

Is Underage Marriage Still Prevalent Among Women in India: Evidence from the National Family Health Surveys

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Abstract: Underage marriage remains a major issue in India. Despite the legal minimum age of 18 for women's marriage, such traditions persist. The study examines how patterns have changed over time and how they differ by place and by social or economic status. The focus was on women aged 20-24. The study used data from five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The survey period spans from 1992-93 to 2019-21. In this context, underage marriage refers to a woman's first marriage occurring before she reached 18. The study examined patterns using descriptive statistics. The study also used binary logistic regression to identify factors linked to marrying before 18. The results show a clear decline. In 1992-93, 61.6 per cent of women reported underage marriage. By 2019-21, the share fell to 22.3 per cent. Still, the decline was not even across India. In 2019-21, the highest rates were seen in West Bengal (41.5%), Tripura (40.3%), Bihar (38.7%), Assam (31.9%) and Jharkhand (31.6%). Rates were higher for rural women than for urban women. Women with no education also showed higher rates. The same was true for women living in poorer households. The share was 28.5 per cent in rural areas and 14.2 per cent in urban areas. Among women with no education, it was 46.0 per cent, while it was 3.0 per cent among those with higher education. In the poorest wealth group, it was 38.3 per cent. In the richest group, it was 7.2 per cent. The regression results matched these patterns. Rural residence raised the odds of underage marriage. Education and household wealth lowered those odds. Overall, the study suggests that national change has not removed big gaps across regions and social groups. Better schooling for girls is important. Stronger support for families' financial situation also matters. Targeted efforts can help address areas where risk remains high.

Keywords: Underage Marriage, Child Marriage, Early Marriage, Adolescent Marriage, Teenage Marriage.

Nomenclature:

NFHS: National Family Health Survey

I. INTRODUCTION

Underage marriage-commonly referred to as child, early, adolescent or teenage marriage- remains a deeply entrenched social problem in many parts of the world. These terms are often used interchangeably in academic and policy discourse.

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They all describe a marital union that takes place before individuals attain the legally recognised age of adulthood. The Child Marriage Restriction Act of 1929 and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006 set a legal minimum age of 18 for female marriage in India [1]. Therefore, underage marriage is defined in this study as a female getting married before turning 18 [2].

Despite considerable legislative measures, public awareness campaigns, and policy interventions, a significant number of girls continue to be affected by underage marriage in India. Its impact has been far-reaching. It has been demonstrated that early marriage lowers girls' educational opportunities, restricts their freedom of movement and decision-making, and makes them more susceptible to domestic abuse [3]. From an economic standpoint, early marriage restricts girls' opportunities for employment and subsequently results in prolonged financial dependence [4]. From a health perspective, underage marriages are linked to increased risks of early childbearing, maternal morbidity, and child mortality [5]. These are some of the reasons that call for there to be an understanding and addressing of the constant hindrances surrounding underage marriage.

Therefore, the complicated interactions between cultural norms, economic instability, gender inequality, and structural disadvantages result in the incidence and persistence of child marriage in India. Low levels of education, entrenched patriarchal values, poverty, and restrictive social norms regarding female sexuality and caste or community-based practices remain the main determinants of marriage decisions in many areas. [6]. Although child marriage has gradually decreased over the previous three decades, there are still significant geographical, socioeconomic, and demographic disparities, according to nationally representative surveys.

In light of these persistent inequalities, a comprehensive, in-depth investigation into underage marriage is warranted. The present study investigates long-term patterns and socioeconomic predictors of underage marriage among women aged 20-24 years using data from all five rounds of the NFHS, which were conducted between 1992-93 and 2019-21. This study contributes to understanding why underage marriage persists in India despite legislative reforms and social progress by analysing variation across states, union territories, districts and socio-economic groups. The findings are intended to inform policymakers, practitioners, and researchers committed to eradicating underage marriage and bringing about improvements in the well-being and empowerment of girls across the country.



II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early marriage has conventionally been practised across many societies, although its prevalence and underlying motivations vary widely over time and place. With 36 per cent of the 68 million women in the world between the ages of 20-24 reportedly having been married before turning 18, underage marriage is one of the biggest issues facing the world today [7]. The practice is most common in developing regions, especially where more than 30 per cent of girls enter marriage before reaching adulthood [8].

With over 44 per cent of child brides worldwide, South Asia leads, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa at 18 per cent [4]. According to recent data, the burden of child marriage is gradually shifting from South Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa [9]. Underage marriage remains common in the Middle East and North Africa (24%) and Latin America and the Caribbean, where 29 per cent of young women marry by age 18, despite this shift in the global burden [10].

Even while there has been improvement worldwide—an estimated 25 million child marriages have been avoided in the last ten years—current rates of reduction are still insufficient to meet Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for the abolition of child marriage by 2030 [1]. Girls from low-income households, those living in rural areas, and those with no education are disproportionately affected by the practice [11].

Early marriage has long been ingrained in Indian norms and cultural customs [12]. Early marriage and confinement were widely accepted as traditional norms [13]. Child marriage persists despite several statutory reforms, including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), demonstrating ingrained sociocultural and financial limitations. Research indicates that reproductive and health outcomes are strongly correlated with marriage age, with early marriage being linked to poor mother and child health indices [14].

Research has consistently highlighted a range of socio-economic determinants associated with early marriage in India. Compared to their more advantaged peers, women with lower levels of education, media exposure, and meaningful employment typically marry younger [15]. Economic insecurity is a major factor, and the fact that daughters are often looked upon as an economic liability often compels their parents to marry them off early as an economic measure [16]. In some patriarchal societies, the maintenance of the mother-in-law's honour and the enforcement of virginity, sexuality, and honour often play an important role as factors that promote early marriage [17].

Several Indian studies explicitly emphasise the importance of caste, tribe and religion in shaping the timing of marriage. In general, women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes typically marry earlier than those from other caste groups [18]. Religion also affects marriage timing, as some communities are stricter in observing traditional gender and marriage norms [19]. Regionally, southern India is characterised by certain cultural practices, such as consanguineous marriage, that result in lower ages at marriage in some communities [6].

Despite the growing body of literature, there is a dearth of knowledge regarding long-term national trends, district-level variations and the combined impact of socio-economic determinants on underage marriage in India. Most existing studies focus on specific states, specific socio-economic groups, or short time periods. This highlights the need for a comprehensive, multi-decadal analysis with nationally representative data, which the present study tries to fill.

A. Objectives

1. To study the prevalence of underage marriage among women in the age group 20-24 years in India.
2. To investigate the variations in underage marriage among Indian women in the age group 20-24 years at the state, district and socioeconomic levels.
3. To determine the key factors influencing underage marriage amongst women aged 20-24 years in India.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Source

This study analyses National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data of 1992-93, 1998-99, 2005-06, 2015-16, and 2019-21. The NFHS is a good resource for examining underage marriage since it offers nationally representative data on health, socioeconomic, and demographic characteristics. The analysis is limited to women aged 20-24 because this age group permits the assessment of recent marriage patterns with minimal recall bias. Sample sizes for this age group are 17,970 (1992-93), 16,586 (1998-99), 22,781 (2005-06), 122,964 (2015-16), and 119,437 (2019-21).

B. Operational Definition

According to India's legislative framework, underage marriage is defined in this study as a girl's first marriage before the age of 18.

The dependent variable is binary:

1=married at the age of 18 or younger.

0=married at the age of 18 or older.

C. Analytical Approach

The analysis was carried out in three stages:

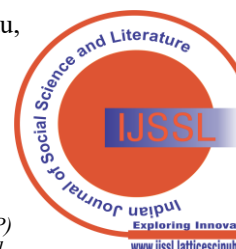
D. Descriptive Analysis

The prevalence of underage marriage was calculated for each round of NFHS to assess temporal trends over time. The association between underage marriage and important socioeconomic and demographic factors were examined using cross-tabulations.

E. Explanatory Variables

The following variables were included as potential determinants based on the existing literature:

- **Place of residence:** Urban, Rural
- **Educational Attainment:** No education, Primary, Secondary, Higher.
- **Household wealth index:** Poorest, Poorer, Middle, Richer, Richest.
- **Religion:** Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Other.





- **Caste/Tribe:** Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Classes, General.

These variables indicate the structural, cultural, and economic factors believed to affect marriage timing.

F. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

To evaluate the overall impact of socioeconomic and demographic factors on the probability of underage marriage, a binary logistic model was estimated.

The form of the model is given below:

$$\log\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \mu_i$$

Where:

P = probability that a woman aged 20-24 years will be married before 18 years of age

X_1 – X_5 = explanatory variables (as described above)

β_0 = intercept

μ_i = error term

Results are presented as odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals. P-values determined statistical significance, and all analyses were performed in SPSS version 25.

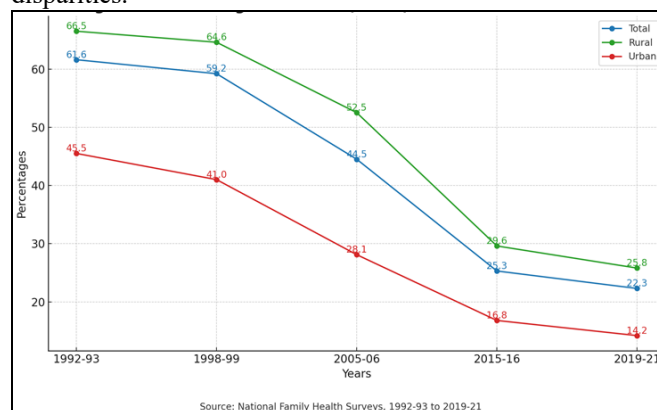
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Prevalence of Underage Marriage at the National Level

The prevalence of underage marriage among women aged 20-24 has sharply declined, from 1992-93 to 2019-21 (Figure 1). The share of women married before 18 dropped from 61.6 per cent in 1992-93 to 22.3 per cent in 2019-21, showing remarkable progress in nearly three decades. However, this decline has not eliminated the persistence of underage marriage, which still affects one in every twenty young women and remains a continuing challenge.

Clear distinctions remain between rural and urban areas. Underage marriage was more common in rural than in urban areas in every survey round. In 2019-21, 14.2 per cent of urban women and 25.8 per cent of rural women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18. Limited educational

opportunities, socio-cultural norms, and adverse economic conditions in rural India likely contribute to these disparities.



[Fig.1: Percentage of Women (20-24) Married Before 18 in India]

B. State-Level Variations

State-level analysis indicates considerable heterogeneity (Table 1). Due to socioeconomic development and greater awareness, historically high-prevalence states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar and Assam have seen a notable decline over time.

However, some states have a high prevalence. In 2019-21, West Bengal (41.5%), Tripura (40.3%), Bihar (38.7%), Assam (31.9%), and Jharkhand (31.6%) registered some of the highest levels of underage marriage.

On the other hand, states such as Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala and Goa consistently report low levels. The differences reflect differing educational attainment, gender norms, economic development, and enforcement of marriage laws.

Some Union Territories, especially Lakshadweep and Ladakh, have almost zero prevalence in most NFHS rounds. This indicates the success of localised efforts, with strong institutional support and socio-cultural attitudes that discourage early marriage.

Table I: Percentage of Women (20-24) Ever Married Before 18 Across States and Union Territories of India

States /UTs	1992-93	1998-99	2005-06	2015-16	2019-21
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	N. A	N. A	N. A	16.1	15.4
Andhra Pradesh	76.8	72.3	54.7	32.7	29.6
Arunachal Pradesh	57.1	44.4	39.1	27.1	18.5
Assam	67.9	57.4	38.0	32.4	31.9
Bihar	67.5	67.7	60.3	39.0	38.7
Chandigarh	N. A	N. A	N. A	12.4	10.0
Chhattisgarh	N. A	N. A	51.8	20.1	11.8
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	N. A	N. A	N. A	27.1	28.3
Goa	25.0	33.3	12.5	9.6	5.6
Gujarat	37.2	47.7	33.5	22.6	18.9
Haryana	58.4	47.9	39.8	18.4	12.0
Himachal Pradesh	30.4	16.1	12.6	8.7	5.4
Jammu & Kashmir	31.4	41.5	13.9	8.4	4.4
Jharkhand	N. A	N. A	61.2	37.0	31.6
Karnataka	67.5	59.5	41.2	23.2	20.5
Kerala	34.9	28.1	15.4	7.7	6.3
Ladakh	N. A	N. A	N. A	N. A	0.0
Lakshadweep	N. A	N. A	N. A	0.0	0.0

Madhya Pradesh	72.5	72.8	53.0	30.1	21.8
Maharashtra	64.9	58.7	39.0	25.0	21.4
Manipur	33.3	26.1	12.0	13.0	16.4
Meghalaya	41.3	44.8	25.0	16.4	19.3
Mizoram	27.3	20.0	19.0	9.9	9.0
Nagaland	27.3	42.1	21.9	13.4	5.6
NCT of Delhi	36.8	32.0	21.1	14.1	10.1
Odisha	62.0	55.7	36.3	21.1	20.4
Puducherry	N.A	N.A	N.A	10.9	5.6
Punjab	21.0	21.4	19.4	7.3	8.7
Rajasthan	69.0	68.0	57.1	29.8	21.4
Sikkim	N. A	42.9	28.6	13.7	10.0
Tamil Nadu	48.4	35.8	21.6	15.8	12.7
Telangana	N. A	N. A	N. A	25.3	23.5
Tripura	61.5	56.9	41.3	32.5	40.3
Uttar Pradesh	60.8	65.6	53.1	18.6	14.8
Uttarakhand	N. A	N. A	22.4	14.0	9.6
West Bengal	69.1	57.9	53.3	40.9	41.5
India	61.6	59.2	44.5	25.3	22.3

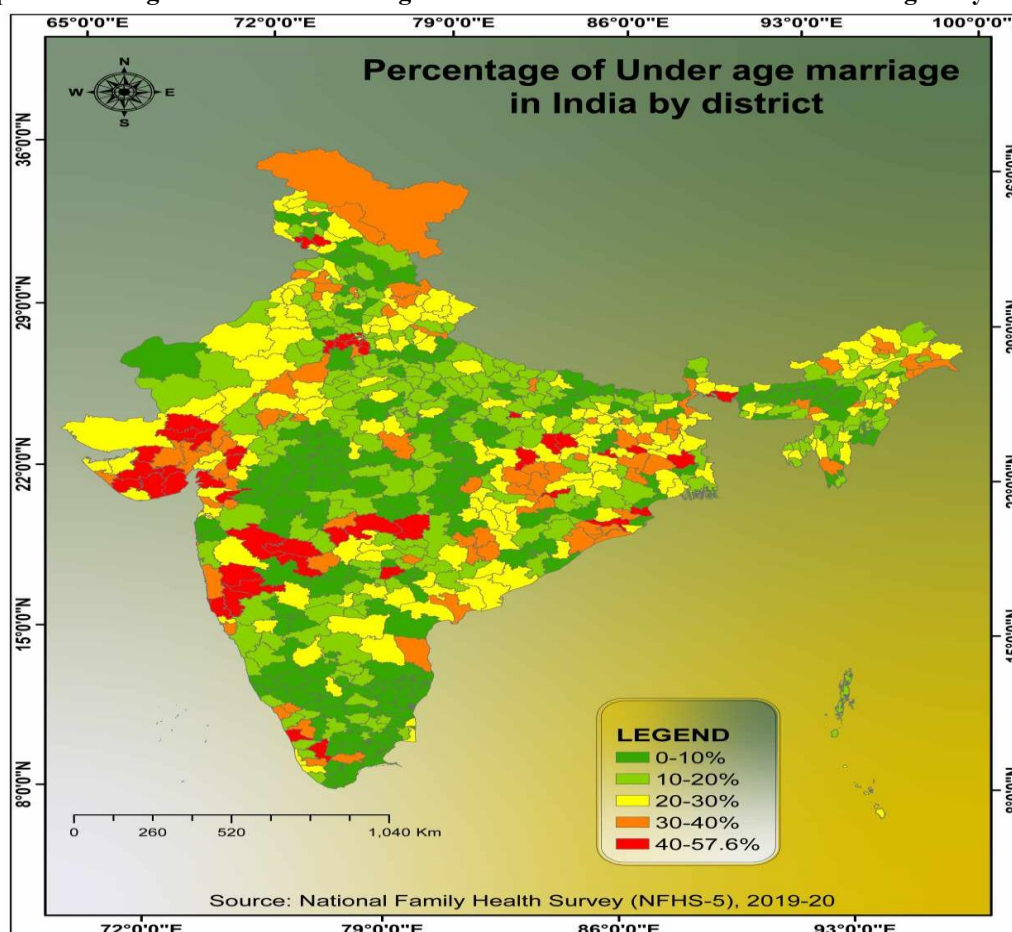
Source: Calculated from National Family Health Surveys, 1992-93 to 2019-21

NA: Not Applicable

C. District-Level Patterns

Spatial clustering is also evident at the district level (Map 1). Lower-prevalence districts are concentrated in northern and southern areas, whereas high-prevalence districts are concentrated in the eastern (West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha) and northeastern regions. Such patterns highlight the need for region-specific rather than homogeneous national interventions.

Map 1: Percentage of Indian Women aged 20-24 who Were Married Before Turning 18 by District



Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-20

Socio-economic Differentials

D. Place of Residence

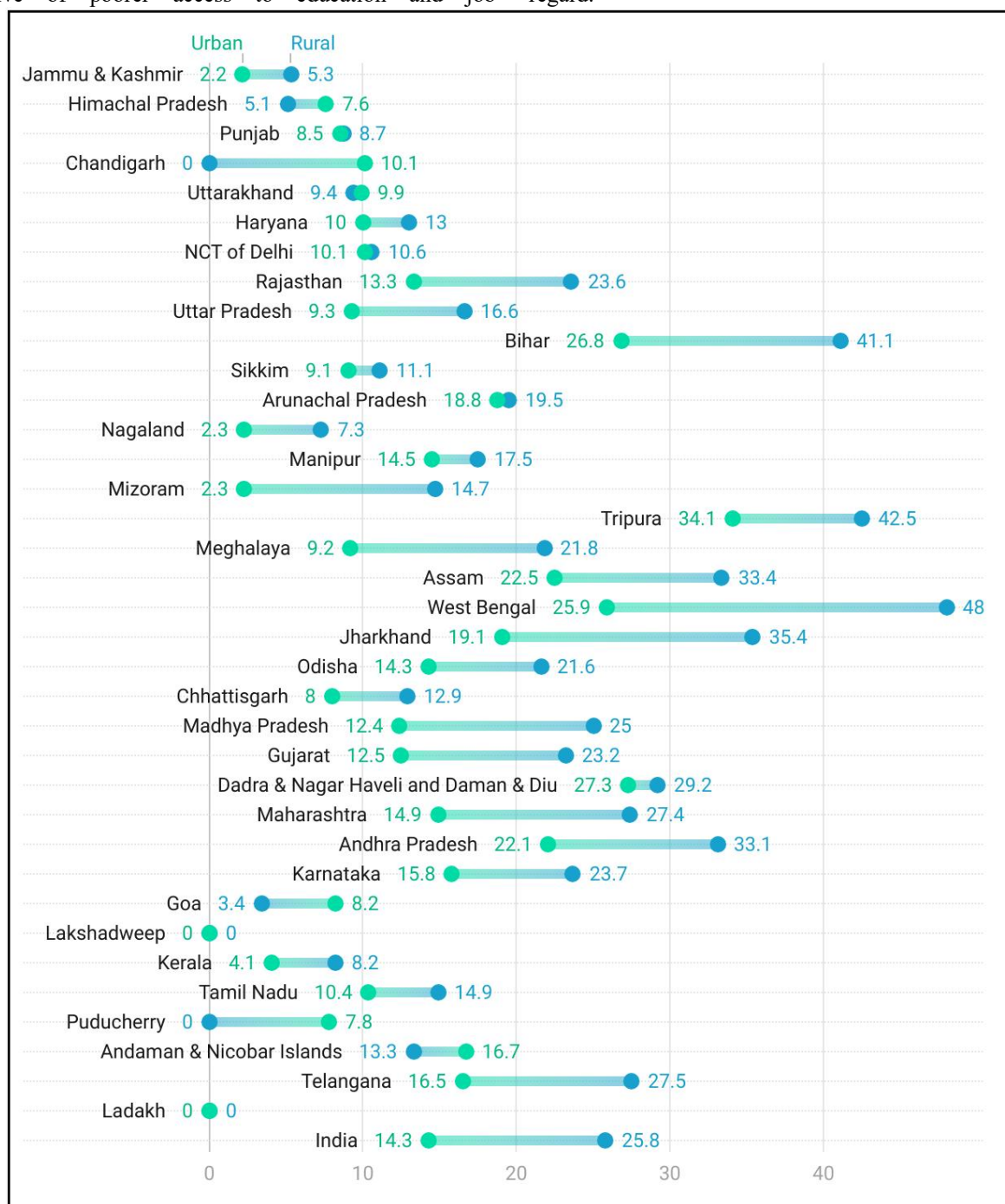
In India, the rural or urban place where someone lives matters a lot for how often underage marriage happens (Figure 2). In 2019-21, 25.8 per cent of rural girls aged 20-24 were married before turning the legal age of 18. For girls

in urban areas, the share was lower, at 14.2 per cent. This gap is visible across most states and Union Territories. There are significant differences between rural and urban areas



in several states, including West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Assam, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. For example, in West Bengal, 48 per cent of rural women aged 20-24 were married before age 18, compared with 25.9 per cent of women in urban areas. These differences are most likely indicative of poorer access to education and job

opportunities, greater compliance with traditional norms, and less stringent implementation of child marriage laws in rural settings. Currently, several states and Union Territories, such as Punjab, NCT of Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim, show comparatively low levels in both rural and urban areas, indicating less inequality in this regard.



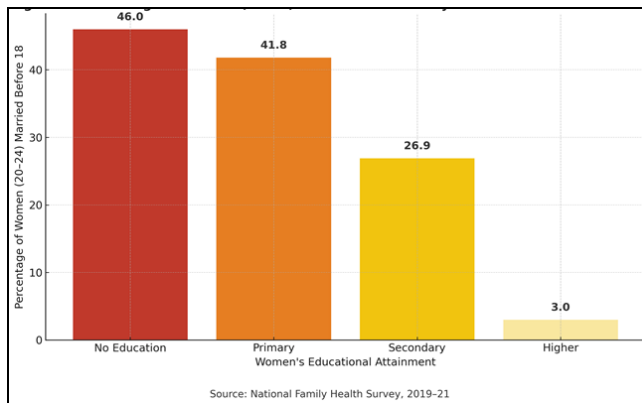
[Fig.2: Percentage of Women (20-24) who Were Married Before Turning 18 by Place of Residence in India's States and Union Territories]

Source: National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

E. Education

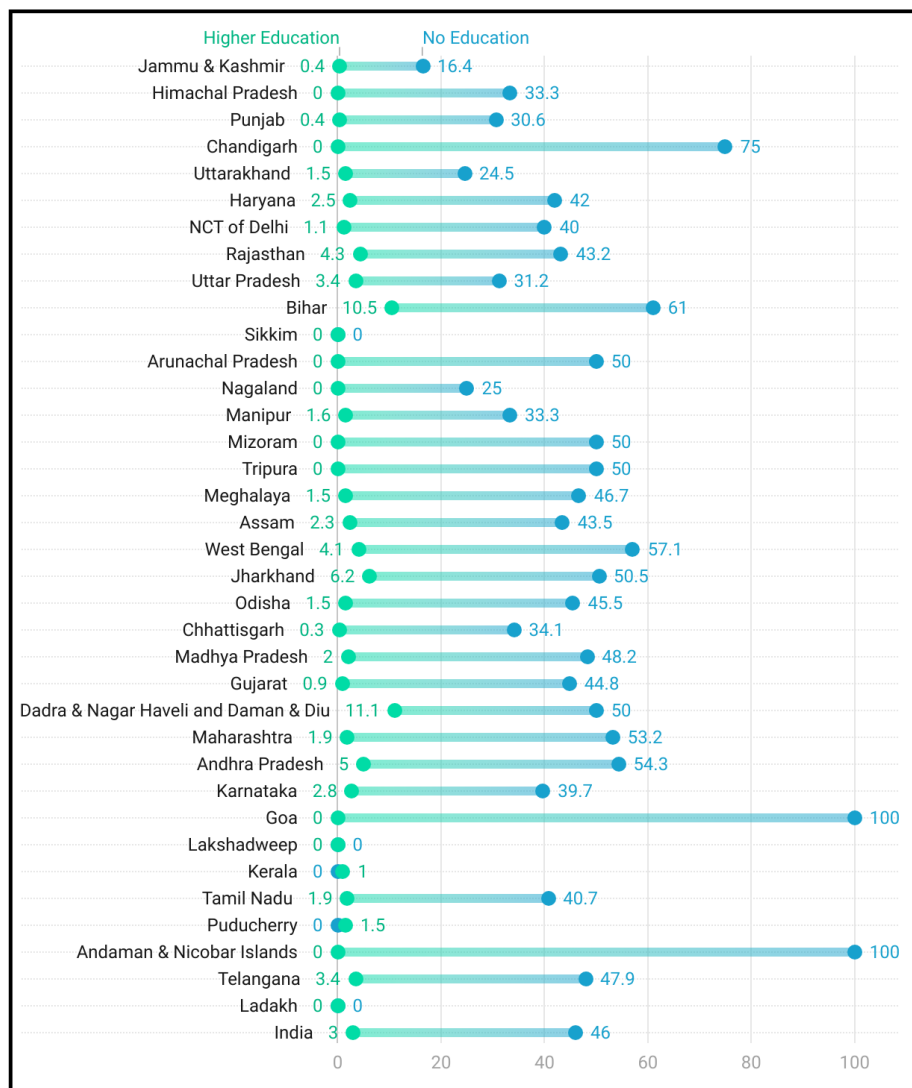
Educational attainment has a strong inverse relationship with underage marriage (Figure 3). Just 3 per cent of women with higher education got married before turning 18 in 2019-21, compared to 46 per cent of women with no education. Education probably delays marriage by increasing girls' aspirations, expanding their knowledge,

and improving access to better economic opportunities. The results confirmed that education is one of the strongest protective factors against early marriage.



[Fig.3: Percentage of Women (20-24) Married Before 18 by Educational Attainment in India]

Underage marriage among women with higher education is almost nonexistent in several states and Union Territories, including Ladakh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Goa, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Chandigarh, and Himachal Pradesh (Figure 4). This implies that education not only delays marriage by keeping girls enrolled longer but also enhances aspirations, bargaining power, and awareness of rights.



[Fig.4: Percentage of Women (20-24) in India's States and Union Territories who Were Married Before Turning 18 by Level of Education]

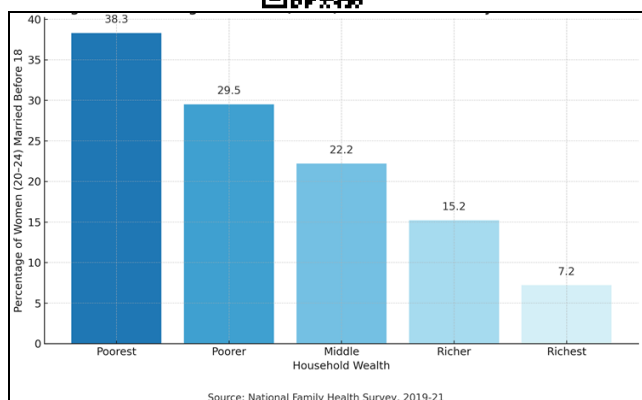
Source: National Family Health Survey

F. Household Wealth

There is a notable wealth gradient in underage marriage (Figure 5). Compared to girls from the richest households, those from the poorest households are significantly more likely to marry young.

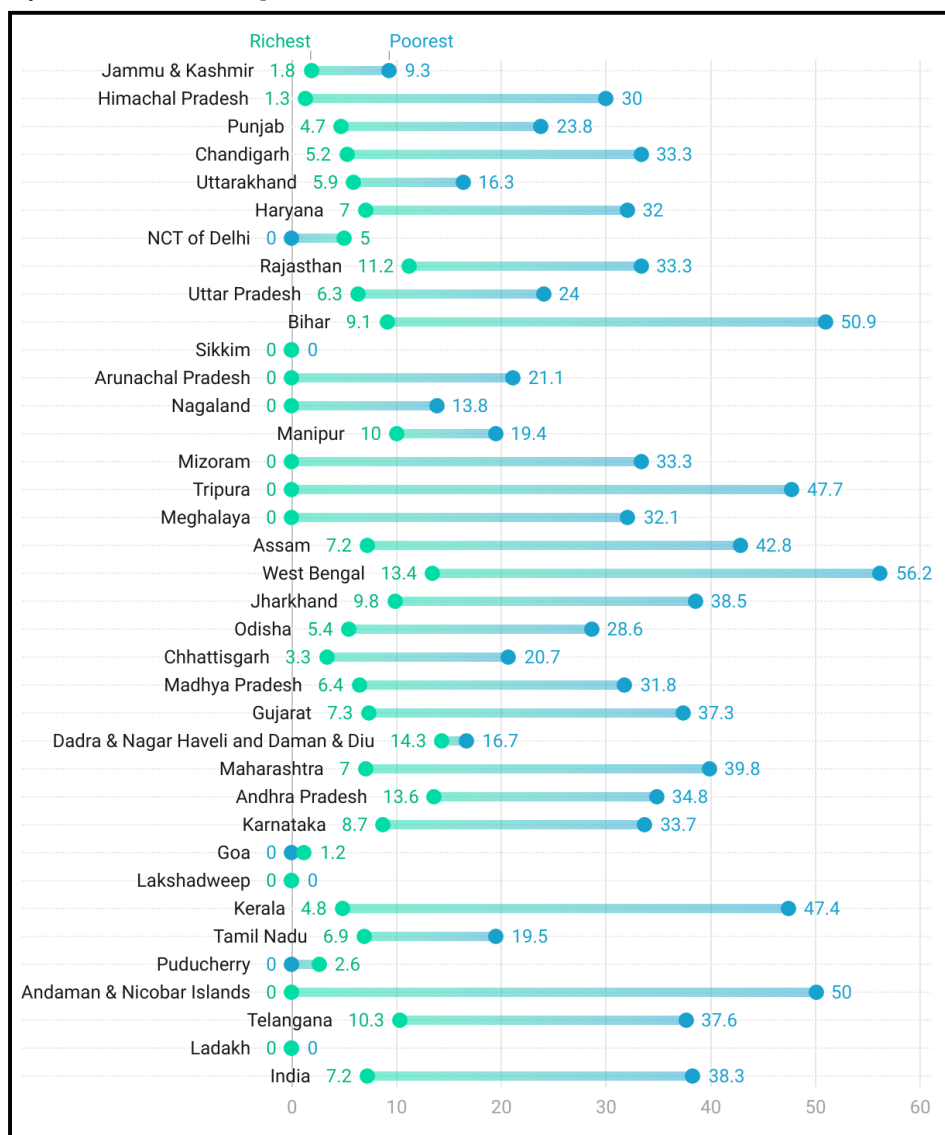
At the national level, the poorest wealth quintile showed a prevalence of 38.3 per cent, while the richest quintile

exhibited a prevalence of only 7.2%. This may reflect poverty-related factors, such as reduced household spending, efforts to secure a daughter's economic future through marriage, and vulnerability to social pressure in disadvantaged families.



[Fig.5: Percentage of Women (20-24) Married Before 18 by Household Wealth]

In many states/UTs (e.g., Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Tripura, West Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Assam, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, and Gujarat), the contrast between the poorest and richest groups is even starker (Figure 6). Yet in some contexts (such as NCT of Delhi, Puducherry, and Goa), prevalence is higher among the richest than among the poorest, suggesting context-specific dynamics that warrant further qualitative investigation.



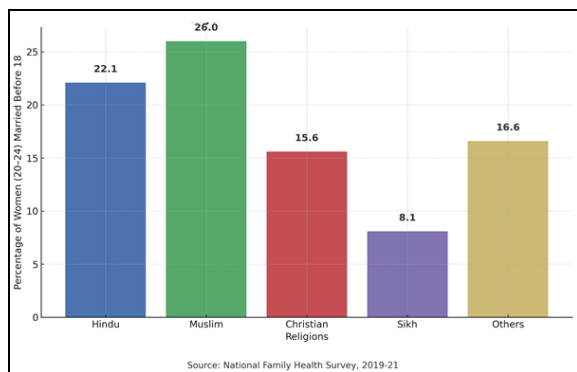
[Fig.6: Percentage of Women (20-24) in India's States and Union Territories who Were Married Before Turning 18 Based on the Poorest and Richest Household Wealth Index]

Source: National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

G. Religion

Muslims report the highest prevalence (26%), followed by Hindus (22.1%). Christians (15.6%) and Sikhs (8.1%) show relatively lower levels (Figure 7). Some patterns may reflect how each group handles marriage timing, gender expectations, and how much women study. They may also differ because of income and other community-specific

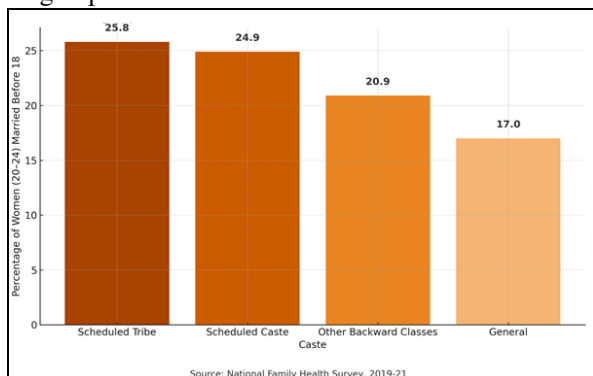
factors. In the "others" group, which covers smaller faith communities, the share is 16.6 per cent. This is lower than in a few of the bigger groups. Even so, early marriage remains an issue across different religions.



[Fig.7: Percentage of Women (20-24) Married before 18 by Religion]

H. Caste and Tribe

Underage marriage differs by caste group (Figure 8). In the Scheduled Tribe group, the share is 25.8 per cent. For Scheduled Castes, it is 24.9 per cent. Other Backward Classes show 20.9 per cent. The general category is the lowest at 17 per cent. These results match what is known about social gaps. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have faced long-term exclusion. They often have less money and fewer school options. Marriage customs can also play a role. Beliefs about marriage timing and family ties may push girls to marry sooner in these communities. Gender roles in these groups can also matter.



[Fig.8: Percentage of Women (20-24) Married before 18 by Caste in India]

I. Determinants of Underage Marriage in India: A Logistic Regression Analysis

From the binary logistic regression results, you can see the net impact of key social and economic factors on the odds of underage marriage for women aged 20-24 in India (Table 2). The model shows which determinants remain significant even after accounting for overlapping influences, including place of residence, education, wealth, religion, and caste, by controlling for several variables simultaneously. By including several variables at the same time, the model shows which factors still matter even after accounting for related factors such as where women live, their schooling, household wealth, religion, and caste.

J. Place of Residence

After accounting for education and wealth, rural residence still predicts underage marriage. Compared with women in urban areas, women in rural areas are 2.093 times more likely to marry before age 18. This suggests the issue is not just tied to schooling gaps or low income. It also points to

stronger local expectations, weak enforcement of marriage rules, and fewer opportunities for jobs or other paths. State-level figures also match this pattern, with rural areas showing higher rates in most places.

K. Education

The strongest deterrent to teenage marriage has been proven to be education. Primary education lowers the odds by 96.3 per cent, secondary education lowers the odds by 95.7 per cent, and higher education lowers the odds by 91.5 per cent when compared to women with no education. These results reflect the descriptive findings in which underage marriage declines sharply with increasing education and is nearly zero among women with higher education in Some states/UTs. The regression confirms that education independently delays marriage, even when economic status and cultural background are held constant. This highlights the importance of retaining girls in school through secondary education and beyond.

L. Household Wealth

Household wealth has a strong, graded protective effect. Women in poorer, middle and richer groups have much lower odds than those from the poorest households. Women in the richest households have 56.6 per cent lower odds.

These effects align with descriptive statistics showing the highest prevalence among the poorest households. After accounting for schooling and place of residence, family wealth still strongly affects marriage before 18. When households have more money, families feel less forced to marry daughters off early. More resources can mean better school chances, fewer early duties at home, and more access to contacts and support.

M. Religion

The model shows small links between religion and early marriage. When the reference group is Hindus, Muslims have about 29.7 per cent lower odds of marrying before age 18. Christians show about 43.4 per cent lower odds of underage marriage. The group labelled “others” has more than double the odds, with an OR of 2.293.

In the descriptive statistics, Muslims show the highest raw prevalence. But in the regression, the pattern flips. This change points to socio-economic factors as the key driver. Education and wealth likely account for much of what looks like a religion gap. After these factors are taken into account, Muslim and Christian women appear less likely to marry early than Hindu women. So, the result is not simple. It seems tied to both social conditions and local cultural rules.

N. Caste and Tribe

Compared to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe women have 2.008 times higher odds; OBCs have 1.915 times higher odds; and general caste women have 2.515 times higher odds. Notably, these patterns differ from descriptive results that indicated higher frequency among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

This reversal suggests that when wealth, education, and residence are controlled for, caste groups traditionally





seen as “advantaged” (OBC & General) still show elevated odds. This points to deeper socio-cultural norms within these groups that may compel early marriage regardless of economic or educational conditions. It also highlights the need to view caste not as a sign of disadvantage but as a marker of community-level marriage practices.

Table II: Binary Logistic Regression Analysis of Underage Marriage among Indian Women aged 20-24

Variables	OR	95% CI		P-value
		Lower	Upper	
Place of Residence				
Urban ®				
Rural	2.093	2.025	2.164	0.000
Education				
No Education ®				
Primary	0.037	0.034	0.040	0.000
Secondary	0.043	0.040	0.047	0.000
Higher	0.085	0.080	0.090	0.000
Wealth Index				
Poorest ®				
Poorer	0.126	0.119	0.133	0.000
Middle	0.186	0.176	0.197	0.000
Richer	0.273	0.258	0.290	0.000
Richest	0.434	0.408	0.461	0.000
Religion				
Hindu ®				
Muslim	0.703	0.608	0.812	0.000
Christian	0.566	0.488	0.655	0.000
Sikh	1.087	0.908	1.301	0.365
Others	2.293	1.822	2.886	0.000
Caste				
Scheduled Caste®				
Scheduled Tribe	2.008	1.735	2.324	0.000
Other Backward Class	1.915	1.649	2.224	0.000
General	2.515	2.175	2.908	0.000

Source: National Family Health Survey, 2019-21

®=Reference category

V. DISCUSSION

Underage marriage among women aged 20-24 in India has significantly decreased over the past three decades, from 61.6 per cent in 1992-93 to 22.3 per cent in 2019-21. Even with these gains, regional differences remain large. In parts of the east and the northeast, underage marriage remains common. West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Assam, and Jharkhand fall in this group. By contrast, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Goa tend to show much lower rates, and this does not seem to change much over time. District-level data also matter. Rates are uneven and cluster in certain areas. This pattern suggests efforts should focus on specific places, not a single plan for the whole country.

Social patterns show that child marriage remains common among rural girls. It is also higher among girls with no schooling. It is higher in the poorest families. In rural areas, the rate is nearly double that in urban areas. As schooling increases, the rate drops sharply. Among women with no education, it is 46 per cent. For women with higher education, it falls to 3 per cent. We also see a clear link with household wealth. In the poorest group, 38.3 per cent of women experienced early marriage. In the richest group, the figure is 7.2 per cent. There are more gaps too. Rates vary by religion and caste. They are higher in some minority communities. They are also higher among groups that face social disadvantage.

The logistic regression results back up what we saw in the earlier descriptive analysis. Living in a rural area still increases the risk of underage marriage even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic factors. Rural women have more than double the odds of marrying early when compared with urban women. Education stands out as the strongest protection. Having primary, secondary, or higher schooling lowers the chance of early marriage compared with having no education at all. Household wealth also matters even after adjustment. Women from wealthier households show lower odds of early marriage than women from the poorest households.

Even with a long-term drop, underage marriage in India is still common. It persists because of social and economic factors, along with long-held cultural norms.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research finds that child marriage in India has gone down a lot in the last 30 years. Still, the problem remains. It shows up in some places more than others. Changes vary across states. Districts also differ a lot. People from different social and economic groups see different outcomes. So, overall improvements at the national level have not turned into steady change everywhere. The data show that rural areas matter. Education level also matters. When schooling is low, child marriage is more common. Household poverty is another strong factor. Region also shows clear differences. Religion plays a role too. Caste differences also show up in the patterns. These findings point to long-held social norms that are hard to change.

The logistic regression results show that schooling and economic stability help protect people. This holds even after accounting for other variables. It also suggests that banning underage marriage by law is not enough on its own. People need more than laws. Programs should focus on getting girls into school, especially in rural areas, and on making family life less financially shaky. Communities must also be involved so harmful ideas can change over time. A plan that fits the local setting matters. With a careful approach, progress can move faster. The goal is that girls across India can reach adulthood with their own choices, respect, and the same chances as others.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support girls' higher education by adding more scholarships for girls from low-income families.
2. Help families who are struggling most by growing livelihood support for households in the bottom wealth group.
3. Make sure child marriage rules are followed and enforced. Penalise anyone who helps arrange child marriage, and do it the same way in every case.



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After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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