in addition to providing quality education.
2. Consanguineous marriages to protect ancestral property and consolidating and strengthening kinship are common across all sample districts in Telangana. To justify such practice, parents and community present religious justification and try to pass it off as a customary practice which must be followed. All upper castes are practicing consanguineous marriages and sometimes child marriages are taking place under this umbrella. This needs special focus.
3. It is evident that socially disadvantaged communities for example Scheduled Castes are performing child marriages under religious belief and opting for devoting young girls to village deities, which ultimately leads to child marriage. This is known as the devadasipractice (locally called as mathamas/jogins) system still in practice in remote parts of Mahabubnagar district.
4. In Mahabubnagar district, poor families who are under the debt trap, are searching for wealthy families from neighbouring Karnataka state that can offer reverse dowry (locally known as Kanyasulkam) during marriage. Irrespective of the age of the girl, parents are performing child marriages if they get a good match from better-

off families. Drought is a major cause for parents to opt for such practices and due to drought poor families migrate to other states. During such period, parents want to ensure better security and food for their girl children at their in-laws family. Such system is also evident in Mahabubnagar district. In this context, it is important to focus on providing social security mechanisms, such as conditional cash transfers.

5. Social norms and beliefs are also encouraging child marriages. For instance, biological maturity of the girl is the sign for marriage in most of the socially disadvantaged communities, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Adilabad, Khammam, Mahabubnagar districts. These communities are celebrating en-mass child marriages during public festivals such as *jatharas* where caste councils play a very strong role commanding the families under social norm umbrella. In this context, separate action plan is required where both enforcement mechanism and awareness campaigns have to work together.

In conclusion, a specific policy and programmatic actions are needed to stop child marriage and its far-reaching adverse consequences. It is important for parents and communities at large to change their attitudes to the issue of early marriage and rather extend opportunities for childhood learning and education by keeping girls in school for more number of years. The role of Government and civil society organisations is important to address this issue. They work closely together, design action plan that is implementable and suits to address different driving factors of child marriages.

Section

1

Introduction

International conventions prohibit child marriage and define eighteen as the age of adulthood. These laws are based on the argument that children and adolescents are not mature enough to make choices about marriage, and that marrying too young can lead to lasting emotional, physical, and psychological harm. Moreover, development experts say child marriage stunts girls' educational opportunities and income-earning prospects, and perpetuate poverty in communities worldwide, inhibiting progress toward national and global development goals and threatening stability. Delaying the age of marriage and investing in girl's future, they say, can have a multiplier effect that benefits the communities at large⁵.

Child marriage is a traditional practice that is embedded into the social life of many communities and continues to harm the lives and stunts the future of millions of girls around the world. Research shows that child marriage results in reduced schooling, impacts health, limiting girls' economic potential, correlated with high rates of sexual violence and abuse, and with higher rates of maternal and infant mortality⁶.

Child marriage transcends regional and cultural boundaries. Across developing countries, an estimated one in three girl is married before turning eighteen, and one in nine before fifteen. Analysts project that if current trends continue, 142 million girls will marry before adulthood within this decade. The practice persists to varying degrees around the globe. The highest prevalence rates, commonly measured by the percentage of women aged twenty to twenty-four who report being married before eighteen, are found in South Asia and West and Central Africa, where an estimated two out of five girls are married

⁵Council on Foreign Relations – CFR Info Guide on Child Marriages https://www.cfr.org/interactives/child-marriage?cid=otr_marketing_use-child_marriage_Infoguide%2523!/#/

⁶Ibid

as children. However, in terms of absolute numbers, India surpasses other countries by a wide margin: about 40 percent of all child marriages take place there⁷.

Surveys of child brides conducted by the United Nations and many non-governmental agencies paint a broad demographic portrait of young married girls:

- Girls from rural areas are twice as likely to marry as children as those from urban areas.
- Child brides are most likely to be from poor families. Across many countries, young married girls are most often from the poorest quintile of the income bracket.
- Married girls are generally less educated, either for lack of opportunity or the curtailment of their schooling by early marriage.

In some countries, disparities in the prevalence of child marriage also lie along religious, ethnic, or regional lines⁸.

Prevalence

Child marriage is a violation of human rights, but is all too common – says UNICEF⁹. Marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights. Many factors come into play to place a girl at risk of child marriage; these include poverty, family honour, social norms, customary or religious laws that condone the practice, an inadequate legislative framework and the state

⁷ Ibid ⁸ Ibid

⁹ UNICEF Data: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women (2018) <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/#>

of a country's civil registration system and the perception that marriage will provide 'protection'. Child marriage often compromises a girl's development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at an increased risk of domestic violence. Child marriage also affects boys, but to a lesser degree than girls¹⁰.

Several government and non-government interventions have worked towards preventing child marriages in India. The data trends shown by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) indicate a fall of approximately 9 percentage points in child marriage, nationally between 1993 and 2006¹¹. The mean age at marriage has increased from 19.3 years in 1990 to 21.2 in 2011¹², and falling rates of child marriage can be seen across the whole country. Nevertheless, the volume of child marriages taking place each year remains extraordinarily high and declining prevalence rates should not distract attention from what is still a substantial problem. The Indian population is increasing year after year and so rapid declines in prevalence rates are not necessarily recognisable when viewed in terms of absolute numbers. Indeed, by far the largest numbers of child marriages take place in India compared to any other country in the world¹³.

The incidence of child marriage is inequitably spread geographically and across different social groups, affected by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, caste, religion and education. There is a stark difference, for instance, in the prevalence of child marriage between girls and boys, with 19 percent of girls aged between 15 and 17 and only 7 percent of boys aged between 15

¹⁰ Ibid ¹¹ UNICEF (2011b) The Situation of Children in India: A Profile, New Delhi: UNICEF

¹² Census of India (2011) Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2011, Report 1 of 2013, New Delhi: Government of India

¹³ Jennifer Roest (2016) Child Marriages and Early Child-bearing in India: Risk Factors and Policy Implications. Young Lives Policy Paper 10,

and 20 married at the time of NFHS-3, in 2005/6¹⁴. This is still a large number for boys and they are not immune to many of the risks, which entail child marriage, including those entailing limitations to education and livelihood opportunities. However, girls commonly experience greater risk because of the link between child marriage and early pregnancy and child-bearing, as well as due to increased vulnerability of young brides, to abuse in the marital household¹⁵.

Child marriage has long been associated with early child-bearing and similar statistical trend in the teenage birth rate as in rates of child marriage¹⁶. The pregnancy rate among girls under 18 declined by 21 percent between 1998 and 2006 according to Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data, yet the number of women aged between 20 and 24, who would have given birth before the age of 18 is projected to increase by 1 million between 2010 and 2030¹⁷. Since pregnancy often follows marriage, it is the same girls who are at the greatest risk of both. In 2005-2006, rural girls were found to be twice as likely as urban girls to have given birth by 18 years of age and 'less educated young women, those belonging to the most economically disadvantaged households and those belonging to Scheduled Tribes [were] more likely than others to have given birth before they were 18 years of age'¹⁸.

Similarly, it is the girls who are least educated, poorest, from rural areas and from marginalised social groups who are most likely to get married by 18. The

¹⁴ Parasuraman, Sulabha, SunitaKishor, Shri Kant Singh and Y. Vaidehi (2009) A Profile of Youth in India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS- 3), India, 2005-06, Mumbai and Calverton, MD: International Institute for Population Sciences and ICF Macro

¹⁵ Jennifere Roest (2016) Child Marriages and Early Child-bearing in India: Risk Factors and Policy Implications. Young Lives Policy Paper 10,

¹⁶ Ibid ¹⁷ Edilberto, Loaiza and Liang Mengjia (2013) Adolescent Pregnancy: A Review of the Evidence, New York: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

¹⁸ Santhya, K.G. and Shireen J. Jejeebhoy (2012) 'The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Young People in India: A Review of the Situation', New Delhi: Population Council

median age of marriage for girls from marginalised social groups was found to be two years earlier than for those belonging to other social groups – 16.5 among girls from the Scheduled Castes, 16.7 for those among Scheduled Tribes and 16.8 for those among Other Backward Classes, as opposed to 18.7 among other, less marginalised groups – according to NFHS data from 2005-2006¹⁹.

Census data from 2011 reveals substantial variance in rates of child marriage between states; the percentage of females ‘effectively married’ before 18 was at its lowest, at 0.3 percent, in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir, and at its highest, at 7.8 percent, in West Bengal. United Telangana State had the ninth-highest number of people who were married as children in 2011, though the percentage of those effectively married before 18 was only marginally higher than the national average, at 4 percent²⁰.

Differences in prevalence between states are smaller in many cases than between urban and rural sites within the same state. NFHS-4 data from 2015-2016 reports 25.7 percent child marriages in Telangana State²¹.

¹⁹ UNICEF (2012) Child Marriage in India: An Analysis of Available Data (2012), New Delhi: UNICEF

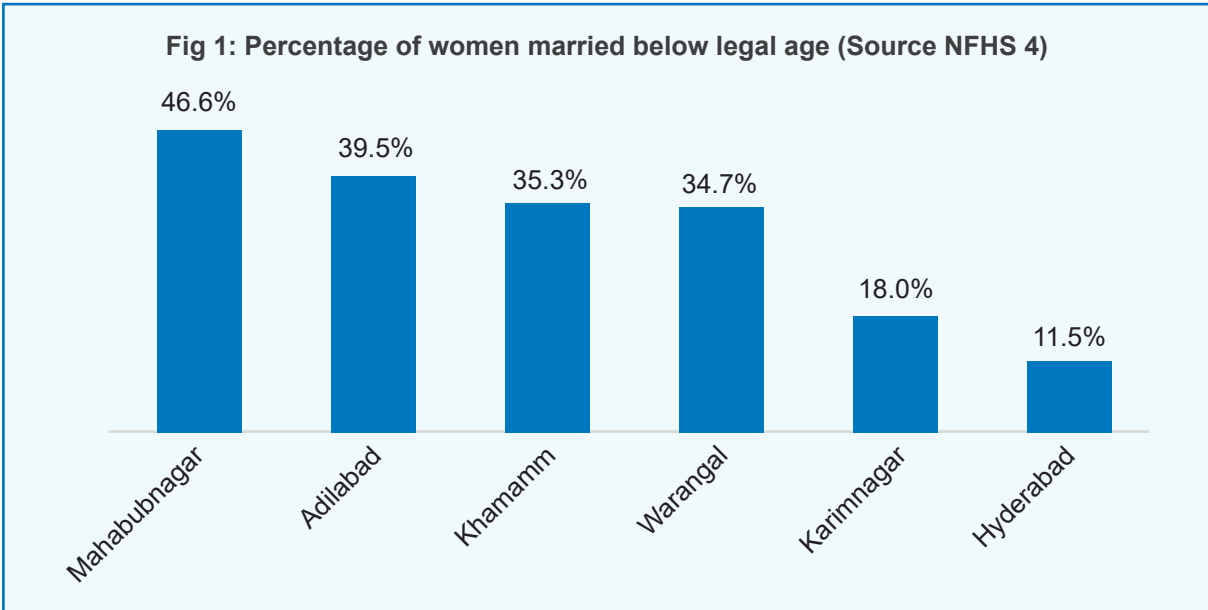
²⁰ Census of India (2011) Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2011, Report 1 of 2013, New Delhi: Government of India

²¹ IIPS (2016a) ‘National Family Health Survey-4, 2015-16, State Fact Sheet: Telangana State & Telangana State’, Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences and Government of India

Table 1 shows these disparities, alongside similar trends observed in the figures for early child-bearing.

Table 1: State-level data comparing the prevalence of child marriage in urban and rural areas of Telangana State			
Indicator	Total	Urban	Rural
Women aged 20–24 years married before age 18 years (%)	33.0	26.8	35.7
Men age 25-29 years married before age 21 years (%)	15.8	9.3	18.9
Women aged 15–19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%)	11.8	8.8	13.2
Source: NFHS 4 (2015-16)			

Within Telangana State, NFHS data says that highest percentage of women below legal age of marriage²² is from rural areas of Hyderabad, Adilabad, Sangareddy, Khammam, Warangal Rural, Yadadribongiri, Mahabubnagar, Gadwal and Vikarabad (**Fig 1**)²³.



²² Child marriage can be defined as a marriage solemnised between two people where the female is below the age of 18 years, and the male is below the age of 21 years.

²³ Note - Data available for erstwhile districts only.

Legislations

India has ratified international human rights conventions – Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Besides, it has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). India's national legislative framework has contained a law prescribing a minimum age of marriage since 1929. The Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) (also known as the 'SardaAct') originally prohibited the marriage of girls below the age of 15 and boys below the age of 18, though by 1978 this had been increased to 18 for girls and 21 for boys²⁴.

There were challenges associated with the CMRA, including that it was 'considered to be ineffectual and its implementation weak', resulting in only a small number of prosecutions each year²⁵. Considering the concerns by Muslim population, resulted its supersession by the Muslim Personal Law Application Act of 1937, which allowed for parental or guardian consent for Muslim marriages with no minimum age limit²⁶.

It was in 2006, that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) replaced the CMRA, which prohibits child marriages, but also allows for the annulment of any such marriage, with petitions accepted up to two years after the child reaches his/her majority (i.e. up to 20 years old for girls and 23 years old for boys). The Act also augments the punishment for any adult male who enters into marriage with a child, increasing the sentencing options to up to two

²⁴ Jennifer Roest (2016) Child Marriages and Early Child-bearing in India: Risk Factors and Policy Implications. Young Lives Policy Paper 10, <https://www.younglives.org.uk/sites/www.younglives.org.uk/files/YL-PolicyPaper-10-Sep16.pdf>

²⁵ UNICEF (2011a) 'Desk Review of Child Marriage', <http://www.khubmarriage18.org/sites/default/les/18.pdf> (accessed 13 July 2016)

²⁶ Ibid

years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to 1 lakh rupees. Similar sentences are prescribed for those who perform, conduct, direct, abet or solemnise a child marriage. However, the law retains the same definition of child marriage – for girls under 18 and for boys below 21 – and implementation has again been described as weak, with only 280 and 222 cases registered nationally in 2014 and 2013, respectively²⁷.

Registration of marriage has been made compulsory under different Acts– The Christian Marriage Act of 1872, the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act of 1936, and the Special Marriage Act of 1954, has brought a mandate of registration of marriages. Even though this was relaxed for Hindu marriages under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, it was in 2006, the Supreme Court directed all State Governments to create and implement rules regarding the compulsory registration of all marriages, regardless of religion, in order to improve the enforcement of the prohibition on child marriage²⁸. The Supreme Court’s [landmark ruling](#) criminalising sex with a minor even within marriage forms part of a solid legal framework²⁹.

National policies

There are few national policies that are aimed at reducing child marriage and early child-bearing. The summaries of these policies are as follows (Table 2)³⁰–

²⁸ MWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) (2011) India: Third and Fourth Combined Periodic Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, New Delhi: Government of India

²⁹ A two Judge Bench of Supreme Court held that sexual intercourse with minor (below 18 years) wife is rape. “we are left with absolutely no other option but to harmonize the system of laws relating to children and require Exception 2 to Section 375 o... Read more at: <http://www.livelaw.in/breaking-sex-minor-wife-rape-police-can-register-case-wifes-complaint-sc-reads-exception-2-s-375-ipc/>

³⁰ JennifreeRoest (2016) Child Marriages and Early Child-bearing in India: Risk Factors and Policy Implications. Young Lives Policy Paper 10

Table 2. National policies (relevant to child marriages in India)

Policy	Relevance to child marriage/early child-bearing
National Population Policy, 2000	Aims to achieve 100 per cent registration of births, deaths, marriage and pregnancies by 2010
National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001	Conceived to introduce interventions and special programmes to encourage delaying the age of marriage so that by 2010 child marriage is eliminated
The National Youth Policy, 2003, and the more recent National Youth Policy, 2014	Emphasizes the multiple needs of the young and identifies 11 priority areas and multi-pronged actions with special strategies to address the needs of adolescents in a holistic manner
National Plan of Action for Children, 2005	Aims to achieve 100 percent registration of births, deaths, marriages and pregnancies by 2010, elimination of child marriages by 2010, and stopping the sale of children and all forms of child trafficking, including for marriage
India's Eleventh and Twelfth Five-Year Plans	The Eleventh Five-Year Plan included a focus on the 'compulsory registration of marriages and verification of age at the time of marriage', and the Twelfth proposed a Girl Child Specific District Plan of Action towards 'advancing rights of the Girl Child with measurable outcomes on increased CSR [child sex ratio] and age at marriage', particularly for districts with a low CSR and a high incidence of child marriages
Draft National Strategy Document on the Prevention of Child Marriage (2013)	Identifies strategic areas of intervention, including law enforcement, access to quality education and other opportunities, changing mindsets and social norms, the empowerment of adolescents, knowledge and data management and the development of monitorable indicators.

Table 2. National policies (relevant to child marriages in India)

Policy	Relevance to child marriage/early child-bearing
BetiBachao, BetiPadhaoScheme (2015)	Aims to improve the Child Sex Ratio in 100 Gender Critical Districts, the imbalance of which exacerbates the buying of young brides in some states. It also aims to address the 'patriarchal mindset' to ensure gender equality for girls, as well as to increase access to education and improve the participation of girls at 'all levels of social, economic and political leadership'.
Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2015)	Identifies increasing the participation of women in the labour force as key to improving the economic growth of the country. Includes provisions regarding the delivery of skills training to out-of-school children, adolescent girls, housewives and rural young people.
Other laws that include provisions relating to child marriage and/or to adolescent sexual and reproductive health include Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ Act) of 2000 and its subsequent Amendment Act of 2006; the Indian Penal Code (and Amendment of 2013); the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 (and Amendment of 2002); the Protection of Children from Sexual Abuse Act, 2013; the National Commission for Women Act, 1990; the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA); and the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005.	

Significance of Present Study

The purpose of this study is to find out about the driving factors influencing child marriages in Telangana State and also to know the perceptions of different stakeholders. Ultimately, the results of the study will help in drafting the advocacy plan. Mahita, one of the leading non-governmental organisations working on child rights is going to use the outputs of this study and design advocacy plan along with Plan India.

Core Objectives

- i. Identify the influencers or factors of child marriage³¹ within families and communities in the selected districts where child marriages are high,
 - a. Assess the impact of child marriages on child brides (Eg. Physical and Mental Health, Socioeconomic),
- ii. Explore the challenges in enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
 - a. Draw positive role models from Administration, CSO's, religious leaders, elected Representatives, Communities, media and youth networks to address CM. (Case Studies),
- iii. Provide recommendations for advocacy and policy implications.
 - a. Recommendations based on experiences from religious leaders, government officials, elected representatives, PRI's, teachers, and community leaders.

Research Design

In keeping with the objectives, the present study focused on obtaining in-depth, qualitative information on the underlying social, cultural and economic factors that are influencing and sustaining the practice of child marriage in the selected districts of Telangana. This methodology was deemed most appropriate because of the variety of questions used under investigation. By collecting data from different contexts and different respondent groups, the research was designed to acquire a cumulative view and information that is as valid, reliable and objective as possible.

³¹This report uses the term “child Marriage” adopting PCMA 2006 definition – “child means a person who, if a male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age”

The appropriateness and relevance of this approach was monitored throughout the research process right from training of the researchers, subsequent collection of primary data at village, *mandal* and district levels. Data collection was also facilitated by the preliminary data analysis to confirm that tools and recording formats were functioning well and implemented appropriately.

Literature Review: Different archival material such as government and NGO assessments, reports, ethnographic and other academic research, project needs assessments and evaluations were reviewed at the initial stages of the study to understand child marriage-related factors, manifestations, interpretations and interventions, across the countries where child marriages are a prominent issue. The synthesised review has been presented in a section of this report.

Key Informant Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person by the researchers at the village, mandal and district with Key Informants. Each interview has taken approximately 2 hours.

Focus Group Discussions: Following the Key Respondent Interviews, FGDs were conducted with selected members of the communities where data were collected using checklists. Each FGD has taken approximately 2 to 3 hours.

Tools Development

Soon after analysing the literature, a semi-structured questionnaire and checklist was drafted and tested in the field. Based on feedback, it was improved to larger extent and presented in couple of internal meetings as well as to Technical Advisory Group (TAG). On TAGs approval, field teams started the fieldwork in selected districts. Data collection was guided by Standard Operating Procedures. In this context, a team of trained researchers was recruited and oriented on the tools and operating procedures.

Research Location

Based on the available statistical data, from government sources, on child marriages nine districts were selected from Telangana State (See **Table 3**).

Table 3: Geographical locations (District, Mandal and Villages)			
S.No	District	Mandal	Village
1	Hyderabad	1. Musheerabad	1. Ramnagar 2. Lalitha Nagar (Sithaphalamandi)
		2. Saidabad	1. Singareni Colony 2. NR Colony
2	Adilabad	1. Utnoor	1. Indira Nagar 2. Pulimadugu
		2. Enchoda	1. Narsapur 2. Sonpally
3	Sangareddy	1. Pulkal	1. Pulkal 2. Korpoul
		2. Patancheruvu	1. Chitkul 2. Lakdaram
4	Khammam	1. Tirumalayapalame	1. Tirumalayapalem 2. Pindiporlu
		2. Rahunathapalem	1. V. Venkatayapalem 2. N.V. Banjara

Table 3: Geographical locations (District, Mandal and Villages

S.No	District	Mandal	Village
5	Warangal Rural	1. Nekkonda	1. Redlawada 2. Peddkorpole
		2. Chennarao Peta	1. Lingagiri 2. Khadharpeta
6	Yadadribongiri	1. Valigonda	1. Sunkishala 2. Puligilia
		2. Thurkapally	1. Madhapur 2. Mulkalpali
7	Mahabubnagar	1. Damaragidda	1. Bapanapally 2. Lokurthy
		2. Maddur	1. DuppatiGattu 2. Dhorepally
8	Gadwal	1. Gattu	1. Aregidda 2. GorlakhDoddi
		2. Leeja	1. Shankapuram 2. Bingidoddi
9	Vikarabad	1. Vikarabad	1. Madgulachitlamkunta 2. Phulmaddi
		2. Bantwaram	1. Rompally 2. Yacharam

From each district, two *mandals*, and from each *mandal*, two villages were covered during the study. The selection of mandals and villages was done in consultation with District Women and Child Welfare Departments in each district.

The process of sample selection is carried out in the following steps:

- Step 1:** Key Informant interviews with Key stakeholders in selected districtlevel officials and NGOs/Civil Society Representatives including Media. Along with required information on influencing factors behind child marriages, data has been collected in *mandals* (including villages) where child marriages history has been recorded in the past 2 to 3 years.
- Step 2:** Based on the data available from Step 1, two high priority *mandals* were selected for one-on-one interviews with mandallevel officials. During this stage, villages with a history of child marriage were listed out.
- Step 3:** With available data, two villages were selected for FGDs with parents, community leaders, religious leaders and with other key appropriate stakeholders.

Data/information collected through one-on-one interviews, and FGDs was analysed and formatted into the interpretation matrix.

Sample covered during the study

As explained earlier, this study had interviewed 315 Key Informants at various stages (district, mandal and village level). Similarly, 36 FGDs were conducted with selected stakeholders (**Table 4**).

Table 4: Sample selected for the study

S.No	District	District level Key informants interviews (5X 1= 5)	Mandallevel Key informants interviews (2X5=10)	Village level Key informants interviews (4X5=20)	Total	Village level FGDs (4X1=4)
1	Adilabad	5	10	20	35	4
2	Sangareddy	5	10	20	35	4
3	Hyderabad	5	10	20	35	4
4	Vikarabad	5	10	20	35	4
5	Mahabubnagar	5	10	20	35	4
6	Gadwal	5	10	20	35	4
7	Yadadri	5	10	20	35	4
8	Warangal	5	10	20	35	4
9	Khammam	5	10	20	35	4
	Total	45	90	180	315	36
	In %	14 %	29 %	57 %	100%	

Study Methods

A total of 315 Key Informant interviews were conducted across nine districts (**Table 4**). Of this 57 percent at village level, 29 percent at mandal level and rest 14 percent at district level were conducted. In addition, 36 participatory FGDs were also conducted in nine districts. In spite of possible efforts to bring representatives from households, many of them did not turn up. This is mainly because of sensitivity of the topic and most of the households declined to respond.

List of Key Informants

Given the importance of key objectives and study requirements, it was decided to meet the following persons and conduct Key Informant interviews as well as FGDs (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Category of Respondents			
S.No	Level	Respondent	Tools for data collection
1	Village (n. 36)	Panchayat Secretary (n.36)	Questionnaire & FGDs
		Anganwadi Worker (n.36)	
		School Headmaster (n.36)	
		Community Leader (n.36)	
		SHG representative (n.36)	
2	Mandal (n.18)	ICDS Supervisor (n.18)	Questionnaire
		CDPO(n. 18)	
		MDO/MRO (n.18)	
		Police Sub-Inspector (n.18)	

Table 5: Category of Respondents

S.No	Level	Respondent	Tools for data collection
3	District (n.9)	RDO/Joint Collector (n.9)	Questionnaire
		CWC chairman (n.9)	
		Leader – ZillaSamakhia (n.9)	
		NGO representative (n.9)	
		Media representative (n.9)	
		Senior staff of WD&CW Dept (n.9)	
		Advocate (n. 2)	
		Medical Practitioner (n.2)	
4	During FGDs (n.36)	Parents,	Checklist
		Community leaders,	
		Religious leaders,	
		School teachers,	
		ANMs	
		AWWs	
		Panchayat representatives	
	Districts	Total number of FGDs	Total number of active participants
	Adilabad	4	34
	Hyderabad	4	36
	Yadadri	4	40
	Warangal	4	30

Table 5: Category of Respondents

S.No	Level	Respondent	Tools for data collection
	Khammam	4	36
	Gadwal	4	40
	Vikarabad	4	34
	Mahabubnagar	4	30
	Sangareddy	4	36

Limitations

The representatives who have conducted this study have not met the families where child marriages have been performed. Similarly, no interviews were conducted with the children who got married before 18 years of age.

However, the representatives conducting the study tried their best and collected few case studies from stakeholders.

How this report is organised

This report presents a summary of the empirical evidence on driving factors surrounding child marriage in selected districts of Telangana State- using data drawn from Key Informant interviews and FGD. It also provides a glimpse into the synthesised review of literature to understand what are the best practices to address child marriages. Larger part of literature synthesis has been drawn from Gayle and Lynn report on *Child Brides, Global Consequences – How to end Child Marriages*³².

³²Gayle Tzemach Lemmon Lynn S. ElHarake (2014)Child Brides, Global Consequences - How to End Child Marriage, Council on Foreign Relations.

Section 1: Briefly describes the context, prevalence, legislations, national policies and facts and figures related to child marriages. It also explains the research methods and sample frame chosen for the study.

Section 2: Summarises the literature, specifically on strategies to end child marriages. Roughly 47 documents, including research reports, policy briefs, and data from Indian Census has been analysed and synthesised. This description will give a summary of various strategies followed in different countries, including in India to address the issue of child marriages.

Section 3: This is the core section with analytics to know the driving factors behind child marriages in selected districts of Telangana State. Analysis in this section is drawn from the Key Respondent interviews as well as from FGDs.

Section 4: Focus of the challenges, as informed by the key stakeholders (implementers) in enforcing the POCCM Act 2006.

Section 5: Concludes the findings and recommends the next steps.

Section 6: Includes the tools used in the study.

Section

2

Literature Review

Many scholars and national and international organisation have conducted research to find out the factors and drivers of child marriages and later consequences. This report has made an attempt to synthesise focused literature on the strategies for ending child marriages. This will help to understand different strategies and using the outcomes of this study, advocacy note can be drafted.

Strategies for Ending Child Marriage

There are few strategies that are adopted in different countries, including in India to end child marriages. Of these, promoting girl's education, economically empowering girls, shifting social norms, changing behaviour of community and its perceptions, involving religious and culture leaders, working with men and boys, and strengthening legal framework are cited as best working examples. This section focussed on these strategies mostly reviewed the literature from different sources, including larger content from documents from Council on Foreign relations and the summary is as follows:

Promoting girls education

The message from UN secretary-general Ban, during the International Day of the Girl Child, highlighting 'education' as one of the most effective paths to curbing early marriage. Ben stated, "*Education for girls is one of the best strategies for protecting girls against child marriage. When they are able to stay in school and avoid being married early, girls can build a foundation for a better life for themselves and their families*³³."

Several studies have examined the link between education and child marriage. For example, study of several West African countries using 1990s data and a

³³ Ibid,

recent study using 2006 data from Nigeria revealed that child marriage accounts for 15 to 20 percent of school dropouts. Studies in Bangladesh concluded that each additional year of delay in age of marriage boosted schooling by 0.22 years and the likelihood of literacy by 5.6 percentage points³⁴.

Though further research is needed to understand more completely the relationship between child marriage and secondary education, what is clear is that education increases women's economic opportunities. According to data from the World Bank, each additional year of education beyond the average boosts women's wages 10 to 20 percent. Often marriage marks the end of schooling for young brides. Literature show that girls with no education are three times more likely to marry or enter into a union before their eighteenth birthday than those who graduate from secondary school or higher education³⁵.

Similarly, girls who complete only primary school are twice as likely to marry before their eighteenth birthday as their peers who obtain a secondary or higher degree³⁶. In every region assessed in the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) 2012 *Marrying Too Young* report, child marriage rates were higher for girls who did not reach secondary education levels³⁷. The disparity was greatest in sub-Saharan Africa, where 66 percent of women with no education were married before age eighteen, compared to only 13 percent of those with secondary or higher education³⁸.

³⁴ Minh Cong Nguyen and Quentin Wodon, (2008) "Child Marriage and Education: A Major Challenge," http://www.ungei.org/files/Child_Marriage_Edu_Note.pdf.

³⁵ UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young"; World Health Organization, "Child Marriages: 39,000 Every Day."

³⁶ Save the Children, (2004) *State of the World's Mothers*, 2004.

³⁷ UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young"; World Health Organization, "Child Marriages: 39,000 Every Day."

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 34–35. Data gathered from seventy-eight developing countries in which a Demographic and Health Survey or Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey was undertaken over the period from 2000 to 2011. These countries represent close to 60 percent of the population of all developing countries. UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young," pp. 34–35. Data gathered from seventy-eight developing countries in which a Demographic and Health Survey or Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey was undertaken over the period from 2000 to 2011. These countries represent close to 60 percent of the population of all developing countries.

In many cases, staying in school is a consequence of parents' decision to postpone age of marriage³⁹. That decision also had positive spill over. First, when the girl was in school, she was more likely to be viewed by her parents as a child and thus not ready for marriage. Second, schooling allowed girls to meet others similarly interested in education and acquire social networks and skills that helped them to better communicate and negotiate their needs and desires⁴⁰.

The correlation between access to girls' education and a drop in child marriage rates can be seen through the '*Berhane Hewan*' programme in Ethiopia⁴¹. Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Launched with a pilot programme in 2004, the '*BerhaneHewan*' programme uses local strategies that protect young girls aged ten to nineteen from early and forced marriage in the Amhara region, where nearly half the girls are married before they turn eighteen⁴². The programme also targets adolescent girls in the same age group who are already married or in unions⁴³.

The programme was pilot tested in Mosebo village in the Amhara region from 2004 to 2006, with a cohort from Enamirt village serving as the control group. Along with community outreach and awareness efforts, the *BerhaneHewan* pilot focussed on encouraging girls to stay in school. The programme offered options for girls in three different circumstances. Those who were still in school received materials, such as pens, notebooks, and reading material, which supported their continued education. Those who had already left school but

³⁹ Gayle Tzemach Lemmon & Lynn S. ElHarake (2014) *Child Brides, Global Consequences – How to end Child Marriages*, Council on Foreign Relations.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Annabel Eruklar, "Early Marriage, Marital Relations and Intimate Partner Violence in Ethiopia," *Guttmacher Institute*, volume 39, number 1, March 2013, <http://www.gutt-macher.org/pubs/journals/3900613.html>.

⁴² The *BerhaneHewan* program is a joint initiative by the Ethiopia Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Amhara Regional Bureau of Youth and Sport.

⁴³ UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young," p. 25.

expressed interest in re-enrolling received the same materials. And girls who had never attended school were placed in mentor-led groups that provided them with non-formal education, livelihood skills, and reproductive health education⁴⁴.

Prior to the programme's launch, only 71 percent of all girls between the ages of ten and fourteen in the BerhaneHewan experimental group in Mosebo had ever been to school. By the end of 2006, 97 percent of girls in this cohort were attending school. Illiteracy also declined. About 45 percent of adolescent girls in Mosebo could not read at the start of the programme, but that number fell to 21 percent by 2006. Additionally, average years of education rose. There was also significant improvement in the timing of marriage for children between the ages of ten and fourteen exposed to the programme. These girls were 90 percent less likely to be married before age 15 years compared to their peers in the control group in Enamirt⁴⁵.

Economically empowering girls and women

Research shows that child marriage is concentrated in the world's poorest countries, and those countries with the lowest gross domestic product per capita usually have the highest child marriage rates. Studies also show that household wealth may affect child marriage rates⁴⁶. An analysis by UNFPA found that more than half of girls in the poorest quintile of households assessed were child brides, more than three times the number in the wealthiest quintile of households. The report cited a "remarkable correspondence between lower rates of child marriage and characteristics commonly associated with higher levels of development such as urban residence, secondary or higher

⁴⁴ Gayle & Lynns, Off cited

⁴⁵ Erulkar and Karej, "Evaluation of BerhaneHewan," p. 14.

⁴⁶ ICRW, "Child Marriage and Poverty," 2006, <http://www.icrw.org/les/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Poverty.pdf>.

education and wealth.⁴⁷ South Asia shows the greatest wealth disparity, with women ages twenty to twenty-four in the poorest 20 percent four times more likely to be married before eighteen than those in the richest 20 percent⁴⁸.

A combination of social, traditional, and economic pressures leads parents to marry their daughters off before they reach legal age. Many parents believe that finding a husband for their daughter secures her future, especially in times of social instability or fragility⁴⁹. Daughters are sometimes also viewed as economic burdens or commodities.

Additionally, child marriages are seen as a solution for mitigating familial or political disputes, or paying off debts, and customary requirements (e.g., dowries or bride prices) can also influence parents' decisions, especially in communities where families can give a lower dowry for young brides⁵⁰. Finance-based programmes encourage families to delay marrying their daughters. Loans, scholarships, subsidies, and conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are some of the most common incentives, and many focus on keeping girls in school. Other programmes aim to give girls employment opportunities as alternatives to child marriage even beyond schooling. Incentives such as direct and unconditional cash transfers and income-generating activities can help provide girls with additional opportunities that raise their status in families and give them a say with parents and others to influence marital decisions. A World Bank pilot programme in Malawi found that unconditional cash transfers led to reduced rates of teen pregnancy and early marriage and had the “effect of significantly delaying both⁵¹.”

⁴⁷ UNFPA, “Marrying Too Young,” p. 35. ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 19. According to Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which provide much of the current country-level child marriage data.

⁴⁹ Ibid. ⁵⁰ Sajeda Amin, “Programs to address child marriage: framing the problem,” Population Council: Promoting Healthy, Safe, and Productive Transitions to Adulthood, no. 14, January 2011, http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/TA-Briefs/14_ChildMarriage.pdf.

⁵¹ World Bank Group, “Cash or Condition: Evidence from a Cash Transfer Experiment,” March 2010, p. 23, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/3988/WPS5259.txt>.

India – A Case Study on Ending Child Marriage

Child Marriage in India: South Asia has the highest rate of child marriages compared to any region in the world and India alone accounts for about 40 percent of the world's child brides⁵². As family incomes increase and more girls attend school in India, child marriage rates are going down, especially for younger girls. The rate of marriage for girls below the age of 15 is declining more than twice as rapidly as for those marrying below eighteen⁵³. But the percentage of women married before their eighteenth birthday remains high⁵⁴.

A 2012 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report echoed UNFPA's results and found that the median age at marriage in India is inversely related to the household economic condition, with the country's poorest women marrying around five years earlier than women in the same age group in the wealthiest quintile⁵⁵. The study also showed that women who had never been to school married at least three years earlier than their counterparts who had completed primary education.

The Indian government has taken steps to prevent child marriage. The relationship between “son preference,” education, economic status, and age at marriage, paired with the reality that laws alone do not change social norms, inspired the government of Haryana State to launch a CCT programme in 1994 called *ApniBeti, ApnaDhan* (ABAD), meaning ‘our daughter, our wealth⁵⁶.’

⁵² Anita Raj, Lotus McDougal, and Melanie L. A. Rusch, (2012) “Changes in Prevalence of Girl Child Marriage in South Asia,” JAMA, 307(19): 2027–29, 2012

⁵³ UNFPA, “Marrying Too Young.” ⁵⁴ UNICEF (2012) “Child Marriage in India,” December 2012, <http://www.unicef.in/documents/childmarriage.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Figure 9, p. 14 ⁵⁶ See ICRW, “Evaluating the Power of Conditional Cash Transfers to Delay Marriage in India,” <http://www.icrw.org/where-we-work/evaluating-power-conditional-cash-transfers-ccts-delay-marriage-india>.

The first of its kind in India, ABAD was a pioneer in testing the idea that a girl could be 'revalued' with the help of economic incentives and financial products funded by the state. Implemented from 1994 to 1998 among the state's most disadvantaged families, it was later succeeded by a programme called *Ladli* that was open to all parents, regardless of income.

Through a small payment at birth and a later conditional cash transfer if the daughter was unmarried till she turned eighteen, ABAD provided families with an incentive to embrace the idea of having a daughter, as well as to delay marriage by helping them to lighten other financial 'burdens' associated with having a girl child, such as the cost of wedding clothes and jewellery. The programme aimed to elevate the status of girls by reshaping perceptions of the value of daughters, traditionally viewed as burdens in Indian society, and was initially conceived as a way to change the country's skewed sex ratio.

Through ABAD, the Haryana government gave mothers five hundred rupees (about eleven U.S. dollars) upon the birth of a daughter. Additionally, the government invested around 2,500 rupees in a savings bond under the girl's name. The initial cohort of ABAD participants, enrolled in 1994, reached their eighteenth birthdays in 2012, granting the first opportunity for programme evaluators to assess the effectiveness of this programme in delaying the age of marriage.

Shifting social norms

It is important to recall that ABAD addressed only one piece of the complex social ecosystem in which girls in India live. Between 1994 and 2014, much has changed. A push for greater awareness by the Indian government means that most families now know that the legal age of marriage in India is eighteen. In some cases, authorities intervene when underage marriage ceremonies are being conducted. In interviews with ABAD programme participants,

families cited weddings that were stopped because the bride was under the legal age of eighteen as one of the factors motivating them not to marry off their daughters⁵⁷.

Technology and access to schooling are also changing norms. The Internet and cellular phone technology have connected India to the world in ways that were unheard of only two decades ago. Access to social media, online Indian media, and global media content means modern and international influences are felt across India, including in rural regions⁵⁸.

Additionally, along with legal norms, enforcement, and technology, the trends regarding girls' education have been largely positive. The number of girls in school is rising and the gender gap in primary education has narrowed. Girls' enrollment at "both the primary and upper primary stages increased sharply" between 1990 and 2006⁵⁹. Though parents remain more interested in their sons' educations than their daughters', girls schooling is becoming increasingly accepted and embraced in many communities. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) found that more than two-thirds of Haryana's girls now are enrolled in secondary schools, compared to less than 50 percent in 2005⁶⁰.

Yet some recent changes have been far less promising for girls. In 2011, the Indian government census counted 830 girls (aged zero to six) for every 1,000 boys in Haryana, up from 820 a decade earlier, but still significantly lower than the 879 girls for every 1,000 boys counted in 1991⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Gayle & Lynn, Off cited ⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹ A. K. Shiva Kumar and PreetRustagi, (2010) "Elementary Education in India: Progress, Set-backs, and Challenges," Oxfam India, September 2010, <http://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/les/III.%20Elementary%20Education%20in%20India-Progress,%20Setbacks,%20and%20Challenges.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Gayle & Lynn, Off cited ⁶¹ Census of India 2011, http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products_haryana.html; Census of India 2001, "Sex Composition of the Population," chapter 6, p. 5, http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Provisional_Population.

Gender-biased sex selection and the skewed sex ratio in Haryana have an effect on girls' lives. In some communities, the scarcity of girls actually increases the risk that they will be subjected to violence, making some families even more likely to see marriage as a refuge that will guarantee their daughters' safety. As brides of marriageable age become rare, those few eligible girls who do remain in the community are increasingly vulnerable to rape and trafficking. These risks also make parents less willing to send their girls to secondary schools and colleges far from their home villages⁶².

In India, at the national level, there have been policies that target child marriages through incentives for the families involved. National Population Policy and the National Youth Policy 2003⁶³, are suggesting few strategies to address the vulnerability of girls in the context of child marriages. For example, provision of non-formal education and vocational training, development of livelihood skills and education and awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues are important while dealing with child marriages. For example, in Rajasthan, the Mamta-Health Institute for Mother and Child started the Action Approach for the Reduction of Early Marriage and Early Pregnancy⁶⁴, involving youth and increasing awareness levels on reproductive health information. This was done through the process of community mobilisation and key stakeholders⁶⁵.

On the legal front, the Human Rights Law Network began advocacy and awareness towards sensitising the masses to the prohibition on child marriage with an emphasis on legal literacy. Their efforts effectively culminated in the passage of the Prevention of Child Marriages Act, 2006⁶⁶.

⁶² Gayle & Lynns, Off cited ⁶³ National Youth Policy, 2003, <http://www.youth-policy.com/Policies/IndiaNATIONALLY-OUTHYPOLICY2003.pdf>

⁶⁴ http://www.mamta-himc.org/res_list.htm ⁶⁵ Human Rights Law Network http://hrln.org/beta/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=107&Itemid=150

⁶⁶ Red Elephant Foundation (2013) "Child Marriages in India - An insight into Law and Policy" <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/TheRedElephantFoundation.pdf>

In addition to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, the International Center for Research on Women initiated a programme called *ApniBeti, ApniDhan*⁶⁷ (Our Daughter, Our Wealth) in 1994, to study the reason and consequence of child marriage, this was the first of a kind Conditional Cash Transfer programme aimed at delaying child marriages. The programme provides Rs. 500 to the mother upon the birth of a girl child to cover her post-delivery needs. The government also invests in a Rs. 2, 500 long-term bond in the girl's name which can be cashed for Rs. 25, 000 upon the age of majority, this is provided by the government only if the girl is unmarried⁶⁸.

The Institute of Health Management-Pachod (IHMP) and the ICRW implemented a Life Skills Programme in Maharashtra from 1997 until 2005, specifically targeting adolescent girls, to make them economically stronger, thereby delaying their marriage to after they attain majority. The Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS) implemented a Regional Initiative for Safe Sexual Health by Today's Adolescence in Jharkhand, from 2004 until 2007, focussing on behavioural change communication, incrementing capacity building and promoting awareness of sexual and reproductive health. The programme was particularly successful in delaying the marriage of girls to after majority⁶⁹.

It is against this evolving backdrop in India that the ABAD programme unfolded. With funding from USAID, which wanted to understand the role of conditional cash transfers, ICRW is now completing its evaluation of the programme. One of the earliest findings shows that the programme has had a positive

⁶⁷ ICRW - MOTIVATION TO PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE-<http://www.icrw.org/media/news/motivation-prevent-child-marriage>.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Red Elephant Foundation (2013) Child Marriages in India -An insight into Law and Policy, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/TheRedElephantFoundation.pdf>

effect on girls' education. More girls who participated in the programme stayed in school than those who did not. In its recent report, ICRW stated, "The girls who were beneficiaries attained higher levels of schooling, were more likely to continue their education and less likely to drop out than non-beneficiary girls, controlling for all other factors." Even though families did not receive the cash benefit until the girl turned eighteen, "the knowledge of the protracted benefits clearly influenced their decision to invest in their daughters' education. This is evident not only from the results on schooling but also some of the supplementary findings on the time girls get to study at home and the investment in sending them to a private school⁷⁰."

Changing community behaviour and perception

Although laws and economic incentives can help to make child marriage less attractive for families, they cannot on their own effectively end the practice and provide greater opportunities for all girls. For that, a broader and longer-term mindset evolution around the role of the girl is critical⁷¹.

Interventions that use community-based behaviour-change strategies can help to promote social change around the perception of girls and women, especially in countries that have yet to set a legal age of marriage⁷². In a review of child marriage programmes, ICRW found that interventions that use behaviour-change communications and community mobilisation help to influence traditional perceptions and practices that "encourage or condone child marriage⁷³."

⁷⁰ Priya Nanda, Nitin Datta, and Priya Das, "Impact on Marriage: Program Assessment of Conditional Cash Transfers," ICRW, March 2014, <http://www.icrw.org/publications/impact-marriage-program-assessment-conditional-cash-transfers>.

⁷¹ Gayle & Lynns, Off cited

⁷² Gambia, Equatorial Guinea, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen remain the only four countries with no enforceable law setting the minimum age of marriage. See Vogelstein, *Ending Child Marriage*, p. 10.

⁷³ ICRW, "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A Global Analysis of Factors and Programs," 2007.

These strategies acknowledge that girls rarely hold the power in their communities to decide when they marry, and that it is thus important to work with parents and community leaders, such as religious leaders and society elders, who make decisions on the girls behalf. Changing attitudes about child marriage is an especially critical intervention in communities where non-state law dominates and where religious leaders often perform the marriage ceremonies. A more comprehensive strategy will include programmes working with religious leaders and educating men and boys on why delaying age of marriage is beneficial to all. Highlighting these two strategies is not meant to discount other interventions but rather to note two groups that are influential in deciding the future of girls and women in many communities⁷⁴.

Involvement of religious leaders

Religion is often blamed for the prevalence of child marriage. Notably, however, the practice is not unique to any one faith; in fact, it occurs across religions and regions. For example, in India, where 40 percent of the world's known child brides reside, child marriage is prevalent among both Muslims and Hindus. In Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, child marriage is practiced by Christians and Muslims alike. An analysis by the International Center for Research on Women found that what is constant across countries with high child marriage rates is not adherence to one particular faith, but rather factors such as poverty and limited education opportunities for girls⁷⁵.

Child marriage might not be tied to one faith, but religious leaders still have a crucial role to play in curbing the practice -- particularly because marriages are often ratified as part of a religious ceremony. Working with religious leaders to tackle the scourge of child marriage has proven especially effective, both

⁷⁴ Gayle & Lynns, Off cited

⁷⁵

because these leaders are uniquely influential in their communities and because religious texts and traditions often encourage advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable, including children.

Examples of successful programmes to combat child marriage by engaging religious leaders abound. In Ethiopia, for example, [Pathfinder International](#) partnered with local faith leaders and government officials to increase awareness about the risks and consequences of early marriage. As part of this programme, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim religious leaders committed to ending child marriage and other harmful traditional practices. In 2005 and 2006, Pathfinder estimated that this initiative prevented more than 14,000 early marriages in the Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia⁷⁶.

In a 2007 review, ICRW found that religion was a significant factor associated with child marriage prevalence⁷⁷. However, there was no single religion associated with the practice across countries; various religions had high rates of child marriage, depending on the country. Because people look to culture and religion to justify child marriage, religious and traditional leaders can be uniquely effective in shifting social and cultural norms away from the practice. They can leverage their networks to lobby for legal reform and use their spiritual influence to encourage followers to change views about sensitive cultural norms, including child marriage⁷⁸.

There are already plenty of religious leaders to get inspiration from around the world. In Indonesia, female Muslim leaders [issued a fatwa](#) against child marriage and urged the government to raise the age of marriage to 18. Religious leaders in Nepal helped develop the country's national strategy to end child marriage. A few years ago, an inter-religious network also led a

⁷⁶ Council on Foreign Relations – Child Marriages and Religion, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/child-marriage-and-religion-0>

⁷⁷ Ibid ⁷⁸ Ibid

public campaign against child marriage. In Zimbabwe, a youth-led organisation worked with youth clubs and schools to identify the right leaders. A Yemeni organisation partnered with the Ministry of Endowment to reach Imams in the region. A community-based organisation in India met with local religious leaders, asking them to identify issues they cared about. Once you have that contact, involve religious leaders in your programme⁷⁹.

Working with Men and Boys

In order to shift attitudes toward child marriage, some initiatives have sought to involve men as decision-makers and boys as future decision-makers, in awareness-raising and outreach campaigns. In many countries where child marriage remains the norm, men serve as the gatekeepers for the women in their families, with fathers, brothers, husbands, and other male figures making most household and communal decisions, often with input from religious leaders. Particularly in communities where child marriage is deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions, these groups should be included in efforts to prevent and eliminate child marriage if the practice is to be eradicated in regions and among populations where it has proved harder to stop⁸⁰.

The USAID Vision for Action cites the critical role of men in curbing child marriage: “Interventions that involve fathers and religious and traditional leaders broaden understanding of the dangers of child marriage, and the long-term benefits of education and economic opportunities⁸¹.” Notably, the Vision for Action also prioritises the involvement of boys: “Equally important is reaching out to boys at a young age to encourage equitable gender attitudes

⁷⁹ Julie Rialet is Research & Policy Associate at Girls Not Brides, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/can-religious-leaders-best-allies-end-child-marriage/>

⁸⁰ Gayle & Lynns, off cited

⁸¹ USAID, Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action, October 2012, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACU300.pdf.

and norms so that they can be allies in preventing child marriage and change agents within their communities⁸².”

In an effort to mitigate child marriage in Yemen -one of twenty ‘hot spot’ countries -the Safe Age of Marriage programme aimed to alter social norms and community attitudes around child marriage by improving community knowledge of dangers associated with the practice, strengthening local support for extending girls’ education, and working closely with religious and community leaders⁸³.

The programme trained twenty male and twenty female volunteer community educators, including religious leaders and midwives— individuals already respected in the community—to conduct outreach educational activities. For example, the community educators were responsible for organising awareness-raising sessions that employed various techniques, such as role-playing, poetry recitations, and small discussion groups, and held these in community spaces, including schools and mosques⁸⁴.

The community educators also hosted monthly health clinics to address the reproductive health challenges associated with early marriage and child-bearing, worked with schools to raise awareness of the social and health consequences associated with child marriage, and distributed printed materials and disseminated radio messages on the health and social consequences of the practice⁸⁵.

After one year of the Safe Age of Marriage project, the community educators had conducted more than 1,316 outreach initiatives reaching nearly 29,000

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children 2013, statistical table 9: child protection, 2013, http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/les/Table_9_Stat_Tables_SWCR2013_ENG-LISH.pdf; USAID, “Safe Age of Marriage’ in Yemen.”

⁸⁴ Gayle & Lynns, Off cited ⁸⁵ Ibid

people. The results from the final survey found that there was an 18 percent increase in awareness in the community about the benefits of delaying marriage. There is evidence that the Safe Age of Marriage project helped in reducing early marriages and reduced child marriage rates, but it is still too early to see representative results of the programme. Additionally, the Yemeni government requested that religious leaders include child marriage messages in their sermons and the community educators continued to mobilise support around girls' education. Due to its success, the programme was scaled up to include two additional districts in Yemen and increase outreach to religious leaders and policymakers to push implementation of a law that prohibits marriage for girls under seventeen. Conservative religious leaders objected to the law, first passed in 2009, and it continues to be a topic of legislative conversation. The recent National Dialogue Conference in Yemen issued a proposal for the country's new constitution to make marriage before age eighteen illegal⁸⁶.

Strengthening legal systems

A number of international frameworks define the minimum age for marriage at eighteen and most countries around the world have laws in line with these agreements. Though laws alone will not end child marriage, in some places attitudes are shifting, as illustrated by the proposal from Yemen's recent National Dialogue Conference. Enforcement, however, often lags behind the laws in the books. Additionally, criminalisation of child marriage is not always effective in preventing or eliminating the practice, since it can drive the practice further underground. Law enforcement officials and activists are also subject to violent repercussions in trying to prevent marriages, and few regulations exist to protect them from such retaliation⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ Christine Hauser, "Yemen Takes a Step Toward Law Ending Child Marriage," New York Times, January 23, 2014, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/23/yemen-takes-a-step-toward-law-ending-child-marriage>.

⁸⁷ Center for Reproductive Rights, "Child Marriage in South Asia," 2013, http://reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicactions.net/files/documents/ChildMarriage_BriefingPaper_Web.pdf.

Yet despite the challenges, strategies for preventing and eliminating child marriages cannot be successful without clear and enforceable laws that are upheld by local governments. Child marriage laws can be incorporated into a number of other regulations implemented and enforced to protect against human rights violations, especially those guarding the rights of children and women. Such regulations include those that criminalise marital rape, gender-based violence, and violence against women; human trafficking and slavery laws; and ceremonies that require consent to marriage from both individuals⁸⁸.

Another tool available is the passage of laws mandating birth and marriage registration. Only half of children under five in developing countries are part of birth registries, with some regions such as eastern and southern Africa and South Asia seeing registration rates hovering at around a third of their populations⁸⁹. Birth registration gives a child an official and permanent identity⁹⁰. The government then has a record of the child and can track his or her age, thereby decreasing the child's vulnerability to practices that include child marriage⁹¹. By documenting the actual age of girls, law enforcement officials would be better able to stop child marriages and girls would be more aware of their own age and whether they can legally be married⁹².

In Bangladesh, where child marriage prevalence is the highest in South Asia and one of the highest in the world, the government has been working with Plan International to implement online birth registration programmes⁹³.

⁸⁸ Gayle & Lynns, Off cited ⁸⁹ UNICEF, "Birth Registration: Progress," January 2013, http://www.childinfo.org/birth_registration_progress.html.

⁹⁰ UNICEF, "Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse," January 13, 2014, http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58010.html.

⁹¹ Human Rights Council (A/HRC/19/L.24) highlights the importance of birth registration in ensuring the "promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development." Human Rights Council A/HRC/19/L.24, "Birth registration and the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law," adopted March 22, 2012, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session19/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx>.

⁹² Gayle & Lynns, Off cited ⁹³ Plan, "Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Findings from a National Survey," 2013, p. 28, <http://plan-international.org/les/Asia/publications/national-survey-on-child-marriage-by-plan-bangladesh-and-icddr-b>.

In 2006, only 10 percent of Bangladesh’s population had birth documents. Today, the government estimates that number has climbed to more than 75 percent of the population. Findings from Plan International show that birth registration has helped to reduce child marriage in Bangladesh as the organisation and its partners work with the government “to expedite a shift to online birth registration in its working areas so that certificates can no longer be falsified to show an underage girl as being above eighteen⁹⁴.”

All these case studies are suggesting the ways to address the child marriages. These thought-provoking learnings will help in planning advocacy with different stakeholders.

⁹⁴ Ibid

Section

3

Factors Influencing Child Marriages Key Findings

In this section, quantified data has been represented in the form of figures to have a clear understanding about driving factors. These details are classified by analysing the multiple answers that have emerged during 315 Key Respondent interviews and 36 FGDs during the study. While describing the driving factors, logical sequencing has been followed by linking different driving factors. Together 25 driving factors have emerged. Based on the nature, these 25 driving factors are classified into four categories – (a) Traditions, Social Norms and Beliefs; (b) Poverty; (c) Access to Secondary Education and (d) Social Pressure. The details of findings are as follows:

Traditions, Social Norms and Beliefs

Customs surrounding marriage, including the desirable age and the way in which a spouse is selected, depend on a society's view of the family – its role, structure, pattern of life, and the individual and collective responsibilities of its members. The idea and function of 'family' varies across the world and is in a state of constant evolution⁹⁵.

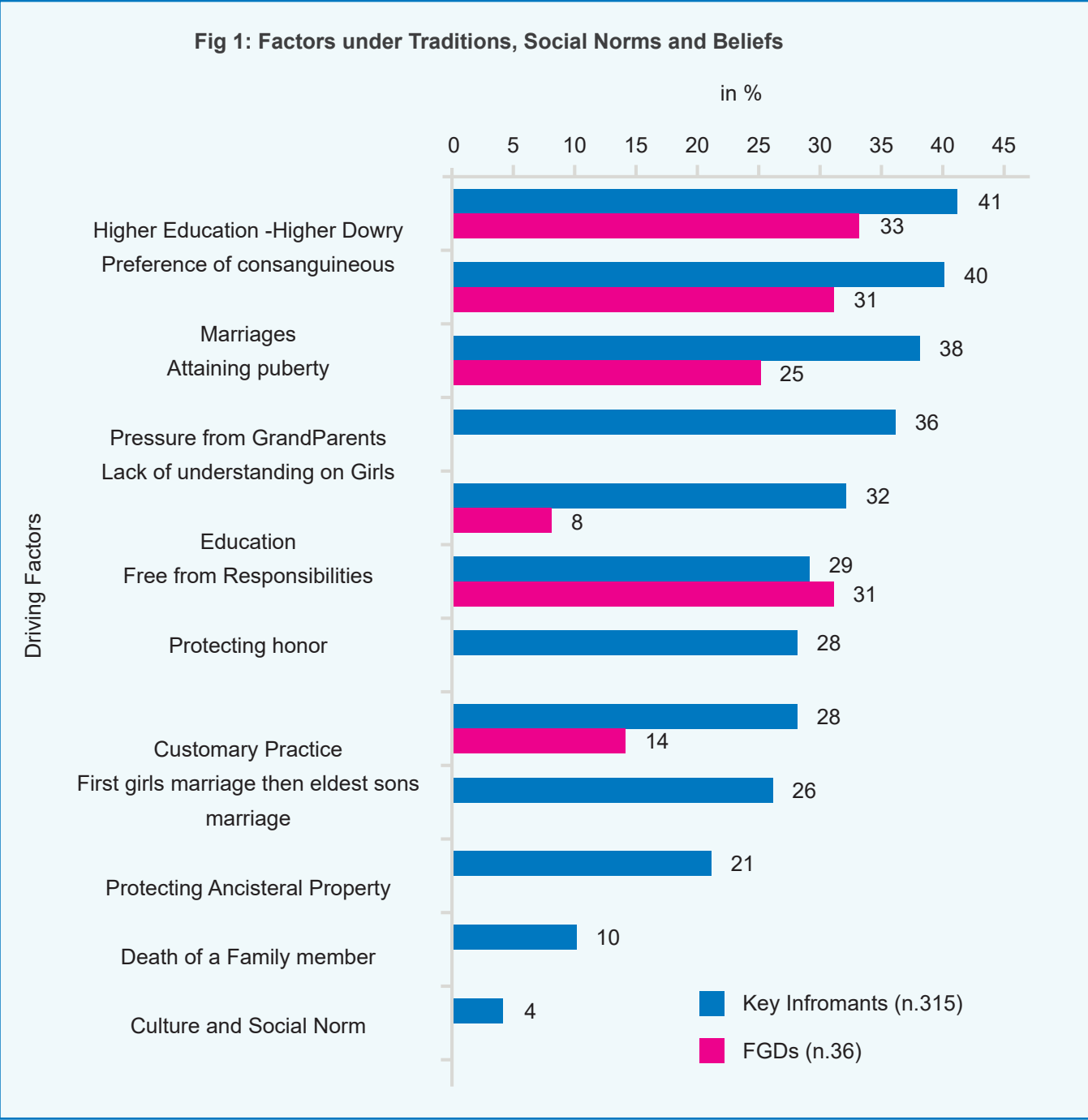
Traditions, social norms and beliefs are one among the strongest of all the major causes of child marriage. Within this category, the Key Informants discussed about 12 different driving factors during the interviews (**Fig 1**). Of these, "higher the education higher the dowry" is the major factor, widely pointed out by 41 percent of the Key Informants. During the FGDs, majority of participants raised this issue as one of the key driving factors for child marriages.

Nearly 33 percent of the FGDs have discussed this practice. In the state of Telangana, dowry system is strongly prevailed among all communities. Particularly for poor families, sending girl child to higher education considered

⁹⁵ Boyden, Jo with UNESCO (1993), Families: Celebration and Hope in a World of Change, Gaia Books, UK.

as a burden. Moreover, finding groom with similar qualifications is also difficult. This is the reason discussed during the FGDs by parents and community leaders.

Fig 1: Factors under Traditions, Social Norms and Beliefs



“Poor families cannot offer the dowry and at the same time in few cast groups (Example – socially disadvantaged castes and sub-castes), finding groom with higher qualification is much difficult. Due to this, once girl reaches biological maturity, we start looking for a groom” – says one of the parents during Key Informant interviewed. Few of the FGD participants have told that, paying higher dowry results in losing whatever minimum assets a family has.

This ultimately pushes the family into poverty. To avoid such risk, general thinking of parents is to find out suitable groom and perform marriage as soon she attains biological maturity. Many of them said, that for parents with such a mindset, the age of the girl doesn't matter.

Key Informants, particularly from Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, Gadwal, Yadadri and Khammam districts have talked about this factor.

The next, important driving factor is consanguineous marriages, which are considered as a customary practice by many families. Traditionally, consanguineous marriage system is known for strengthening kinship ties between families, expanding social networks, protecting ancestral property, and ensures political strength. In this context, it is important to note that; the economic behaviour of the family differently shapes households' decisions even in response to the same economic circumstances.

For most of the families, social norm is preference of consanguineous marriages/choosing groom from close kin (maternal side relations). This is evident when 40 percent of the Key Informants and in 31 percent of the FGDs have talked much about such practice. It is evident that consanguineous marriages are more common in rural and urban areas of Telangana State. Particularly families having agriculture land, including other productive assets such as cattle, jewellery etc., particularly acquired by ancestors prefers consanguineous marriages to protect such ancestral properties.

Agriculturalists tend to have higher rates of consanguineous marriage; a pattern recently interpreted within the context of extensive and intensive kinship systems⁹⁶. Individuals and families making marriage decisions face a tradeoff between expanding their social networks and reinforcing existing kin ties.

Since the system of consanguineous marriages is linked with traditions and social norms, it has gone strongly into the wish list of elders in the family. One of the elderly respondents says: *“in our community, we usually give landed property and other assets to the groom in the form of dowry. Our intention behind this is to economically strengthen grooms family and consolidate our kinship network. Giving top consideration to these two issues, we always prefer groom from our close kin. If the boy is available, we don’t mind going ahead with child marriage, even if the girl has not reached biological maturity. We perform marriage and retain the girl with us till she attains puberty and then we send her to her in-law’s family with full honour. This is how we operate”*. This is one classical example to talk about how the perceptions of elders influencing the child marriages.

This issue was discussed during the FGDs, and one of the representative of Gram Panchayat said that – *“families with political affiliation prefer consanguineous marriages to strengthen their political power. This is the first advantage besides protecting ancestral properties. Whereas for economically poor families, to avoid dowry system and to retain the kinship network, consanguineous marriages are widely preferred. Thus, both in rich and poor families, such system exists in rural and urban Telangana. In this system, girls are becoming victims because parents are unaware of the consequences of child marriages”*.

⁹⁶Mary K. Shenk et al (2016) Consanguineous Marriage, Kinship Ecology, and Market Transition, Current Anthropology, Vol 57 No S13, June 2016. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/685712>

In few FGDs, particularly the parents, community leaders and *Panchayat* representatives have supported consanguineous marriage system is the best to protect the landed properties as well as consolidating kinship networks. While following such system, occasionally age of the girl may not be much importance to the parents. They have quoted few examples where parents have performed wedding of their daughters who have not reached biological maturity. In such cases, after marriage, brides have stayed back with their parents and after attaining puberty, have been sent to their in-law's family.

Following this, protecting ancestral properties is one of the customary practices among the rural as well as urban communities, those who are practicing consanguineous marriages. Nearly 21 percent of the Key Informants have discussed this as one of the driving factors behind child marriages. Few of the parents are of the opinion, that whatever dowry they give to their daughter should be within the control of their close kin. Hence, they don't consider the age difference between bride and bridegroom while deciding to go ahead with marriage. In few cases, the age of bride maybe much less than 18 years.

Even if parents are not in favour of such marriages, pressure from elders, relatives and caste leaders forces them to go ahead with such marriages, where, most of time, age was not a criterion. In oneway or other, this practice will keep kin network sustainable. This is another driving factor expressed by 36 percent of the Key Informants. Particularly most of the grandparents are of the opinion, that higher education is not required for girls. This was supported by many parents. Such perceptions are mainly because of a lack of proper understanding about the importance of education for girl children.

A girl attaining puberty is a sign to consider that she is ready for marriage. In this context, parents are least bothered about the consequences of child marriage. For them, keeping a biologically mature girl in the family is a risk. Here, the perceived risk is the pressure from grandparents, close kin

and caste and community leaders, and the aim is to protect her from peer harassment. This driving factor was widely discussed by about 38 percent of the Key Informants and in 25 percent of the FGD meetings.

Often decisions about sexuality, relationships and reproduction are some of the most important rest with patriarchal families. Women and girls don't have any choice of making these decisions for themselves. In such families, marrying a girl simply transfers the control of her sexuality to others. Husbands and in-law's family, who assess a girl in terms of the physical and reproductive labour she brings to the new family, replaces her parents and other family members. They believe that a girl does not have the right to make sexual decisions. Male dominance in the family always strongly feels that ideal age for girl's marriage is once she attains puberty. Biological maturity of the girl is assign for marriage in most of the socially disadvantaged communities in Telangana.

Another belief is that if parents wish to perform the eldest son's marriage, they first marry off the girl child. Such practice is more common among all caste groups. Roughly 26 percent of the Key Informants flagged this factor. Under such belief, parents are ignoring the age of girl child and even other consequences of child marriage and preparing to perform child marriage. One of the opinion leader said: *"perform girls marriage first, and then boy's marriage. This is the customary practice and families must respect it. Even if the girl is much younger than the boy, it is the duty of the parents to follow traditions"*.

If any one of the family members passed away, it is a custom for that family to perform their girl child's marriage (irrespective of her age). This practice is prevalent in most of the socially disadvantaged communities in the state. If they do this, they believe that soul of a dead family member will rest in peace and all good things will come to the family as well as to the girls in the family. About 10 percent of Key Informants told about this factor.

In Telangana, where patriarchal supremacy is dominant, and communities give much importance to traditions and social norms, child marriages are an acceptable practice. This is the main reason, even in the present period; these communities are celebrating en-mass child marriages during public festivals. Further to this, traditionally, within the family, women in such communities have low status and gender inequality leads to child marriages.

Sometimes, religious justification/customary practice is also found in rural remote areas, particularly in Mahabubnagar district. It appears that, socially disadvantaged communities are performing child marriages under religious cover, known as ‘devadasi system⁹⁷’. Nearly 28 percent of the Key Informants informed about religious/customary justifications made by the parents and community leaders for child marriages. In 14 percent of the FGDs, participants have discussed such system. *However, such practice is not visible to open public and still child marriages under devadasi system are taking place –* says one of the CDPOs.

A similar observation was made during the discussions with religious leader from Muslim community in Hyderabad city. He interpreted Quran (holy book for Muslims) and argued that: *“Child marriages are permitted by Islam. Upon reaching biological maturity, a girl is eligible for marriage. In Islam, protecting the virginity of a girl is very important.”*

After holding discussions with community members, and religious leaders, it appears that social norms and beliefs are given precedence and are influencing parents and communities, resulting in child marriages. Overemphasis on a girl’s virginity is closely tied with a family’s honour and dignity within the caste group and community. Once a girl reaches biological maturity,

⁹⁷ B97 Devadasi system is a religious practice in parts of southern India, including Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to become a property of the temple.

parents don't want to take any chance and try to find a suitable match as soon as possible. In rural communities, particularly in socially disadvantaged communities in all sample districts, the belief is that keeping a girl at home after puberty and sending her to school or for earning a livelihood is not socially acceptable. There will be pressure from community leaders and from elders and close kin groups.

Protecting family honour by ensuring girls' virginity is one of the important driving factors told by 28 percent of the Key Informants. In many communities, non-virgin girls are considered [ruined and unsuitable](#) for marriage; as a result, families marry off their young daughters to ensure they remain virgins until marriage, and to [maximise her](#) child-bearing years. In this context, it is evident that parents and communities are not aware of the negative consequences of early child marriages. This could be one of the reasons behind child marriages.

Unfortunately, because of the cultural emphasis on virginity, child marriage is seen as a legitimate way to protect girls in unsafe environments. One of the community members said: *"We knew it was wrong to marry off girls before they reach 18 years (legal age for girls to marry), however most of the time, marriage is considered as a cover of respect and protection. Not going to school reduces the risk of being sexually active outside the house or being harassed while commuting."*

"Whatever the reason could be, many parents decide to marry their daughters off as early as possible and be free of the responsibility. This mindset is more prevalent among socially disadvantaged castes"— says one of the *Panchayat representatives*. In a family with more girl children, or a family facing economic insecurity, or one in which any one of the parents is chronically ill, early marriage of girl children are preferred. About 29 percent of the Key Informants have highlighted this factor. A similar opinion is expressed by participants in 31 percent FGDs.

Synthesised outcomes from the Key Respondent interviews as well as information shared by the participants during FGDs, following driving factors of child marriages, under traditions, social norms and beliefs are important to be considered for policy level advocacy. –

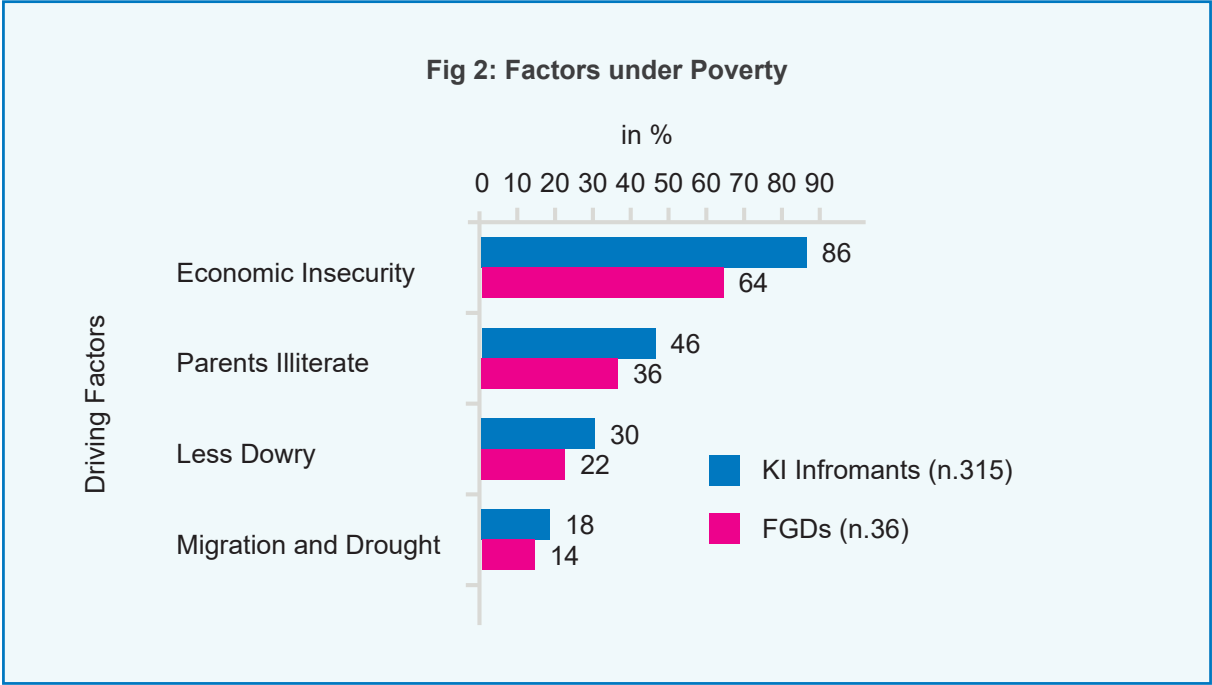
- Beliefs such as – higher the education, higher the dowry – are forcing many parents to opt for child marriages. This is mainly because of lack of understanding and education and negative perceptions among parents and the community about educating girls.
- Parents give top priority to consanguineous marriages where a girl's age is not an issue. This is linked to another factor – protecting ancestral property.
- Parents, kin members and community consider the age at which a girl attains puberty/biological maturity as the right age for marriage. This is linked to the factor of keeping up the family honour within the community.
- Pressure from grandparents is another factor, which is linked with traditional patriarchal supremacy and priority to consanguineous marriages.
- Few beliefs, for example – that a daughter should be married off before a son is married, and death of the family member should be followed by a girl's marriage are also influencing the families to opt for child marriages.

Poverty

Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries and is often concentrated among the poorest households within those countries. It is closely linked with poverty and low levels of economic development. In families with limited resources, child marriage is often seen as a way to

provide for their daughter’s future. But girls who marry young are more likely to be poor and remain poor⁹⁸.

Economic insecurity⁹⁹ is the topmost driving factor of child marriages (**Fig 2**). About 86 percent of the key respondents have stated economic insecurity as the prime cause and 64 percent of the FGDs have discussed this issue. Particularly families those who have no dependable income sources (for example those in Mahabubnagar district) prefer girl’s marriages whenever they have sufficient money in hand. For such families, age of the girl is not a serious issue but the availability of money matters to them.



In 64 percent of the FGDs, participants have reflected on how economic insecurity is forcing parents to take a decision about their children’s marriages.

⁹⁸International Center for Research on Women, Child Marriages and Poverty, <https://www.icrw.org/files/images/Child-Marriage-Fact-Sheet-Poverty.pdf>

⁹⁹The degree of confidence that a person can have in maintaining a decent quality of life, now and in the future, given their economic and financial circumstances.

The summary of these FGDs highlighted that child marriages are taking place in poor families. This phenomenon is more common in rural poor families particularly those living in Adilabad, Mahabubnagar, Yadadri, Khammam, Gadwal and Vikarabad districts.

Families without assured income, or dependable livelihoods often fall into poverty. In such cases, families having more number of girl children, are considered as burdensome and are more vulnerable. Dowry and financial transitions around marriage may also contribute to the practice of child marriages, especially in the context of poverty and vulnerability. This is one of the reasons stated by 30 percent of the Key Informants during the study. In 22 percent of the FGDs this issue was stated by the participants.

In this context, one of the parents said: *“economic insecurity will not allow parents to send their girl children for higher education. At the most, girl children have the scope to complete their primary education. Once girl children attain biological maturity and become sexually active outside marriage, it is risky to send them for economic activities because their peers may harass them, and they may be exploited sexually. To avoid such problems, families prefer child marriages”*.

It is evident that due to drought, many families are facing food insecurity, particularly in some parts of Mahabubnagar, Adilabad, Gadwal and Khammam districts. Such families usually try to discharge their girl children from the family, while male children are considered as assets to the family. Concerns about a girl’s safety and family honour are also considered as one of the factors that influence parents to opt for child marriages.

During the FGDs in Mahabubnagar district, participants have stated that drought is a perennial challenge for most of the families, particularly those dependent on agriculture. Families falling into debt trap are also more common

in rural Mahabubnagar District. Besides, most of the parents prefer male child over girl child. Parents are looking at two main reasons – (1) having girl child is a burden. Given the limited livelihood activities and incomes, sending her for higher education is difficult, and searching for a suitable groom is also difficult; (2) if it is a boy, he will be an asset to the family. Other words, he will support the family by participating in economic activities or if he is educated, there is a possibility of getting into a job thereby providing economic support to parents. This was one of the important discussions during FGDs.

Drought and migration is another important reason pushing families into poverty. About 18 percent of the Key Informants mentioned that due to drought, most the poor and middle-income families are migrating to neighbouring districts. The length of migration could be 3 to 6 months and sometimes it is for 10 months. Whenever such migration is inevitable, families are trying to consolidate their financial sources, and trying to arrange a girl child's marriage, without considering her age. This tendency is more predominant among Palamur¹⁰⁰ labour from Mahabubnagar district. This issue was talked about in 14 percent of the FGDs.

Particularly during migration, families leave their children and elderly in the village. In such circumstances, protecting girl children from peer harassment becomes a challenge. During the FGDs in Mahabubnagar, participants said - *“Mahabubnagar is reeling under drought over the years, and due to insufficient water in Krishna River, irrigation schemes have not given livelihoods to many. Particularly since there is no agriculture work, families are forced to migrate to Mumbai, Gujarat and Karnataka. When parents are migrating in search of livelihoods, children and elders are left behind. Even if the girl is attending school, protecting her from peer harassment is very difficult for elders in the*

¹⁰⁰ 'Palamurlabour' has a lot of demand in other parts of the country. The labourers hail from Mahbubnagar, the place once known as Palamur, and the name lives on through these migrant workers, who are known for their expertise in construction activities and hard work.

family. To minimise the risk, parents are arranging marriages of girl children; such incidences are taking place where most of the girls are between 15 to 18 years". Similar incidents have taken place in the past in other districts, for instance Adilabad, Gadwal and Khammam.

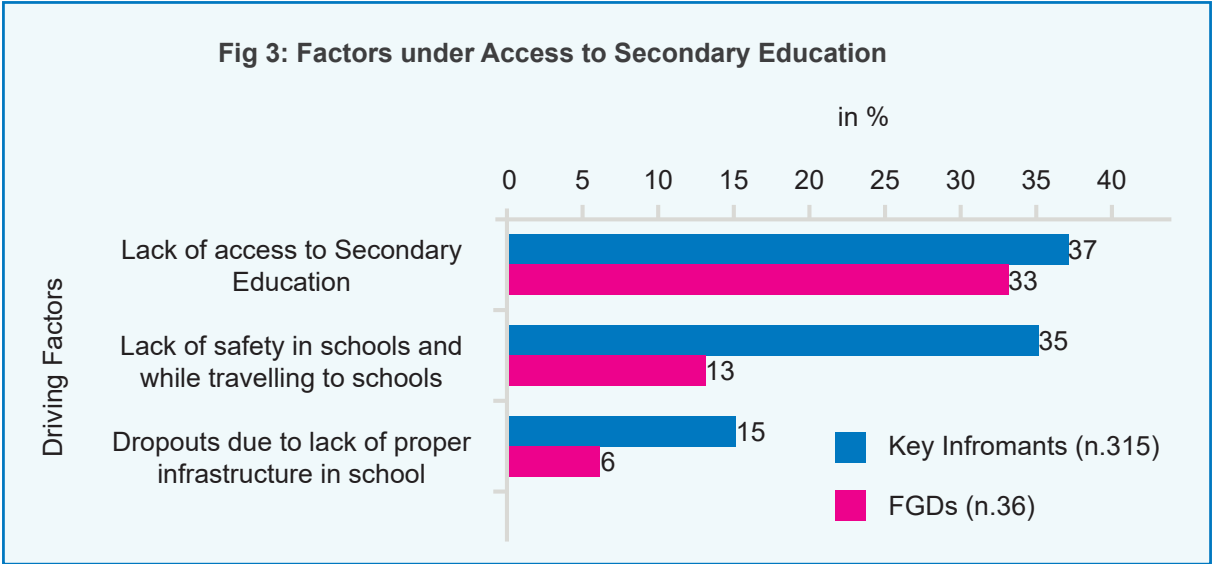
Sometimes parents with the help of kin, search for groom from economically stable families, with an assumption that bride will have a sort of security and there may be no need to migrate in search of livelihoods. This practice is much talked by village level Key Informants as well as by the group during the FGDs. Preferring a bridegroom from a family where economic resources are strong anticipating economic support during and after the marriage with which they can survive. This could be one of the survival strategies when families gets into economic insecurity during drought.

To summarise, economic insecurity is one of the keydriving factors for child marriages. In particular, in most of the poor families, which have no dependable income and both the parents are illiterate, child marriages are taking place. Because of their ignorance or lack of awareness about the adverse consequences of child marriages, and since they are subjected to compelling circumstances, they are opting for child marriages. Drought and migration are the other driving factors for child marriages.

Access to Secondary Education

The relation between child marriage and girl's education is one of the crucial factors. Parent's anticipation of their daughter's marriage and children's aspirations for education are powerful predictors of child marriages. Limited or no access to secondary education and families' prioritisation of boys' over girls' education is the key reason for many families to compel their girl children to drop out after completing primary education and then go in for early marriages.

Limited educational opportunities, low quality of education, inadequate infrastructure, lack of transport and therefore concerns about girls’ safety while travelling to school significantly contribute to keeping girls out of school and therefore tend to favour child marriage¹⁰¹. Similar issues have come up during Key Respondent interviews and FGDs as well.



Nearly 37 percent of the Key Informants have told that the lack of access to secondary education, particularly in rural areas is an extremely crucial factor that favours child marriages (Fig 3). In the absence of access to secondary school, particularly girls will have to take certain responsibilities, for example fetching water, collecting fodder, and work in the farm fields even migrating along with parents – where they have to face peer harassment. To avoid this, parents choose to get a girl married off. In 33 percent of the FGDs, participants have mainly discussed about the difficulties in accessing secondary schools as well as quality of education.

Even for those girls who are attending secondary schooling, safety is a major concern for parents. About 35 percent of the Key Informants and participants in 13 percent FGDs have discussed this issue as one of the driving factors.

The lack of separate toilets for girls, or the lack of permission to use them, could well be considered as infrastructural issues in schools. About 15 percent of the Key Informants highlighted this as one of the leading cause for girl's dropout. Similarly, 6 percent of FGDs have discussed this issue.

Out of all the challenges in sending the girls to secondary and high school, both key informants and participants in FGDs expressed their concerns over the “benefits of higher education to girls”. Many parents don't see any advantage of imparting education to girls and instead of sending them for higher education; vocational education is likely to give them economic strength.

“Peer harassment, in few cases is forcing girls to dropout from schools” – says one of the schoolteachers. Fear complex forcing girls not to go to school and parents are also not taking interest to send their girl children to secondary school.

There are few incidences where girls are discouraged because of their academic failure or lack of interest in education. Such issues are pointed out by the Key Informants during interviews in Mahabubnagar, Adilabad, Khammam and Gadwal districts.

Another opinion expressed by few parents during FGDs is that if girl sent for higher education, getting an equally educated groom is very difficult. This is also influencing parents not to send the girls for secondary schooling and beyond.

Many family members expressed such opinions during the FGDs and most of such members are from marginalised communities whose economic resources are poor. Elders within the family and caste leaders from such communities restrict girl's from having aspirations beyond marriage. In fact, parents themselves do not have proper understanding about the importance of higher education to girls– say 5 percent of the Key Informants. It is

interesting to note that most of the parents and grandparents, particularly the illiterate ones, are of the opinion that it is not necessary for girls to go for higher education.

Irrespective of social and economic status, considering the protection of a girl's chastity is critical to safeguard their family status and reputation within the kin and caste group. While discussing about the education for girls, most of the respondents (including family members, and government officials) expressed their concern over the safety of schooling for girls. Such opinions were expressed by most of the family members. This is another factor behind low or no aspirations about girl children's education.

In general, family members, kin and community members watch girl's day-to-day activities when they are attending secondary/higher education. Their intention is to protect girls from violating the norms around cast and community. The mandal and district level officials express such concerns. Few of the family members and community leaders, described girls with higher education, are more likely to get good match than their less educated peers.

“Engaging parents to promote girl's transition from primary to secondary education is crucial”– says one of the school headmasters. He further says: “School curriculum, lack of interest in studies, unsafe atmosphere in schools, lack of understanding about usefulness of schooling, inability to cope with studies and sometimes academic failure are equally important reasons for girl's discontinuing schooling. Considering such matters, many parents are influencing their girl children's aspirations about education. It is important to sensitise and educate the parents, particularly mothers on the adverse effects of child marriages and importance of education”. Some of the NGOs and media persons also expressed similar concerns during the study.

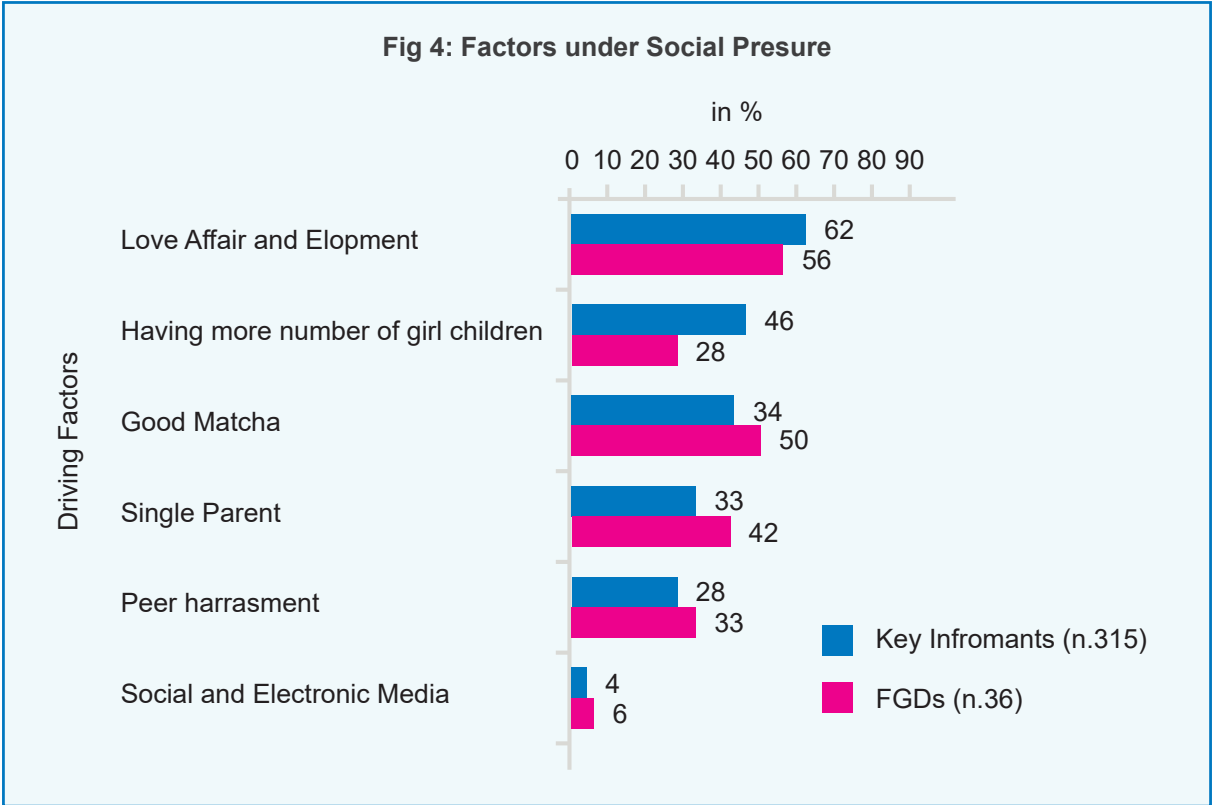
Quite a few participants said that lack of female teachers negatively impacts the experiences of girls schooling and is likely to lead to dropping out of school

and consequently early marriage. Few have commented that the the quality of education and lack of opportunities is also discouraging parents to send their girl children forsecondary and higher education.

To conclude, access and quality of secondary education, is one of the driving factors.

Social Pressure

In addition to traditions, social norms and beliefs, poverty and poor access to secondary schools, different forms of social pressures on parents also lead to child marriages. In few occasions, for example, single parent family will have more pressure from kin and community to get their girl children married at an early age. Circumstances are forcing parents to bow to social pressure and opt forchild marriages.



Although parents are instrumental in arranging child marriages, there are few cases where boy and girl run away secretly with the intention of getting married, usually without parental consent. Concepts of dating and love marriage are not encouraged, however in rural areas such cases are putting parents under pressure. Such incidences have been reported in Hyderabad, Vikarabad, Warangal, and Khammam Districts. Nearly 62 percent of the Key Informants have talked about such cases. When such incidences occur, parents of both boy and girl bring them back and get them married in order to maintain the family honour. In most of these cases, the girls less than 18 years and the age gap between bride and groom is also much higher. This was discussed in 56 percent of the FGDs.

While narrating the existence of such practices, one *Panchayat representative* said – “*in the changing environment, it is more common for boys and girls falling in love and run away from home. This is in fact against community norms and parents of both the boy and girl are penalised by their caste council. Besides, caste council forces both the families to marry these children. To avoid such situations too, also to protect their family honour, parents are opting for child marriages. In most of the cases, the girl is between 12 to 15 years and boy’s age, between 15 to 19 years*”.

In case of a family with more than one girl child, normally there is pressure from kin and community to get them married off as early as possible. Such system exists in economically poor families. Nearly 46 percent of the Key Informants have said that poor families with more number of girl children prefer to have them married off early. Such cases have been recorded in all five districts. Participants in 28 percent of the FGDs confirmed this practice.

In case a suitable match is found (bridegroom) for a girl, parents fix up an alliance without considering her age. About 43 percent of the key respondents, and participants in 50 percent of the FGDs have talked about this issue. This practice is more common among all communities across all sample districts in Telangana State.

Getting a suitable match and getting children married at the right age seems burdensome to single parent families. This is more so, if the woman is heading the family where girl children are more. In such cases, there will be pressure from kin and community to arrange marriage of the girl children as early as possible. Whenever, they have money or if they get a good opportunity, with the support of the kin they sell off whatever assets they have and marry their children. Such incidences are reported by 33 percent of the Key Informants, and participants in 42 percent FGDs talked about this as one of the driving factors that abet child marriages.

It was further told that girls from single parent families, particularly if mother is the head of the family are subjected to peer harassment in the village and also in schools. In addition, it is also difficult to manage girls education and is considered a burden if the family is going through economic insecurity. Immense social pressure on families headed by a female, is also one of the driving factors that push families towards child marriage. Single parent families are more prone to opt for child marriage if they have girl children – say 28 percent of the Key Informants, and participants in 33 percent of the FGDs talked about this issue.

With advancement in technology, social and electronic media is playing an important role in influencing the youth in several ways. About 4 percent of the key respondents and participants in 6 percent of the FGDs have talked about this and said influence of social and electronic media is another driving factor for child marriages. *“Nowadays, movies are influencing the young children. Influenced by such movies, teenagers are falling in love and becoming a challenge thereby putting parents into embarrassing situations”* – says one of the CDPO. Few Key Informants also mentioned about how the social media is influencing the children and to some extent both social and electronic media is also a driving factor of child marriages.

The ill-health of parents, particularly father, also leads to the early marriage of girl children. In such families, mother and maternal side relatives take control over the family and to avoid further social and economic complications, they opt for child marriages.

Different circumstances in the lifecycle put social pressure on parents to opt for child marriages.

Factors told by Community level

At the community level, particularly in rural areas, dominance of opinion leaders, community/caste leaders and religious leaders play crucial role in mentoring and monitoring the community as well as the families within the community. By and large these people are custodians of village and impose rules and regulations.

In few communities, for instance, the fisherman community, leaders promote child marriages. In their opinion, girls should get married with close kin as soon as they attain puberty. They perceive such practices to be beneficial; one is keeping the wealth (fishing boats and nets) within the close family circle, second advantage is that the girl is protected from premarital sex with outsiders thereby avoiding unwanted pregnancies. Here, the key point is that if any girl indulged in such extramarital sex, community leaders will penalise the family of the girl. In some cases, the punishment goes beyond penalty, and such boys and girls are expelled from the community.

The present study also brought out that if any outsider tries to say anything against child marriages, these community leaders become violent, thinking that an outsider is trying to criticise their tradition; which is unpardonable.

Similar voices were heard from other community leaders. In this context, it is important to talk about the caste councils of socially marginalised communities, which are most powerful and exercise regulatory control over their caste and sub-caste groups. In our interaction with one of the caste council members (from the SC community) it was said: *“due to low social status, our girls are often physically abused by the youth from other communities. This often leads to conflict and unrest within the villages. Though upper castes consider us as untouchables, we too have our own traditions and customs. We too believe that girls should get married soon after attaining puberty thereby protecting the dignity of our community”*.

“Once child marriages were prevalent among our caste groups, however access to present education, demonstrated effect of higher caste people’s behaviour, and gradually we are coming out of our traditional practices and customary beliefs. Now girls in our castes are going for higher education and discouraging girl child marriages in the caste groups. Putting girls into school will address many evil practices”: says another member from the caste council in another village.

In this context, it is important to note that, in villages where caste hierarchy is prevalent, the village elders encourage child marriages. This is more so in Mahabubnagar, Khammam, Adilabad, Sangareddy, Gadwal and Warangal districts where most of the villages have such a culture. Under the influence of customs, religion, caste, and importantly the influence of superstitions, child marriages are more common. To avoid legal complications and punishments from policy, most of the families are performing marriages of their girl children as soon as they cross 18 years of age.

It was told that there are quite a few incidences, where parents, particularly grandparents bribe the officials and get birth certificates stating higher age of

their girl children. If we closely examine such families, most of the marriages are consanguine marriages where girls are married to their sister's sons. Practices such as tampering with the birth certificate often go unnoticed.

Impact of Child Marriages

“Child marriage has many effects on a girl’s health: increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, and death during childbirth, and obstetric fistulas. The offspring too are at an increased risk of premature birth and death as neonates, infants, or children”– says one of the medical practitioners during formal discussions. However, unfortunately none of the village level and mandal level Key Informants were aware about the many adverse effects of child marriages. Of 315 Key Informants, majority mentioned that the two complications of child marriages are – denial of education, premature babies, and death of pregnant girl during delivery. This indicates the need for proper sensitisation, of parents in particular.

FGDs have concluded that most of the family members are not aware of the adverse impact of child marriages, particularly girl’s marriages nor are they aware of government regulations . In few instances, the study found that parents are treating marriages as their family affair and are of the opinion that the government has nothing to do with it.

Child marriage has a significant economic impact– says World Bank research study¹⁰². It further says documented with evidences, that child marriage has a large impact on fertility and population growth. Most importantly it has a large negative effect on educational attainment for girls and on the educational prospects of children of child brides. Overall, the impacts of child marriage

¹⁰² Quentin Wodon et al (2017 “Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report” World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530891498511398503/pdf/116829-WP-P151842-PUBLIC-EICM-Global-Conference-Editon-June-27.pdf>

are large for fertility, population growth, and education as well as earnings, but somewhat smaller in other dimensions.

It affects girl's educational prospects negatively, thereby curtailing future opportunities for them to compete for well-paying jobs. Child marriage may also lead to higher health risks for young mothers and their children. Hence, the impact of child marriage on fertility and population growth, children's health, and education and earnings tend to be the largest¹⁰³.

Further discussions with Key Informants and participants in FGD on this issue, reveal that girls who got married early have higher chances of having dropped out of school, have a low-paid job and limited decision-making power at home. There is a chance of being experiencing violence, abuse and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases because they have fewer skills and less negotiating power.

“Awareness levels are very low among illiterate or semi-literate parents, particularly in rural areas. Their priority is getting a girl child married off soon after she attains puberty. They don't pay attention nor are interested in knowing the consequences”—says one of the government officials.

“Girls who marry early have little decision-making power within the marital home, a greater likelihood of being school dropouts, lower labour force participation and earnings, and less control over productive household assets”— says the headmaster.

¹⁰³ Ibid

Section

4

Challenges in Enforcing The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

Child marriages undermine the well-being of women and development. Considering this, the government has brought few regulations, laws and enforcement mechanisms. In 1929, the Sarda Act or the Child Marriage Restraint Act was brought into implementation. Thereafter, in 2006, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (POCM) was brought into force. All these are based on the argument that children and adolescents are not fully matured to make their own choice about marriage.

In spite of all these, now and then the print media reports incidences of child marriages in both the states. In our interaction with government officials, many pointed out the lacuna in the system.

By and large, child marriages are an age-old customary practice supported by the society and religion in many communities. It has its roots strong in history and hence, law alone cannot do much in stopping child marriages. Collective action is required at each level. This is the opinion of the practitioners.

According to one of the legal experts, the law is creating confusion by declaring some marriages void and some others voidable. Marriage of a minor solemnised by use of force, fraud, deception, enticement, selling and buying or trafficking is a void marriage, while all other child marriages are voidable at the option of the parties to the marriage and hence valid marriages until they are nullified by the court. If the law does not attribute consent to a child, it must render all child marriages void, as all child marriages then, become marriages that have taken place either through some form of coercion or use of fraud, trafficking and such other illegal means, or by influencing the mind of the child.

In our interaction with WD&CW officials, we found that one of the top reasons girls are not sent to school after puberty is because of fears regarding sexual safety and violence in spaces outside of home. It is very critical for parents

and school administration to create safe spaces for them to study, where they meet their peers and understand their sexual and reproductive rights. Even if a child is married before she turns 10 or 15, she remains at her parent's home till she reaches puberty. These safe spaces will allow her to understand the consequences of her moving to a married home and might also give her strength and courage to exercise her rights to annul the marriage.

In another meeting with WD&CW team and Police officials, it was told that, in India, while the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act governs child marriages, the legal system also takes into account a gamut of personal laws. Under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, parents, guardians, religious and community leaders promoting the marriage are punishable but under the Hindu Marriage Act, the punishment applies only to the couple themselves and no penalty to parents, guardians or others.

According to the Muslim Personal Law, puberty, presumed at 15 years is considered minimum age for marriage, whereas the Child Marriage Prohibition Act clearly states that all marriages before a girl turn 18 and a boys turn 21, are punishable under law.

Under the Jewish Personal law, minimum age of marriage for girls is presumed at 12 years. All marriages after 12 are considered legal and valid. Inconsistencies between the personal laws and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act has caused complications and [varied judgments](#) by different courts. Therefore, one of the Police officials said: *“there is an immediate need to override all personal laws in the case of child marriage and declare that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act supersedes all other laws”*.

Similarly, even though India has drafted many critical laws and legislations for children, the laws essentially do not always complement each other in a real scenario because they contradict each other or have different definitions.

One of the legal experts has given an example: “*Protection of Children from Sexual Offence Act, 2012 defines any sexual act with a child below 18 years of age as an offence and [Prohibition of Child Marriage Act](#) that prohibits child marriages, but makes them valid once solemnised. In which case, it is likely that minor children have no choice but to enter a sexual union once married, and sex with a child willing or unwilling becomes legal. Such contradictions need to be corrected and a uniform stance needs to be taken across all laws pertaining to children in order to protect their rights and life. Unless power to override personal and religious laws in this regard is integrated into the legal framework, it is difficult to stop child marriages*”.

It is a fact that in India, data on child marriages is inadequate, and in many cases, child marriages are undermined by the enforcement authorities. Political interference sometimes becomes a challenge while implementing the law and child marriages are considered as a normal ritual of social practice. “*In the absence of reliable data, policymaking and implementing is the challenging factor*”– says one of the journalists from the print media. He further said, “*inadequate budget and sometimes underutilisation of available funds is also a serious concern of the enforcement agencies*”.

Absence of systems of birth and marriage registrations is another challenge in implementing the law.

“*In most of the cases where we tried to stop a child marriage, we experienced lot of pressure from parents, community leaders and political leaders as well. Parents treat a marriage as their family affair and say that the government has nothing to do with it,*” says one of police officials. In such cases, according to him, it is very difficult to implement the law and bring the parents to task. He further says that educating parents and community leaders is much important before bringing the law into enforcement.

While narrating a similar issue, one of our respondents from WD&CW said: *“Community leaders/caste councils and religious leaders have a greater role to play in ending early marriages. Because, such leaders have the potential to influence communities and the power to regulate and mentor them. Here the sentiment is attached to religious beliefs. Hence, enforcement authorities have to concentrate on such leaders in order to stop child marriages”*.

The most common opinion expressed by several government officials during our interactions was that change should start from the family and community. Unless girls are treated equal to boys, and parents recognise the consequences of child marriages, it is difficult to regulate it through legal action. Community cooperation and religious leaders involvement is very crucial too. Child marriages are often related to poverty. In such cases, financial assistance through conditional cash transfers could bring better results.

Access to primary and secondary education, particularly in rural areas is crucial to increase a girl’s self-reliance and delay marriage. One of the CDPO said, *“it is evident that those girls who are able to transit from primary to secondary and then to higher education are in a safe zone. If we examine the cases of child marriages, majority of the girls who are victims of child marriage have had no education or are dropouts. An unsafe school environment, the fear of harassment during commuting to school and within school, and no encouragement from parents are the main factors behind girls dropping out from schooling”*.

In this context, parent’s education and aspirations are important factors to be considered. During the interviews at the district level, it was told that parents who had the lowest educational aspirations for their daughters are opting for child marriages. Many communities are of the opinion that girls should not be sent to school after puberty due to safety issues and risks involved. Hence, child marriages are encouraged.

Rising access to education and skill employment is one of the policy level implications suggested by many government officials.

During the discussions, one of the key concerns expressed by CDPOs and Police officials is data/information about child marriages. This is the weakest point impacting the enforcement of law as well as the advocacy. Use of robust, evidence-based data on girls and boys schooling and child marriages is important for learning and tracking the progress in the enforcement of law and advocacy.

Section

5

Summary and Recommendations

While early marriage takes many different forms and has various causes, one issue is paramount. Whether it happens to a girl or a boy, early marriage is a violation of human rights¹⁰⁴.

Synthesised analysis of the study has brought 25 driving factors into picture. For the purpose of logical analytics, these 25 driving factors were further classified into four categories – (i) Traditions, Social Norms and Beliefs, (ii) Poverty, (iii) Access to Secondary Education and (iv) Social pressure. Each of these 25 factors connected to child marriage cannot be examined in isolation, because each one influences the other and is driven by factors such as caste religion, poverty, migration and socioeconomic conditions.

In Telangana State, it is evident from this study that traditions and social norms, economic insecurity, lack of access to secondary education and social pressure are the primary drivers of child marriages.

“Higher the education, higher the dowry” is the strong belief among most of the poor families in Telangana State. If the girl is well-educated, getting an equally qualified boy as a match is difficult. In addition, meeting the cost of higher education for girls is also one of the challenges and hence parents are opting for early marriages where age of the girl has lesser priority. The next important driving factor is consanguineous marriage, mainly to protect ancestral property, strengthen the kinships, as well as political power within the caste structure. In this context, the age of the girl is not of much importance and the only criteria is biological maturity of the girl. In this scenario, pressure from grandparents compelling parents to perform child marriages. In few communities, performing child marriage is a routine customary practice.

¹⁰⁴ UNICEF Innocenti (2001) “Early Child Marriage – Child Spouse” Innocenti Digest, No 07, March 2001, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Italy.

There are certain social norms, for instance parents prefer to marry off daughters, before their sons. Similarly, death of a family member must be followed by a girl's marriage. In such a scenario also, the age of the girl is not taken into consideration. There is a belief among the rural communities that higher the education, higher the dowry. Due to this, few parents prefer to marry off girls, as and when they get a suitable bridegroom and they don't want to send their girl children for higher education. If the family has more number of girl children, irrespective of their age, parents opt for child marriages and want to be free from their responsibilities. These are the key driving factors classified under traditions, social norms and beliefs.

The cycle of intergenerational poverty also contributes to child marriages. Families with economic insecurity (because of no or less dependable income/ assets) prefer child marriages. For example, in Mahabubnagar district, where drought is more common, parents from poor families migrate to faraway places, for example to Maharashtra and Gujarat for livelihood. In such families, to avoid the risks associated with leaving the young girls behind with grandparents, parents prefer child marriages. If both the parents are illiterate, in general their awareness levels are low and they do not understand the consequences of child marriages. Hence, child marriages are common among such families. This factor again is linked to poverty.

Access to secondary education is another top most important issue behind child marriages. In specific geographical areas, where secondary education is not accessible, parents don't want to keep girl children for long in the family. Instead of putting girl children into other household and livelihood activities, parents prefer marrying off girl children. This is also to avoid male harassment within the school or when girls commute to school or workplace. Lack of transportation to reach place of secondary schooling, lack of or poor sanitation facilities in secondary schools are also driving factors behind child marriages. Sometimes, academic failure of girl child influences her aspirations

about higher education, negatively. In such circumstances, she is more likely to drop out from school and alternatively parents prepare for her marriage.

Sometimes, fear of love and elopement, forces the parents to marry off their children at an early age in order to avoid facing caste councils and punishments. In few cases it appears that social and electronic media also influence both young boys and girls to fall in love and elope. In general, child marriage is a common practice among the families headed by women (single parent families). In addition to poverty, pressure from the community, elders and caste leaders force single parents to opt for girl child marriage.

A number of factors are now known to contribute to the practice of child marriage, including the civil registration system, the lack of legislative framework and enforcement mechanisms, and the existence of traditional and religious laws that support the practice. An effective implementable legal framework, which is supported by financial resources and enforcement mechanisms, provides a protective framework that ensures girls' rights to decide when and whom to marry. It also provides an enabling and supportive environment that will help to guide advocates and activists to mobilise communities to end the menace of child marriage.

A summary of the present study, highlights that girls from the poorest and socially disadvantaged backgrounds have the risk of getting out of school or just stopping education at primary level. Government's initiative to support girls from such categories need to have implementable plan that results in potential results.

Recommendations

From the above discussions, one can understand the processes which operate at the more remote, societal level, structural factors and social norms-interact with more immediate factors, such as household contexts (poverty, migration, culture, beliefs) and a girls individual development (access to secondary education), and challenges in enforcing the law predisposes the girls to a higher risk of child marriage. It is therefore in this context,that advocacy with key stakeholders is important. Factors behind child marriages at different levels in different life courses needs to be taken into account.

The implications for policy below include discussion of possible ways to alleviate and counter some of the societal factors that exacerbate gendered disadvantages during adolescence, and measures to help build the capacity of individuals and families to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

From this study the following few advocacy points have emerged –

1. Grandparents and parents were found to have a significantly higher say in deciding upon child marriages. Sometimes religious leaders, and community leaders also played an influential role. Advocacy needs to start from this point by sensitising them on various consequences of child marriages as well as laws and legal implications associated with child marriages in Telangana.
2. Investment in accessible, girl-friendly and high-quality secondary education to assist girls to stay in school for longer. Quality of teaching and quality of school environment is more important.
3. Improved access for young women to economic opportunities, so that staying in school and delaying marriage are more worthwhile for girls and their families.

4. Strong and comprehensive social protection systems and support for the poorest households- since poverty is the major factor pushing many families to opt for child marriages.
5. Conditional cash transfers – one of the best options to support the poor families to keep their girl children longer in schools, and also rendering support to the family in adverse economic conditions.
6. Effective interventions with communities and families (including boys and men) to address social norms and to reduce the risk of sexual and gender-based violence.
7. Encouraging female role models so that girls and their families can envisage positive alternatives to child marriage.

Law and enforcement mechanism alone cannot help in stopping child marriages. Such practice often supported by religious leaders, community leaders, caste councils and elders (patriarchal superiors) in the family. Along with strengthening the enforcement mechanism, it is more important to strengthen specific entitlements to address poverty, social norms, traditions and social pressures, which are major factors pushing parents towards child marriages.

Following are the policy level points to be considered:

1. Improve access to quality education and other vocational opportunities. It is essential to increase the number of KGBVs considering the positive impact of this program in retention and improvement of girl child education. Promote schools as learning environments for girls. Along with this, increase the educational opportunities through scholarships.

2. Extend free and compulsory education up to the age of 18 years, particularly considering the fact that every drop out child is at a highly potential risk of early marriage.
3. Skill development is one of the most important factors for the well-being of adolescent girls. Such initiations will help in stopping child marriages.
4. Initiate programmes to enable community mobilisation and outreach to change social norms and attitudes of the community. Raising community awareness is more crucial in bringing attitudinal change among parents, caste leaders and religious leaders. Involving and improving the capacities of PRIs, community leaders and religious leaders makes the difference in stopping child marriages at grass root level. It also gives strength to the enforcement mechanism.
5. To collect data on child marriages, initiate research to inform about programming and interventions. Improvement in systematic data collection, compilation and analysis is important to strengthen the data bank on child marriages. It is also important to initiate evaluations on a regular basis to inform the policy makers.
6. Develop monitoring and evaluation systems for measuring outcomes.
7. Improve systematic coordination, communication and monitoring among those involved in the implementation.
8. CMPOs and Police for developing state level intervention strategies, effective implementation of PCMA and delivery of services that pre-empt the incidence of child marriages.

9. Develop mechanisms of sharing responsibility of preventing child marriages among different functionaries/structures (PRIs, ULBs, School, PHC, AWC, VO etc.) at the community level and build their motivation and capacities to effectively deliver the desired results.
10. Bring the convergence between enforcement mechanism and organisations working towards ending child marriages and ensure the well-being of girl children. In this context, interdisciplinary coordination with specific responsibilities needs to be laid down.
11. To enforce PCMA 2006 and related laws and policies that can discourage child marriage. The effective implementation of this Act can adopt and enforce state specific rules on PCMA, 2006 and improve the capacity of the enforcement machinery. Raising community-level awareness about the Act, is important too.

Specific Policy Implications

There are quite a few specific driving factors that are prevailing in the districts. Such factors have to be considered during advocacy planning in order to formulate a proper action plan. For example –

1. Poverty is the main cause of child marriages in Telangana State. Particularly poor families are having challenges in educating their girl children. This needs to be addressed through conditional cash transfers along with providing quality education.
2. Consanguineous marriages to protect ancestral property and consolidating and strengthening kinship, are more common across all sample districts in Telangana. To justify such practices, parents and community are using religious justification and also saying it is

their customary practice, which they have to obey. All upper castes are practicing consanguineous marriages and sometimes child marriages are taking place under this umbrella. This needs special focus.

3. It is evident that socially disadvantaged communities, for example Scheduled Castes are performing child marriages under religious belief and opting for devoting young girls to village deities, which ultimately leads to child marriage. This practice is known as 'devadas' (locally called as *mathamas/jogins*) system still in practice in remote parts of Mahabubnagar district.
4. In Mahabubnagar district, poor families who are under debt trap, are searching for wealthy families from neighbouring Karnataka state that can offer reverse dowry locally known as *Kanyasulkam*) during marriage. Irrespective of the age of the girl, parents are conducting child marriages if they get a suitable match from better-off families. Drought is the major cause that is forcing parents to opt for such practices and due to drought poor families migrate to other states. During such period, parents marry off their girl children with the aspiration of giving them better security, better food at their in-law's family. Such a system is evident in Mahabubnagar district also. In this context, it is important to focus on providing social security mechanisms, such as conditional cash transfers.
5. Social norms and beliefs are also encouraging child marriages. For instance, biological maturity of the girl is the sign for marriage in most of the socially disadvantaged communities, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Adilabad, Khammam, Mahabubnagar districts. These communities are celebrating en-mass child marriages during public festivals such as *jatharas* where

caste councils play a very strong role commanding the families under the social norm umbrella. In this context, separate action plan is required where both enforcement mechanism and awareness campaigns have to work together.

In conclusion, a specific policy and programmatic actions are needed to stop child marriage and its far-reaching adverse consequences. It is important for parents and communities at large to change their attitudes on early marriage and extend opportunities for childhood learning and education by keeping girls in school for more number of years. The role of Government and civil society organisations is important to address this issue. They work closely together, design an action plan that is implementable and addresses different driving factors of child marriages.

Section

6

Key Respondent Interview Schedule

A Study on Factors Leading to Child Marriages
in Telangana State

Consent:

“We are exploring how people in this community think about marriage and education of girls and boys. We are talking with different layers of stakeholders starting from PRIs to policy implementers to understand how you and others feel about these ideas/customs and whether you think there has been any change over time and why. We think your views are very important and should be shared with people who discuss policies and programmes that aim to improve the well-being of adolescents. We will be writing a report – there won’t be any immediate effects in the but longer term we would hope your views will be included.’

‘The specific objectives of the study are – (1) Identify the influencers or drivers of child marriage within families and communities in the selected districts where child marriages are high, and (2) Explore the challenges in enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

The expected outputs are – “breakdown of strategies that can be used at the state, and local levels advocacy with all key stakeholders to curb the practice of child marriage” Can I proceed – Yes / No / Not now later (fix the date and time

1. Identification Details		
S.No	Particulars	
1.1	Name of the District	
1.2	Name of the Mandal	
1.3	Name of the village	
1.4	Profession	
1.5	Name of the Respondent	
1.6	Date of visit	
1.7	Name of the Interviewer	

Sl.No	Question	Probe
2.1	Are all the people in the village/ <i>mandal</i> /district aware of the government Acts, legal age for boys and girls to marry? On the prevention of child marriages?	- PROBE for more details such as all the social groups and poor people are aware etc.
2.2	Has the <i>panchayat/mandal</i> /district taken any initiative to create awareness on this issue?	- If so, how, different methods,
2.3	Have you noticed any change in the awareness levels? If so, to what extent?	- PROBE and record
2.4	Do people in your community still practice child marriages? If so give the details with reasons for such practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, in your view to what extent in your village/<i>mandal</i>/district? - Is it confined to some social groups, gender, and single parent children or prevalent among all? Give details - Have you observed any changes in the extent of child marriages? - If so, why, how PROBE for details and record all the reasons leading to change in incidence of child marriages or otherwise
2.5	What is your role in this regard?	- PROBE and ascertain his powers and role in the prevention of child marriages?

Sl.No	Question	Probe
2.6	How do you feel about your role and are you successful in your attempt at preventing child marriages in your village/ <i>mandal</i> /district?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PROBE for all the incidents whether successful or failure and record all the efforts made and outcome of incidents? - PROBE and ask the respondent to recollect and narrate the incidents
2.7	Can you tell about the roles and responsibilities of others at the village/ <i>mandal</i> /district level and the efforts made by them in preventing the child marriages in villages?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Village President - Community leaders - Headmaster of the school - Members and leaders of the village level institutions etc., PROBE and record
2.8	What are the beliefs, norms, values and pressures for child marriages in your community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religion, tradition, family practice, family and peer pressure, safety, gender discrimination, and daughter are taken as burden, family education. - Is there any difference between boys and girls? If so why PROBE all these and record
2.9	What type of marriage contract is in practice? Are the marriages registered? If so, to what extent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil; religious; customary - PROBE the details and record

Sl.No	Question	Probe
2.10	Is polygamy prevalent in your village/ <i>mandal</i> /district? If so to what extent	- PROBE for details with reasons for such practices
2.11	Do you observe dowry practice in the village/ <i>mandal</i> /district? If so give details	- PROBE whether this practice changed over time? If so, since when and the reasons for such change?
2.12	Are there any incidents where child marriages taken place by abduction? If so, reasons?	- PROBE and record
2.13	What are the challenges you have observed in the prevention of child marriages in your village/ <i>mandal</i> / district?	- PROBE for details such as: provisions in the act; cultural practices prevalent in the village; lack of institutions such as KGBV, High schools, Junior colleges, Poverty, Dowry, single parent, family problems etc.
2.14	What are the strategies to be adopted to counter the challenges?	- PROBE giving hints such as creation of Awareness on the bad consequences of child marriages, any issues not clear in the Act? And how to do etc.
2.15	What are activities to be undertaken under each strategy listed above to prevent child marriages?	- Such as Kalajatas for creating awareness etc. PROBE for activities for every strategy and RECORD all the details
2.16	Which are the departments responsible for every activity proposed?	- PROBE and record

Sl.No	Question	Probe
2.17	Do you visualise any benefits/merits in child marriages? Explain?	- PROBE and record details
2.18	What are the risks associated with child marriages – explain?	- PROBE Health, Education, Social, Economic and Psychological
2.19	What are the main reasons for ineffectiveness of the enforcement of Child Marriage Prohibition Act?	- Community pressure, Inactiveness of police, lack of awareness PROBE and record
2.20	In your view, what more should the government do to reduce child marriages?	- PROBE and record
2.21	Your valuable suggestions to prevent early marriages.	- RECORD THREE most important ones

A Study on Factors Leading to Child Marriages in Telangana State

FGD guidelines & Checklist

Consent:

‘We are exploring how people in this community think about marriage and education of girls and boys. We are talking with different layers of stakeholders starting from PRIs to policy implementers to understand how you and others feel about these ideas/customs and whether you think there has been any change over time and why. We think your views are very important and should inform discussions around policies and programmes that aim to improve adolescents’ wellbeing. We’ll be writing a report – there won’t be any immediate effects but longer term we would hope your views will be included.’

‘The specific objectives of the study are – (1) Identify the influencers or drivers of child marriage within families and communities in the selected districts where child marriages are high, and (2) Explore the challenges in enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

The expected outputs are – “breakdown of strategies that can be used at the state, and local levels advocacy with all key stakeholders to curb the practice of child marriage”. Can I proceed – Yes/No/Not now later (fix the date and time)

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2.2	Has the <i>panchayat</i> taken any initiative to create awareness on this issue?	- If so, how, different methods, Have you noticed any change on the awareness levels? If so, to what extent? PROBE and record
2.3	Do people in your community still practice child marriages? If so give the details with reasons for such practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, in your view to what extent in your village/mandal/district? - Is it confined to some social groups, gender, and single parent children or prevalent among all? Give details - Have you observed any changes in the extent of child marriages? - If so, why, how PROBE for details and record all the reasons leading to change in incidence of child marriages or otherwise
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Sl.No	Question	Probe
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2.6	<p>What type of marriage contract is in practice?</p> <p>Are the marriages registered? If so, to what extent?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil; religious; customary - Dowry practice, abduction marriages - PROBE the details and record
2.7	What are the challenges you have observed in the prevention of child marriages in your village?	- PROBE for details such as: provisions in the act; cultural practices prevalent in the village; lack of institutions such as KGBV, High schools, Junior colleges, Poverty, Dowry, single parent, family problems etc.
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2.13	In your view, what more should the government do to reduce child marriages?	- PROBE and record
2.14	Your valuable suggestions to prevent early marriages	- RECORD THREE most important ones



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