

Global Programme to End Child Marriage

# Unifying Systemic Leadership to End Child Marriage

A proactive and multistakeholder approach  
in Uttar Pradesh



**end  
child  
marriage**  
A voice. A chance. A future.

**unicef**   
for every child

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# Abbreviations

AHTU	Anti-Human Trafficking Unit
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BDO	Block Development Officer
BSA	Basic Shiksha Adhikari
CDO	Chief Development Officer
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
CMPO	Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
CPS	Child Protection Services
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
DCMPO	District Child Marriage Prohibition Officer
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
DIOS	District Inspector of Schools
DLSA	District Legal Services Authority
DM	District Magistrate
DPO	District Probation Officer
DSWO	District Social Welfare Officer
DTF	District Task Force
DWCD	Department of Women and Child Development
FIR	First Information Report
GPDP	Gram Panchayat Development Plan
GPECM	Global Programme to End Child Marriage
ICRP	Internal Community Resource Person
IPC	Indian Penal Code
JJB	Juvenile Justice Board
MSK	Mahila Shakti Kendra
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

OSC	One Stop Centre
PCMA	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
SDM	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SHG	Self-Help Group
SHO	Station House Officer
SI	Sub Inspector
SP	Superintendent of Police
SSP	Senior Superintendent of Police
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPSRLM	Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission

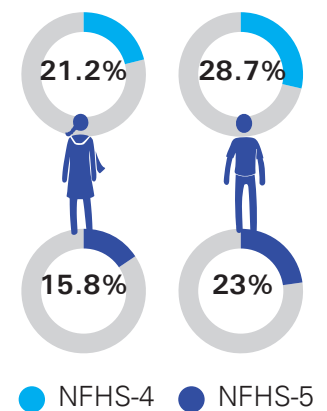
# Introduction

Uttar Pradesh has the largest adolescent population in India and some of the highest rates of child marriage, with approximately 36 million child brides.<sup>1</sup> As per the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, child marriage increased by almost 50 percent in 2020.<sup>2</sup> This steep increase can be attributed to increased socio-economic insecurity faced by families during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5, 15.8 percent of women and 23 percent of men in the age group 20-24 years were married before 18 and 21 years of age, respectively. These figures have fallen by a few percentage points as compared with NFHS-4 (21.2% for women and 28.7% for men). The total fertility rate (TFR) in Uttar Pradesh is 2.4, which is higher than the replacement level. Further, only 39.3 percent women and 48.6 percent men have been through more than 10 years of schooling. The link between high child marriage and lower education level is highlighted in the NFHS-5 findings that indicate that women with more than 12 years of schooling marry much later than other women.<sup>3</sup>

The 2016 Udaya report by Population Council<sup>4</sup> highlighted that 90 percent of married girls reported that their families had paid dowry and only 8 percent had chosen their partner on their own. Adolescents typically do not have a

say regarding their age of marriage and partner, and there is social pressure on families to ensure early marriage of daughters to protect the perceived honour of the family and the girl. Low education levels and poor awareness about the ill-effects of early marriage extenuate the gravity of the issue at the community level. Auspicious occasions such as Akshaya Tiritiya and others are typically periods when large numbers of child marriages are arranged.

Bahraich district has a child marriage prevalence rate that is much higher (37.5%) than the state average. However, this figure has reduced since NFHS-4 (40.9%). The schooling levels are also drastically lower than the state average with only 14.4 percent women having attained more than 10 years of schooling.



In Bahraich, UNICEF has been partnering with systemic stakeholders including the district administration, police and the departments of Women and Child Development (DWCD), Panchayati Raj and Labour, and Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihoods Mission (UPSRLM) to combat child marriage and initiate behaviour change activities. The activities are also aligned with Mission Shakti, the flagship programme of Government of Uttar Pradesh, launched on 29 September 2021 with the objective of providing safety, security and economic empowerment of women and girl child.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/the-economics-of-india-s-high-prevalence-of-child-brides-11603727733091.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://newsroompost.com/lifestyle/50-surge-in-child-marriage-cases-in-2020-says-ncrb-data/5029802.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5Reports/NFHS-5\\_INDIA\\_REPORT.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5Reports/NFHS-5_INDIA_REPORT.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2017PGY\\_UDAYA-ExecSummUP.pdf](https://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/2017PGY_UDAYA-ExecSummUP.pdf)

# The Programme



## Component 1 > Coordination between DWCD, police and other stakeholders for community sensitisation

### Taking coordinated action to prevent early marriage

UNICEF coordinated with the Directorate of Women's Welfare, DWCD, Government of Uttar Pradesh, and supported issuing of letters to the District Administration including the office of the Superintendent of Police to Akshaya Tritiya in 2020. Based on directions from the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police directed the respective SJPU/police stations to conduct awareness programmes with participation from beat constables and community leaders such as Gram Pradhans, chowkidars, faith leaders, etc. prior to Akshaya Tritiya, and counsel them about the ill-effects of early marriage and the importance of continuing education for adolescents. The awareness building began a few days before Akshaya Tritiya and continued in the following week. They were also informed about the legal implications of violating the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006. The District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), One Stop Centres (OSCs)/ Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSKs), Childline and Pratham (NGO) have been a part of the team at district level formed by the office of the Superintendent of Police in coordinating community awareness programmes.

Cases of child marriage were reported to the local Childline, toll free numbers (181 women's helpline, 112 police), District Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (DCMPO) or the OSC. Volunteers were identified

at the community level to tip off Childline/OSC/Police authorities. Beat constables were deployed in plainclothes to monitor villages during events such as Akshaya Tritiya.

A letter was issued by the District Magistrate (DM) and the Police department to all the facilitators of marriage activities including tent providers, caterers and priests to verify the girl's age when an invitation card is issued for marriage. The first line responders including police/beat constable were oriented on what documents are to be checked while verifying the age of bride and groom. Instead of Aadhaar card, the date of birth issued by the Gram Panchayat/ birth certificate issued by the Municipal Corporation or Municipal Council/ school certificate was accepted as proof of age. Female constables were also dispatched to meet with Gram Sabha members to arrange for creating a register of marriages, including details of age.

### Sensitising police to conduct awareness activities along with enforcement

The Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Bahraich led child marriage prevention activities enthusiastically and mobilised police staff to conduct awareness sessions. UNICEF coordinated with the Police department consistently to support the activities. After Mission Shakti was launched, the SSP organised to develop a booklet with child protection and adolescent



During 2019-20, UNICEF was able to avert **nine child marriages** in the intervention districts through the joint efforts of police, DWCD and associated stakeholders.



empowerment messages. The police also verified the age of girls (both boys and boys) whose marriages were being arranged. The police do not accept Aadhaar card as a proof of age (as the card is being misused in many cases to show incorrect age). In the absence of any proof of age document, the case was referred to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for taking appropriate action regarding age verification and rehabilitation of the girl child.

Cases of elopement are typically registered under Sections 363 (punishment for kidnapping) and 366 (punishment for kidnapping a woman for marriage or illicit intercourse) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). However, in Bagraich, these cases were also registered under Section 370 (punishment for human trafficking) of the IPC. This ensured that the cases became case-session trials that could imply 10 years of imprisonment, and seeking bail was also made difficult in this scenario. Thus, the gravity of the issue was highlighted, and people



***The ending child marriage programme cannot be handled by one department alone. It requires synergistic efforts from all stakeholders. When we started the programme, our department committed to work with other departments and UNICEF ensured that all child marriages would be prevented in Bagraich. We kept the police at the forefront and beat constables organised meetings with Gram Pradhans and village chowkidars to sensitise them about preventing early marriage. Faith leaders and women's groups were also met with.***



Dr Vipin Kumar Mishra  
Deputy Inspector General of Police  
Sultanpur (previously SSP, Bagraich)

were made aware of the serious punitive measures that could be taken in cases of violation of PCMA, 2006.

### Conducting awareness generation activities

Efforts were made to sensitise Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members to include services for adolescents while preparing Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs). These plans typically focus on civic infrastructure and PRI members were advised to add funds for amenities such as playgrounds for girls, etc. Gram Pradhans have created Gram

Panchayat level WhatsApp groups to coordinate and share success stories.

Regular awareness generation meetings and rallies were held with community members in which they were informed about the various helpline numbers and about the ill-effects of child marriage. Community members were also assisted to avail of government schemes. Sessions were also held at the school level. Nukkad natak (street plays) were held on the themes of delaying marriage and healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy along with adolescent empowerment. People gradually began to take the issue of child marriage seriously and became community volunteers who tipped off the authorities about child marriage cases.



*Awareness levels were very low in a village called Khalipur. We invited community members to participate in meetings at the local school. In the beginning, women did not know about taking care of one's health and the ill-effects of child marriage. They also reported cases where minor girls had given birth to infants with birth defects. We conducted regular counselling sessions with them and also advised the ASHAs to visit them regularly.*

Sunita Yadav  
Centre In-charge, OSC, Bahraich

### Setting up district, block and community level task forces

Task forces to prevent child marriage were set up at the district, block and village levels under the aegis of DWCD with technical support from UNICEF. The District Task Force (DTF)





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*We were alerted by the Superintendent of Police that every Gram Pradhan should stop child marriage in their village and generate awareness in the community. We regularly counsel community members and have reached out to pandits and maulvis as well for support. We inform people that if they get their children married after the legal age, the government will provide financial support. We also arrange for gifts for families who delay marriage. Most families are convinced through our efforts.*”

Pravesh Verma, Gram Pradhan and faith leader  
Tedwamahant village, Fakharpur block, Bahraich

### District Task Force chaired by District Magistrate

- SP
- Child Marriage Prohibition Officer (CMPO)
- District Child Protection Officer (DCPO), DCPU
- Chief Development Officer (CDO)
- Chief Medical Officer (CMO)
- Secretary, District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)
- Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs)
- District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO)
- District Inspector of Schools (DIOS)
- District Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA)
- District Probation Officer (DPO)
- District Panchayati Raj Officer
- District Information Officer
- Chairperson, CWC
- Principal Magistrate, Juvenile Justice Board (JJB)
- NGO representative

conducts meetings with participating departments, NGOs and relevant committees to discuss the current status of child marriage, trafficking, health, education, etc. and to plan for action.

### Converging with Mission Shakti programme

The ending child marriage intervention was closely aligned with the Mission Shakti programme. Its focus on economic empowerment of women provided an umbrella for the intervention and gave government stakeholders a stronger mandate for partnering to end child marriage.



Community and school outreach were done by all the departments, OSCs, Childline and local NGOs, and key messages around adolescent and women's empowerment were disseminated at the community level.

Families were linked with social protection schemes, and rescuing children and adolescents from early marriage and continuing education was made a focus point of the intervention.

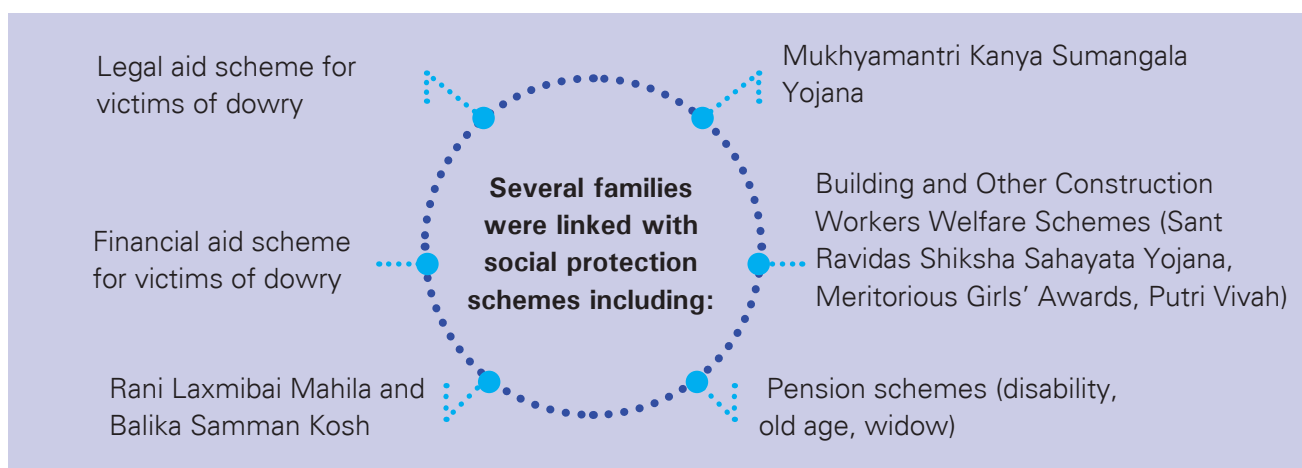
**Component 2** **Intensive mobilisation of SHGs to spread awareness**

UNICEF actively coordinated with UPSRLM to engage the self-help group (SHG) members in the task of spreading awareness about preventing child marriage in their communities. The UPSRLM cadre of Internal Community Resource Persons (ICRPs) was imparted training on communication skills along with an understanding of child protection and adolescent empowerment. They were provided with communication materials such as posters and flipbooks, and taught simple exercises for community engagement. The ICRPs then trained the SHG members in becoming volunteers against child marriage. SHG members would visit homes of families who were arranging child marriage and convince them to call off the wedding. SHG members regularly connected with the local police and frontline workers. Being women, SHG members found it easy to frequently



engage with women and girls and counsel them on delaying marriage and continuing education, and also about proper nutrition and sanitation.

SHG members conducted prabhat pheris (morning rounds/inspection), candle marches and cycle rallies to highlight the issue of child marriage. They also discussed the issue during nutrition events such as Poshan Maah and Annaprashan Day. Street plays and games were also organised to create visibility for the campaign.



“

*A family in our village recently suffered the loss of the mother. The father was left to take care of the daughter and two sons. They were very poor and the education of the children was discontinued after the fifth grade. Our SHG visited the family and counselled the father. We assured him that we would provide financial support and urged him to send his children to school. The father agreed and did so, and arranged for the girl's marriage after she turned 18.*”

Pinky Shukla, SHG member  
Ajjipur village, Fakharpur block, Bahraich

Component 3



Providing services to rescued girls and engaging with adolescents

**Improving services at OSCs**

The OSC provides counselling, medical aid, rehabilitation and social integration, legal aid, short term shelter and rescue (if required) services for rescued girls. In cases where girls are trying to escape child marriage, they provide a safe space for the girl to live in for up to five days till the family situation improves. The Police played an active role in coordinating with DWCD and setting up the OSC in Bahraich, and supported its functioning. The OSC staff coordinated with Childline and

NGOs along with DPOs to ensure that the reported cases of child marriage are addressed. The OSC was also linked with the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) under the Police department. The AHTU provided security for OSC staff at the centre premises and assisted them in taking the girls to court when required.

The OSC teams also visited areas when they are alerted about potential child marriages. The team would take the girl aside and interact with



her. It was found that many times, girls did not know that their marriage was being arranged. In such cases and if the girl said she was being forced to marry against her will, the girl and her family were brought to the centre for counselling. The village head was also called to the centre for discussing the issue. The OSC teams conducted awareness sessions with community members on child labour, child marriage, domestic violence, education, etc. and gave them the helpline numbers. OSC staff coordinated with the district CWC as well to address cases of rehabilitation of girls that were reported to the CWC.

training in first aid and communication skills. They treat any minor injuries that women or girls have when they visit the desk. After that, they ask them to report the case. Providing first aid helps to build a rapport with the women and girls. In cases where unsafe spots for women and girls are identified/reported to Childline or any other authority, police would patrol the area.

Female beat constables also visited villages and interacted with teachers, frontline workers such as anganwadi workers (AWWs) and accredited social health activists (ASHAs), and women and girls. They created a rapport so that women and girls felt at ease in contacting them and reporting any problems. They attempted to resolve issues by counselling the community members and if they were unsuccessful in doing so, they reported them to their Sub Inspector (SI) and then the Station House Officer (SHO).

Childline conducted Child Parliament sessions with adolescents in the 12-18 years age group. Adolescents were made aware of their rights and trained in understanding legal matters, and raising their voice about issues affecting them. Adolescents began to identify issues and raise them, and they also alerted Childline representatives if they found out about a potential case of child marriage.



*I am 21 years old and I was married a year ago. My husband is around 31 years old. I did not want to get married. My in-laws and husband used to beat me and so I came to the OSC. The OSC staff helped me to register an FIR and provided me with a place to stay.*

Girl rescued and rehabilitated at OSC, Bahraich

### Engagement with adolescent girls and community members

Help desks were set up in every police station for women and girls. The help desk was located at the entry of the police station and female constables operated it. The constables were given

## CHALLENGES AND THEIR MITIGATION



**Changing the social norm:** The practice of child marriage is a deep-rooted social practice for which continual awareness sessions with parents and community members are required. Work needs to be done to bring about behaviour change community leaders such as Gram Pradhans and faith leaders.



**Adjusting to staff changes:** The programme requires dynamic and pro-active staff. Frequent transfers of staff in the Police department also create an additional hurdle. Sustained capacity building and sensitisation of staff is required.

## Looking Ahead

The Bagraich model of preventing child marriage shows considerable potential for scaling up as it has activated all child protection institutions under the Child Protection Services (CPS) mandate. Equal importance has been given to behaviour change at the community level along with law

enforcement to prevent child marriage. The creation of task forces ensures that long-term behaviour change that is required for child marriage to be completely eliminated from the district can be realised through planned efforts.

As part of its efforts to end child marriage in Uttar Pradesh, over the next few years, UNICEF will chart a planned, multipronged course of action comprising several strategies:

- (i) Awareness creation at the community level on alternatives to child marriage that focus on retention and transition of girls (and boys) to complete minimum secondary schooling and linkages to livelihood
- (ii) Engagement with boys and men on gender equality and encouraging role models
- (iii) Promotion of adolescent groups that support the adolescent population to exercise their life choices
- (iv) Ensuring effective law enforcement
- (v) Continued capacity development/enhancement of critical structures at community level in creating influencers/local child rights advocates
- (vi) Ensuring that social protection reaches the unreached, excluded and marginalised people, complemented by other entitlements
- (vii) Sustaining the current model, and replicating and scaling it up in districts in geographical proximity.









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