EARLY AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA

A Landscape Analysis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NIRANTAR TRUST

AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Report designed by Indelible Creative.

COVER PHOTO Sukhudi Murmur, age 16, avoided marriage at age 10 thanks to the support of Mohammad Bazar Backward Class Development Society (MBBCDS), an organization working to end early and child marriage in West Bengal, India. Sukhudi is now continuing her studies and lives in a hostel run by MBBCDS. *Photograph by Jonathan Torgovnik*

CONTENTS

To read the full report, visit **www.ajws.org** or **nirantar.net.**

This report provides an analytic overview of the landscape of early and child marriage in India, based on a study conducted in 2014 by Nirantar Trust with the support of American Jewish World Service (AJWS).

Nirantar conducted a thorough survey of the important work that has been done on this issue to-date, mapping the substantial investment over many years made by international funders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations in India to implement strategies to end the practice. The researchers also took a critical look at these interventions and assessed both their strengths and limitations—identifying needs and opportunities for modified or additional investment.

Importantly, this landscape analysis approaches this issue from a feminist perspective, focusing on the way sociocultural norms about gender and sexuality shape the incidence and impact of the practice. The analysis also assesses interventions on the basis of whether they can successfully empower girls to achieve greater choice in the decisions that shape their futures.

This report aims to provide funders, NGOs, coalition partners and policymakers with insights and evidence from the field that they can use to shape discourse, make philanthropic investments and build programs focused on empowering girls and ending early and child marriage. With this roadmap—and with increased commitment in India and around the world—we believe that we can make a profound difference in this field.

BACKGROUND

Early and child marriage has been a prevalent practice at different points in the history of almost all societies around the globe, including Europe, the United States and the Middle East. In India, the practice has origins going back to ancient times and persists today.

For more than 140 years, the Indian government and civil society have sought to curb the practice of early and child marriage through law. In 2006, the government renewed its efforts: India passed the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, which increased the penalties for conducting a child marriage ceremony, made a child marriage voidable by a married party up to two years after reaching the age of maturity, and provided the opportunity for courts to intervene in these cases. Furthermore, in response to the widely publicized rape case that happened in Delhi in 2012, the Indian government in 2013 increased the age of consent for sex to match the age of marriage (for women).

These legal frameworks reflect the government's and communities' concerns about the issue—but they are rarely implemented and have been insufficient in addressing an issue as complex and rooted in community practice as early and child marriage.

According to the most recent national survey commissioned by India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (2005-2006), 58 percent of girls marry before reaching the legal age of 18; 74 percent are married before reaching 20. The Indian government commissioned this research via the National Family Health Survey, which tracks health-related data trends throughout India over time.

Early and child marriage has been a prevalent practice at different points in the history of almost all societies around the globe, including Europe, the United States and the Middle East.

Although the data reveal the widespread nature of this practice, there is some reason for optimism, as they also show the incidence of extreme child marriage is dropping. The latest national representative data shows only 12 percent of Indian women who married before age 20 were younger than 15 at the time of marriage. There has been a gradual decline since the early 1990s in the proportion of women married by the ages of 15, 18 and 20 years.

These changes have influenced our terminology. The documented increase in the average age of marriage indicates that today this practice primarily affects adolescents and young people, whose needs are different from those of children. The term "early and child marriage" reflects these complexities and it is, therefore, the term the Nirantar team would prefer to use rather than "child marriage."

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, among others. More broadly, early and child marriage reinforces existing inequalities between men and women and among different economic classes, castes, and religious and ethnic groups.

To fully understand the causes of early and child marriage and create solutions requires an in-depth understanding of issues of gender, education, sexuality, livelihood and culture. Each of the factors connected to early and child marriage cannot be understood in isolation. We must examine the various ways that they intersect and influence one another, and consider how they are further complicated by connections with socioeconomic factors related to caste, religion, poverty, migration and globalization.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to understand the landscape of early and child marriage, the research team sought to address the following questions:

1. What are the demographics of incidence and prevalence of early and child marriage in India (by geographic area, socioeconomic status, ethnic identity and other factors?)
2. What are the factors that impact decision-making on early and child marriage? Who are the key actors involved in this process?
3. What are the root causes of early and child marriage? How do key players in the field understand these root causes?
4. Why do organisations work on early and child marriage? Why do they oppose it? What is their vision of desired change?
5. How do organisations approach early and child marriage? What are the strategies being adopted?
6. What are the gaps in existing interventions? What strategies have emerged as promising?
7. How can monitoring and evaluation around progress on the issue be done meaningfully?

METHODOLOGY

Our research consisted of five components:

1. A review of the existing literature on early and child marriage, including key studies, academic articles, reports and policy documents.
2. Interviews with experts who have done extensive work on the issue of early and child marriage, including academics, practitioners and researchers. These informants strengthened our intellectual and theoretical base for this report and provided us with an overview of existing laws and government strategies and the shortcomings therein.
3. The theory of change developed by the research team (see annexure 4 in the complete report). This encompasses our understanding and articulation of the problem, based on feminist theories and experience working with communities, and our long-term goals, approaches and strategies, as guided by our observations in the field.
4. The collection of primary data from field visits to 19 organisations working on early and child marriage across seven states in India (Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and New Delhi). These field visits included semi-structured interviews, group interviews and focus-group discussions with adolescent girls and boys, women's collectives and fathers, as well as other actors such as teachers, police and government officials, religious leaders and the elected leaders of local *panchayats* (village-level bodies of self-governance). Nirantar also conducted extensive focus-group discussions with the staff of all 19 organisations.
5. Organizing a two-day National Consultation on Early and Child Marriage that involved more than 40 participants, including leaders from 38 organisations across the country. The consultation provided organisations with a space for honest conversations around their experiences and challenges working on the issue, their struggles with monitoring and evaluation, and their needs going forward.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Nirantar Trust is a centre for gender and education, founded in 1993 to enable girls and women from marginalised communities in India enjoy greater access to educational opportunities as a key to their empowerment. Nirantar works to increase the capacities of a wide range of actors—including community leaders, teachers, staff members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government programmes—as well as to create

educational materials and undertake research and advocacy toward empowerment through education. For the past seven years, Nirantar has worked with local organisations to strengthen their work with adolescents and women, and has focused on issues of adolescence and sexuality.

Nirantar has extensive experience carrying out participatory, multi-method research studies, with a strong focus on making recommendations for change. Work at the community level builds strong communication skills and a close understanding of the realities of the field, both essential for studying early and child marriage. One of the key limitations of existing research is the lack of emphasis on sexuality; even the few organisations that recognize the significance of sexuality have had difficulty creating honest discussions around sexuality, especially with girls who are shy to talk about marriage. This is an area of our expertise, with years of experience in breaking the silence around sexuality and in emphasising the need to recognize the links between the politics of gender and sexuality. As organisations with a holistic perspective, and experience working on education that is relevant to the lived realities of women and girls, we were well placed to study the landscape of early and child marriage in India.

FINDINGS

Here we will share the key findings of the landscape analysis: first, the historical legacy of early and child marriage; second, our findings related to root causes and impacts; third, the key points of analysis emerging from the community-level interventions being undertaken by the NGOs that were studied. While many of these findings reaffirm the existing knowledge base on early and child marriage in India, several are new insights that we hope will inform the thinking of those working on this issue.

HISTORICAL LEGACY

The practice of early and child marriage first came under examination following the colonization of India. European governments used it to justify their role in India as civilizers of "barbaric practices." Despite a "mission to civilize," the British government remained reluctant to intervene in the institution of marriage per se. Amid the growing nationalist movement in India, British officials felt such interventions would further fuel discontent. When approached by reformers, the British government limited their efforts to the sensational issues of early consummation and early pregnancy—the "immediate evils" of child marriage—rather than the long-range

consequences for society.[1] They went on to set a minimum age for consummation of marriage in 1891, skirting all other issues around child marriage.

This colonial legacy of focusing on age still shapes today's discourse on early and child marriage. The obvious similarity of contemporary debates to the discourse from a century ago is hardly coincidental. We have inherited three important legacies in how we engage with the issue: narrow focuses on health, age and the law. These legacies have diverted attention from the role of women's empowerment, issues of consent and choice beyond age, and the need to engage with early and child marriage as a social and political issue, rather than a purely legal or state-centric one. This is one of the reasons why political movements in post-independence India, particularly the women's movement, have had limited engagement, if any, with early and child marriage.

Internationally, as well as in India, there is a tendency to frame early and child marriage as a "native practice"—a problem that plagues the Global South; that plagues a different culture and less educated people; or that plagues "the other." This representation strips the practice of all its underlying causes and complexities, which have resonance around the world, and are as relevant in the Global North as they are in the developing world.

The discourse within the development sector continues to be stunted at many levels. Internationally, as well as in India, there is a tendency to frame early and child marriage as a "native practice"—a problem that plagues the Global South; that plagues a different culture and less educated people; or that plagues "the other." This representation strips the practice of all its underlying causes and complexities (such as teenage pregnancies), which have resonance around the world, and are as relevant in the Global North as they are in the developing world. The key lesson from this history is that we must broaden today's discourse and view early and child marriage differently from how it has been viewed in the past. The main difference, we argue, is to look at the practice as it relates to its structural root causes and engage critically with them, while keeping a focus on empowering young people to bring about positive social change central to this work. We will elaborate on this position with evidence in the following sections.

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1   Forbes 1979.

ROOT CAUSES

Early and child marriage is a symptom of a deeply fractured and unequal society. When asked why people decide to marry their children early, causes like "dowry," "poverty" and "fear of sexual violence" are mentioned. While these may be factors that influence decision-making around marriage, they are not the root causes. The root causes are structural inequalities and direct decision-making factors; dowry and other such explanations are ultimately symptoms of those deeper problems. These underlying structures are an interplay of patriarchy, class, caste, religion and sexuality, which lead to complex realities that then influence decision-making.

In this report we identify seven root causes of early and child marriage: the economics of marriage; sexuality; gender norms and masculinity; educational and institutional gaps; the centrality of marriage; risk, vulnerability and uncertainty; and age as an axis of power. While some of these exist in the current discourse around the issue, others are additions made through this study.

ECONOMICS OF MARRIAGE

Like so many aspects of our lives, marriage is in many ways an economic transaction, and all such transactions are governed by certain rules and assumptions. Norms around marriage transactions are governed by, and reproduce, inequalities. For example, patriarchal Indian society views women as an economic burden. Through marriage this burden is transferred to the marital family. Dowry is then expected from the girl's family as support for bearing this burden. For families that struggle with poverty, this one-time cost is very high, and the decision-making around a girl's marriage is done based on a desire to minimize this cost. Costs of weddings are viewed similarly, and multiple sisters may be married in one ceremony to capitalize on economies of scale.

Economic inequality and patriarchy are the fundamental assumptions behind the economics of marriage. This includes an unequal division of labour within the household, and the role of a woman's labour in decisions about her marriage. Patriarchy ensures the undervaluing of the young bride's labour within the economic transaction, skewing the bargaining power against the girl and her family. This is despite the fact that the productive capacities of the newly married young bride are central to the functioning of the household economy, as she is utilised for unpaid care work, while the rest of the family works in the fields or seeks paid employment.

SEXUALITY

Control over women's sexuality is central to a society that is both patriarchal and divided by class and caste. These boundaries are kept in place by restricting women's sexuality and ability to procreate in order to limit inheritance of wealth and maintain "caste purity." This places a premium on the virginity and chastity of young women, such that even a forced sexual encounter is seen as tarring the image of the woman, leaving her less worthy of marriage.

The overall attitude toward sexuality is negative, and there is no space to acknowledge adolescent sexuality and desires without being shamed or facing severe consequences. These attitudes mean that adolescents themselves don't see sex before marriage as an option and sometimes choose to marry young as a way to satisfy desires. Some adolescents find each other outside of arranged marriage set-ups and choose to elope, often at the cost of severing ties with their communities

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forever. But many others marry the person arranged by their parents in order to fulfil their desires without drastic repercussions. Since these norms create a rigid environment, parents who seek control—as well as young people who wish to exercise their sexual agency—have little choice but marriage.

GENDER NORMS AND MASCULINITY

Women are socialised to believe that their primary role in society is in relation to others—as a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a wife and a mother. These norms restrict women from having aspirations beyond marriage. Similarly, for men, gender norms are constructed around masculinity, and a man's sense of self hinges on his ability to control women, particularly daughters. Until the daughter is married, her protection and chastity is considered a marker of the father's honour and masculinity. Losing control over his daughter can bring a man shame and exclusion from the community, and this motivates men to marry their girls off early.

Fathers of boys face similar dilemmas. Errant boys who stray from the norms of masculinity are married early as a way for the father to reinforce control over the son, by foisting the additional responsibilities of a wife and children on him. This increased dependency of the son on his father ensures that the son and his wife obey orders within the household. The onus of disciplining not only himself but also his wife falls onto the young boy; if he fails, he may be forced to fend for himself. These patriarchal gender norms influence decision-making around marriage.

EDUCATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

For those parents who wish to send their daughters to school, and for girls who wish to study, accessing education is not always easy. Over and above restrictive norms, girls often have to travel long distances to find institutional education. Sometimes the lack of schools ends girls' education. A lack of institutions exaggerates the fact that a girl's education is viewed as a secondary priority to her labour in the household. It also reduces the bargaining power of young girls to resist marriage and to find alternative activities and aspirations.

Those who wish to continue their education are compelled to negotiate with their parents for this freedom. The trade-off for being "allowed" higher education is a greater conformity to the norms of a "good girl" who can be trusted to "do the right thing" and stay on the "right path," which usually implies that girls stay away from romantic relationships and cede control over other parts of their lives. In addition, the content and pedagogy of the mainstream educational system lacks any focus on girls' empowerment or other ideas that could help girls in their negotiations around marriage.

CENTRALITY OF MARRIAGE

Across all social boundaries, marriage is considered to be the most important part of the lives of young people. Both men and women are encouraged to aspire to it from a young age, each in his or her own way. This centrality of marriage is also accompanied by specific norms around marriage. These norms dictate what is and is not an "ideal" marriage. Because social norms require everyone to marry, and because marriage is governed by rigid rules,

families fear that their child might not have an "ideal" marriage or will not find the "ideal" match. In such cases, marrying early is the way parents secure the future of their children. Indeed, marriage is so central that young adults are often eager for it as well. Some young people dream about "love marriages," of course. But for many others, marriage is a means to satisfy sexual desires or access the mobility and freedom reserved for adults; in addition, there is often a deep desire for the romance associated with the act and ritual of marriage itself. Often, the dreams of young people are limited to those that can be accessed through marriage.

RISK, VULNERABILITY AND UNCERTAINTY

For the many families that live amid growing uncertainty, there is a strong anxiety about the future: a sense of "who knows what tomorrow will bring." Structural factors like poverty, agrarian crises and migration exacerbate the vulnerability of families to severe and life-changing situations. In such cases, marriage is seen as a way to bring certainty and insurance to an otherwise volatile environment. This is also why families that migrate, or are under threat of communal violence, or live in areas prone to floods or other natural disasters, are more likely to marry their children young—as a way to avoid greater uncertainty and as a way to mitigate risks by using marriage to strengthen social networks.

AGE AS AN AXIS OF POWER

Young people, children particularly, are viewed as naïve and innocent and lacking the capacity to fend for themselves. This is why society creates mechanisms to protect them from harm. In many cases, this is the explanation used to separate young people marrying underage out of choice. However, the same is not as problematic when it takes place with parental consent, within societal norms and boundaries. This difference shows that young people lack agency not because they are unable to make good decisions. Instead, agency comes with age: those who are older generally have greater power over decision-making. Since age, and age difference, influence the way in which we engage with one another, age can be considered an axis across which young people are left disempowered from the decision-making process around marriage.

IMPACTS

Early and child marriage creates a number of negative consequences for young adults and their families. Of these, the development sector currently focuses on two primary impacts: on education, as girls are forced to drop out of school; and on the health of young women, especially linked to early pregnancy. These two problems are essential to address, but there are other impacts that are also important. By looking at root causes, we gain a broader understanding of the impacts of early and child marriage on education and health, but also on gender and sexuality, and livelihoods.

We visited 19 organisations and interacted with more than 50 others. The organisations were asked to articulate why early and child marriage is a problem; what their long-term goals are to solve it; how they wish to approach the issue; and what their strategies and the thematic areas are in which they work.

A detailed discussion of impacts follows in the main report. Here, we explain why it is important to broaden the scope of the impacts in articulating the problem of early and child marriage, which will, in turn, affect the scope of long-term goals and strategies. By doing so, aspects of adolescents' lives that are invisible will come to the fore—for example, looking beyond early pregnancies will enable interventions to help young brides seek social support and livelihood opportunities after they are married. Currently, grassroots organisations that identify these gaps are unable to work on them because the larger discourse limits the scope of work on the issue.

INTERVENTIONS

We visited 19 organisations and interacted with more than 50 others through interviews and the aforementioned national consultation around early and child marriage. Here we provide a broad landscape of the kinds of organisations working in the field. To be clear, there is enormous variety among these organisations; no two are alike. The structure of theory of change provides the framework for our analysis of these organisations. Below, we provide two different theories of change that exist on two extremes of the pool of diverse organisations in the field, one focused on age at marriage and the other focused on empowerment. No organisation fits solely into just one category, but each can be characterized by having one of these orientations to early and child

marriage, which makes the patterns demonstrative of the trajectories their work may take in the field. These patterns were generated based on theory of change exercises conducted with the organisations: the organisations were asked to articulate why early and child marriage is a problem; what their long-term goals are to solve it; how they wish to approach the issue; and what their strategies and the thematic areas in which they work are.

Through this exercise, it became clear that not all organisations working on early and child marriage articulate the problem in the same way. Organisations' visions of long-term solutions are based on their articulation, which in turn influences their approaches to problem solving, the strategies they employ and the thematic areas they work on. While no organisation fits neatly into one or another pattern, the patterns work as tools to better grasp the landscape of interventions.

PATTERN 1: A FOCUS ON AGE AT MARRIAGE

PROBLEM
Marriage before legal age (18 for girls, 21 for boys)

GOALS
Stopping child marriage, and/or creating child marriage-free zones

APPROACH
Instrumental use of alternative spaces to avoid marriage; focused on behavioural change; showcasing role models who delayed marriage; informed by symptoms; child-centric

STRATEGY
Engaging the law and other authorities; awareness campaigns

THEMES
Media, government, education

PATTERN 2: A FOCUS EMPOWERMENT

PROBLEM
Early marriage exacerbates existing issues of marriage

GOALS
Empowered young people who can exercise agency in important decisions about their lives

APPROACH
Empowering; adolescent-centric; informed by local realities and root causes; focused on groups and collectives

STRATEGY
Creating alternative spaces for young people; creating alternative life options and aspirations

THEMES
Livelihoods, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, media, sports, art

ARTICULATION OF THE PROBLEM

All the organisations we visited are doing valuable work, often under very difficult conditions; the organisations in both categories see early and child marriage as a serious issue, and all are working sincerely to tackle what they see as the most important problems. A significant difference between these two approaches is what the organisations see as the problem. For organisations working with a primary focus on age at marriage, the problem that needs addressing is girls getting married before the legal age of 18. For those organisations that primarily work through an empowerment approach, the problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of agency and choice among young people, within a hostile community context that disables them from making informed decisions, such as deciding their age at marriage.

Organisations that articulate their problem within the framework of age at marriage are less likely to engage with the complex realities in the field and more likely to follow the official discourse of the state and the development sector (including funding organisations). They hope to achieve child marriage-free zones within each state, where all marriages must take place after 18. They pay a lot of attention to measuring the number of child marriages prevented or the decline in the total percentage of child marriage within the region following their interventions.

Such organisations have varied articulations of why they think early and child marriage is a problem. Some of these articulations are not well formed, while others may be strategically limited based on the community within which they work. Often, even when an organisation has a strong articulation of the problem, when it seeks to impact a particular community, it doesn't engage with the realities of that community. In their dialogue with the community, these organisations tend to emphasise the dominant messages of the state and the development sector—i.e., poor health (particularly sexual and reproductive) and dropping out of school. Since this is a borrowed articulation that is taken from the development sector, rather than one that emerges from the concerns of affected communities and actual experiences in the field, it is reproduced by the organisation without consideration of the community and often seems to find little resonance with the realities on the ground.

Organisations that follow the second pattern have room for a lot more diversity: some organisations in this category, for example, find early and child marriage problematic as a violation of the fundamental human rights of young people, while others offer a critical articulation of the institution of marriage altogether.

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GOALS

For many organisations within the first category, numerical measurement and targets take precedence over other aspects of their work, often against the will of the organisation itself. Grassroots organisations that struggle for funds feel compelled to align themselves with the vision of the development sector to "end the practice of child marriage." Organisations in the second category tend to aspire toward a vision where all young people are able to access all basic human rights or aim to empower young people to exercise their agency in making important life decisions.

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APPROACHES

Because the first category of organisations follow the discourse of the development sector, their approach toward the issue is not informed by root causes or by the specific local contexts within which they work. Because of the emphasis on numbers, these organisations focus on behavioural change rather than attitudinal change, and use individual role models to motivate others to follow suit. These organisations primarily use law in different capacities as a way of enforcing age of marriage or use campaigns to create awareness of the law and commonly articulated impacts of early and child marriage. Organisations in the second category approach the issue from an adolescent-centric perspective, understanding that young people need different rights than children do, and they try to work with groups to create a space for dialogue about these rights, rather than merely emphasising a few role models to showcase those who were able to access more rights. Some of these organisations understand that empowerment can only be achieved when young people understand the social structures that disempower them, an understanding that can be further developed into collective dialogue and struggle. They create space for adolescents to voice their own opinions, beliefs and desires. They also understand that not all adolescent desires should be fulfilled, but they engage with such desires by counselling young people, rather than by using force or authority.

STRATEGIES

Not every organisation has an existing theory of change; however, by probing the organisations with specific questions, we can understand the different strategies they take to reach their desired outcomes. These range from creating awareness about the harmful implications of early and child marriage to facilitating better implementation of the 2006 Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. While these are direct strategies, many organisations also use indirect routes, such as helping adolescents voice alternative life aspirations or creating safe spaces that young people can access to resist forced marriage.

Similarly, some strategies work toward their desired goal by creating fear among the community, while others try to create conversations through collectives or provide alternative spaces and life options to young people.

THEMES

Thematic areas are numerous and include everything from education to sexual and reproductive health rights, from law to livelihoods, from violence to the media. Education is seen both in the literature, as well as in the field, as an effective means of preventing early and child marriage: it is typically perceived as a tool that provides girls with the power to negotiate and raise the age of marriage. One of the limiting elements of education-based interventions, however, is they tend to reinforce "good-girl" and "good-boy" norms.

Staff members at one organisation working on health, when asked why they think girls should get married after age 18, said that once a girl turns 18 her body and mind are "ready," an idea often mentioned, but one for which they had no actual explanation.

Almost all organisations working with violence agreed that girls married at a younger age face a higher level of violence as compared to older women, yet this did not inform their perspective or work with girls. We found no organisation actually working on, or addressing, this issue in the field. Girls may face physical, mental, emotional and sexual violence when they protest against something in their marital homes or if they refuse to have sex with their husbands. These organisations still use early pregnancy and maternal health as arguments against early and child marriage, instead of talking about increased violence, lack of sexual agency or the burdens of adulthood.

GAPS IN EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

Having analysed the different types of organisations working directly or indirectly on early and child marriage, some broad gaps are evident. Once again, this is not to say that individual organisations have not worked hard to fill these gaps. Amid the hard work of these organisations, we offer these observations in the hope of creating conversation around possibilities for the future.

GAPS IN ARTICULATION

Only some organisations acknowledge issues of right to choice and consent within marriage decisions, and very few actually view marriage critically as a social institution that reproduces inequalities.

GAPS IN LONG-TERM GOALS

There is a dearth of organisations that see young people's empowerment, their ability to exercise choice and voice consent, as their final goal.

GAPS IN APPROACHES

Organisations in the field currently approach the issue hoping to bring about behavioural change, rather than attitudinal change. These approaches are typically focused more on preventing child marriage than on empowerment.

GAPS IN STRATEGIES

There is a lack of institutional spaces that provide adolescents alternatives to marriage or help them resist early and child marriage. This absence is the most prominent gap, though not the only gap, in strategies.

GAPS IN THEMES

There is almost no work being done at the intersection of boys, masculinity and early marriage. Work on sexual and reproductive health often takes a limiting and negative approach to sexuality and excludes conversations around young people's desires. Education initiatives are often used instrumentally, rather than to create alternative educational spaces (or engage with existing ones) to make education empowering for young people. Livelihood organisations are able to provide tangible skills but fail to help adolescents to translate these into employability and financial independence, and basic career counselling is missing. While organisations that use art or sports do exist and are quite successful in reaching their desired goals, there are too few organisations that work on these innovative thematic areas, which hold potential for social change.

The lack of engagement with issues of violence is also an example of how, because of the overwhelming focus of most organisations on delaying marriage, once a girl marries at a young age, she tends to be forgotten. There is a need for more organisations to make the connection between early marriage and domestic violence, not only to build arguments around it, but also to provide support for those young brides who do experience violence. Despite sexuality being at the core of both root causes and impacts, organisations are not addressing sexuality beyond sexual violence, if they are addressing it at all.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The way monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is currently understood and implemented has a negative impact on interventions. By increasing pressure to meet quantitative indicators or other targets, it is encouraging quick-fix strategies that ultimately narrow, rather than broaden, the dialogue between organisations and communities. The pressure M&E lays on efficacy undermines the challenges faced by organisations—a problem that continues to grow, since the longer an organisation doesn't talk about problems, the harder it is to spark honest dialogue and reflection. Finally, by emphasising a flat, simplistic understanding of the problems involved (in order to make them easier to monitor) this approach leads to solutions that offer Band-Aids but fail to address the multiplicity of issues involved.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the extensive research conducted in the landscape analysis, we make the following recommendations for agencies interested in working on the issue to effectively and sustainably address the issue of early and child marriage in India:

- Broaden the way we define and articulate the problem of early and child marriage to include issues related to gender, sexuality and the centrality of marriage and violence in society
- Focus on empowering young people. Reducing early and child marriage is only one step in realizing this goal
- Invest in research and knowledge-building around issues of gender and masculinity, sexuality and marriage
- Engage critically with the deeply entrenched societal norms around marriage, as a path to bring about sustainable social change
- Empower young people to be critical partners in the work to stop early and child marriage and to imagine and pursue other possibilities based on their needs and aspirations
- Ensure that root causes (e.g., rigid gender roles, control of sexuality, etc.) are understood and addressed in interventions around early and child marriage
- Recognize the shortcomings of existing interventions, and build the capacities of organizations to grapple with them
- Re-evaluate monitoring and evaluation techniques to measure and assess not only important behavioural outcomes, but the changes in values and attitudes taking place within communities. In this way, funding agencies can empower organizations to better address the root causes of early and child marriage.

CONCLUSION

Today, there is a growing international interest in the issue of early and child marriage. As communities, governments and funders seek to shape interventions to address this practice, we hope that the findings of this report will inform their thinking.

Early and child marriage in India is symptomatic of multiple, interconnected root causes and structural inequalities. Effective, sustainable solutions to this complex problem must engage with all of the multiple factors that perpetuate the practice. Interventions must also empower young people to critique the social norms inherent to marriage in their culture and participate in advocating for a collective process of change within their broader communities.

We hope that all who are concerned about this issue will join in building thoughtful, nuanced and empowering solutions to early and child marriage in India—and around the world.

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NOTES

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