



Child Marriage and Pandemic

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Why in News

According to a report published by **ChildLine India** the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have proved to be **new drivers of child marriages** in rural Madhya Pradesh.

Key Points

- **Important Findings by ChildLine India:**
 - Madhya Pradesh recorded **46 child marriages** between **November 2019 and March 2020**, a figure that jumped to **117 in just three months of the lockdown from April to June 2020**.
 - Across India **5,214 child marriages** were reported in the first **four months of lockdown between March to June**.

- **Causes:**
 - **Age Factor:**
 - Some parents consider the age period of **15-18 as unproductive, especially for girls**, so they start finding a match for their child during this age period.
 - **Underaged girls are more prone to child marriage than boys.**
The **Right To Education Act** makes education free and compulsory up to the age of 14 only. **Research shows** that after a girl is taken out of school at the age of 15, there is a **strong possibility of her getting married at an early age.**
 - **Insecurity:**
Law and Order are still not able to provide a **secure environment for the girls in adolescent age**, so some parents get their girl child married at a young age.
 - **Lack of Education:**
 - Girls are often seen with limited economic roles. Women's work is confined to the household and is not valued.
 - In addition, there is the **problem of dowry**. Despite the fact that dowry has been prohibited for five decades (**Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961**), it is still common for parents of girls in India to give gifts to the groom and /or his family either in cash or kind.
 - **Causes for Increase during Pandemic:**
 - **Economic pressures** due to the pandemic have pushed poor parents to marry off girls early.
 - With **no schools, safety of children, particularly girls**, was a major reason for **increase in violence against children and child marriages.**
- **Impact:**
 - Child Marriage is associated with **higher rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections including HIV.**
 - **Delays Demographic Dividend:**
Child Marriage contributes to larger families and in turn, population growth. This delays demographic dividend that would have come from reduced fertility and investment in education.
 - Children married at a young age **do not understand the responsibilities of marriage.** This results in a lack of understanding among family members. Hence, **disturbs the institution of the family.**

- **Impact on Child Bride:**
 - **Violation of rights:**

Married at a young age, girls get deprived of their **basic rights**. Some of the basic rights as mentioned in the Convention on the Rights of Child include **Right to Education, Right to Rest and Leisure, Right to Protection from Mental or Physical Abuse including Rape and Sexual Exploitation.**
 - **Poor Socialization:**

Child Brides often have to **give up their education** due to household responsibilities. It is said that if the women of a house are educated, she, in turn, educates her family. But if she is uneducated, she **loses on to the opportunity to educate her own children.**
 - **Disempowerment:**

Since child brides are not able to complete their education, they **remain dependent and underpowered** which acts as a big **hurdle** towards achieving **gender equality.**
 - **Health Issues:**
 - Devastating repercussions on the **health of Child Brides**, who are neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives and mothers.
 - According to research, the **risk of maternal mortality** is highest for adolescent girls in the 15 years of age.
 - Also, they have **23% greater risk of disease** onset including heart attack, diabetes, cancer, and stroke. They also face a high risk of **psychiatric disorders.**
- **Government Initiatives to Prevent Child Marriages:**
 - The **Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929** restricts the practice of child marriage.
 - **The Special Marriage Act, 1954** and the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** prescribe **18 and 21 years as the minimum age of consent for marriage** for women and men respectively.
 - The **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** was enacted to address and fix the shortcomings of the Child Marriage Restraint Act.
 - **Union Ministry for Women and Child Development** set up a **committee** to examine matters pertaining to age of motherhood, imperatives of lowering **Maternal Mortality Ratio** and the improvement of nutritional levels among women. **The Committee is headed by Jaya Jaitely.**

The Committee was proposed in the **Union Budget 2020-21.**
- Prevention of Child Marriage is a part of **SDG 5** which deals with **gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.**

- It is a **non-government organisation** (NGO) in India that operates a telephone helpline called Childline, for children in distress.
- It was India's first **24-hour, toll free, phone outreach** service for children
- CHILDLINE works for the protection of rights of all children aged **0 to 18**. Their special focus is on all children in need of care and protection, especially the more vulnerable sections.

Source:TH