In Depth - Say No to Child Marriage

Child Marriage is a marriage or an informal union entered into by an individual before reaching a certain age specified as minors.

In India, the minimum legal age for marriage of a girl is 18, while for boys, it is 21.

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.
- As per the UN, **with every child bride, the world loses a future teacher, doctor, scientist, entrepreneur or political leader.** The cost of this is tremendous as countries pay the price in the form of inefficient accumulation of capital and slower economic growth.
- According to a Report by the World Bank and the International Centre for Research on Women, **child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030.**

Impact on Child Bride

- **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.
- **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.
- 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.**
- 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.

Socio-economic factors are largely responsible for child marriages. Specific Reasons are:

- **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 RTE 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 of different countries are still not able to provide a secure environment

for the girls in adolescent age, so some parents get their girl child married at young age.

- **Lack of Education:** Girls are often seen as a liability with limited economic role. 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.
- **Legal Factor:** Some countries have a law for prohibiting child marriage but do not have the provision of invalidating the child marriage i.e. if a child marriage has occurred; it is not considered as void.

Global Stats

- Across the Globe, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of child marriage, where four in ten young women are married before attaining the age of 18.
- South Asia comes second, where three in ten girls are married before the age of eighteen. This region has shown the most progress in the past decade, where a risk of a girl marrying in childhood has dropped by more than a third, from nearly 50% to 30%.
- Latin America and the Caribbean have a lower level of 25% of child marriage followed by the Middle East and North Africa at about 17%. Eastern Europe and Central Asia hold a rate of 11%.
- As per new data, child marriage has continued to decline around the world with accelerated progress in the last ten years. 25 million child marriages have been averted in the last decade.
- Prevention of Child Marriage is a part of SDG 5 which deals with gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

Indian Stats

- According to estimates, **India contributes 33% of the total number of child brides in the world**, with nearly 103 million Indians getting married before they turn 18.
- **UNICEF estimates that 27% of girls i.e. nearly 1.5 million girls get married before they turn 18.** This is better than 47%, a decade ago.
- In 2018, a UN Report said that there has been a significant drop in Indian girls being forced into marriage.

Some data from Report prepared by Young Lives India along with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

(The report is based on comparative data analysis in child marriages from the third and fourth rounds of the National Family Health Survey)

- **Murshidabad in West Bengal has the maximum prevalence rate of 39.9%,** followed by Gandhinagar in Gujarat (39.3%) and Bhilwara in Rajasthan (36.4%).
- Bihar has the maximum number of high prevalence districts (20).
- More than one out of four married teenage girls in the 15-19 age group become mothers in India.
- **States like Goa (64%), Mizoram (61%), and Meghalaya (53%) have the highest prevalence of teenage pregnancy** among girls married early.
- Highest Prevalence of Child Marriage is reported among ST girls (15%) followed by girls from SC (13%)
- In other cases, Maharashtra has the highest percentage of girl child marriage.
- Prevalence of marriage in India among 15-19-year-old girls declined in a decade between 2005-06 and 2015-16.
- The 3rd and 4th NFHS finds that decline has been more than half from 26.5% to 11.9%. Though, data is based on a sample survey and not on 100% enumeration.
- **Rajasthan has shown a decline in the number of child marriages.** Percentage of women married before 18 have come down by half over the last ten years.

Law in India

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

- This Act replaced the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 which was enacted during the British era.
- It defines a child to mean a male below 21 years and female below 18 years.
- "Minor" is defined as a person who has not attained the age of majority as per the Majority Act.
- The legal status of Child Marriage is Voidable if so desired by one of the parties. However, if the consent is obtained by fraud, deceit or if the child is enticed away from his/her lawful guardians, and if the sole purpose is to use the child for trafficking or other immoral purposes, marriage would be void.
- There is also a provision for maintenance of girl child. Husband is liable to pay maintenance in case he is a major. In case, the husband is also a minor, his parents would be liable to pay maintenance.
- It envisages preventing child marriage with punishments of rigorous imprisonment for two years and/ or fine of Rs. 1 lakh.
- The Act also provides for the appointment of Child Marriage Prohibition Officer whose duties are to prevent child marriages and spread awareness regarding the same.

If the world continues to move at current pace, over 150 million additional girls will get married before their 18th birthday, by 2030. So to end the malpractice of child marriage by 2030 i.e. to achieve the target set out in SDGs, progress must be significantly accelerated.

People need to be made aware of the various socio-economic impacts of child marriage on regular basis, to prevent it completely. Strict implementation of laws and making education mandatory up to the age of 18 years can also help in preventing child marriages.

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