CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGES IN KRISHNA DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA- CROSS SECTIONAL ANALYSIS

VASAVYA MAHILAMANDALI
VIJAYAWADA, ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA

Supported by
HAMU, NORWAY
“VASAVYA” is an acronym for

VA: Vastavikata – REALITY
SA: Sanghadrusti – SOCIAL OUTLOOK
VYA: Vyaktitvam – DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY

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by

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FOREWORD

I am glad that Vasavya Mahila Mandali of Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh has undertaken a very important study on Child marriage practices in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh and has come out with a publication of the same. This study appears to be a very scientific with appropriate methodological strategy. As has been pointed out the study on the practice of Child marriages, is significant not only from the point of view of violation of human rights, but also due to its serious health consequences for the child/women.

The report rightly contained the context of the study with a brief presentation on the magnitude of the problem of child marriage at global level, country level and State level as well as facts, causes and consequences of child marriages. The objectives are clearly stated. The focus on the awareness of legal measures against child marriages and their implementation from different perspectives is undoubtedly the most laborious job.

The suggestions that have been made on the basis of this study are most useful to the society. The significance of community participation through formation of child protection committees needs a special mention here as it also highlights the role of N.G.Os in regard to the elimination of child marriages.

With Best wishes
(Dr.TRIPURANA VENKATARATNAM)

To,
Smt.G.Rashmi,
Secretary
Vasavva Mahila Mandali
Vijayawada, A.P.
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ABSTRACT

Over 40% of all child marriages in the world take place in India, making it the child marriage capital of the world. Nearly half of all the Indian marriages involve a child bride, ranking it at number 11 among 68 nations where child marriages are reported. Child marriages account for nearly a quarter of all marriages in Pakistan, according to UNICEF. If we look at the Indian scenario, Andhra Pradesh occupies the third position along with Rajasthan with 55% of marriages being child marriages (NFHS – 2005-06). Andhra Pradesh is first in respect of child marriages in South India, with 49%, followed by Karnataka with 29.6%, Tamilnadu 19.5% and Kerala 11.8%. Andhra Pradesh also accounts for the least Age at Marriage as 12 years, which is the lowest in entire India. According to the Population Council of India child marriage continues to be rampant in India with nearly one-fifth of Indian women being married off before turning 15 and around 50 per cent before reaching the legal marriageable age. There are many socio-economic factors that play a role in the early marriage of girls in India. Widespread poverty is one of the major factors responsible for early marriage. The practice disproportionately affects little girls who are seen as an economic burden by their parents. The child marriages take a severe toll on the little brides’ lives. They are often abused by their husbands and in-laws. And they have more health problem on average than the rest of the female population. They are at greater risk of HIV infections, STDs and unwanted pregnancies and childbirth complications. Women who were married as children remained significantly more likely to have had three or more childbirths, a repeat childbirth in less than 24 months, multiple unwanted pregnancies, pregnancy termination, and sterilization. Further infants and children in India born to mothers married as minors are more likely to suffer from malnutrition than those born to adult women. Against this background the present study is conducted by adopting qualitative and quantitative approach to make a cross sectional analysis of causes and consequences of child marriages in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, India. The findings of the study revealed that poverty is the major contributing factor for child marriages and although the girl child brides face lot of problems child marriage is not considered as a violation of human rights.
INTRODUCTION

According to International Law a ‘Child’ is defined as a human being below the age of 18 years and it is a universally accepted definition of a child, accepted by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In India, different age groups are defined in different concepts creating ambiguity.

- “Juvenile” or “Child” is a person who has not completed eighteen years of age as per the CRC guidelines Section 2 (k) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.
- Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, Section 2 (ii), “Child” means a person who has not completed the age of 14 years.
- Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, Section 2 (a), “Child” means a person who, if a male, has not completed twenty one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age.
- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, Section 2 (a), “Child” means a person who has not completed the age of sixteen years.

Child marriage occurs when one or both spouses are below the age of 18. While boys can be affected, the practice predominantly has an impact on girls. It is often referred to as “early and forced” marriage because, the girls, given their young age are not matured physically or mentally and can rarely make a free and informed decision about their marriage partner, the timing or the implications of this binding commitment. An element of coercion is also involved because their families force the girls into marriage. Strong social and cultural norms also drive the practice despite legislation in place.

In progressing India, child marriages are making an impact on the development of female gender. Despite the legislation forbidding child marriage in India (Child Marriage Restraint Act-1929) which became more proactive with Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006), child marriages are accepted by and large in the society. Although Indian law made child marriage illegal in 2007, many minor girls are still forced into marriage across the nation, placing them under great emotional stress and potentially having a long-lasting negative impact on their health. Child marriage in India has been practiced for centuries and the problem of child marriage in India remains rooted in a complex matrix of religious traditions, social practices, economic variances and deep rooted prejudices towards female gender. Regardless of its roots, child marriage constitutes a gross violation of human rights.

The manifold consequences of child marriages are: social, psychological, medical, cultural like: segregation from family and friends, limiting the child’s interactions with the community and peers, lack of opportunities for education, incapacity to manage her family due to her incompetence to understand and analyze the situation, inability to develop normally as once married she becomes a ‘child turned adult’, traumatized psychological status owing to lack of support of parents/sibling. Married girl children often face situation of bonded labour, enslavement, sexual exploitation and violence. Because of lack of protection, child brides are often exposed to serious health risks, early pregnancy, and various Sexually Transmitted Diseases including HIV infection and they do not get medical treatment or discontinue the treatment thus leading to complications during pregnancy as well as long term effect on their health.
Global Scenario

Globally more than one third of the women between the ages 20-24 are married before they reached the age of 18. Approximately 14 million adolescent girls, between the ages 15-19, give birth each year. Girls in this age group are twice more likely to die during child birth than women in their twenties. Rate of child marriages is higher in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. One of the proposals under consideration is lowering the age of consent for sex from 18 to 16 years, irrespective of marriage. According to Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA. “Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospect”. The UNFPA has also projected that out of the 140 million girls who will be married under 18 by 2020, 50 million will be under the age of 15. The top ten nations with high child marriages according to the UNFPA are Niger (75%), Chad (68%), the Central African Republic (68%), Bangladesh (66%), Guinea (63%), Mozambique (56%), Mali (55%), Burkina Faso and South Sudan (52%) and Malawi (50%). About 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 years give birth every year, accounting for about 11 per cent of all births worldwide.

The custom of child marriage is widespread in parts of Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America. There are many instances where only one marriage-partner is a child, usually the female, because of the importance that is placed upon her virginity, the perceived inability for her to work for money and since woman’s reproductive life is considered to be shorter than that of man’s. However with an increase in the advocacy of human rights, whether as women’s rights or as a child’s rights, the tradition of child marriage has decreased in many areas.

Indian Scenario

According to UN report, India has highest percentage of child marriages (Charu Sudan Kasturi, 2013). Every second girl, in India, is married underage, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported in a recent assessment of global child marriage patterns that paints a worrying picture of a practice widely banned but still rampant.

According to UNICEF, 47% of girls are married by 18 years of age, and 18% are married by 15 years of age. These marriages are often performed without the consent of the girls involved in the marriage. The magnitude of girl child mortality is reflected from the fact that every year, about 12 million girls are born in India; a third of these girls die in the first year of their life; three million, or 25 per cent, do not survive to see their fifteenth birthday. The child mortality rate between 0-4 years for girl child is 20.6%, two percent more than that of boys (18.6%), 46.6% girls of 15-19 years face complications during delivery that are: premature labour 71.7, excessive bleeding 24.1, prolonged labour 36.1, obstructed labour 8.4, breech presentation 6.9, convulsion high blood pressure 8.6 (NRHM AP).

The enrollment figures of the girls in schools are comparatively lower than those of the boys indicating that many girls do not get enrolled in schools. 34% of girls dropout before they complete Class 5. One of the major reasons for so many girls not attending school is their workload, both within and outside the household. Daughters are often kept at home to help the family because the social and economic value of educating the girls is not recognized. Without access to education, girls are denied the knowledge and skills needed to advance their status.
Though Indian law has made child marriage illegal, the practice is still widespread across the country. The highest numbers of child marriages are seen in the rural areas of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. Though the practice of child marriage affects both boys and girls, statistics show that usually girls are forced into a child marriage than boys.

**Andhra Pradesh Scenario**

As per National Family Health Survey report in India girl child marriages are 39.80% as against 48.9% in Andhra Pradesh: 3.50% between 10-14 years and 45.50% between 15-19 years. The girl child marriages are more in rural areas with 69.2% and the literacy levels are: 53.2% non-literate, 6.2% less than fifth class and 23% less than ninth class.

In Andhra Pradesh, Maternal Mortality rate (MMR) is 407 for hundred thousand deliveries as against national average of 301. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) is 58 per 1000 live births as against national average of 56. In remote, underserved and hard to reach tribal villages IMR is 83, MMR 454 and 90% of the deliveries are conducted at home where as in urban areas 90.9% of the deliveries are institutional.

The birth order among 15-19 years married girls in Andhra Pradesh shows that 76.8% gave birth to their first child, 19.9% their second child, 3.4% to their third and fourth child. Only 58.4% know about personal hygiene including menstrual hygiene (NRHM AP).

Gender discrimination results in malnutrition of girls. In Andhra Pradesh 56 percent of girls (15-19 years) continue to suffer from anaemia; 45 percent of the girls suffer from under growth as opposed to 20 per cent of boys. Due to dietary deficiencies, adolescent girls do not achieve their potential weight and height. Also, 35 per cent of rural adolescent girls have a weight below 38 kg and a height below 145 cm. Anemia is often responsible for miscarriages, still births, premature births, low birth-weight babies and maternal mortality during childbirth. Undernourished girls, who grow into undernourished mothers, continue a vicious inter-generational cycle of under-nutrition and wastage of women. Studies show that girls under the age of 15 are up to five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s. Post-delivery complications occur among 30.9% of young girls: high fever 59.1, lower abdominal pain 32.7, excessive bleeding 31.7, foul smelling vaginal discharge 2.3 (NRHM AP)

HIV/ AIDS estimates in India suggest overall prevalence of 0.27% among adults (15-49 years) in 2011, with approximately 2.1 million people living with HIV (PLHIV) as per National AIDS control organization (NACO) Report (2011). Children under 15 years of age account for 7% of all infections, while people aged 15 to 49 years, account for 86% of all infections. Thirty-nine percent of all HIV infections are estimated to be among women. Andhra Pradesh, HIV high burdened state, has Non ANC positivity 4.3% and ANC 0.3%. Andhra Pradesh population constitutes 7% in India whereas HIV burden is 21% (NACO Fact Sheet 2011).

15-19 years age group ANCs in India are 92, 33,241 which comes to 7.38 of total ANCs in India of which 912156 are in Andhra Pradesh which comes to 8.29. In the total ANCs of 15-19 in India Andhra Pradesh constitutes 9.88 (Family welfare statistics 2011).

Adolescent girls (10-19 years) in Andhra Pradesh are about 11% of the total population. Sexual health education is not permitted in schools where as at secondary education there is one lesson on HIV, normally at rural schools the teachers skip it as they feel that teaching about sex and sexuality is bad.
Krishna District Scenario

In Vasavya Mahila Mandali’s PPTCT outreach programme in 29 months (September 2010 to January 2013) in two divisions of Krishna district reached to 16313 ANCs, among them 18.51% (3020) are 15-19 years age group: 40.39 from urban and 59.61 rural. ANC HIV positivity is 1.2% (36) among the tested for HIV (2429). Among 36 HIV positive pregnant girls in the age group of 15-19: mortality of one mother and three new born babies, 3 abortions and one Medical Termination of Pregnancy. Women are blamed for the HIV in the family whereas the male partner is not blamed. Today, 88 per cent of adolescents live in developing countries. But the investment on the adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights is very minimal.

Based on several studies on child marriages, the recognition of child marriage as an issue of concern reinforces some of our key messages – that child marriage is a universal problem, not restricted to one region or country, and that we need to effectively work together to bring it to an end.

CHILD MARRIAGE: FACTS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Child Marriages - Facts

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (among other charters and conventions) all directly or indirectly forbid the degrading and mistreatment of girls, inherent in child marriage. Nevertheless, child marriage is common in many parts of the world, claiming millions of victims annually—and hundreds of thousands of injuries or death resulting from abuse or complications from pregnancy and childbirth.

+ In India Prohibition of child marriage is in place.
+ In the United States, child marriage is still permissible in some states, with parental or judicial consent.
+ Globally, according to UNICEF, 36% of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union, forced or consensual, before they’d reached 18.
+ An estimated 14 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth each year. They are twice more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than women in their 20s.
+ Girls who marry between the ages of 10 and 14 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth.

Child Marriages - Causes

Child marriage is deep rooted in the matrix of culture, socioeconomic and religion. It is interdependent and entwined that result in the imprisonment of children in marriages. The consent of the child is difficult to assess as the child is not in a position to visualize the impact of the marriage at that young age. It is a ‘Game’ to them and they enjoy the ritual but regret later.

Poverty: Poor families ‘sell’ their children through marriage either to settle debts or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty. Child marriage fosters poverty, as it is certain that girls who marry at young will not be properly educated or skilled to be in the placed well at workforce.
‘Protecting’ the Girl’s Sexuality: In certain cultures, marrying a girl young is presumed that the
girl’s sexuality and family’s honour will be “protected” as a very young girl is a virgin. The imposition of
family honor on a girl’s individuality, in essence robbing the girl of her honor and dignity, undermines
the credibility of family honor and instead underscores the presumed protection’s actual aim: to control
the girl. The young are easy to ‘control’ and so the young girls are preferred.

Custom and Tradition: Where child marriage is prevalent there is strong social pressure on families
to either confront or face ridicule, disapproval or family shame. Local perceptions regarding an ideal
age of marriage are connected with economic factors such as dowry, bride price and so on.

Security: In many cases parents resort to child marriages in order to ‘secure’ a good future for their
daughters. Situations of insecurity owing to abuse, rape, other crimes on girls and acute poverty can
prompt parents to resort to child marriage as a protective mechanism or survival strategy.

Gender Discrimination: Child marriage is a product of cultures that devalue women and girls and
discriminate them. “The discrimination,” according to a UNICEF report on “Child Marriage and the
Law,” “often manifests itself in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, and deprivation of food,
lack of access to information, education, healthcare, and general impediments to mobility.” These
are the gender biased dynamics in the male dominated Indian families.

Inadequate Implementation of Laws: Many countries such as Pakistan have laws against child
marriage. The laws are not enforced. In Afghanistan, a new law was written into the country’s code
enabling Shiite, or Hazara, communities to impose their own form of family law—including permitting
child marriage. In India the laws are not effectively implemented due to lack of proper implementation
of marriage registration that ensures the age of the bride and groom.

Trafficking: Poor families are tempted to sell their girls not just into marriage, but into prostitution, as
the transaction enables large sums of money to benefit the girl’s family and harms the girl. There is
apathy towards their girls and the money by selling their girls is used for the benefit of their sons.

Dowry System: Customs like dowry are causing burden on the family as the parents have to give a
huge money, jewelers and / or land to marry their daughter. So the choice narrows to the person who
takes less dowry instead of a good eligible person. Many a time, men who have lost their wives or are
separated or divorced, or very old men take less dowry and so a girl who is a minor is forced to live
with a matured and experienced man.

Girls Rebelling against the Gender Discrimination: Parents feel that girl child is a burden due to
oppressive traditional values and discriminate the girl. Now the girls are rebelling and leaving their
homes in search of the love and affection and placing themselves at grave risks. So parents think
that instead of taking risk with the girl, they want to place her under the protection of a man resulting
in child marriages.

Media Influence: All the children are under great influence of media and aim to be something without
skills. They are being attracted to the cities and do not have coping skills to deal with the stress of life
in the cities and so get trapped into many problems.
Violations of Rights of the Child: The Convention on the Rights of the Child is designed to guarantee certain individual rights—which are denied by early marriage. Rights undermined or lost by children forced to marry early are: The right to education, The right to be protected from physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse, rape and sexual exploitation, The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, The right to rest and leisure, and to participate freely in cultural life, The right not to be separated from parents against the child’s will, The right to protection against all forms of exploitation affecting any aspect of the child’s welfare and The right to eventual employment.

Premature Pregnancy: The majority of young brides have limited knowledge and access to contraceptive and reproductive health services. They are exposed to early and frequent sexual relations and to multiple pregnancies and childbirth before they are physically mature and psychologically ready.

Maternal Mortality: Girls below the age of 15 are five times more likely to die during childbirth or pregnancy than a little elderly woman. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading major cause of mortality for girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide, and girls aged 15 years or under are five times more likely to die than those over 20.

Infant Mortality: Mortality rates for babies born to mothers under age 20 are almost 75% higher than for children born to older mothers. The children that survive are more likely to be premature, have a low birth weight, and are more at risk for transmitting HIV/AIDS.

Health Problems: Premature childbirth can lead to a variety of health problems for mothers, including vaginal tears, fistula and deterioration in general health. Girls with fistula are often abandoned by their husbands and ostracized by society. There are approximately 2 million girls living with fistula, and 100,000 new cases every year add to this number.

HIV/AIDS: Married girls may be more likely to contract sexually transmitted disease, including HIV/AIDS, than unmarried girls. Young girls are more physically susceptible to STI's, have less access to reproductive education and health services and are often powerless to demand the use of contraceptives.

Illiteracy: Child brides are often pulled out of school and denied further education. Their children are also more likely to be illiterate. Human rights research shows that the greatest obstacles to girls' education, as identified in many government reports to human rights monitoring bodies, are child marriage, pregnancy and domestic chores.

Poverty: Child brides - already poor - are isolated and denied education and employment opportunities, making it difficult for them to break out of the cycle of poverty. In many countries child marriage is linked with poverty. This is because it affects particularly the poorest in the population, and makes them delve in the cycles of poverty. Minor girls – as (Child) wives tend to have more children and fewer independent income options. Poverty ultimately fuels child marriage, which in turn perpetuates the feminization of poverty. This situation is also supported by country economic indicators for measuring the health of the economy: several countries with very low gross domestic products (GDPs) tend to have higher rates of child marriage.
Abuse and Violence: Child brides are more likely to experience domestic abuse, and violence than their peers who marry later and less likely to take action against this abuse. Girls who marry early are also more likely to believe that a man is justified in beating his wife and it is his right.

Teen Widows: In a society that condones child marriages, it is not uncommon to find widows and divorcées under the age of 18.

Mental Health: Violence and abuse can lead to post-traumatic stress and depression.

Isolation and Abandonment: Child brides are often isolated from their peers and abandoned if they develop health problems like fistula.

Rationalization of Child Marriage

Child marriage is supposedly necessary or unavoidable in poor societies. It's a way to deliver the girl from hunger and to ward off starvation for the rest of the family. Families sell off their daughters in order to settle debts, assuage disputes and forge communal relationships. Fathers with the vices of gambling can use their daughters in lieu of money to pay their debts. Among the leading classes, child marriage is also a tool in political maneuvering.

In many cultures, men want to marry virgins and parents prefer to settle their daughters before misbehavior or abduction has brought the family shame and made any wedding impossible. The custom of child marriage often occurs in tandem with polygamy. And polygamy is in turn rationalized by way of the claim that poor countries require large families with a lot of female members who can work on the land. Since pregnant women, women who have to take care of children or old women can’t work in the fields young girls, are taken into new relationship. It goes without saying that none of these rationalizations are acceptable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Vasavya MahilaMandali is working for upholding the rights of women and children and HAMU, Norway, is supporting women development programmes. Every year one study report is being developed for better understanding of the situation of a particular issue for furthering programme development. For the year 2013-2014, the present study on child marriages is conducted.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to make a cross sectional analysis of causes and consequences of child marriages in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, India.

The major objectives of the study are to:

✦ Assess the prevalence and incidence of child marriages, in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh, India from different perspectives.
✦ Analyze the various factors leading to child marriage from different perspectives.
✦ Analyze the awareness levels of the consequences and legal measures against child marriage and their implementation from different perspectives.
Approach

In order to fulfill these objectives this study has adopted the Quantitative and Qualitative Approach which are the two major approaches to research methodology in Social Sciences. Quantitative approach was used to analyze and interpret the data collected through survey. Qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern human behaviour. While Quantitative analysis was the major form of analysis used, qualitative analysis was built in order to support the quantitative finding.

Research Design

This study describes the demographic variables and other variables such as causes and consequences of child marriage. Since it is a fact-finding study, it focuses on different dimensions of the problems faced by girl child brides. The information gathered for this study will be more useful in formulating further research problems in different aspects. Keeping this in view, descriptive research design is adopted for this study where the various variables pertaining to causes and consequences of child marriage are described.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in an urban relocated slum Vombay colony, Vijayawada and rural community Kundheru village of Kankipadu mandal in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, India.

Sampling Design

Census method was adopted where every respondent fulfilling the criteria for inclusion that is those women who are of 25 years of age or less and got married before the age of 18 years of age was chosen for the study from the urban slum and rural community of the selected study area. The total size of the sample is 301 which included 140 respondents from urban area, 152 from rural area and the remaining 9 who were key informants. Interviews were conducted with the key informants such as government departments, community leaders, religious leaders, social activists, legal professional and the like to get a cross sectional view of the causes and consequences of child marriage.

Sources of Data

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data in order to understand the causes and consequences of child marriage in the selected communities, as well as attitudes and opinions of key informants such as legal professionals, government departments, community leaders, religious leaders, social activists, educationalist, medical professional and the like. Government reports, journals, books, and websites were also accessed.
Primary Data

Primary data was collected from girl child brides through self-constructed structured interview schedules consisting of 47 questions. Personal discussions and observations were also used in collecting data from girl child brides. Primary data was also collected through 8 key informant's interviews that were conducted with the help of a self-constructed interview schedule consisting of 5 open ended questions, designed exclusively for each key informant and content analysis was done. Based on the content analysis, case studies are presented to get an in-depth understanding and a cross sectional view of the causes and consequences of child marriages in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, India. Key informants for the study included Member of Child Welfare Committee (CWC), District Child Protection Officer of Integrated child protection scheme (ICPS), Community Leader, Women Activist, Religious Leader, Legal Professional, School Teacher and Staff Nurse. On the whole the primary data was collected through 9 self-constructed interview schedules in order to get a cross sectional view and a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of child marriages in Krishna district.

Secondary Data

The secondary data and information pertaining to the study were collected from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, research studies, published reports from various organizations, seminar papers, training modules, government records, community – based organizations, websites, and e-resources etc.

Tools for the Study

The self constructed structured interview schedule and objective (non-participant) observation were the main tools for data collection. Self constructed structured interview schedule consisting of 47 questions was used to elicit the required information from the girl child brides. The interview schedule is subdivided into four parts. The first part elicits information pertaining to demographic details, the second part consists of questions pertaining to marriage related issues, third part focuses on causes of child marriages and the forth part on consequences of child marriages. Case study method was also adopted to present issues pertaining to child marriages from various perspectives. The respondents who are the Key Informants for the case study method were Member of Child Welfare Committee, District Child Protection Officer, Community Leader, Women Activist, Religious Leader, Legal Professional and School Teacher. Five open ended questions were posed to the Key Informants. Case study method is a powerful source in eliciting information on the experience of the respondents from their perspectives. This data contributed towards enhancing the quantitative findings.
THE BASIC INFORMATION

Urban Vs Rural: Area wise distribution of the girl child brides suggested that more than half (52.1%) belonged to rural area while the remaining 47.9% live in urban areas. This does not show a prominent rural predominance as shown in many studies.

Effect of Religion and Caste: Religion wise distribution of girl child brides revealed that more than three fourths (76.4%) belonged to Hindu religion, 15.8% belonged to Christianity, and 5.8% belonged to Muslim religion while the remaining 2.1% of them belonged to other religions.

Caste wise distribution of girl child brides revealed that majority (42.8%) belonged to backward class, 30.8% to scheduled caste, 17.5% to other castes and the remaining 8.9% scheduled tribes.

Economic status and child marriages: Occupation wise distribution of the girl child bride suggested that more than half (58.2%) are housewives, 34.6% are daily wage earners, 4.1% are unskilled workers and the remaining 3.1% are skilled workers. The economic dependency as a housewife makes them incapacitated in decision making that keeps them much vulnerable either during family matters or future of children in the case of marriage or number of children. The women are unable to take care of themselves and their children.

Occupation of the husband of the girl child bride revealed that vast majority (69.9%) of them is skilled workers and the remaining medium proportion (30.1%) is unskilled workers.

38.4% of the girl child bride’s monthly family income ranged between Rs.4,001-6,000, 23.3% of them revealed that their monthly family income ranged between Rs.2,000-4,000, 22.6% of them said that their monthly family income is between Rs.6,001-8,000 and the remaining 15.8% monthly income is above Rs.8,001.

It was reported that more than half of the marriages of the girl child brides (55.8%) were performed in their houses, 40.1% of the girl child brides’ marriages were conducted in a place of worship such as temple, church, or mosque as it is cheaper and a very negligible proportion (4.1%) of the marriages are performed in a marriage hall that costs more.

Consent of the marriage: With regard to marriage whether conducted with the consent of the girl, more than three fourths (77.7%) of them said that it was conducted with the consent of the girl child while a small proportion (22.3%) of them said that they conducted the marriage without the consent of the girl child. Are the consequences of the marriage understood by the girls before marriage is questionable as they get attracted to the ceremony rather than the life after marriage.

Type of Family: Majority (47.3%) of the girl child brides lived in a joint family, 46.2% lived in a nuclear family and the remaining 6.5% live in single woman family. Single women family in our study refers to a family where the woman is either deserted / divorced or widow. This was found due to breaking up of marriages due to lack of mental maturity of the girls or widowhood due to HIV infection of their husbands in most of the cases.

Majority (47.3%) of the girl child brides revealed that their family consists of 4 members, 20.9% of 5 members, 15.1% of more than 5 members, 14.4% consists of 3 members and the remaining 2.4% said that their family consists of 2 members. Further it was observed that earning members were less when compared to non-earning members since they were either too young in the case of children or housewife in other cases. Therefore we can infer that poverty is one of the main reasons of child marriage.
A vast majority (68.2%) of the girl child brides live in a family of two generations living together, 17.5% live in a family of three generations living together, 12.0% live in a family where only one generation lives, 1.4% in a family where five generations are living together and the remaining very insignificant proportion (1.0%) live in a family where four generations live together.

**Literacy and child marriages**: Majority (35.3%) of the girl child bride had primary schooling, 34.6% of them had high school education and the remaining 30.1% had education above high school level. Vast majority (86.3%) of the girl child brides did not continue their education after marriage while the remaining 13.7% continued their education after marriage.

It was observed that in the case of a vast majority (83.6%) the mother of the child bride was illiterate as against 16.4% whose mothers are literate.

It was noted that in the case of nearly three fourths (74.7%) the father of the girl child bride was illiterate as against 25.3% whose fathers are literate.

It was found that in the case of the majority (63.4%) the husbands of the girl child bride are literate with half of them up to secondary schooling and other half higher than the tenth standard. 36.63% whose husbands are illiterate.

**Age at marriage**: Age of the girl child bride at marriage in the case of an overwhelming proportion (86.6%) was between the age group of 16-18 years, a small proportion (11.6%) of them got married between the age group of 13-15 years and an insignificant proportion of them (1.7%) got married between the age group of 10-12 years.

Age of the boy at marriage revealed that in the case of a great majority (92.5%) was between the age group of 19-21 years, a small proportion (6.5%) of them got married between the age group of 16-18 years and a very negligible proportion of them (1.0%) got married between the age group of 13-15 years.

Age of the mother of the girl child bride at her marriage in the case of more than half the proportion (50.3%) was between the age group of 13-15 years, 43.5% of them got married between the age group of 16-18 years and a negligible proportion of them (6.2%) got married between the age group of 10-12 years.

Age of the mother of the boy at her marriage in majority of cases (65.4%) was between the age group of 16-18 years, 30.1% of them got married between the age group of 13-15 years and an insignificant proportion of them (4.5%) got married between the age group of 10-12 years.

Interestingly, a vast majority (61.3%) of them revealed that their marriage is consanguineous and the remaining 38.7% said that their marriage is not consanguineous.

The age of the child brides today when compared to previous generation revealed that the age of the girls at marriage has increased by 2-4 years over two to three decades. This can be due to increased educational standards of the girls and also women empowerment activism in the communities. Compulsory education with a focus on girl child education also may have some impact in increasing the age at marriage of the girls. Many girls are pursuing education up to tenth standard that is up to the age of 16 years and hence majority of the girls were married between 16-18 years.
Maternal and infant morbidity and mortality among child brides: Vast majority (81.10%) of the girl child brides said that there are no incidences of any complications during pregnancy as against 18.90% who said that there were incidences of complication during pregnancy.

Vast majority (86.61%) of the girl child brides said that there are no incidences of early maternal deaths in their families as against 13.39% who said that there were incidences of early maternal deaths in their families.

An overwhelming proportion (90.55%) of the girl child brides said that there are no incidences of problematic deliveries as against 9.45% who said that there were incidences of problematic deliveries such as prolonged labour or lack of labour pains during expected date of delivery and the like.

Majority (87.40%) of the girl child brides said that there are no incidences of infant mortality as against 12.60% who said that there were incidences of infant mortality. Several investigations reveal that mortality rates for babies born to mothers under age 20 are almost 75% higher than for children born to older mothers. The children that survive are more likely to be premature, have a low birth weight, and are more at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS.

Majority (88.50%) of the girl child brides said that they had normal deliveries as against 31.50% who underwent caesarian section. According to (NRHM AP) 46.6% girls of 15-19 face complications during delivery that are: premature labour 71.7, excessive bleeding 24.1, prolonged labour 36.1, obstructed labour 8.4, breech presentation 6.9, convulsion high blood pressure 8.6 clearly indicating the need for proper institutional care during delivery.

A great majority (92.52%) of the girl child brides revealed that their deliveries were conducted in hospitals while 7.48% of them said that their deliveries were conducted at home.

Significant proportion (81.10%) of the girl child bride said that the birth weight of the baby was above 2.5 Kilograms while 18.90% of them reported to have given birth to babies below 2.5 Kilograms. This can be due to Anemia of adolescent girls which is often responsible for miscarriages, still births, premature births, low birth-weight babies and maternal mortality during childbirth. Undernourished girls who grow into undernourished mothers, continue a vicious inter generational cycle of under-nutrition and wastage of women. Studies show that girls under the age of 15 are up to five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s. Post-delivery complications occur among 30.9% of young girls: high fever 59.1, lower abdominal pain 32.7, excessive bleeding 31.7, foul smelling vaginal discharge 2.3 (NRHM AP)

Overwhelming proportion (87.0%) of the girl child brides has children while the remaining 13.0% of them did not have any issues yet.

A great majority (92.52%) of the girl child brides revealed that their deliveries were conducted in hospitals while 7.48% of them said that their deliveries were conducted at home.

Majority of the girl child brides (62.60%) have two children, 32.68% of them had only one child and the remaining 4.72% had three children. This shows the impact of the family planning movement made available in public health sector but women are getting family planning surgeries but men are coming forward. In our study 100% women got family planning surgeries.

An overwhelming proportion (81.10%) of the girl child bride revealed that the first child was born after one year of marriage, 11.82% during second year of marriage, 4.72% during fourth year of marriage and the remaining 2.36% during third year of marriage.
**Reaso**ns for child marriage: Different reasons were given for child marriage and in the case of the majority 41.8% it was poverty, 23.6% of them said in order to strengthen family relation and bonds, 20.2% of them said it was due to customs and traditions that are prevailing in the community, 7.2% due to caste based norms, 4.8% other reasons while the remaining 2.4% of them to protect against rapes and abduction. More than half of the marriages (59.6%) were conducted since it was fixed before and the remaining 40.4% said it was not so.

**Knowledge on the Child Marriage Restraint Act:** With regard to the awareness of the girl child brides about Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 vast majority of them (62.7%) were not aware of it while only a small proportion (37.3%) were aware of the act.

**Marriage Registration:** More than half of the marriages (51.7%) are registered while the remaining 48.3% are not registered. This raises credibility of the marriage registrations as most of the girls are below 18 years at the time of the marriage.

**VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS**

**Views of Member of Child Welfare Committee (CWC)**

Mr. Jayaraj, a member of the Child Welfare Committee, Krishna district, opined that generation gap is leading to differences between the younger and older generations and also most of the parents are more concerned about the security of the child and hence get their daughters married by sixteen years. He said that the parents’ feel that they are shifting the responsibility of their daughter to another man and his family through marriage. Migration for livelihood is yet another reason contributing towards increasing number of child marriages. According to him though poverty prevails in different parts of the world, child marriages are widely prevalent in India. Moreover, people are not aware of Child Marriage Restraint Act and even those who are aware of the act are not afraid of the implications, as law enforcement is not strict. As far as the impact of child marriage is concerned he says it is the young girl who is victimized. Until marriage the girl is under the care and protection of the parents and soon after marriage she has to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of her in-laws. With little or no maturity or understanding about the situation she has to face the challenges of married life. At the tender age she is expected to face the psychological, mental and physical stress and strain of marriage. Added to this pregnancy at the very young age may result in critical emergencies to the mother or child during delivery.

Speaking about the role of child welfare committee, he said that cases of child marriages referred were monitored and the girl was provided with care and support. Also parents were counseled about the harmful effects of child marriages. The rural population should be educated about 25 different laws pertaining to protection of children in general and also about girl child marriages. He felt that it is every citizen’s responsibility to stop child marriages.
Chandra Rekha of Sathyanarayanapuram, Vijayawada, studied up to 10th standard. 1098 a toll free number of Child line, Vijayawada received some phone calls informing about her marriage. On receiving the call at 4.00 p.m. the staff of Child Line, a programme to provide immediate rescue, made a home visit and enquired about her. The parents informed that the girl and boy were above 18 and 21 respectively and they also asked the Child Welfare Committee members to confirm the birth certificate of the prospective bride and the groom. They informed that the certificates would be produced and told them that they would just visit the temple and come back. The Anganwadi teacher and the Integrated Child Protection Services Officer, on enquiry, confirmed that the girl was only 16 years of age. When he requested them to stop the marriage they tried to beat him. The local MLA also requested the Child Welfare Committee members, Integrated Child Protection Services Officers to wind up the case and not to proceed further. The officers, in turn, informed the MLA that as Project Director of Women and Child Development is also aware of the situation. This incident clearly indicates that the officers, sometimes have to bear people’s assaults to protect the girl child. Lack of knowledge among the elected people’s representatives makes the work more complicated.

Views of the District Child Protection Officer (DCPO) of Integrated Child Protection Scheme

Vijaya Kumar, District Child Protection Officer, observed that poverty, parents’ illiteracy, and poor academic performance of children are some of the reasons for child marriages. So instead of keeping the girls at home after they discontinue education they are married off at an early age. His observation of the girls, who come to the hostels of women and child welfare department, reveals that these teenage girls are attracted towards a fanciful life. If some young men lure them with small gifts and a frivolous promise of marriage, these girls blindly believe them and elope with the boy and get married without any proof or witness. Further such incidences were more common when the girl has no father. It was found that mother gets their daughter married early so as to ward off the responsibility as a mother and if the mother dies the father feels that if he gets the child married and sends her away, he can get married again without any encumbrance. Also in some scheduled tribes it is the tradition to get the girl married at a very young age. With regard to the consequences of child marriage he was of the opinion that the girl’s education is discontinued. The girl neither has maturity nor understanding to convince her husband that she can earn for supporting their livelihood. And in some cases the boy does not work and depends entirely on the wife who is forced to take up the entire burden of the family. Since these girls do not have the physical stamina and mental maturity, they are unable to bear the stress and strain of married life. Hence more and more girls go in for separation/divorce. If more than 20 child marriages take place in a community then there is absolutely a need to educate about the consequences of child marriages. Further he was of the opinion that the mother becomes physically weak and she in turn gives birth to weak babies and thereby the families become non-productive and burden to the society. While explaining about the role of Women and Child Welfare Department he says that Anganwadi teachers, Prohibition officers and Protection Officers should increase the awareness in the communities about the child marriages.

Village child protection committees (VCPC) with local sarpanch, Village Revenue Officer, the local management of schools, nurse, Anganwadi teacher, a member from the local NGO, youth club leader, members from SHGs along with a teenage boy and a girl are being formed. They are trained on Juvenile Justice Act, Child rights and other existing acts pertaining to children. The public should be educated about prevention of crimes against children and the procedure to be followed during such situations. The main purpose of this committee is to ensure that the rights of children are protected.
A school dropout, who studied up to second standard, lost her parents. She was living with her grandmother and aunt. As the grandmother was not well they decided to get the girl married at the age of 15. When the police tried to stop the marriage the relatives of the girl tried to convince him saying that the grandmother is sick and marriage is the only way to ensure protection of the girl. When the police tried to educate the relatives about child marriage and assured them that the girl will be under the care of the officials in a state home or a short stay home, the relatives requested that the girl be allowed to be at home and look after the bedridden grandmother and they assured that the marriage will not be performed. Later, on enquiry it was learn that the girl is found missing and her whereabouts are not known. It is inferred that the marriage of the girl might have taken place. Now a case was filed and the where-abouts of the girl are being investigated.

Views of the Community Leader

K. Ramaraju, a community political leader in Vombay colony is a photographer by profession. He is of the opinion that the religious traditions play a vital role in child marriages. Parents are mostly uneducated in Vombay colony. A typical feature of this community is, if one girl is seen moving around freely with a boy, all the other girls are restricted of their freedom and they are married away at a young age to avoid problems. He also quoted an incident where a 16 year old girl gave birth to Twins where one baby died after delivery and the second one is also very weak and in a critical condition. The chance of survival of the baby is very bleak.

He also heads the slum counseling sessions and legal disputes in the community. As an experienced person he says that most of the girls who are referred for family disputes are of 18 years of age. He quotes an incident of a young girl whose case was referred where parents state that the girl was married for 3 years. Further her alcoholic husband did not support the family and indulge in abusing wife and in heavy debts. The parents of the girl ask the leader to threaten the boy and set him right. But the girl insists that she cannot bear the suffering anymore and wants to break the marriage. As a leader he dissuaded parents about the consequences of child marriages but in vain. He suggests that the problem of school dropouts should be addressed to curb the child marriages. When the girl does not go to school and stays at home her security is at stake. So education will solve the problem of child marriage to a certain extent.

Views of a Women Activist

K. Ratna Kumari is a women activist in Vombay colony. She observes that the economic situation of the family is a significant influence as parents with limited financial resources and see marriage as a solution to reduce family costs, to pay less dowry, to save on education and so on. Young girls do not have strength to overcome any family disturbances or difficult situations. They quarrel more as they are helpless and go back to their parents’ house. As brides they are also psychologically not prepared for child care and motherhood. She educates the children about the consequences of early marriages. She could successfully stop a child marriage in the community by increasing the awareness on the consequences.
Views of a Religious Leader

Pastor John noted that customs and traditions play a key role in child marriages. People are scared of giving away their girls in marriage to boys living in a distant locality and hence they prefer to marry their girls within their community. Sometimes this leads to early marriages. The Christian community baptizes the girl at the age of 15 or 16. They believe that after baptism, the girl should not indulge in any bad thoughts or deeds. To avoid misdeeds they get the girl married soon after baptism. He also observes that media influences the lives of the teenagers these days. Hence parents perform marriages of their girls at an early age in order to avoid complications. Further he observes that fear of illicit sexual relationship is also common in early marriages. As we find nuclear families these days there is no guidance to the youngsters. There is no elderly person who could counsel them and save their lives and therefore the family ruins.

Views of a Lawyer

According to Seeta Devi, a Lawyer, the major factors that drive parents to perform marriages of their girls at a young age are the poor financial status. They try to relieve their burden by sending away their daughters after marriage, at the earliest. Lack of security for the girls in the society is yet another reason. Another reason is the infatuation leading to problems for girls such as pregnancy before wedlock, is compelling parents to get their daughters married at an early age. As per her observation most parents perform marriage of their girls as soon as they complete seventeen years as they are not aware of the laws. With regard to consequences of child marriages she says that the cases that have come to her in the past reveal that the girls do not have either physical or mental maturity to cope up with any situation in married life. This further makes her vulnerable to withstand the stress of child bearing. Another major issue of child marriages is early pregnancy and by the time they reach their twenties the men desert leaving the burden of children on mother. Here as young women they find it very difficult to maintain the family as single women and are forced to cope up with the challenges of single parent families.

The lawyer participates in awareness programmes organized by department of women and child development on Child Marriage Restraint Act, encourages them to refer cases of violation of the act and also for providing legal assistance to the clients. She narrated an incidence of a ‘Sugali’ tribal girl who got married at the age of 14 and committed suicide unable to bear the physical abuse and mental tortures. The law makers are unable to curb the problem.
Views of a School Teacher

Rajyalakshmi, a School teacher at Kandrika, an urban slum in Vijayawada, Krishna district, believes that lack of education is the main cause of child marriages and poverty is adding the burden. Parents are of the opinion that they need to shell out more money as dowry in case they allow their daughters higher education. Girls anyway are to be sent to another family sooner or later and hence performing their marriage early is the best option for them. She also observes that during teenage there is a tendency to take wrong steps in life and in order to avoid such deviations they prefer early marriages. Also the parents are of the opinion that if the girl is well educated they have to find a suitable groom who is educated more than the girl.

As per the teacher the reproductive organs of these young girls are not completely developed. During holidays the teacher gives some inputs on sex education, child marriage and the harmful effects of child marriages. The teacher gives counseling to the girls and their parents if he knows about the students’ marriage. Even after communicating about the consequences of child marriages she says that most of the girls get married soon after attaining puberty.

Views of a Nurse

Rajamani a Staff Nurse says that 4 or 5 cases in every hundred cases of pregnancy of children below 18 are reported in the nursing home in the community where she works. Customs and traditions play an important role in promoting child marriages and most of the parents are afraid of the security of their teenage girls. Most of the child marriages end up either in separation or divorce since the girls lack maturity. Also, there is no one to assist them during pregnancy and delivery. Such is the plight of these teenage mothers. Natural abortions are on the rise among teenagers. They are also referred to tertiary care hospitals as they are considered as high risk pregnancies. These young mothers are also unaware of parenting. Both the mother and the child are weak and at risk. The staff nurse along with Anganwadi workers stopped a number of child marriages. These young girls are discouraged to become pregnant at a young age. She is of the opinion that a full time counselor is to be appointed who can devote time to educate the masses on the ill effects of child marriage.
SUGGESTIONS

On the basis of the findings of the present study, the following are some suggestions to promote the health and well-being of young adolescent girls and contribute to the elimination of child marriage.

Community Level

1. People should be aware of legal, social, physiological and psychological issues related to child marriages and are to be communicated through Information, Education and Communication material that is culture friendly. Focus on lawful age of marriage for men and women are needed.

2. Effective initiatives within the community to protect girls to curb child marriages through safety nets by the leaders in the community through village child protection committees.

3. Non Government Organizations should include curbing of child marriages across their programmes.

4. Families should be educated to continue girls' education up to 18 years.

5. Community should respond to child marriages and raise objections. As per the Christian custom before solemnizing the marriage the pastor asks if any one has any objection to the marriage. People can take advantage of that situation and stop child marriages.

6. The laws of child marriage need to be disseminated in all government offices and public places. Clarity on lawful marriage age for women and men need to be focused.

The Government

1. Government should have political will and budget allocation for intensive strategies for awareness on child marriages like those used to disseminate knowledge on HIV and AIDS. Some strategies like mobile IEC vans reaching people in every village and every slum are most useful.

2. Young girls and boys need to be sensitized on health hazards and consequences of child marriages in the schools through compulsory life skill education in schools and junior colleges.

3. Government to release orders to all District Collectors to strengthen the various religious places under endowment department and marriage registration departments on confirming the age of the groom and bride before registering marriage.

4. Timely intervention by the district administration and the officials of the integrated child development department could prevent child marriages by strengthening the village child protection committees.

5. Child Marriage (Restraint) Act to be strictly implemented by government.
6. Education department need to focus more on creating vocational skill opportunities for girls after tenth standard and those dropped out of the schools for security and skill development till they complete 18 years.

7. Members of Legislative Assemblies and Members of Parliaments should be sensitized and involved in the awareness meeting. Political commitment is needed from Legislators and Parliamentarians.

8. Multi departmental collaborative effort to be planned to end child marriages

9. State Commission for protection of child rights to be formed immediately to uphold the child rights and to give them better life.

**Judiciary and Police**

1. Child Marriage (Restraint) Act to be strictly implemented by police department.

2. Special police cells play a key role in filing cases and to increase awareness.

3. The legal services authority to increase awareness on child marriages with a network of paralegal volunteers.

4. Fast track courts to be in place to deal with child marriage cases.

**Print and Electronic Media**

1. Media should actively be involved in awareness on child marriage act by involving the celebrities and politicians.

2. To air the success stories to give a positive thinking among the people.

3. To sensor the movies and serials in Television to reduce negative impact of media on youth.

**Religious leaders**

1. The religious leaders with license to perform marriages should be educated about the child marriage law and to be punished if they violate the law by dissolving the license and to be penalized.

2. Religious leaders should involve in educating people on the effects of child marriages and should focus on young boys and girls.

3. Religious leaders and institutions including the worship places under the purview of government to register all marriages performed in the worship places. Stringent action to be taken for non-implementation.
CONCLUSION

Marriage of girls less than 18 years is a fundamental violation of their human rights including their sexual and reproductive health. It is also a threat to the prosperity and stability of countries. As per the study it was found that poverty is one of the major factors underpinning child marriage. The traditional desire to protect girls from out-of-wedlock pregnancies is also a fear factor. The influence of media is changing the attitudes of girls and boys leading to hasty decisions leading to elopement and marriages. Further it was revealed that girls married under 18 years faced an elevated risk of complications in pregnancy and childbirth and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV and experience social and educational disadvantages. It was also observed that child marriage is physically and emotionally harmful... it violates their rights to personal freedom and growth. For both boys and girls, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional consequences. For girls in addition, it will almost certainly mean early pregnancy, which causes higher rates of maternal mortality, and is likely to lead to lifetime of domestic and sexual subservience. There is a need to redesign the policies and programmes related to prevention of marriage of girls under 18 and ensure that all adolescents' sexual, marital, and reproductive transitions are safe, informed, and voluntary; and to support girls who are already married.

Despite legislation forbidding child marriage in India (Child Marriage Restraint Act-1929) and the much more progressive Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) and many initiatives to prevent child marriage, marrying children off at a very tender age continues to be accepted by large sections of our society. More attention needs to be paid to the situation of children continuing to face the practice of early and forced marriages. It calls for “the synergy of the efforts of governments, law makers, civil society, media, and other relevant stakeholders including family and community” as well as “increased attention at the international, national and regional level in order to develop policies and legislation to prevent early marriages”. Therefore it is needless to say that an integrated approach needs to be adopted to curtail the problem of child marriage and raise the status of girls.

REFERENCES

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VASAVYA MAHILA MANDALI

INCEPTION:
VASAVYA MAHILA MANDALI (VMM) established in 1969, is an organization propelled by women, with a unique legacy inherited by ‘Gorain Family’ and inspired by Gandhian ideology of truth, nonviolence and humanism. It took VMM six years to strengthen and register in 1975, on the eve of the International Women’s year. VMM has carved a special ‘niche’ in the field of social development and service to humanity. This is ‘not for profit’, secular and voluntary organization for promoting gender equity, egalitarian structures and barrier-free society.

VISION: Impacting lives of Women and Children through Sustainable Community Driven Lifecycle Initiatives.

MISSION:
1. To ensure the rights of women and children in life cycle through community-driven initiatives of care, protection, development and welfare.
2. To facilitate knowledge building of communities on issues of orphan and vulnerable children with gender inclusivity and improving value of education through environmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive approaches.
3. To promote the physical and psychosocial health of communities by building knowledge on prevention/care/treatment and thereby increasing demand for government services; building capacity of government services; and delivering quality outreach services through community support structures.
4. To promote entrepreneurship and financial sustainability of vulnerable families by educating them on their economic rights, building vocational skills, employment opportunities and access to credit.
5. To increase capacity of the Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and civil society organizations.
6. To facilitate meaningful participation of women and youth in multi-level democratic decision making bodies and to advocate changes for progressive policies.

HAMU, Norway

Humanist Action for Human Rights (HAMU) is a small non-governmental organization, which operates on the basis of humanist values. HAMU is part of the Norwegian Humanist Association and has been active for more than 10 years in India.

HAMU aims to promote human rights for the oppressed and to aid fellow humans to a dignified life. HAMU’s main priority is to secure rights and expand capacities for women and children who suffer abuse or oppression due to religion or tradition. HAMU also targets social degradation resulting from cultural prejudice, lack of education or superstition.

HAMU operates by supporting local secular, non-profit and non-governmental organizations in the South. Local aid organizations work to help the abused or the oppressed by providing protection, education or vocational training as well as influencing attitudes in local societies. Human dignity, diversity of visions, pluralism and democracy are values guiding this work.