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TOPIC OF THE DAY (DATE: 09.01.2024)

Child Marriage in India

WHY IN NEWS?

Recently, The Lancet study highlighted that Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra accounted for more than half of the total headcount burden of child marriages in girls.

Child Marriage in India

- Child marriage in India, as highlighted by the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) 2019-21, remains a significant issue with substantial disparities between urban and rural areas. The statistics reveal that a considerable percentage of women in the age group of 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, indicating a prevalence of child marriage in the country.

Key Highlights of the Lancet Report

- One in five girls and nearly one in six boys are still married below the legal age of marriage in India (18).
- Although there have been dramatic declines in child marriage during the last three decades, there is evidence of stagnation.
- The all-India prevalence of child marriage in girls declined from 49.4 per cent in 1993 to 22.3 per cent in 2021 while that among the boys declined from 7.1 per cent in 2006 to 2.2 per cent in 2021.
- Variation in the prevalence child marriages: All states, except Manipur, experienced a decline in the prevalence of girl child marriage between 1993 and 2021.
- Bihar (16.7%), West Bengal (15.2%), Uttar Pradesh (12.5%), and Maharashtra (8.2%) – accounted for more than half of the total burden of child marriages in girls.
- For boys, Gujarat (29%), Bihar (16.5%), West Bengal (12.9%), and Uttar Pradesh (8.2%) accounted for more than 60 per cent of the burden.

The impact of child marriage is multifaceted and extends across various aspects of a person's life:

Physical Health:

- Child brides often face health complications during pregnancy and childbirth due to their immature bodies. This significantly increases the risks of maternal and infant mortality.

Education:

- Once married, girls are less likely to continue their formal education. This limits their opportunities for personal and economic development, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

Gender Inequality:

- Child marriage is deeply rooted in gender inequality, reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms. It contributes to the unequal power dynamics between men and women, hindering progress towards gender equality.

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Violence and Abuse:

- Lack of legal protection and social support may leave child brides trapped in abusive situations without proper recourse. This exposes them to various forms of violence and exploitation.

Reproductive Rights:

- Child brides may have limited control over their reproductive rights, including family planning and the number and spacing of their children. This can contribute to a cycle of early and frequent pregnancies, affecting both the health of the mother and the well-being of the children.

Cycle of Poverty:

- Child marriage is often linked to poverty. The cycle perpetuates as poverty can lead to child marriage, and child marriage, in turn, perpetuates poverty by limiting educational and economic opportunities for individuals.

Measures Taken by Government of India to Eliminate Child Marriage

Legal Framework:

- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, establishes a legal framework with specific provisions to prevent and prohibit child marriages. Sets the legal age of marriage as 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys.

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR):

- NCPCR engages in various activities and programs with stakeholders, including Child Welfare Committees, Police, and Women and Child Development Department, to address the issue of child marriages.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme:

- Launched in 2015, focuses on improving the status of girls and addresses issues like female foeticide, child marriage, and gender-based discrimination. Emphasizes the importance of education and encourages the protection and empowerment of girls.

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):

- Aims to improve the nutritional and health status of children, including those at risk of child marriage. Provides services such as health check-ups, immunization, and nutrition support to enhance the overall well-being of children.

National Plan of Action for Children 2016:

- Outlines the government's commitment to child welfare and includes strategies to prevent child marriages.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):

- Ongoing program for providing universal access to quality elementary education.
- Aims to address the root causes of child marriage by promoting education for all children, including girls.

Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA):

- Targets adolescent girls (11-18 years) with a focus on empowerment through education, life skills training, and nutrition support. It Aims to prevent early marriage by fostering the holistic development of adolescent girls.