

Incidence of Child Marriage:

New Findings From the 2011 Census of India

In India, child marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18 for girls, and before 21 for boys. Although the incidence of child marriage in India is slowly declining, the absolute number of girls and boys getting married before their respective legal ages is still significant, with 12.1 million child marriages reported by the 2011 Census of India.

Young Lives and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) recently compiled a report entitled 'A Statistical Analysis of Child Marriage in India', reporting the incidence of child marriage and based on the 2011 Census data (Singh 2017). As wide variations have been noted across regions and states, and between urban and rural areas, the report measured the incidence of child marriage at state and district level for both girls and boys.

The report provides a list of high incidence districts disaggregated by urban and rural areas, and different age groups, and identifies key trends in child marriage incidence between 2001 and 2011. This policy brief provides a condensed presentation of the methodology, data as well as recommendations to enable micro-level planning and targeted interventions by policymakers in different levels of governance.

Introduction

Effective strategies to address child marriage require up-to-date information. The 2011 Census provides the most comprehensive data possible on age at marriage as it allows disaggregation at state and district level by age. By analysing this data and comparing with the 2001 Census, Young Lives aimed to inform national and state planning to prevent child marriage. This brief focuses on three key questions:

- Which states have the highest incidence of child marriage?
- Which districts have particularly high incidence of child marriage?
- Trends in child marriage incidence: what has changed between 2001 and 2011?

The full report (Singh 2017) contains the detailed findings, details of the methodology used, and findings from other recent research into child marriage in India, including analysis of laws and policies related to child marriage, as well as causes and consequences of child marriage.

The report focuses on the incidence of child marriage for both boys and girls, rather than prevalence rate provided by National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and District Level Health and Facility Survey (DLHS) for ever-married women aged between 15-49 years old and men aged between 15-54 years. This is because the Census provides data on current marital status (currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, and never married) by

current age and marital duration, which is a more powerful indicator than prevalence rate. The report's uniqueness lies in the fact that it consolidates the incidence of child marriage in the age group '10 years old to below legal age of marriage' for both boys and girls, and does not include children under 10 years old as the 2011 Census reports no incidence of child marriage in this age group. Further analysis using disaggregated data on child marriage for both boys and girls, by place of residence and different age groups, has identified the top 20 districts with the highest incidence of child marriage for boys and girls, in both urban and rural locations and in the age groups of 10-14 years old for both girls and boys, and 15<18 years old for girls and 15<21 years old for boys. This analysis can support policy interventions in the identified districts.

Implications of child marriage

Marriage at a young age has far-reaching consequences, with implications for the development and well-being of both boys and girls. It impacts opportunities for continuing education, earning livelihood and burdens young people with familial responsibility before they are psychologically mature. For girls child marriage often results in teenage pregnancy, leading to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and malnutrition. The 2011 Census data reveal that 5.1 million girls and 6.9 million boys in India get married before the legal age.

Which states have the highest incidence of child marriage?

Figure 2 shows that the incidence of child marriage varies across states, although it is present to some extent in all states.

It is noteworthy that Rajasthan emerges as a state with highest incidence of child marriage for both boys (8.6%) and girls (8.3%). For girls (10-<18) other high incidence states are Maharashtra and Gujarat (6.6% each) along

Figure 2. Variations by state in incidence of child marriage

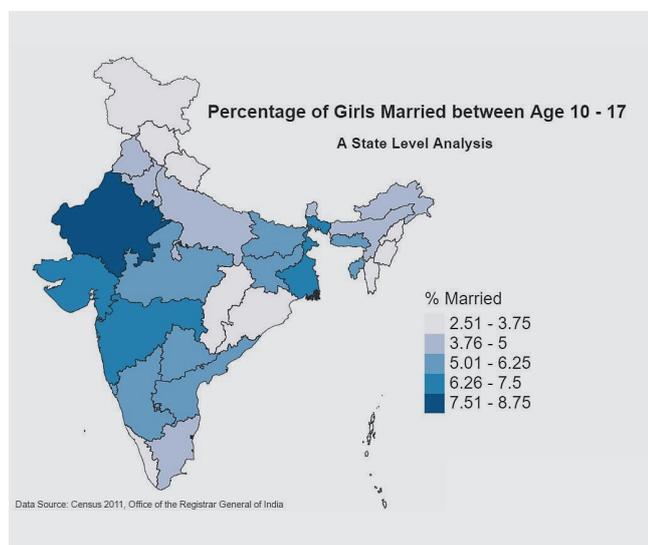
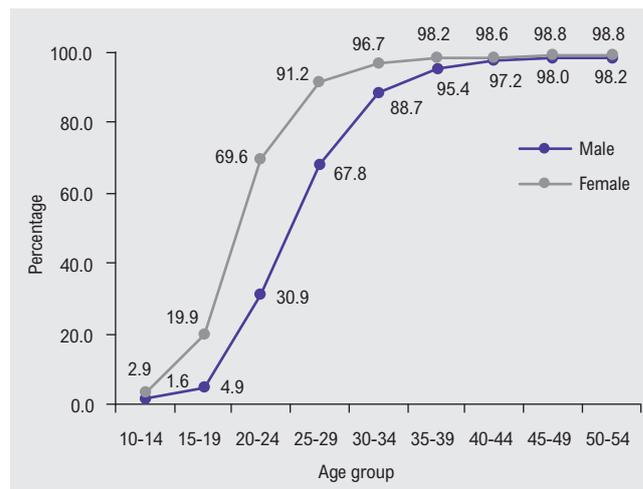


Figure 1. Percentage of ever-married men and women in India, by age groups (2011)

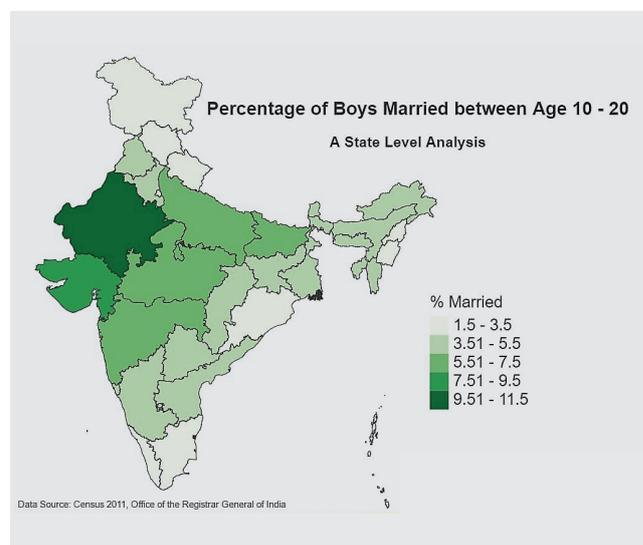


Source: 2011 Census of India.

with West Bengal (6.4%) and Goa (6.1%). With reference to child marriage incidence among boys (10-<21), other states that emerge with high incidence are Gujarat (6.7%), Madhya Pradesh (6.1%), followed by Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (6% each).

Which districts have particularly high incidence of child marriage?

A multi-layered approach was undertaken to identify high-incidence districts, in order to ensure that districts with a particularly high percentage of child marriage relating to a specific group of children were identified. Twenty districts with the highest incidence of child marriage were identified for each of the following categories: urban districts and rural districts; girls aged 10-14 years; girls aged 15<18; boys aged 10-14; and boys aged 15<21. In total, 67 districts were identified with high incidence of child marriage for girls, and 62 districts for boys, with many districts featuring in both lists.



Source: 2011 Census of India

Table 1. Seventy districts identified with high incidence of child marriage, from the 640 districts of India (2011)

State	District	Place of residence	
		Rural	Urban
Andhra Pradesh	Hyderabad		U
	Rangareddy		U
Arunachal Pradesh	Lower Subansiri		U
	Kurung Kumey		U
Assam	Changlang		U
	Dhubri	R	
Bihar	Goalpara		U
	Nawada	R	
	Jamui	R	
	Gaya	Not observed as urban and rural incidence. The average was found to be high as a total.	
	Arwal		U
	Sheohar		U
	Jehanabad		U
	Ahmadabad	R	U
Gujarat	Anand		U
	Dohad	R	
	Kheda	R	U
	Valsad		U
	Gandhinagar	R	U
	Mewat	R	U
Haryana			
Jharkhand	Pakur		U
	Deoghar	R	
	Giridih		
	Davanagere		U
Karnataka	Bagalkot		U
	Barwani	R	
Madhya Pradesh	Jhabua	R	
	Mandsaur	R	
	Neemuch	R	
	Rajgarh	R	
	Ratlam	R	
	Shajapur	R	
	Tikamgarh		U
	Ujjain	R	
Maharashtra	Ahmadnagar	R	
Maharashtra	Bhandara	R	U
	Chandrapur	R	U
	Dhule	R	U
	Jalgaon	R	U
	Jalna	R	U
	Kolhapur	R	U
	Latur	R	U
	Mumbai		U
	Mumbai Suburban		U
	Parbhani	R	U
	Pune		U
	Sangli	R	U
	Satara	R	U
	Sindhudurg	R	
	Thane		U
	Ajmer	R	U
Rajasthan	Banswara		U
	Bhilwara	R	U
	Bundi	R	
	Chittaurgarh	R	U
	Dausa		U
	Jaipur	R	
	Jhalawar	R	
	Karauli		U
	Nagaur		U
	Rajsamand	R	U
	Sawai Madhopur	R	U
	Tonk	R	U
Uttar Pradesh	Pratapgarh		U
	Ghaziabad		U
	Lalitpur	R	
	Shrawasti	R	
West Bengal	Maldah		U
	Dakshin Dnajpur		U
	Birbhum		U

Source: 2011 Census of India.

Once duplication was removed, a final list of 70 districts with high incidence of child marriage, spread across 13 states, was identified. These states were: **Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.**

It is important to note that, due to the specified methodology used for this analysis, many but not all of the districts identified in this way would feature among a list of the 70 districts with the highest *overall* incidence of child marriage.

The profile of the high-incidence districts is diverse, and shows that effective action to address child marriage cannot be based only on state-level information, but must also look at district-level incidence. Much greater priority should be

given to micro-planning and targeted interventions which take account of local dynamics.

The list includes a high number of **urban districts** (28), urban and rural districts (19), as well as purely rural districts (19). It is interesting to observe that in Rajasthan and Maharashtra, almost all districts show high incidence of child marriage in both rural and urban areas. In the past, child marriage has been understood as a rural phenomenon but our analysis identifies many urban districts with high incidence of child marriage. Given rapid urbanisation in India, further investigation is urgently needed to understand the factors driving the high incidence of child marriage in so many urban districts. Interestingly, while 21.1 per cent of child marriage among girls in India can be attributed to these 70 districts, a slightly higher 22.5 per cent of child marriage among boys occurred in these districts.

The findings also show that high incidence of child marriage is **not confined to states with the highest rates of poverty and deprivation**. The Human Development Indices (HDI) of the identified states, as well as districts, vary widely (Institute of Applied Manpower Research 2011). Gujarat, Haryana and Maharashtra, almost all the identified districts fall within the upper half of states ranked according to HDI value, while Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have low HDI values and are low on the overall rankings. Similarly, Maharashtra, a state with high HDI, contains both Mumbai with the highest HDI value and Latur with one of the lowest. This indicates that, although important, tackling poverty and deprivation alone is not likely to be enough to end child marriage.

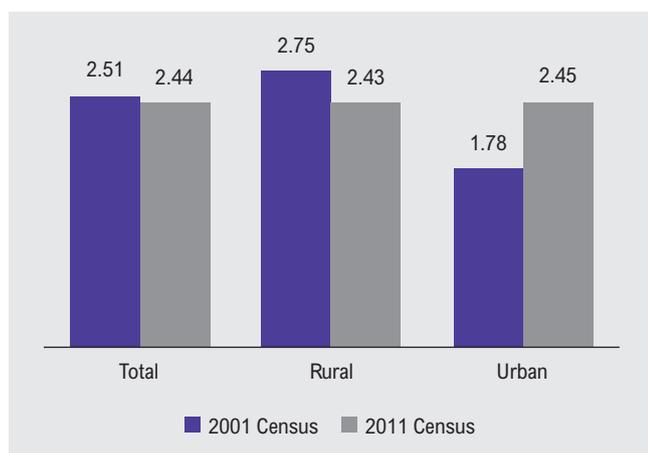
Although **sex ratio** is regarded as an indicator of gender discrimination, the list includes districts with sex ratios as high as 986 girls per 1000 boys (Pakur) and as low as 878 girls per 1000 boys (Ghaziabad).

Trends in child marriage incidence: what has changed between 2001 and 2011?

National trends

Comparison of data from the 2001 Census and 2011 Census at the national level shows a small decline in incidence of child marriage amongst rural girls, but an increased incidence amongst urban girls (Figures 3 and 4). There has been decline in the incidence of boys married before 21 years old in both rural and urban areas, and an increase in child marriage among urban girls. However, this masks the situation at the district level, where incidence of child marriage is the highest. Another interesting finding is that for boys, both the absolute number and percentage ever-married below legal age (i.e. 21 years old) declined over the two census rounds, while for girls the percentage ever-married has declined but the absolute number increased between the 2001 Census and 2011 Census.

Figure 3. Percentage of ever-married girls below legal age, 2001 and 2011



Sources: 2011 Census of India and 2001 Census of India.

Trends by state and district

Girls

The highest number of districts with an increasing incidence of child marriage for girls appears to be concentrated in **Maharashtra**. All 16 districts of Maharashtra in the 70 identified high-incidence districts show an increasing trend in child marriage between the 2001 Census 2001 and 2011 Census. The district of Bhandara in Maharashtra leads with more than a five-fold increase in child marriage among girls, while Kolhapur, Sindhudurg and Satara report more than a three times increase. Even districts with high HDI values show increased child marriage: Mumbai (2.2 fold), Mumbai Suburban (2.3 fold), Pune (2.4 fold) and Thane (2.8 fold).

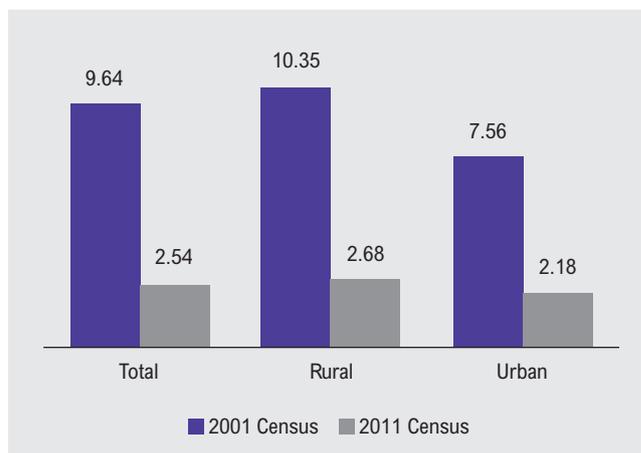
All six districts from **Gujarat** in the 70 high-incidence districts, including urban areas such as Valsad (2.8 times), Ahmedabad (2 times), Dohad (2 times), Gandhinagar (1.2 times) and Anand (1.3 times), report an increase in incidence. Two districts in undivided **Andhra Pradesh** (Hyderabad and Rangareddy) and two districts in **Assam** (Dhubri and Golpara) also show an increasing trend.

Of the 13 districts from **Rajasthan** in the 70 high-incidence districts, 12 reveal a declining trend over the decade. Only Banswara shows a slight increase in the incidence of child marriage. The same declining trend is visible in seven out of nine districts from **Madhya Pradesh**. However, two districts, Barwani (1.1 times) and Jhabua (1.8 times), show an increasing trend in child marriage. The three districts in **Jharkhand** show a declining trend, while **Uttar Pradesh**, **Karnataka** and **West Bengal** show mixed trends.

Boys

In **Maharashtra**, all 16 districts show an increase in child marriage for boys, with **Bhandara** (urban and rural) faring the worst with a 21.7 times increase in percentage of ever-married boys below the legal age. It is important to note that this district also registered the highest increase in relation to girls married before the legal age, though the increase is substantially higher for boys compared to girls.

Figure 4. Percentage of ever-married boys below legal age, 2001 and 2011



Sources: 2011 Census of India and 2001 Census of India.

A total of 13 districts in Maharashtra show more than a nine-fold increase in child marriage, which is a cause for extreme concern. A substantive study needs to be initiated to understand the alarming increase in child marriage incidence among boys. Urban areas such as **Pune, Mumbai, Mumbai Suburban, Ahmednagar and Thane** also show more than six times increase in child marriage among boys.

Similarly, in all six districts in **Gujarat**, three districts in **West Bengal**, two districts in undivided **Andhra Pradesh**, two districts in **Assam**, one district in **Madhya Pradesh** (Jhabua 1.3 times), one district in **Uttar Pradesh** (Ghaziabad: 1.5 times), and one district in **Jharkhand** (Pakur: 1.2 times), we observe an increasing trend in child marriage.

It is encouraging to note that all 13 districts of **Rajasthan** show a declining trend for child marriage among boys, including Banswara. Decreasing trends are also seen across the two districts of **Jharkhand** and five districts of **Bihar**.

Celebrating a girl child: a case study from Rajasthan

The story is one of an inspiring effort to save both girls and the green cover. The village gathers and plants 111 fruit trees in honour of every new-born female child. Village residents collect Rs. 21,000 between themselves and Rs. 10,000 from the girl's parents. The Rs. 31,000 is turned into a 20-year fixed deposit for the girl. Parents are legally bound by a signed affidavit stating that their daughter will receive a proper education. The affidavit also mandates that the girl should be married only after she reaches the legal age of marriage.

The community ensures that the trees survive, bearing fruit as the girl grows up. To protect the trees from termites, residents plant aloe vera plants around them. These trees, and especially the aloe vera plants, are now a source of livelihood for several residents. This unique tradition was first suggested by the village's former leader, ShyamSundarPaliwal, in honour of his daughter who passed away at a young age. In the last six years, over a quarter of a million trees have been planted.

Recommendations

- **Identification of districts (both rural and urban) with highest incidence of child marriage.** Ending child marriage requires identification and understanding of the complex drivers behind child marriage practices in different contexts, and interventions adapted to the local context. National and state averages can mask the sudden spike in child marriages and it is essential to identify pockets where this practice seems to be prevalent. Comparing the 2001 Census and 2011 Census has identified Maharashtra as the state with highest increase in child marriages, particularly among boys in both urban and rural areas. State-specific planning must be undertaken by ensuring that district and sub-district plans are developed with clear accountability and roles identified. This will involve working with the legal system, the police, Panchayati Raj (local self-governance bodies), civil society, religious leaders, as well as the community at large. See the case study for an example of community action to value girls.
- **Focus on boys too.** It seems from a review of Government programmes that these are focusing mainly on girls. Adolescent boys from the most disadvantaged households need to be included as a focus of interventions, since it is common practice for boys to marry younger girls. The sharp increase in the incidence of child marriage among boys should be explored.
- **Monitoring of districts and blocks with high incidence of child marriage.** Close monitoring of the 70 districts with the highest incidence of child marriage needs to be undertaken. These districts need to be studied further to allow blocks to be identified where the practice of child marriage is most rampant so that the Panchayat, along with local community, can take steps to counter the reasons for the increase and/or persistence of the high incidence of child marriage.
- **Focus on urban areas.** Urgent investigation is required in order to understand the factors underlying the rising incidence of child marriage among girls and boys in urban areas.
- **Registration of marriages.** Provisions for the registration of marriages need to be made mandatory and implemented in a simple and user-friendly manner. Registration facilities should be provided at the lowest level of administrative structures (i.e. Panchayat) for ease of access.
- **Promoting education.** Education can influence society at large to combat practices and beliefs perpetuating child marriage. Girls completing secondary education are most likely to escape child marriage. Therefore it is important to bring secondary education under the ambit of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act.



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