

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 4195
TO BE ANSWERED ON 20.12.2024

PROTECTION OF GIRLS

4195. SHRI VIJAYAKUMAR ALIAS VIJAY VASANTH:
SHRI MANICKAM TAGORE B:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware that as per recent reports, 20% of women in the 20-24 age group in the country are married before the age of 18, if so, the details thereof; and
- (b) the steps being taken by the Government to eliminate child marriage and ensure the protection of girls in the country?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SAVITRI THAKUR)

(a): As per National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) conducted in 2019-21, 23.3% of women aged 20- 24 years were married before the age of 18 years. This shows that prevalence of child marriage which was approximately 47% reported under NFHS-3 conducted in 2005-06 i.e. since enactment of the 'The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006' (PCMA) has reduced by half during the period 2019-21 reported under NFHS- 5.

(b): 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. The responsibility to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens, investigation and prosecution of crime against women and children including prohibition of child marriages, rest with the respective State Governments/ UT Administrations; they are competent to deal with such offenses/ criminal acts.

Government has enacted PCMA to curb child marriages and to take punitive action against those associated with child marriages. Section 16 of the PCMA authorises the State Government to appoint for the whole State, or such part there of as may be specified, an officer or officers to be known as the 'Child Marriage Prohibition Officers

(CMPO)' having jurisdiction over the area or areas specified in the notification. This section also specifies the functions to be discharged by CMPOs, which include preventing solemnisation of child marriages by taking such action as they may deem fit; to collect evidence for the effective prosecution of persons contravening the provisions of the Act; to advise the individuals or counsel the residents of the locality not to indulge in promoting, helping, aiding or allowing the solemnisation of child marriages; to create awareness about the ill effects of child marriages; and to sensitize the community on the issue of child marriages. These authorities function under the respective State Governments/ UT Administrations. As such, implementation of the provisions of the Act lies with them.

The Central Government at its level undertakes awareness drives, media campaigns and outreach programs and issues advisories to the States/ UTs from time to time to highlight evil effects of this practice. The Ministry has also written to all States/ UTs to increase the number of CMPOs, as presence of Statutory Officer at local levels results in even more effective public engagement on the subject and prevention of solemnisation of child marriage. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) implements the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) component under the umbrella scheme 'Mission Shakti', wherein creation of awareness on matters pertaining to gender equality and discouraging child marriage is an important focus area. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also undertakes awareness programs and consultations with stakeholders from time to time in this regard.

In addition, Government of India has introduced 'Child Helpline' with short code 1098, a toll-free 24X7X365 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis which responds with suitable interventions to call for any form of assistance which a child requires, including for prevention of child marriages in coordination with police, CMPOs, District Child Protection Units etc. The ChildLine has also been integrated with Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112) to provide for 24x7x365 emergency and nonemergency response and services. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development launched 'Bal Vivah Mukta Bharat' campaign on 27.11.2024 at New Delhi. Under the campaign, a portal '<https://stopchildmarriage.wcd.gov.in>' has been launched to support the States/UTs in raising awareness against child marriage and for effective reporting and prevention of incidences of child marriage. The portal also has facility to provide information to citizens about Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) of all States/ UTs.
