Exploring Mother-Daughter Relationships and Mothers' Aspirations for their Adolescent Daughters: Early Evidence from Umang Project in Rural Jharkhand

Pooja K. Kini, Dr. Sudipta Mondal, Sushmita Mukherjee

Abstract

Data reveals high rate of early marriage and pregnancy, and low literacy among women in Godda and Nala blocks in Jharkhand. Education is considered as the primary means to delay age of marriage for girls. Since mother's aspirations for their children is closely linked to their educational outcomes it is crucial to examine their relationship with adolescent daughters to enable the younger generation to defy social norms such as child marriage. The goal of the study is to explore the nature of mother-daughter relationships, in terms of aspirations for education and career goals of the daughters. Project Concern International India conducted primary data collection with 'mother daughter pair' as a part of a baseline study for an evaluation. The study shows that for 65% mothers' career aspirations do not match with her daughter. We further investigated communication and negotiation between the pair thereby identifying barriers and support system for realization of aspirations. The paper highlights the need for mothers' role in child's upbringing to be strengthened for more efficient inter-generational transfer of knowledge and skills, as tools for empowerment. The study shows that if the mother is empowered, she can be the banner carrier for the change in society.

Keywords- Mother daughter pair, aspirations, child marriage, empowerment, adolescents

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical link between childhood and adulthood. It is characterized by transitions which carries risks and opportunities to influence the immediate and long-term health and well-being for the rest of their lives. Child marriage is denial of human rights, which although has declined in India since last two decades, still lower education and poverty has made it sticky in the rural areas of the country (Paul 2020). In India, one out of every five persons is between 10 to 19 years of age and half of them are girls. According to National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 (2015-16), in India, 38% of the women aged 20-24 years are married off before age 18 years, 12% of women aged 15-19 years were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey, 34% ever-married women have experienced spousal violence. These numbers are double in rural districts of Godda and Jamtara of Jharkhand.

TABLE 1: DATA ON EARLY MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCY, AND LITERACY RATE

Indicator	Godda district (rural)	Jamtara district (rural)
Literacy rate among women	40% (73.6% for men)	43.7% (76.5% for men)
Women aged 20-24 years married before age 18 years	65.2%	45.9%
Women aged 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey	23.4%	19%

Source: NFHS-4 (2015-16)

From dropping out of school, experiencing menstruation amidst myths and misinformation, to marrying and giving birth at an early age – adolescent girls face various restrictive norms which snatches away their childhood and lifetime opportunities, generations after generations. It does not allow them to dream and to aspire for themselves. Adolescent girls lose opportunities in life to grow and realize their full potentials due to restrictive patriarchal norms. Restrictions on girls begin from their families even before her brain matures to understand the societal control. Education and exposure to the world of knowledge enhances agency among adolescents (Lloyd and Young, 2009); however, adolescents by virtue of their positioning and power dynamics fail to voice out their desires and aspirations with the adults in the family and potentially face a lot of backlashes for any such acts (Dasra, 2019). In such contexts, mothers are the close confidante of their daughters. Mothers themselves are the lived examples of negative side of child marriage and restrictive social norms (Raj et al. 2010). They realize how they

were forced to a life which they hadn't thought of nor were ready enough. There is a high potential for mothers to become the voice of their daughters to stop the chain of vulnerability. Mothers' aspirations are closely linked to the aspirations and performance of their children in terms of their education. Girls' education is widely considered the primary means to delay age at marriage for girls and give them the opportunity to aspire and plan for a life of their own choice (Malhotra 2021). Mothers' aspirations for their children at age 12 matter for the children's education outcomes at age 18 (Serneels, 2021). Hence, its crucial to examine their positioning, role, and relationship with daughter; to understand how the duo work to enable a better world for the younger generation and thus defy the social norm of child marriage in these communities. We believe findings from this study would be of great value for designing interventions for sharpening the strengths of the mothers and women in collectives to address issues of adolescents and specially to stop incidences of child, early and forced marriages.

2. Goal of the study:

The goal of this study is to explore the nature of mother daughter relationships in rural Jharkhand, in terms of their aspirations for education and career goals of the daughters.

Project Concern International (PCI) India conducted a baseline study as a part of a larger evaluation for its Project - Umang in Godda Sadar and Nala blocks of Godda and Jamtara districts respectively in the state of Jharkhand. To understand how and how much empowerment of women enrolled in community institutions of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) lead to positive influence on their unmarried adolescent daughters and enable them to fulfil their aspirations and life choices, thereby contributing to reduce the incidences of child marriage in resource poor rural communities. This study presents a section of findings from the baseline study conducted between 22nd February and 13th March 2021. The endline is due in 2023.

3. Methodology

A mixed method was employed, with quantitative and qualitative tools administered simultaneously across two blocks – Godda Sadar and Nala. The **quantitative component** employed a survey tool and reached out to 395 women associated with SHGs, and their adolescent daughters (10-18 years, who have never been married) in 99 villages. In cases where there was more than one daughter in the given age range, the elder one was interviewed. The **qualitative component** employed focus group discussions with mothers associated with SHG and adolescent girls. Ten focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with mothers and ten with adolescent daughters (10-18 years, who have never been married) in 10 villages.

3.1. Procedures Involved

- Quantitative and qualitative tools were developed for the study, which were translated to Hindi and Bengali and piloted in January 2021 by PCI project staff. As per the feedback, a round of revision was undertaken for all tools. It took about 60 minutes each to complete the interview with mothers and daughters. The group discussion tools took about 60 minutes each.
- PCI India's research team received approvals from Sigma Institutional Review Board based in Delhi, India, and PCI international Institutional Review Board based in San Diego, United States, before conducting the survey.
- PCI India hired and trained external team of female investigators and supervisors for the surveys. Along with quantitative and qualitative tools, the three-day training included the context and details of the project and the ethical norms and standards that they needed to adhere to.
- Investigators used hand-held devices loaded with the survey questionnaires to conduct the survey. A strong focus was given to ensure data quality by adopting standard checks and balances including field monitoring with back checks and spot checks, daily checking of the data trend on key indicators. The android application developed for canvassing the quantitative survey had inbuilt consistency checks and time stamps.
- For the qualitative survey, there was a moderator and a note-taker. The proceedings were recorded using a tape recorder and the note taker wrote key discussion points to supplement it. The recordings were transcribed to English for further analysis.

- Before the interview, the investigators sought consent from the mother (consent for herself and underage daughter) and the daughter (assent) and selected a place of her choice where she feels safe and away from the interference from others.

3.2. **Mother-daughter pair**

Mothers and daughters were interviewed in pairs, i.e., from the same household. They were interviewed simultaneously to avoid any sharing of information within the pair. While the mother-daughter pair were being interviewed, care was taken to keep adequate distance between their location so that they do not overhear each other's responses. Few questions were common in the tool for mothers and daughters to identify gaps in aspiration and communication between the pair.

4. Understanding the mother-daughter pair

Majority of respondents (91%) were Hindus, while 2% were Muslims and 0.5% Christians. 54% belong to Other Backward Class, 16% from Scheduled Class, 14% from Scheduled Tribe, 13% belong to General category. More than half (56%) have a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card.

4.1. **Mothers of adolescent girls, members of Self-Help Groups**

On an average, the age of mothers was found to be 35 years old, with a range of 22 years to 55 years). Almost all women (97%) were currently married, with 3% were widowed. Mothers of adolescent daughters were also married off before they attained 18 years of age. The average age of marriage among the mothers was 16 years, while the minimum age was as low as 10 years. It was found that 74.68% of mothers got married before the age of 18, and 13.67% got married at the age of 18 years. Average age of when they gave birth for the first time was 19 years old, while the minimum age was 14 years old. More than 37% of mother gave birth for the first time before they turned 18. Less than half the mothers (46%) had ever attended school, and the majority (43%) had completed only primary education till class 5th. Out of those who attended school, 11% completed their 10th class, and only 4.4% completed 12th. A meagre 2.2% completed some level of education beyond school. For those mothers who have attended till 8th class or below, only 38% could read the literacy card completely, while 35% could read only few words. In terms of engagement in economic activities, it was found that 57% mothers were engaged in employment in the last 12 months, majority as cultivator (48.23%), agricultural labourer (16%) and petty business/self-employment (17%), but 42% were not paid for their work.

When asked during group discussions, most mothers did not express any aspirations for themselves - they only dream for a better life for their children. Mothers expressed that, *"Our life is already spoiled, and we couldn't become independent. We want to make our children independent. It would give us happiness. I would like to educate them, send them on a job, and would get them married. Then I would be happy."* While they do not have specific career aspiration at this stage in life, they hope to earn money for their family by gaining a new employment- *"I am occupied in farming activities or as manual labor, which means that our income is insufficient and many a times, irregular. I am not able to get the necessary means to establish my business. Men are the primary bread earners, but a single wage-earner cannot sustain the costs of their household"*. They look at tailoring, bangle making, incense stick making, or enhancing agriculture output as prospective business ideas for which they hope to obtain capital that will enable them to make their lives better. They feel the need to contribute to the family's income, *"We belong to a backward community and earn less income. How can we manage only with my husband's income? I also have to contribute to it."*

4.2. Household decision making for mothers

During the qualitative discussions it was found that husbands and father-in-law were the usual decision makers within the family- mothers share that *"Husband is the head of the household and takes decisions. We have to agree with him. "* Few households had equitable distribution of power where everybody's consensus was taken, or where the decision pertaining to the daughter's education and domestic matters was solely with the mother. From the quantitative survey it was found that fewer mothers have a say within their households in decisions related to their children's marriage and schooling in comparison to

decision related to petty expenditures and purchase of cooking materials. More mothers (52%) could make decisions related to petty expenditures and purchase of cooking materials. Few of the mothers (45%) interviewed could decide about children's schooling and fewer (31%) on decision-making around their children's marriage. There were very few mothers who said that they try to deter undesirable decisions within their households. One of the respondents during the focus group discussions shared that, *"In my family, husband takes the decisions, but I always object him. He used to tell me, why are you talking with other men. But my four daughters are studying because of me. I take the decisions for myself and for my daughter. I don't respect him because he doesn't want me to participate in any activities. He always restricts me."* However, many mothers are do not resist or were afraid of showing too much resistance out of fear of domestic violence. Arguments were met with abuse, usually under the influence of alcohol. In these cases, their negotiating power drops very low, and their husband's dominance lingers. *"My husband earns Rs. 300 per day and spends Rs. 100 on alcohol. He fights after drinking alcohol."*

4.3. **Daughters**

The average age of girls interviewed was 14 years, where majority (18%) were 12-year-olds, followed by 15-year-olds (16%). 94% of interviewed girls were currently attending school – out of which 91% were enrolled in a government school while rest were in a private school. 45% Girls were engaged in some sort of economic activity in the past 12 months, out of which 84% had worked as a cultivator or as agricultural labour. At the time of the survey, 27%, of girls were still working.

4.4. **The mother-daughter dyad**

During the interviews it was seen that there was a cordial relationship within the mother-daughter dyad. The daughters freely shared issues with their mothers. Mothers expressed enthusiasm during focus groups discussions about being in their daughter's life. Mother-daughter relationships were found to be deeply influenced by each other. Mothers in group discussions shared a positive change in the way their relationships with their mothers were and how they want their relationships to be with their daughters. Most of them said that they had regular conversations with their daughters about their school life and are aware of their daughters' aspirations. A mother narrated that *"I inquire about her study time. I told her to study early morning from 4 AM to 6 AM, after that 9 AM to 3 PM she goes to school. If she wants to clean the house then it is ok otherwise, she should study again from 3 PM to 5 PM. "* While most mothers discussed their daughter's studies, others didn't make such effort because that they can't understand it, since they are illiterate. Most mothers (73%) shared that they could make out if their daughters are having problems through facial cues and body language. 86% of the daughters in the study shared their problems. Within this, 94% of the focus is on health, 96% on education and 70% of the focus for discussion with mothers is on safety. On the other hand, it was found that mothers had limited agency within the household due to their husband's leverage and are thus unable to solve their daughter's problems. It was felt by 35% of the daughters that their mothers did not have the agency to negotiate with their fathers to solve problems.

5. Findings

At the outset, the study looked at aspirations of mothers for their daughters and aspirations of daughters for their own education and career. For the following discussions, aspirations are preferences for future of the daughters, a desire to achieve the goal with some kind of effort to reach that target. We did not look at the feasibility (without any constrains) of reaching the goal, instead, just delved on the mothers' and daughters' willingness to invest. On the other hand, expectations refer to actual beliefs of the future of daughters, considering binding constraints that may affect the aspirations. Wherever suitable, a comparison was made between the younger aged girls (10 to 14 years old) with older aged girls (15 to 18 years old).

5.1. Daughter's aspirations:

In terms of educational aspirations, majority of girls who are currently in school (n=373) aspired to complete their graduation (43%)**, however, only half of these girls expect to actually complete graduation, while the rest expect to complete till their 12th or 10th standard due to various barriers,**

they expect to face in the future such as high expenses and pressure to get married. The next majority is of girls who want to complete their education till 12th (30%), however, again, half of the girls expect to actually complete their 12th, while the rest expect to complete their 10th or lower classes. Only 9.91% aspire to complete their education beyond graduation.

For girls who are currently not going to school (n=22), 86% would like to study further if given a choice now. Out of those girls, 32% would like to complete their 10th class, an equal percentage would like to complete graduation, while 26% would like to complete 12th.

Overall, it was observed that when aspirations are compared to expectations, a lower number of girls expect to complete graduation (23.59%) than those who aspire for it (43%). A rise of 18% was seen for girls who expect to finish only till 10th class was observed in comparison to those who aspire for it. The difference between aspiration and expectations was higher for older girls than was for younger girls. Interestingly, the percentage of girls who are unsure of what to expect for their education is higher (12.87%) than those who are unsure about their aspirations (6.70%) – the difference is more among younger girls than older.

Some challenges to achieving their educational aspirations as highlighted by girls during focus group discussions:

- **Financial constraints:** 40% of girls think that higher education is expensive since they must incur costs of stationery, books, and travel
- **Social norms:** 22% of the girls feel that they will face the pressure to get married before they can achieve their educational aspiration. Presence of passive societal pressure to marry off the girls; many respondents find it difficult to argue for their child's education as a girl who has been educated more is subjected to more dowry. Due to this reason, many fathers oppose their daughter's study
- **Burden of household chores:** Girls often carry the burden of taking on households' chores such as cooking and cleaning, taking care of younger siblings and elderly within the households. They support their mother in these tasks.
- **Inaccessibility:** Girls must travel large distances for schools and colleges
- **Lack of infrastructure:** Where schools are available, there were several vacant posts reported for faculty members or complaints of classes not being scheduled regularly. Absence of streetlights or *pukka* roads also becomes a deterrence
- **Safety:** Mothers feel unsafe sending their child to schools out of fear of rowdy men who harass schoolgirls

Girls currently going to school when asked about their aspirations for becoming economically independent, majority desired to become a teacher (32.44%), followed by nurse (20.38%), and doctor (12.60%). It is evident that a higher proportion of younger girls aspire to become teachers (36.68%), while for older girls' higher proportion aspire to become a nurse (27.78%). Moreover, more younger girls (16.59%) are unsure of what they want to become than their older counterparts (9.72%).

It was observed that majority of the girls who aspire to be teachers, doctors or nurses do not have matching educational aspirations. For example, for 47% of the girls who aspire to complete education only till 10th or 12th, 31% aspire to be teachers, 16% aspire to be nurses, 10% aspire to be doctors. Of the more than 20% who aspire to be nurses, 38% will want to study till 12th. Of the 13% girls who aspire to be doctors, 36% will study till 12th. In India, a minimum of graduation level education in specific fields are required to attain these careers. A key reason for this mismatch is that even though aspirations for engaging in economic activities is high, there is a woeful lack of information and career guidance- 70% of the girls do not have concrete source of information for career guidance.

5.2. Mother's aspirations:

When mothers were asked about their educational aspirations for their daughters, 52.41% said their daughters should study as much as they want, 18.48% said they should complete their 10th class, and

17.47% said they should complete 12th class. Only 7.09% specifically mentioned they should complete their college education. As for career aspirations, overall, is similar what was shared by daughters. A higher proportion of mothers want their daughters to be a teacher (23.29%), a nurse (12.41%), and doctor (7.34%). It is important to note that a large proportion (36.46%) of mothers have not yet thought about a career for their daughters. There are 3.29% of mothers who do not want their daughters to work but want them to get married.

5.3. Communication between mothers and daughters

A deep dive into the career aspirations expressed by the mother and daughter pairs reveals another story. While the discussions above highlight the general thought of the respondents on what career aspirations are, when aspirations between the mother and daughters are matched, it was found that for more than 65% mothers, aspirations do not match with that of her daughter. In 6% of instances, both have not thought about it and in 8% the daughter has not. Hence, there are only 20% pairs for which mothers' and daughters' aspirations match. Further analysis was carried out for popular career aspirations for pairs where it did not match.

1. For mothers who aspire for their daughters to become teachers, 34% want to become a doctor and 25% want to become nurse.
2. For mothers who aspire for their daughters to become nurses, 50% want to become teachers, 14% want to become doctors and 14% want to become police officers.
3. For mothers who aspire for their daughters to become doctors, 68% want to become teachers while 24% want to become nurses.

6. Discussion

First and foremost, this study gives detailed insights into the lives of mothers associated with Self-Help Groups and their daughters living in rural Jharkhand. Mothers were themselves found to be victims of child marriage, who received no or poor education as adolescent girls, held low decision-making powers within the household and lack negotiation and communication skills. More than a quarter of the mothers had a child when they should have been in school and are now either home makers or are involved in activities such as cultivation for which they are not paid. Their only aspiration now is seeing their children progress in life and be able to contribute to the income of their household. The following are the key takeaways from this paper:

1. Mothers and daughters have a cordial relationship, and daughters share information about their health, education, and safety issues with their mother. However, a visible breach in the relationship is the flow of discussion on education and career aspirations – as is evident in the rest of the paper. While mothers are interested that their daughters' study further, they are unable to contribute much to the progress of their career. This is either because mothers are not educated and aware or due to low decision-making powers within the household and inability to negotiate with their husbands.
2. A significant finding of the study was the gap between daughters' aspirations and expectations due to various challenges they face to receive school education. Majority of girls aspire to complete their graduation, but half of them do not expect to achieve this in reality and feel that they will be able to complete only their 12th or 10th. The next large bunch of girls are those who aspire to complete their 12th, and within this group half of them do not expect to achieve this in reality and feel that they will be able to complete only their 10th or are unsure. The main reasons shared by girls for the gap between aspiration and expectation are financial constraints, social norms, burden of household chores, distance to school, lack of infrastructure and safety.
3. Most popular career choices among girls are teachers, nurses, and doctors. As expected, there was more clarity about their career among elder girls in comparison to younger girls. However, there is a disparity between educational and career aspirations. While girls aimed higher in terms of the career, they want to pursue in the future such as becoming a teacher or nurse or doctor, most of them did not have matching educational aspirations, i.e., not all of them want to complete their graduation or specific degrees, which is a minimum requirement to pursue such careers in India. A

key reason identified for this mismatch in this study is lack of concrete source of information and career guidance.

4. Most mothers want their daughters to study as much as they want while 36% want them to study till 12th or 10th class only. Overall, career aspirations shared by mothers for their daughters are similar with popular choices such as teacher, nurse, and doctor. Among mothers and daughters, there is a high priority towards school education, however, career choices point towards traditional career options more 'suited' for girls in rural communities. Moreover, it should be noted that around 33% of mothers have not yet thought about a career for their daughters. There are 4% of mothers who do not want their daughters to work but want them to get married.
5. Overtly, mothers gave a high priority to studies, however, there is telling story when aspirations of mothers are matched with that of daughters. For 65% of mothers-daughter pairs, career aspirations do not match. This signified lack of communication and clarity between the duo regarding which path the daughter must take in the future and prepare for it.

The lack of adequate guidance regarding education and career are the barriers towards effectively shifting norms around child marriage in rural communities. Mothers and daughters have close bonding, but gender stereotypes are still resilient. Mothers despite being part of Self-Help Groups for years have a limited space in household level decision making regarding education and marriage of their children. The adolescent girls feel that their mothers do not have negotiation leverage with their fathers to sort out the challenges related to them. Education as an alternate option to delaying marriage has been accepted as a new norm, but the gap between education and career aspirations may cause further problems for the girls. Further dissuading factors for girls to pursue a career is the severe lack of communication and understanding between the mother-daughter duo regarding the path the girl should undertake.

7 Conclusion and way forward

The role of adolescent girl and her mother is at the centre of all efforts towards the shifting of gender norms regarding child, early and forced marriages. Mothers' role and positioning in child's upbringing needs to be strengthened for more efficient inter-generational transfer of aspirations, knowledge, and skills, as tools for empowerment to live a better life. If the mother is empowered by building her agency, enabling her to negotiate her power relations and interact with systems, she can be the banner carrier for the change in her family and society. Adolescence is the right phase of life of a young girl, when if adequately supported can result in healthy adulthood and stop incidences of child, early and forced marriages.

UMANG, a pilot initiative by Project Concern International (PCI) India, identifies education and economic aspirations as critical elements to resolve the issue of child marriage and lead the path to adolescent empowerment. Currently being implemented in the two study blocks, Godda and Nala in Jharkhand, UMANG relies on the evidence generated through this paper and the larger baseline evaluation to implement the program. PCI India has identified three pillars of this program:

- Mothers as change agents: Mothers have been identified as a key supporter to adolescent girls in their families. Given the fact that mothers are the closest friend and confidante to adolescent girls/daughters, and their aspirations matter for their children's educational outcomes, PCI took the pathway to work with mothers or adult women. PCI's efforts with these mothers or female relatives of the adolescent girls are aimed to capacitate them to support the adolescent daughters or girls towards fulfilling their aspirations at household and community levels.
- Layering on women's collective platform: PCI is working through Self Help Groups' (SHG) and higher up platforms developed and nurtured by JSLPS[1] to reach out to women in collectives to build their skills and capacitate them to encourage adolescent girls to complete school education and aspire for their future life and economic self-reliance. It aims to bring empowerment among the SHG women as collective and individuals. This will ensure that the same message, proven to work

[1] Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society

through the evidence generated, is imparted to all women under the SHG fold in the state of Jharkhand, when scaled up.

- Layering on government flagship project: Partnering with JSLPS gives PCI India the opportunity to make this a scalable model, leveraging the developed and nurtured SHG platform and the higher up federated structure to reach out to mothers of adolescent daughters and the community at large. It also gives the program access to human resources and community members, as well as the recognition and welcome it requires to work on sensitive issues such as child marriage.

8. References:

1. Dasra. 2019. Action Reaction: Understanding and overcoming backlash against girls' exercise of agency in India. Mumbai: Dasra.
2. Lloyd, C.B. and Young, J., 2009. New lessons: The power of educating adolescent girls—A girls count report on adolescent girls.
3. Malhotra, A. and Elnakib, S., 2021. 20 years of the evidence base on what works to prevent child marriage: a systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.
4. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019. The promise of adolescence: Realizing opportunity for all youth. National Academies Press.
5. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16: India. Mumbai: IIPS
6. Paul, P., 2020. Child Marriage Among Girls in India: Prevalence, Trends and Socio-Economic Correlates. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, *14*(2), pp.304-319.
7. Raj, A., Saggurti, N., Winter, M., Labonte, A., Decker, M.R., Balaiah, D. and Silverman, J.G., 2010. The effect of maternal child marriage on morbidity and mortality of children under 5 in India: cross sectional study of a nationally representative sample. *Bmj*, *340*.
8. Serneels, P. and Dercon, S., 2021. Aspirations, Poverty, and Education. Evidence from India. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *57*(1), pp.163-183.