

SANCHAR briefs

Science And News: Communicating Health And Research

Brief #1: Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy

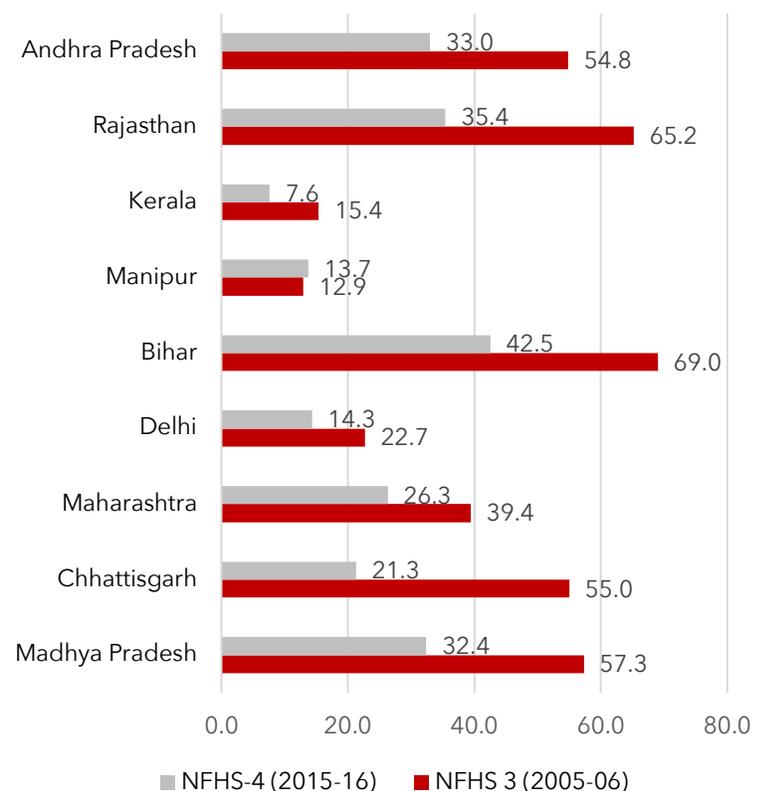
In India, the marriage of any girl below the age of 18 years is categorized as child marriage, which is illegal under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006. Child marriage has significant undesirable effects on young women, including psychological harms, teenage pregnancies, loss of education and employment opportunities, and exposure to domestic violence accompanying a general loss of autonomy. Therefore, the rate of child marriage amongst women aged 20-24 is seen as a valuable indicator of child and maternal health, women empowerment and autonomy.

While India has outlawed child marriage, rates of marriage for girls under the age of 18 are still alarming, though declining in most parts of the country. The 2011 Census reported 12.1 million child marriages. This stems from many socioeconomic determinants, as child marriage is largely still prevalent in rural areas owing to traditional practices and beliefs. Therefore, the two-fold problem of child marriage and teenage pregnancies is largely a concern pertaining to rural India, amongst the bottom income quintile.

Quick Facts from NFHS-4 (2015-16):

1. Comparing the rates of child marriage amongst women aged 20-24 years from NFHS-3 (2005-06) to NFHS-4 (2015-16) shows that progress has been made in all states except Manipur which shows a marginal increase in child marriage rates. In many states, these figures have reduced by 50% or more.
2. 27.3% of married teenage girls have at least one child, while 4.2% of married girls have given birth to two or more children.
3. A survey of body mass index amongst married teenage girls shows that 36% of married teenage girls between 15-19 years of age who were married below 18 are underweight.

% of women aged 20-24 years married before 18 years

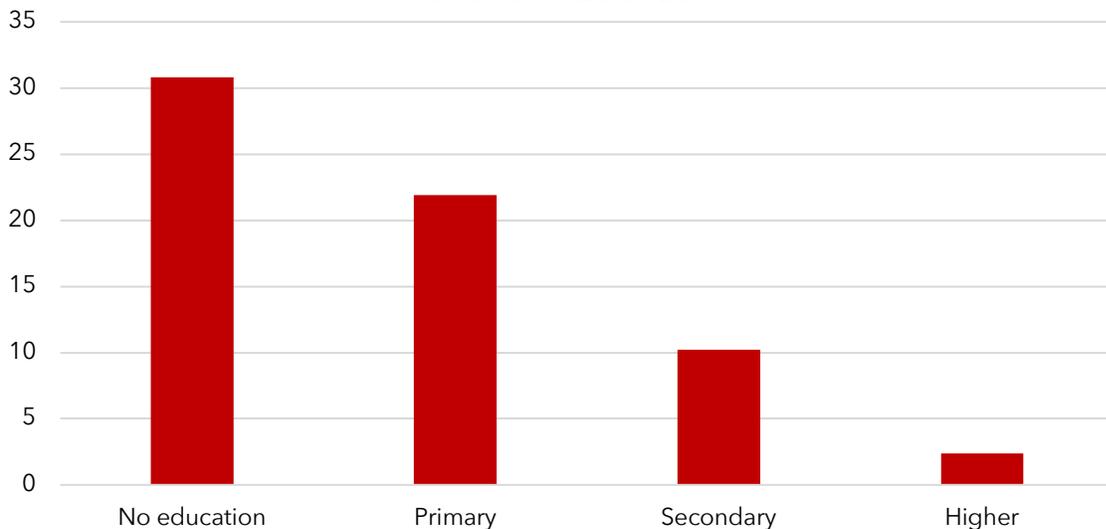


The prevalence of child marriages amongst young women is particularly high in rural areas. In 13 states, over 80% of child marriages took place in rural areas, while in 20 states, this figure is approximately 70%. However, in some states and union territories, child marriage is prevalent in urban areas as well. Some alarming child marriage rates in urban areas are 41% in Haryana, 37% in Tamil Nadu and 33% in Maharashtra.

There is a strong relationship between the wealth index of the family a girl is born into and the likelihood of her marriage taking place below the age of 18.

Rates of child marriage reduce dramatically with increasing years of education; likewise, statistics for secondary school completion are significantly higher amongst girls who were not married below the age of 18.

% of girls aged 15-19 married before legal age, by level of education



How can this inform your work?

Journalists can engage with the reasons for the alarming state of child marriage on a local level, covering factors such as governance, the Prohibition Act, and social attitudes. Additionally, journalists may evaluate any local or national strides that are taken in an attempt to prevent child marriages primarily in rural areas.

Journalists may also explore the social determinants of marriage amongst girls below 18. Stories can highlight how secondary schooling, as a fundamental right, can provide girls from low-income households with secure learning environments, or how residential schools in remote areas can contribute to the autonomy and empowerment of young women and the eradication of child marriage. While correlation does not imply causation, this powerful wealth of data showing associations between wealth, education, and child marriage rates can inform a variety of eye-opening stories to drive further progress.

Reference:

International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India*. Mumbai: IIPS.

Project SANCHAR is aimed at building capacity and facilitating the adoption of practices to use or draw on evidence in public health communication and practice. To facilitate this, SANCHAR collates and provides data from scientifically validated sources, from national datasets in easily interpretable formats, and accessible visuals that can be downloaded easily.