

Impact of ABANDONMENT and SEPARATION on child brides

Child marriage in Odisha

In Odisha, child marriage stands at 21.3 per cent [26.8 per cent is the national average (NFHS-4)]. Early marriage exposes young girls to violence, isolation and confinement. Lack of support from the family and community often leads to extreme domestic violence and harassment for them at the hands of their husbands and in-laws. Though the Prevention of Child Marriage Act (PCMA 2006) has made provisions for legal remedies for victims of child marriage, evidence of benefits being availed was lacking.

The need for a study in Odisha

The Government of Odisha has been directed by the High Court to consider making child marriage void ab initio (invalid from the onset) and is committed to ending child marriage.

UNICEF and ActionAid undertook a qualitative study in year to understand the impact of abandonment and separation on victims of child marriage in Odisha and strengthen the evidence base. The study also explored enforcement of provisions of injunction under PCMA 2006, the triggers of elopement and the role played by families in child marriage. It further delved into ascertaining if the vulnerability of girls increases post-separation.

Key respondents for the UNICEF-ActionAid study

30 girls married off as children and separated/abandoned by their husbands and in-laws from 15 districts of the state. Their case studies were gathered.

Information collected from crucial stakeholders such as Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), One Stop Centres and District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) among others.

3-city PLD study

The study complements a qualitative study by Partners for Law in Development (PLD) conducted in year with 15 girls aged 15-20 years in Mumbai, Delhi and Jaipur.

- Consistent use of punitive laws against couples in self-arranged marriages, showing that the law does not address child sexual abuse but ends up punishing girl's agency and choice
- Adolescents are denied sexuality education, reliable sexual and reproductive health information and confidential services and right to seek abortion independently of parental consent
- Legal obligation of frontline staff to report to police severely obstructs their ability to discharge duties ethically and in the best interests of adolescents



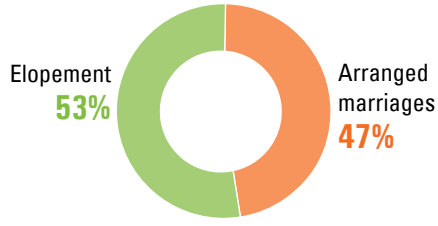
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Key findings of UNICEF-ActionAid study

Based on case studies of **30** girls and interviews of other stakeholders

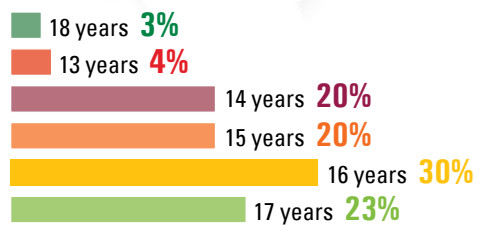
Child marriage

Main reasons behind child marriage

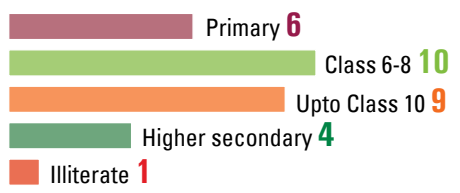


Girls

Age of marriage

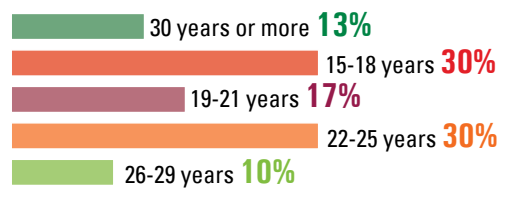


Educational status

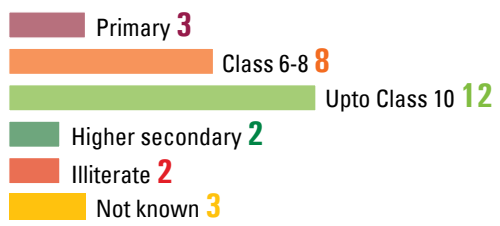


Boys

Age of marriage

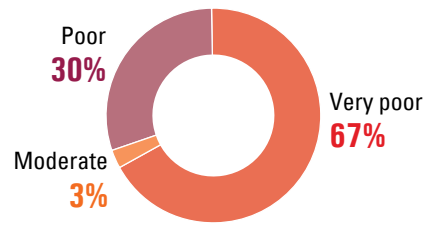


Educational status



Girl's family

Educational status

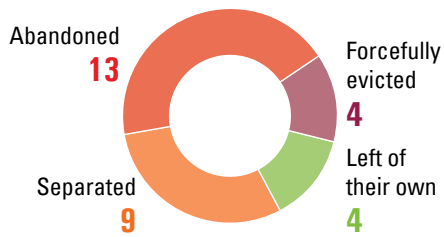


Financial status

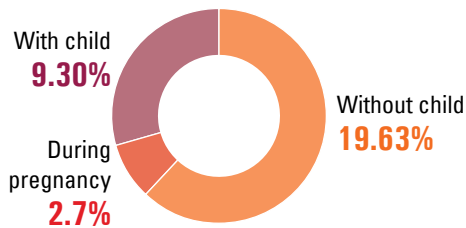


Abandonment after marriage

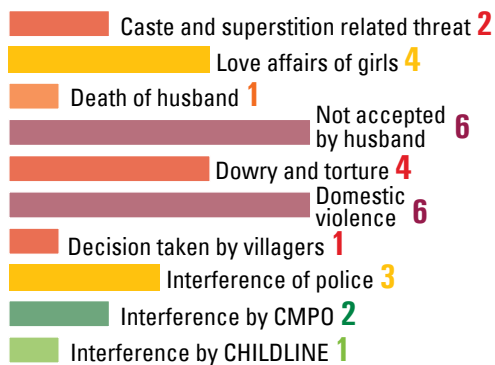
Post-marital situation of girls



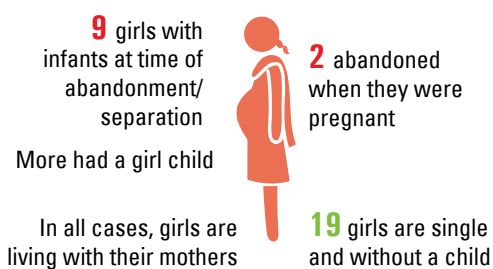
Stage when abandoned



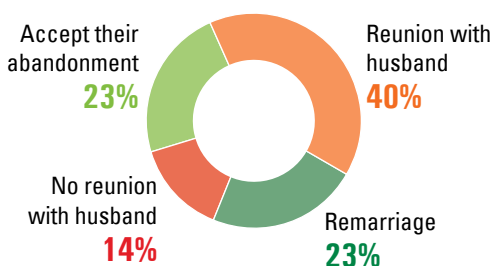
Reasons for separation



Adolescent pregnancy

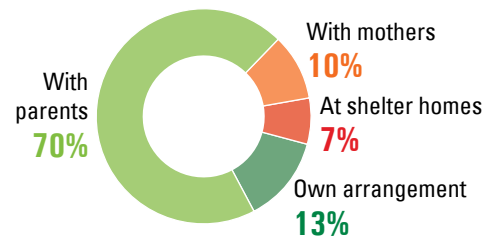


What the girls want

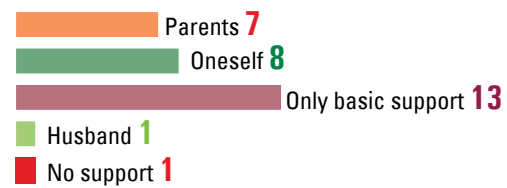


Support for abandoned girls

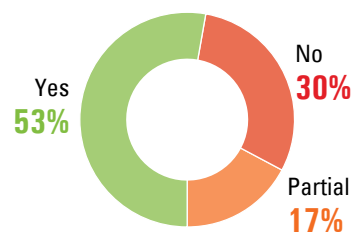
Present settlement of girls



Source of financial support after separation for child brides



Support from parents



Legal support accessed



None of the girls interviewed tried to access their legal rights under PCMA 2006.



Salient observations

- Domestic violence and harassment experienced by child brides from their spouses and in-laws for dowry and non-conformance to norms set by the husband and his family
- Social isolation of child brides and exclusion from any decision-making powers
- In cases of child marriage due to elopement, most girls want to reunite with their husbands after they attain legal age
- Remarriage of child brides is difficult after separation
- Child brides and their families do not avail legal facilities due to lack of awareness and ease of access
- The present legal system does not address the situation to stop a child bride from living with her husband and from being sexually abused, apart from other forms of abuse
- Support systems and institutions to enable a child to annul marriage and get rehabilitated are not adequate
- Many child brides with a child of their own find it difficult to rehabilitate with proper custody of the child
- CMPOs rarely use the injunction to stop a child marriage
- Engagement with adolescents is not effective.



Proposed actions

- Effective and regular engagement plan with adolescents fortnightly/once in a month covering life skills, reproductive and sexual health, mental health and psychosocial support, and legal awareness to make informed choices
- Mapping and tracking of adolescents girls to prevent child marriage, child trafficking or any other abuse
- Engagement with tribal and religious leaders and SHGs for prevention of child marriage or any violence against children/adolescents
- Effective implementation of State Action Plan and District Action Plans on Ending Child Marriage and Adolescent Empowerment and social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) strategies
- Effective functioning of District Task Forces, Block Child Protection Committees (BCPCs) and Gram Panchayat Child Protection Committees (GPCPCs)
- Retention of children in school, transition from grade 5 to 6 and grade 8 to 9, and linkage of out of school adolescents with vocational skills
- Awareness generation and effective implementation of laws related to children.

