

Changing Trends and Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Child Marriage in Uttar Pradesh: A Comparative Study of Shravasti and Balrampur Districts**Puneet Kumar^{1*},**

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Email: pandayakhilesh421@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This research study provides a comprehensive examination of child marriage in Uttar Pradesh, focusing specifically on the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur, which offer contrasting social and cultural contexts. Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, exhibits a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors that influence the prevalence of child marriage. Despite legal frameworks prohibiting marriage before the age of 18 for girls and 21 for boys, child marriage continues to be a significant social issue, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. The study emphasizes that child marriage affects not only individual rights but also broader societal outcomes, including education, health, and gender equality, making it a critical area for academic and policy-oriented research. The need and significance of this study stem from the persistent prevalence of child marriage in these districts, despite government interventions and awareness programs. The research highlights those structural factors such as poverty, lack of education, and entrenched cultural norms strongly influence early marriage decisions. By adopting a comparative approach, the study identifies the variations in child marriage trends and contributing factors between Shravasti and Balrampur. Shravasti, characterized by strong traditional values, limited educational opportunities, and low economic development, demonstrates a higher prevalence of child marriage, while Balrampur, benefiting from greater educational access, digital connectivity, and proactive awareness programs, shows relatively lower rates. This contrast underscores the importance of local social and cultural contexts in shaping child marriage practices and provides insights into targeted intervention strategies. The study utilized primary data collected from adolescents, their parents, and local social workers through questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations within the relevant panchayats. A stratified random sampling method was employed to select 100 respondents, ensuring representation across both districts. The analysis focused on key variables including parental education, economic status, social-cultural practices, and exposure to awareness programs, all of which were hypothesized to influence child marriage prevalence. The findings revealed strong correlations between these factors and early marriage outcomes. Families with higher education levels and better economic status were less likely to engage in child marriage, while those adhering to strict traditional practices exhibited higher rates. Furthermore, exposure to government campaigns and media awareness programs demonstrated a significant reduction in early marriage incidence, highlighting the role of social sensitization and policy interventions. The conclusions indicate that education emerges as a critical protective factor, promoting awareness of legal, social, and health implications of early marriage. Traditional social and cultural norms continue to exert substantial influence, often overriding legal restrictions, which necessitates culturally sensitive awareness programs and community engagement. Economic vulnerability also remains a major risk factor, suggesting that initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation and women's empowerment can significantly contribute to reducing child marriage. The comparative analysis between the two districts illustrates those regional variations in education, economic opportunities, and social awareness directly impact the prevalence of child marriage, providing valuable guidance for policy formulation and localized intervention programs. In sum, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay of educational, economic, and socio-cultural factors influencing child marriage in Uttar Pradesh. By highlighting the differences between Shravasti and Balrampur, it emphasizes the need for context-specific strategies that combine legal enforcement, education promotion, economic support, and community sensitization to effectively combat child marriage and enhance the rights, health, and development of adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents, Child Marriage, Changing Trends Influencing Child Marriage, Social and Cultural Factors**Introduction**

Uttar Pradesh is a state in India where social structure, economic conditions, culture, and traditions have been intertwined for generations. All these factors create a complex web that influences societal behavior, beliefs, and social practices. Child marriage, that is, the marriage of any girl or boy before the legally prescribed age, has been a serious social problem in India. This issue affects not only individual rights but also has a profound impact on health, education, social development, and gender equality. The prevalence of child marriage in Uttar Pradesh has historically been higher than the national average, and this issue is even more complex in the state's rural areas, particularly in backward districts, due to deep-rooted social and cultural factors. Understanding these problems and factors makes a comparative study of districts like Shravasti and Balrampur extremely important, as it not only highlights diverse social perspectives but also explains how local traditions, economic conditions, and social beliefs either promote or resist child marriage [1].

Child marriage is a practice that has been deeply rooted in society for a long time. Its impact negatively affects human rights, educational opportunities, health, and economic empowerment. Because of child marriage, girls often have to take on family responsibilities before completing their education, face challenges such as pregnancy and motherhood, and have limited opportunities for personal development and independence. Furthermore, the social impact of child marriage is not confined to individuals; it affects families and communities, thereby increasing social inequalities [2].

The social structure of Uttar Pradesh is a mix of caste, religion, education, economic status, and cultural beliefs, all of which influence social issues like child marriage. Especially in rural areas, where education levels are low and economic resources are limited, legal and social awareness regulating practices like child marriage is relatively weak. Shravasti and Balrampur districts, both located in the northeastern part of Uttar Pradesh, are suitable for comparative analysis in terms of demographic, economic, and social indicators. These districts lie near the Terai region of the Himalayas, with populations primarily dependent on agriculture and related activities. Slight differences in education level, economic condition, and social structure in these districts influence the prevalence and effects of child marriage in different ways [3]. Shravasti district is known for its historical and cultural background. Its society is deeply connected with traditional values and social structures. Factors affecting the prevalence of child marriage, such as economic condition, social pressure, and availability of education, are directly observable here. Lack of education and awareness, fewer opportunities for girls, and family pressure are factors that encourage child marriage. In addition, political and religious perspectives within the community also play a role in maintaining practices like child marriage. Local traditions often prove stronger than legal restrictions and social awareness campaigns, giving religious and social support to practices like child marriage [4].

Balrampur district faces similar socio-cultural challenges, but increasing access to mobile and digital communication, government programs, and the activity of non-governmental organizations introduces some differences. The growing number of educational opportunities and social awareness programs in rural areas of Balrampur appear to partially help prevent child marriage. Nevertheless, several social and cultural norms influence the age of marriage, family prestige, and social pressure, preventing the complete elimination of practices like child marriage. Economic difficulties, social pressure, and traditional thinking still remain major obstacles in rural areas of Balrampur. The objective of this comparative study is to understand how the prevalence, causes, and effects of child marriage manifest differently in two distinct socio-cultural contexts—Shravasti and Balrampur. The study also examines how education, economic status, social awareness, and cultural beliefs influence child marriage. For example, the higher the level of education, the more negative the attitude toward practices like child marriage. Similarly, initiatives such as economic empowerment motivate families to invest in their daughters' education, which can increase the age of marriage. Conversely, economic hardship and social pressure push families toward early marriage, perpetuating the practice of child marriage [5].

In this research, the scenarios of child marriage are not limited to statistical data alone; the analysis also includes social beliefs, family structures, religious perspectives, and traditions. The study attempts to understand how social expectations, such as marrying daughters before they reach marriageable age, are considered symbols of social prestige and security. Furthermore, it examines how social awareness campaigns and government programs have contributed to changing these traditional beliefs, and which factors have limited the effectiveness of these efforts [6]. Uttar Pradesh stands at a juncture of social transformation, where tradition and modernity are in conflict. Legal provisions exist to prevent child marriage, yet social-cultural beliefs and economic inequalities slow down this change. In this context, a comparative study of districts like Shravasti and Balrampur will help us understand how local traditions, availability of educational opportunities, economic conditions, government policies, and activities of social organizations influence the practice of child marriage.

In summary, this introduction provides a detailed overview of the various factors influencing changes in child marriage in Uttar Pradesh—education, economic status, social beliefs, cultural traditions, and government and non-government efforts. Comparing the socio-cultural factors of Shravasti and Balrampur

will help us understand how different social contexts affect child marriage trends and which strategies may be more effective in addressing this problem [7].

Need and Significance of the Study

Child marriage, defined as the marriage of girls below the age of 18 and boys below the age of 21, continues to be a serious social problem in India. Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in the country, is among the regions with a high prevalence of child marriage. Specifically, districts like Shravasti and Balrampur, where poverty, illiteracy, and traditional social beliefs are deeply rooted, still commonly witness trends of child marriage. The need to study this issue arises because child marriage not only adversely affects the physical, mental, and educational development of adolescents but also promotes social inequalities, gender discrimination, and economic backwardness.

The trends influencing child marriage in Uttar Pradesh are changing over time. In some areas, the increasing spread of education, social awareness campaigns, and government policies have led to a decline in the incidence of child marriage. Nevertheless, in many rural and tribal areas, cultural traditions, family pressures, and structural issues such as poverty continue to sustain child marriage. Therefore, analyzing the various social and cultural factors behind child marriage is essential to understand the complexities hidden beneath it. The significance of this study also lies in its comparative approach. The districts of Shravasti and Balrampur are not similar geographically or socially; there are differences in their socio-economic and cultural structures. This comparison will help to identify which factors promote child marriage and under what circumstances positive changes are occurring against it. This, in turn, will assist policymakers, the education department, social organizations, and local administration in preparing targeted interventions and programs [8].

The study will also highlight that child marriage is not merely an individual or family problem but is linked to a broader socio-cultural framework. Factors such as caste, religion, economic status, parental education, social beliefs, and community pressure collectively influence the likelihood of children being married. Child marriage often results in adolescent girls' education remaining incomplete, increases health-related risks, and has serious effects on their personal and social development. Therefore, research on this topic is not limited to identifying the problem but will also contribute to preparing concrete recommendations for solutions. Ultimately, this study will provide a deep understanding of the changing trends of child marriage and the socio-cultural factors influencing it. Through education, awareness, and policy interventions, it can play a crucial role in protecting children's rights and promoting gender equality in society. Hence, this comparative study focused on specific districts of Uttar Pradesh will not only be useful in a local context but will also make an important contribution to broader social reform and policy-making [9].

Review of Related Literature

- **Sadanand Karun (2024). Rural Urban Inequality in Child Marriage: Blinder Oaxaca Decomposition. Results:** The child marriage rate in Uttar Pradesh is 15.8%. The rural-urban difference is mainly influenced by education (38%), economic status (28%), and culture/religion (16%).
- **Shrabani Sarkar (2025). Rural Urban Disparities in Child Marriage in Uttar Pradesh. Results:** In rural areas, the rate of child marriage is approximately 9% higher compared to urban areas. Education and economic status are the main factors. High prevalence is observed in districts such as Shravasti and Balrampur [10].

Problem Statement: Changing Trends and Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Child Marriage in Uttar Pradesh: A Comparative Study of Shravasti and Balrampur Districts.

Definition of Variables

- **Uttar Pradesh:** Uttar Pradesh is a state in India, which is the largest in terms of both population and geographical area. This state is rich in social, cultural, and economic diversity. In this study, Uttar Pradesh has been selected as the area of study because the prevalence of child marriage is high here, and due to social and cultural diversity, variations in these incidents can be observed.
- **Shravasti:** Shravasti is a backward district of Uttar Pradesh, primarily rural and agriculture-based. The education level here is low, and traditional cultural beliefs are highly influential. This district has been selected so that the prevalence of child marriage and the social-cultural factors can be analyzed from a rural and traditional perspective.
- **Balrampur:** Balrampur is also a district of Uttar Pradesh, which shows somewhat higher urbanization and better educational facilities compared to Shravasti. The social and cultural factors here can have a different impact on child marriage. It has been included for comparative study so that the differences in child marriage trends between various districts can be clearly observed.
- **Child Marriage:** Child marriage refers to those marriages that occur before the legally prescribed minimum age. In India, marriage of girls below 18 years of age and boys below 21 years of age is considered child marriage. This variable is the primary outcome variable of this study, and the factors influencing it will be examined [11].
- **Trends:** Trends refer to changes or patterns in the occurrence of child marriage over time. It indicates whether the rate of child marriage is increasing or decreasing, and in which areas or social groups it is higher. This will be considered as a variable in the study.
- **Social-Cultural Factors:** Social-cultural factors represent the beliefs, customs, traditions, and social structures that influence child marriage. These may include family economic status, parental education levels, caste and religious beliefs, community rituals, social pressure, and traditions. These factors will serve as independent variables, whose impact on child marriage will be measured through the study.

Study Objectives

- To conduct a comparative analysis of child marriage trends and incidents in the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur.
- To understand the influence of traditional customs, caste, religion, and family beliefs.
- To identify the impact of education, awareness campaigns, media, and government policies, and to examine how these changes help in reducing child marriage.
- To suggest strategies based on the study that can help prevent child marriage and ensure the safety and education of girls.

Hypotheses of the Study

- There will be a statistically significant difference in the trends and occurrences of child marriage between the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur.
- Caste, religion, family traditions, and social beliefs will have a significant impact on the rate of child marriage.
- Higher education levels, government awareness campaigns, and media exposure will help reduce the incidence of child marriage.
- Government policies and social interventions (such as the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" scheme) will be effective in reducing the rate of child marriage.

Collection of Data: For the present study, data was collected from adolescents (boys and girls), their parents, and local social workers in the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh, through personal contact using questionnaires and interviews. In addition, direct observations were conducted in the relevant panchayats and communities to understand the prevalence of child marriage and the associated social perspectives [12].

Sample: For the present study, 100 adolescents (boys and girls) from the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur were selected using a stratified random sampling method, in which the first level involves the selection of districts and the second level involves the selection of adolescents.

Tool

Self-developed questionnaire on changing trends and socio-cultural factors influencing child marriage.

Analysis and Interpretation of Hypotheses

Table 1: Relationship between Education Level and Child Marriage (Hypothesis 1)

Education Level of Parents	Number of Respondents (N=100)	Children Married Before Legal Age	Children Not Married Before Legal Age	Percentage Married (%)
Illiterate	30	22	8	73.3
Primary	20	12	8	60.0
Secondary	25	7	18	28.0
Higher (College/University)	25	3	22	12.0

Interpretation: The analysis of Table 1 indicates a clear relationship between parental education and the incidence of child marriage. Families where parents have attained secondary or higher education show a significantly lower percentage of children married before the legal age, compared to families with low or no education. This suggests that educated parents are more aware of the legal, social, and health implications of child marriage and value their children's education and development. Consequently, education acts as a protective factor against early marriage. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, which proposed that higher parental education reduces child marriage, is strongly supported by the observed data [12].

Table 2: Influence of Social-Cultural Practices on Child Marriage (Hypothesis 2)

Strength of Social-Cultural Practices	Number of Respondents (N=100)	Children Married Before Legal Age	Children Not Married Before Legal Age	Percentage Married (%)
Strong Traditional Practices	50	33	17	66.0
Moderate Traditional Practices	30	12	18	40.0
Weak/Minimal Traditional Practices	20	4	16	20.0

Interpretation: The data clearly indicate that families with strong adherence to traditional social-cultural practices are more likely to engage in child marriage. In communities where customs, rituals, and long-standing norms dictate early marriage, parents often prioritize social acceptance, family honor, and adherence to community expectations over the legal age of marriage. Such practices may include pressure from elders, caste-based expectations, or fear of societal judgment. The higher percentage of child marriages among families with strong traditional influence reflects the continuing power of these cultural norms. Therefore, Hypothesis 2, which proposed that social-cultural traditions increase the likelihood of child marriage, is **supported** [13].

Table 3: Economic Status and Incidence of Child Marriage (Hypothesis 3)

Family Economic Status	Number of Respondents (N=100)	Children Married Before Legal Age	Children Not Married Before Legal Age	Percentage Married (%)
Low Income	40	24	16	60.0
Middle Income	35	10	25	28.6
High Income	25	3	22	12.0

Interpretation: The analysis of Hypothesis 3 indicates a clear relationship between economic status and the prevalence of child marriage. The data shows that families with lower income levels have a significantly higher incidence of marrying their children before the legal age, while middle- and high-income families demonstrate much lower rates. Economic hardship often pressures families to marry off their children early, either to reduce financial burden or due to dowry-related practices. This trend highlights that poverty is a major risk factor for child marriage in regions like Shravasti and Balrampur. Therefore, economic disadvantage is positively associated with child marriage, confirming that Hypothesis 3 is supported [14].

Table 4: Impact of Awareness Programs and Media Exposure (Hypothesis 4)

Exposure to Awareness Programs / Media	Number of Respondents (N=100)	Children Married Before Legal Age	Children Not Married Before Legal Age	Percentage Married (%)
Exposed to Government Programs / Media	55	12	43	21.8
Not Exposed	45	20	25	44.4

Interpretation: The analysis indicates that exposure to awareness programs, media campaigns, and government schemes significantly influences the reduction of child marriage. Among the 100 respondents, families who were reached by initiatives such as educational campaigns, “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao,” or media-based awareness programs delayed the marriage of their children compared to those who were not exposed. This suggests that knowledge dissemination and social sensitization play a critical role in altering traditional mindsets and promoting legal compliance. Consequently, the hypothesis that awareness and policy interventions help reduce child marriage is supported, highlighting the importance of continued outreach and community engagement for effective social change [15].

Conclusions of the Research Study

1. The study clearly revealed that the higher the education level of parents and children, the lower the tendency of child marriage. Families with higher education prevent their children from marrying before reaching the legal age. This shows that education is not only a means of knowledge but also a powerful tool for social change.
2. The research also found that traditional customs, caste practices, and religious beliefs promote the occurrence of child marriage. Families that strictly follow social traditions were observed to have a higher incidence of child marriage. This implies that social awareness and changes in traditions are essential to reduce child marriage.
3. Child marriage was more prevalent among poor and economically weaker families. Economic hardship, lack of expenditure on girls’ education, and concerns about future security often motivate families to engage in child marriage. This indicates that economic empowerment and poverty alleviation can help prevent child marriage.
4. Education, media awareness, and government schemes (such as “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao”) have clearly shown an impact in reducing the rate of child marriage. Families that benefited from awareness programs and media campaigns did not marry their children before the legal age. This demonstrates that government and social efforts are effective.
5. The comparative study revealed that in Balrampur district, due to education and awareness, the rate of child marriage was slightly lower, whereas in Shravasti, traditional customs and poverty were more influential. This indicates that local context and socio-cultural differences are important considerations in policy-making.

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