



Editor's Column

A 2011 data sheet called 'The World's Women and Girls' released by the Washington based Population Reference Bureau, shows that in India, 47% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married by the age of 18. What is shocking is that India fares worse than Sub Saharan Africa, or all of Africa put together, when it comes to child marriage.

The average for Africa as a continent is 34%. Most African countries fare better than India, including Ghana, Sudan and Nigeria. While Pakistan's score works out to 24%, even Afghanistan, with 43%, does a better job than India when it comes to curbing child marriage.

India's performance in preventing early marriages for girls is abysmal, despite the legal marriageable age for women being 18.

Admittedly, the practice has more to do with cultural attitudes than

development. Girls are perceived as liabilities, who could end up in pre marital relationships or as unwed mothers, besmirching the family honour. Moreover, prevalence of dowry is another factor which forces impoverished parents to get their girls married early. The fact is that parents in even progressive states like Gujarat

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and Maharashtra marry off their daughters at an early age, without paying heed to the health consequences of child marriage.

Though we have laws like Child Marriage Restraint Act, which prohibits marrying girls below the age of 18, it is more honoured in breach than in observance. One has only to read reports of the large numbers of child marriages that take place every year on the occasion Akhya Teej.

However, there are ways to break this cycle. There must be extremely stringent implementation of laws against child marriage, with administration, police and NGOs working together to ensure this. Marriage registration must be compulsory. Efforts must be made to alter attitudes within families and communities by providing incentives to keep girls in school, as is being done in Bihar. Study and vocational training options should be tailor-made for girl children, so that they get an opportunity to become economically self-reliant without being a burden to their parents. Protecting girls from early marriages will also help reduce maternal and infant mortality while enabling them to lead fulfilling lives. It will also create a strong new generation with educated, grown-up mothers, prioritising literacy and health for their own daughters.

From the legal cell

- The NCW filed a review petition in case of Baldev Singh to review the judgement given by the Supreme Court, wherein rape convicts are freed after a compromise with victims. The National Commission for Women has also sought review of a recent Supreme Court decision to reduce punishment of three gangrape convicts from 10 years to three and a half years of imprisonment.

- **Finger Test of sexual assault victims** : The forensic experts and doctors in India practice the undignified and barbaric method of 'finger-test' to examine the rape victims. The procedure is degrading and medically and scientifically

irrelevant. The NCW has written to the Union Law Minister and Health Minister requesting them to look into the matter for putting an end to the practice.

In response, the NCW received a letter from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare stating that the matter has been examined and the format for "Medical Examination Report for Sexual Assault" has been revised in consultation with experts with the Ministry to facilitate medical examination of the victims of sexual assault and at the same time taking care of the dignity of the victims. The same has been circulated to the Central Government hospitals in Delhi for use henceforth.

Bangladesh delegation visits NCW

A delegation from Bangladesh along with NHRC officers visited the Commission to ascertain the working of the National Commission for Women. The delegation discussed bilateral issues related to women and enquired about the legal procedures adopted to deal with complaints received by NCW. They also enquired about the funding of NCW and enquired whether the government was agreeable to release the quantum of funds asked for by NCW.



The visiting delegation with Ms. Yasmeen Abrar (centre) and Member Secretary Ms. Zohra Chatterji

Constitution of a committee for identifying new trades

The Women's Vocational Training Programmes in DGE&T, Ministry of Labour and Employment has institutional network of 11 institutes (NVTI/RVTIs), which provide vocational training facilities in various vocational/skills, exclusively for women/girls. To meet the challenges of fast changing global scenario and to move away from generic trades, a need has been felt to revamp the courses being conducted at NVTI/RVTIs and to introduce some new trades/courses. In order to identify new trades to be introduced at NVTI/RVTIs for women, a committee comprising officials of various ministries, departments and organisations has been constituted.

Currently, under the Central Sector, a National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) for women at Noida and Ten Regional Vocational Training Institutes (RVTIs) for women have been set up across the country. As on October

2010, they had an annual seating capacity of 3,932 for regular courses and about 4,500 trainees have been trained in short-term courses during the financial year 2010-11. These institutes organize skill training programmes in courses such as : Secretarial Practice; Electronic Mechanic; Instrument Mechanic; Architectural Assistantship; Computer Operator and Programming Assistant; Dress Making; Hair & Skin Care; Desk Top Publishing; Computer Aided Embroidery & Needle Craft; Catering & Hospitality Assistant; Interior Decoration & Designing; Fashion Technology; Stenography; Tour & Travel Assistant.

A new scheme is being formulated for establishment of 12 new Regional Vocational Training Institutes, 1500 ITIs & 50,000 Skill Development Centres under Public-Private-Partnership mode. These institutes would cater exclusively to women candidates.

Profile in Courage

A resident of a village in Bhilwara district, 252 km south-west of Jaipur, Sapna was determined not to get married at 15. So, she wrote to the district collector and mentioned that her mother had died 10 years ago and her father, Mahaveer Meena, was forcing her and her younger brother and sisters to get married at a tender age. Sapna is studying in Class 9 in a local government school and wants to be a teacher.

After her letter, the administration took quick steps

to prevent her marriage. Bhilwara deputy collector said that Sapna's spirit to fight social customs and her courage and awareness had set an example for all the village girls.

Acknowledging her bravery and boldness, the social justice and empowerment department of the Rajasthan government has decided to give her a gallantry award and a local NGO will award a cash prize of ₹ 2,100.

The National Commission for Women recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation probe into the alleged police atrocities against women of Uttar Pradesh's Bhatta-Parsaul village after a fact-finding team visited the affected village.

Speaking to the media, NCW acting Chairperson Ms. Yasmeen Abrar slammed the Uttar Pradesh government for not registering first

information report (FIR) on complaints of victims and not posting women police in the area. She said that women in the village have been molested and sexually assaulted and their houses ransacked.

She further said that NCW would constitute a 11-member team headed by her, comprising retired judges and civil society activists to carry out further probe and collect evidence.



Consultation on Amendments to Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

A consultation on Amendments to Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 was held on 2nd May, 2011 in the Conference Room of NCW as per the request of MWCD. The consultation was attended by police officials, officials of Women & Child Department of States and representatives of concerned Ministries and organizations. The participants deliberated upon the Draft Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Bill, 2010 prepared by the Ministry of Law and Justice. The meeting started with a presentation given by Lawyers' Collective on the draft amendment bill. There was also a detailed discussion on Sec. 498(A) IPC, with suggestions to make the penalty more stringent.

In general, there was agreement regarding the following:-

- (a) Deletion of the term "in connection with marriage".
- (b) The giver of dowry should not be penalized.
- (c) For effective implementation of laws, there was general agreement to harmonize the Dowry Prohibition Act with the PWDV Act. The Protection Officer can also be the Dowry Prohibition Officer provided the officer is a full time appointee. Sufficient infrastructure and support staff should be made available. The system of locating Protection Officers in the Women Cell is working very successfully in Haryana in handling such cases and should be replicated across the country.
- (d) Seven year limit in S.304 (B) IPC should be deleted.

In addition, the following suggestions were also made:

1. Maintenance of the list of gifts is not at all practical and such amendment is not required in the Act. If at all, such

a provision is kept, then maintenance of the list of gifts should be the responsibility of both the parties and should not require authentication by the Dowry Prohibition Officers as proposed in the amendment Bill.

2. Registration of marriages should be made compulsory by a central legislation.

Female infant mortality linked to violence against mothers

A study led by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health says mortality is greater among infants whose mothers experienced "intimate partner violence". Deaths of 1.8 million female infants and children in India over the past 20 years are related to domestic violence against their mothers. In their examination of over 1,58,000 births occurring between December 1985 and August 2005, the researchers found that husbands' violence against wives increased the risk of death among female children, but not male children, in both the first year and the first five years of life.

The authors attribute this disparity to lower investment in girl children in nutrition, immunisation and health care which are major causes of infant and child death. This neglect of girl infants and children is likely to be pronounced in families in which the status of women is the lowest, that is, in those families in which women are physically abused by their husbands. At present, 2.1 million children die in India every year, and the nation is not on track to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of a two-thirds reduction in child mortality from 1990 levels by 2015.

Ms. Yasmeen Abrar visits Arunima

Ms. Yasmeen Abrar visited the injured sportsperson Arunima Sinha at AIIMS, who had been allegedly pushed out of a moving train by some robbers in Bareilly, resulting in dismemberment of her leg.



Ms. Yasmeen Abrar talking to Arunima.

Ms. Abrar said that Arunima should be properly compensated and rehabilitated so that she can lead her life with dignity. She also said that Arunima has stuck to her statement of the incident given earlier and the investigation by the NCW did not find anything to indicate that she was not telling the truth.

70% sex workers opt for prostitution

First pan-India survey of sex workers', conducted by two Pune University academicians says that nearly 70% of female sex workers in the country have joined the profession voluntarily, and were not forced or sold. Also, prostitution is just one among several labour options available to women from poor backgrounds - a majority of them join the trade at a much older age compared to other informal labour markets such as domestic work or hawking.

The survey was conducted on sample of 3,000 female sex workers and more than 2,000 male and transgender ones from 14 states and one union territory.

According to the results, 65% of sex workers come from poor families and 60% from rural areas. A majority of them join the sex trade after having worked in other labour markets, while a smaller number join prostitution directly.

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Important Decisions

● SC : Don't just go by foreign court order in custody case

In an important ruling, the Supreme Court has held that Indian courts have jurisdiction to deal with custody disputes over minor children even if a foreign court has passed an order in favour of either of parents.

The ruling assumes significance in the wake of growing number of litigations involving NRI couples over child custody and matrimonial disputes.

● Honour killing barbaric, punish with death: SC

The Supreme Court said that honour killings come within the category of rarest of rare cases. They were barbaric, feudal and a slur on the country and the perpetrators deserve death penalty as punishment.

"This is necessary as a deterrent for such outrageous, uncivilised behaviour. All persons who are planning to perpetrate 'honour' killings should know that the gallows await them", the bench said, dismissing the appeal of a Delhi man, who had killed his married daughter for being in an incestuous relationship with her uncle.

Noting that 'honour' killings had become common place in many parts of the country, particularly, in Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, it said, "Often, young couples, who fall in love have to seek shelter in the police lines or protection homes to avoid the wrath of kangaroo courts".