

A study on the behavioral practices and gender perspectives related to child marriage among adolescents in the districts of Shravasti and Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the behavioral practices and gender perspectives related to child marriage among adolescents in the districts of **Shrawasti** and **Balrampur**, Uttar Pradesh. The study reveals that child marriage is not merely a legal issue but a complex social problem deeply intertwined with social, economic, cultural, and traditional beliefs. According to the present study, the prevalence of child marriage is higher in Shrawasti, where 60% of adolescents were found to be involved in this practice, whereas in Balrampur, it was only 40%. This difference primarily reflects the influence of social, economic, and cultural factors. In Shrawasti, strong traditional customs and the rural environment contribute to the higher persistence of child marriage, while in Balrampur, increased education, awareness, and changes in social attitudes have led to a relatively lower prevalence. The study also highlights that gender perspectives play a significant role in child marriage. Data indicates that girls are more encouraged to marry early, while boys face less pressure. This is a result of the patriarchal social structure and traditional beliefs, where girls are often viewed as family responsibilities or burdens, whereas boys are given greater importance regarding education, employment, and independence. This unequal approach clearly manifests gender inequality and discrimination in society. The pressure of early marriage on girls negatively affects their educational opportunities, mental development, health, and self-confidence, limiting their potential for social empowerment. The study also measured the impact of education and awareness. Results show that adolescents and families with higher education and awareness exhibit lower tendencies toward child marriage. Higher education not only enhances understanding of legal and social norms but also develops critical thinking, decision-making independence, and social consciousness. Conversely, groups with lower education and awareness showed higher prevalence of child marriage. Therefore, education and awareness emerge as effective strategies to prevent child marriage, sensitizing adolescents to the importance of their rights, health, and safety. The study's findings provide important guidance for policy-making and social interventions. Preventing child marriage requires more than just legal enforcement; it necessitates spreading awareness in the community, improving education levels, conducting training and workshops, and influencing adolescents and families through media and social campaigns. Strategies to change child marriage practices should consider social beliefs, economic insecurity, and traditional customs. Ultimately, this research highlights the social, educational, and gender dimensions of child marriage, demonstrating that education, awareness, and social interventions can bring positive changes in adolescents' lives. The study provides concrete guidance to policymakers, teachers, and social organizations for reducing the prevalence of child marriage in districts like Shrawasti and Balrampur, thereby promoting the protection of adolescent rights, gender equality, and social empowerment. Preventing child marriage is, therefore, not merely a legal or administrative task but a comprehensive need for social reform.

Keywords: Adolescents, Child Marriage, Behavioral Practices, and Gender Perspectives

Introduction

In Indian society, marriage is regarded as an important social institution that not only establishes a bond between two individuals but also strengthens family ties, culture, and social traditions [1]. However, when marriage occurs before the legally prescribed age, it is referred to as child marriage. Child marriage has been a longstanding social problem in India, particularly prevalent in rural and economically backward areas [2]. It is not merely a social tradition but a serious social, educational, and health-related challenge that affects the physical, mental, and social development of adolescents. To address this issue, the Government of India enacted the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys. Despite this legal framework, the practice of child marriage continues in many regions due to various socio-cultural reasons [3].

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, experiences a relatively higher prevalence of child marriage due to socio-economic inequality, poverty, lack of education, and traditional beliefs. Particularly in the eastern and Terai regions of the state, the problem is deeply entrenched. Among these districts, **Shrawasti** and **Balrampur** stand out as socially and economically backward areas. In these districts, a significant rural population exists, where traditional social structures, gender inequality, and limited educational opportunities play a major role in promoting child marriage. Here, child marriage is not merely a result of family decisions but is also influenced by social norms, economic pressures, and security concerns [4].

Understanding the behavioral practices and gender attitudes of adolescents concerning child marriage is essential for identifying the root causes of the problem. Adolescence is a critical phase of life during which an individual's thinking, perspectives, and behavior develop rapidly. The thoughts and beliefs of young people in this age group are influenced by societal traditions, family expectations, and community values. Often, adolescents themselves may accept child marriage as a normal social practice, as they are taught from a young age that marriage should occur according to social circumstances rather than a fixed age [5].

Gender attitudes also play a significant role in the problem of child marriage. Due to the long-standing patriarchal structure in Indian society, girls are often perceived as family responsibilities or burdens. This perception leads parents to consider early marriage for their daughters as a safe and socially acceptable option. On the other hand, greater emphasis is placed on education, employment, and independence for boys, which further reinforces gender inequality. In districts like Shrawasti and Balrampur, this inequality is visible across various aspects of social life, including girls' education, health, and participation in decision-making [6]. Behavioral practices related to child marriage manifest in multiple ways. Many families marry off their daughters early to reduce economic burdens, believing that younger marriages will lower dowry demands. In some cases, a sense of social security motivates parents, who assume that after marriage, the girl's responsibilities will shift to her husband and in-laws. Additionally, social pressure and traditional beliefs encourage families to continue the practice of child marriage. If child marriage is considered normal in a community, other families follow suit to avoid social criticism [7].

Adolescents' gender attitudes also influence these behavioral practices. If boys believe that girls' primary role is limited to household responsibilities, they may consider child marriage acceptable. Similarly, if girls themselves internalize the belief that their primary duty is marriage and family, they may accept early marriage. Therefore, studying the thoughts and attitudes of adolescents is crucial to understanding how their perspectives and social environment contribute to maintaining the practice of child marriage.

The consequences of child marriage are severe. Girls who marry at a young age often discontinue their education, limiting their economic and social opportunities. Early pregnancy also negatively affects maternal and child health. On a mental and emotional level, child marriage impacts adolescents' development, as they are not prepared for the responsibilities that come with marriage. For these reasons, preventing child marriage is not merely a legal issue but also a matter of social awareness, education, and gender equality [8].

In this context, studying the behavioral practices and gender attitudes related to child marriage among adolescents in the districts of Shrawasti and Balrampur becomes critically important. Such research helps understand how the tradition of child marriage in these areas is influenced by social beliefs, economic conditions, and gender roles. Furthermore, it clarifies how changes in adolescents' thoughts and attitudes can help reduce this problem. Thus, this subject is not only significant for social research but also valuable for policymakers, educators, and social organizations to take concrete steps toward eliminating child marriage through effective programs and policies [9].

Need and Significance of the Study

The study on the behavioral practices and gender perspectives related to child marriage among adolescents in the districts of **Shrawasti** and **Balrampur** in Uttar Pradesh is highly relevant and significant. Child marriage, although legally prohibited, is still widely practiced in rural and underdeveloped areas of these districts. It is a complex social issue linked to social, economic, cultural, and traditional beliefs [10].

The need for this study arises because child marriage not only severely affects the physical, mental, and social health of adolescents but also impacts their education, personality development, and overall quality of life. When girls are married at an early age, their educational opportunities become limited, reducing their chances of becoming self-reliant and socially empowered.

From a gender perspective, child marriage particularly violates the rights of girls. Traditionally, society limits girls' roles to marriage and family, while prioritizing education and career for boys. This imbalance leads to a lack of self-confidence among girls, social inequality, and health-related problems. Therefore, it is essential to understand the behavioral practices and community perspectives regarding child marriage to ensure equal opportunities for both girls and boys [11].

The districts of **Shrawasti** and **Balrampur** represent rural Uttar Pradesh in social, economic, and cultural terms, where traditional customs and economic insecurity encourage the practice of child marriage. Families here often marry off their daughters at a young age due to financial burden and social pressures. In this context, the study will help clarify the causes, patterns, and effects of child marriage in the local perspective. Moreover, it can guide social workers, policymakers, and educational institutions to design targeted strategies to reduce the prevalence of child marriage [12].

Additionally, this study will contribute to promoting gender equality and the rights of adolescents. By understanding the mindset of adolescents, their social circumstances, and family perspectives, effective intervention plans can be formulated. This will not only help reduce the adverse effects of child marriage but also increase awareness among adolescents regarding education, health, and social consciousness.

Therefore, studying behavioral practices and gender perspectives related to child marriage in Shrawasti and Balrampur is extremely important from social, educational, and policy-making perspectives.

In conclusion, this study will not only highlight the social and gender dimensions of child marriage but also directly contribute to improving adolescents' lives through policy, education, and social reform programs [13].

Review of Related Literature

Sharma, A. (2021) conducted a study on awareness and social impact of child marriage among adolescent girls. The study found that the likelihood of child marriage is lower among rural adolescent girls if they receive 10 years of education. Family beliefs influence marriage decisions.

Singh, R. (2022) studied the social and economic determinants of child marriage in Uttar Pradesh. The study found that child marriage is more common among children from poor families and with less-educated parents. The impact is more severe on girls.

Verma, R. & Kumar, S. (2023) studied the gender perspective on child marriage among adolescents. The study revealed that girls have a better understanding of the adverse effects of child marriage, whereas boys face greater social pressure. Education positively influences gender perspectives.

Gupta, N. (2024) conducted a study on child marriage and adolescent mental health. The study found that child marriage leads to depression, low self-esteem, health risks, and educational barriers among girls [14].

Problem Statement

A study on the behavioral practices and gender perspectives related to child marriage among adolescents in the districts of Shrawasti and Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh.

Definition of Variables

- Uttar Pradesh:** In the present study, Uttar Pradesh refers to the state in which the districts of *Shrawasti* and *Balrampur* have been specifically selected to study child marriage practices and related behaviors.
- Shrawasti:** In the present study, the district of Shrawasti will be analyzed to understand the child marriage-related behaviors and gender perspectives of adolescents.
- Balrampur:** In the present study, Balrampur district has been selected for a comparative study of child marriage and related behavioral practices.
- Adolescents:** In the present study, adolescents refer to boys and girls aged 10 to 19 years. This age group represents a critical stage of physical, mental, and social development. They form the primary target group of the study, whose experiences, perspectives, and behavioral practices related to child marriage will be analyzed [15].
- Child Marriage:** Child marriage refers to a marriage conducted before the legal minimum age—under 18 years for girls and under 21 years for boys in India. It is the main variable of the study. The study will evaluate the prevalent incidents, causes, and social impacts of child marriage.
- Behavioral Practices:** The regular actions and social behaviors adopted by a community, group, or individuals. This study includes the study of habits, traditions, rituals, and practices adopted by families and communities related to adolescent child marriage.
- Gender Perspective:** The approach of understanding and analyzing an event, practice, or behavior based on the social, cultural, and economic roles of males and females. The study will analyze the thoughts, social expectations, and decision-making differences between boys and girls regarding child marriage, which is an important part of this research [16].

Study Objectives

- To identify the prevalent practices of child marriage
- To study gender perspectives and discrimination
- To understand the impact of education and awareness

Hypotheses of the Study

- The practices of child marriage among adolescents are not the same in the districts of **Shrawasti** and **Balrampur**.
- There is a difference in social attitudes towards child marriage for girls and boys.
- Adolescents/families with higher education and awareness will have a lower level of child marriage practices [17].

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 Shrawasti 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.

Sample

For the present study, 100 adolescents (boys and girls) from the districts of Shrawasti 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 [18].

Tool

Self-developed questionnaire on practices related to child marriage.

Analysis and Interpretation of Hypotheses

Table 1: H1 – District-wise Practices of Child Marriage

District	Involved in Child Marriage (%)	Not Involved in Child Marriage (%)	Total (n)
Shrawasti	60	40	50
Balrampur	40	60	50
Total	50	50	100

Interpretation: According to the data in Table 1, the practice of child marriage is more prevalent among adolescents in Shrawasti district, where 60% of participants are involved in child marriage-related behavior, compared to only 40% in Balrampur. This difference may arise due to social, cultural, and economic factors. In Shrawasti, traditional customs and a rural environment are more dominant, which helps sustain the practice of child marriage. In contrast, Balrampur shows relatively lower prevalence, possibly due to higher levels of education, awareness, and changing social attitudes. This difference is significant for policy formulation and social interventions [19].

Table 2: H2 – Gender Perspective and Child Marriage

Gender	Support Early Marriage (%)	Oppose Early Marriage (%)	Total (n)
Girls	70	30	50
Boys	30	70	50
Total	50	50	100

Interpretation: Table 2 indicates that girls are more encouraged to marry early, whereas boys experience this practice less. The main reason is social and cultural norms that link girls' marriages to family honor, security, and societal duties. Additionally, lack of education and employment opportunities, poverty, and traditional customs increase pressure on girls to marry early. On the other hand, marriage timing for boys is considered more flexible, so society does not push them to marry early as much. This clearly shows gender discrimination, which should be considered in policy-making [20].

Table 3: H3 – Impact of Education/Awareness

Education/Awareness Level	Involved in Child Marriage (%)	Not Involved in Child Marriage (%)	Total (n)
Higher Education / Aware	20	80	50
Lower Education / Less Aware	60	40	50
Total	40	60	100

Interpretation: The data in Table 3 shows that education and awareness play a significant role in reducing the practice of child marriage. Adolescents and families with higher education and awareness had a lower tendency for child marriage, whereas the practice was more prevalent among groups with lower education and awareness. Education increases understanding of social and legal norms and enhances adolescents' critical thinking and decision-making abilities. Awareness programs and social campaigns highlight the importance of rights, health, and safety for both girls and boys. Thus, education and awareness prove to be effective strategies for preventing child marriage [21].

Conclusions of the Research Study

1. The study revealed that the practices of child marriage are not the same in Shravasti and Balrampur districts. Child marriage is more prevalent in Shravasti, while it is relatively less in Balrampur. This indicates that social, cultural, and economic factors have different influences in the two districts.
2. The research found that girls are more encouraged to marry early, whereas boys face less such pressure. This reflects a clear picture of gender inequality and discrimination in society.
3. Child marriage practices were found to be lower among adolescents and families with higher education and social awareness. This indicates that education and awareness programs can play an effective role in changing the tendencies of child marriage.
4. To reduce child marriage, education, awareness, and social interventions are essential. Training, workshops, and media campaigns in local communities can help decrease practices like child marriage.

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