

Prevalence Of Child Marriage In Salem, Dharmapuri And Namakkal Districts: Social Work Perspectives For Intervention

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Abstract: Marriage Is One Of The Important Social Institutions And It Is A Means Of Establishing A Family Through Which The Society Perpetuates. This Social Process Is Expressed In The Form Of Rituals And Symbols. In India 45 Percent Of Girls Are Wedded Below 18 Years. Child Marriage Is One Of The Burning Problems Of Indian Society. In India, Despite Amended Laws Advocating 18 As The Legal Minimum Age At Marriage For Females, A Substantial Proportion I.E. Every Third Adolescent Girl In The Age Group Of 15-19 Years Is Married And Every Second Married Adolescent Girl Has Given Birth To A Child. Child Marriage Or Early Marriage Is One Of The Burning Problems And Issues In Salem, Dharmapuri And Namakkal Districts District. Whereas The Minimum Age Of Marriage For Girls Is 18 And Boys Is 21. It Is Necessary That Both The Bride And Bridegroom Must Reach That Particular Age. Article 13 Of The United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child (Uncrc) Clearly States That Every Child Shall Have The Right To Freedom Of Expression And Also The Right To Choice. But The Opportunity Is Not Give To The Child To Choose His/Her Life Partner. It Is Difficult To Obtain Accurate Data On The Real Extent Of Child Marriage Owing To The Fact That Most Marriages Are Not Officially Registered. The Parents' Information Is Not Reliable. In This Regard, An Attempt Is Being Made In This Paper To Collect Qualitative Inputs From Respondents Using Case Studies, Focus Group Discussion And Problem Ranking Techniques From The Varied Sections Of The Society Residing In Salem, Dharmapuri And District. Secondary Data Is Also Being Used To Arrive At Possible Interventions From Social Work Perspective. The Detailed Interventions Put-Forth Would Be Deliberated In-Depth In The Full Paper.

Keywords: Child Marriage, Lack Of Awareness, Qualitative Inputs, Perspectives For Intervention, Social Work Perspective.

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Introduction

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Child Marriage Or Early Marriage Is One Of The Burning Problems And Issues In Salem Districts. Whereas The Minimum Age Of Marriage For Girls Is 18 And Boys Is 21. It Is Necessary That Both Groom And Bride Groom Must Reach That Particular The Age. Article 13 Of The United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child Clearly States That Every Child Shall Have The Right To Freedom Of Expression And Also The Right To Choice. But The Opportunity Does Not Give To The Child To Choose His/Her Life Partner. It Is Difficult To Obtain Accurate Data On The Real Extent Of Child Marriage Owing To The Fact Most Marriages Are Not Officially Registered. The Parents' Information Is Not Unreliable. If Girls And Boys Are Married As Children, They Will Have Lack Of Skills, Knowledge And Job In Order To Bring Up Their Families Out Of Poverty. If Both Are Not Good At Family Skills, Knowledge, Job, Etc. It May Affect The Society.

Key Drivers Of Child Marriage In India

- Districts Where The Status Of Women Is Low Will Have Higher Prevalence Of Child Marriage;
- Districts With High Percentages Of Sc And St Populations, Considered As Marginalized, Will Have Higher Prevalence Of Child Marriage;

- Districts Where The Educational Facilities Are Weak Or Poor Will Have Higher Prevalence Of Child Marriage;
- Districts With Poorer Basic Infrastructure And Amenities Will Have Higher Prevalence Of Child Marriage; And
- Districts That Have Many Remote And Inaccessible Villages, Or Very Small Sized Villages, Will Have Higher Levels Of Child Marriage, Primarily Because These Villages Are Less Likely To Receive Consistent Government Aid And Attention.

Review Of Literature

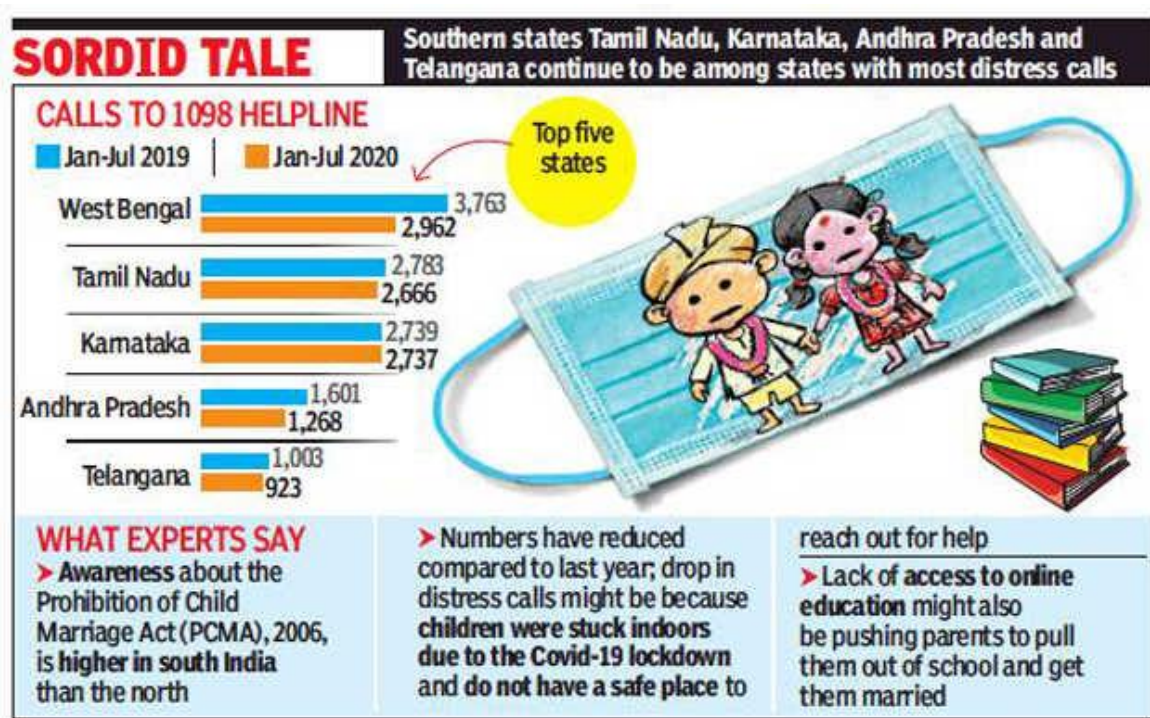
Unicef (2018): Approximately 12 Million Girls Are Married Each Year Before They Reach The Age Of 18, According To Unicef Data From 2018. That's One In Five Girls Globally Whose Childhood Is Abruptly Ended And Future Prospects Further Complicated. Referred To As Early Or Child Marriage; A Marriage Or Union In Which One Partner Is Under The Age Of 18 The Practice Disproportionately Impacts Girls. According To Usaid, Forced Marriage Is A Marriage At Any Age That Occurs Without The Free And Full Consent Of One Or Both Spouses. This Includes Child And Early Marriage, As People Under 18 Are Not Able To Give Full Consent. Child, Early And Forced Marriages Occur Throughout The World, In Both High And Low-Income Countries. And It Is Not Tied To Any One Region, Religion Or Culture. The Practice Has Affected 650 Million Women Alive Today.

Around 33 Per Cent Of Child Marriages Take Place In Tamil Nadu Due To Financial Problems In The Family, And 17 Per Cent Due To Fear Of Children Falling In Love, Shows A Study Conducted By The Social Welfare Department And Indian Council For Child Welfare Along With Unicef. Around 2,666 Distress Calls Were Attended By The State Government In 2020. The Study Group Reviewed These Cases To Identify The Driving Factors Of Child Marriages In The State. The Group Found That There Were Two Types Of Child Marriage: One Decided By The Children Themselves And The Other Decided By The Family. The Reasons Vary Between These Two Types. The Study Shows That 95 Per Cent Of Marriages Were Decided Due To Love Affair And Four Per Cent Of Marriages Due To Broken Family And No One Being Ready To Take Care, And One Per Cent Due To Pregnancy Before Marriage. In Arranged Marriages, 33 Per Cent Took Place Due To Financial Problems Of The Family. Around 17 Per Cent Were Due To Fear Of Love And 11 Per Cent Due To Preferential Marriage. Also 11 Per Cent Were Due To Safety Issues And

Sickness Of Family Members, Seven Per Cent Due To Family Norms, And Two Per Cent Due To Migration Of Parents And Two Per Cent Due To Child Education Related Issues. Also Two Per Cent Were Due To Dowry, Two Per Cent Due To Other Reasons Like Illicit Relationship Of Parents Posing Threat To The Safety Of The Child, Pre-Marital Pregnancy Of The Child. Around One Percent Due To Exchange Of Child For Loan And One Per Cent Due To More Number Of Children In The Family.

Padmavathi Srinivasan, Nizamuddin Khan And Ravi Verma (2015): Their Study Analyzes The Prevalence And Some Key Drivers Of Child Marriage At The District Level In India, Using Government Data Sources. The Practice Of Child Marriage Persists Across The Country, With Many Northern States Having The Highest Percentage Of Women Married Before The Legal Age. Although There Has Been A Significant Decline In Child Marriage For Females Throughout The Country, Especially For Girls Below The Age Of 15 Years, Child Marriage Continues To Affect Almost A Third Of All Girls In India. A Significant Percentage Of Indian Women Continue To Marry Between The Ages Of 15 And 17 Years. In Some Districts, The Trends Show Higher Percentages Of A Younger Cohort Of Women (As Opposed To An Older Cohort Of Women) Who Married Before The Age Of 18 Years. These Districts Need To Be Monitored Carefully To Ascertain Whether The Turnaround In The Declining Trend Is Long Term, Or Merely A Short-Term Deviation. Data From The District Level Household Survey (Dlhs) From 2007-2008 And Census 2011 Show That Many Indicators Of Social And Economic Development, Including Female Status And Levels Of Empowerment At The District Level, Are Significantly Associated With Child Marriage Prevalence In Districts. This Indicates A Strong Need For Improving The Social And Economic Conditions In The Immediate Environment To Bring About Social Change And Put A Stop To Customs And Practices That Are Detrimental To The Health And Wellbeing Of Women And Children And Harmful To Society. Among Individual Characteristics, The Level Of Education Of Females Has The Most Profound Impact On The Age They Marry, Irrespective Of Household Wealth, Locality And Other Characteristics. Further, In The Districts Studied Here, Other Backward Class (Obc) And Scheduled Caste (Sc) Women Tend To Have The Lowest Mean Age At The Time Of Marriage, Irrespective Of Their Level Of Education, Locality And Economic Background.

Pintu Paul (2020): In His Study He Examines The Prevalence Of Child Marriage Among Girls In India, Its Trends And Socio-Economic Correlates. It Is Based On Data Extracted From The National Family Health Survey (Nfhs). This Analysis Shows That The Prevalence Of Marriage Among Female Children Has Considerably Declined Between 1992–1993 (Nfhs-1) And 2015–2016 (Nfhs-4). Its Incidence By Age Cohorts Also Shows A Significant Reduction During The Recent Period. However, Child Marriage Is Persistent Among Uneducated, Poor And Rural Women. The Results Of Multivariate Logistic Regression Reveal That The Educational Attainment And Wealth Status Of The Household Are The Most Significant Correlates Of Female Child Marriage In India. Girls And Young Women With Secondary And Higher Educational Levels Are Less Likely To Be Married Before 18 Years Compared To The Uneducated Ones. Further, Females Living In Poverty Are Associated With Increased Odds Of Child Marriage Compared To Those From Wealthier Economic Status. The Findings Suggest That Increasing Opportunities For Girls’ Education And Providing Financial Assistance To The Poor Families Would Eliminate The Practice Of Child Marriage Among Indian Women.



Scope Of The Study

It is against this backdrop that an attempt was made to undertake a perspective study on prevalence of child marriage in Salem, Dharmapuri and Namakkal districts as it is difficult to obtain accurate data on the real extent of child marriage owing to the fact that most marriages are not officially registered. The parents' information is not reliable. In this regard, an attempt is being made in this paper to collect quantitative and qualitative inputs from the varied sections of the society residing in Salem district. Secondary data is also being used to arrive at possible interventions from social work perspective. The objective of the study was to understand perceived understanding on the right age for marriage for boys and girls, perceived practice of child marriage in the community they belong to, perceived opinion on the practice of child marriage, and their perceived interventions / strategies to combat child marriage, thereby eliciting the perceived opinion of the common mass on the prevalence of child marriage in the community they live in. Based on the data collected social work interventions have been put forth.

Methods And Materials

Descriptive Research Design Had Been Adopted And Data Collected From 170 Respondents Residing In Salem, Dharmapuri And Namakkal District Using Judgemental Sampling. The Chosen Sample Being Involved In Community Related Initiatives. Survey Method Using Google Forms Was Employed To Collect Quantitative Date. Case Studies, Focus Group Discussion And Problem Ranking Techniques Were Used To Further Analyse The Problem Of Child Marriage And To Arrive At Possible Interventions To Alleviate The Problem. Since Judgemental Sample Was Employed To Collect The Data, Only Descriptive Statistics In The Form Of Graphs Were Computed To Present The Findings Of The Quantitative Data Collected.

Analysis And Interpretation

Table No. – 1: Distribution Of The Respondents By Their Socio-Demographic Profile

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender		
	Male	63	37.1
	Female	107	62.9
2	Age		
	Less Than 30 Years	98	57.6
	31-50 Years	65	38.2
	51 Years And Above	7	4.1
3	District		
	Salem	54	31.8
	Dharmapuri	24	14.1
	Namakkal	92	54.1
4	Marital Status		
	Single	66	38.8
	Married	104	61.2

Prevalence Of Child Marriage In Salem, Dharmapuri And Namakkal Districts: Social Work Perspectives For
Intervention

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
5	Highest Educational Qualification		
	Illiterate	7	4.1
	Primary (1-5th)	5	2.9
	Middle (6-8th)	6	3.5
	Secondary (9-12th)	16	9.4
	Under Graduation	55	32.4
	Post Graduation	77	45.3
	Others	4	2.4
6	Family Structure		
	Nuclear	94	55.3
	Joint	73	42.9
	Extended	3	1.8
7	Household Income (In Thousand / Month)		
	Less Than 1000/-	15	8.8
	1001-3000/-	10	5.9
	3001-5000/-	36	21.2
	5001-10000	49	28.8
	10001 And Above	60	35.3
8	Number Of Children In The Family		
	Two And Less Than Two	138	81.2
	Three And More	32	18.8

Table No. – 2: Distribution Of The Respondents By Their Perceived Awareness On The Right Age For Marriage, Legal Binding On Child Marriage, And Orientation Received

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
01	What In Your View Is The Right Age For Marriage (For Males) ?		

	13-16 Years	00	00
	17- 20 Years	00	00
	21-24 Years	49	28.8
	25-28 Years	104	61.2
	29 Years & Above	17	10.0
02	What In Your View Is The Right Age For Marriage (For Females) ?		
	14 -17 Years	00	00
	18 - 21 Years	58	34.1
	22 - 25 Years	96	56.5
	26 Years And Above	16	9.4
03	Are You Aware That Child Marriage Is Illegal?		
	Yes	165	97.1
	No	5	2.9
04	Have You Received Any Orientation On Social Issues Like Child Marriage?		
	Yes	96	56.5
	No	74	43.5

Table No. – 3: Distribution Of The Respondents By Their Perceived Practice Of Child Marriage In The Community They Belong

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
01	Does The Community You Belong To Practice Child Marriage?		
	Yes	46	27.1
	No	124	72.9
02	Has There Been Any Child Marriage In Your Family?		
	Yes	17	10.0
	No	153	90.0
03	Why Do You Think Child Marriage Takes Place?		
	Customs And Beliefs	26	15.3
	Family Tradition	8	4.7
	Community Pressure	19	11.2
	To Ensure The Safety Of The Girl Child	25	14.7
	Economic Burden	55	32.4
	Assured Wealth And Property	5	2.9
	Any Other	32	18.8

Table No. – 4: Distribution Of The Respondents By Their Personal Take On The Practice Of Child Marriage

S. No.	Variable	Frequency (N = 170)	Percentage (%)
01	Do You Support Child Marriage?		
	Yes	2	1.2
	No	168	98.8
02	How Do You Think Child Marriage Can Be Stopped?		
	Enforcement Of Law	37	21.8
	Awareness Programmes	71	41.8

	Improve Educational Status Of Parents	33	19.4
	Economic Empowerment Of Women	13	7.6
	Support State Initiatives	4	2.4
	Work Towards Changing Traditional Beliefs	4	2.4
	Any Other	8	4.7

Major Findings Of The Study

From The Descriptive Data Computed In The Tabulations Presented Above It Is Evident That

- Majority Of The Respondents Consider 25-28 Years To Be The Right Age For Marriage For Boys And 22-25 Years To Be The Right Age For Marriage For Girls, Making It Evident That Psycho-Social Factors Have Been Considered By Them And Not The Mere Legal Age Of Marriage, A Vast Majority Of The Respondents (97.1%) Have Stated That They Know That Child Marriage Is Illegal,
- Majority Of The Respondents Have Stated That They Have Received Orientation On Social Issues Like Child Marriage, 27 % Of The Respondents Have Stated Child Marriage Does Happen In The Community In Which They Live, And 10 % Of The Respondents Have In Fact Stated That Child Marriage Has Taken Place In Their Own Families.
- Most Of The Respondents (32%) Perceive Economic Burden To Be The Reason For Child Marriage To Take Place.
- A Vast Majority Of The Respondents (99%) Have Stated That They Do Not Support Child Marriage.
- Most Of The Respondents (42%) Opine That It Is Through Awareness Programmes That Child Marriages Can Be Stopped.
- Qualitative Data Derived From Case Studies, And Fgd Reveals That There Are Multiple Concerns That Force Parents To Indulge Their Children In Child Marriage, Some Of The Often Quoted Reasons That Emerged Were: Illiteracy, Concern For The Safety Of The Girl Children, Apprehension Of The Social Media Exposure The Girl Children Are Having - The Access To Mobile Phones Being A Major Concern For The Parents Today, Late Adolescent Girl Children Having Infatuations Eloping Without The Knowledge Of Parents And On Being Rescued Parents Marry Them Off Out Of Concern For Their Future, Some Parents Marry Their Young Girl Child When They See The Prospect Of Her Inheriting Property, Wealth Or A Better Life Than They Could Provide.

The Points That Emerged From Casestudies, And Fgd On How This Evil Of Child Marriage Can Be Tackled Were

Sensitization To Parents: Parents Of Adolescent Girl Children Being Sensitised On How The Girl Child's Future Would Be Spoilt If She Is Married At A Very Young Age, Formation Of Children's Club In Schools, Creating Awareness And Building A Child Safe Society. Educating The Society To Know The Impact And Adverse Effect Of Child Marriage - Education Being The Key - Explaining The Implications Of Child Marriage On The Society At-Large And The Psycho-Social Problems Faced By The Girl Children Post Their Child Marriage.

Empowering The Girl Children: Empowering Girls With Information, Skills And Support Networks, Providing Economic Support And Incentives To Girls And Their Families And Promoting Their Education, Motivating The Parents And Community Members To Fight For The Rights Of Girl Children To Be Educated, Enhancing Girls' Access To A High-Quality Education. Girl Children Have To Come Forward And Seek The Support To Combat Child Marriage. Girl Children Need To Be Facilitated To Grow Independently With Courage.

Guiding The Family Members: Parents Should Not Force A Minor Or Adolescent Aged Girl To Marry. It Depends On Mentality Of Both Parent And Child And Child Should Be Given Access, On What They Need To Know At Their Age. One Of The Main Reason For Child Marriage Is The Mentality Of Men. They Think If Girl Studied, She Will Not Respect Her Husband So They Stop Her Studies And Get Her Married. Another Commonly Cited Reason For The Early Marriage Happening Is The Fear Of The Social Media Exposure The Current Generation Has And The Access Of Mobile Phones Has Only Made The Situation All The More Complication. Infatuations Do Happen And Children In Their Late Adolescence Do Fall A Prey Here And There. Parents Feel Insecure And When Such Instances Happen Or Even When They See Or Hear It Happen In Their Society, Some Parents Panic And End Up Deciding That It Is Safer To Get Their Young Daughter Married Off Than Fall A Prey To These Vested Interests. Parents Of Adolescent Girls Should Be Met And Sensitized About The Problems Arising Out Of Child Marriage For The Girl Child, Her Family, And The Society. Families Need To Be Guided, Counselling And Followed-Up To Ensure That They Give Up On Their Plan To Get Their Girl Child Married And Sustain That Decision.

Role Of Government: Govt Officials Taking The Responsibility And Spreading Awareness On Child Marriage Being Illegal And Its Implications, Police Needs To Be Vigilant, Education Department Needs To Ensure Awareness On Child Marriage In Schools And As

Part Of The Curriculum, It Has To Be Monitored Through Vigilance And Law. Girl Children Need To Be Sensitised To Seek Support If Faced With Such Situation. Government Should Facilitate Girl Children To Pursue Their Collegiate Education Free Of Cost.

Role Of Local Governance: Utilise Local Governance Machinery To Educate The People Who Follow The Unwanted Spiritual Belief, Leading To Child Marriage. Watchdog Committee In Each Ward And Regular Follow Up In Temple, Church And Mosque To Ensure That Child Marriages Do Not Happen In Their Locality.

Enforcement Of Strict Laws: Enforcement Of Strict Laws On Child Marriage Can Be A Deterrent, Enhanced Sentencing For Child Marriage, Could Be A Permanent Solution To The Menace.

Interventions To The Problem Of Child Marriage

Problem Ranking Done Resulted In The Following To Be Listed As The Top Five Interventions To The Problem Of Child Marriage Elicited:

1. Awareness Amongst The Parents Of Adolescents
2. Women Empowerment – Educational And Economical
3. Addressing The Insecurity Feeling Of The Parents – Safety Concerns And Apprehensions On Their Future
4. Strict Action By The Govt – Sensitization On Illegality Of Child Marriage And Its Consequences (Enhanced Sentencing To Be Contemplated)
5. More Working Opportunity For Women (Entrepreneurial, Enhanced Reservation For Women In Government Jobs And In The Private Segment)

Implications For Social Work Intervention

1. Challenge The Traditions That Surround Early Marriage. Inform Parents, Community Members, And Youth About The Negative Consequences Of Early Marriage.
2. Create A Supportive Network Of (Religious) Leaders And Teachers Who Can Empower Girls To Negotiate With Their Parents In Case They Are Pressurised To Marry Early.

3. Expand Training For Health And Community Workers On The Dangers Of Early Marriage, Engaging Them As Advocates And Change Agents In Their Communities And Institutions.
4. Strengthen And Establish Community Networks And Partnerships Involving Girls Clubs, Teachers, Elders, Local Government Officials, Women And Youth Groups, Community And Religious Leaders, Etc., That Jointly Work Towards Ending Early Marriage.
5. Engage In Advocacy To Strengthen The Role Of The Judicial System Particularly The Police, Judges And Persecutors Through Training On Enforcement Of The Law Against Early Marriage.
6. Engage In Advocacy To Bring In Initiative To Develop Strong Support Systems To Keep Girls In School. Provide Scholarships Where Necessary And Encourage Teachers To Support Girls.
7. Bring Empowered Women Who Have Made Strides In Their Respective Professions To Talk To Girls As They Would Be A Definite Source Of Inspiration To Them To Reach Greater Heights Against Odds.
8. Finally, Given The Factors Contributing To Child Marriages, All Efforts Should Aim At Changing The Gender Biased Attitudes Of Parents And Society By Imparting Proper Gender Sensitivity Enabling Equity Leading To Equality.

Conclusion

To Conclude, Child Marriage Cannot Be Eradicated Or Brought Under Control Merely By The Stringent Laws Or Schemes, As Had Been Suggested By Many Of The Study Participants. It Has Frequently Been Noted That The Perpetrators Of This Evil Practice Can Easily Produce Bogus Certificate To Falsely Prove The Marriageable Age Of The Girl Or A Boy. To Make The Child Marriage Prohibition Act Very Effective, Everyone Involved In The Marriage – One Who Prints The Wedding Invitation, Priest Performing The Wedding Ceremony And The Owner Of The Marriage Hall Should All Be Brought Under The Legal Purview. The Officials Concerned In Solemnising Marriage Should Be Strictly Instructed To Verify The Age Of The Bride And The Groom Before Involving Themselves In The Marriage Process Or To Face Legal Consequences. This Could Help Prevention Of Such Marriages At A Much Earlier Stage And To Save More Girls From This Social Evil. Awareness Of The Implications Of The Prevention Of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Is

Essential For Administrative, Judicial And Police Officials To Prevent Child Marriages And Initiate Action Against Violators. The Non – Governmental Organizations Have Already Entered Onto The Scene To Create Awareness About The Consequences Of Child Marriage And Also The Legal Implications It Involves. Professional Social Workers Taking A Lead, Their Role Is Equally Important To Protect Children From This Social Evil, And To Eradicate It. Lastly, The Social Awareness And The Attitudinal Change Among The People Is The Most Important Factor For Any Social Change, Transformation And Reformation, For Which All Of Us Are Accountable.

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