

Child Marriage in Karnataka: A Persistent Issue in Mandya

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Abstract:

This article explores the persistent issue of child marriage in Mandya district, Karnataka, despite legal prohibitions and societal condemnation. Child marriage continues to threaten the well-being and future of young girls, driven by factors such as poverty, limited education, the caste system, and cultural beliefs. The consequences for these girls are severe, including disrupted education, increased health risks, and vulnerability to violence and exploitation. Efforts to combat child marriage in Mandya include the enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) 2006, community awareness programs, educational initiatives, and collaboration with NGOs. However, the article argues that beyond legal measures, significant social change.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, Poverty, Caste System, Cultural Practices.

Introduction

Globally, millions of girls become child brides each year, facing devastating consequences. UNICEF reports approximately 12 million girls than 18 enter into marriage annually. While boys are also victims, the impact on girls is far more severe.¹ India, the world's most populous democracy, is grappling with a significant child marriage crisis. Home to an estimated 24 million child brides, the country accounts for nearly 40% of global

child marriages, according to the National Family Health Survey. However, India's rank in terms of child marriage rates is 14th globally, as reported by the International Center for Research on Women. This disparity underscores the complex interplay of regional, cultural, and socioeconomic factors influencing the issue.²

Karnataka, a state experiencing rapid development, paradoxically grapples with

¹ UNICEF. (2006). *The State of the World's Children 2007*.

² UNICEF. (2019). *Ending Child Marriage: A Profile of Progress in India*. UNICEF.

the deep-rooted problem of child marriage. Despite being outlawed and widely condemned, the practice persists, with Mandya district emerging as a particularly alarming hotspot. The district's persistent struggle demands immediate attention. This article delves into the complexities of child marriage in Karnataka, focusing on Mandya's challenges. It explores the underlying causes, the devastating impact on young girls, and the urgent need for comprehensive solutions.

Factors Contributing to Child Marriage in Mandya District

In Mandya district, child marriage is closely linked to lower educational attainment for girls and poses a significant barrier to local development goals. Research indicates that the level of education a girl receives is a crucial factor in determining the age at which she marries. In Mandya, like in many other regions, girls with limited access to education are more likely to marry at a younger age.

Poverty is a major driver of child marriage in Mandya. Many families in the district, struggling with financial constraints, are unable to support healthier alternatives for their daughters, such as continued schooling. The caste system also plays a significant role in perpetuating child marriage in Mandya. Caste-based restrictions, deeply rooted in the region's social fabric, often prevent marriages between members of different

castes, thereby sustaining early marriage practices. Other contributing factors include the belief that unmarried adolescent boys and girls might engage in immoral behavior if not married. Additionally, a lack of awareness about legal measures against child marriage further exacerbates the problem in Mandya.³

Consequences of Child Marriage in Mandya District

In Mandya district, child marriage significantly disrupts a girl's education, severely limiting her chances of securing better employment opportunities. This early marriage poses serious health risks for young girls, who often face early pregnancy and are more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like HIV/AIDS. In Mandya, girls younger than 15 are at a much higher risk of dying during childbirth compared to women in their 20s, reflecting the global trend where pregnancy is the leading cause of death for women aged 15 to 19.⁴

Child marriage in Mandya also curtails young girls' access to skills, resources, knowledge, social support, and autonomy. Girls married before 18 in this district are extremely vulnerable to abuse and

³ Child Rights and You (CRY). (2020). *Comparative Analysis of State Rules: Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006*. CRY.

⁴ Adhikari, R., et al. (2009). Correlates of Unintended Pregnancy among Currently Pregnant Married Women in Nepal. *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 9:17.

abandonment, facing various forms of violence—whether physical, sexual, or psychological. Local data echo national trends, with young, less-educated girls at a higher risk of violence. Reports suggest that a significant percentage of girls in Mandya who marry before 18 experience domestic violence. Many of these girls also lack decision-making power regarding their work, use of contraception, or significant family matters. Instead, they are often limited to making day-to-day household decisions alongside their husbands, with little say in critical issues that affect their lives and futures.⁵

Measures Taken to Eradicate Child Marriage in Mandya District

Efforts to combat child marriage in Mandya district reflect both international initiatives and local actions aimed at raising awareness and enforcing laws. At the global level, organizations like the United Nations (UN) and UNICEF collaborate with communities to raise the legal age of marriage and address gender discrimination through awareness campaigns, community discussions, and by supporting governments in strengthening legislation, policies, and services.⁶

⁵ Bhagat, R. (2016). *The Practice of Early Marriages among Females in India: Persistence and Change*.

⁶ Bhattacharya, J.C., & Cleland, J.Uu (1995). Determinants of Maternal Care in a Region of South India. *Health Transition Review*, 5, 127-142.

Key international human rights instruments that influence these efforts include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956
- Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1962
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989

The UN estimates that if child marriage practices continue unchecked, over 140 million girls will become child brides by 2020, amounting to 14 million child brides annually, or approximately 39,000 every day. To combat this, the UN designated October 11th as the International Day of the Girl Child, first observed in 2012 with a focus on ending child marriage. Furthermore, in 2013, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution recognizing child marriage as a human rights violation and committing to its elimination as part of the global development agenda.⁷

⁷ Case, A., et al. (2005). The Lasting Impact of Childhood Health and Circumstance. *Journal of Health Economics*, 24(2), 365-389.

National and Local Measures

In India, the government has enacted the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) of 2006, effective from 2007, which sets 18 as the minimum age of marriage for girls. The Supreme Court of India has also mandated the registration of marriages to enforce this law more effectively.⁸

In Mandya district, local authorities have taken several steps to combat child marriage. These include:

Enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) 2006: Local authorities work to ensure the law is upheld, with efforts to improve the registration of marriages and verification of ages to prevent child marriages.

Awareness Programs: Similar to efforts in other states, Mandya district in Karnataka has seen initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the legal and health consequences of child marriage. These programs are often community-driven and involve the participation of local leaders and NGOs.

Community Mobilization: Local government and NGOs work to change social norms and attitudes through outreach programs. This includes educating parents and community members about the importance of

education and the dangers of early marriage.

Educational Initiatives: Efforts are made to improve access to quality education and vocational opportunities for girls, which is a key strategy in delaying marriage and empowering young women.

Monitoring and Reporting: The district employs Child Marriage Prohibition Officers who monitor potential cases of child marriage, and there is a system in place for reporting and intervening in such cases.

For instance, in Tamil Nadu, the government has effectively utilized District Social Welfare Officers and Child Marriage Prohibition Officers to stop over 230 child marriages in districts like Perambalur. Similarly, Mandya district officials are taking proactive steps to prevent child marriages and support affected girls through various programs and interventions. The involvement of district-level officials, such as the District Collector, is crucial in driving these efforts.⁹

Additional Local Efforts in Mandya

Collaboration with NGOs: Local NGOs in Mandya are actively involved in campaigns that aim to educate communities about the harmful effects of child marriage. These organizations work closely with schools, religious leaders,

⁸ Centre for Law and Policy Research. (2018). *Ending Impunity for Child Marriage in India: Normative and Implementation Gaps*. Bangalore, India.

⁹ Child Rights and You (CRY). (2020). *Comparative Analysis of State Rules: Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006*. CRY.

and local authorities to create awareness and provide support for at-risk girls.

Youth Empowerment Programs:

Programs aimed at empowering young girls and boys are implemented in the district. These initiatives focus on building skills, increasing awareness of rights, and providing platforms for the youth to voice their concerns and take action against child marriage.

Data Collection and Research: Efforts are being made to collect data on the prevalence of child marriage in Mandya. This data is crucial for informing local policies and interventions, ensuring they are targeted and effective.

Enhanced Coordination: Improved coordination among various stakeholders—government agencies, NGOs, and community leaders—ensures that efforts to prevent child marriage are comprehensive and sustained. This includes better communication and monitoring systems to track progress and address challenges as they arise

Conclusion

In Mandya district, the eradication of child marriage requires more than just stringent laws or government schemes. Although the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) is in place, its effectiveness is often undermined by the ease with which perpetrators can produce fake age certificates. To ensure that this law is enforced more rigorously, it is essential that everyone involved in the marriage process—such as those printing

wedding invitations, temple priests conducting ceremonies, and owners of marriage halls—be held accountable. Strict verification of the bride and groom's ages by officials, with clear legal consequences for failing to do so, could help prevent child marriages at an early stage and protect more girls from this harmful practice.¹⁰

Awareness of the implications of the PCMA among administrative, judicial, and police officials is crucial for the prevention of child marriages and the prosecution of violators. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are already playing a significant role in raising awareness about the consequences of child marriage and its legal implications. Their efforts are vital in the fight against this social evil and in striving toward its eradication.

Ultimately, greater social awareness and a shift in attitudes within the community are the most critical factors for achieving meaningful social change, transformation, and reformation in Mandya. Only through collective effort and sustained awareness can the district hope to eliminate child marriage and secure a better future for its young girls.

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