

What Works to Reduce Child Marriage?

Findings from a Comparative Study of a Successful District and a Not-So-Successful District in Rajasthan, India

Research Brief

January 2019

Background

India has achieved an impressive reduction in the prevalence of child marriage over the past decade. Data also show that progress achieved in reducing child marriage over the same period varied across states. For example, the percentage of women who had married in the five years prior to the census and before they were 18 years old declined by 20 percentage points in Rajasthan (from 52 percent to 32 percent) and by 30 points in Bihar (from 53 percent to 23 percent), both of which are high prevalence states (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2001; 2011). Differences in the pace of decline were observed across districts as well. A better understanding of factors that might have contributed to a faster pace of decline in child marriage in some districts (“successful” districts) and factors that might have prevented others from achieving a similar pace of decline (“not-so-successful” districts) would provide useful programmatic leads to hasten the process of preventing child marriage in India.

Drawing on a comparative study conducted in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts of Rajasthan State, this research brief sheds light on programs and practices that may have resulted in the differential pace of decline in child marriage. It examines the extent to which life choices of adolescent girls, implementation of programs and laws and community beliefs underlying child marriage differed between the successful district and the not-so-successful district.

The study

We conducted a multi-component exploratory study in two districts—Bundi and Chittaurgarh—in Rajasthan State. We located the study in Rajasthan because it is among the top 10 states in terms of child marriage prevalence; the 2015–2016 National Family Health Survey reports that as many as 35 percent of women aged 20–24 were married before age 18 (IIPS and ICF, 2017). Analysis of the

Findings

The proportion of all girls aged 15–19 who were married before age 15 was twice as high in the study locations in Chittaurgarh (31 percent) as in Bundi (15 percent), and the proportion of all girls aged 18–19 who were married before age 18 was 60 percent in Chittaurgarh and 36 percent in Bundi.

There were differences between respondents in Bundi and Chittaurgarh in the choices and opportunities available to pursue their studies and remain unmarried, in decision-making agency in personal matters and in their awareness of marriage-related laws.

- Girls in Bundi had better access to educational facilities and a more supportive environment to pursue schooling, compared with their counterparts in Chittaurgarh.
- A larger proportion of the girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh found remaining unmarried, at least until age 18, easy; they displayed greater agency to insist on delaying marriage.
- A larger proportion of the girls from Bundi than from Chittaurgarh exercised decision-making agency in personal matters.
- In-depth awareness of marriage-related laws was higher among the girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh.

There were also differences between Bundi and Chittaurgarh in perceptions about the implementation of programs and the laws intended to address child marriage.

- The narratives of informants suggest that a wider array of communication, advocacy and community mobilization activities were organized in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh. While most of the communication, advocacy and community mobilization activities were done around *Akshaya Tithiya* (a day considered auspicious, when hundreds of child marriages are carried out) in Chittaurgarh, such activities were largely carried out throughout the year in Bundi.
- Mass marriage ceremonies were more common and more accepted in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh and had the effect of reducing marriage costs, thus incentivizing parents to delay marriage to avail of these subsidies.
- Marriage-related laws, particularly the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and the Marriage Registration Act, were more effectively enforced in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh, although without imposing tough penalties on parents.
- Marriage registration was more common in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh.

At the same time, there were similarities in some of the community beliefs underlying child marriage in Bundi and Chittaurgarh. Community beliefs around girls’ emerging sexuality and dowry demands and the reactions of community members to girls who remain unmarried in their late adolescence were similar in both locations.

2001 and 2011 census data revealed that the decline in child marriage during the intercensal period varied across districts, even among those that had recorded similar levels in 2001. We selected two districts with similar socio-demographic characteristics: In one district, Bundi, the prevalence of child marriage declined at a faster pace than the state average and in the other, Chittaurgarh, it declined at a slower pace.

The study entailed: (i) focus group discussions, using photo elicitation, with girls aged 10–14 (six groups in total); (ii) a survey of unmarried and married girls aged 15–19 (1,093 girls in total); (iii) a survey of parents and parents-in-law of girls aged 15–19 (701 adults in total); (iv) informant interviews with influential adults in communities—teachers, front-line health workers, village-level elected representatives and religious and caste leaders (23 persons in total); (v) in-depth interviews with officials from government departments, such as Education, Women and Child Development, Health, Social Justice, and Law Enforcement (police and judiciary); and representatives of non-government organizations (31 persons in total). This brief draws on data from the survey of adolescent girls and parents of adolescent girls, the informant interviews and the in-depth interviews.

Prevalence of marriage

The survey results show, as expected, a higher prevalence of marriage in adolescence in Chittaurgarh than in Bundi (table 1). Of the girls who participated in the survey, 53 percent in Chittaurgarh were married, compared with 39 percent in Bundi. The proportion of all girls aged 15–19 who were married before age 15 was twice as large in Chittaurgarh (31 percent) as in Bundi (15 percent), and the proportion of all girls aged 18–19 who were married before age 18 was 60 percent in Chittaurgarh and 36 percent in Bundi. Although not comparable, the 2015–2016 National Family Health Survey reported considerably lower levels—14 percent and 8 percent of girls aged 15–19 who had married before age 15 and 48 percent and 39 percent of girls aged 18–19 who had married before age 18, respectively, in Chittaurgarh and Bundi. The median age at marriage, correspondingly, differed—14 years in Chittaurgarh and 16 years in Bundi. The median age at cohabitation was 16 years and 17 years, respectively, in Chittaurgarh and Bundi.



Table 1: Prevalence of child marriage in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts

Indicators	Bundi	Chittaurgarh
Marital status***		
Unmarried	60.6%	47.4%
Married but not yet cohabiting	15.6%	24.9%
Married and cohabiting	23.8%	27.9%
Number of married and unmarried girls	562	531
Age at marriage and cohabitation		
Married before age 15***	14.8%	30.6%
Number of married and unmarried girls	562	531
Married before age 18***	36.2%	60.3%
Number of married and unmarried girls aged 18–19	229	192
Median age at marriage	16	14
Number of married girls	228	179
Median age at cohabitation	17	16
Number of married girls who had cohabited	129	118

Notes: *** means the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant, at $p \leq 0.001$; the number refers to unweighted number of respondents.

Did adolescent girls' agency, choices and opportunities differ?

The study findings differed considerably between Bundi and Chittaurgarh in terms of adolescent girls' agency, choices and opportunities, as measured by such indicators as girls' ease of completing Class 10, ease of remaining unmarried till age 18 or 20, decision-making in personal matters and awareness of marriage-related laws.

Choices and opportunities

A striking difference that the study discerned between Bundi and Chittaurgarh related to the choices and opportunities available to adolescent girls in these two districts. Specifically, the survey and qualitative findings show that adolescent girls in Bundi had better access to facilities and a supportive environment to pursue schooling, compared with their counterparts in Chittaurgarh, although the situation appears to be improving in Chittaurgarh as well. For example, 40 percent of the unmarried respondents in Bundi reported that it is "very easy" for girls in their village to complete Class 10, compared with 24 percent of the respondents in Chittaurgarh (figure 1). Similar views were expressed by mothers and mothers-in-law and fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls in the study area (40 percent and 30 percent of mothers and mothers-in-law in Bundi and

Chittaurgarh, respectively; 45 percent and 42 percent of fathers and fathers-in-law in Bundi and Chittaurgarh, respectively).

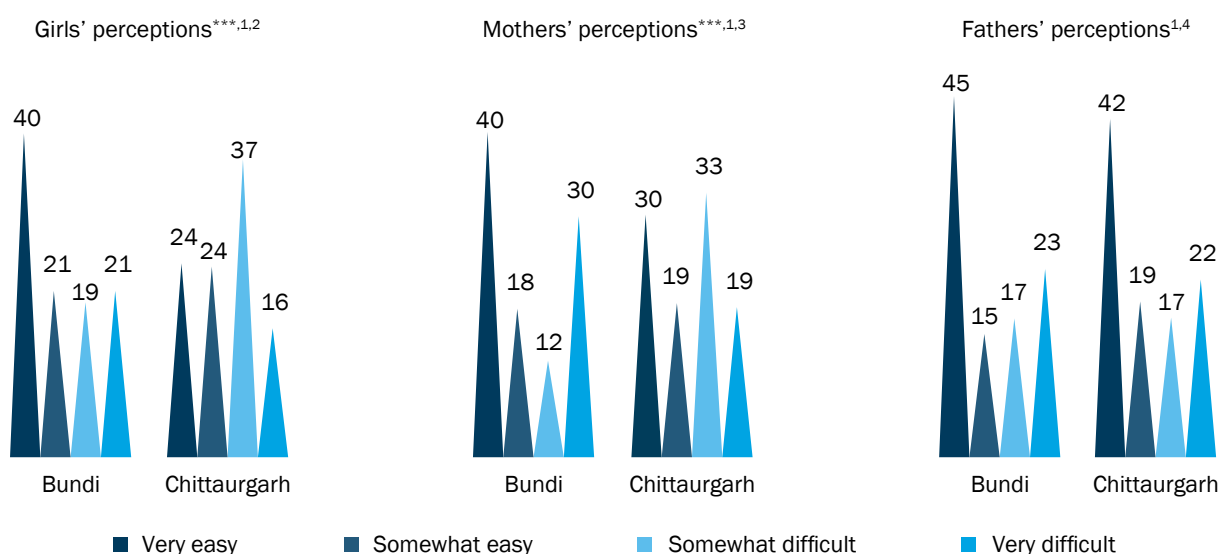
Influential adults in the community who participated in the qualitative explorations mirrored this view. Almost all the participants from Bundi reported that girls in their village typically continue studying till they complete Class 12 or as much as they prefer to study. Some of them also noted that parents arrange private tuition for their daughters and that parents refuse marriage proposals for their daughters before they complete their studies.

"They [parents] try to educate their daughter as much as she wants to study. They arrange private tuition if their daughters are not sent to school for some reason."
 – Accredited social health activist (community health worker) in Bundi

"Even if they get a good proposal for their daughter, they will not get her married if she is studying. They will tell the potential groom's family: 'Our daughter has not yet completed Class 12, let her first complete her studies, she will lose interest in studies if we get her married and she will not study further.'"
 – Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Bundi

In contrast, most informants in Chittaurgarh reported that girls in their village typically only study up to Class

Figure 1: Perceptions of the ease of completing Class 10 for girls in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: *** means the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant, at $p \leq 0.001$. 1=The percentages pertaining to adolescents are weighted, while those related to mothers and fathers are unweighted; 2=denominator includes unmarried girls (Bundi=345, Chittaurgarh=306); 3=denominator includes mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=202, Chittaurgarh=184); 4=denominator includes fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=164, Chittaurgarh=151).

8 or 10, although some girls complete Class 12 or even a college degree. A major reason they cited for girls not studying further is the lack of secondary schools and senior secondary schools in their village, although some reported that the school in their village was upgraded recently, which will help girls get more education.

“They study till Class 8. The school in our village is only till Class 8.” – Sarpanch (head of panchayat, or village governing council) in Chittaurgarh

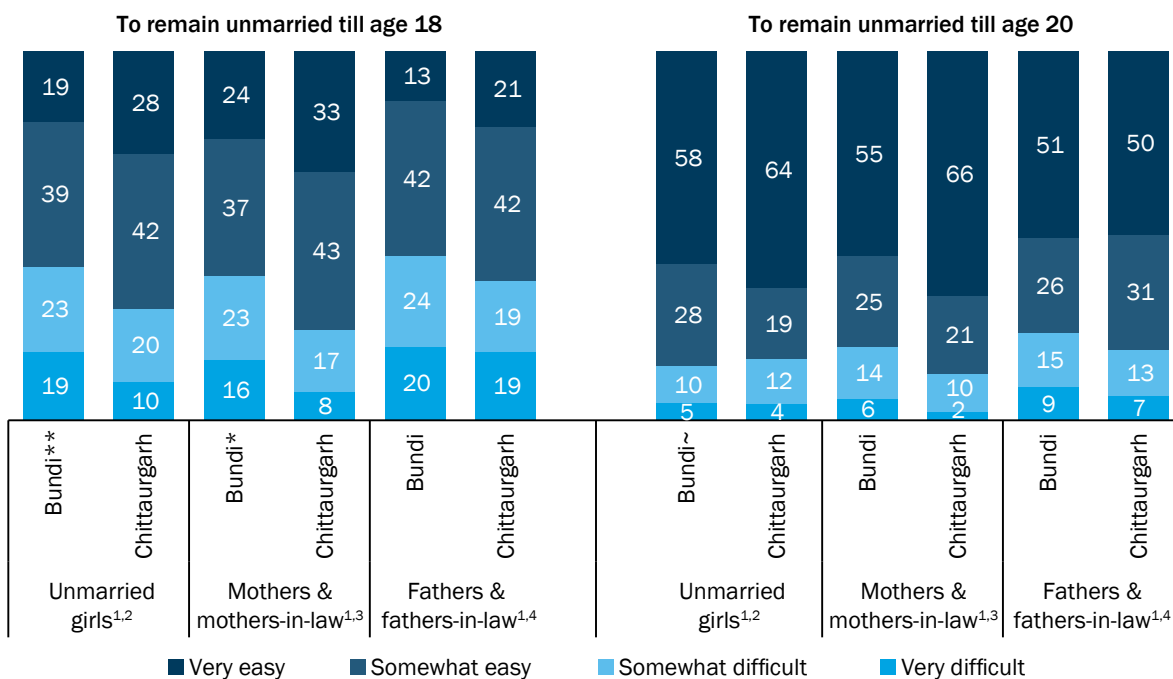
“Mostly, girls study till Class 8 in our village. Now, the school in the village has been upgraded to Class 12, so they will study till Class 12.” – Anganwadi worker in Chittaurgarh

till age 20. Parents of adolescent girls also echoed similar views: 39 percent, compared with 25 percent, respectively, of mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls in Bundi and Chittaurgarh and 44 percent, compared with 38 percent, respectively, of fathers and fathers-in-law.

Exercise of decision-making agency by girls

Closely related to the differences in the education experiences of girls in Bundi and Chittaurgarh is the differences in the exercise of decision-making agency by girls in these districts.

Figure 2: Perceptions of the ease for girls to remain unmarried in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)

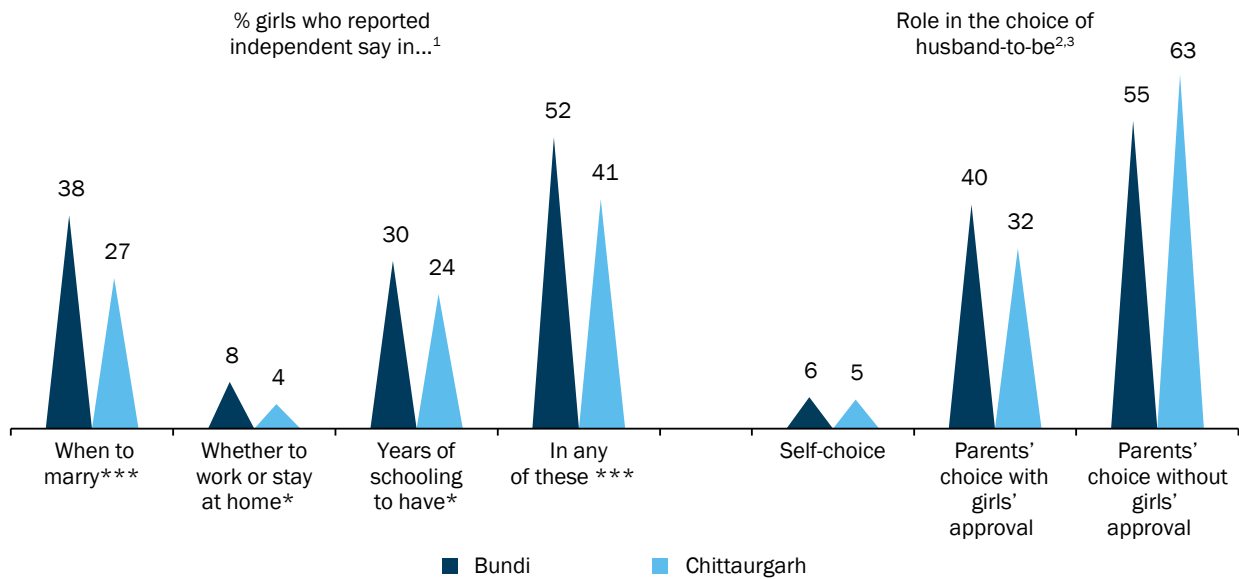


Notes: **, * and ~ mean that the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant, at $p \leq 0.01$, $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.10$, respectively. 1=The percentages pertaining to adolescents are weighted, while those related to mothers and fathers are unweighted; 2=denominator includes unmarried girls (Bundi=345, Chittaurgarh=306); 3=denominator includes mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=202, Chittaurgarh=184); 4=denominator includes fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=164, Chittaurgarh=151).

The study findings also show that remaining unmarried, at least until age 18, was an easier life choice for girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh (figure 2). Two-fifths of the unmarried respondents in Bundi, compared with one-third of the respondents in Chittaurgarh, reported that it is “very easy” or “easy” for girls in their village to remain unmarried, at least till age 18, although the differences were narrow for the proportion of girls who reported that it is very easy for girls in their village to remain unmarried

The findings from the survey of adolescent girls show that 52 percent of the respondents in Bundi exercised decision-making authority in personal matters, compared with only 41 percent in Chittaurgarh (figure 3). Although the differences are not statistically significant, more married girls in Bundi than Chittaurgarh reported that they selected their husband-to-be or their parents had sought their approval of the husband-to-be (45 percent, compared with 37 percent).

Figure 3: Exercise of decision-making agency by girls in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: *** and * mean the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant, at $p \leq 0.001$ and $p \leq 0.05$, respectively. 1=Denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531); 2=denominator includes married girls (Bundi=212, Chittaurgarh=217); 3=information is missing for 15 girls.

The narratives of the informants reiterated that girls in Bundi exercised agency in marriage-related matters more than their counterparts in Chittaurgarh. For example, most of the influential adults who participated in the informant interviews in Bundi (7 of 12) reported that girls refuse to marry early; some noted that girls even lodge complaints with the police if they are forced to marry. They attributed this to girls' education.



“These days, girls refuse and prevent their [early] marriage themselves. They tell their parents, ‘Why should I get married now? See, all the girls in the neighborhood are studying, and I will also study. I am too young right now, I will only stay with you and in your house right now.’ They try to make their family understand like this.” – Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Bundi

“Girls insist on completing their studies. They tell their family that they want to study. Some girls refuse to get married now and they get the police to come if they [parents] forcefully get them married.” – Anganwadi worker in Bundi

A smaller number (3 of 11) of informants narrated similar stories in Chittaurgarh.

“Girls refuse to get married. Girls say, ‘We will study and so, please do not arrange our marriage now.’” – Anganwadi worker in Chittaurgarh

Awareness of marriage-related laws

Awareness of marriage-related laws differed somewhat between Bundi and Chittaurgarh (figure 4). Awareness that there is a legal minimum age of marriage for boys and girls in India (92–93 percent), that 21 is the legal minimum age for boys (72–75 percent) and that 18 is the legal age of marriage for girls (81–85 percent) did not differ between adolescent girls in the study locations. However, in-depth awareness of marriage-related laws was greater among girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh. For example, a larger proportion of girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh were aware of the extent of punishment imposed on those who violated the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (26 percent, compared with 20 percent) and that girls who married before they were 18 can take legal recourse if they prefer to dissolve their marriage (67 per cent, compared with 62 percent). While a similar

proportion of girls reported that a person can be punished for giving, agreeing to give, demanding or taking dowry (78–80 percent), a larger proportion of the respondents in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh were aware that it is mandatory to register marriage at the local government office (68 percent, compared with 56 percent) and had heard about “helplines” or a police “control room” for reporting cases of child marriage (33 percent, compared with 28 percent).



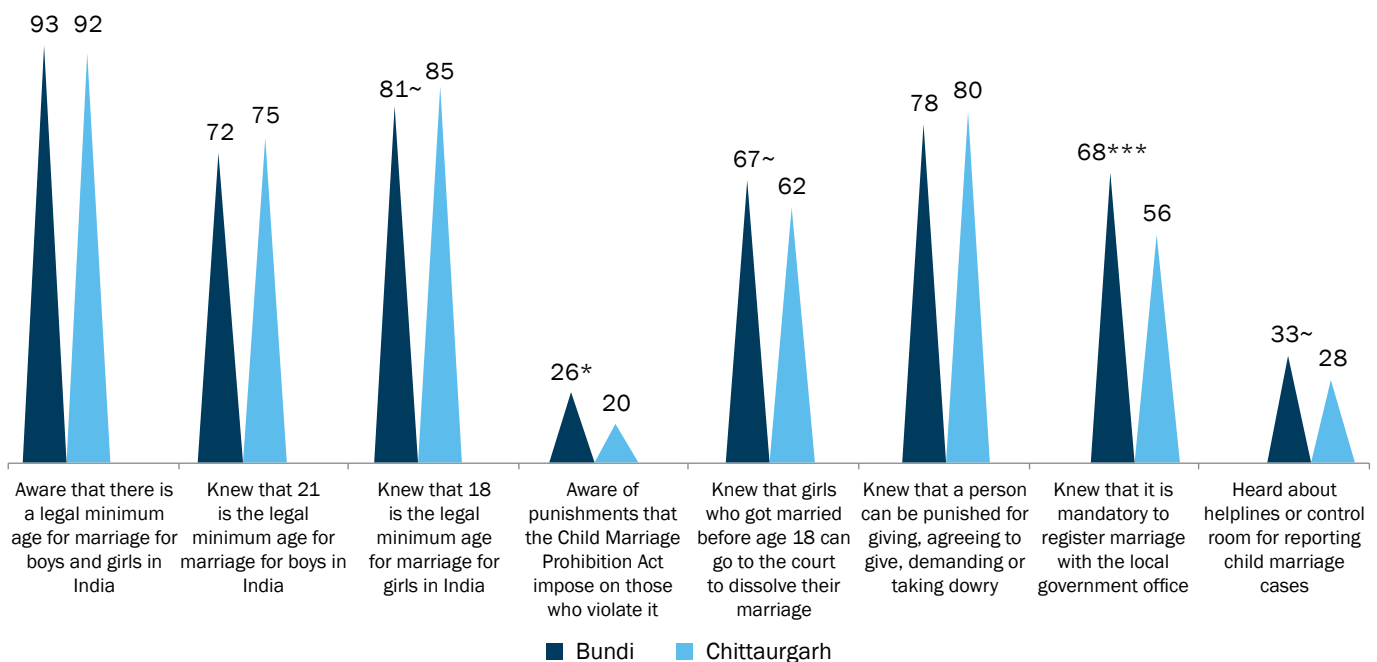
Did implementation of programs and laws intended to prevent child marriages differ?

The study findings present a mixed picture in Bundi and Chittaurgarh of the implementation of programs and laws intended to prevent child marriage.

Communication, advocacy and community mobilization activities

The study findings show that an array of communication, advocacy and community mobilization activities were conducted in both districts. The activities cited by study participants included: (i) the Bal Vivah Roktham (Stopping Child Marriage) campaign, implemented by the Women and Child Development Department in Rajasthan to raise awareness about the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act; (ii) the formation of Child Protection Committees to spread awareness; (iii) Gram Bal Sabhas (Village Children Groups) to spread awareness; (iv) the distribution of pamphlets to inform people about the helplines; (v) public pledges in schools; (vi) engaging teachers to monitor children who are likely to discontinue their studies due to child marriage; (vii) meeting with influential leaders, including caste leaders; (viii) rallies; and (ix) the Night Halt Program in villages, during which district officers discuss issues on a weekly basis that relate to child marriage, the child marriage law and the consequences of its violation and other laws. Other activities listed were wall paintings, street plays and campaigns using mobile vans to spread awareness of child marriage issues.

Figure 4: Adolescent girls’ awareness of marriage-related laws in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)

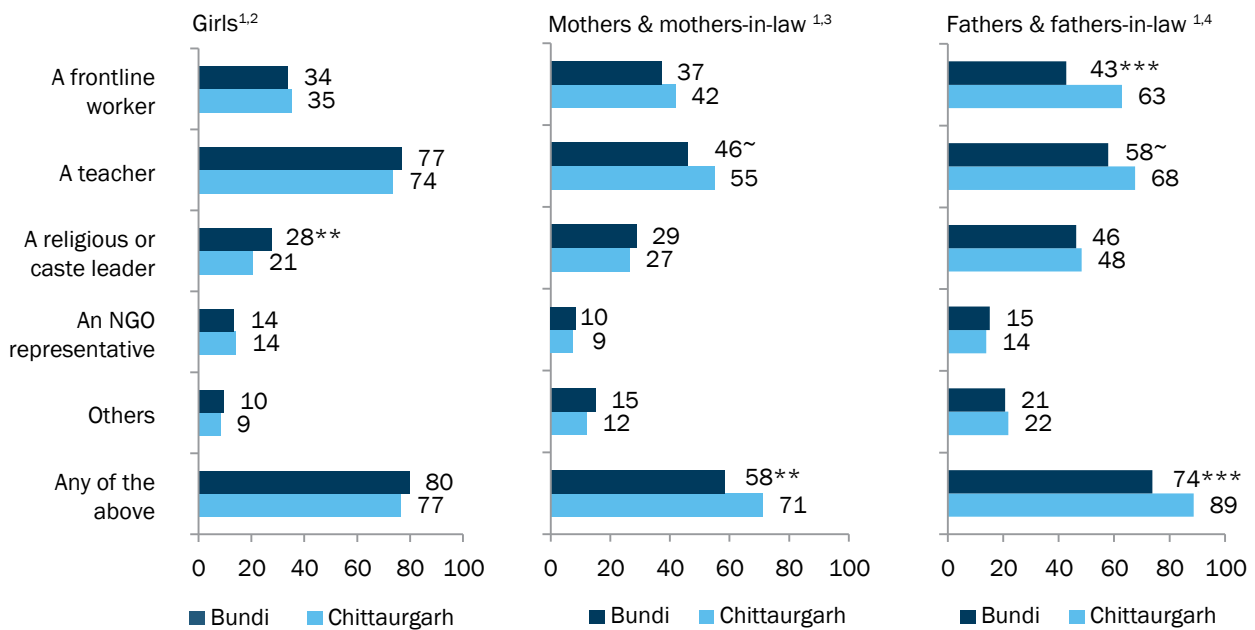


Notes: ***, *, and ~ mean that the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p \leq 0.001$, $p \leq 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.10$, respectively; the denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531).

A similar proportion of girls in both Bundi and Chittaurgarh reported that they had ever seen a rally, a street theatre or a meeting in which the topic of child marriage was discussed in their village (29 percent). Also, a similar proportion of girls reported that an influential adult in their community had discussed child marriage with them and other girls in their village or school (77–80 percent, figure 5).

did the participants from Chittaurgarh. For example, the participants in Bundi noted such activities as the formation of Child Protection Committees, the Gram Bal Sabhas, the distribution of pamphlets about the helplines, public pledges in school, engaging teachers to monitor children who are likely to discontinue their studies due to child marriage, and conducting meetings with influential leaders (including caste

Figure 5: Adolescent girls’ and parents’ exposure to interpersonal communication activities to raise awareness about child marriage and its consequences, Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: ***, **, and ~ mean that the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p \leq 0.001$, $p \leq 0.01$ and $p \leq 0.10$, respectively. 1=The percentages pertaining to adolescents are weighted, while those related to mothers and fathers are unweighted; 2=denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531); 3=denominator includes mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=202, Chittaurgarh=184); 4=denominator includes fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=164, Chittaurgarh=151).

In contrast, a larger proportion of parents in Chittaurgarh than in Bundi reported that an influential adult in their community had discussed child marriage with them and other parents (71 percent, compared with 58 percent, of mothers and mothers-in-law and 89 percent, compared with 71 percent, of fathers and fathers-in-law, figure 5). It is likely that interpersonal communication activities were intensified in Chittaurgarh because of the high prevalence of child marriage.

The informants presented a different perspective about these activities. A comparison of the narratives of informants from Bundi and Chittaurgarh suggests that the breadth of communication, advocacy and community mobilization activities conducted differed somewhat between the two districts. The study participants from Bundi mentioned a wider array of activities than

leaders) to make them aware of the law and consequences of child marriages. None of the participants from Chittaurgarh mentioned these activities.

The findings also show that most of the advocacy and community mobilization activities were organized around the time of *Akshaya Tiritiya* (a day considered auspicious, when hundreds of marriages, including child marriages, take place) in Chittaurgarh (mentioned by almost all the informants). In Bundi, however, such activities occurred throughout the year, with a focus on vulnerable villages and on occasions like *Akshay Tiritiya* (also known as *Akha Teej*).

“The government organizes rallies and processions to increase awareness of the Child Marriage Prevention Act.” – NGO representative in Chittaurgarh

“Workshops are organized around the time of Akshaya Tritiya...and one or two months prior to Akshaya Tritiya. Efforts are also made to impart information to people’s representatives and people solemnizing marriages, such as priests.” – A high-level official in the Social Justice Department in Chittaurgarh

“Most of the marriages take place around the time of Akha Teej in Chittaurgarh District, so they set up a helpline number at district headquarters a month prior to Akha Teej, publicize this number through the media and encourage the public to report child marriage cases that they come across by calling this number. The helpline service is available 24/7.” – NGO representative in Chittaurgarh

“These activities run for the entire year, but more intensely around Ananth Chaturdashi and some dates like these, which are thought to be auspicious for marriage.” – A high-level official in the Law Enforcement Department in Bundi

“From time to time, workshops are held for anganwadi workers, [accredited social health activists and auxiliary nurse-midwives], during which they are sensitized about child marriage issues.” – A high-level official in the Social Justice Department in Bundi

Mass marriage ceremony

The study findings show that the one activity that clearly differentiated the child marriage experiences between Bundi and Chittaurgarh was the mass marriage ceremony. Almost half of the married respondents (48 percent) were married in a mass marriage ceremony in Bundi, compared with 3 percent of the respondents in Chittaurgarh. As many as 47 percent of parents of unmarried adolescent girls in Bundi, compared with 15 percent of parents in Chittaurgarh, reported that they preferred to have their daughter married in a mass marriage ceremony.

Almost all the informants from Bundi reported that mass marriage ceremonies are the norm these days across all caste groups, and these ceremonies help to delay the age at marriage because the organizers must verify the age of bride and groom and they help reduce the burden of marriage-related expenses. They also reported that marriage registration takes place in these ceremonies.

“It [mass marriage ceremony] happens in our village, too. The marriage certificate is also made in the

ceremony. They verify the age of brides and grooms and ensure that the bride is not younger than 18 and the groom is not younger than 21.” – Accredited social health activist in Bundi

“Parents get their children married in these ceremonies. Their marriages get registered as well. The ceremony organizers have the list of couples who participate in the ceremony, and they take all their documents before the ceremony. The committee of the Gram Panchayat attends the ceremony and completes the process of registration there itself.” – Deputy Sarpanch in Bundi

While several informants from Chittaurgarh also reported mass marriage ceremonies in their district, they noted that the practice had only recently started.

“No such ceremony has happened in our village till now. Nobody has got their marriage done in it. Mass marriage ceremonies are organized for our caste people, but no one has ever gone there to get married.” – Sarpanch in Chittaurgarh

“It has not happened in our village, but mass marriage ceremonies are the trend in the cities. Every community wants to move in this direction.” – Caste leader in Chittaurgarh

Enforcement of marriage-related laws

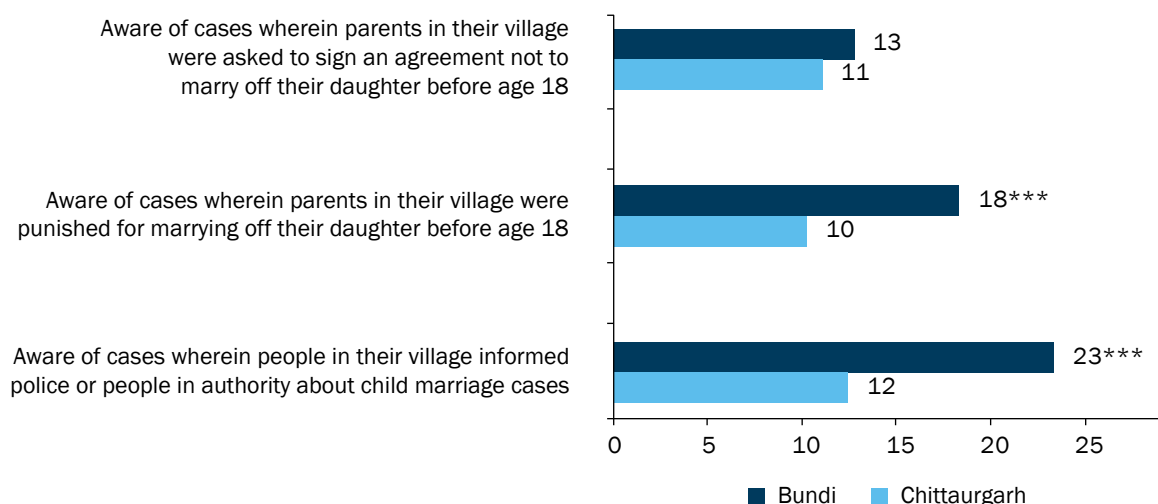
The findings from the survey of adolescent girls and interviews with parents of adolescent girls and informants indicate that the marriage-related laws, particularly the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and the Marriage Registration Act, are more effectively implemented in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh.

A larger proportion of girls in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh reported awareness of efforts to enforce these laws in their village. For example, 18 percent of the respondents in Bundi, compared with 10 percent in Chittaurgarh, reported that they were aware of cases in which parents were punished for marrying off their daughter before age 18 (figure 6). Similarly, more respondents in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh reported awareness of cases in which someone in their village informed the police or other authority about an impending child marriage case (23 percent, compared with 12 percent).

The study findings also show that, although still low, marriage registration was more common in Bundi than Chittaurgarh, with 9 percent of married girl respondents in Bundi, compared with 2 percent in Chittaurgarh, reporting that their marriage was registered.

The narratives of government officials, NGO representatives and influential adults indicate that efforts to raise awareness about marriage-related laws and use of the Child Marriage Prohibition Act as a deterrent to prevent child marriages were more common in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh.

Figure 6: Adolescent girls' perceptions of enforcement of marriage-related laws, Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: *** means that the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p \leq 0.001$; the denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531).

Responses of fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls also suggest a more vigilant enforcement of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh (table 2), although the views of mothers and mothers-in-law differed relatively less.

The informants from Bundi reported that activities to raise awareness about the Child Marriage Prohibition Act were conducted on a regular basis throughout the year in the district.

Table 2: Parental perceptions about implementation of marriage-related laws, Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts

Indicators	Bundi	Chittaurgarh	Bundi	Chittaurgarh
Perceptions about enforcement of marriage-related laws	Mothers & mothers-in-law		Fathers & fathers-in-law	
Aware of cases wherein parents in their village were asked to sign an agreement not to marry off their daughter before age 18	16.8%	13.0%	24.4%~	16.6%
Aware of cases wherein parents in their village were punished for marrying off their daughter before age 18	15.8%*	20.7%	17.7%*	9.9%
Aware of cases wherein people in their village informed police or people in authority about child marriage cases	22.3%	18.5%	27.4%**	13.3%
Number of mothers, mothers-in-law, fathers and fathers-in-law	202	184	164	151

Notes: **, * and ~ mean that the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$, and $p < 0.10$, respectively; the numbers and percentages are unweighted.

“Various departments in our district—the District Legal Service Authority, Women Empowerment Department and other departments—conduct activities to raise awareness about the law throughout the year, and such efforts are carried out with greater intensity before occasions like Akha Teej.” – District official in Bundi

The [police] control room is there round the year, although we receive most complaints around Akha Teej time.” – Representative, District Legal Service Authority in Bundi

“Meetings are held four times a month at Atal Sewa Center—every 5th, 12th, 20th and 27th day—in which we talk and make the people understand. Besides this, we organize camps in which we sensitize people.”
– Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Bundi

In contrast, informants from Chittaurgarh reported that these activities were organized largely around peak marriage season.

“Awareness-generation activities about the law by the government starts just a month before Akha Teej [the wedding season].” – NGO representative in Chittaurgarh

“No one has come to our village to talk about this law. Nothing is done in our village.” – Deputy Sarpanch in Chittaurgarh

“A rally by students is held in our village; slogans are pasted around the village; people are made aware that it is illegal to marry off their daughter before 18 years of age. These activities are done mainly during the marriage season.” – Teacher in Chittaurgarh

“Beat constables receive orders to be constantly vigilant during the time of Akha Teej. Whenever a complaint is received, police make an inquiry and after the investigation, the father of the girl is typically asked to give an undertaking not to marry his daughter before age 18 years. Our work is complete once this is done, and we don’t do any follow up.” – District Official, Law Enforcement Department in Chittaurgarh

Interventions by law enforcement authorities to stop child marriages were more common in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh. For example, most influential adults in the community who participated in the informant interviews in Bundi (8 of 12) narrated an incident in their village

in which the police intervened to stop a child marriage. The actions taken by the police ranged from stopping the marriage ceremonies, admonishing parents and taking the father of the potential groom and bride to the police station and releasing them after getting a pledge in writing not to marry their children at a minor age. They also reported that community members support such interventions by the police and other government officials.

“They [police] took them to the police station and they released them a day later after asking them to give in writing that they will not do her marriage before 18.”
– Accredited social health activist in Bundi

“Ninety-nine percent of people know about this law and everyone supports it, too; education staff, medical staff, [Integrated Child Development Services] staff and everyone make home visits and make them understand. So, people not only extend support but also inform us.” – Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Bundi

“They were doing a girl’s marriage ritual and the police came and stopped it. They took the parents of the bride and groom to the police station; they reprimanded them and asked them to delay the marriage for two years.” – Anganwadi worker in Bundi

In Chittaurgarh, in comparison, only a few informants (4 of 11) narrated instances in which police intervened to prevent a child marriage; indeed, they reported that villagers would not inform the police about child marriages that are likely to take place in their village.

“People in the village support each other, they will not get anyone arrested because they have to live in the village. Policemen are here today but can be transferred to another place tomorrow. If someone is performing the marriage of a minor child, no one will inform the police. If someone has a conflict with that child’s parents, they may inform the police.”
– Accredited social health activist in Chittaurgarh

“Only 40 percent of people support [the law]. There are social workers who support it a lot, but no one listens to them. The villagers abuse and shout at them.”
– Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Chittaurgarh

“No one supports it, no one will ask you to stop a marriage.” – Sarpanch in Chittaurgarh

Did community beliefs underlying child marriage differ?

We examined the extent to which community beliefs underlying child marriage, for example, around girls' emerging sexuality and dowry demands and behaviors of community members to girls who remain unmarried in their late adolescence, differed between Bundi and Chittaurgarh. The findings suggest that the beliefs and behaviors did not differ between the two districts.



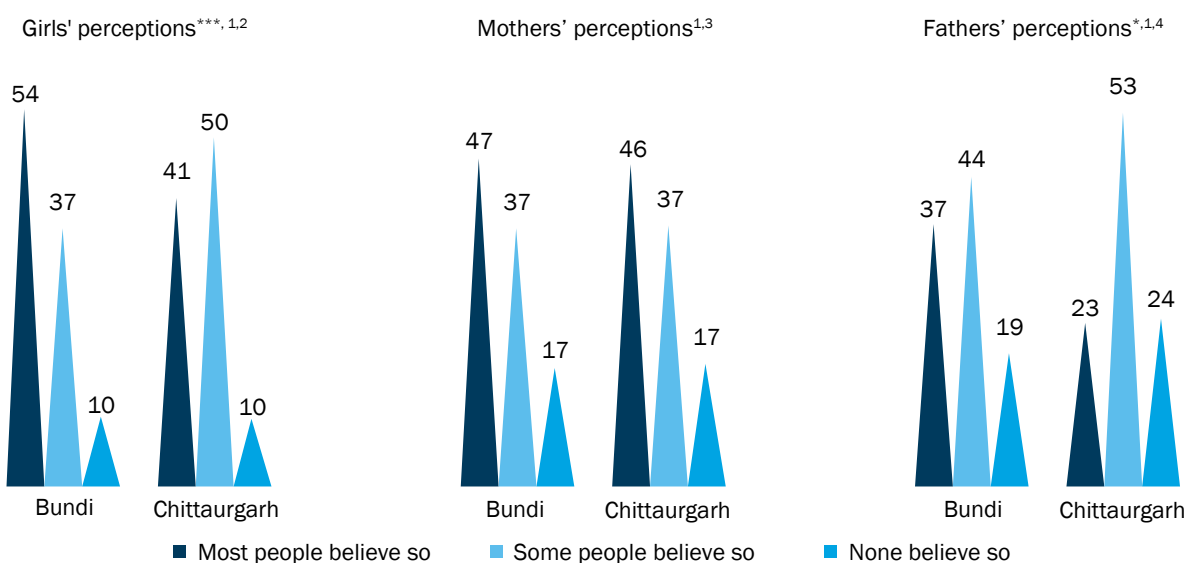
Perceptions about girls' safety in the village and concerns about family honour

The study findings show that girls' emerging sexuality was viewed as a threat in both locations. Figure 7 reflects that a large proportion of respondents, particularly in Bundi, reported that most people in their village believed that girls who remain unmarried may develop relationships with boys and may bring dishonor to their family (54 percent, compared with 41 percent). Parents also expressed similar views. Some 5–7 percent of school-going girls among the respondents reported that they had experienced sexual harassment while commuting to their school.

Most influential adults who were interviewed reported that fear for girls' sexual safety (fear that they will be harassed) and anxiety about girls exploring their sexual or romantic feelings (anxiety about premarital sex and/or daughter eloping) are widespread in their villages (9 of 12 persons in Bundi and 9 of 11 persons in Chittaurgarh). Many informants in both locations mentioned elopements that took place in their village in the recent past (5 of 12 persons in each district).

“She studied up to Class 10; she ran away with a boy from her school.” – Accredited social health activist in Bundi

Figure 7: Community beliefs around girls' emerging sexuality: People who believe that girls who remain unmarried may develop relationships with boys and may bring dishonor to the family, Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: *** and * mean the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p \leq 0.001$ and $p \leq 0.01$, respectively. 1=The percentages pertaining to adolescents are weighted, while those related to mothers and fathers are unweighted; 2=denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531); 3=denominator includes mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=202, Chittaurgarh=184); 4=denominator includes fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=164, Chittaurgarh=151).

“She used to go to school, she had fallen in love with a boy in her class and they ‘went ahead’. Her parents came to know about it and they told her, ‘You do not meet him again.’ Then, the boy and the girl went out and took poison. This kind of incidents have taken place and that is why people do not delay a girl’s marriage much. They think that if girls are married at the right age [at young ages], they will not defame their family. Many girls run away like this, boys take girls and run away.” – Auxiliary nurse-midwife in Chittaurgarh

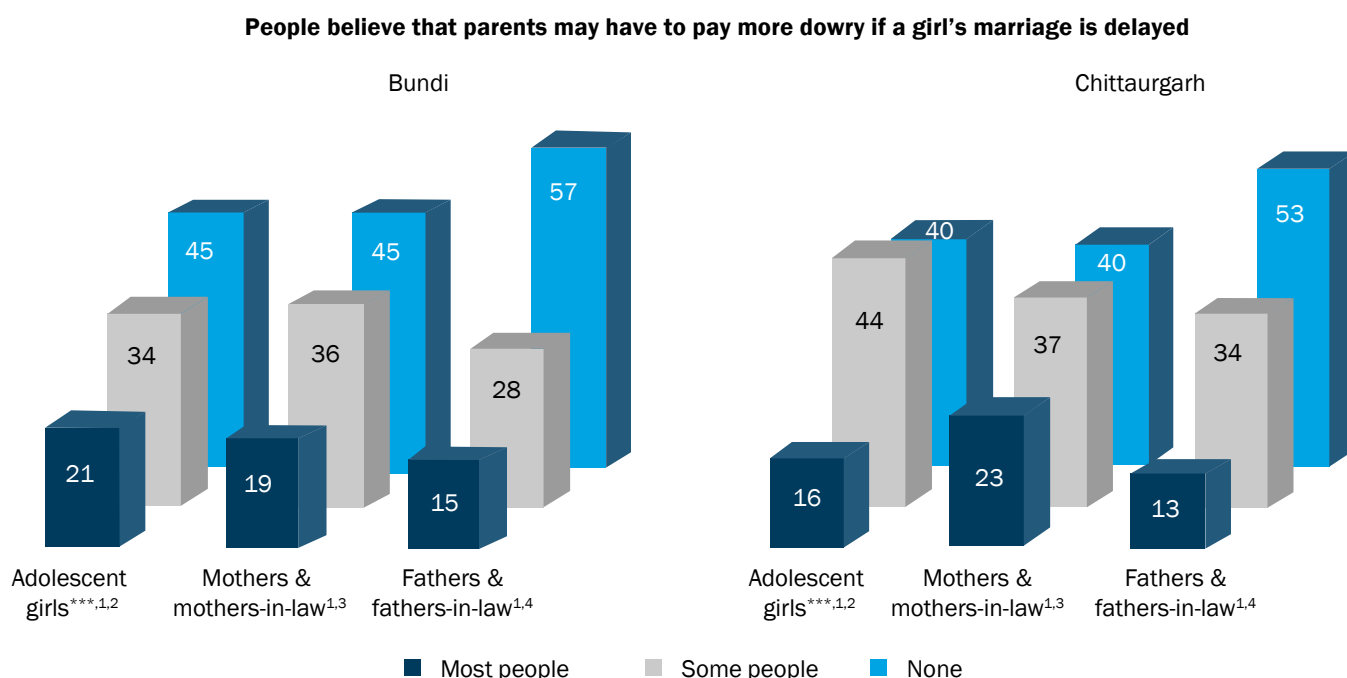
Beliefs around dowry transactions

Studies of drivers of child marriage in India have noted the economic underpinning of the dowry practice, particularly the association between dowry expectations and child marriage. Adolescent girls and parents of adolescent girls who participated in the survey were asked about their perceptions of community beliefs about whether more dowry needs to be paid when a girl’s marriage is delayed.

The survey findings present a somewhat mixed picture (figure 8). Only a small proportion of adolescent girls and parents of adolescent girls believed that most people in their village adhered to such a view (16–21 percent of the girls and 13–23 percent of parents of girls). As many as 40–45 percent of girls and 40–57 percent of parents of girls reported that none of the people in their village so believed.

Most government officials, NGO representatives and influential adults in the community who discussed the association between dowry transactions and child marriage in both Bundi (15 of 23 persons) and Chittaurgarh (22 of 23 persons) reported that the value of the dowry transacted is not related to the girl’s age at marriage. They elaborated that the amount of dowry given depends on the economic condition of the family. They also noted that parents give the same amount in dowry for their daughters regardless of whether they are married

Figure 8: Community beliefs about the relationship between dowry transactions and age at marriage in Bundi and Chittaurgarh districts (%)



Notes: ***means the difference between Bundi and Chittaurgarh is significant at $p \leq 0.001$. 1=The percentages pertaining to adolescents are weighted, while those related to mothers and fathers are unweighted; 2=denominator includes married and unmarried girls (Bundi=562, Chittaurgarh=531); 3=denominator includes mothers and mothers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=202, Chittaurgarh=184); 4=denominator includes fathers and fathers-in-law of adolescent girls (Bundi=164, Chittaurgarh=151).

as minors or adults, and the fear is more about finding a suitable groom if a girl's marriage is delayed rather than paying a larger dowry for her.

"Child marriage has nothing to do with dowry. Those who take dowry will take it whether a girl is 17 years old or 21 years old. If a boy is educated and employed and the girl is not, the boy's family will demand more dowry. They will say that the marriage can happen only if the girl's family gives them a car or gold or whatever. There is no connection with child marriage." – A high-level official in the Education Department in Bundi

"Dowry is not related to child marriage. Child marriage is different, and dowry is different." – A high-level official in the Education Department in Chittaurgarh

"These [child marriage and dowry] are two different issues. Dowry cannot encourage child marriage. Dowry is one custom, and child marriage is another custom. Both are different." – NGO representative, Chittaurgarh

"There is no difference in the amount of dowry at all. He [father] will give only that much dowry that he wants to give, he will give as much whether the girl is married early or later." – Accredited social health activist in Bundi

"It does not depend on whether the girl is younger or older. They have to give as much dowry for a minor girl as they do for an older girl." – Panchayati Raj member in Chittaurgarh

"The same amount of dowry has to be given regardless of the age at which you get your daughter married. If you give more dowry for your older daughter than your younger daughter, the latter will ask, 'Why do you give less for me?'" – Caste leader in Chittaurgarh

Some of the informants further noted that the practice of marrying off daughters at a minor age because of demands for huge dowries for older girls occurred in the past. But what happens nowadays is that parents may delay a dowry transaction until cohabitation takes place if a girl is married as a minor.

"People who cannot give a lot of things as dowry or people who are poor get their daughters married in childhood so that they don't have to give a large dowry. It used to happen in the past, but not nowadays." – A high-level official in the Panchayati Raj Department

"They [parents] give less dowry at the time of the marriage when a girl is married as a minor. But they will give more when she starts living with her in-laws. If they give the dowry at the time of marriage, her in-laws may use and damage her things; that is why they give the dowry when her gauna (time of moving to her marital home for cohabitation) happens." – Anganwadi worker in Chittaurgarh

A few participants, however, particularly in Bundi, indicated that there is indeed a relationship between dowry transactions and child marriage, although indirect (8 of 23 persons in Bundi, 1 of 23 in Chittaurgarh). They reported that girls whose marriage is delayed are likely to be educated and, at times, employed, and they prefer to marry grooms of similar or better status. Grooms who are educated and employed demand a huge dowry. As a result, parents from economically poor households who worry about their ability to identify a suitable match and/or raise money to pay an acceptable level of dowry may marry off their daughters as minors or at least justify child marriage by attributing it to dowry expectations.

"In communities in which child marriage is prevalent, people say, 'If the girl is older, it will be difficult to find a suitable boy, and a lot of dowry will have to be given to such boys.' They give this as a reason." – A high-level official in the Social Justice and Empowerment Department in Bundi

"If a family has four daughters, they have to give dowry for all four daughters. They worry about how they will manage, and because of it, they marry their daughters at an early age and with anyone they get." – A high-level official in the Women and Child Development Department of Integrated Child Development Services



“A girl who is educated will get a job after completing her studies. Then it becomes a difficult task to find a suitable match for her. If her parents find a boy somehow, he will have his own demands. That’s why, marrying off daughters early will make parents free from their responsibilities.” – Representative of the District Legal Service Authority in Bundi

Behaviors of community members towards girls who remain unmarried

The findings show that community members’ behavior toward girls who remain unmarried were more or less similar in both locations.

Most informants reported that the attitudes and behaviors of people in their villages were mixed. While some people admire girls who delay marriage, others make disparaging comments about them, particularly if a girl is neither studying nor working.

“Some say nothing, they think that it is good that the girl is studying or she is living well. Some also make bad comments about the family: ‘Can’t they see that the girl has grown up? Why is she not getting married? What is the reason? She will run away with someone.’”
– Anganwadi worker in Bundi

“People who are wise and educated think highly of girls who are studying. But some people take them wrong, too. Many people do so. They say, ‘She has become mature, she will run away. Why are they not marrying her?’” – Accredited social health activist in Bundi

“They [villagers] behave well with them [girls whose marriage is delayed]. But people who are illiterate and who have old thinking will tell parents, ‘Your daughter has grown up and you must get her married soon.’ They consider a girl grown up when she turns 14.”
– Panchayati Raj Institution member in Chittaurgarh

The only subtle difference that we observed in the narratives of informants was that more of them in Bundi than in Chittaurgarh reported that parents do not pay heed to disparaging comments from others in their community.

“Some people also tell parents this [your daughter is grown up enough to get married], but no one listens nowadays.” – Accredited social health activist in Bundi

Recommendations

Encouraging alternatives to early marriage: Education and livelihoods:

Efforts to delay marriage would require providing girls meaningful and viable alternatives to marriage. Advising families to send their daughters to school when schools are far away, the classroom is hostile to girls or education is of poor quality will not work. Working with the education sector to make schooling for girls more accessible and to make classrooms more gender-sensitive and responsive to the needs of girls and the concerns of their parents are important approaches. Livelihood training, within or outside the education system, offers an alternative to early marriage.

Building girls' agency:

The findings call for efforts to build girls' agency. There are several life skills programs that seek to raise adolescents' awareness of new ideas and the world around them, enable them to put information into practice, encourage them to question gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs, develop self-esteem and strengthen their skills in problem-solving, decision-making, communication and interpersonal relations and negotiation.

Using the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act as a deterrent:

The findings suggest that it is important to make adolescents, their parents and communities fully aware of the law. They also suggest that the law can be effectively enforced without imposing tough penalties on parents.

Promoting mass marriage ceremonies

The findings indicate that mass marriage ceremonies with a process for verifying the age of brides and grooms and for registering marriages can reduce the burden of marriage-related expenses on parents and thereby prevent child marriage.

Addressing the fear of girls going astray

Concerns that a girl who remains unmarried will go "astray" permeate the thinking among community members, parents and even girls. This fear needs to be confronted directly—parenting and community programs must emphasize the need and the right of girls and boys to choose their own spouse and the need to respect that right. At the same time, genuine concerns for the safety of girls must be addressed systemically.

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