

# Child marriages and their impact on mental health

*“Possible impact of changing the legal age of marriage”*



**Pragathi Munnangi,**  
**MBBS Intern, NRI**  
**medical college,**  
**Guntur**

According to UNICEF, Child marriage refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.

This practice mainly affects girls since its prevalence in boys is only 1/6th as in girls. Girls who marry young are more likely to experience domestic violence since even the boy is mostly young and immature or due to age difference and lack of proper understanding. This significantly affects the mental health of the child and often leads to depression.

Parents of girls do this to avoid the expenditure on female education. They also feel girls are more

socially safe when they get married. They forget about the future happiness of their child.

We all know that the legal age of marriage for girls was recently raised from 18 to 21 years under the prohibition of the child marriage bill, 2021.

By rising it and effectively enforcing it, we can have a great impact on many things.

Firstly, there is a huge scope for increasing women's literacy rate. Many young girls drop their education and get married at a young age without the proper knowledge of how marriage works. It is mainly prevalent in rural areas. It might be due to many reasons like economical issues,

religion, long-term cultures, pressure from elders, society, etc. Though it is illegal, its prevalence is nearly 27 per cent according to UNICEF. But if it is strictly reinforced, many young girls can complete their education can have employment and earn their living. They won't be socially isolated. At least they can have basic education which is very much essential. This not only makes them independent but also can decrease the poverty rate, and increase financial stability i.e. economic empowerment.



In the olden days,

women are bound to home and not able to get out of toxic marriages mainly because they aren't financially independent. Even parents abandon them if they want to come out of marriage, so they have no place to go. Avoiding this practice can make women powerful in this aspect.

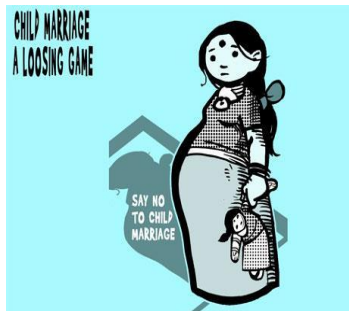
This change also has an impact on the incidence of teenage pregnancies. Teenage pregnancies not only have medical complications for both mother and baby but also affect the mother and family psychologically.

Mother is more prone to obstetric complications like pre-eclampsia, eclampsia, obstructed labour, etc. The baby becomes frequently sick because the mother is not properly aware of

taking care of the baby as she is still a child. They won't have proper knowledge of sanitation and this causes many infections in the child. The new born requires proper tender loving care. This cannot be provided by these young parents because they are in distress to maintain the family and economic issues. Mother is also not mentally stable postpartum as she won't be receiving the love and care she needs. The baby soon becomes malnourished, and poor in academics without any skills.

The topic doesn't end here. Mothers have to bear the tantrums from their in-laws and relatives regarding the birth of a female child. They only want a male child for which women is forced to conceive multiple time without a

gap between consequent pregnancies. This causes anaemia, and malnutrition in both mother and baby.



Avoiding this practise decreases unwanted pregnancies. Women can take care of their baby better and this impact the physical, nutritional, and mental health of the baby.

Women will be mentally more mature and aware regarding choosing their life partner of choice, especially for girls from conservative, regressive and patriarchal families or

at least won't be forced to marry someone they don't like.

There are instances where some women run away from the family unable to tolerate the bad marriage or ill-treatment from the spouse and turn to prostitution to support themselves. Imagine the mental condition of that girl being away from everyone she knows, thriving alone for livelihood.

But the other side of the argument is that women of age between 18-21 years are accountable for their actions as an adult under the age of majority law in India but she is not allowed to get married even if she is willing to.

There are many government initiatives

like Laws against Child Marriage in India, The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, Hindu Marriage Act, 1956, Muslim Personal Law, Indian Christian Marriage Act (ICMA), Legal Action on Marital Rape.

So finally, I think increasing the age of marriage is a good sign and can impact the country only when it is strictly implemented. People should be more responsible and inform the authority when they come across child marriages because it can change a person's entire life. We will end it here hoping for a good change in future years.