

# CHILD MARRIAGE: RESEARCHING STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER GIRLS

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## Introduction

It is illegal in India for a girl or boy to marry before they are 18 years old. This is called a "child marriage". It includes formal marriages and relationships that aren't formal at all, like friendships. As there is always a risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation, any child marriage is against the child's basic human rights. In the long run it ends a child's right to an education as well as their right to health care and protection from abuse. A child would miss school, be abused by their parents, and get sexually transmitted diseases (unicefusa.org). During a child's marriage, it's the child who has kids, so she wouldn't understand how difficult it is to get pregnant and give birth. As a social norm, it is based on gender inequality and discrimination, but it is also deeply ingrained. To make a difference, this research paper will look into the long-term problems in child marriages and look for solutions that will be truly effective and long-term.

## Prevalence of Child Marriage in India

National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights says that at least 1.5 million Indian girls under the age of 18 get married every year. When it comes to 15-19-year-old girls, 16% have been or are getting married now. Between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, there was a big drop from 47% to 27%. (unicefusa.org). Several factors may have played a role in this decline, like how well mothers read and how well girls go to school. One big reason has been strong laws made by the Indian government and how they were put into practice. As a result of this, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was changed to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2006. This law called for harsher punishments and legal actions for people who marry children (iPleaders). Many people have moved from rural areas to cities, which mean that there are fewer chances of getting married as a child in cities because there are fewer chances for people to manipulate them. Proactive government investments in teen girls and strong public messages about the illegality and harm of child marriages have also played a big role in the fight against child marriages (unicefusa.org). Child marriage has a lot of different effects on a country and on the rest of the world.

Because education stops when a child is married, there is no way to learn job skills to earn a living. This pushes the family into a cycle of poverty. It's impossible to get a job because you don't have the skills or knowledge to do so. It's very likely that a girl who gets married early will have more children over her lifetime. Another thing to note is that child marriages can show social norms that don't place much value on girls in that kind of social structure. So that we can come up with ways to stop this kind of thing from happening to people, we need to know how complicated the problem is. It's a mix of socio-cultural and structural things.

### **Effective Solutions to End Child Marriages**

In some cultures, like India, when a girl has her first period, it means that she is sexually mature. This means that the family has a big job to do to keep a girl safe from anything sexually exploitative. Any incident like this is seen as a threat to family honor. A lot of people think that the control of the patriarchy is a big factor in how people live in their communities and the world at large. Using some of the solutions above in the right way can help stop this.

#### **a) Empowering Girls with Education and Support Networks**

People who want to stop child marriage should give girls information, skills, and support groups. Developing basic skills like literacy and math would be part of this. A long-running and proven tool: education. It has helped many cultures get rid of bad social practices and social evils. Girls who go to school learn how to communicate and negotiate with other people, which is a very important skill for living a good life. They learn how to stay healthy during their reproductive years, and they also learn how to work together to find solutions to problems that arise during this time. How to make money and keep it safe are taught to them by their teachers. They learn a lot and become more self-confident. To make things even better, they speak up for themselves and want to avoid early marriages.

#### **b) Enhancing Girls' Access to a High-Quality Education**

There are a lot of studies that say that if girls don't get an education, they are three times more likely to get married early (icrw.org). Girls who go to school because they get uniforms or scholarships are more likely to do well there, too. People also need to be taught the skills and given the support they need to start and stay in school, as well. As soon as this is done, girls are less likely to be thought of as ready for marriage. Make sure that schools are safe and girl-friendly, have curricula relevant to girls, and build supportive

social networks. Also, learn how to better advocate for yourself and your futures. This is very important.

**c) Educating and Rallying Parents and Community Members**

The families and community elders are usually in charge of making decisions about the futures of girls in almost every culture on Earth. Then, they need to be told how child marriage can harm a girl's health through meetings and public announcements. If you want to change things, you need men (fathers and leaders, as well as boys) and boys to learn about how early marriage can have a negative impact on their lives. Children getting married at a young age could change the way adults think and act. This could change the way girls are thought of.

**d) Providing Economic Support and Incentives to Girls and their Families**

It is often because of money, like a lower bride price or less money for the bride's parents to give her. Because daughters who have skills and make money add more value to their families, it's important to help poor families become more financially secure through things like loans or making the girls learn an income-making skill.

**e) Encourage Supportive Laws and Policies**

A lot of countries have laws against child marriage. This is not enough, though. Officials and leaders need to know how child marriage affects the economy and the law, and they need to be aware of these things ([icrw.org](http://icrw.org)). Strengthen and enforce existing initiatives, and advocate for changes in law and policy where they are needed.

### **Successful Programs Worldwide**

Independent and government-supported groups have come up with ways to stop child marriages all over the world, and they have been very successful. Some programs that have worked well are shown above as good examples of how to get rid of child marriages in a smart way.

**a) India: Maharashtra Life Skills Program**

Institute for Health Management-Pachid, ICRW, the Ford Foundation, and Rockefeller Foundation are part of this project. Unmarried teen girls learn about reproductive and sexual health, effective communication, decision-making skills, and more in groups for one hour each weekday for a year. They also teach the people in their community about reproductive health, the causes and effects of child marriage, and how to keep their bodies healthy, among other things. Their efforts have raised the average age at

which people get married; girls have become decision-makers who are supportive and knowledgeable; and because they have become more confident and learned proper life skills, they can now negotiate with their parents about how much money they can get from their parents, too ([girlsnotbides.org](http://girlsnotbides.org)).

**b) Ethiopia: Berhane Hewan**

Organizations from the Ethiopian government to the Population Council to the UNFPA to the UN Foundation and Nike Foundation are all involved in this project. This program is for married and unmarried girls, ages 10 to 19, who live in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. It aims to stop child marriage and support girl's groups, provide school materials, have community conversations, and find adult mentors for the girls to help them get through life. People who do not give away their daughter in child marriage are given goats or sheep. Among the 10- to 14-year-old girls in the project village, 90% are less likely to get married as a child. This project has been expanded to other parts of Ethiopia, too ([girlsnotbides.org](http://girlsnotbides.org)).

**c) Egypt: Ishraq**

Save the Children, Caritas, CEDPA, Population, Council, Ministry of Youth, and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood are the groups that run this project. They run a two-year program for girls between the ages of 12 and 15 who aren't in school. Girls who have been away from school for a long time can get help with literacy, math, health, and life skills from this program. It is because they pay for their education and encourage girls to take part in sports programs that they can do. They also meet with people in their community to teach them about how to avoid child marriage. Girls who took part in this program said that they wanted to wait until they were older and have a say in who they married. The more time the girls have with the program, the bigger the effect it will have on them and their lives ([girlsnotbides.org](http://girlsnotbides.org)).

**d) Senegal: Community Empowerment Program**

Some of the groups that run this program are Tostan, the Center for Research in Human Development, the Population Council, the UNICEF, and Macro International, Inc. It teaches girls about hygiene, problem-solving, women's health, and human rights in informal ways. This is what it does: They organized village leaders and other people in the community and told them not to do things like cut their genitals or marry young girls. Because of this, a lot of villages made public promises to stop child marriage. Girls learned more about what they could do ([girlsnotbides.org](http://girlsnotbides.org)).

## Conclusion

UNICEF and the UNFPA are working together on a global program to speed up efforts to stop child marriage around the world. It is their goal to use strategies in health and education, as well as those in nutrition, water, and sanitation, to help stop and stop child marriages around the world. In this article, we talked about a wide range of possible solutions and how successful programs have worked around the world. This is based on this information. As the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 says, under Target 5.3, we should "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation." This is true ([sdgs.un.org](http://sdgs.un.org)).

In the end, it can be said that there is no single strategy that can stop child weddings. It takes a mix of strategies that are tailored to the local environment and that try to change behavior, attitudes, and social norms in the area. So, we need to build on what we already know and come up with new ways to help each location. We can do this by being creative. Even young girls who have already been married should not be forgotten, because they are the least important. It is important that any plan to stop child marriages is committed and inclusive. It should also make the lives of girls safer, healthier, more valuable and empowered.

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