

# LOST CHILDHOOD - THE IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA

More than 60 million girls and women are affected by child marriage globally. India ranks 13th in the world among countries with highest prevalence of child marriage. **International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2007**

## GOVERNMENT OF INDIA IS COMMITTED TO STOP CHILD MARRIAGE BY

- Ratifying Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified in 1992 - Articles 19, 24, 28 and 34.
- Ratifying Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), in 1993 - Article 16.
- Prohibition of Child Marriage (PCM) Act, 2006
- Compulsory Registration of Marriages Act, 2006
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
- Eleventh Five-Year Plan 2007-2012 calls for the 'compulsory registration of marriages and verification of age at the time of marriage'.
- National Plan of Action for Children 2005 sets the goal of eliminating child marriages by 2010 (Sections 6.1.4 and 7.1.3)

Child marriage has adverse effects on children, particularly girls and on the society as a whole. For both girls and boys, early marriage has a strong physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impact, cutting off educational opportunities and chances of holistic development. While boys are affected by child marriage, this is an issue that impacts girls in far larger numbers and with much more intensity (*Source: Early Marriage: Child Spouses. Innocenti Digest No. 7. UNICEF, 2001*).

Working in Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, WomenPowerConnect (WPC) found that child marriage continues to thrive in India because of lack of awareness; prevalence of dowry; non-recognition of rights of women and children; religious myths; traditional beliefs; patriarchy; poor access to education for girls; and promotion of wrong norms by traditional leaders. Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh are states where the prevalence of child marriage is very high.

***There is a lack of strong commitment from Government and visible gaps in implementation of the PCMA (Prohibition of Child Marriage Act) at the state level.***

***Media has a huge role to play in changing this situation. Media can support through conscious engagement in reporting incidents and prohibitive measures and further spread awareness on policy reforms to build public opinion against such harmful practices. Media reports can influence policy makers and community to say "No" to this practice.***



*Women Power Connect (WPC) a national level organization addressing women's empowerment and rights in India, implemented a three year project to analyze the current status of child marriage and, advocate for policy reforms and influence action towards its prohibition in high child marriage prevalent states of India. This brief presents a snapshot on policy gaps and key concerns that were found in the 3 States around the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 at the state level in India; specifically for the media which is a very important stakeholder in the eradication of child marriage in India.*

State level analysis of efforts undertaken to implement the PCMA 2006 and subsequent use of Right to Information (RTI) by WPC to seek data on Government efforts in various states reveal that there is a lack of strong and sustainable initiatives so far. There is no specific and long term commitment in budget allocation to support administrative structure, awareness campaigns or prevention mechanisms at the community level. The response to the issue and policy implementation so far has been ad hoc. There is a far greater need for political commitment and subsequent state response through committed resource allocation, both financial and systems at every level of administration to eradicate the menace of child marriage. Community awareness on consequences of child marriage in the high prevalent states is still low. WPC Baseline Research Study in 2012 indicates that in rural Bihar 79% of the respondents had no idea that child marriage is illegal and what would be the right age of marriage for the girls. In the states with high incidence of child marriage, caste panchayats have a strong role to promote child marriage. From policy makers to lowest levels of administration like panchayat and police and to civil society, child marriage does not appear as a big concern. As India's children continue to face various conditions of under-development, child marriage forces them into an abyss, blocking their potential to contribute to the social and economic progress of the nation.

## PROHIBITION OF CHILD MARRIAGE ACT 2006 - A- SNAPSHOT


- The legal age for marriage is 18 years for females and 21 years for males;
- Child marriage is an offence punishable with rigorous imprisonment, which may extend to 2 years, or with fine up to Rs. 1 Lakh, or both;
- Child marriage is a cognizable and non-bailable offence;
- Child marriages are voidable and can be annulled;
- Persons who can be punished- those performing child marriages; male adults above 18 years marrying a child; and persons responsible for the child (i.e. parent, guardian promoting, permitting, participating or failing to prevent a child from getting married).

**ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE MEDIA: AT THE LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL LEVEL IS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGY IN THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE. ONLY STRONG PUBLIC OPINION AND RAISING A VOICE AGAINST THE PRACTICE ACROSS THE COUNTRY CAN PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGES**

**COME.. LETS SAY.. NO CHILD MARRIAGE FROM TODAY**

**CHILD MARRIAGE IS A MAJOR SOCIAL CONCERN AND A VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: WHETHER IT HAPPENS TO A GIRL OR A BOY- UNICEF**

**IN INDIA, 42.9% OF WOMEN AGED 20 TO 24 ARE MARRIED BEFORE THEY ARE 18 YEARS (DLHS- 3, 2007-08).**



**DEOGARH**  
Jharkhand

### SNAPSHOT OF A VILLAGE

Bishanpura, a small village at Deogarh district in Jharkhand, includes only 53 household and a population of around 1000 people. There is no Anganwadi (ICDS) Centre and primary school in the village. Only few boys go to the nearest high school, but no girls are allowed to attend the high school. Girls in the village are married early and have no right to determine their future.



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