

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UN-STARRED QUESTION NO. 3343
TO BE ANSWERED ON 29.03.2023

CHILD MARRIAGE OCCURRENCE IN THE COUNTRY

3343. SHRI JOSE K. MANI:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government has the details of the number of child marriages that occurred in the country over the last three years;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the initiatives taken by Government to prevent the occurrence of child marriages in the country; and
- (d) the details of the action taken in this regard?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI)

(a) & (b): The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles and publishes the data on the number of cases of child marriage registered under 'the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006' in its publication 'Crime in India'. The said report is available upto the year 2021. As per information available with NCRB, the number of cases registered under 'the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006' during, 2019, 2020 and 2021 are 523, 785 and 1050 respectively. However, higher reporting of cases does not necessarily reflect increase in the number of cases of child marriages, but it may be because of increased awareness among citizens to report such incidents due to initiatives by the Government and better enforcement of law by States/ UTs.

(c) & (d) The Government has enacted 'the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006' (PCMA) in order to curb child marriages and to take punitive actions against those associate with child marriages. Section 16 of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) authorises the State Government to appoint for the whole State, or such part there of as may be specified, an officer or officers to be known as the 'Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPO)' having jurisdiction over the area or areas specified in the notification. This section also specifies the functions to be discharged by CMPOs, which also include preventing solemnisation of child marriages by taking such action as they may deem fit; to collect evidence for the effective prosecution of persons contravening the provisions of the Act; to advise the individuals or counsel the residents of the locality not to indulge in promoting, helping, aiding or allowing the solemnisation of child marriages; to create awareness about the ill effects of child marriages; and to sensitize the community on the issue of child marriages. These authorities function under the respective State Governments/ UT Administrations. As such, implementation of the provisions of the Act lies with them.

'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. The responsibilities to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens, investigation and prosecution of crime against women and children including prohibition of child marriages, rest with the respective State Governments. The State Governments are competent to deal with such offenses under the extant provisions of laws.

Nevertheless, the Central Government undertakes awareness drives, media campaigns and outreach programs and issues advisories to the States/ UTs from time to time to highlight evil effects of this practice. The Ministry has also written to all States/ UTs to increase the number of CMPOs, as presence of Statutory Officer at local levels would result in even more effective public engagement on the subject and prevention of solemnisation of child marriage. Further, the Ministry of Women and Child Development implements the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, wherein creation of awareness on matters pertaining to gender equality and discouraging child marriage is an important focus area. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) also undertakes awareness programs and consultations with stakeholders from time to time in this regard. In addition, Government of India has introduced CHILDLINE with short code 1098, a 24X7 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis which responds with suitable interventions to call for any form of assistance which a child requires, including for prevention of child marriages in coordination with police, Child Marriage Protection Officers (CMPOs), District Child Protection Units etc.

Further, the Government has introduced a Bill namely 'the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 in the Parliament on 21.12.2021 for raising the age of marriage of women to 21 years to make it at par with the men. The proposed Bill also has provisions to make consequential amendments in the enactments, inter alia, relating to age of marriage of parties, such as 'The Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872', 'The Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936', 'The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937', 'The Special Marriage Act, 1954', 'The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955', and 'The Foreign Marriage Act, 1969'. The Bill has since been referred to Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports for examination.
