

A Statistical Analysis of  
**CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA**  
Based on Census 2011  
Executive Summary



## **A Statistical Analysis of Child Marriage in India Based on Census 2011**

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### **About NCPCR**

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) was set up in March 2007 under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005, an Act of Parliament (December 2005). NCPCR is a statutory body under the CPCR Act, 2005 under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India. The Commission's Mandate is to ensure that all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms are in consonance with the Child Rights perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **About Young Lives**

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam) over fifteen years. [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

Young Lives is funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID).

Young Lives India is a collaboration between CESS (Hyderabad), SPMVV (Tirupati), Save the Children and University of Oxford (UK). [www.younglives-india.org](http://www.younglives-india.org)

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Cover photo caption: Traditional henna applied to a girl child during the marriage ceremony.

Photo Credit: Ms. Sarika Gulati

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The full report can be downloaded from [www.ncpcr.gov.in](http://www.ncpcr.gov.in) and [www.younglives-india.org](http://www.younglives-india.org)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early and child marriage has been a prevalent practice at different points in the history of almost all societies around the globe. In India, the practice has origins going back to ancient times and it persists even today. Child marriage is most common in the world's poorest countries. The highest prevalence rates of women in the age group 20-49 years reporting entering marriage before 18 years are in South Asia (56%), followed by West and Central Africa (46%), Eastern and Southern Africa (38%), Latin America and the Caribbean (30%). According to a UNICEF report (2014), one in three of all child marriages globally take place in India and rates are highest among the poorest and most socially disadvantaged. Child marriage has been declining slowly over the years, but numbers of girls and boys getting married before their respective legal ages remain large with 12 million child marriages reported by Census, 2011 for girls aged less than 18 and boys below 21 years. Furthermore, high variance has been noted across regions, states and between urban and rural areas in the prevalence of child marriage within India.

In this context, to address the issue of child marriage and to highlight enabling policies and good practices, this report has been prepared by Young Lives India in collaboration with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

It is clear from the comparison of National Family Health Survey NFHS-III (2005-06) to NFHS-IV (2015-16) that the prevalence of child marriage in India, as reported by women aged 20-24 and men aged 25-29 reduced from 47.4 per cent to 26.8 for women and declined from 32.3 to 20.3 per cent for men. The Census in contrast to NFHS provides both prevalence as well as incidence of child marriage by age and location. This report presents a comprehensive analysis of child marriage data from Census 2011 by examining the incidence of child marriage at the national, state and district levels. In addition, Census 2001 data at district level has also been analysed to ascertain the decadal changes that have taken place between Census 2001 and 2011<sup>1</sup>. A systematic procedure of calculation was adopted to arrive at the incidence of child marriage at the state level by location and age. Since the administrative unit is the district level, the data was further disaggregated at the district level. The analysis identified top 20 high incidence districts of the country by place of residence (rural or urban) and various age- groups such as below legal age (<18), 10-14 and 15-17 years with respect to girls and below legal age (<21), 10-14 and 15-20 years with respect to boys. The rationale for this was to facilitate micro level planning to address the issues related to child marriage effectively across urban and rural districts in the country. Subsequently, by combining all the districts with high incidence of child marriage (67 for girls and 62 for boys) and removing duplication of districts, 70 districts spread across 13 states were identified (see Annexure 1). These states are, undivided Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. This exercise generated the incidence of child marriage by location and captured incidence of child marriage at the district level with a hope that timely and targeted interventions can be planned for prevention and reduction of child marriage.

This report comprises of a total of seven chapters. The **first chapter** gives a brief account of the genesis of child marriage in India, along with a geographical spread of the phenomenon. It also touches upon the global scenario, particularly in the South Asian region. The objective and rationale of the study and the justification for using Census data are elaborated here.

The **second chapter** examines the national legislative context, looking at various legal and policy frameworks in place, including strategies, plans and provisions available to deal with the problem of child / early marriages in the country. India has ratified almost all the international conventions on human rights including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It also replaced the Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) or Sarda Act by The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006. The PCMA has limitations since it fails to declare all child marriages as illegal<sup>2</sup>. The law makes child marriages voidable only when children or guardians seek annulment of the marriage. Furthermore, the provisions of the PCMA are diluted by the personal laws in the country. A promising provision of the PCMA is the appointment of full time Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO) in every State for preventing child marriages, documenting violations, charging offenders (including parents) and removing children from dangerous situations. While this is a very promising step, many states have failed to put into place full time CMPO's to implement the legislation on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup>This analysis is limited to identified 70 high incidence districts of child marriage

<sup>2</sup>NCPCR [http://ncpcr.gov.in/view\\_file.php?fid=466](http://ncpcr.gov.in/view_file.php?fid=466)

Apart from legislations there are certain policies and interventions that have supported the prevention of child marriage such as Conditional Cash Transfer Schemes, *Sabla*, *Kishori Shakti Yojana*, *Integrated Child Protection Scheme*, *Bal Vivah Virodh Abhiyan*

The **third chapter** comprises the statistical analysis on incidence of child marriage, disaggregating the data based on age, gender and location up to the district level. The analysis also includes a comparison of population change as well as change in the incidence of child marriage across the 70 identified districts located in 13 states based on Census 2001 and 2011. This has provided an insight into changing trends in child marriage incidence in light of demographic changes.

This detailed analysis of the incidence of child marriage amongst boys and girls below their respective legal age, in rural as well as urban districts, across different age groups, reveals interesting, varied and some disturbing trends across the country. These include:

- There is a declining trend in terms of child marriage incidence at the National level.
- While 13 districts in Rajasthan continue to figure prominently amongst the highest incidence districts with respect to child marriage (amongst the 70), it is important to note that other than Banswara (with reference to girls), all the other districts show a positive declining trend in child marriage over the decade (2001-2011)
- In Madhya Pradesh, 7 out of 9 high incidence districts are showing a declining trend in the incidence of child marriage among girls.
- Urban districts such as Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, Rangareddy and Hyderabad in undivided Andhra Pradesh (now in Telangana) and Davangere in Karnataka reveal an increase in marriage of girls below the legal age during the period 2001-2011.
- Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, Gandhinagar in Gujarat, Ahmednagar in Maharashtra and Dakshin Dinajpur in West Bengal are the districts where despite a decrease in population from 2001 to 2011 (as per the Census data), incidence of child marriage among girls increased.
- Gaya in Bihar, Bagalkot in Karnataka, Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, Ajmer in Rajasthan and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh registered an increase in population from 2001 to 2011. Despite this fact, the incidence of Child marriage among girls registered a decrease for the same period.
- Jehanabad in Bihar, Davangere in Karnataka, Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, Chittaurgarh in Rajasthan and Bhirbhum in West Bengal are districts that registered a decrease in population as well as the incidence of child marriage among girls, between Census 2001 and 2011.
- 16 urban and rural districts of Maharashtra feature in the list of districts that have shown an increase in the incidence of child marriage for both boys and girls between 2001 and 2011 (Ahmednagar, Bhandara, Chandanpur, Dhule, Pune, Sangli, Jalgaon, Jalna, Kolhapur, Latur, Mumbai, Mumbai suburban, Prabhani, Satara, Sindhudurg and Thane).
- Bhandara in Maharashtra registered a five-fold increase in child marriage amongst girls and more than twenty-fold increase amongst boys between 2001 and 2011.
- Anand in Gujarat, Davangere in Karnataka and Dakshin Dinajpur in West Bengal are the districts where despite decrease in population between 2001 to 2011 (as per the Census data), incidence of child marriage among boys increased.
- Jamui in Bihar, Deoghar in Jharkhand, Bagalkot in Karnataka, Rajgarh in Madhya Pradesh, Bundi in Rajasthan and Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh registered an increase in population and a decrease in child marriage for boys between 2001-11.

It is hoped that such detailed analysis will aid state governments in developing strategies and interventions that respond to local contexts and thus, lead to reducing child marriage in the 70 high incidence districts identified.

Based on an analysis of the secondary resources including existing research studies, reports and relevant documents, the **fourth chapter** identifies the causes, drivers and triggers of child and early marriage in India.

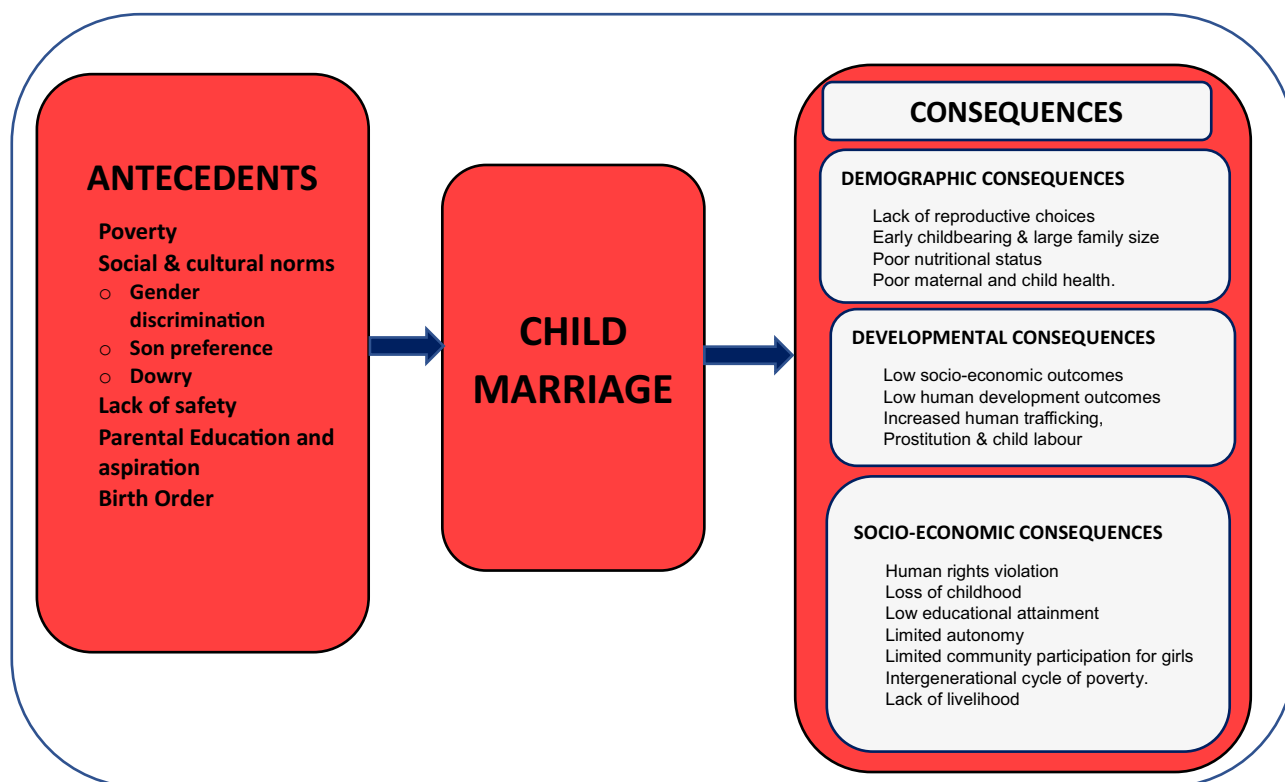
This chapter explores these determinants and elaborates on the social, ecological and structural reasons that contribute to the perpetuation of the practice of child marriage. It highlights that the causes of child marriage are



various and complex, with a number of proximate causes within diverse socio-cultural contexts. Child marriage is a result of various socio-cultural, economic and political factors, which are inter-linked and shape trajectories of children. Girls in particular are married off because they are considered as 'paraya dhan' or somebody else's wealth/property. This is a reflection of the patriarchal norms that still govern our society. Child marriage is often seen by families as a way of protecting young girls from premarital sex, pregnancy outside of marriage and the need to preserve 'family honour' which takes precedence over the rights of the girl to a childhood. Girl children from poor households are at higher risk of becoming child brides. Where resources are limited, gendered social risks become more acute and opportunities more constrained, forcing parents to make decisions which disadvantage girls. Young Lives longitudinal data collected from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana finds that girls from the poorest households were twice as likely to be married before age 18 as those from the least poor households. Rural girls were more likely than urban girls to marry young and that these decisions reflect gendered social norms and structural factors that limit girls' future opportunities.

The **fifth chapter** examines the consequences of child and early marriage not only on children, but also on the family, society and the country. It furnishes evidence based discourse on the negative outcomes of child marriage, particularly for girls, and illustrates how this practice denies children the opportunity to grow and develop optimally. This chapter emphasises the rights perspective and the perpetuation of the cycle of disadvantages from one generation to another. The far-reaching reverberations for girls are elaborated in detail with key consequences such as: early pregnancy and related maternal, new born, and child health problems; maternal and neonatal mortality, educational setbacks; lower employment/livelihood prospects; exposure to violence and abuse including a range of controlling and inequitable behaviours leading to inevitable physical and psychological consequences and the limited agency of girls to influence decisions about their lives. All these factors push these children and their families into perpetuation of intergenerational poverty and marginalisation. Figure 1 below captures both the antecedents and consequences of child marriage.

**Figure 1 – Antecedents and Consequences of Child Marriage \***



\* Adapted from Goli & Action Aid India (2016).

**Chapter Six** examines the various initiatives by government, civil society and national and international agencies that have helped directly or indirectly in tackling the issue of child and early marriage in India. Central and State Government programmes to tackle child marriage have met with varied levels of success. These include initiatives by the government e.g. Mahila Samkhya, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP). Initiatives by civil society for instance Deepshikha (UNICEF), Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon (Population Foundation of India), Tarang etc. have also been highlighted. This chapter also lists proven practices from other South Asian countries as well as from across the globe.

The final **chapter seven**, while summarising the report also put forward general recommendations as well specific steps, based on the Census data analysis, to combat child marriage, particularly in the 70 high incidence districts spread across thirteen states, which account for 21 per cent of child marriages in the country. It is hoped that these steps will be taken into consideration while formulating a plan of action to eradicate child marriage and allow children to develop to their full capacities.

The Human Rights Council recognized that “the complex and challenging nature of child marriage necessitates the collective efforts of Governments, lawmakers, judicial authorities, law enforcement officials, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, media, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders to address the root causes of this practice that exists in different economic, social and cultural settings.”<sup>3</sup> The chapter highlights that the current programmes and schemes for boys and girls are designed in silos and there are very few instances of programmes that simultaneously work with both boys and girls in the same community. Working with one group to the exclusion of the other gender is unlikely to lead to sustained impact and there is a need to recognise that both boys and girls experience vulnerability and must be protected from child marriage.

**Other recommendations to deal with the issue of child marriage include:**

- Promoting free and compulsory secondary education
- Prevent trafficking
- Promote Gender Equity
- Compulsory Registration of Marriages
- Awareness Generation
- Mobilization of religious leaders and community elders
- Provision of Relevant Economic Support to the poorest households
- Using the power of Mass Media
- Strengthening the legal system and its implementation
- Appointment of Full-Time Child Marriage Prohibition Officers
- Evaluate and Scale up successful interventions
- Monitor and focus on districts with high incidence of child marriage
- Support married adolescent girls
- Gather Research Evidence

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<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Council Resolution, supra note 9

**Annexure 1: List of 70 districts with high incidence of child marriage out of total 640 districts in India (Census 2011 )**

Serial no.	State	Districts	Serial no.	State	Districts
1	Andhra Pradesh	Hyderabad	36	Maharashtra	Bhandara
2	Andhra Pradesh	Rangareddy	37	Maharashtra	Chandrapur
3	Arunachal Pradesh	Lower Subansiri	38	Maharashtra	Dhule
4	Arunachal Pradesh	Kurung Kumey	39	Maharashtra	Jalgaon
5	Arunachal Pradesh	Changlang	40	Maharashtra	Jalna
6	Assam	Dhubri	41	Maharashtra	Kolhapur
7	Assam	Goalpara	42	Maharashtra	Latur
8	Bihar	Nawada	43	Maharashtra	Mumbai
9	Bihar	Jamui	44	Maharashtra	Mumbai Suburban
10	Bihar	Gaya	45	Maharashtra	Parbhani
11	Bihar	Arwal	46	Maharashtra	Pune
12	Bihar	Sheohar	47	Maharashtra	Sangli
13	Bihar	Jehanabad	48	Maharashtra	Satara
14	Gujarat	Ahmadabad	49	Maharashtra	Sindhudurg
15	Gujarat	Anand	50	Maharashtra	Thane
16	Gujarat	Dohad	51	Rajasthan	Ajmer
17	Gujarat	Kheda	52	Rajasthan	Banswara
18	Gujarat	Valsad	53	Rajasthan	Bhilwara
19	Gujarat	Gandhinagar	54	Rajasthan	Bundi
20	Haryana	Mewat	55	Rajasthan	Chittaurgarh
21	Jharkhand	Pakur	56	Rajasthan	Dausa
22	Jharkhand	Deoghar	57	Rajasthan	Jaipur
23	Jharkhand	Giridih	58	Rajasthan	Jhalawar
24	Karnataka	Davanagere	59	Rajasthan	Karauli
25	Karnataka	Bagalkot	60	Rajasthan	Nagaur
26	Madhya Pradesh	Barwani	61	Rajasthan	Rajsamand
27	Madhya Pradesh	Jhabua	62	Rajasthan	Sawai Madhopur
28	Madhya Pradesh	Mandsaur	63	Rajasthan	Tonk
29	Madhya Pradesh	Neemuch	64	UttarPradesh	Pratapgarh
30	Madhya Pradesh	Rajgarh	65	Uttar Pradesh	Ghaziabad
31	Madhya Pradesh	Ratlam	66	Uttar Pradesh	Lalitpur
32	Madhya Pradesh	Shajapur	67	UttarPradesh	Shrawasti
33	Madhya Pradesh	Tikamgarh	68	West Bengal	Maldah
34	Madhya Pradesh	Ujjain	69	West Bengal	Dakshin Dinajpur
35	Maharashtra	Ahmadnagar	70	West Bengal	Birbhum

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The Report has been prepared by Young Lives India, in collaboration with National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) ,New Delhi, India

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