



# ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA: OUR APPROACH

## INTRODUCTION

Child marriage—also known as early or forced marriage—violates the human rights of roughly 15 million girls around the world. Many parents view child marriage as the key to obtaining future security for their daughters, often not realizing that child brides are more likely to drop out of school, experience domestic violence or die in childbirth. The effects of child marriage vary across cultures, but everywhere it occurs, the practice deprives adolescent girls of the freedom to make informed and independent choices about their lives and bodies. The presence of child marriage in a community usually indicates that women and girls in those societies face tremendous inequality—not just in their families, but in society overall.



Young women in Andhra Pradesh, where AJWS grantee Voice4Girls provides the knowledge and skills training they need to speak up for their rights and serve as role models for their peers.

PHOTO Anne Lieberman

## THE AJWS APPROACH TO ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** has launched a new initiative focused on ending child marriage in India, a country that is home to one-third of the world's child brides. This initiative emerged from AJWS's more than 15 years of experience supporting Indian social change organizations.

**Since 2014, AJWS has provided more than \$5 million to local organizations working to end child marriage in India.** These groups are engaging adolescent girls and their communities to address the multiple root causes of the practice, including gender inequality, poverty and limited sexual health education. In the United States, AJWS has mobilized American Jews and other activists through our *We Believe* campaign—and one of its top goals is to influence U.S. policies that will help end child marriage around the globe.

## OUR 3-YEAR PLAN IN INDIA

### COMMUNITY

**At the community level, AJWS is identifying and supporting Indian organizations that use a human rights-based approach to address the challenges that lead to child marriage.** The most effective organizations build a supportive environment in which adolescent girls—along with men, boys and community leaders—cultivate attitudes and practices that will help end child marriage. For example, some of these groups help youth gain the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to successfully negotiate decisions about marriage with their families.

AJWS is identifying and strengthening organizations doing this work in Indian communities that are particularly vulnerable to child marriage, especially in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

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## NATIONAL

**At the national level in India, AJWS is investing in Indian human rights movements and supporting them in taking on the issue of child marriage.** In India, the issue of child marriage is not explicitly addressed by the major movements for human rights—including labor, health and women’s rights. However, these movements can help bolster change because they address problems that make girls vulnerable to child marriage; these groups work to end poverty, combat gender inequality and increase access to sexual health information.

AJWS will use strategic grantmaking and organize meetings to bring these movements together, so that they can better address child marriage as part of their broader social change agendas.

## GLOBAL

**At the global level, AJWS is working to influence the conversation about child marriage by conducting strategic research, monitoring and evaluation in India and sharing critical findings.** The AJWS strategy focuses on addressing the root causes of the problem and fulfilling girls’ human rights, rather than focusing solely on enforcing legal age limits for marriage.

AJWS is collaborating with our Indian grantees and with established research organizations in India to generate new data and insights. We will use this research to persuade other organizations to more effectively address the factors that perpetuate the practice of child marriage.

## AJWS GRANTEES CREATING CHANGE

Our grantees are working to address the root causes of child marriage in India so that girls can choose their own futures:

- **Shaheen** provides education and counseling to Muslim women and adolescent girls in the Old City of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. The services help them develop the skills and confidence they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and to challenge harmful social norms in their communities, which have seriously limited what women can do with their lives and bodies.
- **Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM)** works closely with young men and women among the Dalit (“untouchable” caste) in western India to determine why many of them still agree to get married before age 18, despite the known harms and the limits it will place on their lives. MASUM helps these youth learn about their rights and how to advocate for greater choices about their own futures.
- **Azad Foundation’s** Women on Wheels project trains low-income young women to become professional taxi drivers in Delhi. This innovative approach helps young women secure well-paying jobs in a male-dominated industry—vastly expanding their individual life choices and shifting the community’s traditional mindset about what women can and cannot do.

## Want to learn more about the factors that fuel early marriage in India?

Read a summary of new research conducted by AJWS grantees: [ajws.org/earlymarriageanalysis](http://ajws.org/earlymarriageanalysis)

**AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE (AJWS)** is the leading Jewish organization working to promote human rights and end poverty in the developing world. AJWS promotes civil and political rights; advances sexual health and rights; defends access to food, land and water; and aids communities in the aftermath of disasters. We pursue lasting change by supporting grassroots and global human rights organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and by advocating for U.S. and international policies for justice and equality worldwide.

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