

# Too young to wed

The scourge of child marriage continues to be widespread in India despite the laws prohibiting the practice. By **RAMESH CHAKRAPANI**

Census of India 2011 data show that child marriage is widespread in the country, especially in the rural areas. Despite the existence of laws that forbid child marriage by setting the legal age of marriage at 18 for women and 21 for men, hundreds of thousands of boys and girls, some as young as 10, are married off by their parents or families in the name of upholding a tradition that has no place in civilised society today.

The most disturbing statistic that emerges from the

data is the prevalence of such marriages, mainly in the 10- to 14-year age group, in all the most populous States, without exception. The worst offender is Uttar Pradesh, which has the highest number of child brides and child grooms in the country, followed by Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Gujarat. There are at least one lakh child brides in that age group in each of these States. The southern States of (undivided) Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu also rank high, above Haryana,

Jharkhand and Odisha, which are considered more backward. Even Kerala, 100 per cent literate, recorded more than 30,000 such marriages.

The prevalence of child marriage is, not surprisingly, more commonplace among girls aged 15 to 17 in the key States. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of child brides, nearly 5.50 lakh in this age group.

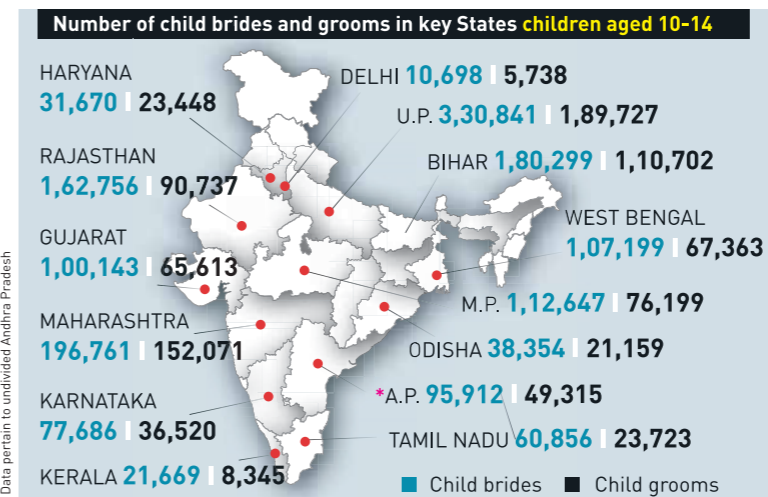
In terms of proportion of population, Rajasthan is the worst offender, with over 3.24 lakh instances, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of the total number of girls in that age group. In West Bengal, Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Assam and Maharashtra, the figure is at least 10 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh has the dubious distinction of topping in the number of child grooms, having more than 11.76 lakh married males in the 15 to 20 age group.

However, Rajasthan again tops in terms of percentage of the population of the category, with 6.9 lakh married males in the ages of 15 to 20, or 14.39 per cent of all males in the age group.

Gujarat is second in terms of percentage, while Bihar is second in absolute numbers.

The Census data also show that the regionwise distribution of child brides, aged 15 to 17, is uneven for the most part, with an overwhelming majority found in rural areas in the most of the key States, while Tamil Nadu and Kerala alone recorded nearly even distribution.



**Prevalence of child marriage in key States among males aged 15-20**

| State        | No of males | Married males | % of child grooms |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Rajasthan    | 48,24,661   | 6,91,801      | 14.39             |
| Gujarat      | 38,81,985   | 3,97,538      | 10.24             |
| M.P.         | 49,16,240   | 4,76,087      | 9.69              |
| Bihar        | 65,29,927   | 5,93,786      | 9.09              |
| West Bengal  | 47,02,325   | 3,94,557      | 8.39              |
| U.P.         | 1,52,02,720 | 11,76,802     | 7.74              |
| Haryana      | 18,18,245   | 1,29,370      | 7.12              |
| Maharashtra  | 70,51,542   | 4,54,364      | 6.44              |
| *A.P.        | 52,42,151   | 2,61,375      | 4.99              |
| Karnataka    | 38,04,178   | 1,79,483      | 4.72              |
| Odisha       | 24,42,879   | 1,10,234      | 4.51              |
| NCT of Delhi | 11,43,273   | 42,998        | 3.76              |
| Tamil Nadu   | 39,49,142   | 1,34,072      | 3.40              |
| Kerala       | 16,07,582   | 30,262        | 1.88              |

**Prevalence of child marriage in key States among females aged 15-17**

| State        | No of girls | Married girls | % of child brides |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Rajasthan    | 20,45,474   | 3,24,866      | 15.88             |
| West Bengal  | 24,92,292   | 3,19,522      | 12.82             |
| Gujarat      | 16,09,061   | 1,81,551      | 11.28             |
| Bihar        | 25,50,924   | 2,87,651      | 11.28             |
| Jharkhand    | 8,95,744    | 97,166        | 10.85             |
| Karnataka    | 15,76,411   | 1,64,698      | 10.45             |
| Assam        | 8,58,619    | 88,908        | 10.35             |
| Maharashtra  | 28,74,690   | 2,92,738      | 10.18             |
| M.P.         | 20,77,664   | 1,97,437      | 9.50              |
| *A.P.        | 22,28,059   | 2,09,239      | 9.39              |
| U.P.         | 66,15,936   | 5,49,522      | 8.30              |
| Tamil Nadu   | 17,55,424   | 1,45,650      | 8.30              |
| Haryana      | 7,06,604    | 56,127        | 7.94              |
| Odisha       | 11,65,027   | 76,460        | 6.56              |
| Kerala       | 7,73,310    | 47,650        | 6.16              |
| NCT of Delhi | 4,38,094    | 22,059        | 5.03              |

**Distribution of child brides in rural India girls aged 15-17**

- UTTAR PRADESH 4,45,448
- RAJASTHAN 2,77,062
- BIHAR 2,59,179
- WEST BENGAL 2,45,482
- MAHARASHTRA 1,71,519
- MADHYA PRADESH 1,56,908
- \*ANDHRA PRADESH 1,37,553
- GUJARAT 1,13,464
- KARNATAKA 1,04,532
- JHARKHAND 79,177
- TAMIL NADU 75,957
- HARYANA 39,875
- KERALA 27,119