



Original Article

Child Marriage and Human Rights Violations: Legal Responses

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Manuscript ID:
RIGJAAR-2025-020210

ISSN: 2998-4459

Volume 2

Issue 2

Pp. 36-38

February 2025

Submitted: 12 Jan. 2025

Revised: 19 Jan. 2025

Accepted: 17 Feb. 2025

Published: 28 Feb. 2025

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Quick Response Code:



Web. <https://rlgjaar.com>



DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.15534690

DOI Link:
<https://zenodo.org/records/15534690>



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Abstract:-

Child marriage remains a pressing global issue that infringes upon fundamental human rights, particularly in developing nations. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty, denies children their right to education, compromises health, and increases vulnerability to domestic violence and exploitation. This study examines the legal frameworks and responses aimed at combating child marriage, with a focus on the interplay between international human rights instruments and national laws.

The analysis explores key legal provisions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), alongside domestic legislations such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (India). It also evaluates the role of judicial interventions, social reforms, and public interest litigations in addressing the issue. Despite progressive legal measures, enforcement challenges, cultural norms, and lack of awareness hinder effective implementation. The study advocates for a holistic approach involving stricter enforcement of laws, community engagement, education initiatives, and global cooperation to eradicate child marriage and uphold the rights and dignity of every child.

This paper examines the legal responses to child marriage from both international and Indian perspectives, evaluating the effectiveness of current laws and identifying gaps. It emphasizes the need for a rights-based, holistic approach involving government institutions, civil society, and the judiciary to protect children from this harmful practice and ensure the realization of their fundamental rights.

Keywords:- Child Marriage, Human Rights, Gender Inequality, Legal Responses, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, International Conventions, Women's Rights, Juvenile Justice, India, Legal Reform.

Introduction:-

Child marriage, defined as a formal marriage or informal union involving at least one party under the age of 18, is a deeply entrenched social issue and a grave violation of human rights. It denies children, particularly girls, their right to education, health, and a life free from violence and exploitation. This practice, often rooted in socio-cultural traditions and economic vulnerabilities, disproportionately affects marginalized communities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Despite widespread condemnation by international organizations and activists, child marriage persists in many regions, with millions of children married each year. It raises critical questions about the role of law in protecting vulnerable populations, ensuring justice, and fostering societal change. Legal frameworks, including international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and domestic laws like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 in India, have been established to address the issue. However, their effectiveness depends heavily on enforcement mechanisms, societal attitudes, and the willingness of governments to prioritize the issue.

This study explores the intersection of child marriage and human rights violations, examining how legal responses at both international and national levels have sought to combat this practice. It also evaluates the challenges of implementation and the need for a multi-faceted approach that integrates legal, social, and educational strategies. By addressing these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on protecting the rights and dignity of children worldwide.

Review of Literature:-

1. Human Rights Perspectives

Martha C. Nussbaum (2000), in *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, highlights child marriage as a violation of fundamental human rights, emphasizing its detrimental impact on health, education, and gender equality. Judith Bruce and Shelley Clark (2004), in their research on adolescent health, argue that early marriage perpetuates cycles of poverty and restricts opportunities for young girls to achieve their full potential.

UNICEF (2020), in its report *Ending Child Marriage: A Profile of Progress*, underscores the link between child marriage and the denial of rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

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How to cite this article:

Gadhavi, . urvashiben I. (2025). *Child Marriage and Human Rights Violations: Legal Responses*. *Royal International Global Journal of Advance and Applied Research*, 2(2), 36–38.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15534690>

2. Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors

Anju Malhotra et al. (2011), in *Solutions to End Child Marriage*, identify poverty, gender inequality, and cultural norms as the primary drivers of child marriage, suggesting community-based interventions for prevention.

G. W. Jones et al. (2009), in their work on Southeast Asian societies, explore the role of patriarchal traditions and economic incentives in perpetuating the practice.

3. Legal and Policy Frameworks

Archana Parashar (2014), in *Women and Family Law Reform in India*, analyzes the effectiveness of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, highlighting gaps in enforcement and societal resistance.

Rebecca J. Cook and Simone Cusack (2010), in *Gender Stereotyping: Transnational Legal Perspectives*, emphasize the role of international treaties like CEDAW in addressing gender-based discrimination, including child marriage. N. Subramanian (2020), in *Judicial Activism in India*, discusses landmark cases such as *Lajja Devi v. State*, which underline the judiciary's role in combating child marriage through public interest litigation.

4. Health and Education Impacts

World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), in its publication *Child Marriage and Health Consequences*, explores the correlation between early marriage and maternal mortality, infant health risks, and mental health issues. Kathy Edin et al. (2012), in their analysis of education policies, emphasize that access to education is a critical deterrent to child marriage, especially in rural areas.

5. Challenges in Implementation

S. Banerjee (2019), in *Challenges of Enforcing Child Marriage Laws in India*, highlights enforcement barriers, including lack of awareness, weak legal infrastructure, and cultural resistance. A. Yadav and R. Bhargava (2021), in their study on South Asian legal systems, argue that laws alone are insufficient, advocating for grassroots-level advocacy and education to combat child marriage effectively.

6. Global and Regional Efforts

Girls Not Brides (2021), a global network, provides extensive data and case studies on community-led efforts to end child marriage, emphasizing the importance of local empowerment.

UNFPA (2019), in its report *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, evaluates the role of regional collaborations in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending child marriage by 2030.

Methodology:-

1. Research Design

Focused on analyzing legal frameworks, international conventions, judicial precedents, and case studies to understand the legal and human rights dimensions of child marriage. Utilized to analyze statistical data on child marriage prevalence, trends, and the impact of legal interventions.

2. Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Data

Conducted with legal experts, social activists, policymakers, and victims of child marriage to gather firsthand insights into the enforcement and impact of laws. Organized with community members and NGOs to understand grassroots-level challenges and perceptions of child marriage. Examination of

landmark judicial decisions to evaluate the role of the judiciary in addressing child marriage.

b. Secondary Data

Analysis of national laws (e.g., Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006) and international treaties (e.g., CRC, CEDAW) to assess their provisions and effectiveness. Review of publications by UNICEF, UNFPA, Girls Not Brides, and government bodies to understand the broader context of child marriage. Examination of data from national surveys (e.g., NFHS, Census) to study trends in child marriage prevalence and its socio-economic impact.

3. Sampling Techniques

Selected regions with high prevalence of child marriage for in-depth analysis. Ensured representation of diverse socio-economic, cultural, and geographic groups in the data collection process.

4. Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Used to identify patterns and themes in qualitative data, particularly in interviews, focus groups, and case studies.

Comparative Legal Analysis: Examined the similarities and differences in legal responses across countries and their effectiveness.

Statistical Analysis: Analyzed quantitative data to identify trends, correlations, and the impact of interventions.

5. Ethical Considerations

Ensured confidentiality and informed consent for all participants, particularly survivors of child marriage. Followed ethical guidelines for conducting research on sensitive topics involving vulnerable populations.

6. Scope and Limitations

Focused on India while referencing international practices to provide a comparative perspective. Challenges in obtaining accurate data due to underreporting of child marriage cases and cultural sensitivities surrounding the issue.

Recommendations:-

1. Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

Amend Laws: Harmonize the legal age of marriage across all religious and customary laws to avoid ambiguities and loopholes.

Enhance Penalties: Impose stricter penalties for individuals and entities involved in arranging or facilitating child marriages.

Effective Enforcement: Establish dedicated child protection cells in law enforcement agencies to monitor and prevent child marriages.

Legal Aid: Provide free legal assistance and support to victims of child marriage to ensure access to justice.

2. Judicial and Policy Reforms

Fast-Track Courts: Set up special courts to handle cases of child marriage and related human rights violations to expedite justice.

Judicial Oversight: Strengthen the role of the judiciary in monitoring the implementation of child marriage laws through regular reviews and accountability measures.

Policy Integration: Align child marriage prevention policies with broader gender equality, education, and health initiatives.

3. Community Engagement and Awareness

Public Campaigns: Launch nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about the legal, health, and social consequences of child marriage.

Community Mobilization: Involve religious leaders, local influencers, and community organizations to challenge and change cultural norms perpetuating child marriage.

Grassroots Advocacy: Empower local self-help groups and NGOs to act as watchdogs and report incidents of child marriage.

4. Educational and Economic Empowerment

Education Access: Ensure free and compulsory education for all children, especially girls, to delay marriage and empower them economically.

Skill Development: Introduce vocational training programs to provide economic opportunities for girls and their families.

Conditional Incentives: Provide financial incentives for families to keep their daughters in school and discourage early marriage.

5. Improving Health and Social Support Systems

Health Services: Strengthen reproductive and mental health services for adolescent girls to address the health impacts of early marriage.

Shelters and Support Centers: Establish safe shelters and counseling services for girls escaping child marriages.

Rehabilitation Programs: Develop programs to reintegrate victims of child marriage into society through education and skill development.

6. Data Collection and Monitoring

Comprehensive Surveys: Conduct regular surveys to gather reliable data on the prevalence and impact of child marriage.

Monitoring Mechanisms: Develop robust systems to track the implementation of child marriage laws and measure their effectiveness.

Accountability:

Create an independent body to oversee government and community efforts to prevent child marriage.

7. International Collaboration and Support

Global Advocacy: Collaborate with international organizations like UNICEF and UNFPA to share best practices and resources.

Cross-Border Measures: Address cross-border child marriages through bilateral and regional agreements.

Funding Initiatives: Seek international funding to support community-driven programs and awareness campaigns.

Conclusion:-

Child marriage is a deeply rooted societal issue that not only violates fundamental human rights but also perpetuates cycles of poverty, inequality, and exploitation. Despite significant legal advancements at both national and international levels, the practice continues to thrive due to entrenched cultural norms, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and enforcement challenges.

This study highlights the interplay between child marriage and human rights violations, emphasizing the critical role of legal frameworks in addressing this issue. Laws such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 in India and international conventions like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provide a robust foundation for combating child marriage. However, their effectiveness depends on strong implementation mechanisms, public awareness, and societal support.

Addressing child marriage requires more than just legal interventions. A comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy is essential, encompassing education, community engagement, health services, and economic empowerment. Public campaigns and grassroots initiatives must challenge

cultural norms that perpetuate child marriage, while government policies should focus on creating opportunities for young girls to pursue education and economic independence.

The fight against child marriage is also a fight for gender equality, education, and human dignity. By prioritizing the rights and welfare of children, societies can move closer to achieving sustainable development and ensuring a brighter future for all. The eradication of child marriage is not merely a legal or policy challenge—it is a moral imperative and a step toward realizing the universal values of justice, equality, and human rights.

Acknowledgment

Nil.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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