

# Child Marriage – A Social Barrier

## Its trend over the years

### From 2010 to 2020

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#### Abstract:

Child marriage- defined by UNICEF as marriage before 18 years of age. Child marriage is one of the most prevalent forms of sexual abuse and exploitation especially of girls. Child marriage serves as a means to perpetuate power imbalances between men and women, both in the home and outside. Child marriage is objectionable for several reasons. The practice condemns children to an existence devoid of education, health, safety, and freedom of choice. Child marriage causes physical, psychological and intellectual impact on the child bride. It has an adverse effect on girl's health along with increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, diabetes, heart disease. Gynecol (2009) stated that marriages in which a child under the age of 18 years is involved occur worldwide, but mainly seen in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. A human rights violation, child marriage directly affects girls' education, health, psychological well-being, and the health of their offspring (as cited in Nour, 2009). The major objectives of the study are-1.To analyse the socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors responsible for early marriage in the study area and the various issues related to child marriage,2.To analyse whether the various governmental measure (Kanyasree Prakalpa) have been successful to control child marriage,3.To find out if there is an increase in child marriage due to pandemic,4.To analyse constitutional and legal measures against child marriage and their implementation. Spatial variation and comparison between villages is shown.Suggestions include there is Need to formulate more stringent laws,Expecting more financial help from the Government,Promote employment opportunities for girls.

**Keywords:** Factors responsible, Trend, Governmental measure, Impact, awareness

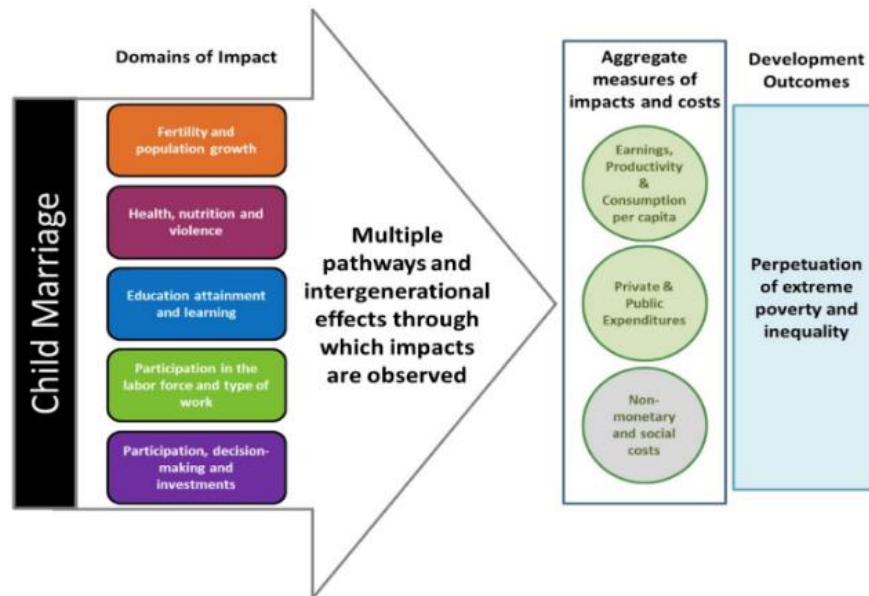
#### Introduction

**Child marriage-** defined by UNICEF as **marriage before 18 years of age**. Child marriage is one of the most prevalent forms of sexual abuse and exploitation especially of girls.

#### **The reasons for considering Child Marriage as a social hazard:**

- It is rooted in gender inequality
- Child marriage is used as a weapon to hide human trafficking and sexual abuse.
- Child brides are deprived of their opportunities to education.
- Child marriage hampers efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable global development.
- National economy suffers
- Dependent population increases due to high rate of fertility.

### Economic Impacts of Child Marriage



### Health Impacts of Child Marriage

- Maternal Mortality
- Child born with defects due to low age of mother
- Children born underweight

### History of Child marriage in India

The practice of child marriage in India started about 1000 years ago when the Muslim rulers invaded India. Rao Sahib Haribilas Sarda proposed the Sharda Bill in the Legislative Assembly to prohibit the widespread practice of underage marriage in India. The Sharda Act 1929, also known as [THE CHILD MARRIAGE RESTRAINT ACT, 1929](#), was approved under the viceroyalty of Lord Irwin. The Sharda Act went into effect on April 1, 1930. Sharda Act is related to prohibiting marriage for girls under the age of 14 and boys under 18. The Act got amended in 1978 which increased the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.

### Causes of Child Marriage

- Poverty
- Limited education and economic options
- Insecurity in the face of conflict
- Tradition and Religion

### Study of Literature

According to **Child Marriage in Rural West Bengal: Status and Challenges (2010)** by **Biswajit Ghosh and Ananda Mohan Kar** -Child marriages serves as a means of perpetuating power imbalances between men and women, both in the home and outside. Due to gendered nature of early marriage, a significant number of girls are married before reaching adulthood. Despite legislations and some efforts by government and non-government agencies to educate the people about the dangers of early marriage, prejudices and beliefs underlying the preference continue in India. In West Bengal too, there is a silent complicity to child marriage; many rural and backward communities treat it as normal and routine.

**DISTRICT-LEVEL STUDY ON CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA (October 2015)** published by **International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)**, India highlighted the prevalence, trends and patterns related to child marriage at the state and district levels. Although there has been a significant decline in child marriage for females throughout the country, especially for girls below the age of 15 years, child marriage continues to affect almost a third of all girls in India. Data from the District Level Household Survey (DLHS) from 2007- 2008 and Census 2011 show that many indicators of social and economic development, including female status and levels of empowerment at the district level, are significantly associated with child marriage prevalence in districts. This indicates a strong need for improving the social and economic conditions in the immediate environment to bring about social change and put a stop to customs and practices that are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of women and children and harmful to society. Among individual characteristics, the level of education of females has the most profound impact on the age they marry, irrespective of household wealth, locality and other characteristics.

The **UNICEF’S “state of the world’s children 2009”** report has shown that, India has the 12th highest rate of child marriage in the world. About 40 percent of the world’s child marriage occurs in India. Similarly, 47 percent of Indian women and 56 percent of rural women aged 20-24 year married below the age of 18. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, such as place of residence, education, religion, and caste are important in determining factors for girls child marriage among high prevalence districts in West Bengal. The districts of Bankura, Murshidabad, PaschimMedinipur, Bardhaman, Birbhum, DakshinDinajpur, Nadia and Purulia are areas with the highest incidence of child marriage in West Bengal. KanyashreePrakalpa scheme (girls with secondary education) by the Government of West Bengal is proving to be a good instrument to reduce child marriage in West Bengal.

The protection of children and the dignity of all girls and women are under great threat during this COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic has disrupted the progress made by various global organizations in reducing child marriage and discontinued the much-needed interventions to eliminate the practice of child marriage. **UNICEF in collaboration with Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University (United States), and Victoria University (Australia) estimated that an additional 13 million child marriages are expected to be taken place between 2020 and 2030.** In Maharashtra, the Women and Child Development department of the state reported about 78% spike in child marriages by September 2020 as compared with the previous year. Estimates provided by UNESCO revealed that over 1.5 billion students across 195 countries were affected by school closures as of April 2020. It is also estimated that about 10 million children may never return school after the pandemic, in which girl children are more likely to discontinue. **Child Marriage and Kanyashree Prakalpa: Exploring Perception and Attitude Changes among Adolescence Girls** by Dr. Susanta Mondal Assistant Professor in Economics Bolpur College, Bolpur, West Bengal, India explores the perception and attitude changes among the adolescence girls covered under Kanyasree Prakalpa with an impact assessment viewpoint. The study also finds out the interrelationship between perception about early marriage and the different socio-demographic factors. Among the different factors participant’s age, education level have significant relationship with participant’s perception about early marriage. It is not only a policy of enhancing women education through enrolment and retention, but also a policy of changing the perception about the importance of women education in curbing child marriage in West Bengal.

### **Objectives of study:**

The major objectives of the study are

1. To analyse the socio-economic , cultural and institutional factors responsible for early marriage in the study area and the various issues related to child marriage.
2. To analyse whether the various governmental measure (Kanyasree Prakalpa) have been successful to control child marriage.

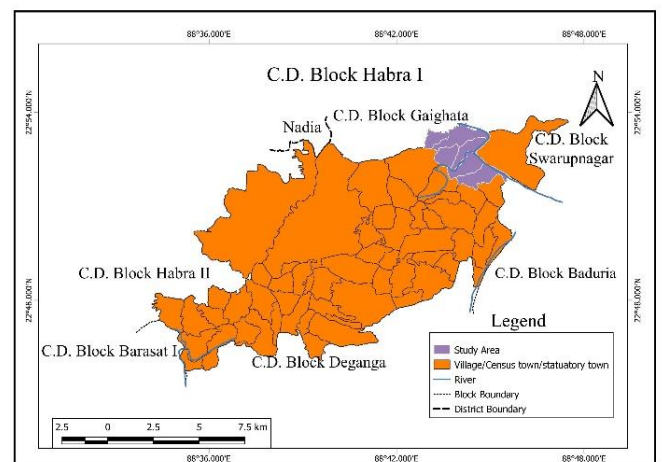
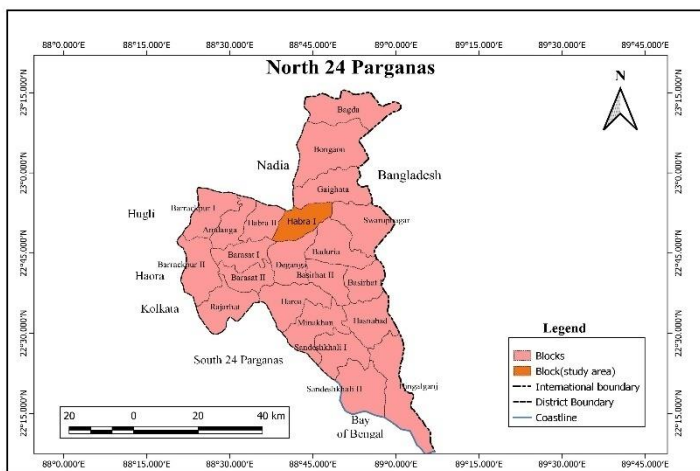
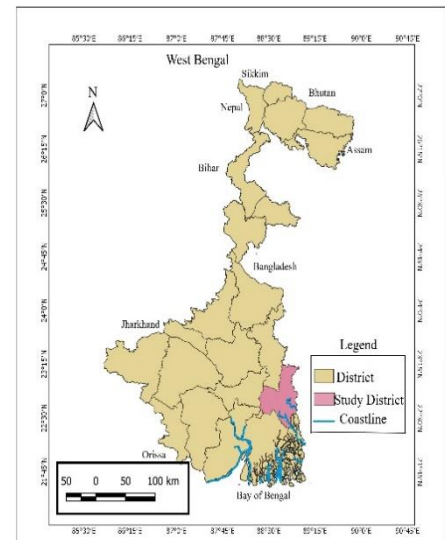
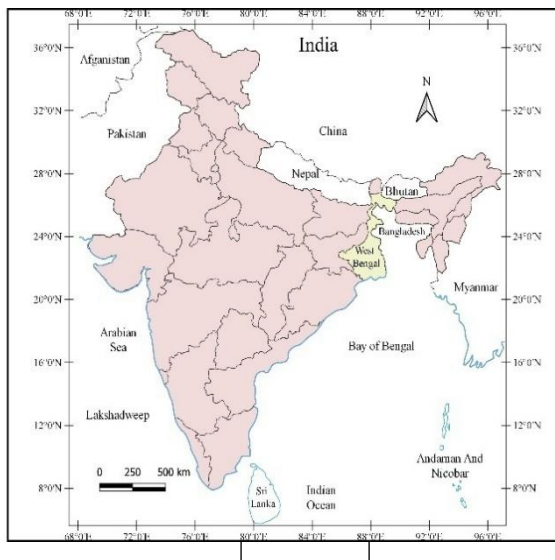
3. To find out if there is an increase in child marriage due to pandemic.
4. To analyse constitutional and legal measures against child marriage and their implementation.

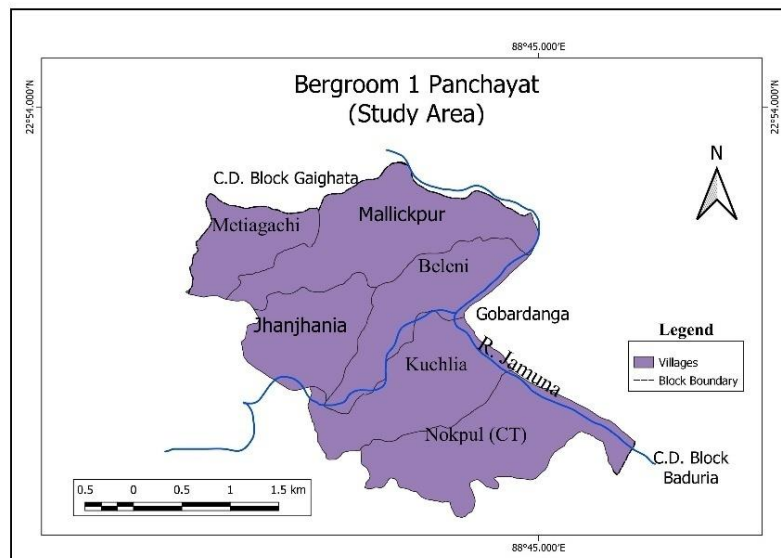
**Study Area :**

C.D. Block	Area	Panchyat	Villages/ Census	Town
Habra I	117.36 sq.km	Bergroom I Latitude - 22.87 north Longitude – 88.7 east	Beleni, Jhanjhania, Kuchlia, Mallickpur, Metiagachi	Nokpul(Census town)

Table 1 Fig 1

**Location Map**





**Methodology:**

The methodology of the study has been divided into three steps

**Pre field:** This stage involves collection of different secondary data and maps. Questionnaire was prepared to collect primary data through door to door survey and school survey.

**Field Work** – This step involves visiting the study area to collect primary data by surveying households, schools , primary health care centres. Photographs of the victims of child marriage have also been collected.

**Post Field** – This included the analysis of data gathered with the help of maps and diagrams. The selection of formula or related methods and techniques of quantifications were made. Various cartographic techniques bargraphs, pie graphs, line graphs, scatter diagrams of the study area were prepared, analysed and interpreted.

**Discussion**

**Status of Child marriage in India**

There is **wide spread prevalence of child marriage** in the north-central belt comprising **Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.**

The occurrence of child marriages in Rural India is more as compared to that of Urban India. According to **UNICEF Report on Child Marriage 2019, 40% of girls are married before age of 18 years in West Bengal.**

Caste/Religion	% of marriages between 15 -17 years of age
SC	24
ST	38
Muslim	30
Other religion	22

Table 2

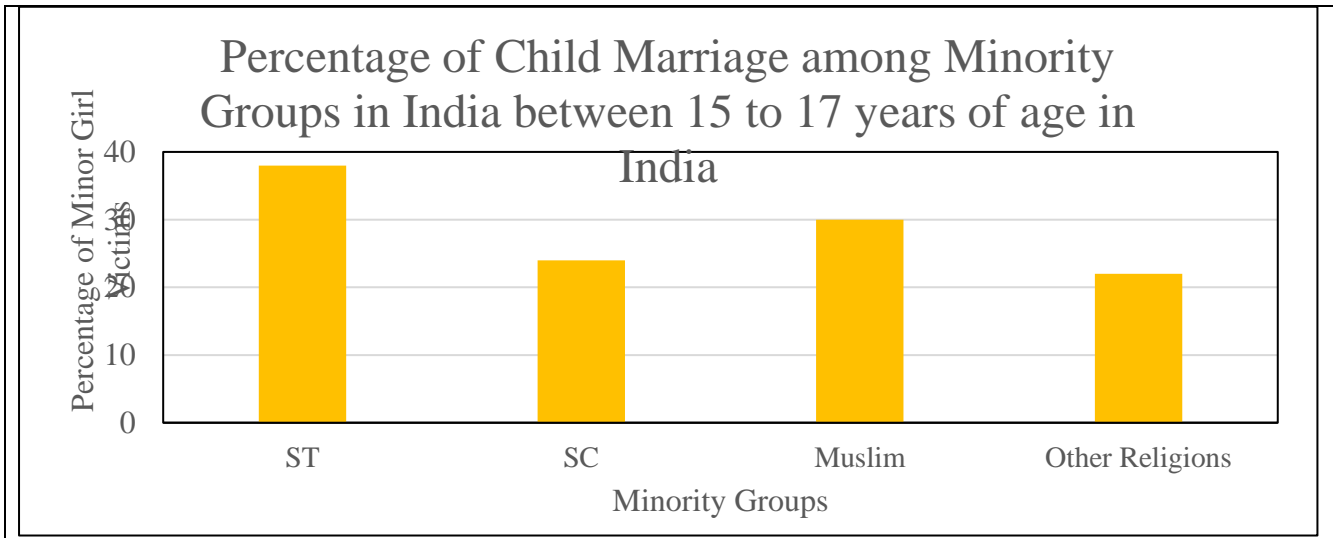


Fig 2

**Status of Child Marriage in West Bengal**

In West Bengal cluster of high child marriage prevalence (31 to 36 percent women married before age 18), comprises of Murshidabad, Maldah, Nadia and Birbhum.

During pandemic Hooghly, Howrah and Purba Mednipur have registered a surge.

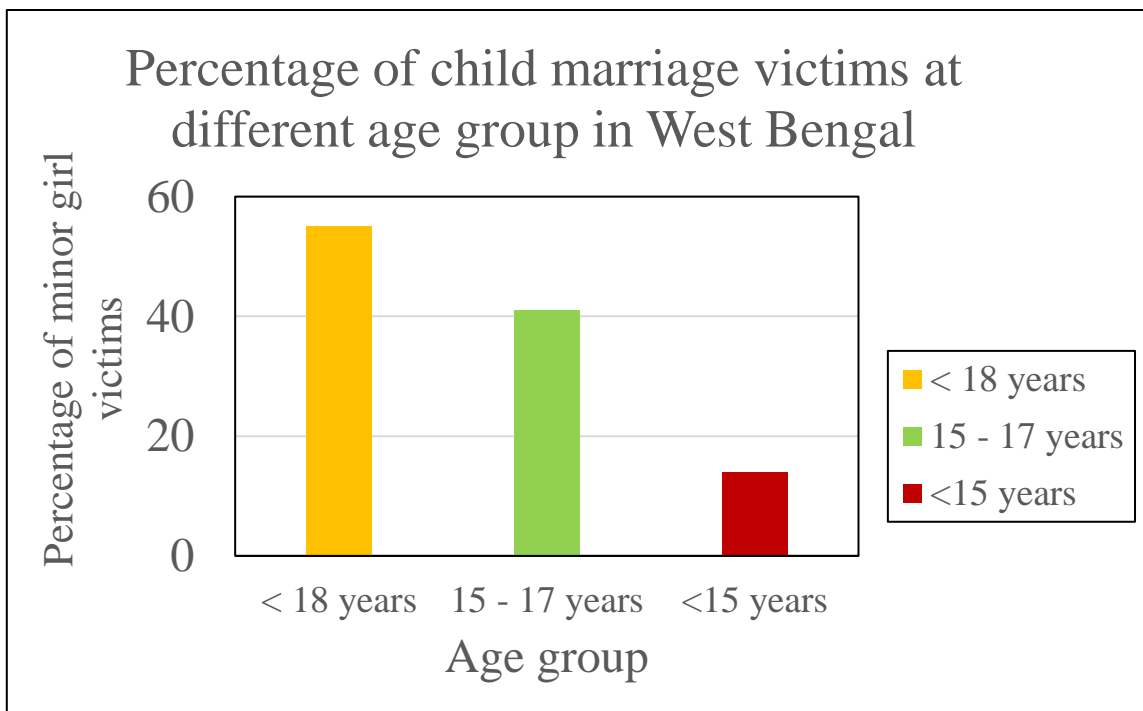


Fig 3

**Demography and Profile of the Surveyed Villages**

- From the primary survey of the villages we can see that **number of the girl child is more than the boys** .(Fig 4)
- There is not much difference in the number of male and female population above 60 years of age.
- So it can be said that the **life expectancy of male and female population of the surveyed area is more or less same**.

In 2011, male to female ratio for West Bengal was 950 females per 1,000 males.

Village/Census town	Sex Ratio
Nokpul (census town)	920
Kuchlia	918
Beleni	962

Table 3

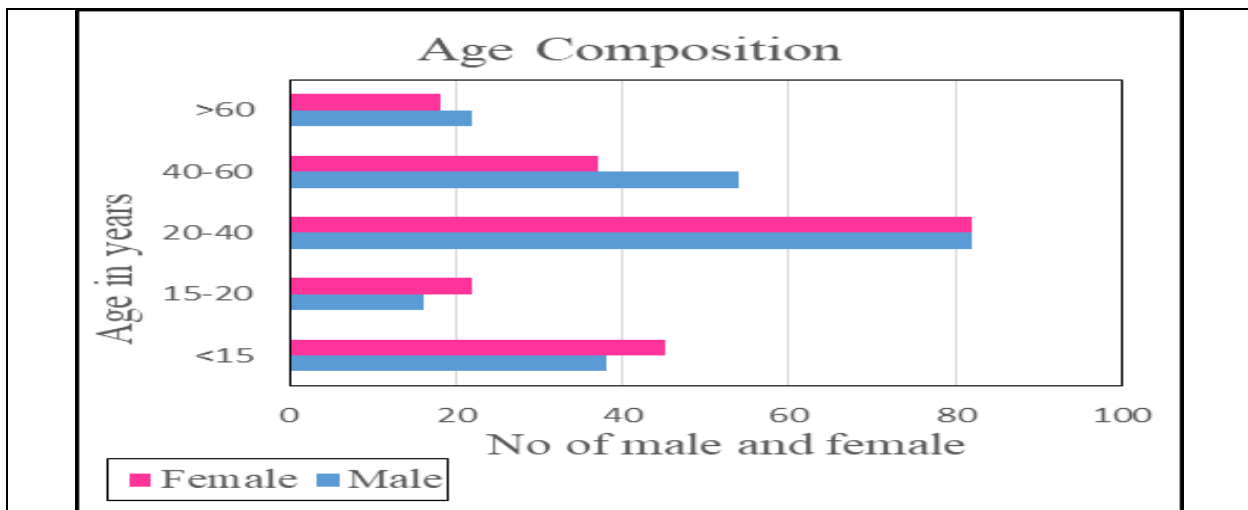


Fig 4

**Economic Condition of women in study area**

In Nokpul, Beleni and Kuchlia a very small percentage of female population **contribute to the work participation force as the midday meal cook**. Among the population who are **involved in stitching** majority are female. In the study area there is a huge disparity in the male and female work participation rate. ( Fig 5)

Male work participation rate	Female work participation rate
78%	22%

Table 4

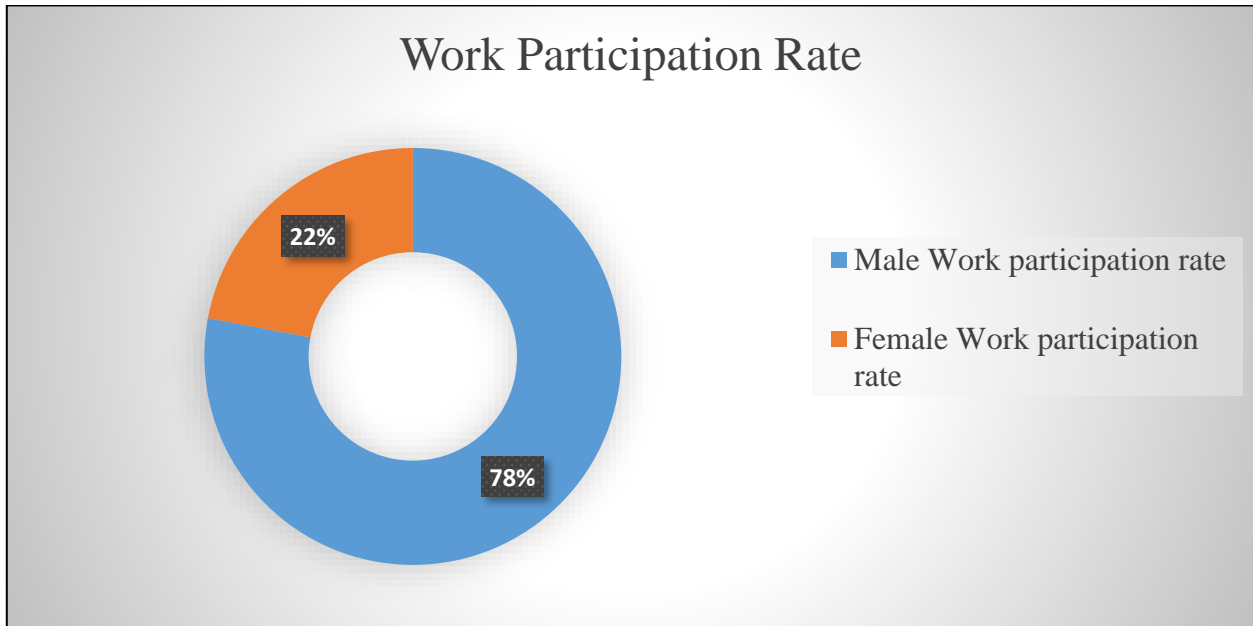


Fig 5

**Child Marriage in relation to the education and religion of the Victims:**

- From the survey of the population of two religious communities it can be seen that **educational level among the victims of the Muslim community is lower than that of the Hindus** creating less awareness among the girls. ( Fig 6a)
- It can be seen that during the taken time period (2010-2020) **the average age of child marriage among the Muslims is 14 to 16 years.**(Fig 7)
- **During 2011 the Hindu girls were getting married at ages as low as 11 years** but during the period **2016-2020 the average age of child marriage has increased to 17 years** among the Hindus.(Fig 6b)

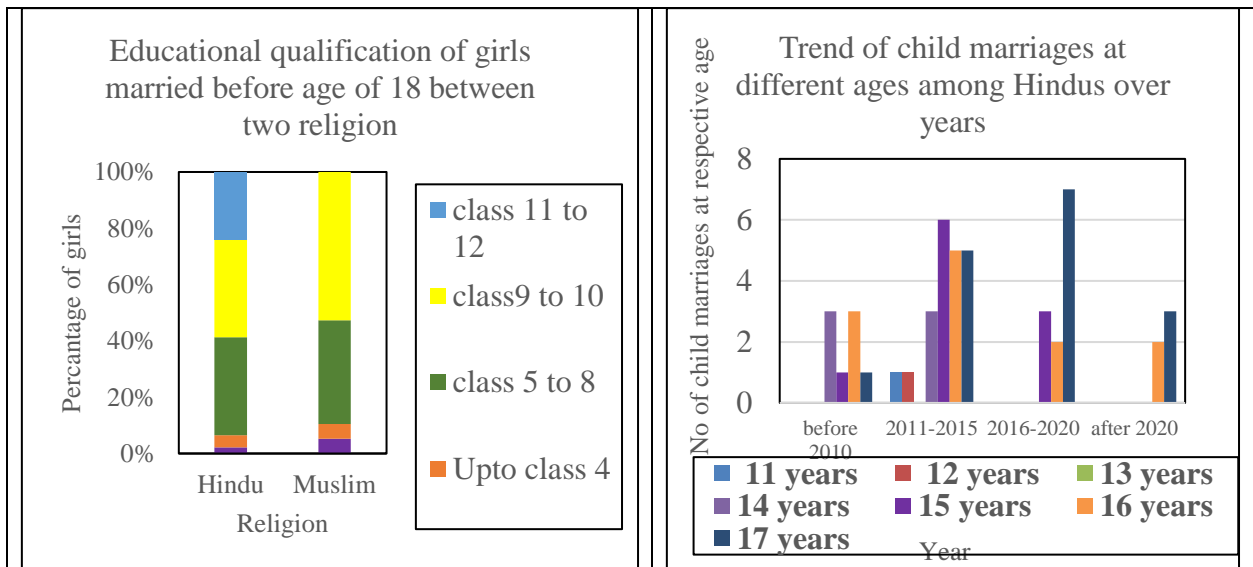


Fig 6a and 6 b

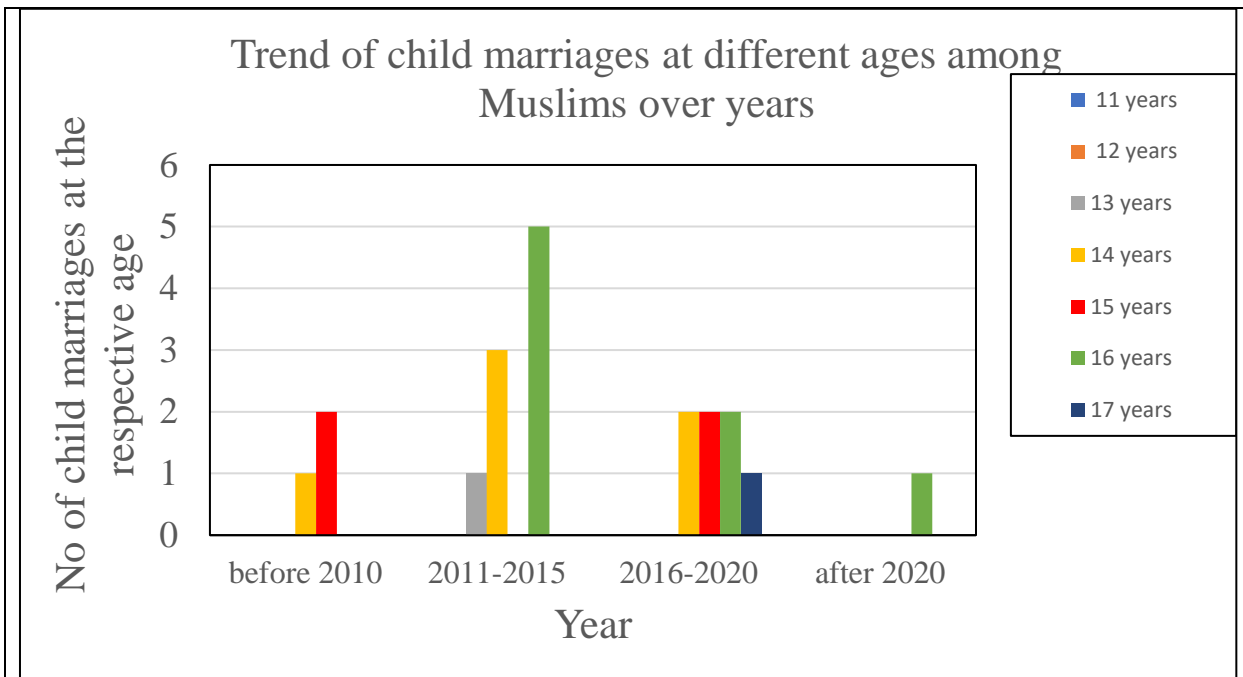


Fig 7

**Trends of Child Marriage in the Study Areas**

- **The practice of child marriage in study area is showing a declining trend.**(Fig 8a and 8b)
- Although there is a decline in trend in arranged child marriages from 2010 to 2020 but from 2015 there is **increase in trend of love marriages.**
- 14.9% of child marriages have taken place before 2010 which have started increasing and became as high as 40.3% during 2011-2015 and started decreasing thereafter and became as low as 9% after 2020.
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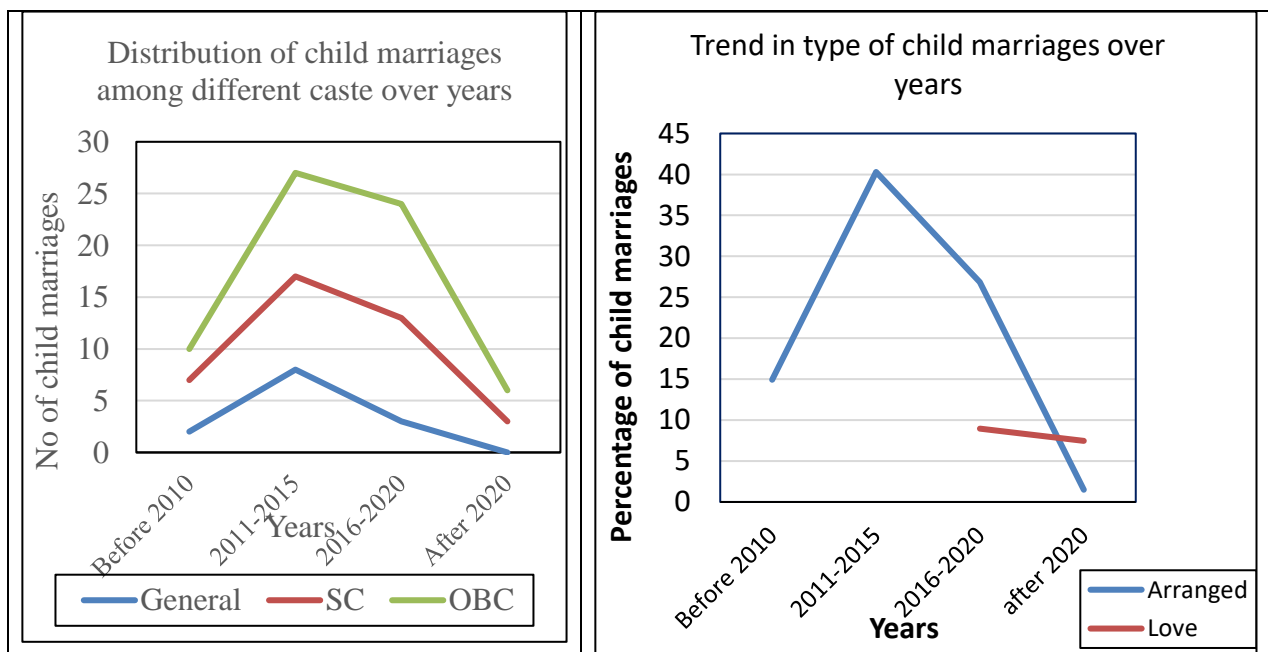


Fig 8a and 8b

**Spatial Distribution of Child Marriage and its relation to Causes**

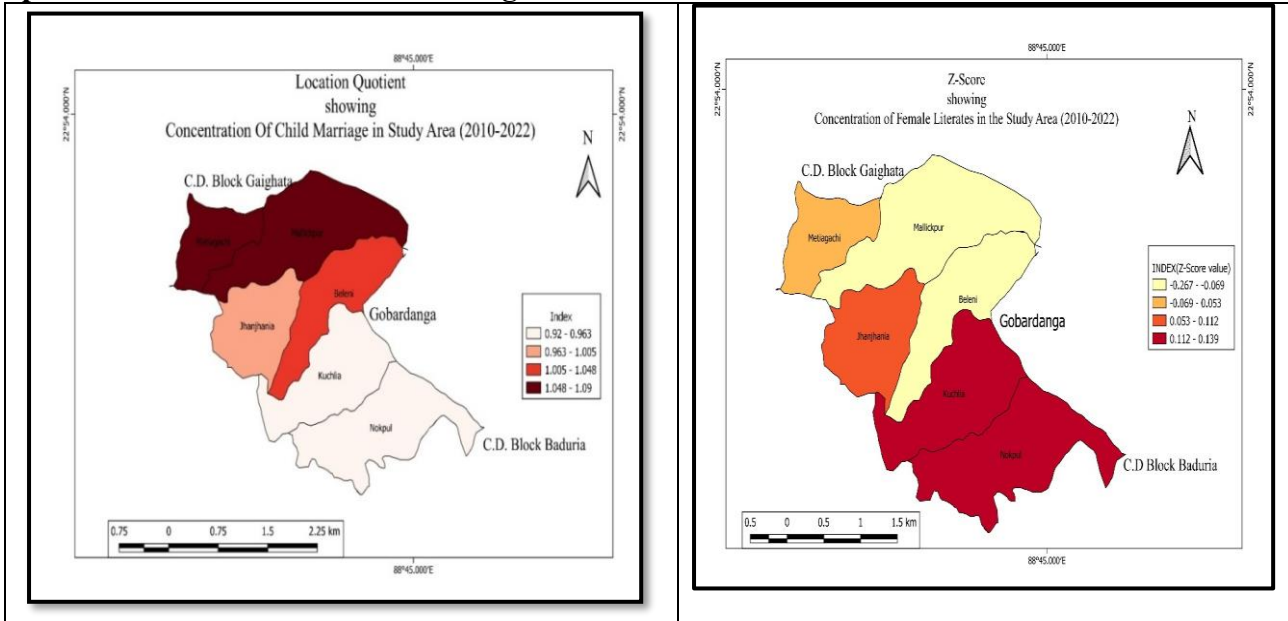


Fig 9

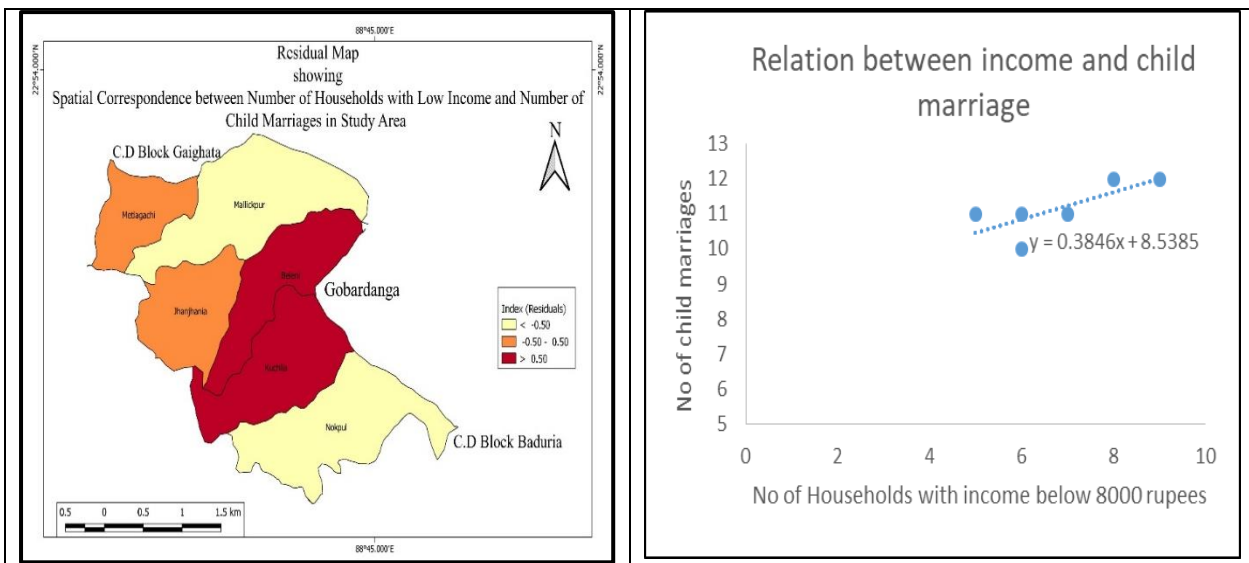


Fig 10

**Causes of Child Marriage in the study area**

Before 2010

In the study area the most important cause of child marriage was **local culture and prevalence of poverty**

2011 to 2015

**Along with poverty large number of siblings** was the driving factor for child marriage.

2016 to 2020

Child marriage due to poverty and lack of awareness among parents started reducing. But due to **more exposure to social media the girls started to elope and get married** .(Fig 11)

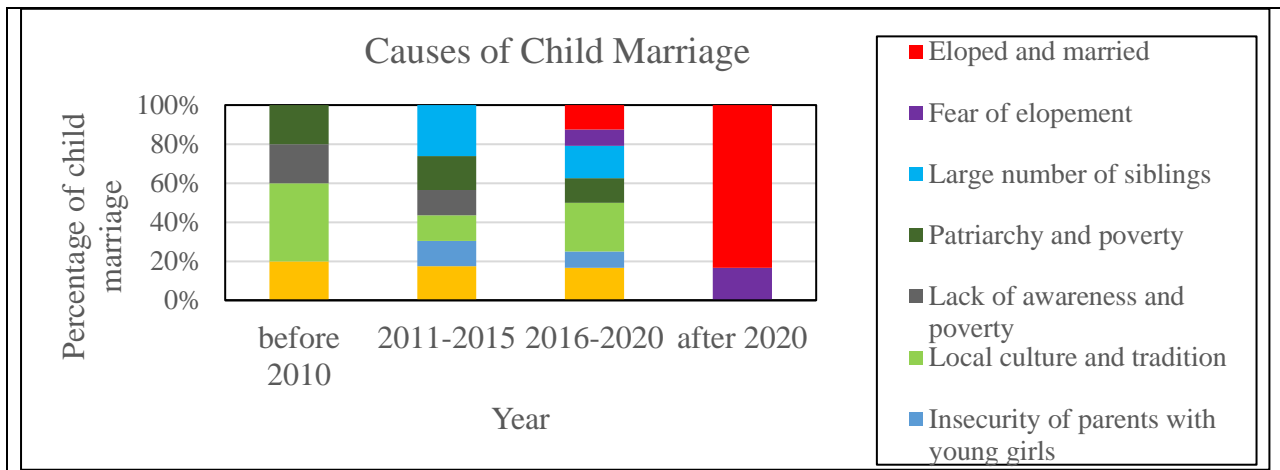


Fig 11

**Causes of child marriage:**-The following table shows the impact of causes of child marriage such as poverty, insecurity of parents of young girls, patriarchy, tradition or lack of awareness and large number of siblings on its occurrence in six villages of study area. One way Anova analysis has been performed to test the significance of impact of causes of child marriage on its occurrence in the study area.

Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) - The impact of causes of child marriage is same for all the six villages of the study area.

Alternate Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) - The impact of causes of child marriage is not same for all the six villages of the study area.

ANOVA-Single Factor						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F-ratio	P-value	F critical value (at 5% level of confidence)
Between Groups	0.4444444444	5	0.088889	0.076190476	0.994768007	3.105875239
Within Groups	14	12	1.166667			
Total	14.44444444	17				

Table 5

Calculated F- ratio is 0.07619 which is less than the table value of 3.1058 at 5% level of confidence with degree of freedom ( $df$ ) being  $V_1=5$  and  $V_2=12$ . The null hypothesis is accepted. It can therefore be said that **the causes of child marriage (poverty, insecurity of parents with young girls, tradition , patriarchy or lack of awareness and large number of siblings) have the same impact on occurrence of child marriages in the six villages of the study area.**

Consequences of Child Marriage on social wellbeing

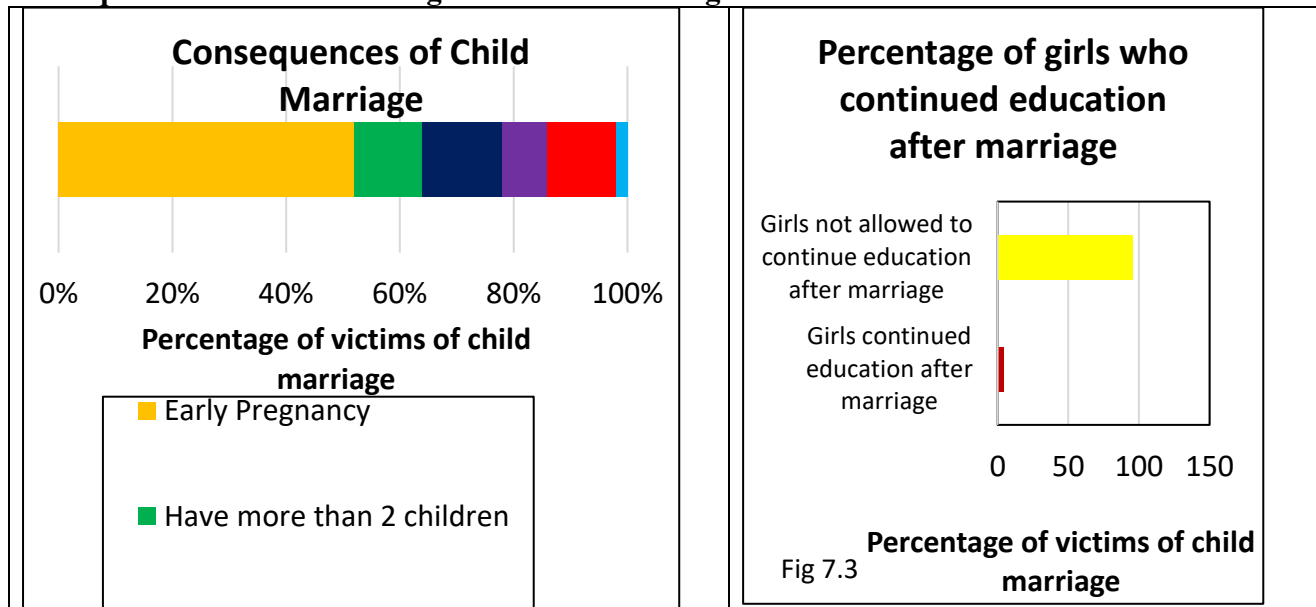


Fig 12a and 12 b

- Early Pregnancy – which may lead to birth of unhealthy child and also increases dependent population of country.
- Girls not allowed to continue education – which deprives them of employment opportunities and get trapped in vicious cycle of poverty and exploitation.
- No role in decision making for the family
- Deprived of nutrition and health care ( Fig 12a and 12b)

The age group at which the minor girls were married off and the consequences of marriage at age below 18 years were studied in a project on child marriage. **The chi square test has been carried out at a = 0.05 to examine if the age of marriage of the victims and consequences of child marriage are associated.**

Null Hypothesis :- There is no association between age of marriage of the victims and consequences of child marriage.

Alternative Hypothesis:- There is significant association between age of child marriage victims and consequences of child marriage.

Chi-square ( $X^2_c$ ) = 6.9024

D<sub>f</sub> (degree of freedom) at 0.05 = 15

$X^2_{t=}$  24.996

$X^2_c < X^2_t$

Therefore we accept the null hypothesis that there is no association between age of child marriage and problems faced by girls due to early marriage such as early pregnancy, having larger number of children, large age difference with the husband and oppressed position in family.

Age Group (in years)	Consequences of child marriage				
	Early Pregnancy	Have more than 2 children	Age difference with the husband	Oppressed position in family	Total
< 12	7	2	2	2	13

<b>12-13</b>	6	1	1	3	11
<b>13-14</b>	5	3	1	1	10
<b>14-15</b>	3	0	1	2	6
<b>15-16</b>	2	0	1	1	4
<b>16-17</b>	2	0	1	1	4
<b>Total</b>	25	6	7	10	48

Table 6

### Measures to prevent child marriage by Central Government

The Ministry of Women and Child Development implements the ‘**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)**’ scheme- to make women and society aware about gender equality and ill effects of child marriages

- Government of India has introduced **CHILDLINE** with short code 1098, a 24X7 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis
- The **Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021** seeks to **increase the minimum age of marriage for females to 21 years**

### Measures to prevent child marriage in West Bengal

• The **Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)** is functional in the state. The ICPS (2006) aims to ensure an environment of safety and protection for children, for them to develop and flourish. The scheme aims to reduce risks of vulnerable children.

To combat Child Marriage, the West Bengal Government has implemented

- **Kanyashree Prakalpa** - An unmarried girl receives monetary support every year for her education and then receives a lumpsum amount if she remains unmarried till turns 18.
- **Rupashree Prakalpa** - provides cash to girls above the age of 18 for their marriage.
- **Sabala and Kishori Shakti Yojana Prakalpa** have been established to empower young girls.
- **Birangana or Bravery awards** to recognize the confidence and courage of minor girls who stopped their marriage themselves.

### Awareness

- 12% of the surveyed population used the money received from Kanayasree for marriage.
- **So on the basis of the survey it can be concluded that Kanyasree acted as an incentive to reduce the rate of child marriage but it failed to bring about a change in the mind-set of the people about the marriage of the girls.( Fig 13 and 14)**

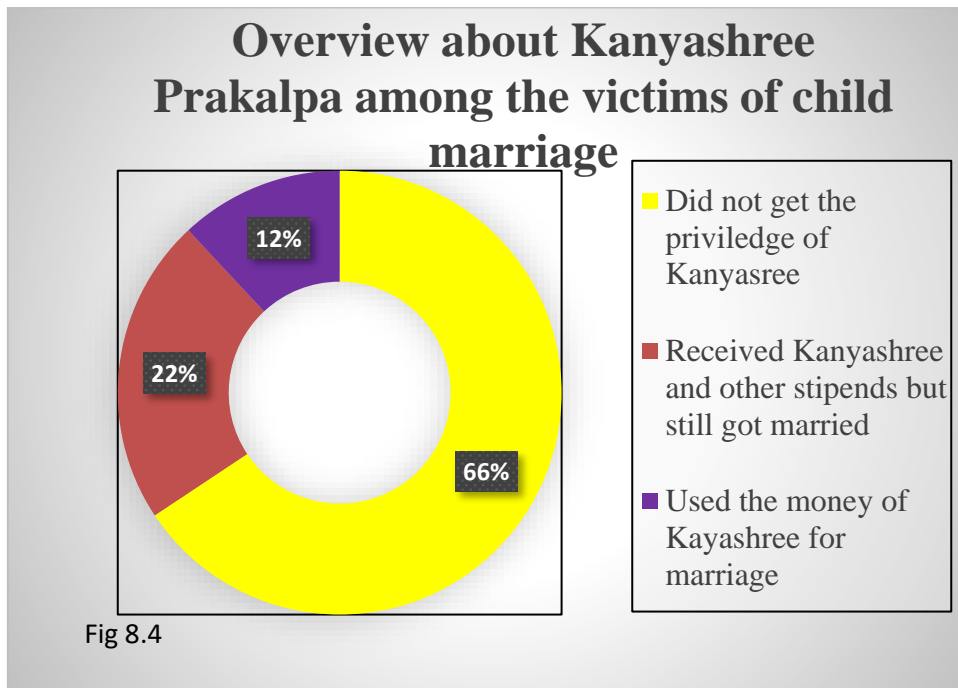


Fig 13

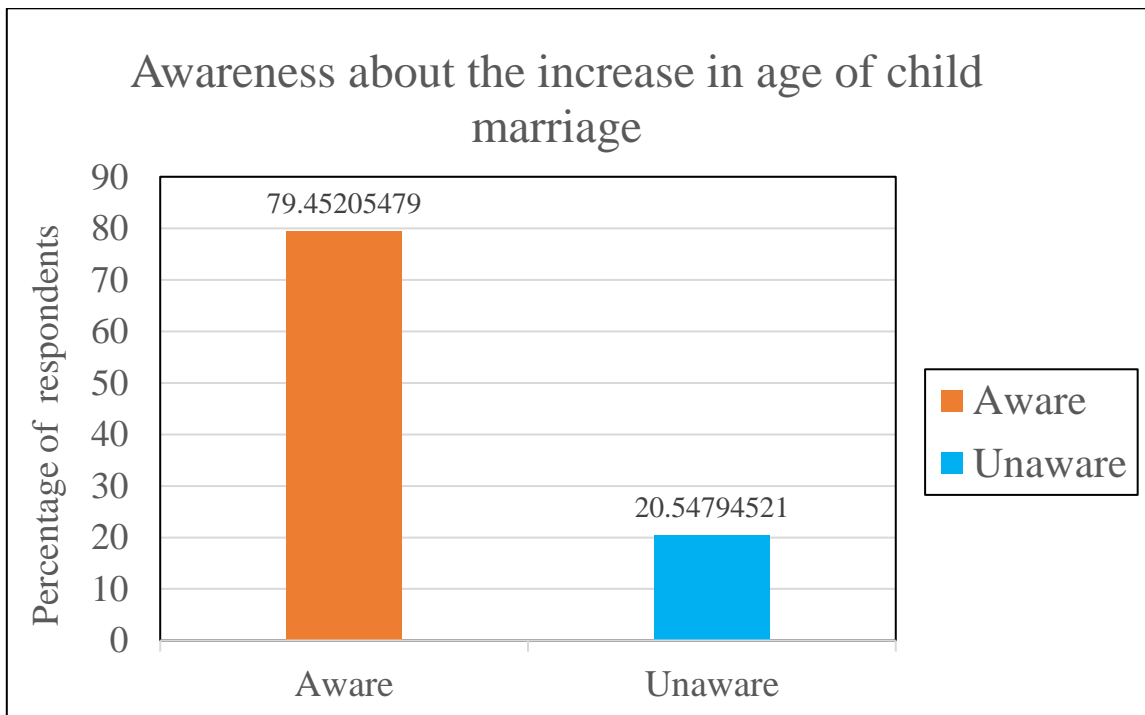


Fig 14

**Rising age of marriage:**

- Respondents in support of rising the minimum age of marriage for girls - Girls will get more time to continue their education, create their own identity and will help them to come out from the vicious cycle of social oppression.
- Surveyed population not in support of rising the minimum age of marriage for girls- difficult for a poverty stricken family to continue to feed the girls or to continue their education for a long time. ( Fig 15 and 16)

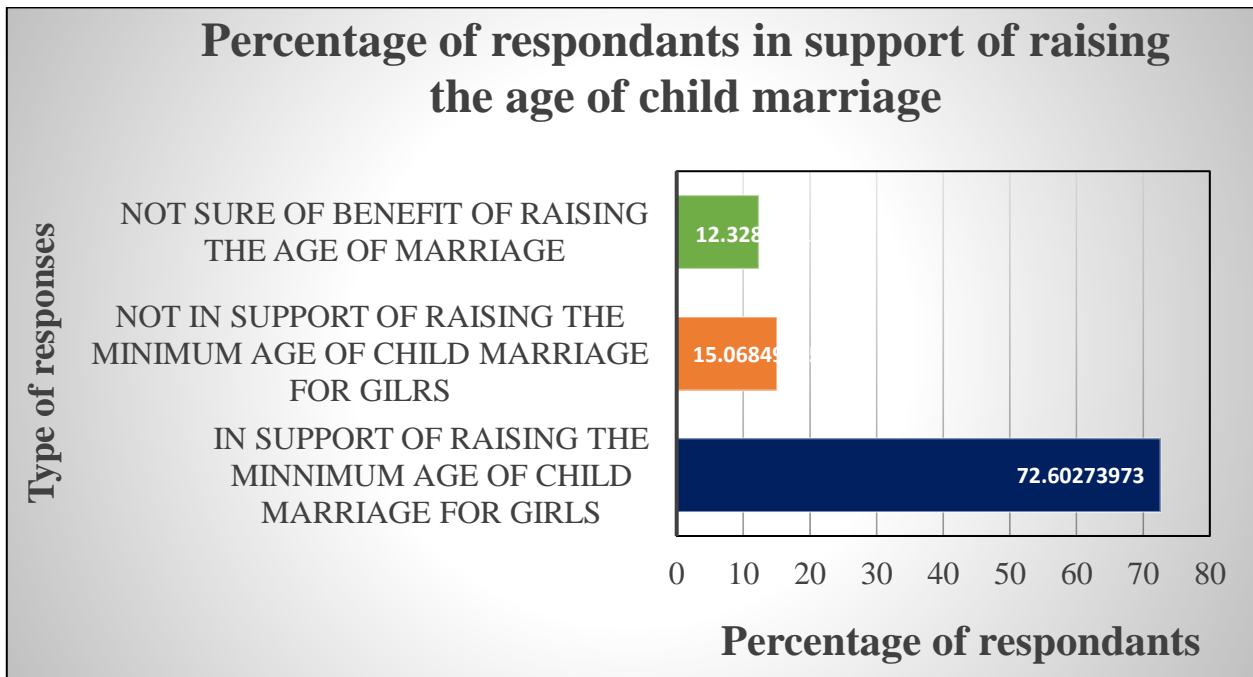


Fig 15

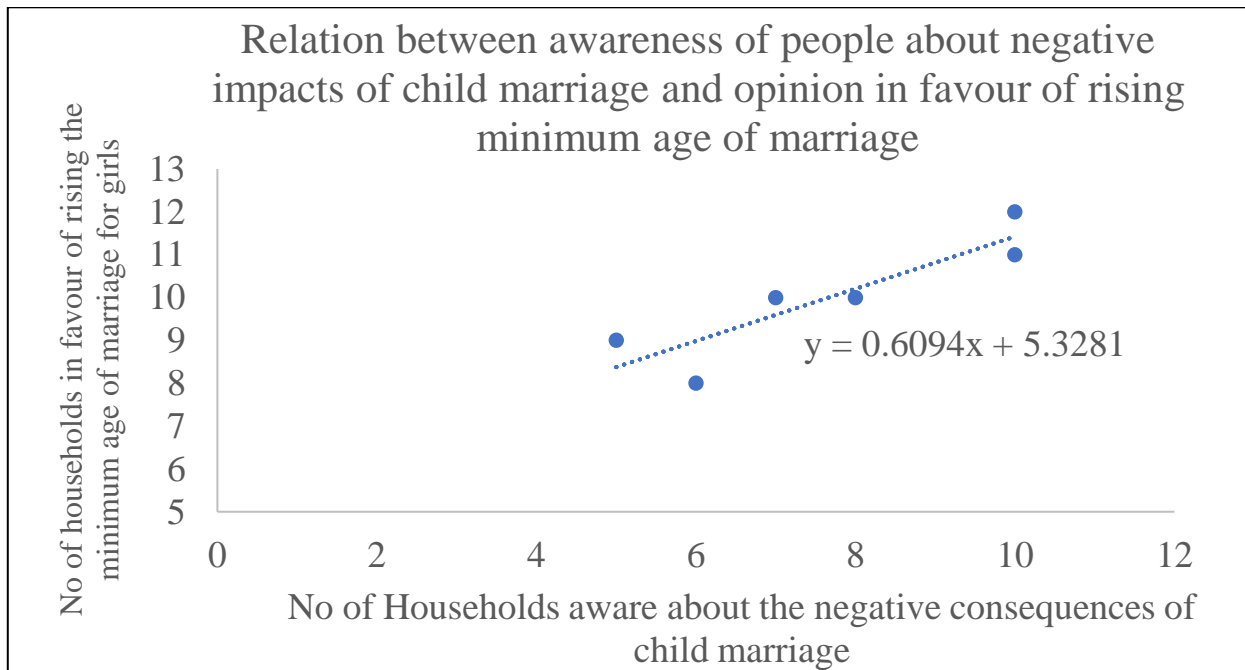


Fig 16

#### Opinions among the respondents to reduce child marriage

- Need to formulate more stringent laws.
- Expecting more financial help from the Government.
- Promote employment opportunities for girls

#### Three simple actions against child marriage expected from neighbourhood

1. Report any child marriage happening around you to the proper authorities
2. Educate your friends, family and community about why child marriage is harmful
3. Promise to never be a part of any event that promotes child marriage

**CONCLUSION**

Child marriage is illegal in India. Every child has a right to go to school . Every child marriage hurts our entire community.

Every year, fewer and fewer children in India are getting married. More parents and community leaders are seeing the negative impacts of child marriage and are aware of the law.

**Eradication of Child Marriage is a priority for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.**

“Say No to Child Marriage – Yes to school”

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