



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Drivers for social change like education, legal provisions and initiatives for creating awareness have still a lot to cover with respect to eliminating girl child marriage. Comment.

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### Approach

- Start with the government's recent proposal to raise the marriageable age of girls.
- Discuss the advantages of the proposal and the need of alternative ways in order to achieve the objectives of empowering women.
- Conclude suitably.

### Answer

Child marriage is a global issue fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, social norms and insecurity, and has devastating consequences all over the world. High levels of child marriage reflect discrimination and lack of opportunities for women and girls in society.

Despite various statutory provisions in India and initiatives like Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes, the progress is not very impressive. Recently the government has proposed to raise the marriageable age of girls is a welcome step but more can be done.

### Child Marriage in India

- **Prevalence:** United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world - accounting for a third of the global total.
- **NFHS Findings about Child Marriage:** Data from the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS4) in 2015-16 shows that pre-Covid, one in four girls in India was being married before 18.
  - Around 8% of women aged 15-19 years were mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.
  - As per reports, more child marriages have been noticed during the Covid pandemic.

### Necessary steps

- **Policy Interventions:** Legislation is one important part of the approach towards eliminating girl-child marriage from India.
  - Karnataka amended the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2017, declaring every child marriage void ab initio, making it a cognisable offence, and introducing a minimum period of rigorous imprisonment for all who enable a child marriage. Similar can be done at the central level.
- **Governmental Action for Social Change:** Field bureaucrats across multiple departments,

including teachers, anganwadi supervisors, panchayat and revenue staff, all of whom interact with rural communities, should be notified as child marriage prohibition officers.

- Moreover, decentralising birth and marriage registration to gram panchayats will protect women and girls with essential age and marriage documents, thus better enabling them to claim their rights.
- **Drivers of Social Change to Play a Fundamental Role:** These include expansion of secondary education, access to safe and affordable public transport, and support for young women to apply their education to earn a livelihood.
  - Expansion of education goes far beyond mere access to it. Girls must be able to attend school regularly, remain there, and achieve.
    - States can leverage their network of residential schools, girls' hostels, and public transport, especially in underserved areas, to ensure that teenage girls do not get pushed out of education.
  - Regular gender equality conversations need to be held with high school girls and boys to shape progressive attitudes that will sustain into adulthood.
- **Empowerment Measures:** Empowerment measures, too, are required to end child marriage, such as community engagement through programmes like Mahila Samakhya.
  - Children's village assemblies in the gram panchayats across India can provide a platform for children to voice their concerns.
- **Economic Growth, Essential for Prevention of Child Marriage:** Ensuring later marriage for girls requires India to evolve not only culturally but also economically.
  - Some of this has happened, as Indians have become more prosperous, and as extreme poverty levels have declined, decline in child brides has been witnessed.
  - Economic growth will save Indian girls from child marriage. Combined with educational and cultural awareness against a sex preference, which no doubt will take longer; economic success a lasting solution.

Drivers for social change like education, legal provisions and initiatives for creating awareness have still a lot to cover with respect to eliminating girl child marriage. Moreover, it is a change that has to come from within.