

Child Marriages in Haryana

Challenges in Implementing PCMA, 2006

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Child marriage continues to prevail in Haryana despite preventive laws. The state government's policy of conditional cash transfers aimed at eliminating child marriage has failed in incentivising parents to not get their daughters married off before they turn 18. The role of child marriage protection officers who have been given the power to prevent and prosecute solemnisation of child marriages, and create awareness on the issue is examined. In order to draft a macro-level policy pertaining to child marriages, it is important to understand the gaps in the implementation of the existing policies along with grassroots realities and the challenges of implementing them.

The occurrence of child marriages in South Asia is a widespread phenomenon. Out of 60 million marriages that include girls under the age of 18, approximately 31 million are in South Asia alone. Not only is it a grave violation of child rights, but it also directly has an impact on other aspects of a child's overall well-being, especially of young girls, such as their education, health, and psychological well-being (Nour 2006). Child marriage is part of the patriarchal traditions that reduce the role of young girls to wives and mothers to their maternal bodies and reduce their experiences of being (Stith 2015).

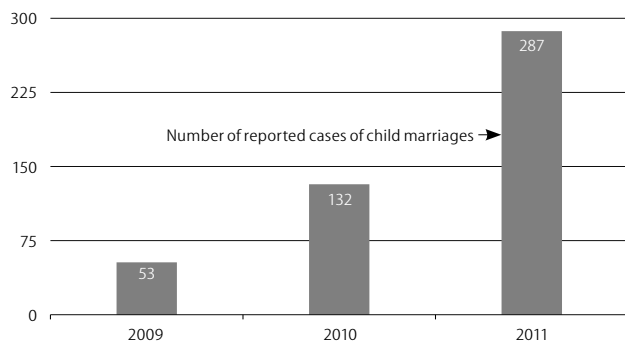
In India, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA) came into effect in November 2007 replacing the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929. The PCMA defines child marriage as a marriage in which either of the contracting parties is a child. Furthermore, a child is defined as a person who, if male, has not completed 21 years of age and, if female, has not completed 18 years of age (PCMA 2006). This act mandates state governments to establish structures including that of child marriage prohibition officers who are empowered to prevent child marriages.

Haryana has one of the lowest sex ratios (834 per 1,000 males) in India and child marriage is quite common. The Haryana government has initiated a conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme called *Apni Beti Apna Dhan* (ABAD), or "Our Daughter, Our Wealth" to address this issue. This scheme, aimed at ending child marriage along with ensuring that girls attended schools for longer, was one of the first CCTs targeting girls. A study conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW 2014) to evaluate the same scheme showed that girls who were beneficiaries of the CCT attained higher levels of schooling, were more likely to continue their education, and less likely to drop out than non-beneficiary girls. The study also found that CCT programmes with immediate or protracted benefits needed to interact with behavioural change, and financial incentives alone cannot trigger effective change without systemic changes in values and aspirations.

In this article, we look at child marriage as a form of violence against women. Child marriage affects girls disproportionately compared to boys (UNICEF 2009). Due to the young age of child brides, they have little or no power of negotiation in their new home and are vulnerable to domestic abuse (Human Rights Watch 2011). Furthermore, the practice has far greater negative implications for health, education, autonomy and

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Figure 1: Year-wise Distribution of Reported Cases of Child Marriage (n = 472)

Source: Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women (TISS 2015).

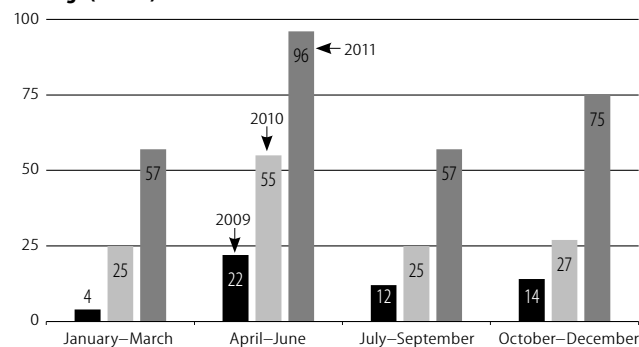
well-being of girls than boys (Sagade 2005; Raj et al 2012; Speizer and Pearson 2013).

As a multi-agency response to child marriages in Haryana, the Haryana government began implementing special cells for women and children in all the districts of Haryana to provide a coordinated, coherent and in-depth response to the issue of violence against women.¹ The special cell for women and children is an initiative of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences' (TISS) collaboration with state governments, especially the criminal justice system, to end violence against women. These special cells have the mandate to implement the PCMA, 2006 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Under this provision, social workers at the special cells are authorised to work as protection-cum-prohibition officers (PPOs) to end child marriage in Haryana, prevent and prosecute solemnisation of child marriages, and create awareness on the issue.

Given that child marriages have a higher rate of occurrence in rural areas than in urban areas (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Statistics Division 2011), it is important to understand the sociological reasons for the same and determine the solutions accordingly. With this objective in mind, this article aims to analyse the reasons for child marriages and the challenges faced by PPOs in Haryana. In the next section, the methodology of the article has been discussed. The sections after that present the findings of the study, highlight reasons for child marriage and state the procedural challenges faced by the PPOs. Then, the article presents the way forward in tackling child marriage and ends with concluding remarks.

Methodology

The article is based on an exploratory study using a mixed methods approach. The data collection involved three different data sets: (i) office data for quantitative analysis, (ii) in-depth interviews with families, and (iii) interviews and focus group discussions with special cell workers. The secondary data included records of child marriage cases that were prevented by the PPOs and were obtained from the complaint registers maintained in special cells. The complaints used for analysis were registered between January 2009 and December 2011 from 20 districts of Haryana. Primary data was collected by selecting 20 cases from the total number of cases. Interviews and focus group discussions with the PPOs were conducted to gain a

Figure 2: Quarterly Break-up of the Number of Reported Cases of Child Marriage (n=472)

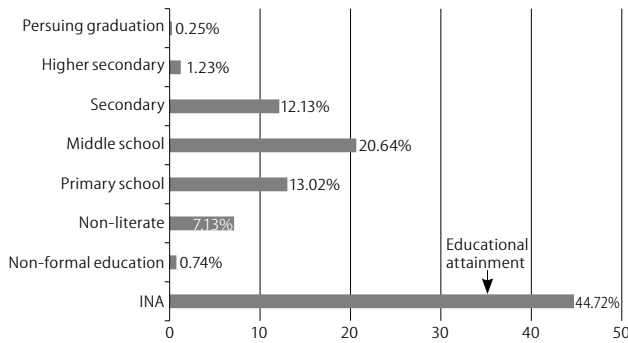
Source: Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women (TISS 2015).

deeper understanding of their role in preventing child marriages as well as the challenges faced by them. Interviews were also conducted with the children rescued (now adults) from child marriages and their families.² The first set of data (office data) was coded and analysed using qualitative analysis software. Descriptive analysis and bivariate tables were used in the analysis. Data sets 2 and 3 were qualitative in nature and were obtained through interviews.

Increase in Reporting Child Marriages

From January 2009 to December 2011, a total of 472 cases of child marriage were registered with the PPOs across 20 districts of Haryana. Since the time of implementation, there has been a steady and significant increase in the number of registered cases (Figure 1), which does not necessarily mean an increase in the incidence of child marriage cases, but reflects an increase in the reporting of such cases—a likely effect of growing public awareness of the law. Thus, it may be seen as an indicator of the effectiveness of the PPOs' work.

Section 16(3) of the PCMA states that it is the duty of child marriage prohibition officers “to create awareness of the evil which results from child marriages” and “to sensitise the community on the issue of child marriages” (PCMA 2006). Apart from the awareness campaigns that were also supported by local media, it was found that a single incidence of child marriage prevented in one village generates enough publicity in that village, thus, raising awareness about the implications of PCMA and the work done by the PPOs. This results in more people coming forward and reporting such cases. Hence, the figures shown in the graph are consistent with the observations made by all the PPOs that the reporting of child marriage cases increased because of growing awareness. However, the reporting of child marriages was not uniform throughout the year. There was a greater incidence of child marriage cases in the April to June quarter across years (Figure 2), as this was when the harvesting season gets over and people are free to take care of other household responsibilities. Akshaya Tritiya (annual spring time festival), also known as Akha Teej that falls during this period is a holy day for Hindus, considered especially auspicious for weddings. The number of reported cases in this quarter had doubled in numbers, a fact also verified by the PPOs.

Figure 3: Educational Attainment of Girls as per Office Records (n = 472)

Source: Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women (TISS 2015).

The number of child marriage cases recorded in different districts were influenced by the socio-demographic characteristics of each district. For example, Sirsa had the maximum number of registered cases (17.2%). Sirsa is the western-most region of Haryana that borders Punjab and Rajasthan; Rajasthan has one of the highest incidence of child marriages after Bihar (Young Lives and NCPDR 2017). It was also noted that there were fewer cases of child marriage in substantially more urbanised and industrialised districts, such as Faridabad (0.4%), Panchkula (0.4%), Ambala (1.7%), and Yamunanagar (1.7%). This is broadly in line with previous evidence suggesting that the incidence of child marriage is inversely proportional to the level of development in the locality, literacy levels, and industrial development (Sagade 2005).

Education and Child Marriage

A strong association was found between educational attainment and girls' age at the time of marriage (Figure 3). While the data on educational attainment of girls was not available in nearly half (44.72%) of the cases, the data presented in Figure 3 indicates that girls begin to drop out after middle school. There were fewer girls who were able to complete secondary school, that is, Class 10 (1.54%); a majority of them dropped out of school by then. Similar findings were reported in studies carried out by the ICRW (2011) in Bihar and Rajasthan.

Education is seen as a three-fold threat to traditional society. First, the crossing of the boundary of the private sphere to physically traverse to the school is an attempt to indulge in the outside world and public participation. Second, ideas and concepts learnt in school empower a girl and make her more aware of the world, which is detrimental to the existence of an orthodox society. Third, the fear of interaction with the opposite sex leads to loss of control over female sexuality. The desire to control women and their sexuality manifests itself in the form of khap panchayats (caste courts) that mete out death penalties for elopement and inter-caste relations (Rajpurohit and Prakash 2015). There is a symbiotic relationship between educational attainment and child marriage, wherein the obstacles preventing the education of girls are expectations of domesticity, safety, and infrastructural barriers (Kelly and Bhabha 2014).

The study attempted to dive deeper into the reasons that prompted families to get their children married before they attain adulthood. Although the records of the reported cases of child marriages did not always mention the reasons for the marriage, they were discussed during the interviews with the PPOs and the families.

Traditional Practices and Child Marriage

In 23.3% of the cases, economic compulsions emerged as the most cited reason for child marriages as per the office records. All the trappings of a socially acceptable wedding ceremony in Haryana (a tent, decorations, music, food and clothes) require substantial funds (Bloch et al 2004). Even though these expenses are borne mainly by the girl's family, the groom's family also has to incur considerable expenditure. Even if a marriage is held in a temple or a gurudwara, the wedding itself is an expensive affair. Marrying off siblings together is an acceptable method of saving costs even when the siblings are below the legally permissible age of marriage. However, some of the PPOs claimed that while poverty is definitely a reason, most parents want to get over with their "liabilities" as soon as possible. Another study in Malda district in northern West Bengal found that even though poverty was apparently identified as the major reason for child marriages, a closer look revealed that parents who were well placed economically also followed the practice, which was influenced by patriarchal values such as the notion of family honour as linked to a girl's chastity and caste endogamy (Ghosh 2011).

The custom of child marriage, as some PPOs pointed out, is so deep-rooted and widespread in certain communities that it has become a traditional practice. Earlier studies have also reported traditional beliefs and practices as one of the reasons for early marriages (NIPCCD 2008). As recounted by the PPOs, among certain castes such as Gujjars and Ahirs, there is a tradition of getting underage girls married. Gujjars of north-western India, who have ethnic affinities with the Rajputs, Jats and Ahirs, were once a nomadic pastoral community practising monogamy, community endogamy and clan exogamy. They practise both child marriage followed by *gauna*³ as well as adult marriage. Junior and senior levirate and junior sororate marriages are recognised (Dabral and Malik 2004).

It was revealed in the discussions with the PPOs that it has become rather difficult to find a wife, compelling people to marry at an early age. The connection between child marriage and low sex ratio is illustrated in the following case of the marriage of a minor boy by one of the PPOs:

The boy was 19 years old, but the girl was above 18 years of age. The father of the boy was aware that his son was below the legal marriageable age. But he was having difficulty in finding a bride for his son and so he wanted to get his son married whenever a suitable match could be found. The family was upset when the marriage was prohibited. They were also apprehensive that the girl's family would get her married elsewhere and their son would find it very hard to get a wife.

During discussions with PPOs and the families, the practice of *atta-satta*, in which the daughter of one family is given in marriage to another family on an agreement of the other family to give their daughter in return, was prevalent. Sometimes

three families are involved in this exchange. In this system, boys can get married only if there is a girl in the family whom they can give in marriage to a boy in the bride's family. If no girl is available within the family, a suitable girl has to be arranged from another family. Low sex ratio has strengthened the system of *atta-satta* among many caste groups.

Prevalent Patriarchal Norms

Chowdhary (1997) while drawing a connection between caste and endogamous marriages states that ensuring caste endogamy is essential to ensure perpetuation of the caste system. As marriage provides the structural link between kinship and caste, a closer surveillance is accorded to marital alliances. Second, selection of one's life partner shows independence which in the local perception presages a disruption of family ties or break-up of the joint family system and a loss of authority suffered by senior members of the family. Third, in case a woman makes an alliance within the village, and since theoretically all people in a village are related (Mishra and Azeez 2014) such a decision introduces a rank outsider into the family who can and may claim the property on behalf of his wife. Location of a married daughter within the natal village also spells danger to patrilineal inheritance as it facilitates and could lead to assumption of land inherited by her. A girl is, at her most vulnerable between the onset of puberty and marriage. Marriage has to be carefully controlled in a caste society concerned with the maintenance of boundaries (Dube 1988). The tightening of restrictions on marriage practice emphasising village exogamy and caste endogamy is to negate the progressive fallout of the inheritance enablement law on female population (Chowdhary 1997).

The men in the family are considered to be responsible for the girl's safety (and chastity) for as long as she is unmarried, which, by means of marriage, is passed on to someone else. This compulsion makes parents ignore the fact that neither does marriage ensure their daughters' safety nor her well-being. There were other parents who reiterated the same emotion with a slight difference. They discussed the consequences of any animosity that is taken out on a girl's body to dishonour the family as the girl's chastity is seen as a symbol of a family's status and honour (Chakravarti 1993). Violating it is a means of extracting revenge in cases of family vendetta. In order to prevent anyone from dishonouring the family, many families felt that marrying them off early was a simple solution.

Although child marriage is seen as a way of protecting a girl from sexual abuse, ironically, far from protecting her, the marriage of a minor exposes her to sexual exploitation from the male members of the marital family as well. Thus, the same marriage, which is looked at as a way of protecting a girl from sexual abuse, exposes her to sexual exploitation from the male members of the marital family as well (Chaudhari 2015).

Other Reasons

As per office records maintained with the PPOs, ignorance of the law was also cited as an indirect reason for child marriages (27.12%). However, during their interviews, PPOs felt that it

might be an excuse given by the families. One PPO narrated her experience:

We got a complaint that three minor children were being married together in one village. This was going to happen in a former sarpanch's (village head) family. We applied for an injunction order. I went to the venue with the Station House Officer. The family was summoned to the court. They pleaded ignorance of the law, and promised to cancel the marriage.

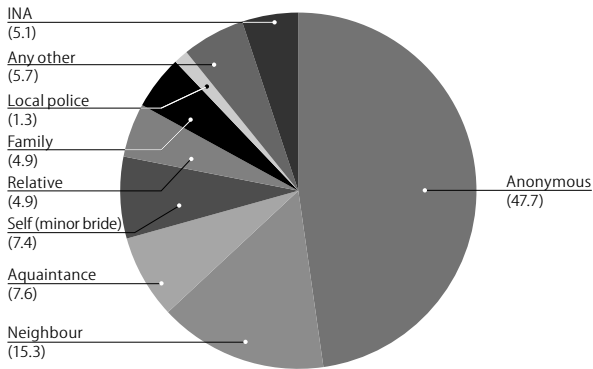
From the interviews with the family members who were prevented under the law to have their underage children married, it was evident that they were aware of the law but lacked clarity regarding its details and legal repercussions. One of the parents of an underage boy kept on insisting that they were unjustly wronged, "Hamara bachcha to balik hai (our boy is an adult)." This confusion could have occurred as the legal age for adulthood for both boys and girls is 18 years, but the legal age under PCMA is 21 years. One parent vehemently stated the inadequacy of efforts on the government's behalf to spread awareness about the law.

Sometimes families feel pressured to get their children married and "settled" because of illness of a family member, even though the children are underage. This is evident from the interviews. One PPO spoke about such a case where the father of the boy had cancer. The girl with whom the marriage was arranged, was underage and the marriage had to be prohibited. Another respondent who was herself married years after attaining majority was involved in getting her underage sister married to her underage brother-in-law only because her father-in-law was terminally ill and wanted to see his son married before his demise.

A family member also alleged that the girl was being married off by her mother for the purpose of child trafficking. Other reasons also included instances where girls wanted to get married by choice and were not willing to wait till the legal age of marriage. Many girls brought up in a restrictive and repressive atmosphere, deprived of the opportunities of education and independence, and encouraged by media portrayals of a happy life with a self-chosen partner, start looking at marriage to a partner of their choice as a way of escaping their oppressive households.⁴ In a few cases, kidnapping and sexual assault were mentioned as reasons for getting a girl married before she was of legal age. These could be the case where a minor girl elopes with a self-chosen partner and the girl's family registers a complaint of kidnapping and rape against the boy.

Procedural Challenges Faced by the PPOs

Among many reasons, procedural challenges faced by the PPOs were also examined. When a report is made to the office of the PPO regarding an impending child marriage in the district, the PPO first tries to verify if the persons getting married are actually underage. They visit the village, verify the age, mediate with the family and the community, and also explain the provisions of the PCMA. The objective is to convince everyone concerned about the illegality of child marriages and persuade them to postpone the wedding. Some PPOs go with an injunction order from the court prohibiting the marriage, some obtain the order later only if they feel the necessity, and others rely on written

Figure 4: Complaints Received from Office Data (n=472)

Source: Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women (TISS 2015).

assurances given by the concerned families that the marriage would not take place till the child is of marriageable age. The process is far from smooth, and the PPOs have to negotiate many challenges in the course of their work.

In almost half the cases (47.7%) the complaint was lodged through anonymous calls or letters (Figure 4). The office data also suggested that majority of the cases were reported through a phone call (51%) or a letter (43%), which ensured the anonymity of the person making the complaint. In-person reporting by visiting a PPOs office was rare (4%).

The experience of the PPOs has been that anonymous complainants are usually neighbours or acquaintances who bear a grudge against the family. Since interruption or prohibition of an impending wedding on legal grounds translates into a grave social insult as well as economic loss to the family, such complaints are made as a way to take revenge against the family. Relatives or family members may also report a child marriage out of spite. If a family rejects a proposal from one family and fixes the marriage elsewhere, the rejected family may complain. Girls who want to choose their marriage partner may themselves lodge complaints if their families forcibly try to get them married to another person or their boyfriends may do so. One of the reasons that came forth in the discussions was that boys from landholding families, who sexually exploit girls working in their farms, would report their victims' marriage to continue abusing them without any repercussions. In some cases, neighbours and acquaintances had identified themselves (15.3% and 7.6%) while registering the complaint. Relatives or family members themselves (4.9% each) had complained against the marriage because the girl had eloped, or if the alliance was arranged by some other members of the family without their approval. Very few girls (7.4%) seemed to have come forward to make a complaint. Even when the identity of the complainant was known, PPOs go to great lengths to keep the identity a secret to ensure the safety of complainants. However, this practice renders the system open to abuse by people who mislead the system by giving false information out of spite.

Time of Intervention by PPOs

The time at which intervention takes place affects the process of intervention as well as its effect on the family and the child. Records of the marital status of the child at the time of

(%) intervention is maintained. In a majority of the cases, the intervention was done when the wedding was in progress (72.5%). In very few cases (8.9%), the impending child marriage was reported immediately after the engagement ceremony and the PPOs were able to intervene well in time. In some cases (11.6%), the marriage was already solemnised before the case was reported to the PPO, or before the intervention could take place. In more than half of these cases, gauna was also performed, that is, the girl was sent to her marital home. There were some instances when the information given to the PPO was inaccurate; there was no marriage taking place as reported (2.8%). According to the PPOs, reports of child marriage are invariably received so late that they have no option other than to stop the wedding at the venue. In cases of complaints that are done out of spite, the timing of the complaint is deliberate so that the family is humiliated publicly. When the PPOs receive information about a child marriage at the eleventh hour, they have to go to the venue directly to stop these marriages which is awkward for the family as well as for the PPOs. The venue for the wedding may be in a remote village and reaching the place in time may itself be a difficult task, especially in view of the fact that PPOs do not have an official vehicle to commute to neighbouring villages. Sometimes on auspicious days, such as Akshaya Tritiya, many marriages are scheduled on the same day, and reaching all the venues becomes a difficult task for the PPOs. At such times, PPOs are forced to take help of the local police by asking them to go to the venue. However, as one PPO said, "60% of the times I reach the venue before the police. Even if the police do reach the venue first, they usually chit chat with the villagers, and wait for me to start the proceedings." There is no time to take an injunction order, which further handicaps the PPOs.

Difficulties in Verifying Age

As mentioned earlier, all the complaints that come to the PPOs have to be verified by obtaining proof of age, before engaging in any other intervention, except in cases where there is no marriage taking place as reported. A large number of PPOs admitted facing problems at this stage (40%). Office records indicated that in very few cases (7.84%) birth certificates were available as the proof of the age of the girl. According to one PPO, families do register the birth of a son, as they are aware that he may need the birth certificate later for his further education or employment. But they may not register the birth of a girl. Even when certificates are available, families are unwilling to show them. If possible, the PPOs obtain birth records from the local civil hospital or the village anganwadi worker. School leaving certificates were obtained as age proof in 37.92% of the cases and in some cases, ration cards were accepted as age proof (6.99%). However, the PPOs were of the opinion that the ration card was not an acceptable document for verifying their age because it was usually issued without checking. It was only after a successful mediation with the family that the family members accept in writing that the child was a minor (31.99%). In the absence of any document to

verify their age, some PPOs asked the family to give an affidavit, which was sometimes endorsed by the village panchayat members.

When the intervention takes place at the last minute, the task of age verification becomes even more difficult. As one PPO said, “In a house where a wedding is taking place, you cannot expect anyone to produce a birth certificate. Nor is it possible to call the anganwadi worker at 8.30 in the night. And if I want to order a “medical” for the girl, how do I do it?” Ossification tests to determine the age was conducted in a few cases (7.41%) as shown in the office data. The problem with the ossification test is that it does not pinpoint the exact age, but indicates an age span of two years. One PPO said that, “If the test says that the age of the girl is between 16–18 or 17–19 years, there is a problem. We have to submit the ossification test report to the court and accept the court’s decision. In a majority of the cases the court decides the girl to be a major.”

Other Concerns

There was a divided opinion on the necessity of injunction orders. One of the PPOs justified this approach saying,

It is necessary to take an injunction order in every case. If you just counsel the family, there is no guarantee that the marriage will not be performed later. The family can take the child to another place in another district, and get him/her married there. In Haryana, you can procure documents showing false age certificate. Families, after giving assurance letters, may do that and slap a case of mental harassment on the PPO. If an injunction order is taken from the district magistrate, you can lodge a first information report (FIR). Then, the family is also scared of reprisal. If there is a child marriage in a village, and if we go with an injunction order, it acts as a deterrent and there will not be another child marriage in that village.

Data showed that even where child marriage was proven after verification, the PPOs did not try to obtain an injunction order except in a few cases. The injunction order was not taken because there was no time to take an injunction order when complaints were made at the last minute. Some of them had experienced that the court was unwilling to give injunction orders due to reservations from the judges as they came from the same society and have similar values. Some PPOs said that they asked the court for an injunction order only when they felt that the counselling was going in vain.

Some of the PPOs also admitted to having faced a moral dilemma while stopping child marriages. A few of them reportedly felt remorse after preventing marriages in such cases where the marriage was being solemnised because a parent was critically ill. In cases of destitution where the child was orphaned, or the family was extremely poor or led by a single parent, prohibition of the marriage is a major financial loss. However, as one PPO said, “you cannot let a girl’s life be ruined because of economic reasons.” Another PPO said very firmly, “there are many types of dilemmas. There is pressure on us from political leaders, local leaders, society, caste, culture, etc. But in spite of that, I am focused and always function according to the law.” In some cases the dilemma was not easily solved. One PPO shared a difficult case:

The family was extremely poor. When we went to stop the marriage, the “baraat” (wedding procession) had already arrived. The villagers opined that the family didn’t even have enough to eat and it would be a crime to stop the wedding. After a long meeting, a solution was found. A girl of marriageable age from the extended family was married off to the same groom. The baraat did not go back empty-handed. However, I felt that though we had succeeded in preventing a crime against one girl, we had committed one against another, because the girl who was married that day was totally unprepared for it, and was suddenly pushed into marriage.

Possible Interventions

Changing age-old and deep-rooted societal attitudes is a herculean task. This can neither be achieved by, nor be entrusted to a single agency. It is only through the combined, persistent and widespread efforts of the government machinery, non-governmental organisations working for women and children, community-based organisations and media that such a change can be hoped to be achieved. Just like any other sociocultural evil, it is important for all the stakeholders to converge to find a multi-pronged approach to not only tackle child marriages but to also change age-old patriarchal mindsets that manifest in gender-based sexual violence.

Local bodies such as gram panchayats should be made accountable for reporting such cases. They should also make it mandatory to register births which will help in establishing a child’s age. It is also important to ensure a wide dissemination of information about PCMA and related laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 through various mediums to build capacities of the communities to exercise their constitutional rights. Apart from building capacities of the communities where child marriage is found to be rampant, it is also important to sensitise lower levels of judiciary and other stakeholders in the criminal justice system for them to be guided in a rights-based approach. Mass marriages act as a garb for child marriages, and therefore, pre-marriage registration of couples with age proof should be made mandatory in such cases and the PPO should be intimidated.

Multiple agencies should be imparting gender-sensitive education in schools and colleges using media to disseminate ideas about female foeticide, dowry and extravagant expenditure on weddings to sensitise young minds. Also, there should be financial assistance that would enable girls to study further and reduce their chances of getting married earlier. Transport facilities and hostel facilities in institutes for learning are also important for girls to continue their education. Strict laws against sexual harassment and other forms of harassment against girls are a must to ensure empowerment of women. Educational opportunities and viable job opportunities go hand in hand to ensure economic growth and stability.

The Haryana government has taken cognisance of the need for additional staff, specifically counsellors, responding to demands by PPOs. The demand for separate vehicles is justified if one takes into consideration the urgency with which they have to respond to information or complaints of child marriages, the distances they have to cover, and the caseload during peak

marriage season. Clear procedural guidelines should be laid down to file cases of nullity, to lodge FIRs, and to cater for individual variance in cases. PPOs also need to improve the quality of documentation with regular inspection by a nodal agency.

Conclusions

This article explores the issue of child marriage in Haryana through a gendered perspective. The PCMA, aimed to prohibit and eliminate the tradition of child marriage, provides for PPOs who are tasked with prohibiting such marriages and creating awareness about the consequences of child marriages.

NOTES

- 1 The Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence against Women was started in 2008 under the Centre for Equity for Women, Children and Families, School of Social Work at TISS, Mumbai. The experience of engaging with survivors of violence, through the Special Cell for Women and Children led the faculty of the institute to realise the need for a centre that would steadily engage with the issue of violence against women. The RCI-VAW nurtures effective interventions with different stakeholders through training and research to enable deeper understanding of the issue and interventions to stop violence against women.
- 2 Since the information sought from the girls interviewed was of a personal and sensitive nature, such as reasons for marriage and feelings after the marriage was prohibited, it was difficult to get them to open up. Their reticence was understandable since some of them were also intimidated by their parents and this added to their trauma.
- 3 Gauna is a North Indian custom, and involves a ceremony associated with the consummation of marriage usually of a child. The ceremony takes place several years after the wedding depending on the age of the couple. Before the ceremony, the bride stays at her natal home. The marriage is consummated only after the gauna ceremony.
- 4 In a 2002 study, Chris Segrin and Robin L Nabi found that the unrealistic portrayal of marriage in the media is a cause for high divorce rates in the United States. This concept has been applied to the Indian context as one of the contributing reasons to child marriage.

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Through the PCMA, the state aims to eradicate child marriages and thus provide a better future for children, especially vulnerable girl children.

Due to rigid notions that surround child marriages, the PPOs who work to prevent them are often faced with hostility from the community and work with the help of the local police. While such efforts are invaluable to the process of empowerment for women and girls, they need to work in tandem with other efforts such as better access to educational institutions, better public infrastructure, family planning initiatives and other social welfare policies that will prevent related socio-economic factors that have a significant correlation with child marriages.

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