

POLICY BRIEF:

INDIA



QUILT.AI

DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS ON CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA



CONTENTS

UNFPA POLICY BRIEF - INDIA

Introduction	1
Methodology	2
Limitations	2
Findings: Search Analysis	3
Findings: Social Media Analysis	4
I) Comments on YouTube videos denounce the practice of child marriage	4
II) The Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill of 2021 became a political issue on Twitter	5
III) General discourse on condemning child marriage is pronounced on Twitter	5
IV) Public groups and government pages on Facebook are used to mobilize and educate people	5
Recommendations	7
Conclusion	8



INTRODUCTION

India today stands on the cusp of development with a young population ready to take charge. About 21 per cent of the population in India are between the ages of 10 and 19 years, of whom 47 per cent are female and 53 per cent male.¹ Data by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) suggests a 50 per cent rise in child marriage cases in 2020 compared with the year before.² This includes formal marriages and informal unions in which children under 18 live with a partner as if married.³ Moreover, social inequality, gender norms, perceived low status of girls, poverty and lack of education lead to children in rural areas being more affected than those in urban areas.⁴

The practice denies children access to education and quality of life and adversely impacts their physical and psychological well-being.⁵

The Government of India has been proactive in tackling the issue of child marriage. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 states stringent measures for those who perform, promote and permit child marriages. Under this act, specific actions such as solemnizing, permitting and promoting child marriage are deemed punishable.⁶ The recent introduction of the Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in Lok Sabha⁷ has suggested increasing the minimum age of marriage for women.

In 2021, mobile penetration in India was approximately 492 million.⁸ However, the Internet reach was around 45 per cent.⁹ This ranked India second in the world in terms of active Internet users. Therefore, mobile Internet can potentially serve as a reliable tool to raise awareness of and compel individuals and organizations across different strata of society to take action against child marriage. For instance, the Naubat Baja Mission (2019)¹⁰ in Rajasthan uses mobile phone edutainment to address multiple issues related to adolescents' well-being, empowerment and health - including curbing the practice of child marriage. Similarly, a mobile application named Bandhan Tod,¹¹ developed in 2017, aggregates information about 270+ charities that work towards gender rights in Bihar.

People have taken to social media to rally around issues such as child marriage. Therefore, it becomes imperative to tap into the online space to understand perceptions existing within the community. This understanding can drive culturally informed initiatives by the Government, non-profit organizations and individuals. Quilt.AI, in partnership with the UNFPA Asia Pacific Regional Office, combines digital research and artificial intelligence to understand people's behaviours and attitudes towards child marriage in India.



¹ Census 2011, Office of Registrar General of India

² <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202020%20Volume%201.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://en.gaonconnection.com/india-child-marriage-covid19-pandemic-rural-girls-education-school-health/>

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>

⁶ <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2007-06.pdf>

⁷ [https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2021/The%20Prohibition%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20\(Amendment\)%20Bill,%202021.pdf](https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2021/The%20Prohibition%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20(Amendment)%20Bill,%202021.pdf)

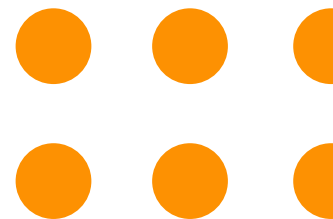
⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/748053/worldwide-top-countries-smartphone-users/>

⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/792074/india-internet-penetration-rate/>

¹⁰ <https://india.unfpa.org/en/news/mobile-phone-edutainment-helps-prevent-child-marriage>

¹¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-women-tech-idINKN1BU1Q5>

METHODOLOGY



Big data from online searches and public posts were analysed for India to identify potential trends related to child marriage. The reference period for search data ranged from April 2021 to March 2022, whereas for social media posts it ran from January 2018 to April 2022.

For India, 52 keywords and approximately 250,000 unique searches were analysed. Keywords were determined by consulting the language used in local and English-medium media and reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The keyword list therefore included both Hindi and English words. This was followed by a brief literature review on the prevalence of child marriage in the country. The keyword list was later used as a search analysis tool to determine which keywords produce online volume. The final keyword list reflects how individuals search for these terms in India, including local words and phrases. Historical search data for each keyword was extracted for month-to-month data comparison.

The keywords were further clustered into four categories: information-seeking, law-related, religion-related and help-seeking, and an aggregate of the four. The categories are defined as:



©UNFPA India

● INFORMATION-SEEKING:

general searches about child marriage or early marriage (e.g. "percentage of child marriage in India", "बाल विवाह" [child marriage])

● LAW-RELATED:

searches related to legal aspects of child marriage (e.g. "child marriage act", "legal age to get married")

● RELIGION-RELATED:

searches about religion and child marriage (e.g. "minimum age for marriage in Islam", "age of marriage according to Vedas")

● HELP-SEEKING:

searches about needing solutions to end child marriage or stopping the practice (e.g. "report on child marriage", "what to do for early marriage")

The social media discourse analysis included a qualitative read of 300 posts across Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (including 725 comments) to better understand what people are discussing on child marriage across social media platforms.

Limitations

- For search, only data from the past year can be extracted. Further, it cannot be determined who is searching for the keywords.
- Social media data depends on what the research team can receive from each platform. It is not under the research team's control when social media platforms change their data-sharing policies with third-party organizations. For example, at the end of July 2021, Facebook no longer gave access to its audience insights information.

This leads to a limited analysis of age and geography disaggregated data for this study.

- Discourse across countries differs depending on the volume of data available.

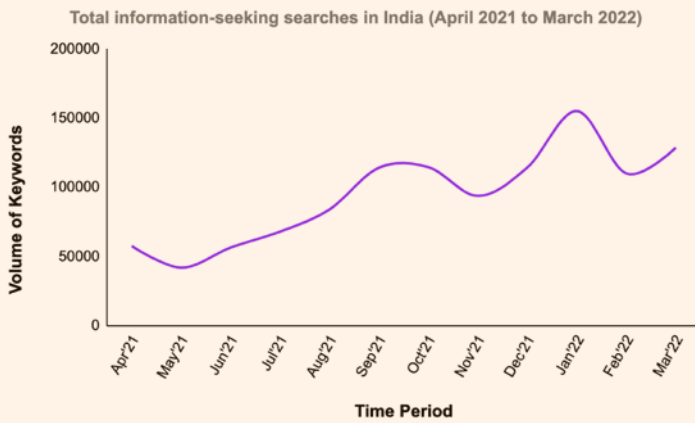


©UNFPA India/Arvind Jodha

FINDINGS: SEARCH ANALYSIS

Volume of searches across all categories showed steady growth over one year

with a 69 per cent increase between November and December 2021. This coincides with the Government of India proposition to increase the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years.¹²

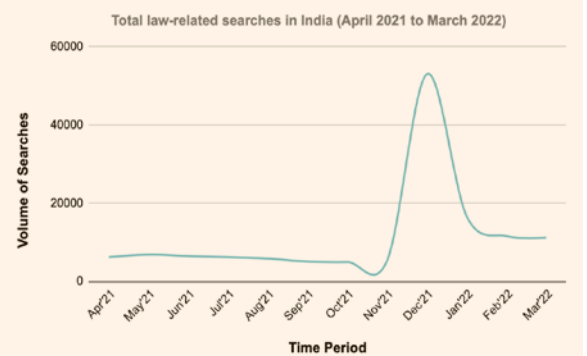


Information-seeking searches showed a 35 per cent increase from December 2021 to January 2022

which coincides with the Government's proposal and the union Cabinet's approval to change the legal age of marriage to 21.

Law-related searches saw a phenomenal 889 per cent jump between November 2021 and December 2021

This coincides with a significant legal move to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. The spike observed may be directly related to this. On the other hand, upon comparing keyword clusters with the highest volume of searches from April 2021 to March 2022, it was noticed that **information-seeking searches are significantly higher than law-related searches**. This indicates people's general interest in knowing more about child marriage.

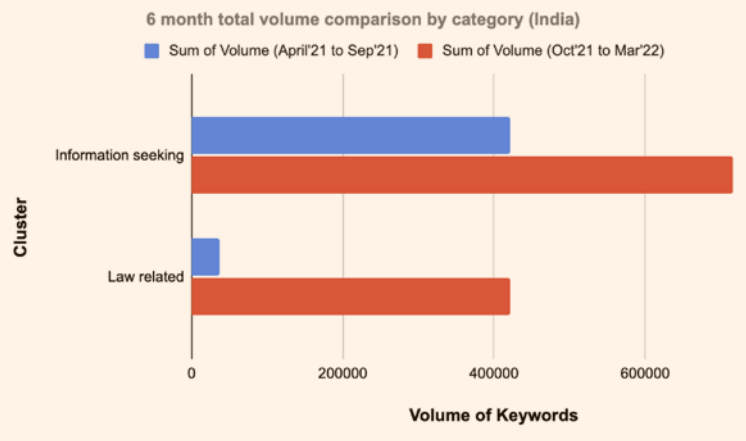


¹² <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/union-cabinet-gives-nod-to-raise-womens-marriage-age-to-21/article37968276.ece>

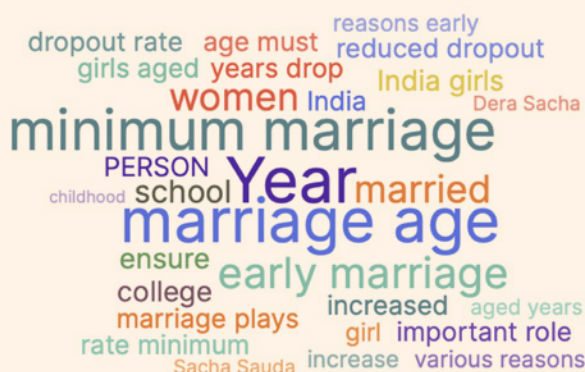
IV)

Information-seeking and law-related keywords grew by 69 per cent and 1,050 per cent between the periods April 2021 to September 2021 and October 2021 to March 2022

This is possibly due to the significant events that occurred in the latter period, prompting more discourse online and in the media regarding child marriage, including the introduction of the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021.¹³



FINDINGS: SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS



Top phrases and words detected in YouTube comments

Comments on YouTube videos denounce the practice of child marriage

YouTube as a platform includes informative content that educates people about the ills of child marriage. These include poignant advertisements by organizations such as Save the Children India or short documentaries by news organizations such as VICE Asia that portray the reality of child marriages in the country. Such videos get tremendous responses in comments (between 8,000 and 9,500).

People use the comments feature to express their views on the practice and indicate a need to “end” it. They use hashtags such as #endchildmarriage to define their support further. Others express shame and shock at the state of affairs in the country. About 20 per cent call out the Government for its laxity in controlling child marriage cases and implementing stronger laws.

Lastly, a segment of people (approximately 12 per cent) narrate stories of child marriage in their immediate families, such as their mothers and grandmothers. One user comments: “My grandmother got married when she was 12 (she’s 93 now), and whenever we talk to her about her expectations from us, she just says one thing: study and gain knowledge, so you know everything about the world. Her story is actually so sad, she wanted to study but wasn’t able to, and she is the only inspiration for me to continue my studies and stand on my own.”

Our artificial intelligence (AI) tool detected the top sentiments in 725 YouTube comments to be anger, optimism and sadness. This is indicative of the overall emotions displayed by social media users online – specifically when it comes to their engagement with the topic of child marriage. Top phrases detected in YouTube comments (see image below) can be useful when designing future social media interventions, as they help give a sense of how people are engaging with the topic.



¹³ [https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2021/The%20Prohibition%20Of%20Child%20Marriage%20\(Amendment\)%20Bill,%202021.pdf](https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2021/The%20Prohibition%20Of%20Child%20Marriage%20(Amendment)%20Bill,%202021.pdf)



©UNFPA India/Arvind Jodha

III) The Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill of 2021 became a political issue on Twitter

The introduction of the Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the parliament in 2021 received significant attention, especially online and in the media.

The proposed amendment was to increase the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21. The bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Union Cabinet Minister for Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani. Several Indian news outlets such as ANI, Deccan Chronicle and The Hindu shared live updates from the Lok Sabha proceedings on Twitter. These tweets received several responses from the general public, ranging from congratulatory comments (18 per cent) to criticism (22 per cent). However, most retweets/replies (approximately 60 per cent) focused on the political aspects and implications of the move.

III) General discourse on condemning child marriage is pronounced on Twitter

There is a visible discourse on child marriage on platforms such as Twitter. There are a variety of conversations on the topic and its prevalence in India – with international organizations (such as UNICEF India) and ordinary citizens participating in them. People express their concern and outrage on the platform, referring to NCRB's statistics on the increase in child marriage cases in the country. Thought pieces by India Development Review (IDR) and reports by the UN containing worrisome statistics are also shared on the platform.

There is also a focus on practices of child marriage and dowry in states like Bihar. NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations, political leaders and ordinary citizens participate in these conversations equally.

There are celebratory tweets of local government efforts and initiatives taken to end this practice in the state, especially through awareness programmes and campaigns

People are also quick to respond to news related to changing laws and introducing bills within other states. For instance, the Rajasthan Government's amendment to the Compulsory Registrations of Marriage Amendment Bill (2021) made it mandatory to register all marriages in the state, including those of minors.¹⁴ This prompted outrage on Twitter, with people criticizing the Rajasthan Government for what is perceived by ordinary citizens as "legalizing" child marriage.



©UNFPA India/Arvind Jodha



©UNFPA India/Arvind Jodha

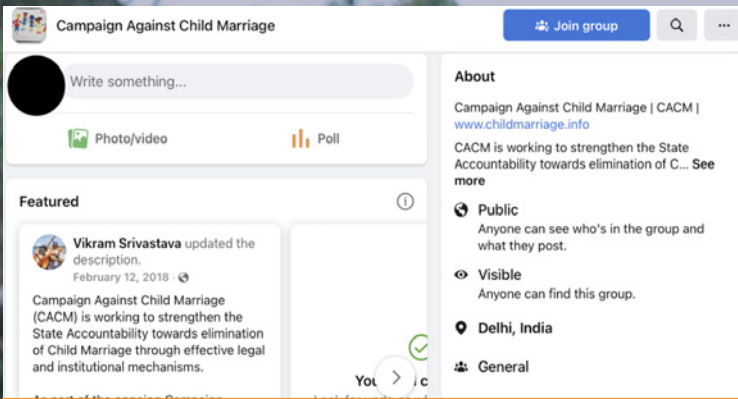
IV) Public groups and government pages on Facebook are used to mobilize and educate people

Public groups on Facebook unite and mobilize people to fight against child marriage. These groups are open to all people on the platform and regularly share news related to local legislation/initiatives and awareness campaigns. They also intermittently post messages with powerful videos and images – appealing to people's emotions. These groups operate across states such as Odisha and Maharashtra, and cities such as Delhi, with membership ranging from around 800 to 3,800 people.

Examples of these groups include: Campaign Against Child Marriage (CACM), Say NO to Child Marriage and Stop Girl Child Marriages.

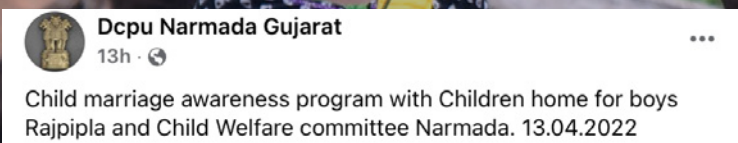
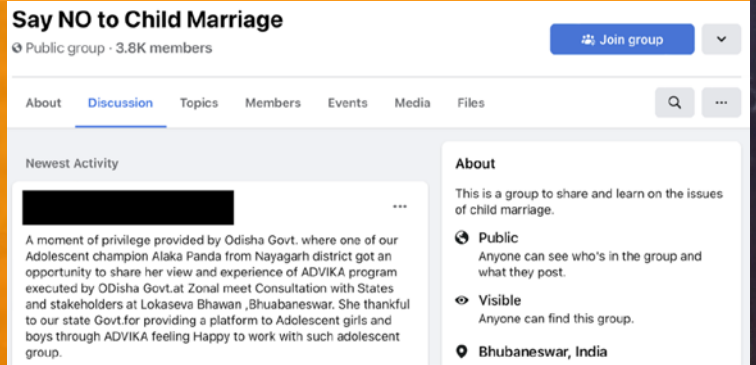
Local government units, such as District Child Protection Units (DCPU), which fall under state Women and Child Development (WCD) offices, also use the platform to share awareness initiatives and workshops conducted in government schools.

¹⁴ <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2021/10/dhaval-sheth-compulsory-registration-child-marriages-india>



Examples of Facebook groups

in Delhi and Bhubaneswar, India



(1) On dated 05/04/2021, District Child Protection Unit, DNH team has been carried out Awareness Programme at: -Ultan Faliya, Silvassa

Points covered during Awareness Programme –

- i) Child Beggar
- ii) Child Labour
- iii) Child Marriage
- iv) Good Touch & Bad Touch
- v) Child Help Line – 1098
- vi) Risk of consumption of Tobacco, Cigarette & Liquor

Today's Participants = 09

Total Participants to till date = 6154

(2) Open Shelter Home, DNH team has carried out Awareness Programme at- Amlia Fuvara, Silvassa.

Today's Participants – 25*

Total Participants to till date – 1664*

Also taken concern from the shopkeepers, that they will not engage any child labour & also distributed IEC Material at Near Masjid, Vapi Road, Silvassa.

Today's Bahendari filled-18*

Total Bahendari filled to till date= 1645



Examples of posts by DCPUs in Gujarat and Silvassa

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ● ● Stakeholders and organizations working to eradicate child marriage¹⁵ can use Facebook effectively to reach out to people and share updates on their initiatives/campaigns. Moreover, they can use the pin feature on Facebook to make important information, including helpline numbers, more accessible to people.

- ● ● "Call to action" messages and posts can be impactful as they prompt people to take proactive steps towards solving an issue. In the case of stopping child marriage, short videos on Facebook and YouTube that end with a direct call to end child marriage are likely to garner attention.

- ● ● NGOs, CSOs, and international organizations can intermittently share success stories to ensure that people hear about the strides being made in reducing child marriage. People are also likely to respond to both real and emotional content.

- ● ● Social media platforms are an essential repository for resources (as observed on Twitter). They can be leveraged to ensure that correct and actionable information is being shared for people to take note of. These include local helpline numbers, contact details of local NGOs/shelters and legal resources.

- ● ● Video is a medium that people tend to engage well with online (e.g. through comments) and can be harnessed to generate awareness. In particular, documentaries on YouTube that depict the realities of child marriage receive maximum engagement from people.

- ● ● Facebook pages and groups can be used as landing pages to direct people to other resources such as websites, helpline numbers and legal resources. They can also be used effectively to mobilize people across various geographies. It is also an effective way of keeping people abreast of local developments, which often go unreported in the media.

- ● ● Hashtags on Twitter (e.g. #IndiaAgainstChildMarriage and #EndChildMarriageinIndia) can be used to generate online support on the topic of child marriage. Multiple hashtags can be used in one post to create traction. Moreover, they can be used to develop content repositories on the platform; for instance, typing in a hashtag will direct the user to all resources on child marriage.

¹⁵ Child marriage here refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child (as defined by UNICEF).



CONCLUSION

As the practice of child marriage continues to grow in the country, it is imperative for organizations to diversify their outreach efforts. Social media platforms allow a diversity of opinions to be expressed and shared. They also offer the advantage of sharing information across geographies – making them helpful in disseminating essential resources.

In India, there is a consensus online regarding the end of child marriage. However, the discourse is still focused mainly on expressions of outrage and shock – especially reactions to instances of child marriage in the country. These reactions can be harnessed by organizations to push people towards tangible action.

Complementing on-ground initiatives in the country with a robust online advocacy and communication strategy can be effective in moving towards a future free of harmful practices such as child marriage.



UNFPA ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGIONAL OFFICE ©

2023 APRIL

Follow-up: Upala Devi, Regional Gender Advisor. For more information on the work of UNFPA in Asia and the Pacific, please visit our website at:

<http://asiapacific.unfpa.org>

This publication has been commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). The designations in this work do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers. Permission to reproduce, translate, adapt, publish, or disseminate in printed or electronic format the whole or any part of the work in the publication is granted so long as appropriate acknowledgement is given.

UNFPA Asia and the Pacific is committed to providing resources that are accessible to the widest possible audience, regardless of technology or ability. We are actively working to increase the accessibility and usability of our resources and in doing so, aim to adhere to many of the available standards and guidelines, yet acknowledge our limitations. We are striving for continuous improvement. Please contact us at <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/contact> regarding any accessibility issues.