



## Odisha's Initiative to Curb Child Marriage

**For Prelims:** Advika, Prevention of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill 2021

**For Mains:** Major Developments in Minimum Marriageable Age in India, Associated Issues with Child Marriage.

### Why in News?

Odisha has been taking a long-term approach to bring about **social and behavioral change regarding child marriage** over the past **4-5 years**.

- Odisha recorded an overall decline in the prevalence of child marriage: from 21.3% in National Family Health Survey-4 to 20.5% in [NFHS-5](#).

### How Odisha is Tackling the Problem of Child Marriage?

- The state has implemented a **multi-pronged approach to tackle child marriage**, including tracking the absence of girls in schools and villages, **counseling**, and using a platform called "**Advika**" to **link all schemes targeting girls aged 10 to 19 years**.
- It has issued guidelines to **declare villages child-marriage-free** and there are also **monetary incentives for particularly vulnerable tribal groups**.
  - The approaches to prevent child marriages differ from district to district, with some **maintaining a database of adolescent girls** and others making the **production of Aadhaar number mandatory in all marriages**.
  - Various districts have come up with their own ways of tackling the problem, such as weaving a **Kathak performance into a local celebration to raise awareness about child marriage**.
- The emphasis is on **engaging with the community, especially girls in the age group of 15 to 18 who are dropouts**, and retaining them in educational institutions.
- The Odisha police have also been involved in the effort, conducting **monthly meetings in the community to discuss dropping out from school** and child marriages with representatives of the panchayat, parents, and children.
  - Police stations have been **made child-friendly** so that girls would feel empowered to approach the police.
- Various community leaders of different **caste, tribe, and religious groups have been roped in to build awareness** about child marriages.

### What are the Major Developments in Minimum Marriageable Age in India?

- At the time of India's independence, the **minimum marriageable age stood at 15 years for females and 18 years for men**.
- In **1978**, the government increased it to **18 for girls and 21 for men**.
- The **Law Commission Report of 2008**, on reforming family law, recommended a **uniform age of marriage for boys and girls at 18 years** and not 21.

- In **2021**, the Central government sought to introduce the [Prevention of Child Marriage \(Amendment\) Bill 2021](#), to raise the **manageable age for women across all religions, from 18 to 21 years**.
  - The proposed law will apply to all communities in the country and, once enacted, will supersede existing marriage and personal laws.

## What are the Associated Issues with Child Marriage?

- **Health Complications During Childbirth:** Child brides are often not **physically mature enough to safely carry and deliver a child**, leading to a higher risk of health complications for both the mother and child.
- **Interrupted Education:** Marriage often interrupts a girl's education, which can **limit her future opportunities** and perpetuate the cycle of [poverty](#).
- **Limited Economic Opportunities:** Child brides often have limited opportunities to pursue a career or earn a living, which can **leave them financially dependent on their husband** and vulnerable to abuse.
- **Domestic Violence:** Child brides are more likely to **experience [domestic violence](#) from their husbands**, who may view them as subservient and less deserving of respect than older wives.
  - Child marriage also have a significant impact on a girl's [mental health](#), leading to **depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem**.

## Way Forward

- **Leveraging Technology:** Technology can be used to raise awareness about the harms of child marriage and to **provide education and support to girls at risk of child marriage**.
  - For example, **mobile apps can be developed that provide information on legal rights, health, and education**, and enable girls to connect with support networks.
- **Involving Religious and Community Leaders:** Religious and community leaders can play a key role in **ending child marriage**.
  - They can be **encouraged to speak out against child marriage**, and to use their influence to promote education, gender equality, and women's empowerment.
- **Focus on the Success Stories:** While it is important to raise awareness about the harms of child marriage, it is also important to focus on the positive.
  - This means **celebrating successful programs and initiatives that have helped to reduce the incidence of child marriage**, and highlighting positive stories of **girls who have been able to break free from the cycle of poverty and discrimination through education and empowerment**.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q.** Examine the main provisions of the National Child Policy and throw light on the status of its implementation. (2016).

[Source: TH](#)

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