

Delaying Marriage for Girls in India:

A Formative Research
to Design Interventions for Changing Norms



International Center for Research on Women
Report to UNICEF

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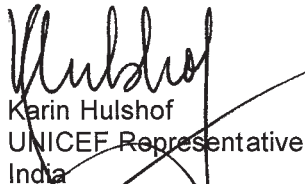
Foreword

Child marriage is a gross violation of the rights of girls and boys, as it denies the basic rights to health, nutrition, education, freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation and deprives the child of his/her childhood, as stated in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. Boys are also affected, but it impacts girls in far larger numbers and with more intensity. The consequences for girls are especially dire, as they are usually compelled into childbearing, and are subject to higher risk of domestic violence and abuse, increased economic dependence, denial of decision-making power, inequality at home, which further perpetuates discrimination and low status of women. The young girl's prospects for development are severely curtailed resulting in a vicious cycle of gender discrimination, child rights violation, intra-marital violence, illiteracy and high infant and maternal mortality.

In India child marriage has been forbidden for more than a hundred years, but the fact is that the percentage of women in the age group of 20-24 years who married before attaining the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 is still 43 per cent, as per DLHS 3. Although child marriage is declining, the pace of change is far too slow and child marriage rates remain unacceptably high. Child marriage is not prevalent only among isolated or backward communities in certain states: it is widespread all over the country and affects all social groups.

In this context, UNICEF and the International Centre for Research on Women conducted this important study to better understand the social norms and practices surrounding child marriage in two high-prevalence states –Bihar and Rajasthan. This study, brings not only a better understanding of the gender norms, economic considerations or the role of positive deviants, but more importantly, translates them into specific recommendations to delay age at marriage: increase girls' access to high quality education, strengthen awareness and enforcement of the law against child marriage, scale up successful and promising interventions, create an enabling environment and advocate for change using positive role models, and use the media to reach the communities and break the silence around child marriage.

This important initiative has been made possible thanks to the support of the European Commission, which funded this study in the context of the global project *Contributing to the Abandonment of Social Norms Harmful to Girls and Women*. I believe it represents a valuable contribution in the fight against child marriage, to which UNICEF remains committed in the best interest of children in India.



Karin Hulshof
UNICEF Representative
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March 2011

Acknowledgements

This study aims to contribute to understanding the issue of child marriage by providing new findings and insights from the States of Rajasthan and Bihar. The study was undertaken by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and supervised by UNICEF India, within the framework of a broader set of initiatives targeting the elimination of harmful traditional practices against women and girls.

At UNICEF the study was conducted under the supervision of Simrit Kaur, with the collaboration of Jose Bergua, Kiki Van Kessel, Karuna Bishnoi, Anu Puri and Marianna Muzzi. Administrative support throughout the research was provided by Veenu Kalra. Special thanks also go to the UNICEF state offices in Bihar and Rajasthan for their support and feedback.

At ICRW, the study was led by Priya Nanda with the engagement of several contributing authors who were part of the research in the two States. The key contributing authors are Priya Nanda, Sonvi Kapoor, Sushmita Mukherjee, Marcy Hersh, Sharmishtha Basu and Rashi Bhargava. The research team is extremely grateful to Dr. Pertti J. Peltto for his insights and guidance on the research, analysis and writing of this report.

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Acronyms

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
ASTEC	Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Women
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BEPC	Bihar Education Project Council
BPL	Below Poverty Line
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CMPO	Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
CDPO	Child Development Project Officer
CSWR	Centre for Social Work and Rehabilitation
DC	District Collector
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DISHA	Development Initiative on Supporting Healthy Adolescents
DLHS	District Level Household Survey
DM	District Magistrate
DORD	Daudnagar Organisation for Rural Development
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EEB	Educationally Backward Block
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRHS	Foundation for Research in Health Systems
GVNML	Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Lahpodiya
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IRPF	Inter Religious Priest Forum
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPEGEL	National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level
OBC	Other Backward Class
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions

SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SDM	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SDO	Sub Divisional Officer
SHG	Self Help Group
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
SSHE	School Sanitation and Hygiene Education
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
VEC	Village Education Committee
VVC	Village Vigilance Committee
WDC	Women Development Corporation

Executive Summary

International Center for Research on Women was commissioned by UNICEF, using European Commission funds, for undertaking a 'Formative Research to Design Interventions for changing Norms – for Delaying Marriage for Girls in India'.

Background and Need for the Study

Child marriage is not only a human rights violation, but it also hinders the achievement of millennium development goals and compromises the future of our children and our country. This study on understanding the social norms around child marriage and the barriers to delayed marriage of girls was commissioned by UNICEF with the aim of contributing and informing the plans and programs led by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, India.

In India almost half of all girls marry before the age of 18 years, which is the legal age of marriage. The implications of child marriage for girls are an increased risk of maternal and infant mortality, HIV infection due to early sexual debut and early childbearing. Girls married at early ages are also at a higher risk of domestic violence. Moreover, it restricts girls' opportunities to go to school and realise their own potential beyond their roles as wives and mothers.

There has been influential research over the last decade that has focused on the prevalence, causes and consequences of child marriage. Relatively less known are the kinds of interventions that can enable a change in communities' attitudes and practices around child marriage. This study, through an examination of the social norms and practices surrounding child marriage, proposes an actionable intervention strategy to delay marriage. Central to this strategy is education as a key catalyst for change. This study, conducted in the states of Rajasthan and Bihar, is also relevant to the rest of India.

Research Approach

This is a qualitative research study conducted in two districts each of Rajasthan and Bihar to

examine social norms, positive role models, platforms of community engagement, successful pilots and government level schemes related to child marriage. Based on secondary data and UNICEF's recommendations, the team selected the Nawada and Madhepura districts in Bihar and the Bikaner and Tonk districts in Rajasthan. These districts are among those which have the highest levels of child marriage throughout India. Almost 69 percent of girls in Bihar and 65.2 percent in Rajasthan are married before reaching the legal age of 18 years. The study comprised of 170 in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), state level stakeholder meetings and key informant interviews to explore the perspectives of different actors on the study themes.

Key Findings

1. Gender norms and expectations affect girls' value and role in the community. In the study areas in both Rajasthan and Bihar, there are expectations that girls will help with domestic chores, learn to undertake household responsibilities and get prepared for marriage. Community members often do not perceive any alternative roles for girls. These gendered expectations are prioritised over sending girls to school, especially beyond the primary level. Once a girl attains puberty, the concerns around protecting her chastity, fears around elopement, and stigma from losing family honour, restrict her physical mobility including sending her to school. Families also do not perceive any benefit in investing in girls' schooling as their economic contributions are seen to be geared towards their marital homes. Girls are considered '*paraya dhan*' or property of the marital family and therefore it is socially unacceptable to accept financial contributions from a married daughter.

2. Economic considerations motivate child marriage. While concerns around the cost of dowry influence child marriage in Bihar, in Rajasthan it

is more the expenses incurred in the wedding ceremony that affect practices associated with child marriage. These traditional practices help reduce the economic burden of wedding ceremonies¹, such as marrying off children in collective/community marriage ceremonies, marrying off all girls in one ceremony if there are multiple daughters or cousins in a family, and marrying a daughter at the time of other ceremonies held in the community.

3. Role model individuals value education and aspire for alternative roles for girls. Across the board, role model mothers, fathers and girls are driven by a desire to enable girls to achieve their potential. Consequently they do not hesitate to deviate from the customary practice of child marriage. They do face potential stigma and exclusion but articulate a resolve to educate their daughters and even allow them to pursue careers beyond completion of schooling.

4. Lack of public education infrastructure, facilities and teachers affect motivation to send girls to school. The selected study sites in both Rajasthan and Bihar suffer from a lack of high quality, accessible public education. Poor or nonexistent school facilities and a lack of dedicated teachers contribute to girls not attending school. Middle and secondary school locations are often a significant distance from rural homes, raising concerns about the safety of young girls, particularly when they reach puberty. Thus many families opt to end a daughter's schooling rather than put at risk her safety by sending her to school.

5. There are increasing signs of change, enabling girls' access to education. Models that both promote and facilitate girls' education exist in both the states. These programmes have been successful because they provide security and financial support to girls, allowing them to continue their education. These include nongovernmental organisation (NGO) led *shivirs* or education camps, government run residential schools and a NGO led boarding home for girls. These programmes remove the social and physical barriers to education for girls, enable girls who have previously dropped out of school to

continue their education, and provide spaces where access to quality education is possible. While these platforms for change exist, interestingly, vocational training programmes that build livelihood skills are rare in all four districts.

6. Lack of public awareness and weak enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006. The current 2006 Prohibition of Child Marriage Act has improved through several iterations and has strong tenets to prevent child marriage. However, awareness of the Act is limited amongst local people including district and village level government officials in all four districts. In addition, weak enforcement of the law also undermines its potential to curb child marriage.

7. Local NGOs and community groups actively work to delay child marriage and address social norms. Many NGOs have been working in these communities for a long period, are well accepted and have significant leverage to shift long standing traditions and expectations.

8. Government schemes to discourage child marriage lack correspondence and outreach. National and state level cash incentive schemes to discourage child marriage are limited in their outreach and often do not correspond with immediate needs and decision making of an individual family. Many of the schemes are meant for below poverty line (BPL) or other backward class (OBC) families but the problem persists across caste and class groups.

Recommendations

The research findings summarised above and detailed more fully in the report provide ample evidence of the norms that influence child marriage in Rajasthan and Bihar and support a clear mandate for an integrated intervention strategy. To put this intervention strategy into action for the girls and families in Rajasthan and Bihar, intersectoral collaboration between the various stakeholders, including the government, local and international NGOs, the media, and communities, is a key recommendation.

The following specific recommendations articulate the integrated intervention.

1. Increase girls' access to high quality education.

Increasing girls' access to and motivation for additional schooling is a key intervention strategy for delaying age at marriage in both Rajasthan and Bihar. In order to provide accessible, high quality education, the grave deficiencies of government run schools must be addressed. These deficiencies in basic structural facilities should have a high priority for direct governmental actions. State governments must also address absentee teachers, the lack of sufficient numbers of teachers given large class sizes, and the indifference of teachers regarding quality performance of their duties. A major challenge is to ensure that girls can continue beyond the fifth year of school in those places where middle and secondary schools are located at a significant distance outside the village. Residential education camps (*shivirs*) found in Bikaner, offer a promising solution to this problem. The *shivirs* are designed to encourage former school drop outs to come back into the school system, and to give them sufficient education for re-enrolment in regular classrooms. Programmes for promoting more years of schooling for girls should also be explored, which can include financial support to low income families, increasing vocational and livelihoods training, providing or subsidising girls' transportation to school and increased parent-teacher communications.

2. Strengthen awareness and enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006.

The research clearly demonstrates that the enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is practically non-existent in all study sites. Training camps and workshops need to be organised for government officials in order to sensitise them as to the gravity of the issue and the need for action. Most field level workers are poorly informed about the law and lack the motivation and means of taking effective action against child marriage. These workers need to be informed through training workshops and other means, about the responsible governmental authorities and

non-government entities involved in campaigns in the local area and district. In addition, community members lack complete information about the law's punitive measures and therefore have little fear of legal punishment. The study's recommendation is to address this through community sensitisation meetings as part of advocacy campaigns at each village, highlighting both the punitive measures of the law, along with the importance of alternatives to marriage and the benefits of educating the girl child.

3. Scale up successful and promising interventions.

At the district and village levels, some interventions led by NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) are already facilitating a delay in marriage for girls. Additional support and capacity building of would help these organisations strengthen their approach and enable them to extend their services into new areas.

4. Create an enabling environment and advocate for change.

An integrated strategy will depend on developing effective advocacy and information dissemination campaigns at the village, district and state levels to encourage individual behaviour change. A key element of an effective communications and awareness generation strategy should be showcasing positive role models to highlight the reasons why they do not support early marriage, including the benefits they perceive from delaying marriage. In addition, educating, protecting and empowering young girls through life skills classes is an already proven strategy for effectively delaying the age of marriage, as demonstrated in previous studies. Families and communities, including boys and men, also need to be involved in the process of shifting norms by sensitising them about the risks associated with child marriage. We recommend supporting this cooperation through the creation of formalised groups and networks. Finally, the research findings also demonstrate that on certain auspicious days throughout the calendar, child marriages are performed in higher numbers. Interventions need to be designed to especially prevent child marriages from happening on these auspicious dates.

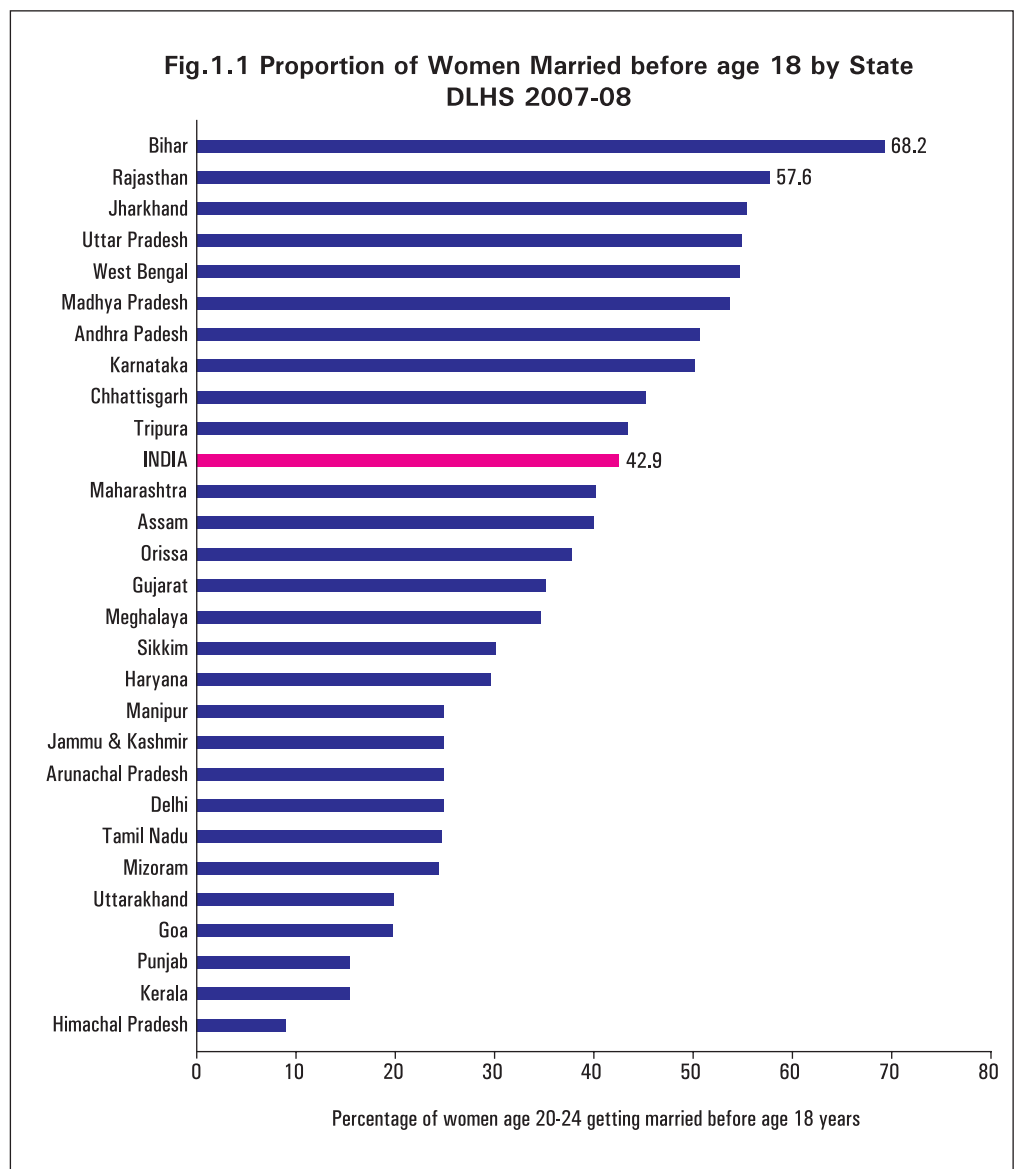
5. Use the media to reach the community. The media plays an essential role in community sensitisation and changing social norms. A comprehensive media approach can engage a wide spectrum of community groups and catalyse change in the norms around child marriage. In rural areas, consistent messages through a variety of different media, including radio, local theatre productions, puppet shows, mobile units and billboards should be carried out. These media should especially help to laud and spread awareness about positive deviants in the community.

1. Introduction

1.1 Child marriage in India: The problem

Researchers, policy makers and governments recognise that child marriage is not only a gross violation of human rights {as per the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and further international legislation}, but also undermines progress toward basic development goals.¹ Delaying marriage for girls can contribute towards reducing maternal and infant mortality, preventing HIV infection, improving women's educational and economic status, and ensuring women's rights and gender equality. Despite this, experts estimate that by the year 2014, globally more than 100 million girls will marry before the age of 18 years (Bruce and Clark 2004). In India, almost half of all girls marry before the age of 18 years (Indian National Family Health Survey, 2005-2006) (Fig. 1.1). While data from this survey indicates a decline in child marriage to some extent in virtually all states, levels remain unacceptably high.

Child marriage is both a symptom of and a contributor to gender inequality. Studies demonstrate the clear link between the incidence of child marriage and poor health indicators, often due to early childbearing that contributes to high levels of maternal mortality and morbidity (ICRW 2008b). In addition, girls who marry at a young age often do so with limited experience and information, no autonomy, and negligible power in negotiating



¹ Child marriage is any marriage that occurs before the age of 18 years, a standard that is reinforced by a general consensus among various international conventions and human rights agreements (Mathur et al 2003). The same definition holds in India, where The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) prohibits marriage for girls below 18 years and for boys below 21 years of age.

sexual relations. Partners are often older and more sexually active, and therefore put their young wives at an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections including HIV (ICRW 2008b). Child marriage is also directly associated with lower educational attainment for girls, limiting their employment opportunities, economic security, and productive capacity to society. These factors combined contribute to the girl's low levels of decision making in the home, increased vulnerability to violence, and limited access to social and economic resources (Mathur et al 2003).

1.2 Research rationale

Previous studies indicate that child marriage is a reality among the rural poor in India, perpetuated by a multiplicity of complex factors. However, there is a dearth of research analysing child marriage as a social norm. Moreover, existing studies do not provide recommendations for strategic interventions to address these norms and delay the age of marriage.

A review of 51 programmes, in India, that delay age of marriage directly or indirectly was undertaken in 2008. These were programmes run either by an NGO or the Government over the last decade in India (ICRW 2008b). This assessment clearly demonstrates the need for further research to understand the social norms and form a comprehensive intervention strategy. The findings from this assessment are synthesised below.

First, programmes with the goal of delaying marriage can only be successful by addressing the underlying social norms that need more nuanced understanding and exploration (ICRW 2008b). Second, while the social norms that lead to child marriage may be firmly entrenched, there are exceptions. An evaluation of a programme to delay age of marriage in Bihar, Development Initiative on Supporting Healthy Adolescents (DISHA), showed that 80 percent of adults in intervention areas articulated that the ideal age of marriage for girls should be 18 years, but in the face of social norms, they are helpless to change conditions.² This suggests that there are individuals and families within

communities open to change and actively working towards it. Little research has been done on the motivations of these positive deviants and their unique voices, especially fathers, mothers or daughters, whose existence and power to influence their communities represents an opportunity for change. Third, while there is a law, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, which prohibits marriage for girls below 18 years and for boys below 21 years of age, weak implementation, lax enforcement, and lack of awareness all undermine the national policies and programmes attempting to limit child marriage. There is a need to better understand the community and implementation agencies' roles and perceptions on the law and government policy and programmatic initiatives to address the issue of child marriage in India. For example, a conditional cash transfer programme has been introduced to incentivise marriage at the legal age, but structural, administrative and attitudinal challenges all contribute to gaps in the implementation of both the law and government programming.

Aiming to bridge this research gap, UNICEF commissioned this study to better understand the social norms that perpetuate child marriage as well as the promising changes taking place within communities. These include role model family members who break away from child marriage norms, NGO interventions, and community and government level schemes to prevent child marriage. Using qualitative methods, the research team carried out fieldwork in 2009 to gain a better understanding of these issues. With these findings, the study proposes an integrated intervention strategy to develop platforms for social change and combat the incidence of child marriage.

The prevalence rates of child marriage guided the selection of Rajasthan and Bihar as study states. These states have among the highest levels of child marriage incidence in the country (65.2% and 69% respectively, NFHS-3 2005-2006).

1.3 Literature review

While there is extensive literature on child marriage, the majority of this research has focused on

² The DISHA project was designed and evaluated by ICRW and sought to improve the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand. Delaying age at marriage was a key objective.

the structural factors that contribute to and emerge from child marriage, highlighting the effect on women's lives. This literature review provides a brief overview of the norms surrounding child marriage in India and effective interventions to delay marriage for girls.

Norms

Indian society is marked by gender stratification and differentiation. Gender differences are reflected in the division of labour, where women bear the reproductive activities, while men primarily engage in productive activities. As a result, men often control and restrict women's access to resources (Sagade 2005). Women's work, despite being highly laborious and time consuming, is not highly valued, often giving men greater access to productive resources and social status. This system of gender stratification and patriarchy provide a primary justification for excluding or limiting women's participation in the formal education system (Mathur et al 2003). In the absence of alternatives to the role of wife and mother, from which woman's social identity and economic status are derived, older women have no choice but to continue the custom of child marriage (Sagade 2005). Discrimination against girls in decision making regarding family, education, employment, matters of sexuality and other areas, creates and perpetuates the conditions in which child marriages occur.

There are marked pressures toward marriage at an early age among girls to minimise the risk of, and dishonour associated with improper female sexual conduct. The institution of child marriage reduces the possibility of any suspicion regarding the virginity of a young girl (Mathur et al 2003). Therefore, marriages are often arranged immediately after, or even before a girl reaches puberty. This is considered the only and proper solution to avoid the problem of teenage pregnancy out of wedlock.

In most communities of India, a girl's parents are required to provide a dowry to the bridegroom and his family, a practice that lends an economic dimension to marriage. The dowry amount may increase

as the girl gets older and she requires an older bridegroom, who is likely to be more educated (the higher the education, more the dowry required is an established trend (IPPF 2006)). To avoid such expenditures, parents prefer to marry their daughters off at an early age. In addition, if there are multiple daughters in a family, all are often married off at one ceremony to save on marriage celebration expenses; another practice that may abet child marriage (IPPF 2006). Another financial consideration is that daughters (unlike sons) once married, cease to be members of their natal family and bear no responsibility to support their parents or siblings, so there is limited incentive for daughters to remain unmarried for long (Sagade 2005). For these economic reasons, the system of child marriage continues.

Many Indian girls, vulnerable to child marriage, suffer from a lack of alternative, constructive opportunities. From childhood, girls are conditioned to believe that marriage is a centrally important life goal for them and that their interests are subordinate to those of their family (Mensch et al 1998). Educational opportunities, which could support daughters' autonomy or employment skills, are frequently denied to girls, or the girls are withdrawn from school early because of marriage (Somerset 2000). In addition, access to schools in rural areas is not always easily available to girls, given that schools are often located long distances away from homes and parents are fearful of their daughters' commute and the potential for sexual assault or involvement with men (Khan 1993).

Young brides face pressure to prove their fertility and produce children soon after marriage and also have little ability to negotiate sexual activity (Mensch et al 1998). If and when young women suffer from illness or die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, this is rarely attributed to young age (Pendse 1999).

While the practice of child marriage is one of the most important factors responsible for the high rates of maternal and child mortality and morbidity, these consequences are not well known at the family level (Sagade 2005).

While the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 attempts to curtail the practice of child marriage, there is a general lack of awareness of the law among the population and a lack of political will to enforce the law. The lack of knowledge, particularly among Indian women, generally stems from illiteracy, belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, and residence in a rural area (Sagade 2005). In addition, there is limited political will to enforce the law or create awareness about it throughout India. This is potentially due to the fact that women's issues and interests hold limited weight in political processes. While political parties frequently state their supportive positions on improving the status of women, budgetary provisions are generally inadequate for the implementation of such policies (Sagade 2005).

Interventions

Given the severity of the consequences of child marriage government and non-governmental organisations as well as international organisations work actively on programmes to combat this practice. Research and assessments on such interventions and programmes on the prevention of child marriage globally over the last decade suggest several best practices in delaying the age of marriage for girls and promising strategies for future interventions.

Integrated programme design

Evaluations of a pilot from India suggest that large scale integrated programmes hold promise for improving young people's sexual and reproductive health and delaying the age of marriage. The *Development Initiative Supporting Healthy Adolescents (DISHA)*, aimed at developing, implementing, and testing integrated approaches for improving the reproductive health and lives of young people in the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand (ICRW 2008a). DISHA focused on improving youth skills and capacity through peer education, building community support for the sexual and reproductive health of the youth; ensure access to health services, and building the capacity of partner NGOs. The programme evaluation demonstrated major successes

in improving youth sexual and reproductive health and delaying girls' age at marriage. Specifically, DISHA is responsible for a two year delay in the age of marriage for girls to 17.9 years old (as compared to the baseline age at marriage of 15.9 years) at intervention areas and a 60 percent increase in contraceptive use among youth (ICRW 2008a).

Education interventions

Keeping girls in school and expanding economic opportunities for them stands out as a fundamental approach to delaying age at marriage. Child marriage prevention programmes have emerged largely from a reproductive health framework; therefore, keeping girls in school is not routinely put forward as a key strategy. Education remains the most consistent predictor of age at marriage. According to bivariate analysis of NFHS-2 (1998-1999) and NFHS-3 (2005-2006) data, nearly 40 percent of women aged 20-24 years with post-secondary (higher) education were unmarried, compared to five percent of women with no education. Conversely, less than 30 percent of highly educated women married before 18 years, compared to 77 percent of uneducated young women.

A comprehensive review of programmes to delay age of marriage in India, suggests that low education is significantly associated with lower age at marriage (ICRW 2008b). For example, the Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour in Bihar (PRACHAR) of Pathfinder International, Action Approach for Reduction of Early Marriage and Early Pregnancy programme of Mamta and DISHA all found that girls who are more educated are also more articulate and better able to negotiate with their parents to delay marriage. Despite the importance of formal education, few programmes undertook specific activities to foster school enrolment. PRACHAR, an intervention on providing reproductive health education to girls has also shown a gradual decrease in the proportion of girls marrying before 18 years of age (Wilder et al 2005). During the five years in Bihar (2002-2007), the proportion of girls who married before age of 18 years declined from 88 percent in 2002 to 61 percent in 2005 and 49 percent in 2007 (Wilder et al 2005).

Empowerment interventions

Providing girls with information, opportunities, and life skills fosters their aspirations beyond child marriage and childbearing, and increases their agency to negotiate key decisions with their parents. Girls who participate in programmes that focus on empowerment through information and skills demonstrate strong skills in articulating, negotiating, and making decisions. Even programmes that focus on reproductive health, but include a life skills module, like EMEP, DISHA, and the Regional Initiative for Safe Sexual Health by Today's Adolescents (RISHTA), find that girls take such training seriously and use their skills to negotiate with their parents to delay marriage. The programme, *Improving the Reproductive Health of Married and Unmarried Youth in India: Evidence of Effectiveness and Costs from Community-based Interventions* demonstrated an increase in the age of marriage for young girls in the programme villages, whereas it remained unchanged in the control areas (Pande et al 2006). Interestingly, all young girls at the programme site, including those not directly involved in the life skills classes experienced an increase in the age of marriage, suggesting that the intervention successfully changed the community in these villages. In addition the creation of 'safe spaces' has been a tested and successful strategy by the Government supported programmes like *Kishori Shakti Yojana*. Other government supported schemes like *Balika Samridhhi Yojana* (1997-2004), *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* (1994-2005) do help girls in continuing education and delay marriage but rely on cash incentives rather than empowerment approaches (ICRW 2008b).

Engaging key decision makers

It is not sufficient to focus on the empowerment of girls without working at empowering communities. Most interventions recognise the need to involve a range of key stakeholders, and this engagement is an important factor in effective implementation and potential success. The success of EMEP in rural Rajasthan lies in deeper outreach to the communities through involvement of religious leaders, particularly Muslim clerics. In this project implemented by the NGO, Mamta, religious leaders, played an

essential role in building acceptance for delayed marriage within their communities (Mamta Health Institute for Mother and Child 2008). Working with other key decision makers for girls, through formation of community resource centres, ensured continuous awareness generation and discussion among parents and opinion leaders in the community. This further helped in changing norms around marriage. Findings from this programme, EMEP, suggest that fathers' support is particularly essential as ultimately, the fathers will make the decisions about their daughters. Mothers also play a critical role as influencers within the family and can support their daughters' involvement in programmes or their access to information. Strategies that target key adults are needed to create a supportive environment for delaying marriage. The Tata Steel Rural Development Society implemented RISHTA found that even when parents understand the need for delaying marriage for their daughters, they find it difficult to resist the social pressure (ICRW 2008b). Therefore, RISHTA had a special component of creating enabling environment in the community so as create pressure for social change on a larger scale.

The results from programmes working with men and boys are more ambiguous. In some interventions, fathers and brothers supported child marriage for girls as part of their duty to "protect the virtue" of their women (ICRW 2008b). In the DISHA project, where girls and boys were trained

Action through Advocacy: International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009, USA

Organisations that are engaged in advocacy to build strong leadership and support among policy makers for improving the health, security, and well being of adolescent girls in developing countries by particularly focusing on preventing child marriage and promoting the health needs and rights of married adolescents.

The Parliament of the United States of America has drafted the *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009* through strong advocacy efforts of organisations like ICRW. The legislation would enable the U.S. foreign assistance funding over four years to prevent child marriage and provide educational and economic opportunities to girls in the developing world.

Source: www.icrw.org

as peer educators who advocate for later marriages, boys were strong supporters of delaying age at marriage for the sake of girls' own preferences and wellbeing (ICRW 2008a). Involving men and boys in interventions can be challenging and the full effect of that involvement on delaying marriage for girls remains unclear.

From these experiences, it is clear that successful programmes for girls are based on a clear understanding of the local cultural and economic contexts, seek to expand education and opportunities for girls, engage with relevant stakeholders, and limit the constraints to economic empowerment that compel girls and their families to choose lives of child marriage and childbearing.

The current study is unique in that it builds on the recommendations from previous studies and examines social norms and other supportive contextual factors surrounding child marriage that can be mobilised to design an intervention strategy. This report brings together the findings from Bihar and Rajasthan and then presents specific intervention approaches to deal with the child marriage contexts in both states. The report is organised as follows. Chapter Two provides an overview of the methods used in the study, Chapters Three and Four highlight the research findings in Rajasthan and Bihar, respectively, Chapter Five provides a synthesis of the findings, Chapter Six presents the intervention strategy, recommendations and concluding thoughts.

2. Study Objectives and Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used in four districts namely Nawada and Madhepura in Bihar and Bikaner and Tonk in Rajasthan to examine social norms, positive role models, community engagement, and government level schemes related to child marriage. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, state level stakeholder meetings, and key informant interviews were used to explore specific themes with a variety of participants. The primary data collection is supplemented with secondary analysis to provide the historical, economic, and political contexts at the district level.

2.1 Study objectives

The purpose of the study was to unpack social norms and understand

- 1) Fears of fathers, uncles, and mothers who marry their daughters early,
- 2) Motives of fathers, uncles, and mothers who delay marriage of their daughters,
- 3) Attitudes of religious and other key opinion leaders on the issue,
- 4) To identify role models in the community who have changed norms, their motivation and responses from the community,
- 5) To understand community response to legislation and policies on delaying marriage,
- 6) To capture experiences and opinions of administrative representatives implementing legislation and policies,
- 7) To identify organisations, networks, and platforms which can be leveraged for catalysing change, and
- 8) To understand the viable alternatives to marriage that already exist as well as what communities consider viable alternatives.

The study includes six specific objectives and corresponding research questions detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Research Objectives and Research Questions

Research objectives	Key research questions
1. Unpack social norms	<p>What are the norms that rationalise child marriage for girls?</p> <p>Do key community members think differently?</p> <p>For what reason do they perpetuate child marriage?</p>
2. Identify role models	<p>What motivates some fathers/uncles/mothers to go against the norm?</p> <p>How did they cope with the social pressures?</p> <p>Who are the girls who resist marriage until they are of age?</p> <p>How did girls cope with the social pressures?</p>
3. Community response to policy	<p>Are communities aware of government actions on child marriage?</p> <p>What prevents them from respecting the law?</p> <p>How do community members feel about current intervention programmes trying to prevent child marriage?</p>
4. Implementation experience of administration	<p>What are the challenges faced by government staff in implementing government action to prevent child marriage?</p>
5. Platforms for change	<p>Who are the key stakeholders working against child marriage in each state?</p> <p>What roles do they play?</p> <p>Who could be key stakeholders/catalysts of change who are currently not advocating against child marriage?</p> <p>What are the good practices adopted by communities and NGOs that have led to change?</p>
6. Alternatives to marriage	<p>What are the potentially viable alternatives to marriage that communities want?</p> <p>What options might be strengthened or developed?</p>

Fig.2.1 Percentage of Girls Married before Age 18 (among women of aged 15-49 years). DLHS-3, Rural Bihar, 2007-2008*

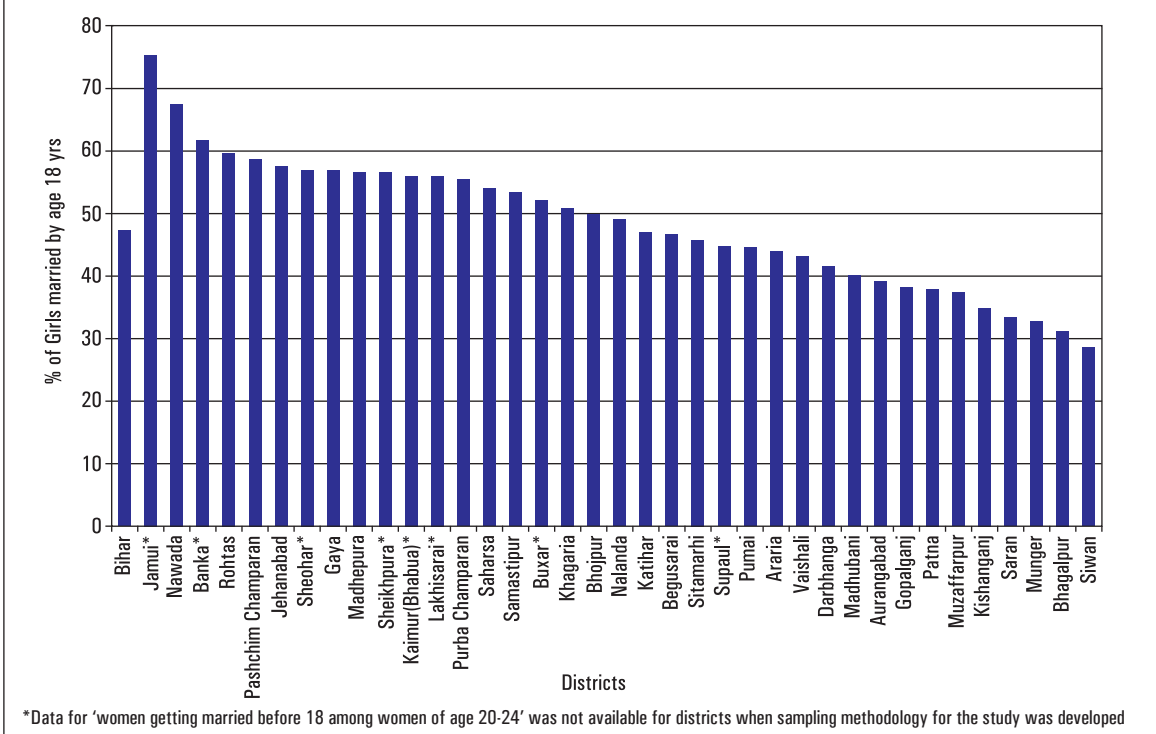
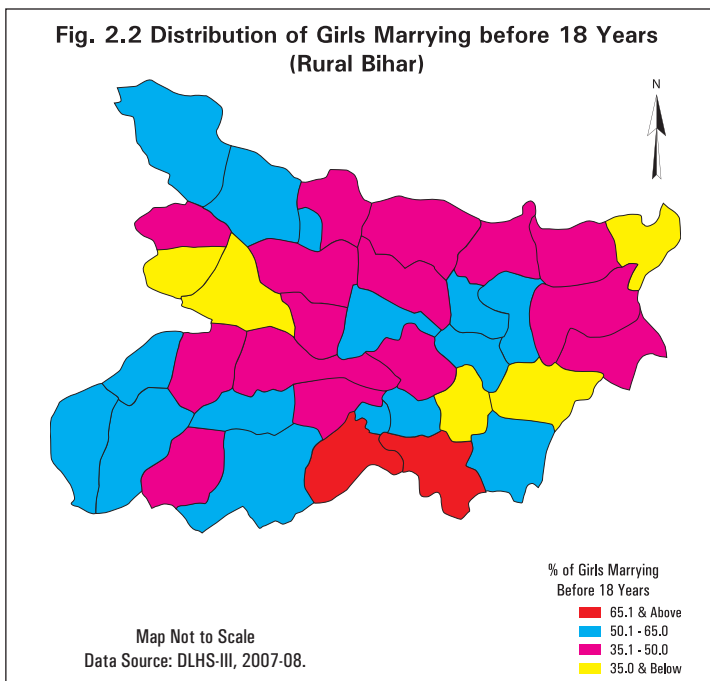


Fig. 2.2 Distribution of Girls Marrying before 18 Years (Rural Bihar)



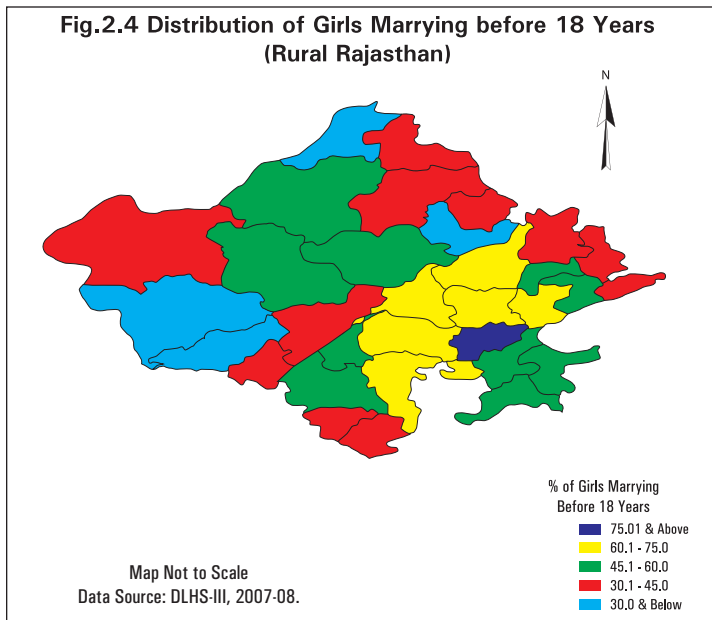
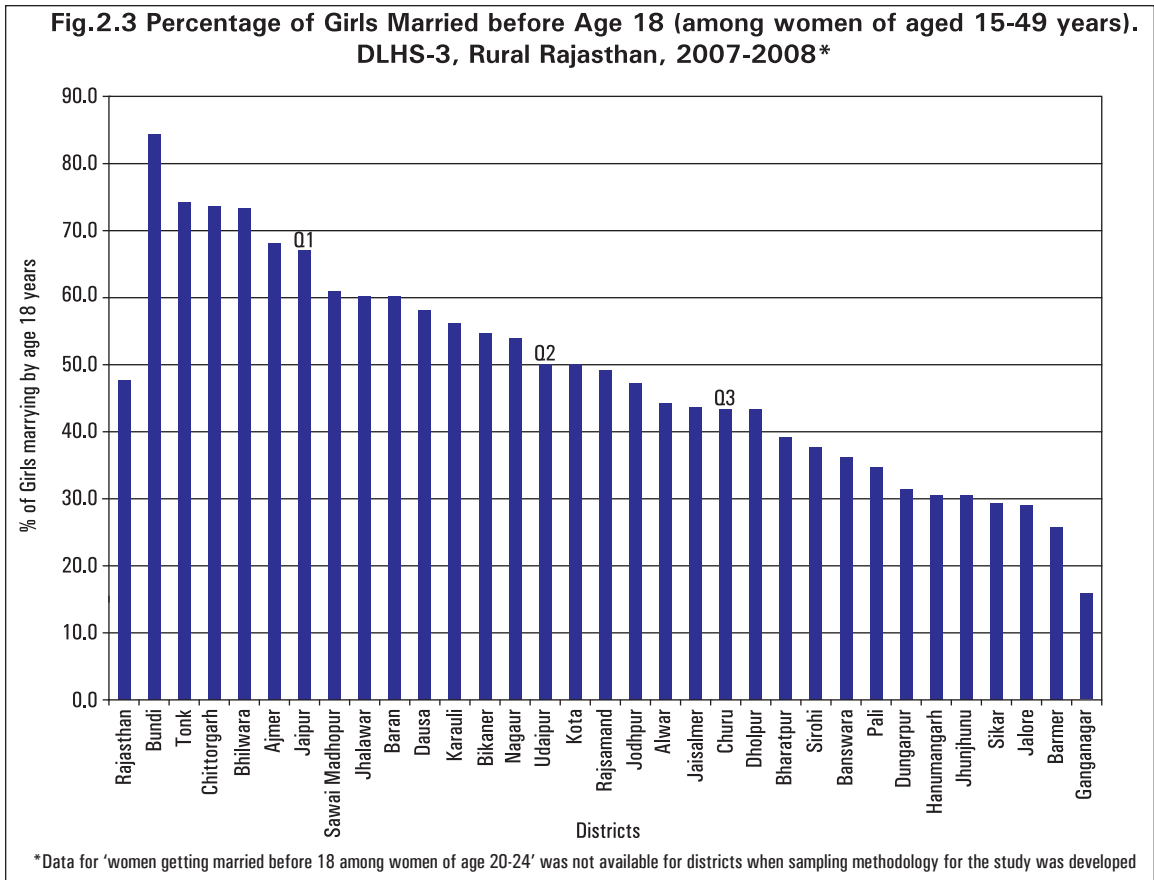
basis of the cumulative population, quartiles were calculated to group the districts into four parts. Then the districts falling under quartile one, one fourth (the most vulnerable districts) were further divided into quartiles and those districts falling between quartile one and quartile three were considered for selection.

The research team utilised a cross-combination method of ranking districts with other indicators like percentage of Scheduled Caste population, percentage of female illiteracy, and standard of living index. These methods culminated in the selection of Nawada and Madhepura districts, taking into consideration the need for equal representation of North and South Bihar and different cultural contexts.

2.2 Sampling

In Bihar, a first stage selection of two districts sorted each district in descending order of data on percentage of girls married before reaching eighteen years of age (DLHS-3, 2007-2008) (Fig. 2.1, 2.2). On the

The research team used the same method for selecting districts in Rajasthan, first making a quartile division and then using the cross-combination method (Fig. 2.3, 2.4). In Rajasthan, the team took a percentage of the Scheduled Tribe population as one



districts for data collection, based on the above mentioned criteria along with representation from Mewar and its geographical delineation.

The research team used purposive sampling to select villages within each district and recruit study participants representing a variety of key informant groups. This included key stakeholders knowledgeable about the issue of child marriage, representing the state government, donor agencies, and NGOs. With regard to the state government, the stakeholders included the Secretary/ Director of the Ministry of Women and Child Development in each state, sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs), Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), *panchayat* representatives and frontline workers who implement government programmes.

indicator along with the above mentioned indicators, as in Rajasthan the percentage of Scheduled Tribe population is significantly high (13%, which is higher than the national average). After this analysis, the team chose Bikaner and Tonk as the two

Within the villages, the research team sought out parents who supported a child's marriage that took place in the past and those who supported

delaying marriage, including mothers of girls aged 12 to 18 years. The study specifically targeted men who are fathers or uncles of girls aged 12 to 18 years old as they are the key decision makers for the marriages of their daughters (or nieces). Given that the average age of marriage of females in Rajasthan and Bihar is approximately 17 years (DLHS-3, 2007-08); this research study sought to include fathers who have daughters up to four to five years younger than this age, as this is when decisions about marriage begin to be made in a family. This category of men is also a potential group that the government and UNICEF will target to build a critical mass of positive role models.

In addition, men who are fathers of girls aged 16 to 20 years, who have not yet married their daughters or do not intend to get them married before 18 years were interviewed. These men will have successfully resisted family and social pressures and are considered to be role models for the community.

Young women between 16 to 20 years old were selected for interviews who are not yet married or do not intend to marry before the age of 18 years. These girls may have successfully resisted family desire and social pressures to get them married before 18 years and can be considered role model daughters. FGDs were held with young women of the same age who may or may not be actively resisting marriage within their families and/or communities.

A final group of study participants included male community leaders, as identified by community members and local NGOs, as key influencers of social norms. These men are in a position to safeguard social norms and have the power to impose social sanctions and also change them, for example religious and caste leaders.

The rich narratives resulting from qualitative data collection methods provide the depth and reflection of individual life experiences necessary to examine the complex social and economic practices

explored in this study. Fundamental to qualitative research methods is the emphasis on the perspectives of the 'insider,' those who experience the phenomena being studied, rather than the observer's point of view. From the collected research, the research team then analysed the findings in relation to the goals of the study. A triangulation of methods, namely IDIs, FGDs, and key informant interviews were applied to fully understand the social context of the study communities and aid in interpreting the narratives.

Given the confidential nature of the study, names of those interviewed cannot be disclosed. Table 2.2 quantifies the number and kind of research activities undertaken by the research team for each target group.

Table 2.2 Number and Kind of Research Activities Undertaken

Target group	Method(s)	Number conducted in Bihar	Number conducted in Rajasthan
Fathers/uncles	FGDs	6	6
	IDIs	8	8
Role model fathers	IDIs	3	7
Mothers	FGDs	3	4
Mothers	IDIs	8	7
	FGDs	2	7
	IDIs	8	9
Young women (11-20yrs)	Informal Interactions	5	*
	IDIs	1	4
Role model young women (15-21yrs)	IDIs	1	4
Young men (15-22yrs)	FGDs	2	2
Community leaders	IDIs	6	6
Community members	FGDs	2	2
Government officials/ panchayat members/ frontline workers	IDIs	9	13
	FGDs	*	1
NGO officials/ workers	IDIs	11	6
	FGDs	*	1
UNICEF officials	IDIs	3	2
Beneficiaries of government schemes (fathers of girls)	IDIs	5	*
Key stakeholders	State based consultation meeting	1	1

2.3 Research ethics and data collection

The study protocol, including the written informed consent process, was reviewed and approved by an ethical review board. After the review, the researchers received informed written consent, approving the study design, prior to beginning data collection.

Since child marriage is against the law, the study potentially puts mothers and fathers whose daughters are married, before 18 years of age, at risk of imprisonment for two years or a fine of Rs.100,000. This study sought personal and sensitive information about private matters since it asked personal motivations and fears related to marriage, compliance with the law, individual desires versus family desires. There was also the risk of causing distress among the young women being interviewed about resisting marriage, if they have little support within their family to delay marriage. The research team sought permission to not disclose those who participated in the study from government officials (CMPOs or other district level authorities), thereby avoiding likely penalisation.

The study design, with FGDs, sought to encourage fathers and uncles to speak freely on the issue and practices of marriage and tried not to make any one individual feel culpable as might be the case in a one on one interview. Given how prevalent the practice of child marriage is in this area, it is easier for community members to talk about the norms in a group and through that forum bring out the synergies and contradictions in personal beliefs and community norms. It must be remembered here that often communities do not perceive the practice of child marriage to be incorrect and therefore do not report against their own members to the authorities that are concerned with enforcing the law. The NGOs and government officials on the ground also tend to work in the paradigm of preventive and not punitive action. In case child marriages occur despite this, they do not report such cases, but try and convince parents to delay the *gauna*

or consummation of marriage so as to delay child bearing and prevent maternal and child mortality. As a result, FGD respondents did not have any risk of being prosecuted through their participation in the study.

The research team did not seek out cases of current violations of the law. In fact a key objective of the research is to identify unmarried girls, between the ages of 16 and 20 years, who can be role models. In meeting uncles and parents whose daughters married early, in this research on understanding norms, the research team did not seek out information on or targeting those whose daughters were currently getting married and therefore considered violators of the law.

The research team had the primary responsibility for the data collection process. Consent forms were translated into Hindi and verbally communicated to the study participants. Since the discussion focused on a sensitive topic that is illegal, we sought verbal consent from the participants. Villagers in India are often wary of putting their signatures and thumb prints on a document; in addition the team did not want to put the research subjects in a position where they could face victimisation at a later date. Participants were given contact information for the researcher and NGO in case they had any questions, and were offered a hard copy of the consent form. All subjects determined eligible to participate in the study were fully informed about the study, their right to refuse or to withdraw, and existing procedures for ensuring confidentiality of the FGDs/IDIs. During FGDs respondents were properly sensitised to respect each other's opinions and maintain confidentiality of the information shared by discussants during the exercise.

The data collection team ensured that everyone present in a FGD (community members, fathers, uncles, and mothers) was aware of the researchers' presence and purpose for being there as part of the study. Field research staff underwent training to be sensitive to the level of comfort, understanding, and consent of all individuals present at the four

districts. The selected research staff had prior experience in conducting research in challenging field situations and was accustomed to ensuring widespread understanding among community members of their role.

2.4 Data management and analysis

Qualitative data was collected and recorded using digital microphones, by trained investigators, to ensure objectivity. Interviews and FGDs were conducted exclusively in local dialects to ensure the subjects' understanding and full participation. The digital recordings of these sessions were translated first to Roman Hindi and then into English by a professional translator.

The research team analysed the data to explore and highlight emerging themes and conceptual categories and utilised Atlas/Ti software for data management and coding.

All voice files, transcripts and study results were kept in password protected files and folders in the office and access to these was limited to the research team. Access to computer files containing participant data was password protected and all personal identifiers have been removed from analytic files. The research subjects' names and identifiers do not appear in this publication and data is reported in aggregate form to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

2.5 Assessment of the study methodology

It is important to note that given the relatively small scale and purposive nature of the sample, the results from this study are not statistically reliable nor can they be freely generalised to the experiences of girls and young women throughout Bihar and Rajasthan, or the rest of India. Villages included in the study were selected in consultation with NGOs working in the community. The team specifically sought out role models to inform the study and visited intervention districts of several NGOs to evaluate their progress and potential for success. The analysis and results, therefore, are not necessarily

representative of every village in the study site or the rest of the country. The research team selected a qualitative approach specifically to understand the multi-faceted issue of child marriage, its causes and consequences. The study methodology made it possible to explore the intersection of these issues in the lives of girls and their families, living in conditions comparable to those found in other parts of Rajasthan, Bihar, and the country.

One limitation of the study was the difficulty of speaking with girls regarding their feelings and experiences around child marriage. Many girls felt shy about participating in a study that asked personal questions. In a telling exchange in Rajasthan, several girls who had been responding to questions regarding their routines, when asked about marriage, became silent and were shy about sharing their opinions. It became a challenge for researchers to find girls willing to speak on this topic and in the end, only the most outgoing and vocal girls shared their perspectives.

Language and the necessity of translations was another site of potential limitation. In the process of translating from the local dialects, to Roman Hindi, and finally, to English, some details and nuances may have been lost. Also, when speaking with subjects in their local dialect, the data collection team sometimes had difficulty understanding what was said, which may have led to missing some important points. The team combated this challenge by using voice recordings of every interview, which was useful in later expanding the team's field notes. In addition, those who carried out the field work also analysed the data, minimising the potential for errors in the study.

These problems notwithstanding, the IDIs and FGDs represent a rich repository of material, encompassing not only attitudes, but also knowledge and practices related to household structure, family relationships, and community norms. In working with and abstracting from this material, the researchers endeavoured to act with due respect for the individuals who shared their personal experiences.

3. Research Findings - Rajasthan

3.1 Social norms and practices

In this section, the focus is on the study findings around norms and practices that are associated with child marriage in Rajasthan. The norms and practices while socially mandated do manifest some flexibility and variation among the study participants, suggesting that some of these are changing or are amenable to change. Practices and norms around marriage have in fact evolved over time to both accommodate the new law as well as the rising costs of marriage. While these adaptations continue to imply child marriage, they do suggest that norms and practices are not as rigid as when one looks at the sheer demographic facts around child marriage. It is the adaptations in these norms that give researchers hope for creating an evidence base for interventions to delay the age at marriage, that is, to take advantage of the space that seems to be created through changes or shifts in norms and practices. Later in the following sections, role model individuals and families have been profiled to understand their potential to be innovators of behaviour change in relation to the rigidities around social norms discussed below.

Gender norms and expectations

The study findings from Rajasthan show how gender expectations and norms for girls interact with priorities placed for their education and decisions to send girls to school. In the study areas of Rajasthan we learned that there are clear household role expectations from girls very early in their lives. These roles include work such as cleaning, fetching water and looking after the cattle. The data from focus group discussions (FGDs) with fathers and mothers, as well as in-depth interviews with fathers reveal that in both Tonk and Bikaner districts, girls across castes are expected to engage in household activities. These expectations reinforce the low perceived value that a girl holds in her natal family.

“What do girls do, they are illiterate. They make cow dung cakes; work on the field, do manual labour. Household work is there. Cooking, taking care of the animals, cleaning, washing utensils, washing clothes. They also work on the field. They do not have any other work.”

- Muslim fathers FGD, District Bikaner

While girls do go to school, they bear a dual responsibility of household chores as well as their studies. They also typically drop out from schools between grades five and eight. There are a range of reasons that are supported by the findings for this early drop out. One, parents do not always see investment in a girl's education worthwhile beyond this time. This is because they are expected to be married and be prepared for taking on marital responsibilities early on in their lives. Their roles are often only envisioned to this reality. This in turn affects decisions around schooling for girls.

Second, while some parents, especially mothers, are keen on educating their daughters at least till fifth or eighth grade (if school is accessible); concerns around security affect their inclination beyond that point. If the school is far away and transport is a problem, these are security concerns are very tangible. A Kumhar³ mother in Tonk, whose daughter had completed grade eight from the village school, indicated that she had been willing to send her daughter for higher studies in the neighbouring village if a few other girls could have accompanied her. She said she even tried to convince other parents but they did not agree, so she too could not send her daughter outside. Similarly, a Scheduled Caste (SC) father in Bikaner said, “If the school is too

³ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Kumhar community belongs to the backward classes in Rajasthan.

far we cannot send our girls as it is a matter of our family honour". Further, there is concern around what people would say about the girl if she is seen outside the house after attaining physical maturity.

In addition to these factors, study findings indicate that people often do not see any alternative roles for girls other than marriage. Additionally, educating a daughter is not seen as a gain to her natal family because it is considered socially inappropriate to take any financial help from a daughter particularly if she is married. This creates social pressures to get a girl married even if an individual family may want to send her to school. A Scheduled Caste father from Bikaner shared that his community members would ask him, "What will you do by sending your daughter to school since she is not going to get a job anyway." He noted that if such remarks were made by several people in his community, then it affects his motivation to send his daughter to school. In contrast there are different valuations about boys' education. A father belonging to the Other Backward Class (OBC) community in Bikaner says, "We are poor farmers, how can we afford education for our daughters. The boys are sent to school because there is an expectation they will get a job". In both districts boys do attend schools and some are even sent to private schools. However, due to extreme poverty, boys too drop out to work on the family farms, and also migrate out to earn.

// *If I would have the means I would educate my daughter till whichever class she would like to study. At least then she will not face the troubles we faced. She might set up a small stall in the village or even get a job if her luck favours her. If nothing else she will at least be able to write me a letter and read mine.*

- A Gujjar⁴ mother, Tonk **//**

Poor economic conditions also hinder families from seeking an alternative future for their daughters. This is particularly poignant in the case of parents who do value their daughters' worth beyond marriage and might have encouraged them to study more if they had the economic means.

While in both Tonk and Bikaner, gender roles and expectations continue to be centred on girls' marriage, there are emerging aspirations for girl's education. These aspirations are valued for the well being of the girl and are dependent on family's ability and means to support the girl's education as well as conditional on supportive factors like distance of a school and safe means to reach the school.

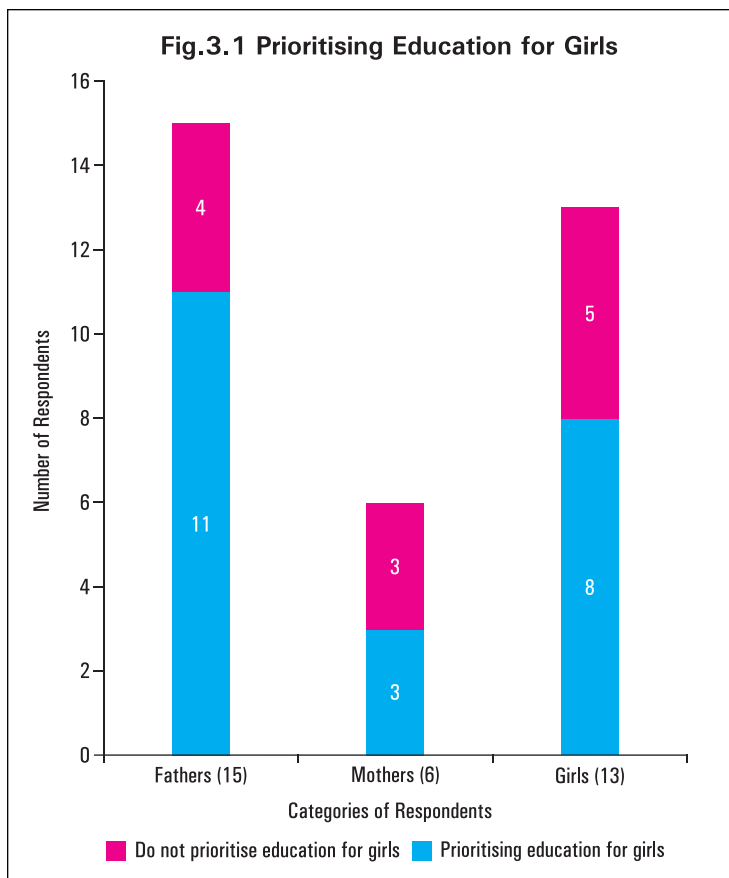
During interviews with fathers, mothers and girls, education was prioritised across all three categories of respondents. Of the 15 fathers, 11 suggested that education is a priority for their daughters and eight of the 13 girls stated the same. There were fewer mothers who were interviewed and of the six, three talked about the significant role of education for their daughters (Fig 3.1). These attitudes are conditional on factors such as ability of schools nearby identified above. They suggest a gradual shift in priorities towards education notwithstanding the structural constraints.

Concerns around chastity for a young girl are also one of the oft noted reasons for marrying girls at an

// *If someone sexually violates my daughter while she is going for an errand then what will happen? In villages news spreads like rapid fire that the girl has been raped. The parents lose their honour. That is why we don't keep grown up girls in the house without at least marrying them.*

- Fears expressed by a father, Tonk **//**

⁴ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Gujjar community belongs to the General category in Rajasthan.



early age. Norms around chastity first and foremost restrict a girl’s mobility. Parents fear that someone might sexually abuse their daughter. Another fear is that if the girl is kept unmarried for too long and given the freedom of mobility and communicating with outsiders or strangers, she might elope with some one.

Also, during focus group discussions with mothers and fathers at the two districts it came out that sexual violation by boys from dominant castes is very common. In addition to the threat from boys, parents have limited trust in their own daughters. A Gujjar mother in Tonk said that parents want to trust their daughters but the times were bad and girls were no longer trustworthy. There are also fears about the dishonour to the family. An interview with a father from Bikaner also suggests that while boys are sent to school even if it is far from the village, girls are not. He reasons this out by saying:

“ When girls grow up, we don’t trust them. The school in Bajju is co-educational. If there was a separate school for girls then it would have been fine. There is some amount of blind faith here that if girls and boys study together the girl might become too smart and run away.

- OBC Father, District Bikaner

If the girl elopes with a boy of the same caste then she is or can be married to the same boy with community acceptance, but if the boy is from another caste, such a marriage is unacceptable to both the communities. In either case, a girl’s elopement stigmatises her family. This stigma is not only expressed verbally, but also through different degrees

of ostracism from social forums. A Scheduled Caste father in Tonk shared that if a girl elopes or becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, her father is considered a “powerless” person who has been unable to manage his daughter and therefore has no legitimacy to speak in the village *panchayat*. Thus, the norm of chastity makes it an important determinant for arresting girl’s education and hastening her marriage.

Practices sustaining child marriage

The emerging practices around child marriage in Rajasthan are apparently linked with desire to reduce the costs of wedding ceremonies and related expenses. In the Tonk and Bikaner districts of Rajasthan the age of marriage, especially for girls, is often decided by some practices that are prevalent across various castes, however with some variation. These practices include, marrying multiple sisters or cousins in one ceremony, *Atta Satta*, *Mrityu Bhoj* and group/community marriages.

One of the most common marriage practices observed at the study districts is of marrying sisters or cousins together in one marriage ceremony. An NGO representative⁵ in Tonk shared that officially a marriage ceremony is arranged for one girl who is around 18 years or above and younger girls from the immediate or extended family are also married off in the same ceremony. The invitation card bears the name of the oldest girl alone. This helps maintain secrecy around the under age marriages planned along with that wedding. The cost is then divided by the families of all the girls married off in that ceremony. This helps in not only avoiding the expenditure of holding separate events but also in evading any legal implications for marrying under age girls.

A Kumhar woman in Tonk shared that she married her daughter at 11 years of age along with her niece (sister's daughter) who was 17 years old at the time. The entire cost incurred for the marriage was Rs.120,000, which she and her sister's family divided equally. Though the older girl was sent to her marital house immediately after the marriage, the younger one, now 15 years old, continues to live with her parents.

It is not only financial constraints that may facilitate this practice. These are old and customary practices that simply are prevailing as well. A teenage Jat⁶ girl from Bikaner reported that she was married at the age of six along with her two other older sisters. On being asked if money was the reason for her being married so early with her sisters she said, *"It is not like we have less money. We have land as well as a shop in the village, but earlier they just used to marry girls off together. Now girls are not married so early along with older sisters"*.

Atta Satta is another practice that impacts the age at marriage for girls in Tonk and Bikaner. It is the practice of exchanging a daughter in return for a daughter-in-law in marriage. An official from UNICEF (Rajasthan)⁷ informed us that this practice is

10 to 15 years old. One of the stated reasons for the emergence of this practice seems to be a decline in the number of girls. If a family is unable to find a bride for their son, they are willing to exchange their daughter in return for a girl from another family. In *Atta Satta* the girl may be married off irrespective of her age. However the *gauna* (ceremony of sending the girl to her marital house) is performed after the girl is physically mature or attains puberty. This implies that marriages for girls can happen at a very early age, sometimes even at the age of four to five years.

In *Atta Satta* even boys get married early. We learnt from a Gujjar girl in Tonk that her brother was married at the age of five in an *Atta Satta* arranged for a female cousin. An NGO representative⁸ in Tonk said that this exchange need not involve only two households. Sometimes five to six households are involved in one *Atta Satta* marriage so that the required number of brides and grooms are ensured in one go. Though this practice is prevalent in both districts more respondents spoke of *Atta Satta* as a reason for child marriage in Tonk.

Another practice that determines the age at marriage of girls in both districts is *Mrityu Bhoj*. When an elderly person dies, the family invites people from seven surrounding villages to a communal feast called *Mrityu Bhoj*, which is held on the third day after the death. The expense incurred in performing this custom is seen to reflect the status of the deceased and his or her family. As a result this is a big and expensive ceremony held by the family. Traditionally, the Bishnoi⁹ caste used to marry their daughters, irrespective of age, on the day of the *Mrityu Bhoj* itself. According to an NGO representative¹⁰ in Bikaner, this served the dual purpose of saving money and ending the mourning with an auspicious and happy event. While the custom is still followed by the Bishnois, it is no longer restricted to their caste alone in the districts of Tonk and Bikaner. The research team got detailed information from a father in Bikaner about how this custom is followed these days. He said:

⁵ Interview with a representative from Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Lahpodiya (GVNML), Tonk, August 2009

⁶ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Jat community belongs to the general category in Rajasthan.

⁷ Interview with an official from UNICEF, Jaipur, August 2009

⁸ Interview with a representative from GVNML, Tonk, August 2009

⁹ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Bishnoi community belongs to the general category in Rajasthan.

¹⁰ Interview with a representative from Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009

“ *In case an old member of the family dies, for example my mother dies, we are poor people and in future we can't afford 5-6 marriages. So we send a coconut to close relatives and invite them to the Mrityu Bhoj. In the morning we have the Mrityu Bhoj and in the evening we get our daughters married. The benefit of this is that, in the same feast we have the 'Mrityu Bhoj' and marriage feast. After this if one (girl) is mature enough then we even call the son-in-law the next day and perform the 'Muklawa or Gauna', that is, we send our daughter to her in-laws place.*

- Muslim Father, District Bikaner

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The practice of group marriages is also prevalent, especially among Gujjars in both the districts. During the field visits the teams observed banners with the date and venue for an upcoming Gujjar community marriage. According to an NGO representative¹¹ in Tonk, these marriages are sponsored with funds collected from the Gujjar community by the Gujjar Group Marriage Committee. Families, who are even slightly better off economically, do not marry their children in group marriages. While a few of these weddings are legal, many under age girls and boys are also married in the same ceremony. Community or group marriages are not common among other castes in Bikaner and Tonk.

There are three stages in a marriage process as informed by the interactions with mothers and fathers at all the study districts. First, the couple is engaged, then the marriage is performed, and finally the *gauna* is done. The engagement is a small function with

close relatives. There is no minimum age for the engagement of a couple. It may even happen when the child is in the mother's womb. By formalising the engagement the families give their word to each other and the couple is considered betrothed. However, a Gujjar mother in Tonk suggested that not much value is given to the engagement now-a-days and there is high likelihood that an engagement at an early age can break later. Therefore the engagement is followed by marriage as soon as possible.

The time when a girl is sent to her marital home is referred to as the *gauna*. Even if the marriage takes place at a very early age, the time of the *gauna* is determined by a girl's physical maturity, attainment of puberty as well as the will of both families. Economic considerations also play a role in the timing of the *gauna* because public feasts are common at this time. Mothers belonging to Other Backward Class and Scheduled Caste groups in Tonk in a focus group discussion reported that they are supposed to inform family members if the girl is old enough or has matured for the *gauna* to take place and if the mother feels that the daughter is not ready yet, she can attempt to delay the *gauna*. The father and other male elders of the family usually take the decision regarding a girl's engagement and marriage. Sometimes even the grandmother is involved. Mothers in Tonk informed that the mother may or may not have a say in choosing the household or groom, but she definitely has some influence in determining and communicating the age at which the daughter will be sent to her marital house.

Auspicious days

Other than the marriage practices mentioned above, there are a few auspicious days on which child marriages can take place in Rajasthan. Traditionally, *Akha Teej* was the one day on which the marriage ceremonies were usually performed. Due to the optimal positioning of the planets, this day is considered highly auspicious. It is believed that there is no need to determine the *mahurat* or best hour for performing the marriage on this day, while on other days a priest is required to determine the marriage

¹¹ Interview with a representative from Shiv Shiksha Samiti, Tonk, April 2009

hour and preside over the marriage ceremony. *Akha Teej* falls in the post harvest period, when people have some resources, like money and spare time, to arrange the wedding of their children. However, in the last few years, five more auspicious days have become popular for performing marriages without a *mahurat* or priest. Key informants suggested that it is due to the heightened legal attention around *Akha Teej* that other auspicious dates have been identified (Table 3.1).

Most critical barriers

The most critical reasons for child marriage for girls in Tonk and Bikaner emerged from the qualitative interviews and FGDs with fathers, mothers, and girls. Social pressure/chastity, poverty, and sibling marriages were the top barriers voiced among the groups of fathers, mothers and girls. It is noteworthy in this quantitative presentation of our qualitative data that the three groups – fathers, mothers and girls – have highlighted the same reasons as being most critical for child marriage with only slight variations.

According to a few mothers and girls a lack of inclination towards education and/or the girls’ dropping out of school for various reasons leads to child marriage. On the contrary, if a girl expresses a desire to study, parents do tend to delay the search for a groom for a while. However, all respondent categories indicated that sibling marriage is a critical barrier. If the family had limited economic means and an older girl of the household was getting married, often the younger ones would be married in the same ceremony as well irrespective of their age or status with regard to education. While sibling marriages was listed by all three types of respondents, the actual poverty status of a household as a reason for child marriage is most strongly mentioned by fathers.

Another critical factor that leads families to marry their girls early is the social pressure to marry off girls who appear physically matured as well as families’ own fears around securing the girl’s chastity. Mothers and girls perceived this pressure as a more

Table 3.1: Auspicious Days for Marriage

Auspicious days for marriage	Months
Basant Panchami	January/February/March (Falgun)
Akha Teej	April/May (Baisakh)
Besakh Purnima	May (Baisakh)
Badla Navami	May (Jaishtha)
Gangadasami	June (Jaishtha)
Devuthani Gyaras	August (Shravan)
Navratri	September/October (Ashwin)

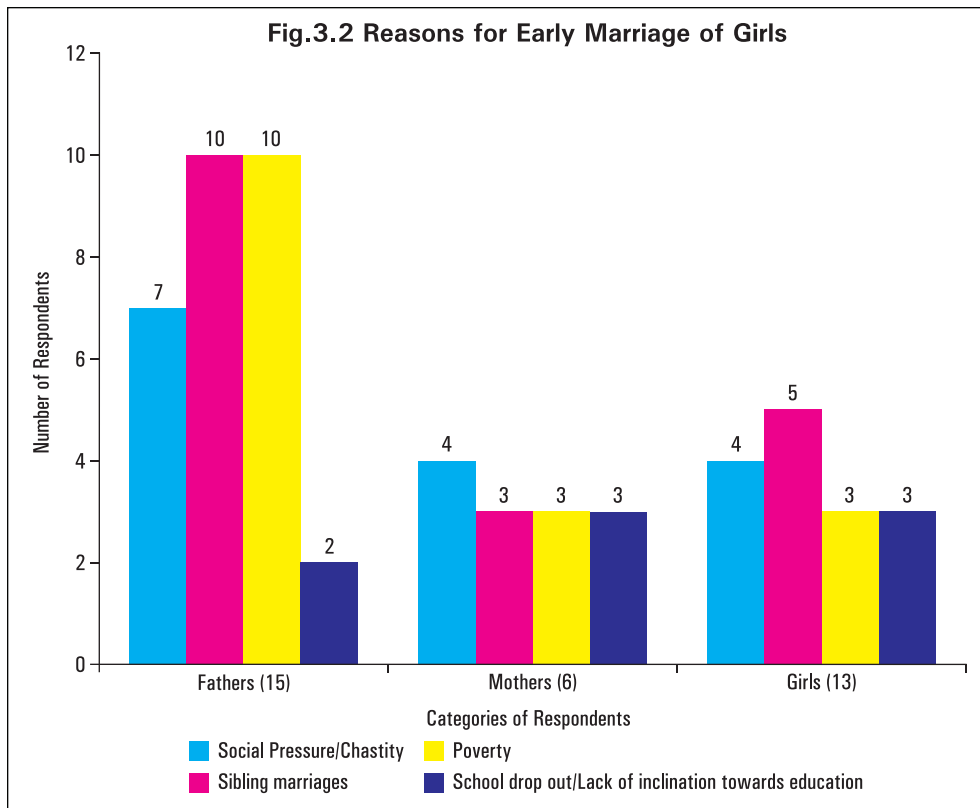
critical barrier to delaying age at marriage for girls than fathers. Fig. 3.2 highlights these findings

3.2 Profiling positive role models

While it is evident from data that child marriage is quite prevalent in the state of Rajasthan and there are norms that sustain the practice of child marriage, there are individuals-mothers, fathers or girls-who have different expectations of delayed marriage and/or education for girls. This section profiles some of the fathers, mothers, and girls who have either positively shifted from the practice of child marriage or hold alternative views regarding the priorities they place on education for girls and are willing to delay their marriage. Deviating from the norm is not easy. On one the hand, exposure to urbanisation, education and access to facilities have facilitated the shifts in behaviour for some individuals regarding child marriage for girls, on the other hand they may also face stigma in their communities. Role models may not always be positively received within their communities and therefore strategies that highlight role models need to consider their acceptance along with their profiling.

Role model fathers

Fathers play a critical role in altering traditional child marriage practices, as they are usually the main decision makers. Seven role model fathers were interviewed who have challenged the norm for child marriage and have made decisions to delay their marriage. While communities in the study areas consider child marriage as inevitable and unchangeable, role model fathers differ. They want to educate their daughters and some also would like



see fathers supporting a need for a career for their daughters and prioritising education over child marriage. The same father in Tonk continues: "I feel until she becomes 20 to 22 years old, once she makes her career then she is fit for marriage... until 18 there is no proper physical development. Education is also an important.... If we marry girls before that it is wrong. After this there should be time for career development even though she is 24 or 25."

Role model fathers are also more convinced about the fact that girls

their daughters to have careers. The most common employment aspired for their daughters were to work with the government or NGOs. Interestingly, the role model fathers were from different castes and communities and had different levels of socio-economic status.

are not mature enough before 18 years of age to take on the responsibilities of motherhood or a new household. Those fathers who have been exposed to cities through higher education or employment realise that girls should be able to participate in the decision making around their own marriage. A father in Bikaner expresses this:

Role model fathers are progressive about educating their daughters and willingness to face community pressures. A father belonging to the Other Backward Class in Tonk district strongly expressed this, "I will educate her until she completes her education. Until then I will not marry her off. I will not marry her off, till she attains a BA/MA." It is encouraging to

// I get a lot of offers and pressure to marry off my daughter but I disagree, telling that my daughter doesn't have the capability to understand what is marriage; moreover, she has the right to decide where to marry so when she will become about 18 to 20 years then.

- OBC Father, District Bikaner

//

In one case where a family has already married their daughter, the father has committed to a delayed *gauna* so that his daughter can continue her

Profiling Role Model Fathers (n=7)

Six of the role model fathers had completed schooling between grade eight and post-graduation and one was illiterate. There is strong awareness among these fathers about the negative health impacts of child marriage and all placed high value on education for girls. In addition, role model fathers talk to their daughters about their aspirations for the future.

education and possibly get a job. This is similar to other role model fathers who would like their daughters to become self sufficient in case of any negative consequences in their marital homes. During an interview a father in Tonk shared:

// *My efforts will be fruitful if she gets a government job. I have been through long dismal phases in my life; at least she will not face such situation. As an earning member, she would be valued more in her marital home.*

- OBC Father, District Tonk **//**

Case Study: Role Model Fathers

A father of a teenage unmarried girl and two sons, Jat by caste, from Tonk district, had to take responsibility of his family at quite an early age. Within three years of his marriage while he was only in the eleventh grade, he had to drop out of school to work with his father in their agricultural field. Today he is working as a *Shiksha Karmi* (para-teacher) in Tonk, and values education for all his children and especially for his daughter. As he got married at an early age he could not complete his studies and his wife is illiterate. This adds to his woes as not only does he have to earn for his family, but has to put in extra effort to make his wife understand family matters. As his wife is illiterate she is unable to help with the children's education.

Ram Bharat (name changed) sends all his children regularly to school. His daughter is studying in the grade nine and walks six kilometres every day with her friends to school. As a father he fears sending his daughter all alone to school so he ensures that other girls also go to the school regularly. Ram Bharat had got his daughter engaged while she was only eight years old. As a father he aspires to educate his daughter at least till graduation and is ready to break the engagement if the groom's side is not ready to wait till the girl finishes her studies. As a strong father aspiring for a bright future for his daughter, he says *"I agreed to everybody's demand to get her engaged at an early age but now I will not marry her off till she completes her higher education."*

Role model mothers

Mothers often are the silent partners or influencers in decision making about the marriage and *gauna*

Profiling Role Model Mothers (n=4)

Mothers who have been able to cope with the social pressures to marry their daughters early are often well educated. Others work with NGOs and have been exposed to progressive ideas through their work. Role model mothers are also united by their want for a better life for their daughters than what they had.

of their daughters. The mother is also the conduit who transmits the community's social expectation to the family and the girl. This means passing on the gender norms and expectations to daughters and training them to take on marital roles and responsibilities. Mothers who may be supportive of the daughters' education and therefore delayed marriage may still be in a difficult position to deal with social pressures.

One of the role model mothers belonging to the Other Backward Class group shared that she was not prepared to cope with the responsibilities her in-laws placed on her when she was married at a young age. She does not want her daughter to go through a similar experience. She noted:

// *We used to feel suffocated and cry the whole day in our veil. We used to cry when our fathers used to come to meet us in our in-laws house. But there was no one to help us out. We do not want our daughters to go through a similar experience. We will marry only after 18 years. Until then, let her get educated, be wise and mature, then only we will marry her.*

- OBC Mother, District Bikaner **//**

A Scheduled Caste woman in Bikaner who has now pledged not to marry her 13 year old daughter early noted that if she and her husband had been

educated, they might have had better employment instead of working as day wage labourers. Because of this she aspires for a better future for her daughter.

“ We have been through a bad phase of life, but at least would like to educate our children. My husband works as labour in others’ field and I also work as daily wage labour. If we had been educated, we would have been in some other job. ”

Role model mothers take radical steps to send their daughters outside the village for continuing education at senior schools. A Naik¹² mother in Bikaner whose daughter had completed tenth grade reported that people even comment if a girl is walking with her brother. She said that she and her husband had to ignore people’s comments and take a strong stance to keep their daughter in school through tenth grade. They opine that a higher education will give their daughters the ability to manage their lives better. A mother from the Other Backward Class group in Tonk expressed that *“One can get grooms later as well. If the girl is educated, we will get an educated and mature groom. Then both will be able to manage their lives properly.”*

The mother as head of a household with a migratory father, or when she is independently earning for her family has a greater degree of influence regarding priorities for her daughter’s marriage. Many of the role model mothers have been influenced by the NGO workers or government front line workers, to act the way they do in response to their own experiences of child marriage.

Case Study: Role Model Mother

Sita Devi (name changed), an animator with a local NGO working in Tonk has one daughter and one son. Her daughter is educated till eighth grade. Her daughter was not interested in studies further. Seeing her interest, Sita Devi arranged for her to learn cutting, stitching and embroidery from a local woman in her village. Sita Devi had got her daughter engaged while she was 15 years old. Within one year on finding some unacceptable behaviour from groom’s family, she broke her engagement.

For the last two years, Sita Devi is looking for another groom for her daughter. Neighbours and relatives have started pestering her with questions about when she will marry of her daughter. Initially it was difficult for Sita Devi to deal with such comments, but slowly she gathered courage and responded back *“I am happy to have my daughter with me where she is happy and healthy. I would prefer not to send her to another family where she might not be treated well and no one will take care of her.”*

Through support of the NGO where she works for, Sita Devi has been able to cope with the daily taunts of the neighbours; but her husband finds it difficult to face the neighbours and relatives. He has stopped going out to public gathering or ceremonies in his family. He says, *“These men are not wise. It is difficult to make them understand. I have stopped going to village chaupals. They should understand that it’s our daughter and we take care of her.”* The daughter confidently says, *“I have learnt new skills and I can work and earn. Girls should not be married early when they can’t do anything. When neighbours or relatives ask me, I tell them, please wait, you will be informed when it happens. One cannot make them understand that child marriage is not good for girls.”*

Through this experience, Sita Devi has become a strong woman. She not only talks about stopping child marriage at work, but also in her neighbourhood and with relatives. Sita Devi visits households of all such young adolescent girls and counsels parents to educate their daughters and not to marry them early.

Role model girls

Exposure to education is a high influencer for a young girl to counter pressure to marry early. When a girl aspires to an alternative role it is most often linked with her desire to for higher studies as well. Role model daughters have been able to speak with their fathers directly or through their mothers to convey their wish to marry at or after the legal age. A Scheduled Caste girl in Tonk district,

¹² According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Naik community belongs to the Scheduled Tribes in Rajasthan.

now 18 years old, described that she referred to the marriage law in successfully delaying her marriage: *"I told my parents that if you get me married early, police will arrest you. Thus, I could avoid marriage for two years."*

Daughters gain courage with the support of NGO interventions or due to the presence of supportive government front line workers (*Anganwadi* workers). A Scheduled Caste girl in Bikaner shares:

// *The Anganwadi madam used to tell us that child marriage causes problems to young girls and then I have seen my friends. After standard fourth or fifth they have left their studies and are facing problems at their in-laws.* **//**

Another Scheduled Caste girl in Tonk was able to stand up to her family as she aspired to marry later. She said:

// *Family members were asking me to marry, but I said no to them. I do not want to marry now. I want to study. I want to work. I want to become a teacher. Father knows this much only that I want to study.* **//**

Role model daughters are those who have been able to win over the trust of their parents by assuring them of their desire for higher education or have sometimes challenged situations of coercion. The trust between parents and daughters enables them to step out of the village boundaries and continue their education. Clearly if a daughter has her parents' trust, she also has supportive parents. A 21 year-old girl from the general caste in Bikaner shares, *"From our cluster no girl used to go to the*

Profiling Role Model Daughters (n=4)

Role model daughters having been exposed to education or livelihood opportunities and have strong voices in their families to articulate their opinions and determine their own destinies. Educated girls have a greater decision making ability to make choices about their lives, in comparison to uneducated girls.

college until very recently. My mother and father were such that they have full faith in me and noted that if I am not involved [with boys], no body will tell me anything. That's why they have sent me so far."

The presence of facility centres such as schools or *Anganwadi* centres also helps girls to gain the courage and skills to negotiate the timing for their marriage. Even small groups of girls from a neighbourhood going to school together, as well as support from NGO workers in the area, help girls pursue higher education. One of the female volunteers with an NGO¹³ in Bikaner suggested to the interviewer:

// *I collect all the girls in my neighbourhood and teach them what I have learnt in the shivir (residential education camp). I inform them about negative results of child marriage and tell them to talk to their parents to delay their marriage.* **//**

3.3 Platforms for change: Role of NGOs, community and media

Efforts to delay age of marriage and motivate girls' education are palpable through NGO initiatives in the study areas. Based on interviews with role models and other key stakeholders, existing positive efforts have been identified in the community that can be further developed to bring about social normative change. In particular it was found that the role of some of the NGOs in building awareness among

¹³ Interview with a female volunteer from Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009

the community is critical. The residential camps set up by Urmul also have a catalytic effect on incentivising girls' education and empowering them in the study areas. The role of media is currently under-utilised but can be considered effective platform for change if it were to enhance its focus on consistent messaging using traditional, oral and visual forms of art and storytelling.

Community awareness and mobilisation

NGOs in the two districts play a major role in disseminating messages about child marriage in communities. As human rights advocates, several NGOs have adopted strategies to target different stakeholders to curb the practice of child marriage. These target groups are parents, young girls and boys, various government personnel, elected representatives, and media people (newspaper, television and radio reporters and commentators). The issue of child marriage is considered significant and it comes up as a discussion in almost all their community based interventions, regardless of the focal area. A senior NGO representative¹⁴ working in Bikaner for over two decades explained:

“ We make it a point to talk of prevention of child marriage in all our community based programmes. We have taken an institutional stand that both marriage and gauna should not happen before the age of 18 years for the girl. Even our staff is asked to leave if they marry before the legal age. We don't attend any child marriage or don't accept such invitations at personal level as well. ”

NGOs have addressed child marriage in innovative ways in the communities they work in. This may be in response to an event or more generally in terms of awareness generation. An NGO representative¹⁵

in Tonk explained how they involved the district administration in playing a role in delaying marriages.

“ In some cases when our organisation got to know of a child marriage that was about to take place, they informed the district government official who sent them a letter ordering the marriage to be stopped. We send this letter to the family, through a third party so that the people do not begin to get bitter against our NGO. However, we then personally contact the family to counsel them against marrying their daughters early. ”

We found that several NGOs have worked to influence the attitudes of individuals and families with whom they have worked. Families have been exposed to different ways of thinking regarding raising their sons and daughters. NGOs like Urmul have been working for more than two decades in Bikaner and have worked towards building the confidence, and self esteem of individuals to think of alternate modes of living in addition to providing them information and knowledge to improve their living conditions.

In all our study villages, women noted the significant work carried out by the NGOs for bringing changes in the mindsets of men in the family so that they allow their daughters to go for higher education. As one of the Scheduled Caste mothers in Bikaner noted, “These people from Urmul keep on visiting us regularly. They call meetings and, talk to our husbands. That's why we are now able to send our daughters to school; earlier this was not the case.”

Urmul Trust organises regular awareness generation meetings with community members, which has

¹⁴ Interview with a senior representative of Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009

¹⁵ Interview with a representative of GVNML, Tonk, August 2009

enabled people to understand and realise the importance of delaying age at marriage for young girls. A Scheduled Caste mother in Tonk expressed:

// *The sister (worker) from GVNML (NGO) has been coming to our village for the past two to three years. She keeps on encouraging us to delay our daughter's marriage. That's why we waited to marry our daughter till she reached 16 years; otherwise, in our caste girls of 12 – 13 years age are married.* //

NGOs work with young girls, boys and their parents directly to make them understand the adverse effects of child marriage. They motivate parents through channels of inter personal communication. An NGO worker¹⁶ in Tonk expressed her efforts as, *"I go to the parents of young girls and ask them to send their girls to school for higher education. I ask them to send their daughters to school in the next village."* Some of the key NGOs in the study districts are specially emphasising girl's education. They have successfully intervened at different levels to promote education through providing tuition, non-formal education, linking with the open school system and residential camp facilities.

Catalysing education for girls: Residential camps

An interesting mechanism for catalysing education has been initiated through residential camps or *shivirs*. These shivirs are run by an NGO named Urmul Jyoti Sansthan¹⁷ in the Nokha Block of Bikaner, with the aim to advance the education of

adolescent girls. The *shivirs* were initiated in 1998 to help adolescent girls complete their education up to the fifth grade, and enable entry in the mainstream education system. Girls who have never been to school or have dropped out before fifth grade are selected for the *shivirs*. Each session runs for a period of seven months, and accommodates about one hundred girls. A small number of *shivirs* are also held for girls who want to study between grade six to eight and nine to ten. Until now about 18 *shivirs* have been run by Urmul Jyoti in Nokha. With same format, Urmul Setu (another offshoot of the Urmul Trust) has also been running *shivirs* successfully in the Lunkaransar Block of Bikaner.

The *shivir* currently being run by Urmul in Nokha is supported by the Ratan Tata Trust and provides education for girls up to the class five. The camp in its current session (2009) has 105 girls enrolled with seven female teachers. A fee of Rs.300 is charged for each girl as a one time contribution by the family. In addition to the lodging and educational classes, the girls are provided with three meals a day.

Caste boundaries are blurred in the *shivir*, as girls from different caste groups stay together. Students in the camp include *Rajput*¹⁸, *Brahmin*¹⁹, *Gujjar*, *Jat*, *Bishnoi*, *Nai*²⁰, *Meghwal*²¹, *Kumhar*, *Saini*²² to *Bhat*²³ and others. Although initially upper caste girls hesitate to mingle with lower caste students, the *shivir* environment facilitates breaking these barriers within the first few weeks of the camps.

During the data collection process, it was found that most of the girls (ages 11 to 16 years) were unmarried and the parents had signed papers stating that they will not get their daughters married during the camp session. Although, a few girls were married off in the midst of the on going camp session they were

¹⁶ Interview with a GVNML worker, Tonk, August 2009

¹⁷ Urmul Jyoti Sansthan started its efforts in 1995 with a major focus on education and has expanded its efforts to include initiatives for creating health awareness and mobilising people to fight against corruption. Urmul Jyoti is an offshoot of Urmul Trust which has been working in Bikaner district of Rajasthan since 1972.

¹⁸ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Rajput community belongs to the general category in Rajasthan.

¹⁹ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Brahmin community belongs to the general category in Rajasthan.

²⁰ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Nai community belongs to the backward classes in Rajasthan.

²¹ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Meghwal community belongs to the Scheduled Castes in Rajasthan.

²² According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Saini community belongs to the backward classes in Rajasthan.

²³ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Bhat community belongs to the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes in Rajasthan.

sent back to the camps to complete the session. Many girls who are waiting for their *gauna* or marriage also join the camp to receive basic education.

At the beginning of each session, field workers from Urmul Jyoti visit the villages and talk to the parents of eligible students in order to motivate them to send their daughters to the *shivir* and invite them to visit the camps. Convincing parents to send their daughters to the *shivir* is easier now that the camps have been running successfully for ten years. At the start and end of each term, girls are given a test to determine their appropriate grade level.

The awareness generation discussions on different social issues at the *shivirs* helps girls broad-

“ *When these girls come to the camp, they are very different. They are too shy to participate in any activity. They are unaware about issues like child marriage, and girl’s education. I mean they do not understand what child marriage really is. They think that getting married early is a part of their tradition and household’s rituals itself. But here when social issues are raised and they are told about the negative consequences of child marriage, they begin to feel that yes if our marriage happens at an early age it is wrong. It is a kind of unfairness against them. Once they begin to feel like this, they gain some faith in this perspective and sometimes also raise a voice in their homes to delay their marriage.*

- *Shivir* teacher, Bikaner **”**

en their horizons. By the end of the session, girls increasingly recognise their status and value in society. The energy created in the *shivirs* empowers girls to raise their voices against child marriage. Married girls in the *shivirs* attempt to delay their *gauna* and fight against child marriage for their younger siblings and friends.

According to the girls at the *shivir*, they prefer the *shivir* education to regular school. One of the girls said, *“There they hit, here they do not hit. There we clear one class in a year, but here we pass five classes in seven months.”* This preference is also due to the high quality of teaching and facilities provided at the *shivirs*. A girl in the Nokha *Shivir* mentioned: *“In school sirs and madams may or may not come, but here they teach well. [In government schools] There are toilets in school but they are not nice. Here it is clean and nice.”*

The *shivir* students during the FGD said that they hoped to find employment for themselves in the future. Many girls in the *shivirs* desire to become teachers. They indicate *shivir* teachers as the role models they would like to follow. One of the girls from the *Jat* community who had been recently elected as sarpanch of *Shivir Balika Panchayat*²⁴ wanted to become the actual sarpanch of her village. She said: *“I want to become a sarpanch so that I can improve the facilities in the village, construct nalas (drains) and roads in the village.”*

Role of the media

The role of mass media is critical for behaviour change, however, the reliance on newspapers and television is insufficient as many rural areas of Rajasthan have very little exposure to these sources. Based on the findings, even when and where media plays a role, the positive messaging around discouraging child marriage seems inadequate. The information about the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is also not well profiled through the media. An NGO worker²⁵ described to us how government officials go to different television channels, radio and newspapers to spread awareness about child

²⁴ *Balika Panchayat* is an elected group of girls in the *shivir* who lead the activities of the maintenance of systems and discipline with help of other students.

²⁵ Interview with a NGO worker from Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009

marriage during the time of *Akha Teej*. Volunteers and workers associated with NGOs and positive role models feel that the mass media should be more active on this issue throughout the year and not just on *Akha Teej*.

There is a general perception that the media should focus more on profiling the positive role models instead of only highlighting the negative cases of child marriage. A senior NGO representative²⁶ in Bikaner shares:

“ In newspapers, child marriage should be discussed throughout the year. Whenever there is any case of child marriage, it gets lot of coverage, but if there is any case of a girl performing well in school or taking action to delay her marriage, then it will either not at all be printed or will be printed in small paragraphs in some corner of inside pages. ”

An adolescent girl in Tonk expressed her disappointment about media reporting and noted:

“ If there are any cases of elopement of girls or some cases of love marriage or rape, newspapers will publish it in a big way. But if there is any case of some girl coming first in her class/school or there is information regarding different training courses – newspapers will be most careless about printing it. Thus parents also get scared with such negative news and stop us from going out for other things, and then get us married off soon. ”

While newspapers and television have high influence in communicating messages, in rural areas they can have a minimal role due to illiteracy and lack of electricity. The wall writings that were observed during the study in the various sites also mostly profile superficial information about the law and about the rights of the girl child. Beyond limitation in content, the problem is also lack of literacy and therefore inability of most people to connect to written messages. Therefore there is need to have supportive messaging through traditional art forms, music, and puppetry.

3.4 Response to state schemes and law in Rajasthan

This section profiles the response within Rajasthan to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), along with the incentive and education based government programmes to deter child marriage.

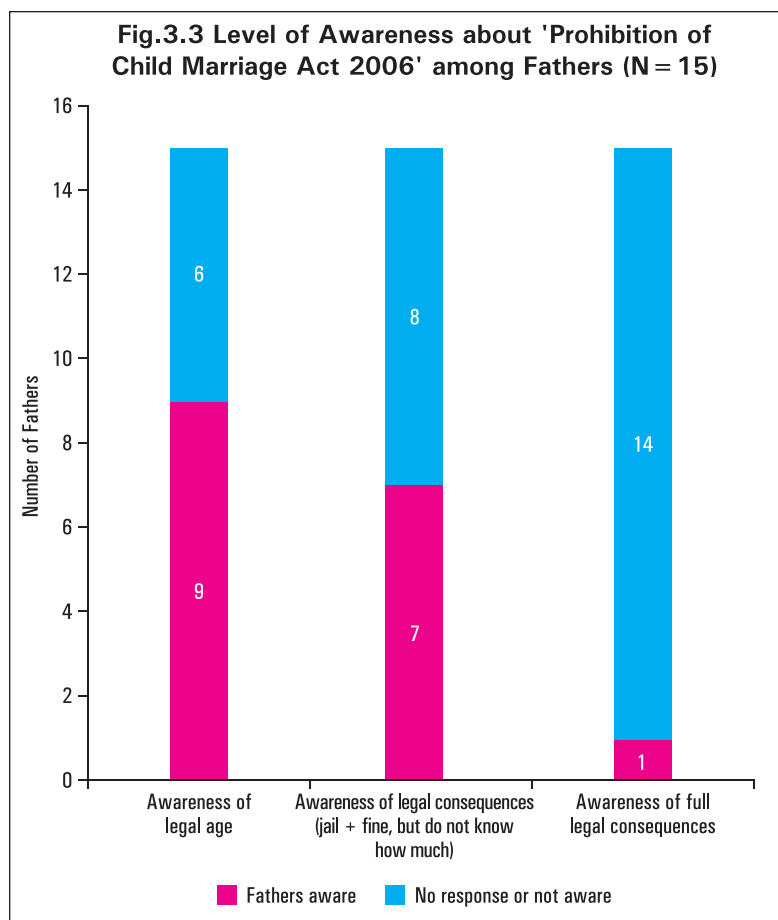
Community awareness of the law and its implementation on the ground

At the community level, knowledge of the Act is mostly restricted to the prescribed legal age for marriage and the fact that child marriage is a punishable offence. However, details related to who can be convicted, and the nature of penalty and punishment, are not well known amongst the

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, prohibits marriage for girls below 18 years and for boys below 21 years of age. It authorises the state governments to ensure proper arrangements and budgetary allocations for its facilitating proper implementation. This Act provides for nullification of the marriage on the request of either party, and allows a separated female the right to maintenance and residence support from her ex-husband and/or in-laws, until she is remarried. Any children born from a child marriage are deemed legitimate. In the case of separation, either party can claim custody of the children, which will be allotted as considered best for the children. The Act sets punitive measures against all those who perform, permit or promote child marriage. The punitive measures entail up to two years rigorous imprisonment or a fine of upto Rs.100,000. Finally, the Act provides for recruitment of a special officer, the Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO), to undertake execution of the Act.

²⁶ Interview with a senior representative of Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009



communities (Fig. 3.3). As noted by a mother in Tonk: "...we don't have any such Act in our village. ...this year we had 18 child marriages".

While fathers are the most critical decision - makers around a girls marriage, their awareness of the legal consequences of child marriage is insufficient. Weak awareness of the law therefore fails to create any fear for fathers to delay age of marriage. Of the 15 fathers, nine were aware of the legal age for marriage; of which only seven were vaguely aware of the kind of punishment prescribed by the law. Only one father out of all 15 respondents was aware of the tenure of imprisonment and amount of fine that has been prescribed in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

There is a certain degree of fear about the law, but because the enforcement is lax, child marriages continue in both districts of the study. A father belong-

ing to the Other Backward Class group in Bikaner explained this by stating that the "Law and traditions are two separate issues. We people forget the law to preserve our traditions. That is why despite knowledge of the law, child marriage is practiced here." Another father from Bikaner explains "people implementing the law are corrupt, even if someone complains, the police will not come to inspect. But in case they do, we will have to spend Rs. 500-1000-2000. That is all."

According to an NGO representative²⁷ in Tonk, to evade legal action parents are avoiding using priests to preside over marriage ceremonies. Any literate man is asked to preside over the marriage and he can recite even the *Hanuman Chalisa*²⁸ for the ceremony to be considered complete.

Though government officials are well aware of the legal age at marriage, they are often unaware of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006. For instance

they do not know the punishment decreed by the law and who all can be convicted. According to a senior NGO representative²⁹ in Bikaner, the District Magistrate, who functions as the CMPO, already has many other responsibilities and thus s/he gives limited attention to the proper implementation of this law.

While on paper the law appears to provide for clear and specific actions in cases of child marriage, government officials at various levels point to the challenges in effective implementation. One of the Child Development Project Officers³⁰ (CDPOs) in Bikaner suggested that though the law exists, it is not being effectively enforced. He noted that even if two arrests were made for the offence of child marriage, as provided by the law, people would begin fearing the law and would refrain from performing child marriages. At the time of *Akha Teej*, the CDPO had formed ten teams comprising of *gram sevaks*

²⁷ Interview with a representative from GVNML, Tonk, August 2009

²⁸ Hanuman Chalisa is a hymn sung in praise of Lord Hanuman, who, ironically, remained a bachelor throughout his life.

²⁹ Interview with a senior representative of Urmul Trust, Bikaner, August 2009

³⁰ Interview with a Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Bikaner, April 2009

(village helpers) and *patwaris* (Block-level PRI officials) to monitor and note any child marriages that might be taking place in their area. He had also ordered them to issue fines. However, none of the ten teams noted a child marriage or issued a fine. The CDPO commented that these workers fear the consequences of confronting the villagers about child marriage. A senior official of the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)³¹, Bikaner also stated that since these actors are a part of the same local community they hesitate in stopping a marriage and ruining the festivities, when all the arrangements have already been made.

The Bikaner CDPO also stated that police officials are bribed, so no punitive action is taken against any incident of child marriage. In case the police come for an inspection, families invite the officials to the marriage feast and the matter is resolved. In contrast, an *Anganwadi* worker from Bikaner talked about incidents when she was successful in stopping a couple of marriages by calling the police in time. In both cases she either sent a written report or personally informed the police. Her identity was kept confidential in those cases. As a result of her complaints, though the marriages were stopped and the police issued fines, no arrests were made. These incidents did serve to create fear in the minds of the other community members and they think twice before arranging for any child marriage.

A senior official of ICDS³², Bikaner, informed that the authorities focus on the prevention of child marriages, but generally do not take any action once the marriage has been performed. At most a fine may be issued but no legal follow up is conducted with the couple or their families. A senior government official³³ in Tonk stated that although the reporting of child marriages is very low, if a report is filed and the guilty families and couple are found by the Station House Officer³⁴, they are taken into custody and the judiciary takes tough action against them.

On the whole there are rare cases that legal action, either fine or custody, does take place underscoring the weak implementation of the law where the prevalence of child marriage is high.

Incentive based interventions

The Rajasthan Government has also launched several incentive based schemes that aim directly or indirectly at delaying the age at marriage for girls. These include the Community Marriage scheme and the *Sahyog* scheme.

Under the Community Marriage scheme the state government grants Rs.5000 to each couple married at the legal age or a total of Rs.100000 for up to twenty weddings being performed together. The amount increases to Rs.10000 if the girl is married after she is 21 years old. This amount is payable to a family for the marriage of up to two daughters. For a group marriage involving more than 20 couples the District Collector has the authority to make a decision. Before registering the marriage and granting this money, the Collector is supposed to check the age certificates of all the couples. Though this scheme has been active for many years now, none of the study respondents had accessed it in Tonk or Bikaner.

The state government initiated *Sahyog* scheme also provides a cash incentive for marrying girls after the legal age. It gives families of backward castes an amount of Rs.5000 if they marry their daughters between 18 and 21 years of age and Rs.10000 if their daughters are married after 21 years of age. This amount is payable to a family for the marriage of up to two daughters only.

A Kumhar mother from Tonk talked about the *Sahyog* scheme in her interview. However, the information she provided differed from the actual provisions and conditions of the scheme indicating partial knowledge about the scheme. This Kumhar

³¹ Interview with Deputy Director, ICDS, Bikaner, April 2009

³² Interview with Deputy Director, ICDS, Bikaner, April 2009

³³ Interview with District Collector, Tonk, April 2009

³⁴ Station House Officer is the senior most official in a Police station.

mother had married her daughter at the age of 11, but her daughter, now aged 15, still lived with her. The mother stated that she would send her daughter to her marital house only after she turned 18 years old, because she would then receive Rs.20000 from the government. This amount is clearly different from the actual provisions of the *Sahyog* scheme described above. The Kumhar mother was also misinformed because she thought the amount could be availed if she conducted the *gauna* after the girl turned 18 years of age while the condition for the payment of the grant is that the marriage be conducted after that age. This suggests that people might be misinformed about the full benefits and conditions of schemes that are intended for them, which is likely to undermine the effectiveness of these schemes in impacting the age at marriage for girls.

An NGO representative³⁵ in Tonk also mentioned that in his experience these incentive based interventions do not effectively delay child marriage in villages. Government officials themselves consume much of the money as bribes in the process of receiving it. Also, the list of families in the below poverty line list (BPL List) is often incomplete or inaccurate. Those who vote for the Sarpanch, get included in these lists even though they may not be truly poor.

Government communication and campaigns

According to UNICEF officials³⁶, the Rajasthan Government's overall communication around child marriage has been focused on public information campaigns targeting districts with a high incidence of child marriage. In the current year, the government is focusing on district level action plans with community groups and frontline workers as the mainstay of communication activities. Since 2005 information and awareness campaigns against child marriage have been introduced by the state government a few weeks before *Akha Teej*. In the past, a great many child marriages took place on that day, but that has changed, perhaps due to the Rajasthan government's campaigns and vigilance

on the day itself. Interviews with representatives of an NGO³⁷ in Tonk revealed that while there has been active campaigning around *Akha Teej* the government's campaign does not target some of the other auspicious days on which child marriages are being performed, for instance the nine day period of *Navratri*.

In 2009 the Government of Rajasthan began its information campaign much in advance of *Akha Teej* and continued it till the month of July. The UNICEF officers in Rajasthan reported that the campaign went on with the aim of keeping the issue visible. Due to the government's actions, there is enhanced motivation among District Magistrates to take action on the issue. For instance, a one day media workshop was facilitated by the District Magistrate in collaboration with NGOs in districts with high reported numbers of child marriages. Before the campaign, a number of stories of positive examples of families that delayed their daughters' marriages were collected and published in the newspapers. The state sponsored information focused on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) with special attention on the punitive aspect of child marriage, and emphasis on 18 years as the legal age for marriage of girls. Messages in the mass media (electronic and printed) also focused on the need to reduce the rate of girls dropping out from educational institutions, as that is considered a proxy indicator for monitoring potential child marriages. As a part of the campaign, a helpline to the District Magistrates' offices was established so as to enable people to report any potential violations directly.

Besides the government's official publicity campaign, *sathins*³⁸ were asked to conduct *jajams*³⁹ or community discussions in some districts, focusing specifically on child marriage. According to the officers of UNICEF (Rajasthan), these *jajams* are useful as they facilitate discussions on an issue that is otherwise not even spoken about in local communities.

UNICEF officials in Rajasthan also informed that the 2009 government campaign around child marriage

³⁵ Interview with a representative from GVNML, Tonk, August 2009

³⁶ Interviews with officials of UNICEF, Jaipur, August 2009

³⁷ Interviews with representatives of GVNML, Tonk, August 2009

³⁸ The post of *Sathins* was introduced by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, under its Women's Development Program. They are government workers who directly work with the community in the villages.

³⁹ These are village meetings called to especially discuss one or more social or development issues. [Research Findings - Rajasthan](#) | 29

provided for more community engagement. *Jajams* were initiated and carried out by the *sathins* in the presence of a few government officials. These are important strategies, which need to be monitored and strengthened.

Education related interventions

Education is a very important component of the government's approach towards empowering girls and delaying age at marriage. The government provides free elementary education up to the eighth grade. The state programme has tried to establish primary schools in each village, or within three kilometres of each village. On the other hand, middle schools are fewer, and they may or may not be in close proximity to individual communities.

Despite the availability of free education at these schools, the drop out rate especially for girls is very high. There is a laxity in studies at these schools and the teachers are quite indifferent. A Naik girl in Bikaner narrated, *"The teacher asks us to learn on our own and then he tests us. If we are unable to answer the teacher hits us."*

A shortage of female teachers is another factor for the rising drop out rates among girls from schools after they attain puberty. The administrators at two government schools in Bikaner suggested that there were fewer female teachers in the schools than the allotted number. As noted by a male teacher at one of the middle schools for girls in Tonk, *"The government wants to give only five teachers. In addition to this, teachers are also involved in other government tasks like polio campaigns and during voting for elections, etc."*

Parents expressed discomfort with sending grown up girls to co-educational schools. A Berwa⁴⁰ woman in Tonk suggested that her sister-in-law discontinued schooling after class eight as she was the only girl left in the class. An added concern for parents is the security of the girl child, especially after she attains puberty, and if the high school is at a distance from the village. Another mother in Tonk stated:

"I wanted my daughter to study after eighth grade as well. But the school is far away and there were no other girls to accompany my daughter. I tried to convince the parents of my daughter's friends but they did not listen. So I did not send my daughter to study further." A Gujjar mother, in, Tonk, stated that there are no public buses in her village and the private buses are too expensive for her to pay for on a daily basis. Poor or non-existent transport to schools is therefore a deterrent in continuing education beyond the primary or middle school for girls.

Besides day schools, the state government is also providing boarding school facilities for girls at the middle school level through its Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) programme. Several of the key informants noted that these boarding schools have been successful in reducing the drop out rate for girls at the middle school level.

The KGBV programme was introduced by the Central Government of India to provide boarding school facilities for grades six to eight, mainly for girls from underprivileged castes. The scheme was launched in 2004 to cover the Educationally Backward Blocks (EBB) in the country (as per the 2001 Census) with low female literacy and higher gender gap in literacy than the national average. A total of 200 KGBV residential schools are currently functioning in Rajasthan, of which five are situated in the Bikaner district and seven in the Tonk district.

The team visited a KGBV school situated in Bikaner, which was started in 2005. The school accommodates about 100 girls who dropped out between classes five and eight. In order to encourage parents to send their daughters to the residential school, a *Bal Mela* is held at the school campus each year. Parents are invited to these *melas* so they can come and see the school, and the boarding facilities available at the school. The school's senior representative noted that once the parents come and see the arrangements at the school, they are satisfied about sending their girls here. Girls are admitted into the school on the basis of an entrance test. The senior

⁴⁰ According to the State Department for Social Justice and Empowerment, the Berwa community belongs to the Scheduled Castes in Rajasthan.

representative at this KGBV said, *“These girls are drop outs so we need to know the level of their education and admit them accordingly. Most of the time, the levels are so poor that we have to first admit girls in a lower class so that they get maximum opportunity to proceed forward.”*

The KGBVs follow the formal education system. In addition to this, girls are given computer lessons for an hour after school. All three grades are given separate lessons/ tuitions after school hours, and a separate teacher has been recruited for this purpose. There are also special three month programmes to train girls in cooking in addition to stitching, knitting, and embroidery. An hour in the evening is also devoted to social issues, where the teachers talk to the children and then question them on the topic of the day. All personal and education related requirements of the girls are provided by the school at no cost.

A Bishnoi girl studying in eighth grade stated that she preferred the residential school to the education provided at the Urmul education camps (*shivir*) she attended earlier. *“The studies here (at the KGBV) are more intensive and much better than the Urmul shivir I came here after completing grade five. Here we have proper syllabus and we are more disciplined. Since we are in grade eight, my teacher also teaches us after school hours in the afternoon.”*

Schools do assist students in stopping child marriages of the girls. In 2008, a school succeeded in directly stopping the marriage of one of their students, studying in class eight. An invitation card was sent to the school to facilitate the girl to leave and attend the wedding of her sister. Since the wedding was taking place on the day of her science exam, the school refused to send her, but her parents took her by force. The school authorities sensed that she might be getting married along with her sister and therefore went to counsel the parents to delay the marriage at least until the girl completed eighth grade, six months later. As a result, the marriage got postponed and the girl is currently studying in grade nine.

The school has had a 100 percent pass rate in the previous year, and one girl from grade eight also made it to the merit list. In the previous academic year there were fifteen girls in grade eight, of which seven or eight girls took admission in secondary schools. It appears that this education model has been successful in facilitating the continued education of many girls, and in delaying the age at marriage for some.

The Rajasthan State Commission for Women

The Rajasthan State Commission for Women is considered the second most powerful women’s commission in India, preceded only by its counterpart in Kerala (Planning Commission of India, 2006). The Commission’s most significant contribution to the cause of women and girls in Rajasthan has been through the ‘*Jan Sunwai*’ or public hearings initiative, supported by UNICEF. These hearings provide women and girls with the platform to voice their grievances before the Commission and seek redress. In addition, these public hearings are utilised to showcase role models and spread a positive message. During UNICEF’s ‘Girl Child’ week in 2006, the Rajasthan State Commission for Women organised a public hearing in Jaipur and Udaipur on ‘*The Struggle to Stay in School*’. About 150 girls enrolled in school, despite challenging circumstances,

The Rajasthan State Commission for Women

The Rajasthan State Commission for Women is an autonomous body with the status of a civil court in the state. The commission was set up by the Rajasthan government in 1998. It has the power to investigate complaints brought before it by women and recommend government action. The Commission is also responsible for making existing legislations and/or enactments for women more effective. In addition, this body is supposed to stop all gender-based discrimination women face in any public services or undertakings. Finally, the Commission must study the social, economic and political status of women and use statistical evidence to promote women’s rights, as well as take other necessary steps for the development and empowerment of women in the state.

Source: Planning Commission. Government of India. 2006. *Rajasthan Development Report*.

participated in this hearing. Each one of those girls shared the problems posed by their family, community and the education system as well as the methods they used to pursue their education still. The experiences of these girls allowed educators and planners attending the meeting to identify the real gaps in the education system and how these could be bridged (Wadhwa and Heydlauff 2005).

As a direct step to address the problem of child marriage, the Rajasthan State Commission for Women along with UNICEF launched a year long 'Child Marriage Abolition Campaign' in 2006. The campaign was launched in Jhunjhunu district, where the rate of under-aged marriages is very high, through local NGOs (Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti, 2006).

Even though the Rajasthan State Commission for Women has been both very active and powerful in the state, we did not find much evidence of its role in addressing the issue of child marriage in our study districts. Still, the Commission is an influential actor that could conduct effective advocacy against child marriage if information about its presence and roles is communicated more consistently to villages in all districts of Rajasthan.

Role of the *panchayati raj* institutions

Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) are elected representatives who represent the government structure at the local levels. They are the smallest bodies promoting government campaigns in addition to monitoring and enforcing laws and policies. Unfortunately in both districts, there is little evidence of PRIs fulfilling this role especially curbing child marriages in their area. PRIs have recently been given the authority to register marriages in their villages. This system's objective is to keep a check on any occurrence of child marriage and promote the marriage of girls after 18 years of age.

NGO representatives explained that that these civil society representatives are caught in a dilemma, as

taking any action against child marriages can cause them to lose political support in their communities. Since they are resident members of the local communities, they do not dare to oppose practices that are supported by a large majority of their community, neighbours and other supporters. No party or political leader wilfully and publicly endorses the issue of delayed age of marriage for girls because of the fear of losing voters' support.

NGO workers in Tonk and Bikaner said that village heads often act as protectors of families who contract child marriages for their daughters. The local leaders are given the responsibility of saving the honour of the family and village by not allowing the police to enter the village or take any action against such families. In one of the villages in Tonk district, a NGO worker⁴¹ expresses it in this way:

// *In villages the sarpanch does not say anything against child marriage. If a family is organising a child marriage, they would simply go to the sarpanch, give their pagdi (a turban which is a symbol of patriarchy and male headship) – an indicator of honour) and ask them – now you please take care. In such a situation the sarpanch either does not allow the police to enter the village or does not allow them to take action against the family. Sarpanch attends the marriage and makes sure that everything goes well.* //

⁴¹ Interview with worker of Shiv Shiksha Samiti, Tonk, April 2009

It appears that only a very strong, concerted effort from higher levels of government can bring about changes in the local PRI motivation, so that they might play a positive role in combating child marriage. A discussion with the UNICEF officials⁴² in Rajasthan highlighted that the Rajasthan government is strongly committed to addressing the issue of child marriage, and has initiated action to address the issue through incentive based interventions, communication campaigns, education related interventions and the implementation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006).

Conclusion

The findings in Rajasthan demonstrate that there are significant hurdles for girls, families and communities to combat child marriage and support alternatives for girls. Within this environment though, change has started, as evidenced by a number of role models who break with social norms and fight to delay child marriage for themselves and their families. A multitude of NGO interventions and government programmes are active in both districts, offering promise of social change.

⁴² Interview with officials of UNICEF, Jaipur, August 2009

4. Research Findings - Bihar

4.1 Social norms and practices

This section brings out the findings of the study in Bihar on gender and social norms and practices that are associated with child marriage. In particular the factors that determine what is considered an appropriate age of marriage for a girl and its relationship with the amount and practice of dowry is explained. The study findings underscore that some notions of appropriate gender roles and age at marriage are changing, providing clues to interventions that can be designed to bring about change in the lives of girls. In particular, these factors are referred to in the later sections to understand the role models who have deviated from the norms and the structures they have used in order to delay the age of marriage of their daughters.

Gender norms and expectations

Like in Rajasthan, there are clear gender roles and expectations for girls and boys in Bihar. The data from both Nawada and Madhepura districts illustrates that young girls are required to do household chores, including cooking, washing, cleaning, and looking after the cattle's feed and shed. Many of the girls from poorer families engage in agricultural wage labour for land owning families. Their role also includes care giving for younger siblings in their own homes. For school going girls these chores leave very limited time for studying since these routine tasks form a major part of a girl's daily activities.

Relative to the case of young girls, boys are more likely to study in schools. However, there is pressure even on boys, especially from poorer families, to work for wages which can lead them to drop out of school. Migration is common amongst boys and parents choose to marry them off before they migrate in order to avert inter caste marriages later. This can lead to early age marriages amongst boys as well.

There are class/caste specific patterns regarding gender roles and expectations. Among the Scheduled Castes, young girls are often not sent to school at all. One of the major reasons for this is the non-ownership of land among the Scheduled Castes and limited possibilities of income generation. Thus, many of the Scheduled Caste girls in the study areas go for wage labour at farms or brick kilns along with their parents. These girls share dual responsibilities of household chores and income generation. A Scheduled Caste father in Madhepura district explained:

// They go for (wage) labour along with us. We take them with us. One of them reaps and the other cleans it. If I go alone then I earn one ser [one ser = 933.1 grams] and if she comes along then two. //

Among the Scheduled Tribes as well, unmarried girls help their parents with wage labour and very few girls attend school. Scheduled Tribe boys are generally sent to school and do not go for wage labour until married. Among the *Bhumihar* (general caste) and *Yadavs* (other backward class) who are farmers and own most of the land in these rural areas, the dynamics are different. In these communities girls go to school, however, they mostly drop out after the class five or eight, either due to the physical distance to the school and security concerns of the parents or even lack of peer groups. In these communities, the girls are supposed to look after household chores and do agricultural work in their own fields in addition to their schoolwork. Girls among general castes and other backward classes are usually not viewed as a source of income generation for the households. Boys from other

backward classes and general castes, after completing their education or dropping out of school, generally engage in agricultural activities within the village or migrate outside their villages for better livelihood opportunities.

While girls are expected to contribute to the natal family by doing household chores and also go out to work (in poor families) it is a social expectation that they have to be married and sent to their marital homes. A girl is considered “*paraya dhan*” or property that belongs to the marital family and not the natal family. Until the time of her marriage, a girl stays in her natal family; the parents believe that their role is to bring her up and prepare her, so that she is ready to be sent to her ‘own’ home later. A daughter is not supposed to contribute to her natal family, but to her marital family’s well being. The understanding of most families is that the natal family has to bear the expenses of bringing her up and for her dowry. These factors have an effect on the families’ willingness to invest in their daughters when the benefits of such investment will be reaped by another family.

The gender-based expectations of girls’ roles in the society affects the priorities placed on their education. Relative to boys, motives for educating girls do not include expectations of future financial returns. If girls are sent to school it is only up to a certain grade and after that families tend to rationalise investment only on boys, and send them to high school, as they are expected to become breadwinners. As mentioned by a father belonging to the Other Backward Class group in Nawada:

// *Even if the girl does not drop out from school after the fifth or eighth class, they will not get a job, and the dowry will not decrease, so only one percent of girls are sent to school in their village.* **//**

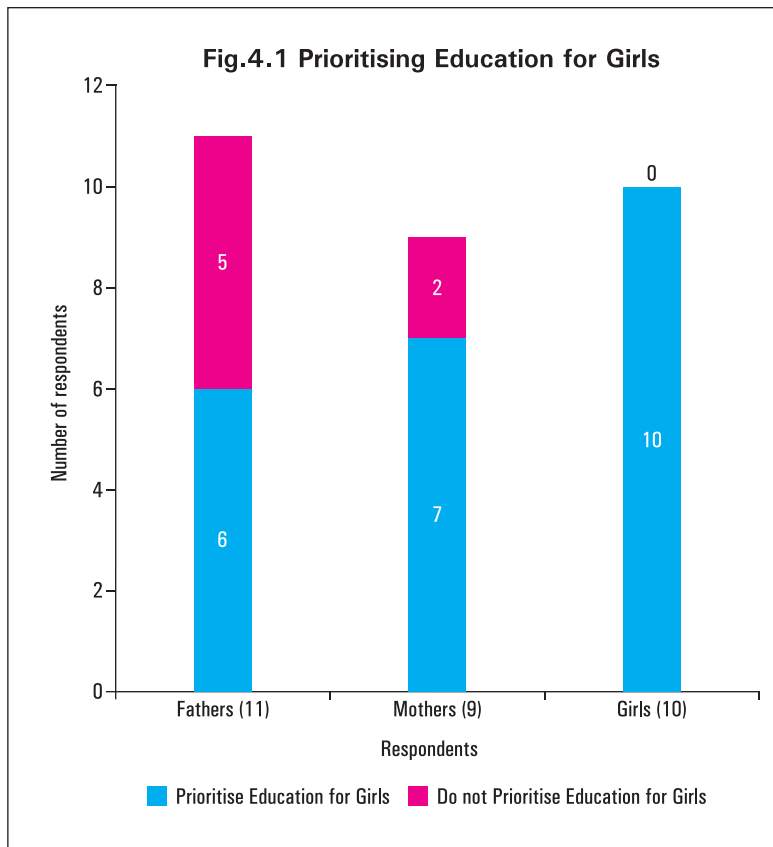
Once the education of the girl is terminated, there is no evident reason to delay her marriage. This is the time that parents commence the process of planning her marriage, which initially includes a search for the groom. Some mothers consider girls’ education as a significant part of their skills development, which enables them to successfully take on their future roles as wives and mothers.

A major constraint to educating a daughter is the lack of economic resources. Often the girl has to drop out of school to support her parents by engaging in wage labour. A Scheduled Caste mother in Nawada spoke about the trade-off:

// *We don’t even have enough to eat, then how can we send them to school? If she goes for work along with us then she can earn at least 20 kilograms of rice in a week and then we can eat.* **//**

On the other hand, in some communities, the marriage market is creating a demand for educated girls so that they can get jobs and earn to help support their marital families. A mother from the General caste in Nawada noted:

// *In-laws also demand educated girls... even the in-laws want her to continue her studies after marriage... it is no more expected that a girl should just be a daughter-in-law of a household... she is expected to go out and get a job. The standard of living and the consequent expenditures are so high nowadays that one needs to earn for being able to sustain all of it.* **//**



During the interviews in the study communities, it was found that despite poor access to quality education facilities for girls, all respondents perceive the value of girls' education. Six out of 11 fathers were motivated to educate their daughters as long as there were schools nearby. Though there is a concern for their security, seven out of nine mothers preferred their daughters to get educated and be able to fend for themselves. Interestingly, despite social pressures, all ten girls interviewed in the study wanted to either be educated or continue their education (Fig. 4.1).

During the interviews with men, women and community members, it came out that physical development (perceived to be visible to all the community members in the village) is also a factor for deciding a girls' marriage-ability. Physical maturity not only affects a girl's mobility and schooling but also the age of her marriage. If the girl looks well-developed physically she could get married early.

One father belonging to the Other Backward Class in Nawada said:

“ If her health is good, she is strong and sturdy then there is a possibility of her getting married one to two years early. ”

In all castes other than Scheduled Tribes, the onset of puberty is a criterion for initiating the process of marriage, as concerns around the girl's chastity begin to trouble parents this point onwards. It is the mothers who communicate the onset of puberty to the girl's father and then the fathers actively begin the search for a groom. One mother belonging to the Other Backward Class in Nawada explained:

“ When the girl starts menstruating, which is generally around 13 to 14 years, we start working towards her marriage. It takes one to two years to fix the wedding and so by that time the girl is 16 or 17 years old. ”

Concerns about chastity and security seriously affect the decisions around child marriage. Young girls are exposed to a hostile work environment quite early, where they can face risks of dishonour and insecurity. Additionally, mothers share that they are so busy that they cannot look after their girls. One Scheduled Caste mother in Nawada explained, “When she grows up a bit, everyone's attention is on her, which is why we get them married early, so that something wrong does not happen and dishonour the family.” In the Scheduled Castes, mothers

are concerned about girls being sexually assaulted by boys while they work outside or when the girls go to work in the brick kiln or on others' agricultural land. There are concerns that mothers articulate for their daughters around sexual involvement with adolescent boys and pregnancy. For example, a Scheduled Caste mother in Nawada talked about several incidents where girls conceived outside the wedlock.

// *Yes, a number of times unmarried girls get pregnant. That is why we marry our daughters at the age of 12... we say go to your own home and do whatever you want to do there.* **//**

An unmarried girl whose marriage has been delayed raises questions and rumours in the community. For example, people gossip that the delay may be due to the father's inability to perform his filial duties of arranging a suitable marriage or that the girl has a handicap or a shortcoming. Fathers from a Scheduled Caste community explain that it is necessary to marry young girls early to maintain their respect and honour within the community. People from the community will even offer monetary support to a family to ensure that a daughter is married at an early age. A Scheduled Caste father in Madhepura explains:

// *If the girl gets older, then the people from the community ask why we are not getting our daughters married. So we reply that we do not have enough money for the marriage, so they tell us that we will help you, will give you Rs. 5000, but you should get her married.* **//**

An unmarried girl is stigmatised in a variety of ways, such as defaming her by spreading rumours about her already being married. The findings suggest a strong expectation among neighbours and relatives about the need for child marriage in the Scheduled Caste communities.

Amongst Scheduled Tribes, there is much greater freedom of communication and sexual relationships among young people, so protecting a girl's chastity is not a matter of great concern. Generally, young people choose their life partners themselves. Nonetheless, child marriage is still an issue; young people enter into sexual relations at an early age, and begin cohabiting before the girl reaches 18 years of age. Because of these associations, parents prefer to marry their daughters early even amongst the tribal groups.

Practices sustaining child marriage

The practice of dowry was identified, by community members and other key stakeholders, as one of the main reasons for families marrying their daughters early. In both districts there was evidence that there is a strong correlation between age at marriage and the amount of dowry that the girl's family has to give to the groom's family. The dowry amount increases with the girl's age as typically the boy is older and therefore more likely to have a potential of earning a higher income. Dowry is also referred to as *Tilak* in Bihar. *Tilak* is generally cash that a bride's family gives to the groom's family before marriage. The cash amount ranges from Rs.10000 to a lakh or two (general caste and other backward class communities that are generally better off). *Tilak* is often accompanied by gifts like a bicycle, motorcycle, watch, radio, music players and televisions. At the time of the *gauna*, household items like kitchen utensils or furniture are also given.

Often people are forced to take loans because of the high dowry demands and marriage costs for older girls, which are especially burdensome for poor families. A father belonging to the Other Backward

Class community in Nawada district noted that it is more likely that a rich person can delay the age of marriage of his daughter, but for a poor person this more difficult.

Dowry is governed by the broader patriarchal structures and gender norms in Bihar; an educated girl would perforce require an educated groom. A Scheduled Caste father in Madhepura said, *"If we want to marry our daughters later then even if we sell off everything we will not be able to bear the cost of the wedding."* In addition, as mentioned above, the girl's education leads to no perceived immediate economic returns for her natal family. In a group discussion with fathers from the Other Backward Class community in Madhepura, one father commented:

// If we educate girls then we will need educated grooms or else there would be no match and consequently no wedding. That is why we think that we will not educate our daughters so that the marriage expense is less. //

In Bihar, *dham* marriages are a regular practice. A *dham* is a place of religious significance where a temple is built and, in Bihar, many people from various socio-economic backgrounds go to these temples for the marriages of their children, because marriages at the *dham* entail less expenditure. Families from lower socio-economic backgrounds consider it an economical option. Some people from higher socio-economic situations consider *dham* marriages unacceptable in their community, though it is an appropriate option for lower caste and lower class families.

A field worker⁴³ in Nawada explains that *dham* marriages are a recent phenomenon, *"I have been noticing from the past four or five years that there are fewer marriages at home. Rather they get together*

and conduct the marriage in the dham and then together, they give a feast to the people from the village. They have approximately Rs.10-15,000 as expenditures."

In addition to these motives, informants noted that *dham* marriages provide anonymity, as often a number of couples get married simultaneously, which provides security for underage brides. Interestingly, a senior government official⁴⁴ in Nawada noted that strict vigilance and counselling of *pandits* has been instituted in the *dhams*, to combat child marriages occurring here.

Most critical barriers

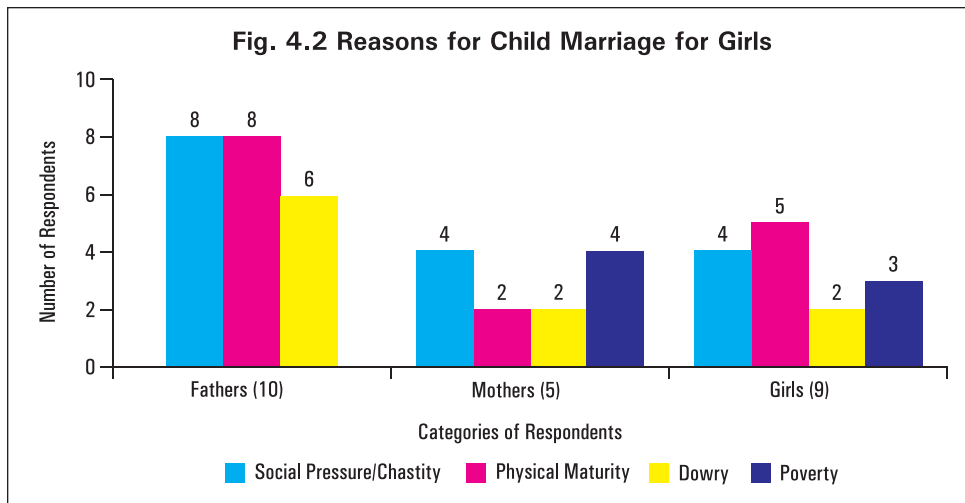
Based on the qualitative interviews with fathers, mothers, and girls, there are various factors perceived as the most critical barriers to delaying age at marriage in Bihar. Of all the reasons articulated above, the most critical barriers identified are chastity, dowry, physical maturity and poverty. However the reasons do vary by respondent category.

Based on the qualitative interviews with fathers, 8 out of the ten fathers interviewed felt that physical maturity of their daughters and chastity were the key barriers to delaying their daughter's age of marriage. To avoid any social stigma and ensure their family's social standing, these fathers prefer to marry off their daughters early. As shown in Fig. 4.2, 6 out of ten fathers, perceive that dowry is the key barrier to delaying age at marriage.

In contrast to fathers, mothers consider chastity and poverty as the strongest reasons to marry off their daughters early. Adolescent girls perceive that physical maturity is the main reason that girls are married off early in Bihar. The next important barrier identified by them is the social pressure and concerns around chastity. Interestingly social pressure around chastity is an important barrier identified by all the three types of respondents. While this data is qualitative and small in numbers it does speak to the importance of some of the social norms around chastity and physical maturity that affect a girl's age of marriage.

⁴³ Interview with a field worker from Daudnagar Organisation for Rural Development, (DORD), Nawada, August 2009

⁴⁴ Interview with the District Magistrate, Nawada, April 2009



tion, and articulate that they have full faith in their daughters and support their aspirations. One father has allowed his girl to go to a college seven kilometres away to complete her matriculation. The role model fathers tend to disregard social pressures for child marriage or for keeping their daughters at home. A *Bhumihar* father in Nawada shared:

4.2 Profiling positive role model parents

Despite the various factors that perpetuate child marriage, there are cases where some families are deviating from the traditional patterns of child marriage of their daughters. These are the role models who are motivated by different factors, but their actions are often rooted in their support of the girl's aspirations. Along with their own individual attitudes, there are additional structural factors that facilitate success for these families in delaying marriage and fulfil their daughter's aspirations of continuing the education.

Role model fathers

Since fathers are usually the key decision makers for the marriage of their daughters, therefore their initiatives and motivations in finding alternatives to child marriage are of central importance. In the study, role model fathers were found to be more among *Bhumihar* families as they had land holdings and supplementary incomes such as shops and jobs as school teachers. All fathers have now started recognising the importance of girl's educa-

No one dares to tease my daughter on her way to college, knowing that I completely defend my daughter's wishes.

Case Study: Role Model Father

Shivlal (name changed) is a teacher in a private school in a village in Nawada in Bihar. Both his son and daughter have received schooling at least till the tenth grade. While his older son has enrolled into college, his daughter has completed her graduation and is working as a social worker in a local organisation. Although Shivlal wanted her to get a government job, he has never stopped his daughter from pursuing her desire to work as a social worker. While he would like to get his daughter married now, he states that the dowry requested for a suitable groom and family will be high, and he is particular about the kind of boy and family he would get his daughter married to. In the meantime, if his daughter would like to pursue higher education, Shivlal is willing to support her and delay a search for a groom for a year or two. Shivlal trusts his daughter a lot and notes that everyone in the area knows that if someone would try to misbehave with his daughter, he would not spare the person. As far as community's comments are concerned, he noted that while 5-10 years ago people used to talk badly about older girls going for higher studies; it has become common now and people also realise the need for educating girls and making them independent. He suggests that educated families understand the value of educating girls and that they should be sent to a 'nice' home only after that, even though the dowry demanded for older girls is higher. Shivlal is going to wait till his daughter completes her education and becomes self reliant.

Profiling Role Model Fathers (N=4)

Identified role model fathers have completed at least tenth grade level of education and either work with the government or are exposed to the influence of NGO personnel who encourage education for girls and/or tend to have landholding and higher socio-economic status.

Improved economic situations have, in some cases, supported and allowed the delays in the age of marriage of daughters.

Role model mothers

There are families where both parents are educated, recognise the value of education, and ensure that all their children go to school. These are considered as role model families; a role model mother from a Scheduled Tribe community in Madhepura noted, *“Even girls now want to study and then find a job and then get married. So we have taken loan to sponsor her education.”* Similar opinions were echoed by a *Bhumihar* mother in Nawada whose daughter was studying at the bachelor level. Her family also values girls’ education and has well educated family members. Role model mothers in Bihar are mostly illiterate and do not act as decision makers within the households, but can be an important voice in influencing their daughters’ marriage since they share information about their daughter’s age with the family.

In Nawada, a Scheduled Caste mother could not afford to send her children to school until her son migrated to Delhi and found employment in a computer shop there, because of which the economic status of the family greatly improved, allowing for the younger daughter’s education. Instrumental in her decision was the son’s aspiration for his sister to be educated before being married off.

4.3 Platforms for change: Role of the NGOs and community responses

This section highlights the efforts emerging from NGOs and community based groups in Bihar to engender positive changes in people’s attitudes towards girls’ education and marriage. The interventions highlighted below are indicative of the high level of innovation and commitment from local NGOs and CBOs working to delay marriage for girls. In Madhepura, there is direct intervention to stop child marriages through a network of structures such as Village Vigilance Committees (VVC) and the Meena Manch girls’ groups. Nawada has many

self help groups (SHGs), which do not directly stop child marriages but contribute to awareness generation among communities on the issue. In Madhepura, after the floods in August 2008, an increased

Case Study: Role Model Mothers

Usha (name changed) is a happy mother today because her second daughter, Hemanti (name changed) going to city for higher education. She could not allow her elder daughter to continue her education beyond first year of graduation, as they got a good match for her and as a poor household they were compelled to agree to her marriage. After completion of her education, Hemanti wants to get into medical or banking sector. Usha, a mother of two daughters and two sons is determined to support Hemanti’s wishes of higher education and enable her to get a job of her choice. Usha is ready to take an education loan to support her daughter’s higher education. Usha and her husband, who is a teacher, feel proud that they can support their daughter for her education. They know even if they do not find a good match of their choice for their daughter, Hemanti will be able to fend for herself. She would be able to take care of her family and children in the future. Usha says, *“we are not a family which can distribute money to our children we can only provide them education”*. Hemanti has even walked up to seven kilometres a day to reach her school. She has lots of hope of getting a good job since she has support from her parents.

Kaushalya (name changed) is a 45 year old woman belonging to the *Bhumihar* community in the Nawada district. She lives in a joint family which includes her in-laws, husband, children (two daughters and two sons), her brother-in-law and his family. Kaushalya’s husband has a cement business and is a graduate. Kaushalya herself has studied till the tenth grade. While Kaushalya’s elder daughter is 17 years old and has taken admission in a college in Hisua to pursue her B.A., her younger daughter is 14 years old and is currently in high school. Kaushalya and her husband jointly decided that their daughters will not get married until they complete their studies. As a mother of two young girls, she does face pressure from the community but is of the opinion that *“if we start bothering ourselves with what others say and think then my daughters will probably not even be able to pursue studies.”* Kaushalya is supportive of her elder daughter’s aspiration of doing a job after graduation and is not worried if her daughter moves to Patna and stays alone in a hostel or a house all by herself. She is not restrictive about her daughters’ mobility – *“if women folk stay back in their homes how will they ever get to know about things elsewhere?”* As any mother Kaushalya is worried that eventually she has to get her daughters married and has to save up money in order to pay the *“Tilak”*. However, under no circumstances, she will pressurise her daughter into a marriage against her will.

number of local NGOs working in the area on disaster relief have expanded the scope of their work to include the issue of child marriage. The NGOs profiled here will be critical actors in the context of designing a larger comprehensive intervention to combat child marriage.

Community awareness and mobilisation

Role of religious forums

There has been increasing interest among development practitioners to understand the role of religious leaders to bring about social change. In Bihar, the Inter-Religious Priest Forum⁴⁵ (IRPF) is a community-based group of religious leaders working on trafficking and child marriage. IRPF gives regular sermons and interacts with the community to create awareness on the issue of child marriage. A member of the forum⁴⁶, explained that since Muslims obey the *Imam* of the Jama Masjid, they contact him for support to stop child marriages. As a strategy, he informs the people that according to the Imam there is no mention of child marriage in the Koran.

Another IRPF member⁴⁷ shared that IRPF leaders periodically meet the *Pradhan, purohits and pandits* in different communities and ask them to inform the IRPF leaders whenever they anticipate any child marriage in the area. He also stated that people do understand when they talk to them about the child marriage law. He added that if leaders from all religions convey the same message against child marriage it will definitely influence people's mindset and contribute towards delaying age at marriage for girls.

Village vigilance committee

The Village Vigilance Committee (VVC) formed under a multiagency partnership programme, Sambal, consists of influential and respected people within

Inter-Religious Priest Forum: Success Story

An IRPF *pandit* shared an incident of successful prevention of child marriage that took place in 2008. One of his local agents informed him that a child marriage was about to take place in a temple. Three religious leaders of the IRPF went in a group to the temple and threatened the *pandits* who were presiding over the marriage ceremony with legal action. They also explained to the *pandits* that marrying minor girls was against the Hindu religion. To satisfy the girl's family, the *pandit* explained to the girl's family that "If you marry her after she turns 18; we will collect money and give it to you for her marriage". Finally, they requested the family to sign a document that they would not marry either their son or daughter before the legal age. This approach has succeeded in stopping four child marriages.

each intervention village. These people strengthen the credibility of the programme as well as the committee. VVCs have addressed the issue of child marriage and stopped several child marriages by targeting all members of the family. An NGO representative⁴⁸ in Madhepura shared that they seek assistance from the VVC members for spreading messages and prevention of child marriage successfully in the area.

Structures like VVC shows potential to engender community behaviour and attitudes towards the girl child and stop child marriages. These structures are currently dependent on support from outside led programmes like the Sambal programme which might be tenure based; however, they need long term presence in their communities' to bring about any sustained change. As shared by a UNICEF consultant⁴⁹ these structures need to be connected with district officers working for child protection to

Village Vigilance Committee: Success Story

In July 2009, Sheena (name changed) a social worker with a CSWR, Madhepura received information that a thirteen year old girl, was to be married within a month. Sheena along with an Ex-SAMBAL animator visited the family and tried to convince them to stop the marriage. They presented information about the ill effects of child marriage, but the family became furious and refused to listen to the argument. After that the Sheena took the support of the VVC active in that village. The VVC members spoke to the girl's parents and convinced them to postpone the marriage.

⁴⁵ This forum has been formed by an NGO called ATSEC – Action against trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and women in Bihar.

⁴⁶ Interview with a *maulvi* from IRPF, Patna, August 2009

⁴⁷ Interview with a *pandit* from IRPF, Patna, August 2009

⁴⁸ Interview with a representative from Centre of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation (CSWR), August 2009

⁴⁹ Interview with a UNICEF district consultant, Madhepura, August 2009

ensure sustainability. These officers can provide the back up support even in case of withdrawal of programmes like the Sambal programme.

Awareness generation activities with girls

It is essential for the girls themselves to understand and raise voice for the delay of their own marriages. Nari Gunjan⁵⁰ in its community outreach activities provides girls with elementary education, vocational training and life skills in its intervention villages. They organise the *Kishori Manch* to bring together girls from different villages and hold discussions with them on different social issues, including child marriage. This helps girls to understand the cause and consequences of these issues and think of steps for their own improvement. After the interaction at the *Kishori Manch* the girls hold similar discussions with other girls in their village and try to form a peer group to make all girls conscious about various social issues and take actions.

Another effort to mobilise girls is the *Meena* campaign that began in 2001-2002 to promote girl's education. The symbol of the *Meena Manch* campaign is the character "*Meena*," an adolescent girl, on whom a series of inspirational stories have been based. These stories aim to motivate girls for higher education and to raise awareness about issues affecting young girls. Each middle school in Bihar is supposed to have small groups of 20 girls with a "*Meena*" as their leader who is selected by the group. The group also called *Meena Manch*, aims to hold regular meetings to discuss education and other issues and also aims to motivate girls in the village to continue schooling. Teachers facilitate these meetings, discussions and activities. By 2008, approximately 14,000 *Meena Manches* had been formed throughout Bihar.

One of the major successes of *Meena Manch* is the re-enrolment of girls who had dropped out of

Meena Manch: Success Story

In July, 2009 a group of *Meena Manch* school girls in one of the villages in Madhepura became aware of marriage plans for an adolescent girl in their community. They went as a group to the family and presented their argument that the girl was too young for marriage and gave reasons as to why she should continue her schooling. The family was unmoved. The girls then contacted the community facilitator of the Sambal program. This facilitator also tried to convince the family to stop the marriage plans, but her efforts at persuasion failed as well, so she contacted the VVC of the Sambal program. They took the VVC with them to discuss the matter with the family. The VVC delegation pointed out that the laws had become stricter about under age marriages, and that education was very important for girls. The family was convinced, and called off the marriage plans.

school. The *Meena Manch* girls have actively spread information and highlighted the issues surrounding child marriage in their communities. As evidenced by the success stories profiled here, their work has made a tangible difference in the lives of the girls in their communities and prevented child marriages. *Meena Manch* girls alone are unlikely to be able to convince families to give up their marriage plans, but can play key roles in mobilising local action by contacting influential adult members of the community or the village vigilance committee (VVC).

Enabling access to education: Residential hostels for girls

Residential hostels for girls are a place where they are away from any household or social pressures of getting married early and devote their full time and energies in education. The hostels provide safe and secure residence facilities to girls to complete their higher education. Along similar lines an NGO Nari Gunjan runs a residential hostel for girls in Patna city. The hostel called 'Purna'⁵¹ is within the premises of a Government Secondary School. Nari Gunjan provides education, vocational training, healthcare, and life skills for girls and women while they reside in this hostel to continue their education and learn different livelihood skills. The hostel is a fairly old and dilapidated building, however, with a number of rooms where girls are provided supportive education classes. Nari Gunjan works with the *Musahars*, which is an extremely marginalised and poverty stricken community. These girls are first generation learners from their community.

⁵⁰ Nari Gunjan is an NGO in Patna run by Padamshree award winner Sr. Sudha Varghese, who has been working with the Musahar community since 1988.

⁵¹ Nari Gunjan runs the hostel – Purna in Laal Kothi area of Danapur Block in Patna

Structures like residential hostels provide alternate means to girls to continue their education and fulfil their aspirations. The long term association with the community has led to trust amongst families to send their daughters to this hostel. In addition the services are free therefore economic constraints also do not pose an obstacle.

An NGO representative⁵² in Patna shares that the residential hostel approach has really worked with parents and daughters.

// We conduct meetings with the parents and convince them. Once the girls are here in the hostel there is less pressure for marriage. And so they can at least complete Matric (tenth standard). Sometimes the girls too feel that they have grown up and so they should get married. There have been some cases too – two girls went back for the vacation and then never came back. //

households have very low awareness about it. Of the 11 fathers of young girls (aged 12 to 18 years), more than half (7) responded affirmatively that they were aware of the legal age for marriage of girls in India. As shown in Fig. 4.3, only two of these seven fathers knew about the provision of being jailed or fine, but none were aware of exact durations or amount and other provisions of the act.

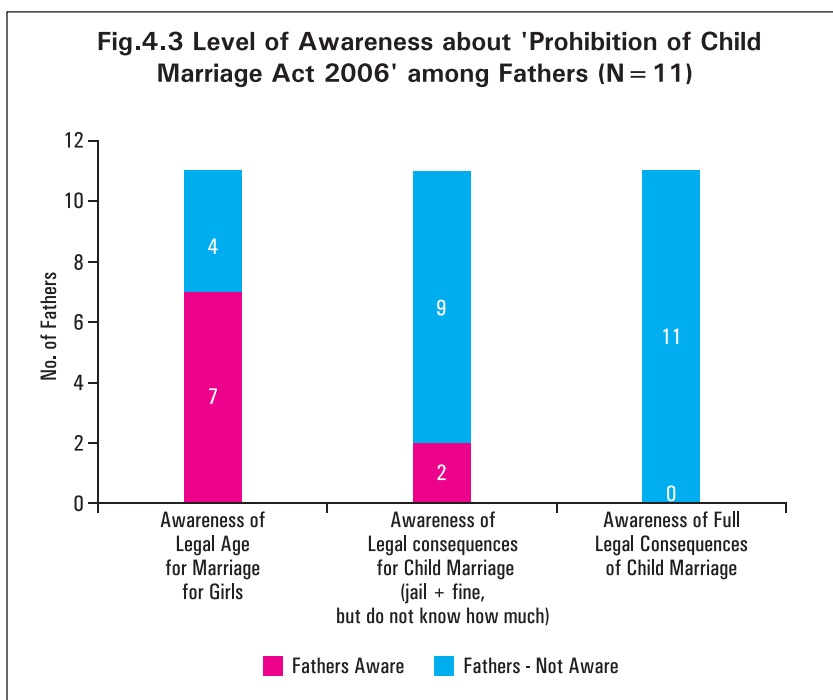
In both districts there was a general lack of awareness around the provisions and penalties of the law. While most study participants know the legal age of marriage and that there is a law against child marriage, the intricacies of how it is enforced are not widely understood. An NGO worker⁵³ in Madhepura suggested that “as high as 80 percent of people know about the law but there is not much fear of about its enforcement.” This could be because of inadequate information about the specifics of the law, poor enforcement, and lack of any known infractions. In a group discussion in Nawada, a Muslim father said, “Only if we have full information on the government schemes (the law) will there be any pressure of being handcuffed. If they don’t know about it so how will they be afraid? There is no one who imparts information to us.”

4.4 Response to state schemes and law in Bihar

This Section profiles the response within Bihar to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, along with the incentive and education based government programmes to deter child marriage.

Community awareness of the law and its implementation on the ground

Since independence, India has had a law against child marriage, which got amended twice and recently in 2006 with stricter punitive action. However, the decision-makers of the



⁵² Interview with a representative from Nari Gunjan in Patna, August 2009

⁵³ Interview with a field worker from CSWR, Madhepura, August 2009

An important reason for poor enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act is the lack of any system of reporting to the authorities about violations. According to key informants, no one informs the police about the marriage of an under-aged girl. Further, the general perception through focus group discussions with fathers in Madhepura is that even if the police learn about a violation, they ignore it.

A focus group discussion with Scheduled Caste women in Madhepura highlighted the possibility of bribing the police, if one had enough money. One of the focus group discussion participants stated:

// *For how many days does one have to stay in jail? The person who has money he can be out in a day.* **//**

Some respondents expressed that the normative fears are more compelling than the legal penalties. One Muslim mother in Madhepura noted:

// *If police takes us to jail for not abiding by the law, we will tell the police official to give us in writing that he will get our daughters married by paying the requisite dowry after they have completed the age of 18 years.* **//**

Weighing community pressures against remote threats from the government through enforcing the law, an OBC father in Madhepura noted, “If we do not marry her by the age of 18 then people will taunt us and say that she has grown up and then will the government get her married? The government doesn’t even give anything.”

The District Magistrate and CMPOs bear the responsibility of enforcing the law and taking action to stop

child marriages. A government official⁵⁴ in Nawada noted that the lack of information about a potential violations as one of the most critical challenges to ensuring law enforcement. In addition, if a District Magistrate or CMPO arrives at the site after a child marriage has just been completed, it is difficult to void the marriage. He noted:

// *My (phone) number is in every village, but these marriages take place too secretly. When we get the information we send the district CMPO immediately, or the women of the women’s helpline. Once the marriage has been performed one faces a dilemma. According to the law we can void the marriage but families that conduct child marriages often belong to socially and economically downtrodden groups. If you try to stop them by law then many people go against you, it will take the shape of a mass revolt.* **//**

Besides the difficulty of stopping or voiding the marriage, law enforcement authorities are not adequately trained and mobilised. A government official⁵⁵ in Patna reports:

// *In Bihar the sub-divisional officer (SDO) has been made the Child Marriage Protection Officer and is not sensitised. In addition, Anganwadi workers are not fully convinced of the importance of their work.* **//**

⁵⁴ Interview with District Magistrate, Nawada, April 2009

⁵⁵ Interview with the Women Development Corporation (WDC) project officer, Patna, April 2009

A government official⁵⁶ in Nawada suggested that the *panchayat* officials should be made accountable for enforcing the law and the associated legal impunity. Additionally he also spoke about the need for more awareness generation about child marriage through educating girls and sensitising women in the communities.

Overall there is a sense that the law cannot be effectively enforced as there are members in the community who safeguard norms around child marriage and have no incentive to report the infractions. There is limited knowledge of the law and how it works including the nature of punitive action prescribed. Finally, inadequate sensitisation and training of law implementers makes implementation of the law more difficult.

Incentive based interventions

The Bihar state government has a number of schemes to support girl's empowerment. As part of the Cash Incentive Scheme for Marriage, the government implements the *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Vivah Yojna*, a state run programme in Bihar which was initiated in 2007. The objectives of the scheme are to:

1. Provide financial assistance to poor people at the time of daughter's marriage
2. Encourage marriage registration
3. Stop child marriage
4. Reduce domestic violence

The scheme provides financial assistance of Rs.5000 at the time of a daughter's marriage only if she is of legal age. The scheme can be availed only by BPL families or those with an annual income of less than Rs.60000.

Findings from both Nawada and Madhepura suggest that many people are not aware of the scheme. Most community respondents complain that the government officials or the *panchayat* members do not inform people about the schemes. The scheme is in its initial stages and the application forms are not always available to the local communities. On an enquiry about the payment process, the team learnt that it generally takes six months for the money to

reach recipient parent's bank account, despite the Block Welfare Officer's claim that the money is released a week after the submission of the application. This delay in receiving the incentive money could be a deterrent for participating in this scheme.

There is a general misunderstanding among parents regarding the Cash Incentive Scheme for Marriage. Very few fathers knew about the purpose of the scheme. In several instances, fathers and the mothers expressed that they thought the government gives out money for all married girls, not only for marriages after the girl turns 18 years old. The mothers knew that they received money for a daughters' marriage, but did not know its source, where to get the forms, or the follow up process.

An additional problem with the Cash Incentive Scheme for Marriage lies with the middlemen. Two fathers who had availed the scheme had to take loans at high rates of interest from local moneylenders to bribe the middleman, so that they could fill out the form and receive the cash incentive. As a result of these bribes, they received only half of the actual money. Even without these problems, parents explain that Rs.5000 is a meagre amount to offset the social and dowry cost of delaying marriage.

To improve the scheme, a field worker⁵⁷ from Nawada suggested that the *mukhiya*, a *Panchayati Raj* Institution member elected by the people and responsible for the government schemes in the village, could play an important role in the effective implementation of the scheme. The *mukhiya* signs all forms as the guarantor for the girls' age. To rectify misunderstandings about the incentive programme in the community, a counsellor from an NGO⁵⁸ in Madhepura suggested an information campaign:

“ There are no Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on it within villages. If the government makes proper IEC materials on all its yojnas it will be very helpful for all villagers as well as us. ”

⁵⁶ Interview with District Magistrate, Nawada, April 2009

⁵⁷ Interview with a field worker from Daudnagar Organisation for Rural Development (DORD), Nawada, August 2009

⁵⁸ Interview with a project counsellor of Sambal Programme from CSWR, Madhepura, August 2009

In 2008, a scheme called *Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana* was initiated jointly by the Social Welfare Department of the state, WDC, and UTI Asset Management Company. The scheme entails an investment of Rs.2000 by the state government for the first two girls of BPL families born on or after November 22, 2007. By their 18th birthday, an amount of approximately Rs.18000 is to be paid to the girl child.

The objective of the scheme is to ensure a girl's security and safety and discourage sex selective abortion. The scheme is not directly linked to the age at marriage, but during an interview, a senior state government official⁵⁹, suggested that they were planning to link this scheme with the marital status of the girl at the time of maturity of the cash investment. She noted that:

// *We have programmes, Kanya Suraksha Yojana, launched very recently there is a clause which doesn't state the age of marriage and we have sent a note and strictly say that she should be unmarried at time of claiming benefits of schemes.* //

In one of the interview with a government official⁶⁰ in Nawada district, it was noted that the *Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana* would be more effective than the marriage law if the clause about marriage after the age of 18 years is introduced. It was stated that recipients will be *"getting the economic benefit and they will be delaying [the marriage] because the law will not be as effective as the economic benefit."* Moreover, she noted that if the marriage registration and age certification are added as important documents necessary for enrolling in the programme, then the *Kanya Suraksha Yojna* could be effective in delaying age at marriage.

Education related interventions

Another set of government schemes are those that attempt to address child marriage through an emphasis on education. The Bihar Education Project Council (BEPC) is an instrument for improving Bihar's elementary education system. A number of national and state level education programmes are administered by the BEPC. These include *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL), *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Yojna* (KGBV), District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE). Out of these programmes, the NPEGEL and the KGBV have been specifically designed for girls' education.

The NPEGEL is another programme launched for the Educationally Backward Blocks (EEBs). EEBs are those blocks in which rural female literacy is below the national average (46.1 %) and the gender gap is more serious than the national average. The NPEGEL seeks to develop facilities to provide access to education, facilitate retention of girls to ensure greater participation of women and girls in the field of education, improve the quality of education through

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) mandates that the program for universal elementary education be implemented in all states by 2010. In addition, the program intends to bridge the gender gap in education and reduce the social and regional inequities in accessing education. One of the most important components of the program is community ownership. The scheme calls for local communities to form Village Education Committees (VECs) through which the villagers should take up the responsibility for the development, progress and administration of the schools in their villages. One expectation of the scheme is to make local community people aware of their educational requirements and use the funds sanctioned by the government effectively. The VEC also is responsible for ensuring the enrolment of children of all castes in the age group of six to fourteen years. The VEC is also intended to improve the performance of teachers, by ensuring their presence at the schools. The SSA legislation also provides for the building of schools in communities where none exist. The declared standard is that there should be one primary school for every community of 300 or more inhabitants.

⁵⁹ Interview with the Women Development Corporation (WDC) project officer, Patna, April 2009

⁶⁰ Interview with a Child Development Project Officer (CDPO), Nawada, April 2009

various interventions, and stress on the relevance and quality of girls' education for their empowerment.

Another programme that provides education to girls in rural areas is the KGBV, mandated by the central government for areas with low female literacy and high levels of gender inequality. *Mahila Samakhya* administers the programme. In Bihar, KGBV maintains 356 hostels for girls aged 10 to 14 years from Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Other Backward Class communities. One of the State Gender Coordinators of the Bihar Education Programme stated that⁶¹:

“ In the KGBVs many girls enrol in bridge courses and have resisted their marriage with the support of peer groups. There have been cases of girls running away from home to the KGBV for shelter when they came to know about their marriage being fixed. ”

In addition to the above mentioned programmes, there are other schemes implemented by the state government. These aim to provide facilities to girls so as to help their retention in school. The *Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojna* aims to reduce gender disparity in education and create social change through the empowerment of women. Under this scheme, any girl who is studying in the sixth to eighth class is entitled to a free school uniform. In the Nawada district there was jubilation of all those children who had just received school uniforms during the time of the field visit. A key informant⁶² explained that the children were extremely excited to go to school with their new uniforms.

Later a key informant⁶³ from Nawada said that the free school uniforms were only for the Scheduled Caste community and the *Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojna* focuses on only this sector of the

population. However, some of the men from the Other Backward Class community in Madhepura explained that the benefits of the government schemes especially the *Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojna* often do not reach the ones who are in dire need of it, and noted:

“ What happens is that the people at the top take their share from it and it does not reach the ones for whom it is meant to be. ”

Unlike programmes targeting Scheduled Caste students, *Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojna* is available to all girls who are studying in the ninth and tenth grades in government schools. It is designed mainly to deal with the problem of girl drop outs by providing them bicycles to support their commute to school.

From the observations in the field, it emerged that many parents showed interest in the schemes and saw it as useful for the education of their girls. A mother from the Scheduled Caste community in Madhepura saw some potential in the schemes, but complained about the very small target group of beneficiaries, as it is only meant for students in the ninth and tenth grades.

“ They (her daughters) do not get the benefits presently. It is only given in classes nine and ten. When they will get enrolled in the ninth class, then she will get it. ”

As evidenced by these schemes, there is significant consideration for girl's education at the government level, though implementation does not currently reach all girls in need as the terms vary by different poverty and caste groups as well as people are not

⁶¹ Discussion during Stakeholder Consultation Meeting, Patna, February 2009

⁶² Interview with a field worker from Daudnagar Organisation for Rural Development, (DORD), Nawada, August 2009

⁶³ Interview with a school teacher, Madhepura, August 2009

so well informed about the various benefits entailed within the schemes. There are also allusions to leakages from the schemes that call for tighter enforcement and targeting.

Education based challenges

While these schemes seek to improve girls' access to education, school infrastructure often provides a significant hurdle for students in the study areas in both districts. The research team witnessed a number of dilapidated, makeshift school buildings and in some cases, no buildings at all. In the villages visited in Madhepura, the middle school buildings are in a dilapidated state with broken walls and structures. There are four rooms in a decrepit building for the senior classes while the primary classes sit outside due to lack of any classrooms. Meals for the students are prepared in a small shed next to the building. Local politics and corruption also obstruct any improvement in school facilities. During an interaction with the teachers in a school in Madhepura district they explained:

“ Local landlords expect a cut on any government building in the village. The money for the school building has already been released but nobody takes the initiative to build the school. ”

Another challenge to girl's education is the distance between homes and schools, as the distance from a middle school and the cost of transportation is the main deterrent for girls' completing their matriculation. A FGD with fathers belonging to Other Backward Class community in Madhepura, stressed that the girls must walk long distances to go to the school, despite tempos and buses being available because regular use of these means of transportation would be too expensive.

“ Generally they walk to the school. Sometimes when we do have money, then she can take a tempo, otherwise she has to walk up and down. For studying through the sixth standard they have to walk four kilometres to Vrindavan and for seventh standard, they have to walk eight kilometres to Murliganj. ”

Even if girls are able to get to school, classes are led by uninspiring teachers. In a village of Madhepura district, one man demonstrated how a teacher sits in class stretched out with his feet on the table. During a group discussion, a woman of the same village informed the team that children who had completed grade five could not even write their own names.

Scheduled Caste fathers in Nawada informed us that while teachers do come regularly to school, they leave after marking attendance of students. A group of fathers from the Other Backward Class communities in Madhepura commented that while teaching does happen, in government schools studies are not intensive. He added that there are only 13 teachers allotted for schools with up to 1100 students. As evidenced by the research, school resources, facilities, and teachers are currently insufficient to provide high quality public education to students. There seems little evidence that the government schemes developed for catalysing education are reaching the study areas that we conducted research in.

Conclusion

The findings in Bihar demonstrate that there are significant hurdles for girls, families and communities to combat child marriage and support alternatives for girls. These include norms around dowry, appropriate age of marriage, lack of educational infrastructure and incentives, and poverty. However,

within this environment change is beginning to be seen as is evidenced by a number of role models who deviate from social norms and fight to delay child marriage for themselves and their families. A multitude of NGO interventions and government programming are active in both districts, offering early promise of social change. Alternative structures to schools such as hostels and use of village

level groups to stop marriage are also emerging as successful strategies that need more support and enhancement.

The next chapter is a synthesis of the research findings in Rajasthan and Bihar, noting the similarities between the two states and the most salient points for an intervention strategy.

5. Synthesis and Conclusions from Both Sites

This chapter synthesises the findings from the study sites in Bihar and Rajasthan, for the purpose of developing an intervention plan that is described in Chapter 6. The findings are discussed within three areas that are not mutually exclusive: unpacking social norms, structural issues sustaining child marriage and agents of change. It is the interaction of the three areas that is both illuminating as research findings and important in terms of identifying points of intervention.

5.1 Unpacking Social Norms

5.1.1 Gender roles and expectations condition priorities for girls' education

In all four districts, gender norms and expectations about girls' value and roles affect whether they go to school at all or beyond grade five. Irrespective of the caste or poverty status, households tend to utilise girls' labour for domestic chores and also as a way to prepare them for responsibilities they would undertake in their marital homes. Many families with limited financial resources believe that it is economically prudent to invest in education for their sons instead of daughters. This is because sons are expected to find employment and provide financial resources to their natal homes, while girls and their earning potential (if any) will possibly benefit their marital homes. Boys do tend to study till a later grade than girls, if their households have the economic means. However, in poorer households boys also tend to drop out of school and migrate to cities for work.

5.1.2 Concerns about chastity and stigma motivate child marriage

At all study districts, it was emphasised that a girl's chastity is to be protected. Parents fear that girls will be sexually assaulted or engage in pre-marital sex; therefore, parents promote child marriage to protect a girl's chastity. Parents also fear their

daughters' elopement, which can bring tremendous stigma to both the family and the girl. In addition to the concerns about their daughters' chastity, there is a widespread belief in communities that if a girl's marriage is not arranged when she is an adolescent, there must be something wrong with her, or that she is not an eligible match for good grooms. Parents fear that the eligible, desirable grooms will be married by the time their daughter reaches the legal age of marriage.

5.1.3 Dowry and other marriage associated costs induce child marriage

Dowry is a critical determinant of child marriage in Bihar. The dowry amount increases with an increase in the girl's age and therefore parents prefer to marry their girls early out of financial considerations. In Rajasthan however, dowry is not a deciding factor for the girl's age at marriage. The practice of dowry did not emerge as consistent across caste groups in both districts studied in Rajasthan. In Rajasthan the cost of the wedding ceremonies is a factor that influences social practices that lead to child marriage. For example, girls can be married off while quite young at the same time as their older siblings in a common wedding ceremony; or in other instances can be married off early in exchange for a bride for their older brothers/cousins.

5.2 Structural issues sustaining child marriage

5.2.1 Physical distance to schools influences girls' school dropout

The government provides school facilities and free education through class five in most villages. Students who continue their education in the middle school and above must travel further distances to reach schools in larger villages. The travel to these schools involves costs of transportation and raises concerns about the safety of young girls, particularly around puberty.

For all girls enrolled in grade nine and above in Bihar, there is a government run scheme that provides cycles for commuting to school. There is evidence from the community respondents that this scheme has benefitted many girls to continue their schooling. Our data also suggests that others parents, who had not benefitted from this scheme, would support their girls' continued education if they had access to cycles. In Rajasthan, we found less evidence of the cycle programme at work and parents' suggestions focused more on the need for low cost or free public transportation as a method of getting girls to school.

5.2.2 Government schools have inadequate facilities and teaching standards

A fundamental similarity between the states is the lack of quality, accessible public education. This can be attributed, in part, to insufficient coverage of middle and high school facilities. School buildings are often dilapidated and in some communities, buildings are sometimes non-existent and classes are conducted outdoors. Students must also deal with dirty toilets (or a lack of toilets altogether) and insufficient classroom resources, including desks, chairs, and blackboards.

The other major weakness of some of the government run schools is the lack of motivation among teachers. Respondents in both states report high teacher absenteeism and indifferent and uninspiring teaching methods. Teachers often resort to corporal punishment to discipline the students. The study data in Rajasthan and Bihar also shows that girls would be more motivated to continue schooling if there were female teachers in schools. The government lacks an adequate number of female teachers to allot them in desired numbers to each school. In Bihar, however, the lack of female teachers has potentially been addressed through recent recruitment efforts, although the impact of this initiative is yet to be seen.

5.2.3 Vocational training programmes are rare in the study sites

The researchers did not find evidence of government run vocational programmes in all four study

districts. In Bihar, many parents prefer vocational training over formal education, because it provides practical job skills, while formal education does not seem to directly lead to increased employment opportunities. In Rajasthan, Urmul and KGBVs provide vocational training classes and run *shivirs* that focus on vocational training, yet girls find it difficult to employ the skills they learn, because of the lack of capital to realise these skills into income earning activities.

5.2.4 Lack of awareness and enforcement of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)

Awareness about the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act amended in 1978 is more widespread than the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) amongst the people and field level government officials at the selected districts. While people may know the legal age for marriage, the details around who can be convicted, the prescribed punishment, and the process for voiding a child marriage are less known.

Enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) is weak in all districts visited. This is because the District Magistrate/District Collector depends on information from *Anganwadi* workers, *gram sevak*, *mukhiya*, PRI members and other government field level officials. These people are themselves members of the local communities and, therefore, are hesitant to report against their neighbours in the local area. In addition, as members of the community, many of these community based government workers find it difficult to deviate from the social norms that support child marriage. In both the states the police play a limited role in enforcement, since few officers investigate child marriages, even if they are reported. Also, corruption is reported to be prevalent amongst the police in both states and if parents bribe the police, no action is taken against a child marriage.

5.2.5 Government schemes to discourage child marriages are generally insufficient

There are state run cash incentive schemes in both Bihar and Rajasthan, which seek to address child marriage directly or indirectly. The Rajasthan

government has a programme to facilitate and ease the economic burden of group marriages for up to 20 couples by offering Rs.5000 to each couple. The programme requires that the bride and groom are both of legal age, with appropriate documents to prove their age. The state government also runs a Sahyog scheme, which offers OBC families an amount of Rs.5000 if they marry their daughter after the age of 18 years and Rs.10000 if the daughter is over 21 years of age. This money is offered to families up to a limit of two daughters only.

The Bihar government has a *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Vivah Yojna*, which offers Rs.5000 to BPL families for the marriage of their daughter after turning 18 years of age. Through the *Mukhya Mantri Kanya Suraksha Yojna*, the state government invests Rs.2000 as a deposit with the Unit Trust of India Bank for up to two daughters of BPL families. This amount accumulates to Rs.20000 by the time the girl turns 18 years old and is only payable to the family if she remains unmarried until that age.

These cash incentive schemes have not worked well at either study site. Much of the money is consumed by corrupt government officials at different levels and by the time the funds reach the families, it is a considerably smaller amount than what was promised. Many of these schemes are availed by Below Poverty Line and Other Backward Class families only. *Mukhiyas* often prepare incorrect lists of Below Poverty Line families and include those who have promised votes to them. In addition, at the Bihar study districts, the *mukhiya* may even allow under age girls to use these schemes for his personal financial gain.

5.2.6 Influence of migration as a structural change on social practices is high

In both Bihar and Rajasthan increasingly young men migrate to urban areas for employment and educational opportunities. Sons who have migrated bring back new ideas through their city exposure and often support girls' advanced education in their families. The diffusion of ideas that they bring are also

supported through messages from media, television, radio, movies, that penetrate more deeply into rural areas now than in the past, influencing community beliefs and attitudes. A family's resulting increased economic status from their son's remittances can also influence a delay in a daughter's marriage.

5.3 Agents of Change

5.3.1 Role models deviate from the norms around child marriage and girls' education

Role models who deviate from the general expectations of child marriage were found in all four districts. These included fathers, mothers and girls. The reason they choose to deviate from these norms is because of their desire to support a girl's aspirations, their intrinsic value for a girl's education and the understanding that this is for her well being. Their community's response to them is sometimes critical or neutral, depending on their social position in the village. However, role model parents clearly articulate their resolve to educate their daughters and take complete responsibility of their daughters' actions and future as a way to combat social pressure. Role model daughters are often voice their aspirations and show determination to pursue studies. These girls mostly rely on external supportive structures to fulfil their aspirations.

5.3.2 Inclination and alternative models to catalyse girls' education

Encouragingly, there is a budding desire among parents to educate their daughters. In both Bihar and Rajasthan, parents who value girls' education mainly do so to enable their daughters to have a better life for themselves. In addition, in Bihar, a girl's education is additionally valued, as it increases a girl's eligibility for a quality husband. Grooms and their families have recently started demanding brides who have been educated through grade ten or twelve. This is because they are desirous of having a bride with earning potential in government jobs, such as teachers, *anganwadi* workers, auxiliary nurse midwives, and ASHA positions, which are only available to those who have completed their secondary education.

Alternative models for promoting girls' education exist in the study areas at both states and these have been successful because they provide security and financial support to girls, allowing them to continue their education. In Rajasthan, these alternatives include NGO led *shivirs* or education camps and government run residential schools. In Bihar, in addition to the residence for girls run by an NGO there are also the government run residential schools. These alternative education systems provide promise for expanding girls' access to quality education.

5.3.3 NGOs carry out valuable programming to combat child marriage

NGOs that have been working with the community for a long time and are well accepted have significant

leverage to change long standing traditions. These groups include *Nari Gunjan* in Bihar and Urmul Trust in Rajasthan. To change norms surrounding the deeply held practice of child marriage, veteran actors in the community like these NGOs have the best chance of communicating effective messages and generating a critical mass. In addition to these organisations, there is another set of NGOs that have recently begun work in the study sites in Rajasthan and Bihar. These groups, such as GVNML in Rajasthan and CSWR in Bihar, began working with the communities on village level development and flood response programming, respectively; however, these groups have now begun programmes on child marriage, along with their other activities.

6. Recommendations for an Integrated Intervention

The research findings on the perceptions and status of child marriage in Rajasthan and Bihar provide ample evidence of a severe problem and support a clear mandate for an integrated intervention strategy to prevent this practice. An effective strategy will target individuals at the community level; NGOs and groups operating at the district level; and government officials at the institutional level.

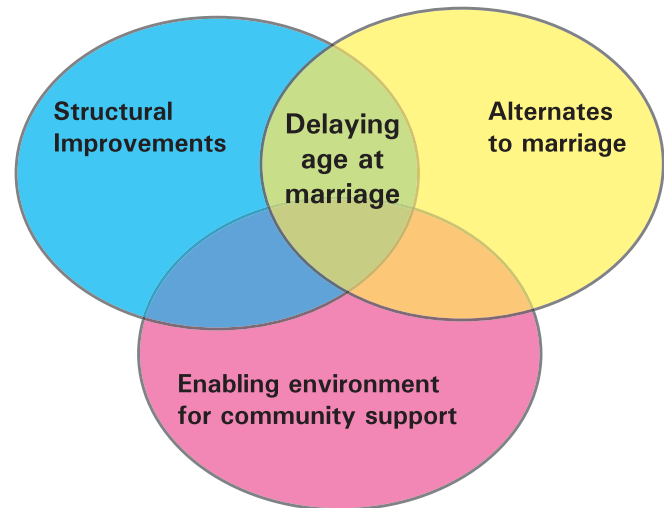
The study indicates the need for an integrated approach so that the process of changing social norms is supported through the availability of alternative opportunities for girls, the creation of an enabling environment, and structural improvements (Fig 6.1). Integrating efforts will help enforce and sustain momentum for shifting the deeply entrenched norms and practices regarding child marriage.

This chapter outlines the intervention strategy proposed to prevent child marriages at the selected study sites in Rajasthan and Bihar, delineating first, the need to recognise education as a core strategy to provide girls with alternatives. Second, awareness and enforcement capacity of the laws surrounding child marriage must increase, along with solving many of the problems inherent in the related government schemes. Third, the research findings point to several promising initiatives already in place that require support and scaling up to increase their capacity. Fourth, the findings underscore the importance of creating positive messages with different forms of advocacy, profiling positive role models, and creating an enabling environment that empowers girls. Finally, the findings highlight the need for developing a media strategy. This integrated approach is given below with suggestions of appropriate implementing partners.

6.1 Increasing access to high quality education for girls

Increasing girls' access to and motivation for schooling and higher education is a key intervention

Fig.6.1



strategy for delaying age at marriage in both Rajasthan and Bihar. This section suggests methods for strengthening government and non-government programmes to facilitate girls' access to education.

Government schools must be greatly improved

The findings in Bihar and Rajasthan demonstrate that government schools are seriously deficient in providing quality education to students. Some remedies offered by the government and NGOs provide patchwork level support for the educational advancement of a minority of children, but these cannot be the entire solution. To provide accessible, high quality education, the deficiencies of government run schools must be addressed. The data points to a dire need for strong government initiatives to achieve the extensive improvements to the school structures and addressing the lack of teachers, especially female teachers and low performance standards.

Many villages do not have primary school buildings, let alone middle and secondary schools. Functional school buildings need to be built in communities lacking the facilities, at least at the primary level.

Many other communities have dilapidated school facilities, lacking blackboards, adequate seating, toilets, and other necessary features. Addressing these deficiencies in basic structural facilities should have a high priority for direct governmental action.

The respondents in both states made frequent mention of absentee teachers, lack of sufficient numbers of teachers given large class sizes, and the indifference of teachers towards quality performance of their duties. The state governments must address these problems, given the central importance of education in improving the welfare of their populations.

To address teacher attendance and performance, monitoring programmes that provide both punitive measures and incentives should be considered. Capacity building programmes that provide teacher training and support could also be implemented by the government to address performance.

Going beyond grade five

In both states, most young girls are sent to school through grade five when primary schools are available close to the home. A major challenge is to ensure that girls can continue beyond the fifth year of

during a girl's commute to school are a primary motivation for prematurely terminating her education.

To combat this issue, the *shivirs* found in *Bikaner*, offer promise. The Urmul *shivirs* are designed to encourage former school drop outs to come back into the school system and to give them education sufficient for re-enrolment in regular classrooms. Camps at two levels, grade five and grade eight to ten are intended to facilitate catching up and re-entry into regular schools. This is not a substitute for improving government schools, but an initiative to enhance government schools' utilisation and facilitate girls' going to school beyond grade five.

To address the security concerns, girls could be sent to distant schools in groups that are secure in numbers. NGOs could sensitise religious schools, including *madrasas* or *ashramshalas* to share the importance of delaying marriage with students and teachers and to share the idea of sending girls to school in groups.

The possibility of distance education programmes should also be explored for girls who cannot leave their home to attend school, because of security concerns, parents' wishes, or time constraints.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

The Act, signed by the President of India on August 26th 2009, describes the provision of free and compulsory education for children in the age group of 6-14 in India. The Act makes it obligatory for *"the appropriate government to provide free elementary education in a neighbourhood school and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group."* Elementary education is defined as education from first to eighth standard. It specifies duties and responsibilities of appropriate governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education. Further, the Act creates norms for appropriate pupil-teacher ratios, learning equipment, library, play material, school buildings and infrastructure, working days, and teacher working hours. It provides for hiring *"appropriately trained"* teachers and prohibits teacher's use of physical punishment or mental harassment. Screening procedures for children's admission, capitation fees, and

Source: The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. The *Gazette of India*, 27 August 2009, New Delhi.

private tuition fees are not recognised. The Act also provides for children not admitted to any school beyond age of six or who could not complete his /her elementary education, by providing admission in a class appropriate to his/her age.

This Act asks local authorities to monitor admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by every child residing in their jurisdiction. The local *panchayat* are called to keep records of admission, continuation, and completion of elementary education of all children over six years old in their area, in addition to monitoring to assure quality education.

The Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act (2005) will monitor the effective implementation of the Act and recommend measures as and when required. The state governments are directed to appoint state commissions so people can redress grievances.

Residential schools and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) model

The government bodies that support the residential schools and KGBVs should scale up and strengthen these interventions, as they show signs of positive influence in both Bihar and Rajasthan. In both states there are a considerable number of hostels for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Class girls. The mandate from the central government has been that these hostels should be in areas of very low literacy and greater gender inequalities, however; policymakers should strongly consider expanding these facilities to other areas and districts.

Both the residential camps and residential schools are designed to overcome the barriers of distance. In those cases where schools beyond grade five are at a considerable distance from girls' homes, parents will not allow their daughters to undertake daily travel to the schools because of costs, and concerns about the girls' safety. The KGBV model has a number of advantages as they eliminate the cost and security concerns associated with commuting and also separate girls from their homes, eliminating the burden of daily household chores, which interfere with their focus on schooling.

Transportation issues

Transportation to schools, especially middle and secondary schools located at some distance from most villages requires additional innovative interventions. The various cycle schemes, sponsored by the government, are one such attempt that the government should consider expanding to be available for all castes and communities. When girls are provided with cycles, small groups can travel together, and the thought of girls travelling a few extra kilometres beyond the village limits becomes more acceptable for parents.

The government should explore various transportation alternatives that will differ in relation to geographic and social realities in various community contexts. In some middle school areas with sufficient population concentrations, school buses may

be feasible. Another possibility is offering monetary support to families to subsidise the costs of auto rickshaws or tempos. Such efforts in local communities will require structural support from NGOs or local governmental bodies, including *panchayat* committees.

Scholarships and other financial incentives

Programmes for improved access to education should expand the availability of monetary support for girls of low income families. Some programmes already exist, but the coverage is inadequate or fails to reach the neediest families. Many of these programmes only cover the costs of uniforms and books. Performance and attendance based incentives for girls should be explored, especially at the primary school level, which are not presently included.

Develop vocational training and other specialised schooling

Promotion of girls' schooling should include attention to special vocational and livelihood training directed at increasing girls' income earning opportunities. Income earning activities increase girls' empowerment and well being in marital households. Training in vocational skills can also motivate delaying marriage. Some of the mothers interviewed spoke of lost opportunities for learning useful skills, and some girls who wished to delay their marriages spoke of their preference for vocational training, rather than continuing in the regular school programmes.

The residential education camps in Rajasthan have, in some cases, included vocational training and this approach can be an effective means for teaching valuable skills. Intervention programmes should also seek to ensure that opportunities are developed for effective utilisation of the newly acquired skills. This should include creating opportunities for girls to purchase the raw material needed for their new vocations, perhaps through micro loans. Interventions should also seek to establish these girls in their vocations especially those that need a complementary market for their goods or services to sustain their enterprise.

Strengthen communications between schools, students and the families

The *Bal Melas* at residential schools in Rajasthan are an important demonstration of ways to communicate with parents, including the parents who need more persuasion to send their daughters to the residential schools. NGOs and government agencies should devise additional communication channels for increasing the information sharing between schools and the communities and families they are serving.

Monthly parent-teacher meetings are a possible mechanism for developing those communications channels. This will foster parent's engagement in their daughters' education and encourage familial support for her continued attendance.

Monitoring education related developments in communities

Groups like the VEC should be trained and encouraged to work actively on education related issues, particularly enrolment of girls and monitoring their retention in the schools. They should relate to the *Meena Manch* units, and work with them on issues of girls' education, in addition to their monitoring of other school related matters.

These groups can keep track of the major events in the village and take action when they encounter incidences of child marriage. However, it is important to note that since these groups operate within villages, they require support from outside actors, especially from enforcement agencies. There has to be a close collaboration between the micro and macro level groups and structures. One such way could be through regular visits by the CDPO.

6.2 Strengthen awareness and enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)

While the programmes for strengthening educational opportunities can provide attractive alternatives to marriage for girls, awareness and enforcement

of the law must be strengthened simultaneously to discourage child marriage practices. Much of this will require clear guidelines for the implementation of punitive actions associated with the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act.

The research clearly demonstrates that the enforcement of marriage laws is practically non-existent in all areas, even though there is general awareness among the communities and governmental personnel that marriage before the age of 18 years is illegal. In some cases it appears that police action against child marriage has spread awareness and may have led some families to postpone child marriage plans, but such action by the police has been extremely rare.

To sensitise government enforcement agencies

To create awareness of the depth of the child marriage problem and sensitise government officers to contribute to solutions, training camps and workshops need to be organised on their behalf. The focus of such trainings should be on providing detailed information about the scope of the law, lines of authority, and the various actors operating on this issue at the state, district, and local levels to develop clear guidelines for prevention. Some of the main actors for inclusion in such trainings include the police, other law enforcement agents, Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), and Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), and government personnel at lower levels of authority.

The National Police Academy (Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh), police academies in States should train all police officers on the importance of enforcing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. This should include a child protection component that includes child marriage in the permanent training curriculum for the police. Similarly, others responsible for law enforcement, including lawyers and magistrates should also receive professional training on the Act during their education.

Structural arrangements for addressing specific instances of marriage law violations cannot depend

entirely on local units like the *panchayat* committees; however, local organisations, including PRIs, can be empowered to deal with illegal marriages if there are clear supporting mechanisms from enforcement authorities. In some instances, local individuals or organisations can put pressure on families to put off child marriage if information is conveyed to the district level. At that point, as exemplified in Rajasthan, a letter from enforcement authorities can be delivered to the family, warning them of impending legal action if they move forward with a child marriage in progress.

While it is important to enforce the law, the mechanisms need to be non-coercive. Early education and sensitisation of communities on the law and its role in preventing child marriages may be important, so that there are fewer instances of stopping a marriage when it is occurring.

To involve elected representatives and community based workers

Most of the *panchayat* members, the *anganwadi* workers, Auxillary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers and other community based actors are poorly informed about the marriage laws and also lack motivation and means of taking effective action against child marriage. Grassroots workers need to be informed through professional, on-the-job training workshops about the governmental authorities and non-government entities involved in campaigns in the local area and district. They also need to be informed of the mechanisms for insuring their anonymity in any situations where they report violations of the child marriage law to higher authorities.

Legislative assemblies in both Rajasthan and Bihar have been very active on issues of child welfare and can play an important role in supporting initiatives to delay the age of marriage for girls. Those implementing interventions should partner with these key stakeholders for advocacy support.

A Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights will be set up in the near future and

the same in Bihar and other states. This group will play an important role in delaying child marriage initiatives and the government and NGO activities in these states should seek the involvement of this new body.

To educate communities

In addition to the government and community based officials, community members also lack information about the law's punitive measures and require evidence of the penalties they will face for carrying out child marriages. To share this information, local government officials could hold community sensitisation meetings at each village, highlighting both the punitive measures of the law, along with the importance of alternatives to marriage and the benefits of educating the girl child. Fostering this level of dialogue provides an important step in challenging traditional practices and changing a community's norms around child marriage.

6.3 Scale up successful and promising interventions

In India there is a strong tradition of collective action and community organising for social change. In previous research studies documenting the range of responses to domestic violence in India, there is an overwhelming sense that organising and collectivising rural women's into *sanghas*, is a unique and critical mechanism to address gender based violence (Poonacha and Pandey, 1999). These small and self governing groups of women are now all over the country through the *Mahila Samakhya* initiative. These collectives are an ideal mechanism for raising awareness about and contending with social problems where solutions are internally valid, culturally appropriate and respond to women's collective power (Burton et al. 2002).

To this end, approaches to work with SHGs for women are encouraged. This was witnessed in findings from Bihar where SHGs were supported by the Sambal programme and Daudnagar Organisation for Rural Development (DORD). These groups of village

Empowering Women: The *Mahila Samakhya Model*

Mahila Samakhya (MS) is an innovative women's education programme, which evolved out of the National Policy on Education, 1986. The programme endeavours to build collectives of rural, poor, landless women at the village level that become forums for reflection, learning, and collective action. MS is characterised by its flexibility and process oriented approach. The strength of the MS programme lies in its basic principles, which guide the program implementation. These include ensuring that women have the time and space to analyze their situations, to articulate their priorities and needs, and to plan and initiate change. The inherent flexibility precludes any form of blueprint development process or standard model. The MS philosophy states that women coming together to form a group, meeting together, analysing their life situations, discussing what can be done about it, accessing the appropriate information they want and actually acting on the issues they have identified is in itself an educational process.

Source: <http://www.education.nic.in/ms/ms.asp>

women, coming together to analyse their lives, discuss social issues, seek out information, and act on their desires, show tremendous potential for combating practices like child marriage. This type of collective action will empower the women and girls in a community, begin the process of developing critical mass, and evolve social norms to protect girls from the risk of child marriage.

Another example of positive NGO level action is the Inter Religious Priest Forum, active in Bihar. Their efforts to stop child marriages in progress point to the potential of influential religious leaders providing credibility and authority in curbing harmful social practices.

CBOs, like the Village Vigilance Committees (VVCs), present a highly effective model for preventing child marriages in that they are made up of senior, respected community members who will be aware of marriages happening within their communities and can take rapid action to prevent or stop them.

Meena Manch is another programme with considerable potential. The findings from Bihar show that *Meena Manch* girls can play important roles in motivating girls and their families concerning the continuation of schooling and can also take an active part in campaigns opposing child marriage. In some cases they have participated in stopping or delaying marriages with support from local

enforcement agencies. The promise of this intervention suggests the importance of activating *Meena Manch* units at additional districts where the programme has not yet been implemented.

Ideal interventions combine local knowledge and credibility with mechanisms of authority. For example, *Meena Manch*, given its roots in local knowledge and youth leadership, is an important actor for preventing child marriages, but requires

authority from networks like the VVCs and enforcement capacity from the police to enact lasting change. Such collaborative efforts are necessary to create sustainable change and increase the visibility of the effort being made to combat child marriage, avoid redundancies in programming, and encourage collective action for a common cause.

Given the burgeoning success of these local interventions, these groups would benefit from additional support and capacity building from international NGOs and the government to strengthen their approach, access to resources, and enable their extension into new geographical areas.

6.4 Create an enabling environment

The integrated strategy of enhanced education opportunities for girls, combined with improved enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and interventions to curb child marriage practices, will depend on creating an enabling environment that encourages behaviour change.

Profiling positive role models

Highlighting positive role models has a strong potential for motivating parents as well as young girls and boys to emulate role model behaviour in their own lives. Specifically, role model profiles can help reduce a community's opposition to child marriage, convince parents and girls of the importance of

education, and increase the value of the girl child in society.

The role models profiled in the findings represent a range of actors, including fathers, mothers, daughters, and others. The presentation of role models will need to pay close attention to the distinct sub-groups in different communities to include modeling situations with a variety of castes and classes. The presentation of the real life situations of selected role models can be incorporated into a variety of different communication strategies, for example, radio talk shows, newspaper stories, street theatre presentations, puppet shows, and others. Films can be developed for presentation in villages to facilitate community discussions about child marriage and work towards changing social norms. On some occasions the role models may volunteer themselves and can be invited to share their stories in live forums. The media strategy in section 6.5 fully details the suggested communications strategy.

These communication materials should also be introduced within special training programmes and workshops at various levels, conducted by the government or NGOs, for staff and community volunteers. PRIs should celebrate role models on occasions like the *gram sabhas*. NGOs working in specific areas should be encouraged to collect role models' success stories, so they can be disseminated in information networks and presented at intervention programmes.

As role models often face significant stigma and isolation from an unsupportive community, local NGOs and CBOs can increase support mechanisms to protect role model girls and parents. This is essential to ensure that those who have had the courage to speak and act out against child marriage are encouraged and assisted. This could include enrolment in school or a distance learning programme so that they can continue their education.

Recognise and empower girls

Central to creating an enabling environment for delaying marriage is educating, protecting, and empowering young girls. While the need for formal education and vocational training has been underscored above, supplementary education, focusing on life skills and reproductive health can spread awareness of the consequences of child marriage and inspire girls to combat this practice.

The creation of life skills and reproductive health classes for girls is an already proven strategy to effectively delay the age of marriage for Indian girls, as demonstrated in previous studies (ICRW 2008b, Pande et al 2006). Empowering girls through education on sexual and reproductive health encourages increased utilisation of reproductive health services and changing norms around child marriage for girls. NGOs operating in Bihar and Rajasthan that work on girls' education can increase their scope to include life skills and health classes for girls.

Local celebrations of Girl Child Day annually on January 24, as designated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, represent an additional opportunity to advocate for delayed marriage through the media, as well as local events that profile role models who have successfully avoided child marriage. On such days there should be increased space for girls and opportunities to heighten respect for girls' voices and their potential.

A Successful Intervention: Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan Programme

Ethiopia's Berhane Hewan programme is one of the few rigorously evaluated interventions to delay marriage. Conducted in Amhara Province, where nearly 30 percent of girls marry prior to the age of 15 years, the programme included schooling support, group formation, and community awareness of child marriage consequences. Elements included group formation by adult mentors, support for girls to stay in school, including economic incentives, participation in non-formal education, livelihood training for those out of school, and community conversations to engage the community in collective problem solving. The intervention showed that the intervention improved girls' school enrolment, delayed age at marriage, and improved reproductive health knowledge (Eruikar and Muthengi 2009).

Source: Temin and Levine. 2009. *Start with a Girl: A Girl's Count Report on Adolescent Girls*.

Create safe spaces for girls to grow

Going beyond individual girls' behaviour, to the communities where they live is essential for effectively protecting girls' from child marriage. Activities undertaken at the community level have successfully built support, awareness, and demand for change (Temin and Levine 2009). To this end, NGOs can create safe spaces for girls. This includes creating a safe space where girls gather with a mentor on a regular basis to learn skills, make friends,

and discuss their lives. The concept of safe spaces emerged out of the recognition that girls often lack the space to socialise with peers, learn new skills, obtain critical health information, develop relationships with mentors and role models in the community, and begin the process of civic participation and engagement (Temin and Levine 2009).

The safe spaces approach is used in a variety of settings in the developing world to provide out-of-school unmarried and married girls, who would otherwise be isolated, the chance to meet peers, participate in schooling, skills building, and participate in sports and recreation (Temin and Levine 2009). In this way, safe spaces offer myriad ways for girls to exert control and autonomy over their lives.

Engage men and boys as partners

Families and communities, including boys and men, need to understand the risks associated with child marriage and become engaged in the process of making change. Programmes that target men and boys on their own as husbands, brothers, and fathers are now emerging around the globe to protect adolescent girls. While few of these programmes have barely moved beyond the pilot stage or small scale implementation, promising results are emerging on their effectiveness in changing gender norms. A WHO review of programmes aimed at

Safe Spaces: Empowering Girls with Autonomy

The Ishraq programme in Egypt created safe spaces for socially isolated, out of school girls to learn, play, grow, as well as return to school and delay marriage. Ishraq offers girls literacy, life skills, and team sports in an integrated curriculum that includes particular attention to health information and access to health services. Girls also developed livelihoods skills, including the ability to raise and sell poultry, repair home appliances, and basic financial skills.

The successful pilot involving more than 200 girls and their families in four communities won top level political backing to support the programme. Programme achievements included the following: around 92 percent of participants who took the government literacy test passed; participants reported increased levels of self confidence as compared to non-participants; and they expressed a desire to marry at later ages with a say in choosing their husbands. The evaluation of the programme shows that 68.5 percent of participants who completed the programme entered or re-entered school.

Source: Brady et al. 2007. *Providing new opportunities to adolescent girls in socially conservative settings: The Ishraq program in rural Upper Egypt*

involving males found that those interventions that included a gender-transformative approach where men question and modify their gendered attitudes were more effective than those without a gender component (Temin and Levine 2009). It also found that a combination of integrated activities works best, for example, a combination of group sessions combined with community campaigns, mass media, and counselling (WHO 2007).

Several organisations in India and globally are developing programmes that target men and boys to increase gender equality and reduce discriminatory behaviour and practices. One such project, The Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) programme works with municipal bodies, district authorities and local NGOs in a bid to reach thousands of students and teachers in schools and the wider community⁶⁴. The aim of GEMS is to promote gender equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours in a school setting with a view to reducing negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes among boys and girls aged 12-18 years. In addition, the Family Violence Prevention Fund and ICRW are adapting and implementing a programme titled "Coaching Boys into Men" for use with cricket players, their coaches and peers in Maharashtra, India. The programme includes group education, a communications campaign, and capacity building activities to communi-

⁶⁴ The GEMS programme is implemented by ICRW and its partners in Goa, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.

cate to boys that violence against women is wrong and that violence does not equal strength. The results of these projects will demonstrate the efficacy of engaging men and boys to alter gender norms.

Working with parents

A few programmes in developing countries recognise the important role that parents play in protecting girls from child marriage. Research shows that good parenting, strong bonds between parents and children, and positive, non-violent discipline have an impact (Temin and Levine 2009). Home visiting programmes, though rare in developing countries, can assist parents in practicing good parenting, bond with their children, and recognise and address potential risk factors that could lead to child marriage.

Parents groups also offer promise in the form of support between families within a community to discuss the salient issues and challenges surrounding child marriage. With sensitisation and counselling from local NGOs and CBOs, such groups can ensure that parents are aware of the risks associated with child marriage and the variety of marriage alternatives available within the community. Parents groups provide the additional benefit of internal group checks and balances to ensure that parents continue to receive support from each other and resist falling back on traditional practices.

Promote consistent awareness on child marriage at high risk times for marriage

The research findings demonstrate that on certain auspicious days throughout the calendar, child marriages are more common and there is an additional risk to young girls during these times. To combat this, NGOs, CBOs, frontline workers, and community leaders could support special interventions to discourage and stop child marriages. This could include high frequency media messaging, detailed in section 6.5.

The Childline provides another medium to respond to high risk times, emergency situations, or needs for information about the law and children's rights.

This phone hotline currently provides support to children in distress who can call in on a variety of topics. The project has been supported by NGOs and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment since 1998 and has collectively responded to more than 900,000 calls concerning children in distress. Sadly, this valuable resource for information of child marriage is not currently in place at the selected study areas in both states. Bringing the Childline to rural areas will enable children in Rajasthan and Bihar to receive NGO support when facing challenges related to marriage or discontinued education.

Multi-sectoral engagement

To put this broad intervention into action for the girls and families in Rajasthan and Bihar, intersectoral collaboration between the numerous stakeholders is essential. Delaying the age at marriage for girls requires sustained engagement and coordination among the many actors involved in implementing the various levels of this strategy. Given the number of actors involved in delaying child marriage, including state level governments, the international community working in Rajasthan and Bihar, local NGOs, CBOs, school administrators, and members of the media, coalition building is necessary. Regular coordination meetings are needed to foster ongoing dialogue and engagement between the various stakeholders.

6.5. Use the media to reach the community

Mass media approaches have a demonstrated impact on young people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour (Temin and Levine 2009). The potential of the media has been harnessed in many countries to provide educational entertainment to adults, adolescents, and children (Temin and Levine 2009). Media approaches are most effective when coordinated as part of an integrated intervention.

The media can play an essential role in community sensitisation and changing social norms around child marriage in Rajasthan and Bihar. Although in rural areas of India the access to certain sour-

es of media that are dependent on literacy and /or electricity may be limited. A comprehensive media approach can engage a wide spectrum of community groups and create a culture of delaying marriage. In rural areas, a variety of different media messaging will prove effective, including mainly radio, local theatre productions, puppet shows and mobile units but also press, billboards and participatory video communication strategies.

Newspapers and radio already play significant roles in disseminating information to the people of Rajasthan and Bihar and are already well used by the government for spreading awareness about child marriage during *Akha Teej*. However, these efforts are currently insufficient, as this study's findings demonstrate that girls are at high risk of child marriage throughout the year. In addition, many remote, rural areas have limited exposure to newspapers, television and other information sources. A final challenge lies in the continued high levels of female illiteracy that prevent women and girls from receiving and accessing information about important social issues, including topics directly affecting their health and welfare.

The use of mass media throughout the year, as well as expanding the use of new, innovative media techniques to reach men, women, boys and girls in target communities is therefore critical. A successful media strategy design would utilise mass media "edutainment" programmes, reinforced by capacity building with grassroots leaders and communicators, network building, and local level mobilisation. Project components could include, but are not limited to:

- A weekly radio "soap opera" series broadcast on national and local stations. This series could integrate various issue-

based storylines and introduce sensitive and complicated topics related to child marriage into the home.

- A live nightly radio call-in show broadcast simultaneously on national and local radio stations. The call-in shows discuss and debate the same issues as the television series.
- Mobile units to travel through rural areas and expose communities to child marriage and gender equity issues. Mobile units can spark audience participation through games, street theatre, audio visual tools and quizzes.
- Participatory video training, where participants receive training on videotaping equipment and filmmaking techniques and then set out in the community to interview people on camera about child marriage practices or on role model girls. When utilised in other settings, locally made videos are extremely compelling for community members, since audiences become immediately and deeply involved in stories that reflect

Media Messaging to Change Social Norms: The Breakthrough Approach

Breakthrough is a media based international human rights organisation that uses popular culture, media, leadership development and community education to bring about a change in public attitudes and advance equality and justice. They use creative strategies to build a culture of human rights. One of their campaigns, *'Is This Justice?'* provided a 360 degree campaign that ran from February to April 2007 and included television, print, radio, internet and mobile messaging. The campaign aimed to draw attention to the intersection of domestic violence and the increasing HIV infection rates among married women. The campaign focused on Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, which have a combined population of 315 million. According to Television Audience Measurement and the National Readership Survey, the campaign reached over 34 million people through television, 29 million through print and 18 million through radio. An end line study found that *'Is This Justice?'* led to a significant increase in knowledge about the human rights violations faced by women living with HIV/AIDS (WLHA). The campaign succeeded in sensitising the community to the unequal status of women, how it is linked to the violence they experience, the presence of WLHA among the general population, and their increased vulnerability because of domestic violence. As a result, the community recommended family support and the right to shelter as ways to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by WLHA. The campaign successfully increased awareness about the violence faced by WLHA and also brought about a change in attitude towards discrimination against women, their ability to negotiate safer sex and other issues within marriage, and the need for family support.

Source: <http://www.breakthrough.tv/learn/campaign/is-this-justice>

their daily reality. This type of engagement helps spark dialogue and exchange on issues that are rarely addressed in other settings. Further, the medium of video is accessible to everyone, regardless of educational levels, a vital consideration in areas where illiteracy rates are high.

- Youth leadership training and capacity building with grassroots youth leaders and communicators aimed at strengthening analytical and leadership skills related to preventing child marriage, encouraging viable alternatives to marriage, and addressing gender inequality. A major component of this should be the promotion of alliances across different groups, including between young people and the adult leaders of their organisations, to promote effective youth involvement.
- Coordination with national and local journalists and media outlets and in particular with young communicators to report on role model behaviour demonstrated by parents and/or girls choosing to delay marriage.
- Development and distribution of support materials, resource packs, and thematic campaigns.

Conclusions

In this report, social norms and practices surrounding child marriage were defined based on field work conducted in Rajasthan and Bihar, two states with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in India. From the field work, several promising themes emerged. While social norms surrounding child marriage are deeply entrenched, there are exceptions to the rule; role model girls and parents demonstrate that alternatives to child marriage are possible. Promising interventions are already at work to delay marriage and encourage girl's education. The integrated intervention strategy laid out in this chapter describes a holistic approach to delaying marriage for girls through improving girl's access to education, empowerment, community mobilisation, media messaging, and strengthening law enforcement.

Given the gradual decline in child marriage prevalence, according to NFHS-3 (2005-2006) data, there is an urgency to mobilise policy makers to act now. To put this plan into action for the girls and families in Rajasthan and Bihar, intersectoral collaboration between the various stakeholders, including the government, local and international NGOs, the media, and communities, is essential.

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ⁱ Group marriages are also prevalent among Gujjar communities in Tonk and Bikaner districts in Rajasthan. These marriages are sponsored with funds collected from the Gujjar community by the Gujjar Group Marriage Committee. Many children are married during these community ceremonies.) in 'Delaying Marriage for Girls in India: A Formative Research to Design Interventions for Changing Norms (Bihar and Rajasthan). UNICEF and International Centre for Research on Women - ICRW, 2010.



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