

## IPC-Abstract 2

**Title: Influence of First Wave of Covid-19 Pandemic on Adolescent Girl's Marriages in Jharkhand, India**

### Extended Summary

**Context:** India accounts for one in three child marriages, globally. The Covid-19 pandemic has raised questions on meeting the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending child marriage by 2030, as around 2.5 million additional girls globally are at risk of marriage, in next five years<sup>1</sup>, Save the Children warned. During pandemic CHILDLINE-India witnessed 50% increase in calls for protection from abuse, violence and child marriage<sup>2</sup>. Covid-19 will disrupt efforts to end child marriages resulting in an additional 13 million child marriages between 2020-30, that could otherwise have been averted<sup>3</sup>. Thus, literature around India on this topic indicate, with economy contracted by the pandemic, the poor have been left feeling socially and psychologically vulnerable, are rushing to get their girl child married as early as possible to alleviate poverty. In this context, this paper examines issues like understanding the fear of marriage among adolescent girls during the pandemic; how many of the 15-18 years girls are already married and are vulnerable to marriage in near future; parents views about marriage of their daughter during the pandemic; likely influence of proposed marriage on continuation of studies; agency of the girls to negotiate about their marriage with parents.

**Methods:** Cross-sectional, rapid quantitative household survey was held with adolescent girls aged 15-18 years and her parents during February-March 2021, by UMANG program team in collaboration with UMANG program's field partners (Badhlav and Saathi). Data for this study was collected by trained female and male staff of partner organizations, by administering two types of data collection tools for girl and her parent (father/mother). Data was collected by personally interviewing respondents at their home. Data was collected by adhering to all the Covid-19 protocols of Government of Jharkhand, in Feb-Mar 2021. Rapid survey covered a total of 493 households. However, the following is the coverage according to type of respondent covered:

- Both girl and her parent interviewed: 463 (93.9%)
- Only parent interviewed and girl could not be interviewed: 14 (2.8%)
- Only girl interviewed and parent could not be interviewed: 16 (3.2%)

For key indicators we have provided block-wise variations and select indicators were compared between current survey (Feb-Mar 2021) the baseline survey (Jun-Aug 2019).

**Results:** Background characteristics of the surveyed households in terms of age distribution, caste and occupational distribution of parents are mostly similar in the current rapid survey (Feb-Mar 2021) and the baseline survey (Jun-Aug 2020). As both the surveys were conducted using cross-sectional survey design in the same geography of UMANG program.

In the current survey 7% of the girls aged 15-18 years were already married when this proportion in baseline survey in 2019 was 12%. Out of the 33 marriage of the current survey, 24 (73%) marriages

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<sup>1</sup> Cousins S (2020). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)32112-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32112-7).

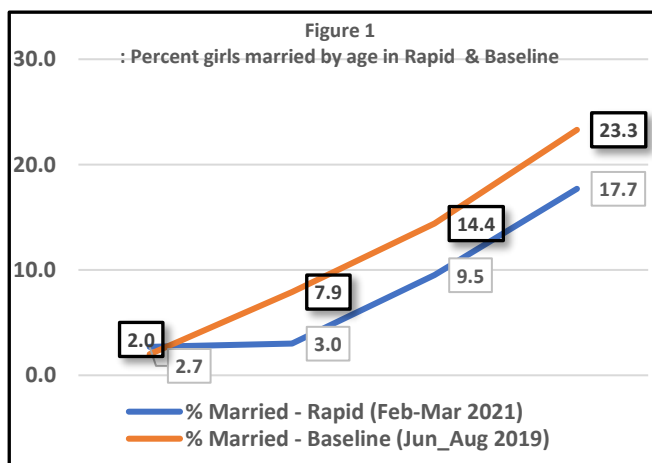
<sup>2</sup> Sehgal and Tirunagari (2020). <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/7/19075/Covid-Leads-to-More-Child-Marriages-in-India>

<sup>3</sup> UNFPA (2020). [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID19\\_impact\\_brief\\_for\\_UNFPA\\_24\\_April\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf)

happened prior to lockdown (March 2020) and remaining 9 (27%) marriages happened during pandemic (March 20 to March 2021). It implies all the 24 marriages and at least some of the marriages that happened during pandemic are child marriages. Twenty three percent of the surveyed parents and 28% of the surveyed girls reported that *'there was discussion about marriage of reference girl during pandemic'*. However, in 16% cases, both the parent and the girl said there was discussion about marriage of the reference girl. As girls and parents in the current survey were interviewed separately and it's not necessary parents always discuss about marriage of reference girl in front of her, we have noticed differences in reporting about potential marriages according to girl and parent. However, 40% parents (or 10% parents of unmarried girl), reported that they *"want to get their daughter married in 2021 /within next one year from current survey"*. This opinion about proposed marriage of girl in next one year was substantiated, as 7% parents said *"they are planning a function in terms of daughter's marriage in next six months"* Thus, it may be summarized that around 7-16% unmarried girls in UMANG program area are vulnerable for marriage in next six months to one year. Also, around 12% unmarried girls are vulnerable for dropping out from school/studies, as girl's parents said they *'do not want to send their daughter back to school when it re-opens in 2021 or uncertain about sending their daughter back to school'*.

Both during intense lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020) and at the time of rapid survey (Feb-Mar 2021) around two-in-three (64%) of the unmarried girls *"did not have"* any fear of marriage. However, 9% girls were afraid of marriage *"to a large extent"*, both during intense lockdown as well as now, while 5% girls were afraid of marriage *"to some extent"* during lockdown and now, implying 15-35% girls are/were afraid of marriage during the past one year.

Out of the 479 girls aged 15-18 years covered by current survey 7% were married. In baseline survey of UMANG program this proportion was 12%. In the current survey, out of the total married, around 27% got married during pandemic/last one year, when this proportion who got married in last one year was 37% during baseline. It also implies majority of the remaining three-fourth marriages in current survey could have been child marriages, as this survey was conducted with girls aged 15-18 at the time of survey. As expected, with increase in age there is a corresponding increase in proportion married in both the surveys, with proportion married at each age being slightly higher during baseline as compared to current survey (Figure 1). Majority (67%) of the surveyed girls in current survey believe that the likelihood of their marriages has decreased due to pandemic.



Excluding Jamtara block, in current survey, 7-10% girls in current survey and 8-12% girls in baseline survey were ever married. In the current survey, as compared to other three blocks, Nala reported maximum number of ever married girls (11%) as well as maximum number of girls are on their pathway towards marriage (31-41%).

Irrespective of the block, in the current survey 16% girls said she will take decision about timing of marriage her, when this confidence level in baseline survey of 2019 was only 2%. Also, in the current survey 39% girls are confident that they will be able to convince parents about timing of marriage when this proportion in baseline survey in 2019 was only 14%. In summary, 27% girls in the current survey reported that "they are confident to discuss about timing of marriage and bridegroom with parents" as compared to such a confidence only in 14% girls in baseline survey of UMANG program in 2019 – implying girls of current survey have better agency to negotiate about their marriage as compared to agency in 2019.

In UMANG program area we did not notice increase in incidence of marriages during pandemic, although 7-10% girls are vulnerable for marriage in next one year. By ensuing continuing education of girls even during school closure, home visits to vulnerable homes about ill effects of child marriages, routine health services, by providing reproductive health education to girls, by enhancing confidence and by empowering girls and her parents - it is possible to delay likely child marriages.