



Breakthrough  
Formative Research

**Marriage Can Wait.**  
**Our Rights Can't.**



# The causes, consequences, and resistance of early marriage in Bihar and Jharkhand

Submitted by Praxis

Institute for Participatory Practices

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# **Breakthrough** is a global human rights organization

**seeking to make violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable.** Working out of centers in India and the U.S., we use the power of arts, media, pop culture, and community mobilization to inspire people to take bold action to build a world in which all people live up to their full potential.

We create groundbreaking multimedia campaigns that bring human rights issues into the mainstream and make them relevant and urgent to individuals and communities worldwide. These, along with our in-depth trainings of young people, government officials, and community groups, have ignited a new Breakthrough Generation of leaders sparking change in the world around them.

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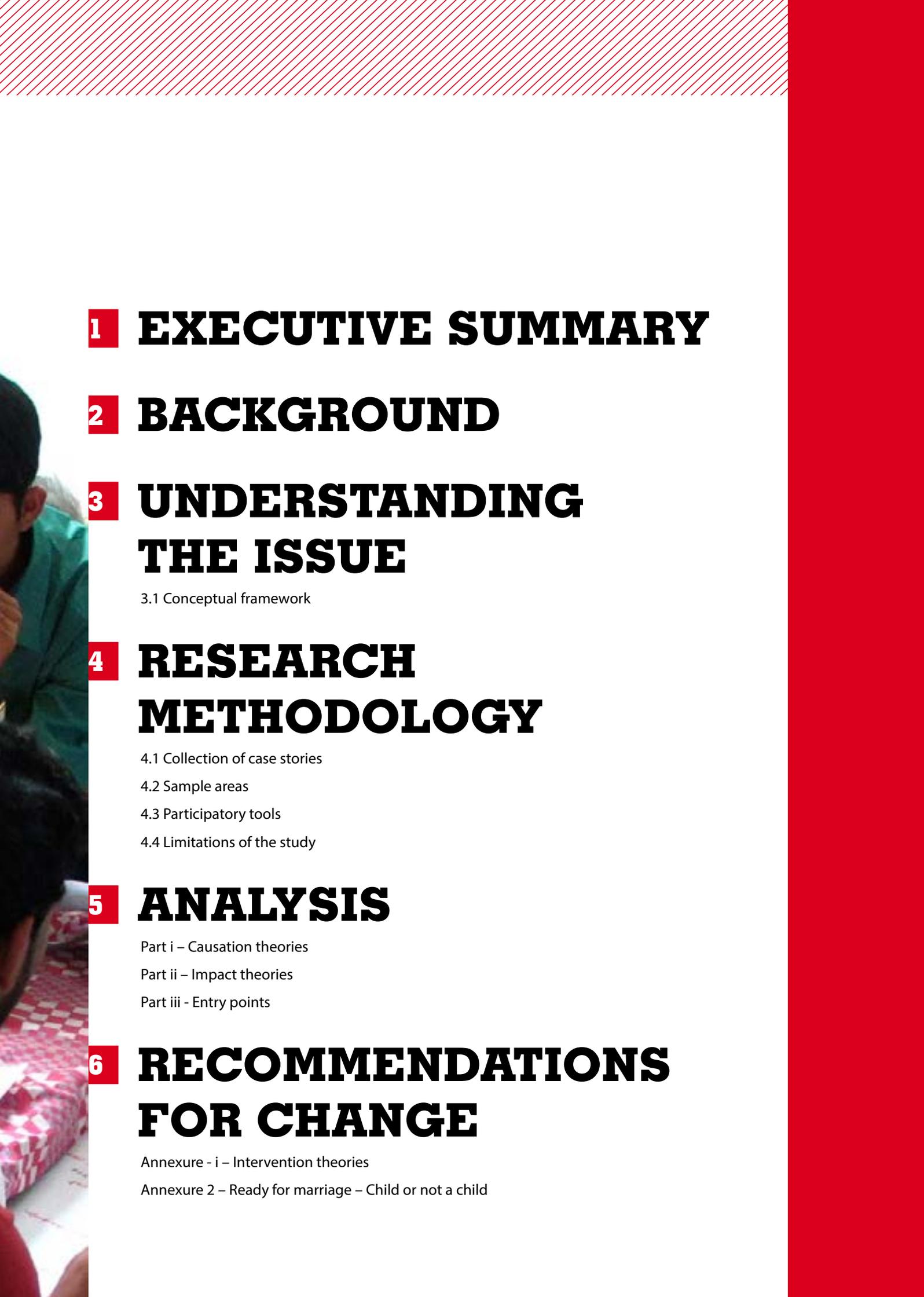


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Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices conducted formative research on early marriage in two districts of Jharkhand and one district of Bihar to inform the program strategy of Breakthrough and make program recommendations based on research analysis. Field visits to Ranchi and Hazaribagh in Jharkhand and Gaya in Bihar were undertaken in December 2011 and March 2012 by two teams comprising Nilima, Latika, Pradeep, Ajai, Vikram, Shilpi, Vijay, and Anusha. The report was put together with dedicated support from Shalini, Sowmya and Satyapriya. The research team acknowledges with immense gratitude the support and cooperation provided by the staff of the NGOs who facilitated interaction with the community groups and provided input:

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# 1

## Executive Summary

Breakthrough is a global human rights organization seeking to make violence and discrimination against women and girls unacceptable. Working out of centers in India and the U.S., we use the power of arts, media, pop culture, and community mobilization to inspire people to take bold action to build a world in which all people live up to their full potential.

One of Breakthrough's current initiatives is to end early marriage in India. We commissioned the formative research in this study in order to fully understand the underlying context of and inform our programs on this issue. We are sharing our findings to help advance the broader field and support our partners working on similar issues in India and around the world.

We hope our research will provide helpful information for other organizations and entities who share the goal of challenging early marriage, and will offer current and complex insight into this urgent global crisis of human rights.

### Early marriage defined

Early marriage occurs when girls or boys — mostly girls — enter marriage before they are fully adult. While the definition of “adult” varies according to different laws and customs, we define early marriage as marriage before a girl is legally, physically, or emotionally a woman.

Early marriage occurs across the world, especially in South Asia, where, according to the World Health Organization, nearly half of young women are married before their 18th birthday. Worldwide, 36 percent of women aged 20–24 were married before age 18, 1 in 9 before age 15.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, if current trends continue, 142 million girls will be married by age 18 — which

means 14.2 million girls married every year, or 37,000 girls married every day.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of early marriage persists even where it is illegal, and in spite of international and regional conventions and government and NGO interventions. In fact, it is the norm in many regions worldwide, even as it does serious damage to girls' physical and mental health and fundamental opportunities, rights, and freedoms. Early marriage leads to domestic and sexual violence, reproductive health complications, physical and emotional trauma, HIV/AIDS and other STDs — and, in far too many cases, death.

The practice of early marriage arises from and perpetuates deeply engrained beliefs and norms about the inferior status of girls and role of women. Adolescent girls usually have no say in whom or when to marry, whether or not to have sexual relations, and when to bear children.

Early marriage is harmful to all involved, especially young women and girls. It both represents and perpetuates a culture that devalues them. It exacts a steep price from families, communities, and societies in terms of lost human potential. Early marriage means a very early start to a series of human rights violations and deprivations that affect girls and women throughout their lives.

<sup>1</sup> (36 percent figure does not include China.) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Addressing the problem of early marriage offers an opportunity to begin breaking this cycle. Doing so requires a clear understanding of the culture in which the practice persists. To that end, this research takes a close look at two areas of India where early marriage rates are particularly high. From these observations, we can draw conclusions and make recommendations about what interventions will be effective in challenging the practice of early marriage.

### **Key recommendations:**

- Focus on men and boys as stakeholders and leaders of change. Fathers and male elders make most of the decisions around early marriage. And the negative impact of early marriage, while felt most directly and acutely by girls and women, ripples through families, communities, and beyond. We must train men, and especially young men, to act as leaders in challenging early marriage — not just “on behalf of women,” but for change that will support human rights and well-being for all.
- Focus on gender and sexuality. Interventions must include but go beyond increasing girls’ access to schools and skills. They must position girls and young women as full human beings with intrinsic value and inalienable human rights. An approach that includes and addresses gender and sexuality stands to challenge norms, break taboos, and pinpoint the deepest roots of this practice, creating an environment for deep, sustainable change.

Why do we call it “early marriage?” We use the term “child marriage” when referring to a legal document or definition using the term. Otherwise, the term “early marriage” helps address several concerns. These include:

- Legal definitions of the term child vary. Variants in India include: the Juvenile Justice Act 2000 (boy or girl below 18 years of age), the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986 (boy or girl below 14 years of age) and the Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2006 (boy less than 21 years of age and girl less than 18 years of age).
- Some communities are less resistant to interventions on “early marriage” than on “child marriage,” which they are already aware is illegal.
- The concept of age may be fluid in the communities in question, with registration of birth a relatively recent phenomenon. Age in itself is seen as correlated to physical maturity and not to a legally sanctified entity.
- The age groups affected by early marriage are not homogenous. Not everyone below 18 has the same needs. A 17-year-old is very different from a 9-year-old. Calling the practice “early marriage” helps us expand our view of the young people it affects — and explore solutions that are appropriate to their age group.
- Breakthrough addresses early marriage through the lens of sexuality and sexual rights. That means acknowledging and addressing the issues of sexuality that drive early marriage: the stigma

against young women expressing their sexuality and mingling with young men outside family and societal view and constraint; the (misguided) notion that marriage will help shield young women from sexual harassment and assault. Calling the practice “early marriage” expands our capacity to characterize and address those it affects as young people (not just “children”) with sexuality, sexual agency, sexual expression, and sexual rights.

- Also see Appendix 2.

### **Early marriage in India**

According to the World Health Organization, in 47 percent of all marriages in India the bride is under 18; 18 percent are married by age 15. Among the countries with the highest prevalence (percentage) of early marriage, India is 12th.<sup>3</sup>

Early marriage in India is a centuries-old practice. It has also been illegal in India for nearly a century. While the age at first marriage has shown a marginal increase, the last National Family Health Survey (2005-06) showed a prevalence of 60 percent. Age-old customs and traditions, patriarchal views of the girls as burdens, and the economic insecurities associated with having an unmarried girl at home continue to ensure that social sanction has a greater influence on communities than a 100-year-old law.

### **The focus of this research**

UNICEF figures show that Bihar and Jharkhand are among the states with the highest prevalence of early marriage. Bihar has the highest rate of all, with more than 60 percent of girls married before age 18. In Jharkhand, more than 55 percent of girls are married before 18.

These areas present an opportunity for intervention that is both urgent and challenging. Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices conducted formative research in a few locations in Gaya district in Bihar, and

Ranchi and Hazaribagh districts in Jharkhand. The team used participatory methods to:

- Understand the causes and effects of early marriage from the perspective of the communities involved.
- Shed light on the subject in a specific geographic area.
- Analyse the findings.
- Use this analysis to pinpoint effective interventions by Breakthrough and other organizations.

The research team collected detailed case stories. Discussions with the community revealed complex links among tradition, poverty, dowry practices, lack of opportunities for education, concern for girls’ safety, resistance to inter-caste alliances, and the practice of early marriage. Even as the practice persisted, there was some acknowledgement of the impact of the practice on the health of a young girl, her loss of educational and other opportunities, and her diminished status in the marital relationship and the marital family.

### **The data confirmed several basic realities:**

- Families are often motivated by the belief that early marriage will protect girls’ safety and security. (Across India, there is fear, and significant risk, of sexual harassment and assault. However, early marriage simply exposes girls to another set of related dangers.)
- Households and communities are stigmatised for unmarried girls (and sometimes boys).
- Girls and young women (and, to some degree, boys and young men) lack decision-making power.
- There is a strong perception of girls as “bad investments.”

### **The data also revealed some compelling details and nuances:**

- Young people are more inclined than their elders to question the practice of early marriage. Clearly this is an important demographic for advocates to focus on, as

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



young people can lead change for the next generation.

- Providing girls with education and marketable skills does not automatically protect them from early marriage. In some cases, skills and education make them more “marriageable.” The relationship of education, skills, and economics to early marriage is complex.
- Girls view most men they know as potential threats or harassers. (At one school, 90 percent of girls said they viewed men they knew as potential molesters.) The taboo against intermingling of the sexes outside marriage leaves no place for girls and boys to explore healthy sexuality or to develop mutual respect, communication, and understanding. Consent issues, harassment, and other problems are thus even more likely to arise. This in turn fuels stricter controls — including early marriage — and perpetuates a vicious cycle.

From this research, several entry points for program development emerged:

- Education
- Teen pregnancy
- Livelihoods
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Sexual harassment
- Girls’ sexuality and societal control of it
- Gender rights

By addressing these topics, new and emerging community leaders have the potential to spark a shift in the perception of girls as liabilities. Men and boys especially must be considered and cultivated as agents of this change — not only in the context of early marriage, but also as champions of women’s rights as human rights essential to the well-being of all. That shift — wherein girls and women are equally valued members of families and societies — will create the cultural conditions for the end of early marriage.

# 2

## Background: The Purpose of this Study

Breakthrough ([www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)), a global organization with documented success using multimedia campaigns, community mobilization, and leadership development to change attitudes and build a culture of human rights, sought technical assistance to conduct formative research on its initiative to address the issue of early marriage. The project has the long-term goal of facilitating an environment conducive to reduction and prevention of early marriage. This will be achieved through a change of attitudes among individuals and communities, leading to sustained social change supporting reduction of early marriage.

The focus areas were two districts of Jharkhand (Ranchi and Hazaribagh) and one district of Bihar (Gaya). Praxis - Institute for Participatory Practices, which specialises in participatory approaches that aim to enable excluded people to have an active and influential say in equitable and sustainable development, was commissioned to conduct the formative research and inform the subsequent program strategy for Breakthrough. An intersectional approach is necessary to address the lack of adequate services, the limited alternative opportunities, and the social and familial attitudes and constraints that together form the context in which early marriage persists. With that in mind, the aim of the research

was to identify key forms of media to employ, target stakeholders for capacity building and leadership training, and facilitate links with existing service providers (government and non-government). Analysis of this data would result in recommendations for effective strategies and interventions for Breakthrough. It also offers an analytical and strategic framework for other organizations and entities who share the goal of challenging early marriage — and, overall, current and detailed insight into a complex and urgent global crisis of human rights.



# Understanding the Issue

Early marriage occurs when girls or boys — mostly girls — enter marriage before they are fully adult. While the definition of “adult” varies according to different laws and customs, we define early marriage as marriage before a girl is legally, physically, or emotionally a woman.

Early marriage occurs across the world, especially in South Asia, where, according to the World Health Organization, nearly half of young women are married before their 18th birthday. Worldwide, 36 percent of women aged 20-24 were married before age 18, 1 in 9 before age 15.<sup>4</sup> In 2020, if current trends continue, 142 million girls will be married by age 18 — which means 14.2 million girls married every year, or 37,000 girls married every day.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of early marriage persists even where it is illegal, and in spite of international and regional conventions and government and NGO interventions. In fact, it is the norm in many regions worldwide, even as it does serious damage to girls’ physical and mental health and fundamental opportunities, rights, and freedoms.

Early marriage is first and foremost an interruption of childhood. As numerous studies show, it has a negative impact on education, health, physical safety, and autonomy, depriving children and young people of their basic human rights. It acts as a brake on their development. It disproportionately affects the girl child. National and international indicators on maternal health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality are all negatively linked with high early marriage rates. Early marriage leads to domestic and sexual violence, reproductive health complications, physical and emotional

trauma, sexually transmitted disease, human trafficking — and, in far too many cases, death.

The practice of early marriage arises from and perpetuates deeply engrained beliefs and norms about the inferior status of girls and role of women. Adolescent girls usually have no say in whom or when to marry, whether or not to have sexual relations, and when to bear children.

Early marriage is harmful to all involved, especially young women and girls. It both represents and perpetuates a culture that devalues them. It exacts a steep price from families, communities, and societies in terms of lost human potential. Early marriage means a very early start to a series of human rights violations and deprivations that affect girls and women throughout their lives.

Addressing the problem of early marriage offers an opportunity to begin breaking this cycle. Doing so requires a clear understanding of the culture in which the practice persists. To that end, this research takes a close look at two areas of India where early marriage rates are particularly high. From these observations, we can draw conclusions about what interventions will be effective in challenging the practice of early marriage.

<sup>4</sup>(36 percent figure does not include China.) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

## Early marriage trends in India

A 2007 UNICEF report<sup>6</sup> stated that nearly half of the girls who marry early live in South Asia. 41-60 percent of Indian women are married before they are 18. Between the National Family Health Survey-1 (NFHS-1) (1992-93) and NFHS-3 (2005-06) the percentage of women married before the age of 18 saw only a modest decline, from 54 to 47 percent.<sup>7</sup>

- While the national prevalence of early marriage has declined, both Bihar and Jharkhand showed prevalence higher than 60 percent in 2005-06.<sup>8</sup>
- The median age of marriage in India as based on the NFHS-3 figures showed that among women aged 20-49 at the time of survey, the median age at first marriage was 17.2 years and the median age of cohabitation was 17.7. By contrast, men in the same age group got married at a median age of 23.4 years and 23.8 respectively. In Bihar, the median age for marriage was 15.1 for respondents aged 20-49. The corresponding age of cohabitation was 16.4. In Jharkhand, the median age of marriage for the same age group was marginally higher at 16.2. But the age of cohabitation was marginally higher at 16.8.<sup>9</sup> 1 Graph shows this data.

- Early marriage was more likely in poor households than in rich households.<sup>10</sup>
- Education was one of the most important factors influencing the age at marriage. The less education girls had, the more likely they were to get married early. Girls with secondary schooling were approximately 70 percent less likely to marry early than their uneducated counterparts.<sup>11</sup>
- Caste was a much more significant influence on age at marriage in NFHS-3 compared to NFHS-2. Members of scheduled castes and tribes and other backward castes were between a third and a half more likely as high-caste women to marry before age 18 in 2005-2006.<sup>12</sup>
- The urban-rural differential was substantial throughout the country. In all the three NFHS surveys, early marriage was more common in rural areas. Almost twice as many girls in rural areas (56 percent) marry before 18, compared to girls in urban areas (29 percent).<sup>13</sup> This data has been shown below, 2 Graph.

<sup>6</sup> Progress for Children, A World Fit for Children, Statistical Review, No. 6, December 2007, UNICEF

<sup>7</sup> The NFHS is a state-wide and national information survey on fertility, maternal and child health, and family planning. Three rounds of this survey have been conducted.

<sup>8</sup> Knot Ready, Lessons from India on Delaying Marriage for Girls, S. Dasgupta and others, 2008, ICRW

<sup>9</sup> National Family & Health Survey – Reports of Bihar, Jharkhand and India; the study covered 2005-06.

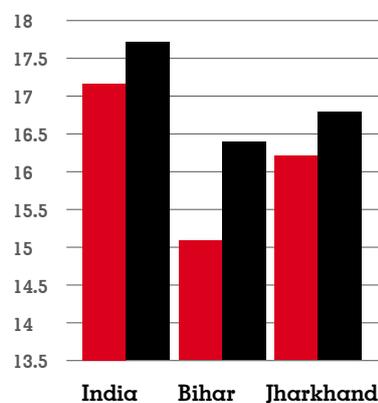
<sup>10</sup> Progress for Children, A World Fit for Children, Statistical Review, No. 6, December 2007, UNICEF

<sup>11</sup> Knot Ready, Lessons from India on Delaying Marriage for Girls, S. Dasgupta and others, 2008, ICRW

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

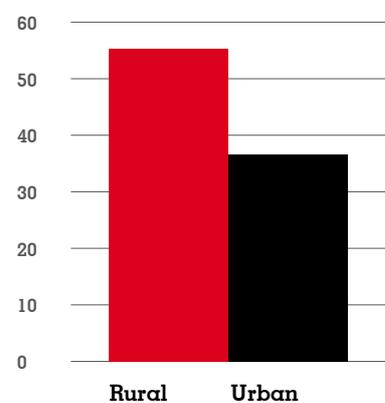
<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

1 Graph Age at marriage and cohabitation among girls in India, Bihar and Jharkhand,



Source NFHS – 3, 2005-06

2 Graph Percentage of rural and urban girls who get married before the age of 18



Appendix 1 provides detail on Indian legislation against early marriage. Source ICRW

# 3.1

## Conceptual Framework

Early marriage continues to be looked at largely from a reproductive and sexual health framework. This research consciously adopted a conceptual framework based on three approaches.

**Child rights.** A child rights approach to early marriage is based on the premise that a child has inalienable rights to survival, protection, development, and freedom from discrimination, physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment and exploitation, including sexual abuse. Early marriage is an infringement of all these rights. For girls, early marriage is the beginning of a series of rights violations and deprivations that continue to affect them throughout their lives. A human rights perspective is urgently needed to understand the full dimensions of this practice.<sup>14</sup> The study also sought to understand early marriage from the perspective of the child. (See Appendix 2.)

Appendix 3 lists some national and international human rights treaties on early marriage.

**Gender rights.** A gender rights approach to early marriage rests on the argument that gender discrimination fuels the practice of marrying girls young. The practice is a form of discrimination against the girl child and a perpetuation of the patriarchal system, which devalues girls, positions them as a burden, and denies them agency while also assigning to them responsibility for family “morality” and “honor.” The system also socializes girls from birth to accept male domination and ignore their own needs, with impact both societal and personal: girls commonly describe feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth.

With puberty comes decreased autonomy and mobility, with increasing limitations on health, nutrition, and education as well as restrictions on speech, appearance, conduct

and interaction with the opposite sex. Girls inherit their mothers’ domestic chores and adopt stereotypical gender roles. After marriage, their husbands and in-laws control them. Consequently, the girls enter a “culture of silence”<sup>15</sup> in which they have no voice in decisions, including how many children to have.

**Community rights.** A community rights approach recognises the community as a political entity claiming political, economic, cultural, and social rights. In this context, it is usually a marginalised community: Dalit, tribal or rural poor, generally deprived of many rights, entitlements, and participation in decision-making. These communities have of necessity developed their own sets of rights to protect their traditions and cultures. They have their own complex power relationships based on age, gender, class, and other factors.

It is necessary to understand the important role community plays in influencing marriage decisions and to include the community in any early marriage interventions. In the same way, the space for participation by women and children in community-led processes and centres of influence will have a bearing on the nature of community rights and institutions.

<sup>14</sup> Early Marriage, Child Spouses, Innocenti Digest, No.7, March 2001, UNICEF

<sup>15</sup> Adolescent Girls in India Choose a Better Future: An Impact Assessment; 2001, CEDPA

# 4

## Research Methodology

The research team visited villages in three districts. They collected detailed stories using participatory tools and focus group discussions. Appendix 3 describes the research process in detail.

### Limitations of the study

**Small sample size.** The small sample size reduced the reliability of inferences from the data. The study was not meant to be a representative survey, and the data was not completely representative of the selected districts. Researchers attempted to offset the limitations of a small sample size by focusing on outliers and collecting as many variations as possible with regard to each aspect of early marriage.

**Time limitations.** Time constraints meant that data were collected during a short period, and it was not possible to spend long periods with the participants.

**Accessibility.** Due to lack of roads and transport, interior locations were left out. Most of the sample villages were located close to towns, and well-connected. This implies some urban influences on social customs, and the possibility that the early marriage situation might be different in more remote locations.



# Results and Analysis

Early marriage was the norm in every area studied. The average age at marriage for girls was 15-17. There were, however, some instances of girls getting married as young as 12 and 13. Based on focus group discussions, it emerged that generally, girls reached puberty and started attending to household chores by age 14. At that time, parents started to look for grooms. The girl was married as soon as a suitable groom was found.

Some findings were fascinatingly at odds with conventional wisdom. For instance, conventional wisdom holds that many girls are married off early because they have no opportunity to perform remunerative work. Indeed, many well-meaning programs focus on income generation for girls as a tool for reducing early marriage. However, our study found the opposite to be true in many cases: families use the girls' marketable skills not to keep them at home, but to pay less dowry and therefore get them married at a lower cost. Also, many communities are not open to living off daughters' incomes.

## A snapshot of trends observed:

- Marrying off children at a young age is an age-old custom and tradition.
  - The practice of dowry continues unabated, with prevalence higher among non-tribal communities. The rate of dowry has gone up considerably. In communities where dowry was not customary, gift exchange is the norm.
  - Desire for male progeny is common.
  - Finding a good match for a daughter is considered the primary responsibility of parents, especially fathers.
  - Unwed girls aged 17 and 18 are subjects of gossip and ridicule by the community. This adds pressure on parents to get them married.
- Early marriage is fueled by prevalent notions of sexuality and is seen as a way to "control" girls and "tame" boys.
  - Parents often turn to early marriage as a means of "protecting" their daughters from dangers perceived and real, especially sexual harassment and assault.

## Early marriage in Bihar and Jarkhand: what this research shows

### Deep-rooted tradition makes early marriage resistant to change

Early marriage is an age-old, deep-rooted, tenacious tradition, protected by community elders and reaffirmed by generations of social conditioning. Communities have historically been resistant to any interventions addressing early marriage.

Early marriage was an accepted practice across the districts, castes, religious and tribal groups studied, although the prevalence rate varied. Tradition was the universally acknowledged reason for continuing the practice. There were repeated expressions of "Karna padta hai" ("We have to do it"). Deviation from the norm was an invitation to gossip, queries regarding the unwed girl child, and assumptions that the parents have failed in their duty to find a

## Boys are also married early.

Upendra and Rahul of Paswan Toli in Gaya's Visar village said it was customary to marry off boys at an early age. This age was marginally higher among boys (17-18) than among girls (15-16). Kiran Devi of Paswan Toli said she got her son married at the age of 17 and her daughter at the age of 15.

Like unmarried girls, unmarried boys were subject to ridicule. Members of a theatre group in Manpur cited the example of Panchan Kumar, a 22-year-old who is studying and does not want to marry. The villagers call him awara/ujand (vagabond/wild).

Worldwide, some boys may be married (or at least betrothed) as early as age 9, but the majority are 18 or over. While the negative consequences of early marriage disproportionately affect girls, any forced marriage, or marriage to which one is too young to consent, is a violation of human rights.

## Girls and education: exceptions to the norm

Many study participants stated their belief in the importance and rightness of girls' education and sent their girls to school. In Chandra Mahili School in Barhu, in Kanke district of Ranchi, 100 out of 175 students are girls. All the girls of Kanke's Nava Toli go to school. A handful of girls were pursuing their collegiate education.

A minority of girls continue their education after marriage, particularly in Gaya, where the practice of *rugaddi* or *gauna* was common. (*Gauna* refers to the consummation of the marriage, which under this tradition does not take place until several years after the betrothal. In some cases this practice may allow a girl to continue with a few more years of education.)

Cases of parents-in-law funding a daughter-in-law's education were also reported. Pinki Kumari of Wazirganj college of Visar lived at her parents' house while her father-in-law funded her education. Pinki Kumari of Lakhanpur, who is working with Pragati Gramin Vikas Kendra, lived at her parents-in-laws' house and continued with her studies, funded by her father-in-law.

But examples such as these were few and far between.

groom: "Kya koi ladka nahin mila?" ("Did you not get a groom yet?")

Parsuram Mistry of Kaiyyan village in Gaya said that he got his daughter Mamata married off at 14-15 because of the tradition in the village. "Gaon mein aisa hi hota hai." ("This is how it happens in villages.") This sentiment was echoed during a focus group discussion with the Paswan community in Visar village in Gaya's Manpur block: "Gaon vasi se nigah kharab hoti hai." ("The girl comes under the scanner of the village.")

Being rooted in tradition, early marriage was seen as a very routine and natural practice. There was little acknowledgement of any attendant harm, except in some in-depth discussions. In the words of Jeera Devi in Angara in Ranchi, "Girls become relatively free from other tasks by the age of 14. They neither go to school nor work. It is the responsibility of parents to get them married. So the marriage happens."

In notable contrast is the practice of dowry. The practice of giving/taking dowry, though highly prevalent, is considered a social evil. People acknowledge that it is a wrong practice. Dowry cases get frequently reported. The station house officer at Manpur Mofussil police station said dowry cases were very common. In fact, they were the most reported in the category of offences against women. There was always a passive resistance to changing this tradition.

## Education is not a straightforward solution to early marriage

Generally, education is thought to help prevent or at least delay early marriage for girls. Indeed, in some parts of India, increased prioritisation of and access to girls' education may have contributed to a rise in marriage age. In our sample areas, however, the impact of education on age of marriage has been negligible.

To being with, significant barriers to education remain, especially for girls beyond the primary or middle school level. The principal of a middle school in Dumar pointed out that because of the absence of a high school in the village, many students — especially girls — dropped out after Class 8. It was almost impossible to find high schools in a

village cluster. Where schools may exist, they may be inaccessible. Ruby Devi and Anita Devi of Jagdishpur said most girls dropped out of school after Class 8 because the access to the nearest school (about 10 km away in Hazaribagh Sadar) was through unsafe, forested areas. In Sarauni, the respondents said that the jeep or bus to and from college and high school charged 10 INR each way, with 20 INR (about \$0.34 USD) per day unaffordable for most families.

(On the other hand, for some poorer parents, sending a daughter to school meant one less mouth to feed at home. In one of the poorest houses in Angara a father said that his 15-year-old daughter went to school for one square meal a day, which they cannot afford.)

The absence of separate toilets for girls also kept girls out of school.

Girls' household duties — from chores to care of younger children to labour (cattle-rearing and harvesting, for example) — interfere as well. Jouri Devi in Nava Toli, Kanke block of Ranchi, dropped out of school in Class 7 when her mother died and she had to take care of her 10 siblings.

Once out of school and at home, girls begin to receive "rishtas" (proposals) from *aguas* (matchmaking relatives and friends). At this point marriage begins to seem inevitable.

All of that said, where education was available and accessible, it was often seen as a route to marriage, not an alternative. Many people believed that education was important for finding suitable grooms for girls. Indeed, the trend of the day for more people was to seek educated brides. This trend cut across the sample area, and across gender, age, caste/religion, educational, and other divides.

Radhika Devi of Ward 8 of Kharhari said the time was not far when it would become difficult to marry off uneducated girls.

Caveat: brides with some — and only some — education were seen as desirable. For many, primary schooling was enough. Respondents in Barhu said that educating a daughter could create multiple burdens. Investing significantly in girls' education, some said, would reap returns only for the father-in-laws' family

— and presented the risk of having to pay an even higher dowry. (The more educated the girl, the more educated the groom must be, according to the patriarchal belief that a wife cannot be more educated than a husband. And the more educated the groom, the higher the dowry demand.)

Shanti Devi from Angara said her family had to pay a dowry of 4 lakhs (approximately \$6314.00 USD) for her niece's marriage because the boy was doing his engineering course. An NGO in Padma cited cases in which educated girls understate their educational attainments in order to avoid problems in marriage. Only one instance of a bride more educated than her prospective groom was found, in Bejnetata. Sarita Devi, who was pursuing her Bachelors in Arts, found her life partner, a class 5 dropout, from the same village.

Young boys in the community said they did not prefer well-educated girls as brides. Boys in Jitu in classes 10 and 12 said they wanted brides educated only up to class 8 or 10.

Simply making education accessible, therefore, is not enough. Even where schooling as available, education — at least through primary grades — was seen as increasing girls' status and prospects as brides. Both girls with little education and girls with "too much" education were seen as difficult to marry off. Higher education, if available, was not seen as an alternative to marriage but rather as an impediment. In these contexts, therefore, better access to education does not necessarily reduce early marriage.

### **Marketable skills are not a straightforward solution to early marriage**

Perhaps also contrary to conventional wisdom, a girl's ability to earn income did not necessarily delay the age of marriage. Economic sustainability was often not seen as the goal of education. Very few families in the sample area thought of education for a daughter as a means of enabling her to become financially independent. Young boys from the community were also very candid about the fact that though they wanted (somewhat) educated wives, they did not want working wives. Reasons included protectiveness and concern for their wives' physical safety and fear that

household chores and responsibilities would be neglected. In other words, "And who will make the chapatis?"<sup>16</sup> Among the few who said they would "allow" their wives to work, the assumption was that their wives must seek and secure their permission first. (Certain beliefs prevailed about what kinds of paid work were suitable for women. Bimla Devi from Barhu in Kanke explained, "Boys can do whatever work they like. But girls need security. They cannot do any job. They can do something like teaching which is regarded as respectable.")

The research team found only one unmarried employed girl: Sanita, a 19-year-old in Dumar, who was doing a graduation in Geography and simultaneously teaching in a school.

The relationship among the education, marriage and financial independence of girls and women is complex, with several paradoxes. While basic education seemed to be a prerequisite for marriage, "too much" was a liability. The utility of educating a girl was measured more in terms of marriage and matchmaking than financial independence; educated girls capable of becoming financially independent had to wait for marriage to find employment and then could do so only with the consent of their husbands and in-laws. For some, marriage makes employment impossible; for others, marriage is the only thing that makes it possible.

### **Both poverty and affluence drive early marriage**

Poverty plays a role in perpetuating early marriage. Several studies have adopted the "standard of living" measure to establish a correlation between poverty and age at marriage. Increased dowry demand (rising with a girl's age), inability to pay for education, general economic insecurity and lack of livelihood options, inability to provide for children, and above all the perception of daughters as burdens: all are reported to be reasons for the higher incidence of early marriage among poor families.

This study did find that a family's ability to pay dowry was one of the biggest determinants of a girl's marriage age. In Kaiyyan, Reena Kumari's father had to sell off some land in order to arrange for dowry for his 17-year-old

### **Exceptions and encouraging signs of change**

Many parents acknowledged that a sound education would give their daughters the opportunity to work and supplement family income, and many husbands were slowly but steadily reconciling to a scenario where the wife's income would come in handy.

In Jarkhand (tribal and mixed habitations), the team met 15 married women who worked in the health sub-centre and Integrated Child Development Schemes centre in Angara block and supported their families with their income. They were employed as Midwives, Activists, known as didis or sahiyas, and Anganwadi sevikas. Some were also involved in drip irrigation. One of them, Laxmi Devi, who was a sarpanch,<sup>17</sup> and now works as a sahiya, said, "Hamare yahan, aurten hi paisa kamati hain." ("In our village, the women are the main bread earners.") In a village in Kanke, women were involved in incense stick-making.

In a few cases, girls learned skills in order to bring in an income after marriage. Anju Devi of Kaiyyan learned tailoring and Lalitha of Charkitongratoli learned stitching and knitting. In Visa, one couple planned to buy a sewing machine for their daughter-in-law so that she could start a small business and earn for the family.

<sup>16</sup> And Who Will Make the Chapatis? B. Datta, ed., 1998, Stree Publications.

<sup>17</sup> A sarpanch is an elected head of a village level statutory institution of local self-government in India, called the gram panchayat.

daughter. He was worried about how he would arrange for four more dowries for four more daughters.

However, poverty was not the only trigger for early marriage in our sample areas. 16 women self-help group members in Angara block of Ranchi district were asked to list five each of the poorest and richest families in that village. Early marriage took place in three of the five poorest families and two of the five richest families. One rich family had three daughters, and all married early.

According to these women, the rich could find good grooms for their daughters faster and this, coupled with the fact that they could pay higher dowries, resulted in urgency to get the daughter married off into the best family. (Marrying a girl into an affluent family is seen as an achievement for her father.) The richest family in the Yadav (OBC) cluster in Visar had reportedly married off all daughters of marriageable age and were planning to marry off the next daughter (age 16) in March 2012. (Among the richer families of Barhu, there was also a trend of marrying off their sons early. This was because a certain standard of living ensured that they did not have to wait for a son to find a job and contribute financially to the family before marrying him off.)

Therefore, both poverty and relative affluence could trigger early marriage.

Moreover, poverty was not reported to be the only motivator for early marriages in the sample area. Indeed, there were a few cases of poor families not succumbing to the pressure to marry their young daughters. One of the poorer families in Angara chose to educate both their daughters.

It is important to note that when adults living in poverty were questioned about their primary issues, early marriage did not come up. In the village of Angara, women did not see early marriage itself as a problem; their chief concerns were hunger and diminishing livelihood options.

Young people, it should be noted, had a different take on this. Overall, we found clear evidence that while adults tended to accept and endorse early marriage, young people were more inclined to question it, even as they saw it as an opportunity to interact with the opposite sex. This is a very important demographic difference for outside agents to take into account.

### **Girls and women have no role in decision-making around early marriage**

When it comes to the question of early marriage, brides almost never had a say; mothers nearly always endorse their husbands' decisions. As in most other parts of the country, marriage was not seen as a contract

**3 Table**  
Role of mothers, girls and boys on decision-making related to marriage

Marriage-Related Decision-Making Pattern		
	Timing of Marriage	Choice of Groom/Bride
Mothers' say	Mothers feel that they do have a say but their roles and agency is limited to endorsing their husbands' decisions.	Mothers never meet the prospective groom. The male members base any expression of opinion, mostly in the form of endorsement of the male members' opinion, entirely on the assessment of the groom.
Girls' say	The girl's consent is not even considered. In rare cases where girls voice their opinion against marriage, they are overruled.	The girl's opinion is not considered of any consequence. In rare cases where they speak up, elders overrule them.
Boys' say	Boys have very little say in the timing of the marriage. The decision is taken by the elders of the family, and depends on various factors.	Boys by and large have a greater say in than girls. However, the family generally makes the final decision.

between two consenting adults, but rather as a tie between two families and/or villages and an agreement so significant that it's entrusted only to (mostly male) family elders.

Several women in the sample areas indicated that children's marriages were a joint decision by their parents, implying that they had a say in the matter. However, further probing revealed that mothers of prospective brides almost never went to meet the prospective groom, relying completely on their husbands' assessment, and that they had no say in deciding the marriageable age of their daughters. These were unquestioned male prerogatives and a woman's role was limited to endorsing decisions taken by the male members of the family. As far as the bride and groom were concerned, in general boys had more say than girls.

The fact that men made early marriage decisions and women had no say does not necessarily mean that if women had a say, things would be any different. Women were invariably in favour of early marriage. More often, as in the case of Kiran Devi from Visar, women support the early marriage of their daughters. "Ladki ka mahina shuru hote hi uske liye ladka dhundna shuru kar denge." ("Once my daughter attains puberty, we will start looking for a groom for her.")

Very few women who were married early themselves saw any need to delay their daughters' marriages. One exception was Promila Devi of Barhu, who ensured that her daughter was educated: "What I couldn't enjoy in my own childhood; I want to give all that to my daughter."

It is interesting to note how the scenario with regard to women's agency in decision-making powers changed in the face of out-migration of the male members of the family. In the absence of the husband, the first power of decision-making fell to the woman's in-laws (the girl's grandparents) – the father-in-law and the mother-in-law, in that order. In a few families, where the husband's parents were dead or did not live with them, the woman made decisions, albeit in discussion with her husband. This was seen in Charkitongra Toli in Sarauni, where several men had migrated to other cities. Only one woman, Geeta Devi, took decisions about property and children's education because her in-laws were dead.

Young girls often learned of their wedding plans only on the day the groom's family came to "see" them. This was especially common in Manpur block of Gaya and in Charkitongra Toli in Hazaribagh Sadar among Yadavs, Paswans, and Mahatos. Rekha Devi from Bandarbela village was 14 when she got married. She found out about her marriage only when her in-laws came to see her. Pooja

#### Girls defying tradition: exceptions to the norm

In rare cases — as in Bejnetata village in Angara block of Ranchi, where girls seemed to have some freedom of choice — there were relatively more instances of girls continuing with education beyond Class 10. Sarita Devi, 22, and Geeta Devi, 19, were both doing their graduation; Sarita had chosen her partner and Geeta Devi had rejected two proposals.

The same village reported several cases of elopement as well as inter-caste marriages. 13-year-old Manita fled with 17-year-old Sanjeev, a member of a different caste. Lakhiram Mahato, an SC (member of a scheduled caste), married a 16-year-old tribal girl from the same village. In this village, when allowed to exercise a choice, girls were keen to break free of the traditions that had bound them.

Sanita Kumari of Dumar threatened a hunger strike when pressurised to marry. She is now 19, studying, and unmarried. Guriya, a Class 12 student in Dharampur, married at 12, refused to go to her in-laws' place since her husband was a drug addict.

#### 4 Table

Areas where a girl's opinion may or may not be expressed and accepted

Issues	Express/do not express opinion	Opinion accepted/not
Education	More girls express desire to study.	This depends on other factors which may or may not lead to further schooling.
Groom	Of late, more girls are asked about their choice of groom, specifically in communities closer to urban centres and in tribal/mixed villages. Girls in Gaya are not asked this.	Acceptance depends on choice of groom, reason of rejection whether it conforms to family reasons or not. There are at least four cases of elopement.
Time of marriage	Once a girl turns 14-15, the hunt for groom begins. Her opinion is not sought. In Gaya, at least two girls were not aware of their marriage till the last day. However, several said they didn't want to marry.	Even in cases where girl does not want to marry, she is convinced to change her mind, or forced to accept the decision.
Number of children	Woman may not want to have a child.	It is decision of husband and husband's family that matters. Maya Devi and Binulata's cases are pointers to this.

Devi of Kaiyyan learned about her marriage on the day of the wedding. She was 11 at the time. Reena Kumari of Kharhari, who was 17 at the time of her marriage, found out about her marriage just 10 days before the wedding.

Unfortunately however, sometimes even an attempted suicide failed to save unwilling girls from early marriage. Pooja Devi from Hazaribagh Sadar, when forced to marry against her wishes, attempted suicide. She was saved by her family members — and convinced to marry the same groom.

### **The more girls in the family, the greater the likelihood of early marriage**

In our sample areas there was a clear connection between early marriage and the number of female children per family. The patriarchal preference for sons, combined with women's lack of agency regarding the number and spacing of children, means that women may bear many children in the attempt to have a son or more sons. (Maya Devi, a teacher married at 18, has three daughters and a son. She was compelled against her wishes to have four children until she gave birth to the male heir of the family. Binulata from Kharhari had two daughters and wanted no more children. Her in-laws denied her the freedom to decide about birth control measures and insisted on her continuing to give birth until she produced a son.)

Several female children in the family are often a trigger for early marriage as each requires the process of collecting dowry. In families with several daughters, the oldest is invariably married early. Sushila, 16, of Visar, explained that her marriage had already been finalised because she had several sisters of marriageable age. Meera in Bejentata was married at 12 because she had three other sisters. Parents with several daughters often said, "Iski (implying the oldest daughter) shaadi karenge, tabhi baki ka dahej jama sakenge." ("If she is married off, only then can we start saving dowry for the rest.")

Often this plan actually bought time for the younger daughters in the family, who were able to continue with education until it was their turn for marriage. Babita Kumari, 17, of Bandarbela, was able to continue with her education primarily because she was the youngest of three

sisters. Ironically, however, Sarita Devi of Jagdishpur, who had dreamt of getting educated, was married off at 11, while her younger sister, who was not keen to go to school, was married at 14 after studying till Class 3.

### **Early marriage is seen as a way to control girls' sexuality and protect family "honor"**

Early marriage was seen as a way to protect girls from sexual urges, activities, and assaults alike. This is a matter, in turn, of protecting her family's status, pride, and "honor."

Through discussions, it emerged that a family's honor could be damaged in several ways:

- Inter-caste marriage
- Elopement
- "Promiscuity" (including social intermingling of sexes)
- Harassment, molestation, assault, etc.
- Unmarried daughters
- Violation by girls of the norms regarding code of conduct

Lakhan Ram, an octogenarian from Jagdishpur, explained that a girl's "honor" was considered equivalent to the family's pride and any "wrong action" on the girl's part could leave a "daag" (stain or blot). "Kuch galat na ho jaye" ("lest something wrong happen") was the fear echoed in discussions across locations.

The pervasive — and not unfounded — fear of sexual harassment or assault was a clear trigger for early marriage. The concern, however, was not fundamentally about a girl's health or rights but rather about preserving family "honor." Parents believed — not always correctly — that their daughters would be safer with a male guardian. Since fathers and brothers could not provide this guardianship forever, the onus was seen as best shifted to her marital family at the earliest opportunity.

Early marriage was also considered a way to circumvent the growing trend<sup>18</sup> — and associated family shame — of young girls and boys eloping to escape the dictates of caste-driven marriages and other associated customs which deny them a say in choosing their partners.

State interventions to promote inter-caste marriages made no dent in the sample areas, where the institution of marriage continues to be caste-

endogamous. Discussions with the Yadav and Paswan communities of Visar confirmed that while there is no open animosity between the communities — in fact, they often faced and handled problems together — inter-caste marriage was unthinkable. In Jagdishpur, Rupan married a boy from a different caste when she was 20. Her sister Sunita was soon after married to a rich widower with two children when she was just 16. Her brother says the family took this step out of fear of ostracism. Many families marry their daughters young to prevent such problems.

Indeed, the ostracism caused by inter-caste marriage was more severe for poor families — and for girls. Said a respondent in Dharampur: “Beta ko nahin tyagte hain, par beti ko tyag dete hain.” (“It is not the son who is stigmatised; it is always the daughter.”)

Overall, parents saw early marriage as protection from the community stigma associated with girls’ deviation from any social norm. Deviant behaviour could range from a young girl choosing to drive a bike (like Sanita from Dumar, who rides a Hero Honda bike) to another young girl merely interacting socially with boys. “Haath se nikal gayee hai” (“She has gotten out of hand”) was a common way to refer to these violations — and early marriage was the accepted way of preventing them.

### Early marriage is seen as the only acceptable space for sexes to mix

Mixing between girls and boys, even platonic, is taboo in many cultures. Marriage is seen as the only socially acceptable space for girls and boys to act on their sexuality — or interact at all, as interactions outside marriage trigger the fear of premarital sexual relations.<sup>19</sup> The problem is that when there is no place for girls and boys to mix casually, or explore aspects of their sexuality, there is no place for them to develop mutual respect, communication, and understanding; and consent issues, harassment, and other problems are more likely to arise. This in turn leads to stricter controls – including marriage — and perpetuates a vicious cycle.

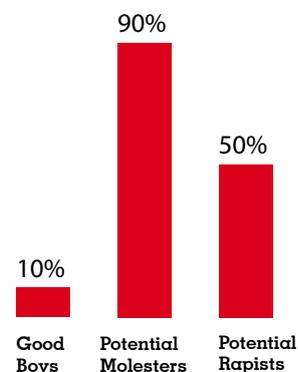
Sexual harassment was commonly reported among the sample communities in Gaya and Jharkhand. Girls in Visar said that boys created a new way of harassing girls for every new situation; girls in the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Awasiye Vidyalaya in Padma said that boys would wait outside the school every day to watch the school girls. The girls however admitted that on any day the boys happened not to come, they missed the attention. This reflects prevailing confusion about healthy interactions with the opposite sex.

These girls also identified the forms of violence they faced or had heard of being perpetrated by men: verbal violence, brushing against them, grabbing them, and sexual assault and rape. In this context, 23 girls described their perception of the men they knew. Indeed, a full 90 percent indicated that they perceive men they know as potential molesters.

This striking mindset and attitude, not surprisingly, contributed to a community-level fear of sexual harassment in general and urgency to protect women. Sushila of Visar, for instance, said her father cited the threat of sexual harassment as the main reason they did not delay her marriage.

Sexual harassment was generally targeted at unmarried girls, according to the schoolchildren in Padma, who pointed out that married girls looked and dressed differently. (A representative from Kalyan Parishad said the vermilion mark on a woman’s head, indicating her married status, could protect her from harassment in public.) However, they pointed out that even married women at times faced physical and sexual abuse.

**5 Graph**  
How girls perceive men they know



<sup>18</sup> Both inter-caste marriages as well as cases of elopement were particularly high in Bejnetata, a village in Angara in Ranchi.

<sup>19</sup> Baseline survey on prevalence of violence and abuse against children at family, community and institutions; Abul Barkat et al; 2007; Human Development Research Centre; Harassment: The effects of “eve teasing” on development in Bangladesh; Emma Weisfeld-Adams; 2008; The Hunger Project; <http://www.thp.org/files/Harassment.pdf>

Early Marriage Child Spouses in Innocenti Digest No 7, March 2001; UNICEF

## Age of young marriage varies with caste

Caste has been a strong and significant influence on the age of marriage. Members of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) are between one-third and one-half more likely than high-caste women to marry before age 18, according to the 2005-2006 NFHS.

Interactions with various stakeholders led to suggestions that marriages were marginally earlier among Scheduled Caste groups than tribal groups. This said, there were tribal groups such as the Mahatos among whom the age at marriage of girls was as low as 14, the same as in SC groups such as the Bhuiyyans.

At Jitu, a Munda village in Ranchi district, girls as young as 14-15 were married off, whereas among the same tribal group in a mixed village (Bejnetata) in the same district, girls' age at marriage was substantially higher; at least two girls there were over 20 and unmarried. Villagers said that distance from bigger towns and accessibility to urban influences influenced the age at marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Within the caste groups, too, there were differences. Age at marriage was delayed among the Ravidas community in Hazaribagh.

In Gaya, among the Thakurs and Yadavs, early marriage was a tradition. While the average age of marriage at a Yadav village cluster in Gaya was as low as 14, with some girls being married off as young as 12, the age at marriage among the neighbouring Paswan cluster was marginally higher at 14-15. NGOs in Gaya agreed that early marriage cut across castes, with Brahmins also marrying off their daughters early. However, they said the problem was worse among the Scheduled Castes and the Mahadalits, with the age at marriage dipping to 10-12 in some cases. The marriages across the castes were solemnised by Thakurs or pandits, with ceremonies being held at home, or in the nearby temples. The Vishnupad temple in Gaya was said to be notorious for the large number of early marriages that were conducted during the marriage season.

Hindus married earlier than Muslims. There were no Christian respondents.

## Other factors influencing early marriage

### Household chores

One reason for early marriage is that females traditionally look after the household. In situations when mothers of young children died or fell sick, or a daughter-in-law died leaving behind a husband and several children, quick marriages of eligible boys in the family were considered a practical solution. The daughter-in-law came in handy to take care of the family. At times, in families where men migrated for work, a daughter-in-law was brought in to take care of the old/widowed mother. Among the poor, this often also meant an extra hand to help earn a living. A discussion with functionaries of an NGO revealed that a large number of marriages were contracted during dhan katai (harvest season) as a daughter-in-law during such times meant an extra hand and additional wages. The same isn't true of daughters, as unmarried girls are less likely to be sent into the fields. The need for a female hand in all such scenarios became an opportunity for parents of young girls to get rid of their own economic burdens — in this context, their daughters.

### Migration

Migration also was seen to impact early marriage in various ways. Absence of a male figure in the family compounded the insecurities and fears regarding the safety and honour of the girl child. The timing of marriages was invariably determined on the basis of the annual (sometimes once in two to three years) home visit of the male guardian. In these cases the age of the girl child was of little consideration.

Young men intending to migrate for work were sometimes married off before they left the safe precincts of the community. Fear of migrating young men going astray, entering into sexual relationships with girls outside the community, and the belief that a young bride waiting for them at home would ward off temptations of any kind led to these marriages. The dangers of promiscuity in such men leading to spread of sexually transmitted diseases to their wives was listed as a cause of concern in Jharkhand by NGO Pradan. This is borne out by the reality of migration as a known vector for HIV.

<sup>20</sup> Madhusudhan, husband of Mukhiya Seema Devi of Angara village, pointed out that influences of city life and modern living had helped push back the age of marriage over the past five to 10 years.

### Grooms from other states seeking brides in the sample area

The research team came across several cases of grooms from other states (primarily Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana) marrying girls in Bihar and Jharkhand. These men usually paid not only for the wedding, but also the bride. (This practice is likely driven by a low sex ratio in the men's home region, itself a result of a preference for sons and sex-selective elimination of female fetuses as well as neglect and abandonment of girl children.)

In some such cases, the bride's family lost touch with the girl after her marriage, triggering rumours that she could have been trafficked. In others, girls offered in marriage to men from other states were known to be well-settled. However, there was an easily blurred line between trafficking and marriages of this kind that opened up the scope for further research. In many discussions on this subject, fear about the safety of girls offered in such marriages to men who come seeking brides, came up for discussion. A vigilante group, Gram Vikas Samiti, was formed in Dumar to look into such marriages and verify the antecedents of potential grooms. The group worked to convince parents not to get their girls married if the groom was much older. However, Shaqibullah of Women's Development Corporation, the nodal agency for women and child issues in Bihar, said this practice was common among Muslim families, and the grooms were much older than the brides.

### Impact of early marriage: community views and realities

The tradition of early marriage is so deeply engrained that its harmful consequences — even when acknowledged as such in some way — are not seen as a reason to end the practice. Indeed, girls' freedoms and opportunities are already so limited before marriage that in some cases it is clear that the primary damage is done by gender discrimination itself, not just by the practice of early marriage that results from and perpetuates it. Some examples:

#### Health

The devastating health consequences of early marriage are well-documented. Reproductive and sexual health risks include early sexual activity for physically and psychologically immature girls; limited access to contraception

and sexual health information; early pregnancy and childbirth; HIV and STD infection; and infant and maternal mortality.

This research probed the level of awareness of these negative consequences — with young pregnancy as a particular example — and whether that awareness, if any, led to condemnation of or concern about the practice.

Because of early marriage, teenaged pregnancies were common. While it was widely understood that these pregnancies were not healthy for the young mother or child, the groups interviewed showed more resigned acceptance of than concern about their negative impact. There was very little dissemination of information comparing survival rates of children or mothers from early pregnancies to later ones. One 50-year-old woman, who gave birth to her daughter when she was 12, said, "Hum dono theek hain." ("We are both fine.") In a situation where nearly everybody was born to young mothers, the negative impact of teenage pregnancies is not seen as a concern.

In fact, several cases of deaths of infants and young mothers were reported. Meera of Bejnetata, who was married at age 12, had a baby boy within two years. The boy died soon after birth. Sarita Devi's baby girl died when Sarita was 16. Also in Bejnetata, one girl was married at 12 and had a child at 13. While the baby survived, the mother died. Unfortunately, however, these deaths were not acknowledged by and large as a consequence of early marriage and young pregnancy. While people are aware of the dangers of early pregnancy, they stop short of linking the concern to their own lives or community practices.

#### Education

It is commonly agreed that the practice of marrying girls young is a violation of their right to education. Most literature on early marriage and its impact on education largely focuses on how the practice causes girls to leave schools. This study revealed other areas of concern as well.

As discussed earlier, in the entire sample area, communities largely failed to understand the significance of educating the girl child. While some basic education was considered necessary, its utility was mostly measured only in terms of an educated girl's value in the marriage market. Too much education was



seen as a liability. Education was not valued for its role in equipping girls to become financially independent. Women during discussions often said that the loss to the girl child denied education was not much and that education was not going to take them too far in any case. A majority of the young girls had absorbed these attitudes as well.

The practice of gauna in certain belts of the sample, such as Gaya, gave girls the opportunity to continue with education even after marriage. This raised the challenging question of whether gauna should be supported as a practice, at least in so far as it buys girls time to continue with schooling.

Several times in the course of discussions, especially in Gaya, community members also explained how marriage adversely affected performance in schools. A teacher in Visar said his nephew who got married five months earlier to a 16-year-old would be appearing for his Class 12 exams in March. The nephew's wife was appearing for Class 10 exams at the same time. But he felt his nephew's frequent visits to his wife were affecting the education of both the bride and the groom.

#### Status of women

It is commonly believed that early marriage arises from and perpetuates the inferior status and powerlessness of women in society. This research revealed in particular two significant ways in which early marriage continues or reinforces the devaluing of women: limited decision-making power, especially over childbearing decisions, and limited mobility. Even with the "protection" of marriage and male escorts, young brides — bound to the home by chores and responsibilities — continue to have limited mobility, agency, and opportunity.

The research team came across several examples of educated and working women who had no say in the number and spacing of their children. Maya, a teacher, was forced by her husband and in-laws to have several children out of the desire for a male heir. An accredited social health activist with five daughters, ironically, she lost the moral standing to speak to people about family planning and good childbearing practices. Even older, educated, and/or financially independent married women with potentially greater agency made or endorsed the very decisions (having many children in hopes of bearing a male; marrying

their daughters young) thrust upon women by patriarchal structures and ideology.

Similarly, the assumption that women's lack of decision-making power results directly in early marriage also does not hold. The survey revealed that many older women who were married young endorsed early marriage for their daughters.

Early marriage undoubtedly added to the burden of household chores and responsibilities on young girls. Women explained that while at a parent's house there was an element of choice in performing chores, at an in-law's place it was a compulsion and an issue of obedience. That said, the assumption that young girls missed out on opportunities because of the chores and responsibilities associated with early marriage was tenuous. Little opportunity came their way whether they were married or not.

# Recommendations for Change

## General

When it comes to making social change, it is easier to challenge a practice that is socially unacceptable (such as open defecation) than to challenge one that is socially sanctioned. Any intervention on early marriage must address the community's need to conform to this long-held tradition — a need so strong that it outweighs the universal awareness that this practice is illegal. Individual change — the decision not to marry girls early — will come and persist only when the social norms that drive early marriage are successfully challenged and changed.

Successful interventions depend on identifying and communicating both the need for change in social norms and associated benefits to the individual. Most individuals are willing to change behavior not only if they are able to see a benefit in that change, but also if they are convinced that other people will do the same.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, change is required at two levels: individual and social. At the individual level, incentives to stop early marriage may include extending educational benefits for girls until graduation or further, or monetary benefits to families who delay the marriage of their girls. Communities could showcase instances of families that support daughters-in-law's education, and argue that early marriage need not necessarily disrupt a girl's education. Targeting people through self-help groups by creating awareness among members about the problems of early marriage can also make an impact.

But for a larger, deeper, and longer-lasting effect, social norms must change. Facilitating change at a collective level — and showcasing these experiences of change from within the community through discussions and deliberations, trainings

or messaging — will go a longer way in making change go beyond individuals.

## Early marriage in our sample area and beyond

In the case of early marriage, we must focus on challenging the perception of girls as burdens and work to create new norms in which girls are valued.

This study focused on a very particular geographic and demographic group. But many of the lessons learned transcend their source and have the potential to be useful in many other contexts.

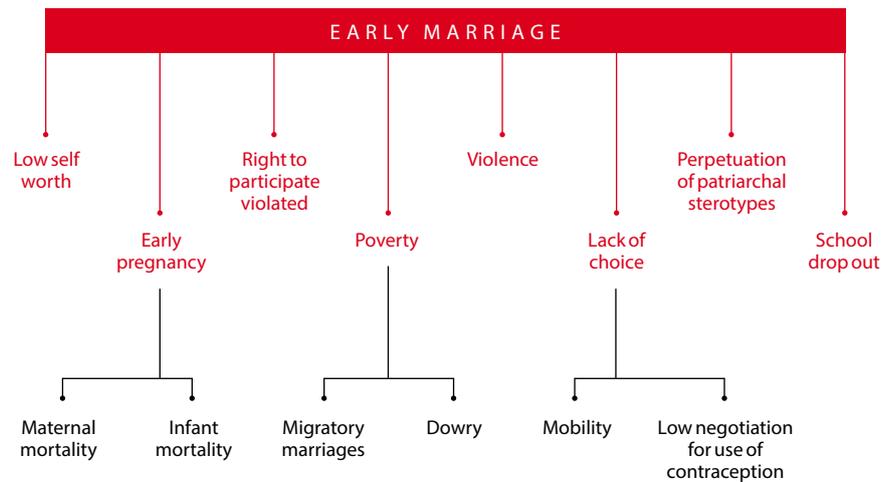
## Entry points for intervention

Among these factors, we identified six possible entry points for intervention.

- Education
- Early pregnancy
- Livelihood options
- Awareness of sexual and reproductive health
- Politics of sexual harassment
- Sexuality – power and pleasure

<sup>21</sup>The Role of Social Norms in Achieving Behaviour Change, Paolo Mefalopulos; <http://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/node/5783>

The diagram at right represents the key factors we found to be associated with early marriage.



We then considered our own data and research against existing interventions and intervention theories. Our resulting observations and recommendations include:

### Education

**Existing interventions:** In the sample area, several schemes and interventions, governmental as well as non-governmental, focused on creating awareness about the importance of education and more specifically about the Right to Education Act (which provides for education until Class 8).

**Observations:** While these interventions had increased girls' awareness, knowledge, and in some cases ambition, they had not resulted in significant improvement in community value of the girl child or of the girls' bargaining power in matters that affected their lives. Girls were still thought of as economic burdens; education for the girl child was not in itself an attractive proposition; "too much" education was considered a liability; and the community failed to understand the real significance of education.

The general trend was to enroll the girl in school but then marry her off at the earliest, or wait until she passed Class 8. (One respondent noted that the school in her village went only to Class 5; she was married soon after finishing all available education.) Free and compulsory education was available only up to the age of 14 years. The

marriageable age had more or less reached the band of 15-17 years in the sample area, with some cases of marriages taking place as young as 12, too.

**Recommendations:** Raising the perceived marriageable age to at least 18 requires interventions on education that

- Make post primary levels of education available, accessible and affordable
- Keep girls in schools post primary levels
- Create community understanding of both the importance of education and the adverse effects of early marriage
- Create awareness among girls about their rights, and practices that curtail those rights.

### Early pregnancy

**Existing interventions:** Essentially none.

**Observations:** Awareness within the community of the adverse effects of early marriage on sexual and reproductive health is almost non-existent.

**Recommendations:** Interventions on early marriage must address the sexual and reproductive health risks of child marriage. They must start from scratch, provide definitive information, and enable communities to comprehend and eventually condemn the health impact of early marriage.

Interventions should target early pregnancies with clear, powerful and, where

possible, visual images. “Jo khud bachhi hai wo kya bachhi ka khyal rakhegi.” (“How can a girl who is still a child herself take care of her own child?”) Young married girls should be specifically targeted, both for creating awareness on teenage pregnancies as well as for disseminating concrete information on related issues such as the use of contraceptives and impact of early pregnancy both on the infant and the mother.

Interventions must also touch on the other adverse effects of early marriage on sexual and reproductive health — unwanted pregnancies, frequent pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV.

### Livelihood and economic opportunity

Existing interventions: Intervention theories around the world have focused on generating livelihood opportunities for young girls and women. The assumption is that livelihood options and economic opportunities, if available to girls and women, will delay early marriage.

Observations: Interaction with the community revealed that women by and large stayed away from remunerative work outside the domain of the house. Where women were employed, their decision-making powers remain stifled. However, modest but promising changes — improved self worth, articulation, and self-assertion — were visible in women who had taken up remunerative work or had acquired the skills to do so.

Recommendations: Interventions must not seek only to provide skills and opportunities. They must also address the reason why livelihood and economic opportunities do not necessarily translate into more bargaining power for women; and where they do, why that power does not translate to challenges against early marriage. Interventions must also address ingrained attitudes — such as the belief that living off a daughter or wife’s income is shameful — that hinder women’s pursuit of remunerative work.

### Sexuality

Existing interventions: Essentially none.

Observations: An unnerving silence surrounded the subject of sexuality in the sample area. The fear of the family being “disgraced” by a daughter engaging in pre-marital sex, eloping, being sexually assaulted, and so on, were cited as justifications for early marriage. These fears also created deeply-held norms and taboos regarding intermixing of young boys and girls. In such circumstances, marriage became the only acceptable way of exploring sexuality.

Recommendations: The underlying perceptions, norms — and silence — around sexuality must be addressed and challenged forcefully in order to delay the age of marriage for girls. Interventions on sexuality must strive to make young girls and boys comfortable with their sexuality and provide safe spaces for interaction, all the while challenging the community taboos and parental fears that stand in the way.

### Others

- The entire sample area is in dire need of intervention on dowry. Dowry was the single biggest stated reason that girls are seen as burdens. The survey showed that the amount of money given or received as dowry has increased exponentially. Even in tribal communities, where dowry was not a practice, the custom of giving/taking gifts at the time of the wedding assumed the proportions of a dowry.
- Interventions addressing sexual harassment are also required. The problem was dire in sample areas, severely limiting the mobility of girls, becoming a barrier to their schooling, and creating fear among parents — all creating the conditions that perpetuate early marriage.
- Interventions must also generate deeper awareness of laws prohibiting early marriage, and address gaps in the implementation of those laws.

# Conclusions

Given the current gaps in interventions, two essential and overarching strategies are recommended.

1. Focus on men and boys as stakeholders and drivers of change. Fathers and male elders make most of the decisions around early marriage. And the negative impact of early marriage, while felt most directly and acutely by girls and women, ripples through families, communities, and beyond. We must train men, and especially young men, to act as leaders in challenging early marriage — not just “on behalf of women,” but for change that will support human rights and well-being for all.

Men as leaders and allies can help challenge the physical and sexual abuse of girls within and outside marriage, diminish the fears that perpetuate early marriage, dismantle the norms that prioritize male authority, and enable communities of boys and men to take proactive steps to reduce the practice.

2. Focus on gender and sexuality. Interventions must include but go beyond increasing girls’ access to schools and skills. They must position girls and young women as full human beings with intrinsic value and inalienable human rights. An approach that includes and addresses gender and sexuality stands to challenge norms, break taboos, and pinpoint the deepest roots of this practice, creating an environment for deep, sustainable change.

While many well-intentioned people and organizations are doing good work on early marriage, certain areas need more attention. Sexuality in particular is a crucial — and ignored — topic. That very silence, and fear, around girls’ sexuality is a key driver of early marriage. It also amplifies the negative consequences of early marriage, as girls married very young tend to lack awareness about their bodies and sexual health and needs, and enter relationships — both within and outside marriage — based on power rather than intimacy.

With the proper collaborations and interventions, and with the leadership and partnership of young people, especially men and boys, it is possible to challenge and change even the most deeply-rooted norms that drive and perpetuate early marriage. Over time, the practice of early marriage, and all its consequences, can cease to be part of the fabric of Indian life, and women and girls like Poonam, 16 — who wants to join the Bihar police force — can come into their own as full citizens with all their rights, and all their dreams.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Legal and Institutional Frameworks in India

The legal discourse on the subject of early marriage has undergone a paradigm shift and the current mechanism is extensive in its scope. Yet the practice continues to receive religious and social sanction and there are strong socio-economic and cultural pressures on parents to marry their daughters early.

The following is a brief outline of some key institutions, policies, and schemes designed by the government to check the practice of early marriage.

In the 1860s, the Indian Penal Code prohibited intercourse with a wife below the age of 10. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act restrained but did not invalidate early marriage. In 1978, amendments raised the minimum age to 21 for boys and 18 for girls, and specified cognizable offences.

THE PROHIBITION OF CHILD MARRIAGE ACT (PCMA) 2006: Whoever, being a male adult above eighteen years of age, contracts a child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or with both. Whoever performs, conducts, directs or abets any child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment, which may extend to two years and shall be liable to fine, which may extend to one lakh rupees unless he proves that he had reasons to believe that the marriage was not a child marriage.

Child Marriage Prohibition Officer – PCMA, 2006, provides for state governments to appoint Child Marriage Prohibition Officers whose duties include prevention, evidence gathering, advising, creating awareness, collecting data and acting with legal authority when necessary to prevent early marriage (1).

The Eleventh National Five-Year Plan — This plan calls for a “major advocacy and sensitisation program through all channels of communication and social dialogue, including motivation of local leadership. A multi-media campaign needs to be undertaken to reach out to all sections of the society especially targeting both parents and youth (2)”. One of the strategies is the Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme to encourage families to keep their girls in school.

The 2005 National Plan of Action for Children — This plan set 2010 as the target for complete elimination of early marriage (3).

In addition, states have formulated schemes to prevent early marriage, e.g. Mukhyamantri Kanyadaan Yojana in Bihar and Jharkhand, where anganwadi service centres gather information about female births. The scheme works in conjunction with the Unit Trust of India Mutual Fund and once the birth information is processed, officials hand over Unit Trust of India mutual fund certificates to the families below living below the poverty line (4). Mukhya Mantri Kanya Vivah Yojana, launched in Bihar in 2008, offers financial support for girls from economically disadvantaged families (5). Some schemes, such as the Dhan Lakshmi Scheme of the Government of India, do not directly target early marriage, but provide incentives for education.

India is also signatory to several human rights instruments that aim to protect children from all forms of abuse/violence, one of which is early marriage.

The International Centre for Research on Women has identified and evaluated 58 interventions (both governmental as well as non-governmental) in India focusing on early marriage (6).

### Notes

1. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, page 5.
2. Sub-Group Report, Girl Child in the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) page 16 and 17.
3. National Plan of Action for Children, 2005, Department of Women and Child Development, page 7.
4. Muskan gift for poor parents, The Telegraph, November 30, 2009, [http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091130/jsp/nation/story\\_11801151.jsp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091130/jsp/nation/story_11801151.jsp).
5. Special Financial Incentive Schemes for the girl Child in India, A Review of Select Schemes, T.V. Sekher, International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai.
6. Knot Ready, Lessons from India on Delaying Marriage for Girls, S. Dasgupta and others, ICRW, Page 13.

## Appendix 2

### Ready for marriage — a child or not a child?

The PCMA (Prohibition of Child Marriage Act) of 2006 defines a “child” as a person who, if a male, has not completed 21 years of age, and if a female, has not completed 18 years of age. It provides punishment for solemnizing child marriage, for promoting or permitting child marriage, and for indulging in child marriage.

In India the debate over the age at which a person ceases to be a child stems from the fact that different laws prescribe different minimum ages for different kinds of protection offered to a child. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 defines a child as a person who has not completed 14 years of age. The Factories Act, 1948 and Plantation Labour Act 1951 states that a child is one that has not completed 15 years of age. For the purpose of free and compulsory education Article 21 (a) of the Indian

Constitution speaks of children between the ages of six to 14. The Indian Penal Code has its own prescriptions. The Census of India considers a child as a person below 14. While the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” it allows for minimum ages to be set by different states under different circumstances.

At a discussion with school-going girls of age 12-17 in Padma’s Kasturba Niketan, our research team explored perceptions of young girls about the age associated with childhood, how to tell if a girl is ready for marriage, and the age at which the girls, given an option, would like to marry. The findings are tabulated below.

Among the girls who participated in this discussion, 58 percent thought of age 10 as the threshold when a girl ceased to be a child and

**Table 6** Perceptions of girls on issues of childhood, marriage and choice of age at marriage

S No.	Who is a child?	How do you know somebody is ready for marriage?	When do you want to marry?
1.	Age 1 to 8; one whose laughter is carefree	You know by age and style (Umar aur andaaz se)	20
2.	Age 1 to 10	You know it is time when the girl grows up fast.	22
3	Age 1 to 10	You know automatically.	23
4	Age 1 to 10	You know by looking at the girl.	22
5	Age 1 to 10	You know by looking at the girl.	22
6	Age 1 to 10	You know it is time when the girl grows tall, develops breasts, starts menstruating, and her mind develops faster.	24
7	Age 1 to 10	You know by looking at the girl if she has physically matured.	25
8	Under 10, when a person’s physical development is not complete.	She starts menstruating.	25
9	Till age 8	You know from her birth certificate.	23
10	Age 1 to 8; one who can laugh without reason; physically and psychologically developed	You know from her birth certificate.	25
11	Till age 10	You know from her birth certificate.	18
12	Till age 15	You know from her birth certificate.	18
13	Till age 15	You know from her birth certificate.	26
14	Till age 15	You know from her transfer certificate.	18

entered into adulthood. An equal proportion of 21.1 percent thought of age 8 and age 15 as being the threshold. This showed how a child's perception of herself was influenced by social conditioning and the roles and responsibilities assigned to her in familial duties. It also showed the variance it had with legal connotations that failed to permeate the mind-set of society.

A majority of 71 percent wanted to get married at the age of 22 and above. If this wish was indicative of the wishes of all young girls in all three districts that were surveyed, the PCMA, 2006 probably missed out on an important consideration in prescribing the minimum age to marriage for girls at 18. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, before it was amended in 1978, prescribed the minimum age at marriage for girls at 14. With this Act the legal age at marriage got pushed by two years (it was previously only 12). Between 1929 and 2006 when the PCMA was enacted, the legal age at marriage was pushed back further only by a mere four years. Questions for further consideration: Do we need more progressive amendments? A girl at the age of 18 has just about passed Class 12. Is she really ready for marriage? Has the trajectory of legal reforms on early marriage in India belied the hopes of young girls, whose very interests it is purported to protect?

### Appendix 3

#### Human rights instruments on early marriage

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); Article 16: 1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages Article 1: No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person after due publicity and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and

of witnesses, as prescribed by law. Article 2: States parties to the present Convention shall take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage. No marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Article 16: 1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: (a) The same right to enter into marriage; (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent; (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution; ... (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights; ... 2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

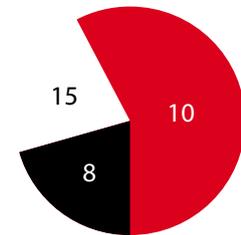
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): It defines child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years." In its general recommendation no. 4, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, found early marriage to be a harmful traditional practice that negatively affects girls' sexual and reproductive health. The CRC asks states to take all measures to abolish such traditional practices (Article 24(3)) and to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34).

### Appendix 4

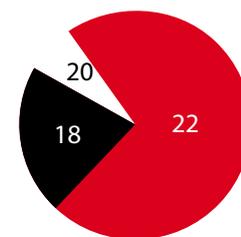
#### Research methodology

In order to understand variants of early marriage among different communities, the research team visited villages in three districts. Case

**Pie chart 1**  
Age at which girls think they enter into adulthood



**Pie chart 2**  
Age at which girls wish to get married



stories were collected with the aim of generating information on: early marriage practices, intergenerational variants, reasons (cultural, socio-economic and others), and rebels (outliers).

#### Collection of case stories

The stories were collected using focus group discussions and participatory tools. A broad spectrum took priority over deep analysis.

#### Sample areas

The sample areas included Gaya district in Bihar, and Ranchi and Hazaribagh districts in Jharkhand. The research team selected two blocks from each district, with at least one rural and one urban or peri-urban centre. The blocks were selected based on demographic composition, accessibility, and the presence of NGOs.

After identifying the blocks and villages, the team carried out an initial visit to formulate tools for data collection. Based on the scoping visit and the conceptual framework developed on the basis of the literature survey, the tools were finalized. These included collection of case stories through in-depth interviews, participatory tools and focus group discussions with various stakeholders. The team then developed a set of probe questions.

#### 4.3 Participatory tools

Unlike most other studies on early marriages, the researchers chose to investigate the problem, identify the trends, understand the implications and help identify ways of addressing these directly from communities, which continue to indulge in early marriages, by interacting with them. The team used a series of participatory tools to understand the circumstances that compel parents to marry their girls young, the experiences of girls who have been married before 18, the interface



#### The blocks:

1. GAYA

\* Gaya Sadar (Peri-urban)

1. Kaldaspur
2. Dharampur

\* Manpur

3. Kaiyyan
4. Visar (Paswans, Lohiyas, Yadavs)
5. Kharhari

2. RANCHI

\* Kanke (Peri-urban)

6. Barhu (Muslims)
  7. Nava toli
- \* Angara
12. Bejnitata (Tribal presence, but other groups also there)
  13. Jitu (Tribals)

3. HAZARIBAGH

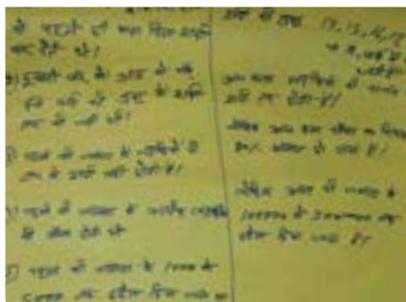
\* Hazaribagh Sadar (Peri-urban)

10. Jagdishpur
  11. Sarauni/Dumar
- \* Padma
12. Banderbela (SC)
  13. Bundu

between education and early marriages, the prevailing attitudes towards the issue, the limitations of existing interventions and others in order to help design a suitable intervention. The section below describes some of these participatory tools, and the kinds of information they generated.

### 1. Before-After tool

The Before-After tool was used during the focus group discussions with women in Barhu, Bandarbela, Kharhari, Dharampur and Sarauni. The image shows the tool used in Kaldaspur with a group of men and women. The tool generated a perspective of the changing trends with regard to early marriages, for instance the rising rates of dowry, beginning of interaction between girls/boys before marriage, increasing age of marriage, and the cost of conducting a marriage.



### 2. Life journeys

Comparative life journeys of women in the sample villages generated information about individual life stories as well as trends related to early marriage. At Jagdishpur, the research team chalked out life journeys of three women of one family – Karmi Devi, her daughter-in-law Geeta Devi, and her grand-daughter-in-law Ranjana Devi. This information enabled a comparative analysis of various trends over time: age of marriage, space between children, education, etc.

### 3. Institution mapping

The institution mapping exercise asked community members to map important institutions in their lives. This helped the team understand infrastructure-related issues. It simultaneously gave the participants/communities a sense of perspective about the infrastructure available to them and what they needed. At Sarauni, women mapped the bank, primary health

centre, middle school, integrated child development services (ICDS) central public distribution system (PDS) dealer, college and so on. While discussing the access to these institutions, it emerged that the intermediate college and high school was 10 kilometres away and since the commute was irregular and expensive, several girls dropped out after matriculation (10th standard).



### 4. Process mapping

Process mapping explored the weak and strong links in various processes such as accessing schemes or services. This helped to identify potential partners for intervention. In Visar's Paswan tola, process mapping began with asking the group how they access certain schemes like rural credit or the Mukhyamantri Kanyaadaan Yojana. Members of the group outlined the process of availing benefits under the scheme. It turned out that several families had manipulated the loopholes in the scheme to draw the benefits that were meant to prevent early marriages.

### 5. Problem tree

The problem tree analysis allowed the community to unpack its own perceptions on the causes of early marriage. While the roots of the tree explored the causes, the branches of the problem tree represent the community's understanding of the impact. The problem tree (below) from Visar generated several interesting causes and impacts of early marriage, some of which are listed below:

### Causes of early marriage



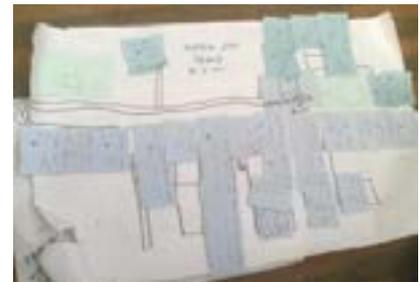
- Daughters were considered burdens from the day they were born.
- Dowry weighed heavily on girls' parents' minds.
- Girls who matured early remained unmarried became the subjects of gossip within the community.
- Family elders often forced their grandchildren to get married early with the hope of seeing them well settled before the elders' deaths.
- Girls wanted to marry early as they saw their peers getting married off.

### Impacts associated with early marriage

- Girls lost freedom.
- Chances of abortion were greater.
- Mother and child mortality and morbidity rates were high.
- Girls were pressured to conceive
- Young mothers were not well equipped to take care of their babies.

### 6. Social mapping

Through social mapping, the research team generated information on various socio-economic aspects of the study locations. The community members plotted their habitations on the ground with whatever medium was comfortable. The visual representation generated discussions on various issues of concern such as availability of infrastructure, community-based access to infrastructure, and access to schemes. Social maps (image below) were made in Jitu, a tribal village, and Paswan Tola (a habitation dominated by the Paswan community, who are on the Indian Central Government list of Scheduled Castes) in Visar Gaya. Once community members plotted maps of their villages, there were discussions on families within the habitation, marriageable girls/boys in each, women-headed households, poor and rich households, and the relationships among these and early marriage.





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