

# Determinants, Attitudes and Practices on Child Marriage: Evidences from Rural Rajasthan

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## ABSTRACT

*Rajasthan State is one of the hotspots of child marriages in India. A large number of children especially girl child get married before attaining the legal age and even before the occurrence of physical maturity. The magnitude of the age-old tradition has decreased in many regions in comparison to the last decade of 20th century. But still the diminishment of the child marriage is not promising and it exists as one of the major social concerns. The very existence of child marriage has multifaceted effects on the individuals who victimized for it. The glaring gender disparity and gender biased issues are also one of the products of early marriages. Present paper is analysing the etiological factors, attitudes, and practices of child marriages in rural Rajasthan. Information was collected from eight villages of Central Rajasthan through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Structured interview schedule was administered with 125 households and ten case studies were done with selected cases who were married before attaining the legal age. Result of the study indicates that many of the etiological factors of child marriage indicated in the previous research finding still exist in different forms and magnitude. Present study inferred the changing and positive aspirations of parents and children against child marriage and it is found that there is positive association between education and attitude. The increased awareness of girls on their rights, privileges, and educational aspirations are the positive signs for the prevention of child marriage. The projection of the present study indicates that at least for the next 10-20 years child marriage will exist in its full magnitude as the youngsters of the region still have a narrow mindset on*

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*the issues of marriage. The study further infers that the victims of early marriages are most vulnerable and unsatisfied with their present state.*

**Keywords:** *Determinants, Attitude, Practices, Child Marriage, Rural*

## INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is one of the major vulnerability that prevents the positive development of children in many developing and under developed countries. Even in the age of modernisation, millions of children are compelled to be groom and bride during their later childhood and teenage. Societal compulsion makes a child to take an unwanted responsibility in young age by compromising the wishes and aspirations. The case of girls is disheartening as most of them merely obliged to perform the functions of a housewife without having physical and emotional maturity and are forced to leave schools. During the period of play and peer learning children are unfortunate to take up the unwanted pressure, that too not coherent for their physical and emotional maturity. Those forces who coerce this age-old practice never consider the important prerequisites of maturity, ability, and responsibility for the marriage. Child marriage is a social evil that persists with different forms and magnitudes at many regions of world even though there are number of legislations and policy measures to prevent it. India is not an exception and is a leading country in case of child marriages and child related vulnerabilities even though the country is signatory of many international policy frameworks to protect the rights of children. In India, nearly half (43%) of women aged 20 to 24 are married before the age of 18. There has been a decline in the incidence of child marriages nationally and in nearly all states (from 54% in 1992-3 to 43% in 2007-8), but the pace of change remains slow. The prevalence of child marriage still exceeds 60 percent with the highest rates found in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh. The practice is more prevalent in rural areas compared to urban areas, with rates of 56 and 29 per cent respectively (UNICEF 2011). Many empirical evidences show that India is ranking higher position in case of child marriage (UNICEF, 2013; UNFPA, 2011) and one third of the world's child brides and grooms are hailing from the country.

Child marriage is the result of various socio-cultural factors. The social change and modernization occurring around the globe have made little impact on practices like child marriage in many parts of India. The contemporary practice of early and child marriage in India is rooted in rigid societal norms and serves to bolster long-standing social inequalities

and power structures. Marriage at a young age prevents both girls and boys from exercising agency in making important life decisions and securing basic freedoms, including pursuing opportunities for education, earning a sustainable livelihood, and accessing sexual health and rights (Nirantar Trust, 2015). Early marriages have long-lasting impacts on the young generation of the country as it constrains the different indicators and dimensions of human and social development. Child marriage is a major social concern and a violation of children's rights as it denies the basic rights to health, nutrition, education, freedom from violence, abuse, and exploitation and deprives the child of his/her childhood. There are plenty of empirical evidences that highlight the very pathetic situation of children who get victimized of the early marriages and they are mere victims of early childbearing, unwanted pregnancies, maternal and infant mortality, STI's, HIV/AIDS, pre-mature sexual relationships, unsafe abortions, deprivation from healthcare and educational attainment, high incidences of disease, poor sex ratios, and the subordination of women (Mathur, Greene, & Malhotra, 2003; Bruce, 2007; Amin, Chong, & Haberland, 2007; Children's Dignity Forum, 2008; Bhat, Sen, & Pradhan, 2005; Gupta, 2005; Yadav, 2006; Segal, 1999). The deprivation and privation of victims of child marriage is a case for concern and they are far away from the dimensions/indicators of positive human development.

Despite international human rights efforts, the eradication of child marriage is greatly hindered by the intertwined social issues that often lead to and are then in turn reinforced by the practice. Various underlying social factors inform why child marriage exists, including: traditional gender norms; the value of virginity and parental concerns surrounding premarital sex; pressure of marriage transactions (or *dowries*); and poverty (Amin *et al.*, 2007). The list of reasons for the existence of child marriage is endless and which differ from region to region and country to country. The factors such as poverty, security of girls and completion of the parental responsibility at the earliest are tops in the reasons. In a country like India child marriage is the resultant of large spectrum of socio-cultural and economic aspects. The perpetuation of child marriage is mainly due to the attitudes and knowledge on the issues pertaining to the practice. The effects of rapid social changes has reached even to the rural villages and which bought glaring modernity to their life but the age old traditions like child marriage and gender biasness is still persistent in the patriarchal society to a great extent. It is relevant to investigate the people's attitudes and practices on child marriage in the era of modernisation and what changes have been occurred to it as the results of ongoing policy interventions.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Rajasthan is known for its rich tradition and culture. The societal norms and values are unique and every attempt is made by the informal social agents to impose such aspects in the life of people, especially this is prevalent among rural population. Majority of the people are living in the rural areas and following age-old practices and customs. Rajasthan is criticised for its depleted performance in the developmental issues such as lowered sex ratio, higher level of gender disparity, strict patriarchal norms, lowered human development indicators, substandard educational system, large number of infant and maternal deaths, low level of girl education, and the age-old practice of child marriage. The child marriage has a negative correlation with all the above said points as it is a contributory factor for many of them. Rajasthan has reportedly the second Indian state having highest number of child marriages in the country with more than 60 percent of girls getting married before 18. The practice of child marriage is common in Rajasthan. Although the government, civil society and community-based organisations unequivocally view child marriage as a social evil and crime, perceptions differ in rural areas (Rajasthan Human Development Report, 2008). There are ample empirical evidences of child marriages in Rajasthan though the official records account very less number of child marriages as it is not recorded legally. Researchers claim that, in Rajasthan, the number of girls married off before eighteen is somewhere between 55.5% and 80% and other researchers estimate that roughly 56% of Rajasthani marriages occur with girls under the age of fifteen (Yadav, 2006, pl. 10; Burns, 1998). Therefore, there is overwhelming evidence that child marriage is occurring in Rajasthan in large numbers, despite the laws against it. The investigation on the etiological factors of child marriage shows a range of issues and the attitude of people ranks in the first. Many people are aware about the law that punishes people involved in child marriage, but still they practice it.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The sample of the present study constitutes people from eight villages of two districts of Central Rajasthan; Ajmer and Jaipur. Villages were selected randomly and an in-depth interview schedule was administered with 125 households. Face to face interview was conducted after taking the consent from the respondents. Questions were asked on the attitudes, perceptions and practices on child marriage. Households were selected

by using the convenient method of sampling. Majority of the samples constitutes the married men and women in the age group of 20-60. Apart from the household survey a detailed case study was conducted among ten adults who were married before the legal age of marriage (<18 for girls and <21 for boys) and have not crossed 25 years of age as of the study period.

## RESULTS

The study explored the possible answers of the attitudes and practices of child marriage in the region. Qualitative and quantitative information are analysed critically to projects the possible trends in the near future.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile**

1	Gender	Frequency	Percent	2	Type of Family	Frequency	Percent
	Male	88	70.4		Joint	65	52
	Female	37	29.6		Nuclear	60	48
3	Occupation	Frequency	Percent	4	Education	Frequency	Percent
	Agriculture	87	69.6		Illiterate	39	31.2
	Govt. Jobs	11	8.8		Primary	49	39.2
	Daily Wages	13	10.4		Secondary	15	12
	Others	14	11.2		Higher Secondary	7	5.6
					Graduation and above	15	12

Total No: 125

The information was collected from different demographic dividends of the population (from both sexes) which included adolescent, youth, middle aged and elderly. The age group extends from 15 to 80 years, even though the minimum and maximum age dividends are very less. The calculated mean age of the respondent is 40.35. Mean age of the male respondents is 41, they constitute 70 percent of the total respondents and mean age of females is 38.5, they constitute 30 percent of the respondents. An equal portion of the respondents are living in nuclear and joint families (52:48). The study is conducted in the rural area, 70 percent of the respondents are engaged in agriculture as their primary occupation. More than 30 percent of the respondents are illiterate and around 40percent have primary education. Very few have secondary, higher secondary and graduation as educational qualification. Most of the people (86%) belong

to Hindu religion and the remaining respondents are categorised as non-Hindus.

**Table 2: Attitudes on Age of Child and Child Marriage.**

<i>Who is a Child</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>What is Child Marriage</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mode</i>
	5	18	13.104	14		5	18	13.84	15

Total No: 125

The perception of respondents on the question 'Who is a Child' has categorical variations and the minimum age is found as 5 and the maximum is 18, the mean age is calculated as 13 and the most repeated response (mode) is 14. Same responses have reflected on the people's perception on 'what is child marriage', calculated mean age is 13.8 and the mode age is 15. Perception of respondents on the age of child and child marriage is an indicative of how people consider child right as a concern. People's perception on the age factor is contributory for the rampant prevalence of child marriage.

The attitude of respondents on the age of child and child marriage is reflective in many related responses. Around 75 percent of the respondents opined that they support child marriage and they agreed that child marriage is very common practice in their region. Majority of the respondents are aware about the different indicators of marriage (age, puberty, psychological maturity etc.) and they agree those are necessary for marriage. But at the same time majority of them support marriage of girls and boys even before attaining 18.

**Table 3: Age of Marriage and Became Parents.**

1	Age of Marriage	Frequency	Percent	2	Became Parents	Frequency	Percent
	Single	12	9.6		No child	18	14.4
	Below 5	11	8.8		Below 15	5	4
	6-10	29	23.2		16-20	54	43.2
	11-15	35	28		21 Above	48	38.4
	16 and Above	38	30.4				

Total: 125

More than 50 percent of the respondents got married during the age of 6-15 and most of them were sent for *gona* before 15 years of age. Those who were married even before attaining the age of 5 were also sent for *gona* before the age of 15. Fifty percent of the respondents became parents before they crossed the age of 20. The occurrence of marriage in the early ages has significant impact on the respondent's attitude to initiate the early marriage of their upbringings.

**Table 4: Ideal (Desirable) Age for Marriage**

1	Boys	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode	2	Girls	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Mode
	14 and Below	25	20	16.5	15		14 and Below	61	48.8	14	12
	15-18	66	52.8				15-18	61	48.8		
	19-21	32	25.6				19 and above	3	2.4		
	21 and Above	2	1.6								

Total No: 125

Table 4 indicates that respondents of the study perceive that 16.5 (mean) is the ideal age of marriage for boys. Only one percent of the respondents opined 21 or above as the ideal age of marriage. In the case of girls, people perceive that 14 is the ideal age and very less number of people have opined above 18 as the age of marriage for girls. The attitude of respondents on the age of child marriage indicates the attitude of people and how such attitudes are reflected in the practice of child marriage.

**Table 5: Precipitating Factors for Child Marriage**

1	Fear Eve Teasing	Frequency	Percent	2	Com- munity Pressure	Frequency	Percent
	Yes	101	80.8		Yes	26	20.8
	No	24	19.2		No	99	79.2
3	Fear of Rape/ Violence	Frequency	Percent	4	Fear Self Initiation	Frequency	Percent
	Yes	100	80		Yes	110	88
	No	25	20		No	15	12

5	Marrying Together	Frequency	Percent	6	Atta-Satta	Frequency	Percent
	Yes	120	96		Yes	120	96
	No	5	4		No	5	4
7	Availability of Schools	Frequency	Percent	8	Poverty	Frequency	Percent
	Yes	94	75.2		Yes	116	92.8
	No	31	24.8		No	9	7.2
9	Fear of Premarital Sex/Loss of Virginity	Frequency	Percent	10	Eve Teasing	Frequency	Percent
	Yes	101	80.8		Yes	101	80.8
	No	24	19.2		No	24	19.2

Total No: 125

Child marriage is multifaceted phenomenon which is precipitated by many factors and contradictory to analyse. Many of the respondents don't have a specific answer for why child marriage exists in their society. Many opined that it's a very common practice in their society and they also do the same. The common contributory factors of early marriage are shown in Table 5. More than 80 percent of the respondents opined that fear of eve teasing and rape/violence against girls are important factors which make the parents do early marriages. Around 90 percent of the respondents opined that the emerging trend of self-initiation is also a reason for early marriages of children, especially girls. More than 95 percent of the respondents said that marrying younger siblings along with elder siblings for reducing the marital expenses and exchange marriages are very common practices and it results in early marriages of child. More than 90 percent of the respondents opined that poverty is a factor that compels the family to take initiatives for early marriages. Non-availability of secondary, higher secondary schools is also a leading cause for marriage.

**Table 6: Age Preferences for Marriage**

1	Preference for Bride	Frequency	Percent	2	Preferable age for Girls Marriage	Frequency	Percent
	Bride Under 18	99	79.2		Before 18	97	77.6
	Bride Above 18	26	20.8		After 18	28	22.4

Table 6 indicates that around 80 percent of the respondents prefer a girl under eighteen for their son as a bride and approximately the same percent of people wanted their girl children to get married before they cross the age of 18. The preference shows the projections and probability

for the increased incidence of child marriage in the near future.

**Table 7: Education of the Respondents and Age Preference for Marriage**

<i>Education of Respondent.</i>	<i>Age Preference for Bride</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Critical Ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Preferable age for Girls Marriage</i>		<i>Critical Ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	<i>Bride Under 18</i>	<i>Bride Under 18</i>				<i>Before 18</i>	<i>Before 18</i>		
Illiterate	36	3	39	16.846	.002	35	4	14.665	.005
Primary	42	7	49			41	8		
Secondary	9	6	15			8	7		
Higher Secondary	4	3	7			5	2		
Graduation and above	8	7	15			8	7		
Total	99	26	125			97	28		

It is evident from Table 7 that there is a significant relationship between age preferences for marriage and education of the respondents. Educated respondents prefer brides who are above the legal age for them and their sons while the illiterate and low level educated respondents prefer under-aged girls as brides. The same trend is shown in the case of their aspiration for the marriage of their daughters. Most of the illiterate and low level educational qualification holders prefer to get the marriage done for their girls before eighteen. The statistical inferences are alarming the relevance of education for the prevention of social evils like child marriage.

Statistical analysis on different socio-demographic variables and people’s attitude show that sex, age, religion, occupation do not make any differences on the attitude and practices of people. The only factor that shows the variations in attitude is education. It is observed from the study

that there are no significant differences in the perception and opinion of respondents on the ground of gender. Both the genders support the age-old practice of child marriage.

**Table 8: Educational Attainment and Attitudes on Age of Child and Child Marriage**

	<i>Educational Attainment</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>d.f</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Who is a Child?</i>	Illiterate	39	12.3077	2.91235	5	17	4	6.63	0
	Primary	49	12.4898	2.67802	5	18	1	7.152	0.009
	Secondary	15	15.8	2.21037	12	20	1	12.496	0.001
	Higher Secondary	7	13.5714	2.37045	9	16	3	4.674	0.004
	Graduation and above	15	14.2667	1.16292	12	17	120		
	Total	125	13.104	2.78482	5	20	124		
<i>What is Child Marriage</i>	Illiterate	39	12.7949	3.66476	5	18	4	3.549	0.009
	Primary	49	13.3878	3.47501	5	18	1	9.394	0.003
	Secondary	15	15.5333	2.74816	10	20	1	12.266	0.001
	Higher Secondary	7	14.8571	4.48808	5	18	3	0.644	0.589
	Graduation and above	15	15.8667	2.29492	10	18	120		
	Total	125	13.84	3.541	5	20	124		

Table 8 indicates the significant association between educational attainment and people's perception on 'who is a child' and what child marriage is. The calculated mean of both the responses is 13. But education has a significant factor which makes considerable variations in the people's attitude on the age factor of child and child marriage. It been observed that according to the level of educational attainment attitude on the age factor is changing. Respondents from higher educational background preferred higher age for marriage while comparing to the illiterates and less educated.

## DISCUSSION

The present study is an indicative of the persistent child right violation prevalent in the form of child marriages. The sample of the study constitutes rural people of the Central Rajasthan and the peculiar characteristics of the socio-demographic aspects of the region are reflective in the sample. Majority of the male respondents are engaged in rural based self-employment and agriculture. Except a few, majority of the female respondents are not engaged in any occupation. An equal percent of the respondents belong to nuclear and joint families respectively and it indicates the changing patterns of family set up in the region. The educational attainment of respondents is poor with approximately 40 percent as illiterate and an equal percent having only primary education.

The study has analysed the people's attitude on the precipitating factors of child marriage in the region. As shown by many empirical studies child marriage is being practiced in the region as a traditional and cultural practice. Poverty and dowry are core factors which contribute to the prevalence of early marriage. Respondents opined that fear of rape, eve teasing, premarital sex, and increasing tendency of self-initiation are also leading factors for the early marriage, especially for girls. Most of the reasons are unrealistic and unjustifiable as many of these are not the real factors which contribute toward the age-old practice. The fear of premarital sex, eve teasing, and the concept of virginity have significant impact upon people and to justify their act of child marriage. Eighty percent of the respondents said that they don't have a direct pressure from the community for the early marriage of their children but the community practices have significant influence upon them which compels them to initiate the early marriages of their children. One of the respondents opined that "I really didn't want my daughter to get married in her early teens but continual questions from my neighbours and relatives, why are you not taking initiative of your daughter's marriage?, made me in an odd position to search a groom for her". This is the scenario, where many parents don't want to put their children to early marriage but the prevailing socio-cultural scenario doesn't allow them to think and act differently.

The study reveals that marrying together (with elder sibling) and exchange marriages (*Atta Satta*) are the leading factors of child marriages. Marrying together is widely practiced as to reduce the marriage related expenses. This is practiced even though the age difference of siblings is more than 5-10 years. *Atta Satta* or exchange marriages are also widely accepted practice which intend to reduce the marriage related expenses

and the adjustments in dowry. It is noteworthy that more than 95 percent of the respondents opined that both of these are leading factors of child marriage and more than 70 percent of the respondents said that marriages through *Atta Satta* and marrying together happened to them or any of their family members. This is a clear indicative that how these factors are the indirect and strong factors of the child marriage. The attitudes of people initiate a strong desire for child marriage and the options like *Atta Satta* and marrying together furnish a reason to fulfill it.

The socio-demographic variables are reflective in the attitudes of respondents on the age criteria of child marriage. The mean calculated age of the respondents on their perception 'who is a child' is 13 and on 'what is child marriage' is 13.8. It indicates that those who are above this particular age limit (i.e., 13) are not considered as child by them. Consequently their attitude is reflective on child marriage as they consider the marriage above 13 is not child marriage. It is interesting to note that very less number of respondents opined that they consider marriage above 18 as child marriage. It is worthy to note that education is an important factor that has significant influence on people's perception as the statistical inferences (Anova) show that according to the educational attainment the perception on age factors of child and child marriage is increasing. Age preference for a bride and the preferable age of girl's marriage are also significantly correlated with the educational attainment. Those who have higher educational attainment (higher secondary & graduation) prefers a bride of higher age (around or above 18) as compared to the respondents of low educational profiles. Even though it is a positive dimension that education makes significant attitudinal changes but the mindset of people who are educated also does not allow the age of marriage to cross the limit of 18-20. Sex, religion, type of family, and age do not have any association with the attitude of people. It is disheartening to know that women don't have a different opinion on child marriage even though girls are very vulnerable to the consequences of child marriage issues. The sensitisation of women on such issues is least and unaddressed in the patriarchal rural society.

The evidences from the present study project that child marriages would persist with its full vigour and magnitude in the near future as the majority of the respondents constitute the youth which is the largest demographic dividend of the region as well the country. The perception and attitudes of youth have significant impact on every human society. The sensitisation and legal provisions make little impact on people. More than 80 percent of the respondents knew that child marriage is a crime and

a punishable offence. But they are well aware that the implementation of the same is practically difficult and hence they continue to practice child marriage. The same percent of respondents opined that there should be amendments in the law related to child marriage and the marriages under the age of 18 should be legalised.

The determinants of child marriage are being constant and adding more reason to the wide practice of it. But certain factors like strict societal/community pressure have decreased significantly as a result of modernisation, social changes, and rapid changes in the family setups from joint to nuclear families. Poverty, dowry, and expenses on marriage are still the major reasons of child marriages. The advancement of technology, communication, and life style has made some determinants of child marriage very stronger such as fear of premarital sex, rape, and self-initiation. A 28-year old man said, "It is a good practice and nowadays it is very common that girls are eloping and the family losses its status. Mobile phones and computers are main reason behind it". The increased tendency of the young generation for self-initiation to find a partner is also a leading factor which makes the parents prevent higher education of girls and initiate their early marriage.

Changes in the attitudes of people are not promising to the extent which is supposed and projected in various social legislations, policies, and programmes. The gender biased and patriarchal Indian rural society doesn't allow the women to come forward to the main stream and therefore such attitudes and narrow mindsets are still prominent which results in many anti-women/girls practices. The impact of new media and policies helps less in the alteration of the mindset of people. A 42-year old man said, "Nowadays children are getting maturity at early ages and the government should think about the relaxation of age for marriage".

There are few changes occurring in the practices of child marriage in the rural Rajasthan. The age of sending for *gona* has changed considerably. Up to the later 1990's the practice of sending for *gona* before the occurrence of puberty was very common but the recent past has witnessed significant changes as most of the parents send their daughters for *gona* most probably after the occurrence of puberty or menarche. Government interventions on child marriage significantly increase especially during the Akshaya Thrithiya, when largest number of child marriages occurs throughout the state. The interventions of Govt. and non-governmental sector are making progressive impacts on the practice of child marriage. Increased educational facilities in the rural areas also made momentous impact on the reduction of child marriages. The age difference between

bride and groom has also decreased in a considerable amount as compared to previous decades which were known for the marriage between adult male and young girl child. Parents face difficulty in convincing and compelling their daughters for the early marriages as girls are getting aware about their rights and privileges. As an indication of this, Yamuna (name changed) a fifteen year old girl said, "Law has to be strict enough to take necessary actions, if parents pressurise us for the early marriage". A number of girls are developing positive mindset towards the worse practice against them.

## CONCLUSION

The indication of the present study is not positive for a country like India which is now expected to be in the list of world powers in the near future. India cannot enter in such lists until the burning social issues like child marriages are prevented. Child marriage is a social problem which has significant impact on the entire life of the person and the family as well as the society. Projections from the present study demonstrate that child marriage will persist with full magnitude in the coming future and will affect at least the two generations if the prevalence and attitudes continue as of now. Child marriage has a negative entity to ruin the most vital dividends of our population; children and youth. The implementation of law, development of policy framework, and the sensitisation of people are the need of the hour to prevent the age old practice of child marriage. The social sanction given to child marriage is a serious concern to think and act up on.

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