

# Forced Child Marriages - Unheard Stories ...



I'm a  
**CHILD**  
not a  
**BRIDE**

No  
more  
**Child**  
marriage!

No Child Marriage!  
No Child Marriage!  
No Child Marriage!



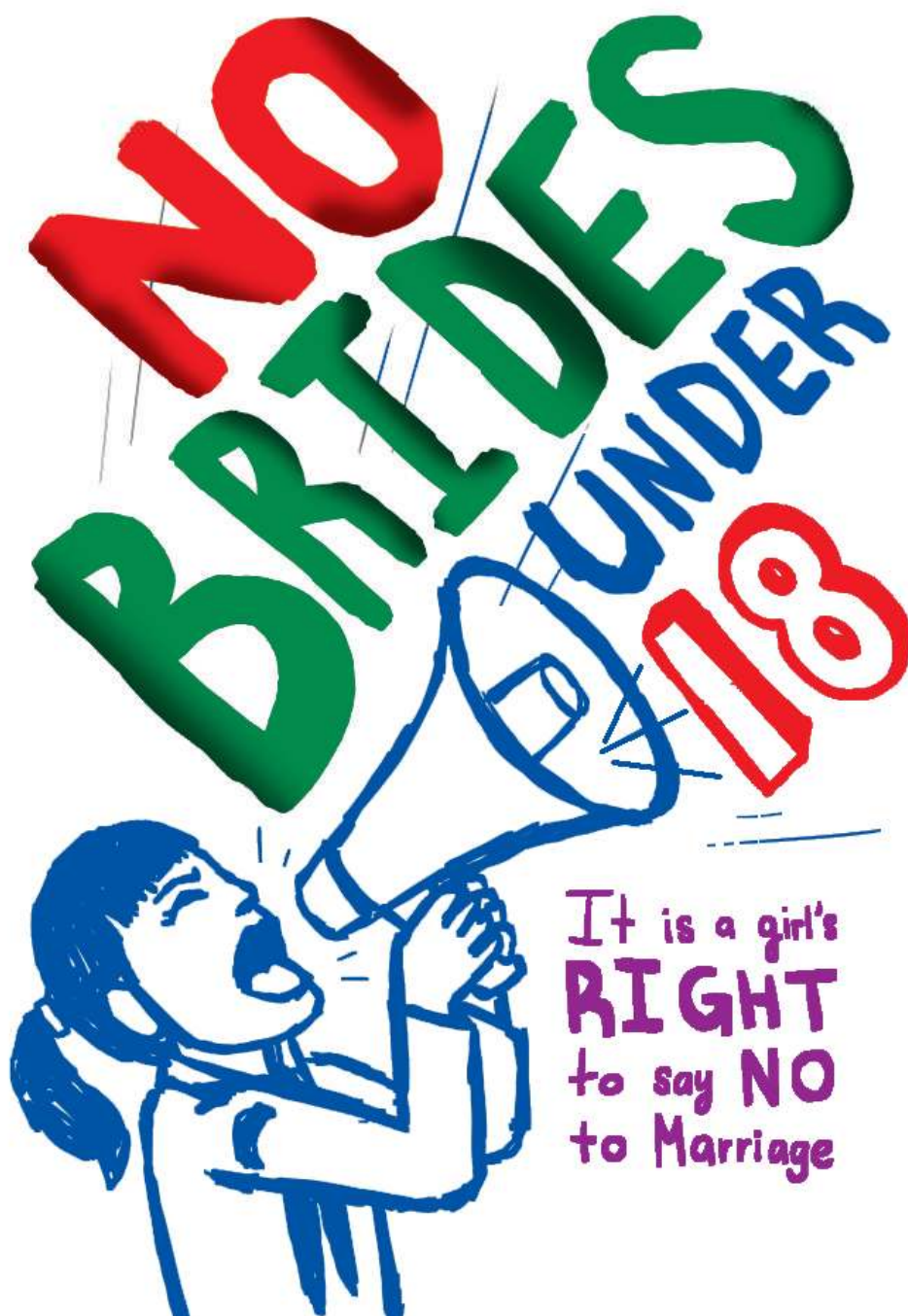


# Our Interventions .....





# Forced Child Marriages Unheard Stories



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## **FOREWORD**

Let the child be child! Let us together build the society where every child enjoys their childhood to the fullest. Child marriage is a fundamental violation of child rights. The case stories in this report explain the scourge of Child Marriage, which is an issue that requires urgent attention. Various social movements, as well as government programmes in the last 70 years has still not eradicated this from our society. Various factors such as poverty, disempowerment of women, cultural norms result in preventing women from realising their rights for their security, self-sustainment and to exercise their agency as free human beings. No society can truly progress when half the population is kept in chains. In our patriarchal society, child marriage may be described as a disguised form of modern slavery.

The above metaphor may seem jarring to some naysayers, but it is essential to sensitise the mainstream society to the real life struggles of the victims of child marriage. Too often, human realities are hidden and lost through statistics and figures. By documenting case studies narrated by the women themselves in their own voices, this report provides great depth as well as empathetic understanding of the real struggles of these women. It is hoped that such warm and humane stories narrated here will find an emotional chord in the hearts of the readers. We need to mobilise public support and empathy towards the victims of child marriage, and increase awareness on empowering girl child through Education.

I have no doubts that such reports will certainly go a long way towards that goal. This report is definitely a feather on the hat of SNEHA, with its long experience of over 30 years of working for the rights of women and children.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the mammoth task of organising, interviewing, drafting and preparing this report including all the staff of SNEHA, District Child Protection Unit and various others whose efforts have gone into the production of this report.

  
District Collector  
Nagapattinam



**SNEHA** (Social Need Education and Human Awareness)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the District Collector of Nagapattinam for rendering support to protect children and Child Rights and for encouraging civil societies working for the welfare of the Women, Children and Other Vulnerable Sectors.

I also appreciate and acknowledge the constant support and guidance provided by the District Child Protection Officer, Nagapattinam and the District Child Protection Unit to carry out the Case Study, Training and evolving the district specific Standard Operating Procedure and shaping each stage in the process.

I extend my special thanks and deep appreciation to the entire team of SNEHA who supported the project.

**Jesu Rethinam,**

**Director, SNEHA.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Women are still considered as second-class citizens with regard to their position within family and society. They are restricted inside the home and so in society. Women and girls from marginalised communities face double discrimination gender inequalities and caste discrimination. They are forced to play the role of an adult with no power. Violence Against Women (VAW) starts from her birth to death various forms of violence such as Female Foeticide, Infanticide, Child Marriage, Child Labour, Sexual Abuse, Physical and Emotional Violence in Family, School and Society, Dowry Harassment, Abuse, Rape, Acid Attack and other forms of violence continue throughout women's lives. The lack of power within the marital relationship can compromise a woman's ability to exercise her reproductive rights, including decisions related to family planning, childbearing, and maternal and child health services. This leads many girl children into distress.

Child<sup>1</sup> Marriage<sup>2</sup> should be viewed within the context of force and compulsion, involving pressure and emotional blackmail; and children are forced to accept their parents' choice. So, they lack the choice or capacity to give consent. In many Child Marriages, the girls lack power in their marital relationships. Therefore, Child marriages are always considered as a forced marriage because valid consent is absent. Thus, children are denied the right to make decisions in their life. Their participation in the family's important decisions is considered negligent.

Child Marriage exploits one gender and steals childhood of millions of children across. It should not be perceived as the concern of an individual family along. It is a social

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<sup>1</sup> According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, "Child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."

<sup>2</sup> According to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 "Child Marriage" means a marriage, or a marriage about to be solemnized, to which either of the contracting parties is a child; and child for purposes of marriage is defined based on gender of the person if a Male, it is 21 years of age, and if a Female, 18 years of age

evil that endangers the holistic development of a particular gender and should be addressed as gender exploitation. The NFHS-IV data reveals that almost 17 per cent of marriages happening in Tamil Nadu are Child Marriages, showing that two out of every ten marriages are child marriages.

India ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in terms of child marriage with 47% girls married before the age of 18<sup>3</sup>. Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) say that 17% of Child Marriages in India occur in Tamil Nadu. According to the fourth edition of National Family Health Survey (2015-16)<sup>4</sup>, 7.1% of women in the age group of 20-24 years got married before the age of 18 years is, which reflects just how many young girls have experienced pregnancy or motherhood in their adolescence. This necessitated District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Nagapattinam and SNEHA (Social Need Education and Human Awareness) to undertake a Study to explore the Causes of Child Marriage, Influencers of Child Marriage and the Mental Distress that girls undergo when they are married young.

## **FRAME WORK OF THE STUDY**

This study was carried out in the district of Nagapattinam. Social Need Education and Human Awareness<sup>5</sup> (SNEHA) with support of DCPU<sup>6</sup> carried out a survey in the coastal districts of Nagapattinam and Karaikal of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. SNEHA is facilitating the processes of empowerment through training, information dissemination through Research and Documentation, enabling participation in decision-making, creating awareness through literacy and involving in participatory researches to transcend the micro level issue to the macro level policy.

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF's State of the World's Children, 2013 data from UNICEF

<sup>4</sup> National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-2016)

<sup>5</sup> SNEHA has reached fisherfolk and other coastal dependent communities (including Dalits) who are dependent on coastal resources for their livelihood and fisheries allied activities. The main focus of SNEHA is, Women and Children. SNEHA has also facilitated in the formation of Community Based Organisations such as Women Sangams, Self Help Groups, Taluk and District Level Federations for the empowerment of women.

<sup>6</sup> Social Defence Department under Integrated Child Protection Scheme has been functioning under the Chairmanship of the District Collector. This unit is Providing Care, Protection and Rehabilitation for the children below 18 years under Juvenile Justice Act 2015. District child protection officer is the Public Information Officer of District child protection unit, which assures protection of children in the district.



## Hypothesis

Socio-cultural factors lead to forced Child Marriage in the districts of Nagapattinam and Karaikal of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

## Objectives

- ❖ To understand the challenges of girl children married in the age group of 15-18 years.
- ❖ To explore various reasons for the practice of child marriage.
- ❖ To understand the consequences of girl child marriages.
- ❖ To bring social awareness on the consequences of girl child marriages and influence policy level changes.

## Scope

- ❖ To understand the situation/ challenges of women in the age group of 18-25 years, this forced them to engage in child marriage.
- ❖ To strengthen the impetus for advocating/ ensuring proper implementation of Prohibition of Child Marriage (PCM) Act, 2006.

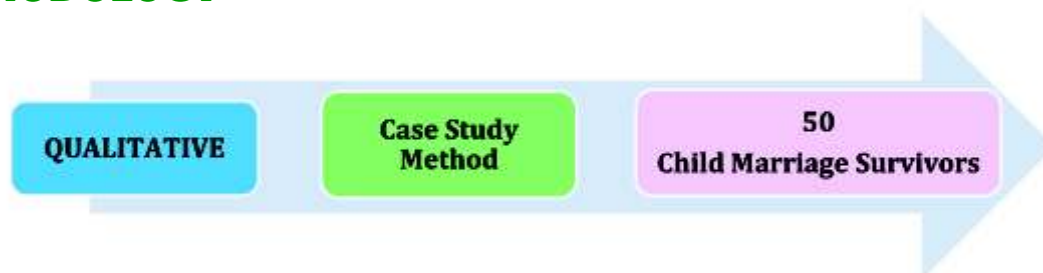
## Sampling Design

50 samples who were the survivors of child marriage are selected across the district.

## Questionnaire Sections

- ❖ Basic Information
- ❖ Education Status
- ❖ Family Status
- ❖ Current Status
- ❖ Consequences of Girl Child Marriage

## METHODOLOGY



## Research Ethics

1. The objective and the process were explained to all the respondents in this study.
2. Prior consent was taken from the respondents.
3. The stories were recorded by maintaining high confidentiality no references to villages or individuals are made in the report or otherwise. As a standard rule, **names of all the respondents in the report are changed as per research ethics**. Separate note is provided in the report for the names being changed for each respondent.
4. Safeguarding the dignity of all respondents is the primary consideration for this analysis
5. Data collection with respondents is done on a one-to-one basis and not in a group setting.

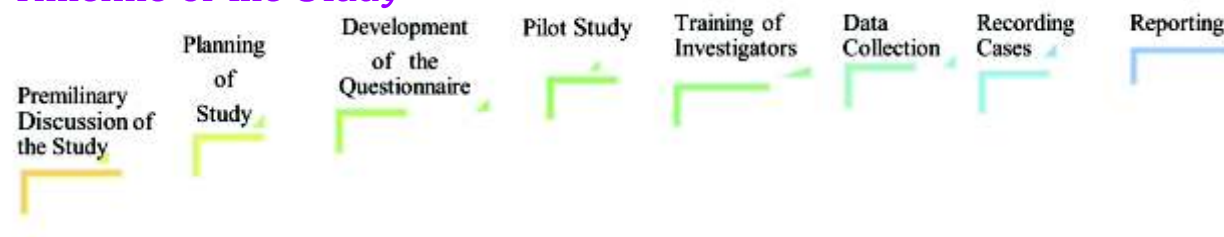
## Study Team

A Core Team of members were involved in the field. They visited the samples with prior permission and consent.

## Training of Investigators

Prior training for investigators was conducted at SNEHA Head office, Nagapattinam.

## Timeline of the Study





# CHILD MARRIAGE SURVIVORS

*Human Interest Stories Survivors Seeking Change*

*The girls in the stories are striving to protect other girls from having to go through what they have experienced*

**Ms. Niswana, 20 years, Nagapattanam**

*I belong to Muslim Community. I was brought up by my Grand mother. My father and mother lived in Neyveli.*

*I lost my childhood and Education. I have been longing to be nurtured and pampered by my parents.*

*When my own parents were not able to secure my life, how could they believe that early marriage will?  
- nothing worked out.*

*I couldn't get along with my husband and his family. I lost my freedom and couldn't manage to serve everyone at home. I applied for divorce and am continuing my passion to design clothes.*

*I'm not the only one, there are many girls crying for help to decide their lives in my community. Will they be heard?*

I am **Meena (name has been changed to protect her identity)**, a child marriage survivor. I belong to Kuravar community. Both my parents would spend their day collecting trash from road side. They began each day hoping to collect enough to sell so that they could feed us and take care of other needs at our home. Some days won't be fortunate for them and in those days, we would go to sleep hungry. Both my parents are addicted to alcohol so many days they would never mind me sleeping hungry. When we couldn't eat properly, education wasn't a priority in my life. I wanted to lead a life which provides basic needs so I myself quit my education in 8th std. Later my desire to study faded and I had a love affair with my close relative Mr.Raj. Thus, I became an easy prey for child marriage.

My parents were not able to afford to feed, buy clothes or fulfil my needs and I also felt that marriage may save me and I wouldn't have any better choices. At the age of 16, without any awareness on my role as a wife and having a family, I was ready to marry him. My parents also hoped that this marriage would improve our financial crisis. They arranged for the Wedding Engagement. The child rescue team in District Child Protection Unit came to know this news and stopped the engagement ceremony. I was placed in Children's home for a while. Later when I attained 18 years of age, both of our parents initiated the marriage plan. Thus, I got married and moved to my native district.

A year later, I gave birth to a baby girl. My husband is taking good care of me. My husband is encouraging me to continue my studies but I feel ashamed to go school again as I'm a mother of two kids. I'm able to understand the importance of education, so I will give good education to my kids and help them to lead a better life.

\*\*\*\*\*

My name is **Tamil (name changed)**, a child marriage survivor and native of Nagapattinam District. I'm narrating my story so that it encourages others to have hope in their lives. Like me, millions of young brides are waiting to be heard. I belong to the Vanniyar community which is classified as Most Backward class in Tamil Nadu. My father is a construction worker; my mother is a home maker. I have a younger brother, who completed his ITI and is helping my father in construction work. They take up building contracts and work together.

When I was studying 9th grade a huge storm swirled in my life. My parents convinced were to be get me married and secretly arranged for marriage with my 30-year-old uncle. I cried and longed for help and rescue but was not aware of any remedy. My parents were stubborn because they wanted to retain the relationship, build good rapport, save the ancestral property and tried to console me in various ways. Without my consent the engagement ceremony was over and the wedding was arranged. I was literally scared and looked for help. By that time Officials from Child Protection Unit smelled my parent's plans and arrived at my home. After several enquiries, they got to know the fact that marriage date was confirmed. They cancelled the wedding. Sensing that my home is not a safe place to me, they rescued me. Today my life is saved. I have completed my School education and for attending college I moved to Pondicherry. Now I'm a second year Nursing student of a reputed Medical college at Pondicherry.

Later I heard that my uncle got married and have a child of Two years. Now my parents understood the importance of education and the implications of child marriage. They are spreading the awareness on the ill - effects of Child marriage and importance of Education in my community.

Thus, as a family we came out of the vicious storm in our life.

\*\*\*\*\*

“I wonder whether I too will have Education in future” **Dharshini (name changed)** said with serious concern on her face.

Her parents had an early marriage and it was not a happy marriage. Her father worked in a hotel and her mother was a homemaker. Suddenly her father passed away. She and her brother were too young to realize the loss. Being a young widow and mother of two, Darshini's mother struggled to cope with the loss and couldn't manage the crisis without a source of income. Darshini's family, returned to her mother's native district hoping to get a job but she didnt get any job!

The relatives and neighbours suggested Darshini's mother to arrange marriage for her daughter, because their survival was now a big question mark. Dharshini's mother was even ready to compromise in terms of caste in order to get her daughter married of quickly thinking that only through marriage her daughter will be saved and the financial crisis can be managed. She also started looking for a groom for her daughter through her relative and neighbours. Finally, she got a groom through her neighbour and the groom was not of her same caste and was 31 years of age. Believing that this groom will be supportive and the entire family will be saved, she had arranged for an engagement. Engagement was also carried out in the groom's house. The marriage arrangement was also carried out in a hurry.

Dharshini was so worried and wanted to tell her mother "No for Marriage" but after seeing her mother's burden, she prepared herself for this marriage. A Neighbour from her village reported this marriage to District Child Protection Officer.

After enquiring, the officer stopped the wedding arrangements. Through friends Dharshini came to know about the news that the marriage has been thwarted. She was excited and wanted to continue her education. She had requested the officials, to help her to continue her education.

The officials also arranged for a job for Dharshini's mother. Dharshini was happy to continue her studies. Now she is a Diploma graduate in an Institute.

Yes... she has a future too and is able to continue her studies.

\*\*\*\*\*



My name is **Subha (not her real name)**. I live in a Village of Nagapattinam. My father and mother are agricultural coolies. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. I belong to 'Goundar' caste. When I was studying 11<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher Secondary School, my parents forced me to discontinue my studies to solemnize her marriage with uncle. They didn't allow me to go to school. I felt so sad and missed going to school and being with my friends.

Then my marriage was fixed secretly with my maternal uncle as his second wife. Without printing invitation and informing neighbours and relatives, my wedding was arranged in the Muniswaran Temple. As I was not interested in marriage, I informed CHILDLINE through 1098 Telephone number. Immediately 3 persons from CHILDLINE visited our home and discussed the issues and consequences of minor marriage and they gave counselling to our parents. My parents agreed to stop the marriage till I turn 18.

I was so happy. As my marriage was stopped I was in my home. I wished to continue my education. Gradually I lost interest in education, before joining 11<sup>th</sup> standard I fell in love with a man of BC Vellalar Community from the nearby village. Once when we were talking alone, the villagers misunderstood it and took us to the nearest Police Station. There they demanded for our marriage.

After enquiry, we were sent to All Women Police Station, Nagapattinam. There they enquired our parents. I was less than 18 years of age, and after a series of enquiry and counselling, they informed our parents to arrange marriage for us, once I attain 18 years. But both of our parents didn't accept it, as we were from different communities. The police inspector convinced our parents for our marriage.

Later it was decided that our marriage will be scheduled when the man returns from abroad. Now I am living with my parents. My father won't talk to me. He scolds me daily. Now both of my parents don't like me. So, I go to my relative's home in day time and come back to my home only at night. I'm afraid of my immediate society as to how long I can stay like this.

My parents forcibly discontinued my studies and I forgot all the basics in this course of time. This became a barrier for me to achieve my dreams. Now I'm looking for the opportunity to develop my vocational skills.

\*\*\*\*\*

My name is **Jaya (not her real name)**. I belong to a small village in Nagapattinam District. My father was an agricultural labourer and my mother would cook for wedding and ceremonies. I have 2 younger sisters and a younger brother. I belong to Choleiya Vellalar (BC) community. I was studying 12<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher secondary School, and was in love with Prem (not his real name), a 11<sup>th</sup> Standard student of the same school.

When my father came to know about our love, he chided me and considered discontinuing my studies. He arranged for my marriage with a relative from a nearby village. So, Prem and I decided to elope from home. As discussed, we came out and got married in a Temple. Prem belonged to Gounder community which is categorized as Most Backward Class in Tamil Nadu. My family is economically poorer than his, but both our parents egoistically thought tired to separate us and lodge a complaint in local police station mainly to satisfy their respective egos.

The complaint was forwarded and registered in All Women Police Station Nagapattinam and we were produced in the court. Considering our age and education, the judge ordered us to go back to our respective homes. My parents didn't accept me and so I was staying in my grandmother's home. They stopped my education. Prem was with his parents. He was ordered to sign in the court on a daily - basis and he followed the order.

For 6 to 7 months he signed without delay, but later he didn't. And he was put behind bars for contempt of court. He was remanded for 28 days. Later he went to Malaysia and returned after 2 years. As our parents didn't accept us, we went to Tirupur and worked in a textile mill. We stayed in a rented home. For nearly 1 year we both worked there.

I became pregnant for 7 months. Prem's family asked us to return back to our native village. So we came back. They performed the baby shower ceremony. Prem's mother took me to the hospital for consultation. After the check-up the doctor said the baby's growth (heart, kidney) was not sufficient. I hoped that the baby will be alright before the delivery. I gave birth to a baby girl but she died after she was born.

From that delivery I became so sick. I was admitted in a private hospital. Till now I haven't recovered. As there were continuous property issues between my husband and his elder brother, we moved to nearby village. My husband was working as a welder. His earning was not sufficient to run our family and my health expenditure.

I married early and faced a lot of consequences such as; my parents didn't accept us till now, when my husband went to jail, I was depressed. Also the work in the Tiruppur textile company was very arduous. When I was pregnant, there were no elders to support me. When my child was dead becoming depressed and couldn't cope with it. Moreover, my health condition also got worse and I became physically and mentally sick.

Due to child marriage, we lost our education, our parents didn't accept us, and we are stigmatized by the society. We have faced tremendous stress due to the continuous trials in court. It drained our mental energy. I have faced lot of health issues due to the work in textile mill.

\*\*\*\*\*



My name is **Vasu (not her real name)**. I belong to a small Village of Nagapattinam District. My father is old and he has problems in his vision. He wouldn't be able to go to any work. My mother is an agricultural labourer. We were running our family with her earnings. We were living in a temporary residence build by a charitable organization during Gaja Cyclone. I have two elder sisters and an elder brother. Both my sisters got married. My elder sister had issues with her husband and separated physically but not legally and presently living in my aunt's home.

My brother is mentally retarded, working as assistant in a flower shop. Daily he would get 50 to 100 rupees. But he wouldn't go to the job regularly. We belong to Vanniya Kula Chatriya community. I have studied up to 9<sup>th</sup> standard in the Government Higher Secondary school but I could not continue my studies further due to our economic condition. I remained idle at our home.

At that time, the family of Velu (not his real name) 45 year old, belonging to the same community proposed to my family to get me married to him. As they are rich, my relatives convinced my parents and made them accept the marriage proposal using the excuse of our poor economic conditions. So, they planned to conduct the engagement ceremony and to conduct the wedding 12 days after that.

It was planned to conduct wedding in a Temple. But some anonymous people complained to CHILDLINE about the situation. Officials from CHILDLINE came to our home and informed us that marriage before the age of 18 is an offence and warned us of legal action. But the villagers didn't accept it. They shouted, "Who are you to stop the marriage? We will organize the wedding function". As it became an issue, the CHILDLINE team informed it to the police department. The Police came in to the scene and got a written confirmation from us that we will not solemnize the wedding before I attain 18 years of age.

But secretly the marriage arrangement was done and very few were invited; the marriage was completed by exchanging rings and not with Thali(nuptial chain). After the wedding we went to our respective homes and lived there. Often, I would go to my



husband's home. My husband has two younger brothers and their wives and an unmarried elder sister. They lived as a joint family. My husband is not affectionate towards me. He is a drunkard. He is addicted to alcohol and used to drink until he loses consciousness. I was afraid and couldn't even serve him food , so his sister would serve him food. He wouldn't respect me even treat me as a human. He would pick up fight at the drop of a hat and I have undergone domestic violence.

My neighbours would see the fight and I used to feel ashamed. After the fight he would leave but the neighbours would console me by saying, the elder son of this family is a drunkard and the family suffers a lot because of it.

A few days later I started thinking that, “He is elder than me, what will happen if he dies”. I was so afraid. I started questioning, what will happen to my life. I got scared and I returned back to my parent's home bravely. Thereafter, I didn't see my husband, didn't even speak with him through phone. They also did not visit my home. Slowly I consoled my parents and as a family decided that I didn't need this life and stayed with my parents concluding that my future and life is over.

We signed for our divorce in front of our relatives and the village heads. So, both of us returned back the jewels and things we gifted each other. So, from now on we don't have any contact. I was crying and depressed thinking about my life. A year later Ram (not his real name) approached us to marry me as his second wife. Without informing to relatives and friends we got married. Now we are living happily. He is in Malaysia at present on work. He regularly calls me through phone. I am very happy now.

I have a message to share and this is it “men should treat women with respect and women should make sure they select the man they love. When women are forced into marriage, they have to report it to the police or to someone in their community and they should be sensitized to end marriage in early ages.

\*\*\*\*\*

My name is **Vani (Not her real name)**. I am from a small village of Nagapattinam district. I have a younger sister. My father and mother are agricultural coolies. Their work starts in the morning and ends after sun set. We belong to Vanniya Kula Chatriya Community. I studied till 9<sup>th</sup> standard in Government High School. My sister and I help my mother in household. During our holidays and vacation, we use to go work in the agricultural farms. My father is addicted to alcohol. He spends all his earnings to consume alcohol and pick up fight with us. This is a regular drama happening in our house. Getting notebooks and pen was so difficult, many a times I skipped my school without basic needs. One day I told my parents that I don't have to study anymore and stopped going to school. I stayed at home and looked after the household works. Till my sister and parents return home, I stayed alone.

My relative Kumar (not his real name) who also belongs to Vanniyar kula Chatriya community approached our family with a marriage proposal for me. Due to Security reasons and to release their burden, my parents planned to solemnize my marriage.

Though they knew it was a child marriage, they completed it by informing only to close relatives without printing any invitation. But someone informed CHILDLINE. Officials from CHILDLINE came to my husband's home, warned that child marriage is an offence. My husband left me back in my parent's home. They informed my parents that I should be in my home and got the declaration signed by my parents. I was in my parents' home and found it difficult as my father had not changed at all. Whenever situation would get worse, I would go to my husband's home. This pattern kept getting repeated, so I shifted to my husband's home permanently.

My husband is living with his parents and he is 27. He works as a mason. My father in law is also a mason and my mother in law works as an agricultural labour. We are running our family with this income. On 11.06.2019, I gave birth to my son Harjith and now he is 1 year and 4 months. Now I am spending my time with my son.

I felt that I should not be a burden for my parents. So I accepted the marriage. That time I didn't know much. As I was too young and not used to heavy household work, my mother in law would scold me often. No one has beaten me though. But when my mother in law scolds, I would get distressed and think why I even got married. Even when I was pregnant she forced me to do all the work.

I will do all the work with heavy heart. She will force me to do all the work, claiming it will help for a natural delivery. Now I am suffering. No one should do child marriage. We will be childish and we will not be aware of any responsibilities. We will not know how to run a family. Due to this we will face a lot of problems without happiness and peace. So no one should do child marriage. Parents should not consider their girl child as a burden and should marry them only after attaining the right age.

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I am **Mathi (name changed)**. I am living in Village of Nagapattinam district. My parents are saltpan workers. I have an elder brother, who works as a labourer in a prawn hatchery. I have an elder sister, who is married and a younger sister, studying 11<sup>th</sup> standard. We belong to Ambalakarar (seermarabinar) community. I was studying in Government Girls Higher Secondary school. I was staying in Government girl's hostel and would go home only during my holidays.

When I was in hostel, I used to go to the nearby shop with my friends to buy essential items. During such visit to the shop, I would talk with Roopan (Not his real name). He also belongs to my community. Over the course of time, we fell in love with each other. One day Roopan came to meet me in my home. At that time the villagers surrounded and called for the village assembly. They have raised the issue as to how an outsider can enter our village at night time. Information was passed to Roopan's parents and their villagers.

On the next day they planned to solemnize our wedding. When they were discussing about our marriage, officials from the CHILDLINE intervened. They said that the bride is only 16, she should be married only after 18 and hence they are stopping the marriage. They took both our parents and the village chiefs to Vedaranyam Police Station. In the police station they took the declaration from our parents that the boy should be married after 21 and the girl should be married only after 18.

After this issue I was in my home for some days, and then I went to the hostel and complete my 12<sup>th</sup> standard with good marks. Now I have applied for Nursing course. For my educational fees I was working in a sweet stall in Vedaranyam Bazar Street without troubling my parents. I am confident that I will complete nursing and will go to a job.

The villagers mistook us, when Roopan and I were talking alone and they created it as an issue and it was depressing. I felt guilty that because of my act I bring shame to my family. It took lot of time to come out of the issue. I felt shame in my village and in my school. But without giving up I focused in my studies and scored good marks.

Now I have realized that it was merely an infatuation and was not in love with Roopan. Had I gotten married, it would have been a terrible disaster by now. I am very thankful to CHILDLINE who stopped my marriage and secured my dreams. Society should show the right path for people like me, who have done mistakes. But they should not encourage child marriage. Government should create awareness about the hazards of child marriage in villages.

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I'm **Sasi (not her real name)**. I am from the village Agasthiyanpalli in Nagapattinam District. My father died 6 years ago. My father had two wives. His first wife (Elder Mom) has a son and a daughter. His Second wife, my mother, has a son and 2 daughters. I have an elder brother and a younger sister. My mother works as a helper in construction work. My Elder mom works as a labour in Salt Pan and my brother also work as a labour in saltpan

With a very low income we lived in a rented house. We belong to parayan community. I was studying 9<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Girls Higher Secondary School. As I was not able to learn English, I stopped going to school. I was in love with my relative Chandru. When we were talking alone in his home, my brother saw us. He got angry, beat us, and kicked us out of the home. Due to this the issue spread and the village assembly was called for. In the assembly my brother refused to take me home. Due to this Chandru's mother agreed to solemnize marriage for us and requested to arrange temporary stay for me in a relative's home.

My marriage was planned in Mariyamman temple. At that time 3 officials from CHILDLINE came and stopped our wedding. They warned that I should be married only after turning 18, otherwise legal action will be initiated. I was not able to return to my home and was staying in my uncle's home instead.

I was staying in my uncle's home for a month. Later my mother took me to my home. I was living with my mother. It is planned to solemnize our wedding for us when I attain 18 years of age.

When the marriage was stopped, it was so difficult with so much of stigma. The society sees us as a disgrace. The marriage expenses had to be foregone wasted. It was a moment of pain with shame. Because of me, my family had to endure shame. I will say that a girl should get married only after 18. Government should strictly enforce the prohibition of child marriages. They should bring awareness about the evils of child marriage to everyone.

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I'm **Shalini (not her real name)**. I am from a small Village of Nagapattinam District. My father was a fisherman and he died 3 years ago. I have a younger sister and a brother. We belong to Pattinavar (MBC) community. I was studying 10<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher Secondary School. I want to continue my education further, but my parents didn't allow and I had to stay home.

Though my father worked as a fisherman, he spent most of his earnings in consuming liquor and would fight with my mother daily. We were running our family with my mother's income. Chandru is (name changed) from a family of Pattinavar (MBC) community from Seruthur Village approached us with marriage proposal. As my father drank continuously and also to reduce the burden they accepted for the marriage. Our marriage engagement function was completed in February 2017. After the engagement, someone informed to CHILDLINE. Two officials from CHILDLINE visited our home and informed our parents about the marriage age for a girl and warned about the implications of child marriages. They counselled our parents.

Two months after my engagement was over, suddenly my father died due to health issues. As the groom's mother fell ill, they forced us into marriage. And hence we got married on 04.10.2017. Within a year after my marriage my mother in law died. In my husband's home his two elder brothers, their wives and their children and his unmarried younger brother were there. Though we are in the same home, we live as independent families. With my husband's very low income we are running our family.

I gave birth to twin girls. I found it very difficult to manage them. When my mother in law was there she supported me. Now we are living in the same home, but my brother in laws create problems for us. They don't even talk to us.

During my engagement I was very happy. But when the CHILDLINE officials visited our home, I was very upset. Without knowing they are doing child marriages. If someone arranges for child marriage, I will tell them about consequences they have to face because of child marriage.

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I am **Vigneshwari (not her real name)**. I am living in Vedaranyam Taluk, Nagapattinam District. My father is an agricultural labourer. My mother is a house wife. My father has two wives. His first wife works as an agricultural labourer. As she doesn't have children, my father married my mother as second wife. I have a younger brother; he is studying in 6<sup>th</sup> standard. I was studying in 12<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher Secondary School. We belong to Vanniya Kula Chatriya community.

Now due to differences between my father and mother's age, they got separated, though not legally since 3 years back. When I was studying 12<sup>th</sup> standard, it was planned to solemnize marriage to me with my maternal uncle, who lives in Ariyalur district and we got engaged. Our marriage was planned on June 2020. After my Engagement, I kept going to school as usual. My friends were curious about the new jewellery I was wearing. After hearing that I'm engaged, my classmates mocked me on seeing my engagement ring. They kept asking me why I accepted the marriage and I had no answers. Thinking of this I was totally depressed and upset. I had planned to quit my life, as I had no hope in my life and in this marriage.

To save myself from this marriage, I drank pesticide and went to the school. There I became felt ill and the teachers rushed me to the primary health centre. After administering First Aid treatment they forwarded me to the Nagapattinam Government hospital for further treatment. During the police enquiry, I told that since my classmates mocked me for my marriage engagement, I attempted suicide. Officials from the child welfare department visited the hospital and counselled me as well as my parents. They informed the legal aspects of child marriage to my parents.

After that I was going to my school and continuing my education. As my grandmother was not well they took me to her home in Ariyalur. I was supporting my grandmother. Without my knowledge, over there they planned for my marriage. When I came to know about it, I confidently alerted it to the Child Welfare Department.

Immediately the officials called our parents and warned us to return to our home, else legal action would be initiated. Without an option they took me back to my home.

My father has planned for my marriage and forced my mother. When the marriage was stopped, my mother thanked the officials and the government.

Due to the law, we are secured from child marriages. I sensitised my friends and the villagers to inform to 1098 in case they came to know of any incident of child marriage.

When my mother got married, my maternal grandmother didn't give any gifts and dowry. So my father planned to marry me back to my maternal grandmother's son. So that he doesn't have to give any dowry and his expenses will get reduced. Moreover, they didn't give any share in the property to my mother.

I was in distress during my Engagement. When my marriage was stopped, I am very happy. It helped me to continue my education. I informed my father that I don't need marriage now, but he didn't listen to it. But now I am happy.

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My name is **Latha (not her real name)**. I live in a small Village of Vedaranyam, Nagapattinam District. I have an elder brother and a sister. My sister got married 5 years ago. Now my brother is in Malaysia without any job due to COVID19 Pandemic restriction. My father is a sick man and he is not able to go to any job. Mother is an agricultural coolie. I belong to Pandaram caste which is categorized as Most Backward community in Tamil Nadu.

I was studying 10<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher Secondary School. I fell in love with Karan (not real name) who lives in the next street. He belongs to Konar community. Every summer the villagers will celebrate Draupathi Amman Temple festival which is a famous festival in our village. That night when we were talking alone, one of my relatives saw it and informed it to my parents and to my neighbours. And the information spread across the village.

The next day everyone gathered, discussed and planned to solemnize our marriage. On 09.06.2015 at 4pm my marriage was planned in Mariamman temple. That time the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) informed about this to the Vettaikaranirupu police station, as child marriage is an offence. Charge Sheet was filed against my father and uncle for organizing this wedding. The VAO, local Priest, Assistant Sub-Inspector, and my mother were enquired.

Even I was enquired in the court, I replied to their questions stressfully. Finally, the case was closed by the court, as there was no evidence. I feel guilty. I embarrassed my family and relatives in front of others in the villages as they stigmatized our whole family; Even now my neighbours don't talk to me.

Because of this, I don't like to stay in my home. I went to my aunt's home in Vedaranyam. Due to this issue I got separated from my parents, siblings and with heavy heart and guilt, living with my aunt's family and trying to forget the past. I am aware that I should not create any more issues to my family in the future

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I am **Subha (Not her real name)**. I am living with my parents and a younger sister in Nagapattinam Taluk, Nagapattinam District. We reside in a hut. We belong to Peramalaikallar community. My father sells eggs and his income is not sufficient to run our family. Till Seven years back my mother worked in a hotel. There she met with an accident and suffered a severe injury on her leg. Even after two surgeries she was unable to walk and became bed ridden. None of our relatives helped us out. My father didn't have regular work. Worried for my mother's health and unable to bear the stress of having to take care of his children, he turned addicted to alcohol and started giving only the remaining money for our food and medical expenses.

Due to these circumstances, I took responsibility of running the home and to take care of my younger sister. When I was studying 8<sup>th</sup> standard in Higher Secondary school, they planned to marry me off to Raj (not his real name), aged 28 of Chandran Kallar community from nearby village. They came with their relatives to our home and exchanged rings with me as a token of our Engagement. I got so upset that I went to my mom and cried that I want to study. But my mother said that she is already ill, and will die soon. She wanted me to get married when she was alive, so that she would be at peace that my life is secured. She cried in order to convince me, but I did not get convinced.

Then I went and cried to my father. My father too tried to convince my mother explaining that I was too young to get married. But my mother didn't accept and said that I should get married within a month. After the Engagement I went to school in the same afternoon itself. I was writing my annual examination in the month of April, that's when I heard my mother talking about organising my wedding in a local temple. Again, I cried to my mother that I don't need marriage now. But my mom didn't listen to me. At that time, I got reminded of what was said by the CHILDLINE team during their visit to our school. They said that children below 18 years of age should not get married.

"If someone forces you to get married, call us on 1098 and we will stop the marriage". So I rang 1098 and informed them that my marriage was fixed and I am only 13.

Officials from Child line team visited our home and insisted that I should get married only after 18 years of age, warning of legal action if violated. They even got written confirmation from my parents.

Finally, my marriage was stopped. I was excited, happy and peaceful. When I heard that I was going to get married I wept profusely. I wanted to study and get a good job, not married off. Thanks to Child line, my marriage was cancelled.

As the marriage was stopped, the groom's family asked us to return the 2gm gold ring which was given to me during Engagement. But we had pawned it in the pawn shop for my mother's medical expenses. They are forcing us to return it back. But we are not in such a position that we can return it immediately.

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My name is **Sureka (not her real name)**. I am living in small village of Nagapattinam District. I have a younger sister. We belong to Muslim Rawther community. My parents separated, though not legally 10 years back due to personal differences. All our education and our family expenses are met by our maternal uncle. After completing my 10<sup>th</sup> standard, I have joined first year in famous College in our village. During my examination my uncle died and my aunt's health condition got worse. I needed to take care of her. So I discontinued my education.

Their son Ahim (not his real name), working in Dubai returned home for holiday. My family and relatives planned to fix our marriage. My marriage was planned in a Mosque. As our marriage rituals were being conducted in the Mosque, my father informed this matter to Child line to take revenge on us. That night officials from CHILDLINE accompanied by Police came and stopped our marriage. They informed us that marrying a girl before 18 is an offence. And they warned us that if we do child marriage, they will take legal action.

The leaders of our Jamaat (Assembly of Islamic members of the Mosque) replied that it is usual in our community. But Childline officials strictly told that a girl should be married only after 18. With no other option the leaders of the Jamaat accepted that they will conduct the marriage after me turning 18 and stopped our marriage. Thereafter we just served food for the friends and relatives who came for the wedding. Then Ahim went abroad. He returned after a year.

Then, without much expense we formally a registered marriage in front of our parents, an Advocate and Notary Public who was in Nagapattinam. At that time, I was 18 and my husband was 31. In my husband's home we are living as a joint family with my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law and his wife. I gave birth to a girl child. Now she is 3.

My husband is working abroad. Yearly he will come for 4 days of holidays. At present he is working and sends ? 25000/- monthly. With this money we are taking care of my family's expenses and my mother's family expenses. Now we are living happily.

When my marriage was stopped by the Childline, I was distressed. Earlier such incidence never happened. All the expenses we incurred for the marriage got wasted. When our relatives enquired about this, it was very embarrassing.

That time my family and my husband's family were not in peace. When my father died due to health issues, we didn't even visit for his death. We were not aware that my marriage was a child marriage and it is illegal. Now due to my marriage issue, it is decided in Jaamat to verify the age of the girl in the certificates before the marriage. Now they are strictly following this norm.

I am happy about the awareness created in our Jamaat. Similarly, all the Jamaats should verify the age of the girls before performing the marriage.

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My name is **Indra (not her real name)**. I am living in village of Nagapattinam District. I have two younger sisters. My father is a differently abled person. He is an agricultural labourer. When there is no agricultural work, he will go as a helper in a music Orchestra for Marriage and death ceremonies. My mother is working as an agricultural labourer. With both their income, we run our family.

I was studying 12<sup>th</sup> standard in Government Higher Secondary School. I fell in love with Karthi (not his real name) of Parayan community, who was living near to our home. Our families came to know about our love and it became an issue. Both families were picking up a fight and accusing each other and in between they were scolding and cursing us. So, we planned to run away from home. Karthi and I eloped to Chennai and stayed there in a friend's home. We got married with the help of our friends. My husband was 23 when we got married. My husband would go for construction work. For 5 months we stayed in Chennai. In June my husband's parents asked us to return back. So, we went back. After we returned back, the issue was discussed in the village assembly with both the families. That time someone informed it to Childline and officials from the Child line came to the spot. As I was not 18 they asked us to return back to our respective house after giving a written statement. Both our parents signed in it. That time I was 4 months pregnant, but I didn't inform them.

I was living in my parent's home for 2 months after which I went to my husband's home. In my husband's home, my father-in-law, mother-in-law and brother-in-law were all there. My father-in-law was an agricultural labourer and my mother-in-law is differently abled. My brother-in-law was working as a mason. My husband has started working as a welder. With their income we are running our family.

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## Intensity of Child Rights Violations Involved in Child Marriage

Moni has stated that she lost her freedom and childhood in the marriage. She has attempted suicide to get away from marriage. It was planned with a person who is 12 years elder to her.

Hasini said that she was married to a 42 years old man who is differently able, who's condition became worse after marriage.

Rani married a man 15 years elder to her, who was a drunkard. His behaviour is extremely unpredictable when drunk. Afraid of even serving food to her husband, she couldn't make intimacy with her husband and lived a miserable life.

Harini was talking to her friend while the whole community and society were forcing her for marriage. The whole family was in debt for the marriage where she didn't live happily

Rosy was talking to her friend. Her brother hasn't accepted her back and refused to take her back to the family. Thereafter she married her friend and became a labourer in a textile mill, which led to infertility issues. She feels she has lost her life

Leela shared that none of her family members were educated to know the importance of Education.

Aruna shared that her parents allowed her to live with the man whom she was married to, as they didn't want to be further in debt.

Manju shared that her marriage was planned in order to fix marriage for her brothers, since they are getting old. She lost her education, and her parents are now struggling alone

Karunya shared that her parents looked for wealth when they got the bridegroom with an abroad job as they wished. She feels Marriage is supposed to be for living together but she is living alone. While her husband is in abroad, she is having to take care of his parents and provide security for the house.

## Intensity of the Poverty Due to the Consequences of Child Marriage

### *The Myth “Marriage Ends Poverty” But Our Life in Vain!”*

*When the marriage is stopped, the boy's family and the village people forcefully impose all the expenses onto the girl's family. Poor parents are forced into a vicious cycle of poverty which they are unable to break from. They became debtors for life.*

My name is Vanitha. I am 21 years old now. I married a man who is 17 years elder to me. I believed marriage will end my family's poverty but Poverty continued even after marriage, nothing changed. Due to frequent health issues, I feel depressed and regret the decision I made in my life.

I am Anju and my age are 19 years. Child marriages and men having two wives are not new to the community I belong to. My father married my mother as his second wife, when he lost his first wife. I married when I was 14-year-old. My husband is one year elder to me. We both were children when we got married. I studied up to 5<sup>th</sup> standard and my husband studied up to 8<sup>th</sup> standard. We don't have kids. We don't have a permanent house. We live in tent near the shades of a tree. I will go for begging and my husband sells ice cream for our living.

My name is Lekha. I am 24 years old. I belong to fishing community. I married at the age of 16. My husband is 10 years elder to me. I studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> standard. As we were two daughters for our parents, they considered us a burden. So, to strengthen the family relationship, my parents arranged my marriage with my aunt's son. I was too young to understand family relationships and I found difficult to manage family, kids which depressed me.

My name is Devi. I am 18-year-old now. I have a younger sister. My father left my mother when I was young. We lived in a hut. Due to Gaja cyclone, our hut was damaged and we were not able to live there anymore. So, we moved to the community hall where my daily living became a question mark. I found marriage was the only safe choice for me to lead a decent life.

I am Kiruthika. Both of my parents are working as agricultural coolies. I did not succeed in my higher secondary board examinations. We didn't have a proper house, and all these factors strongly influenced us to fix my marriage. Many false assurances were given by the boy's parents. When our marriage was stopped, village heads ordered my parents to repay all the expenses of my marriage to the boy's house.

I am Pavithra. Both of my parents were working as agricultural coolies. My parents were convinced by the relatives and friends to accept proposals from the affluent and rich. As they were ready to take care of marriage expenditure, we got married. But they hid details about the health condition of my husband so I left him and am staying with my parents now.

I am Sasi. I am 16-year-old. My mother worked as a maid in Dubai. My father is running a tea stall in my village. My father and mother have separated due to difference of opinion, though not legally. My sister stayed with my mother and I was taken care by my aunty. My relatives decided to fix my marriage. My parents weren't accepting but unfortunately it didn't matter. I got married when I was 15-year-old. I was placed in a shelter home and my husband was remanded for 15 days.

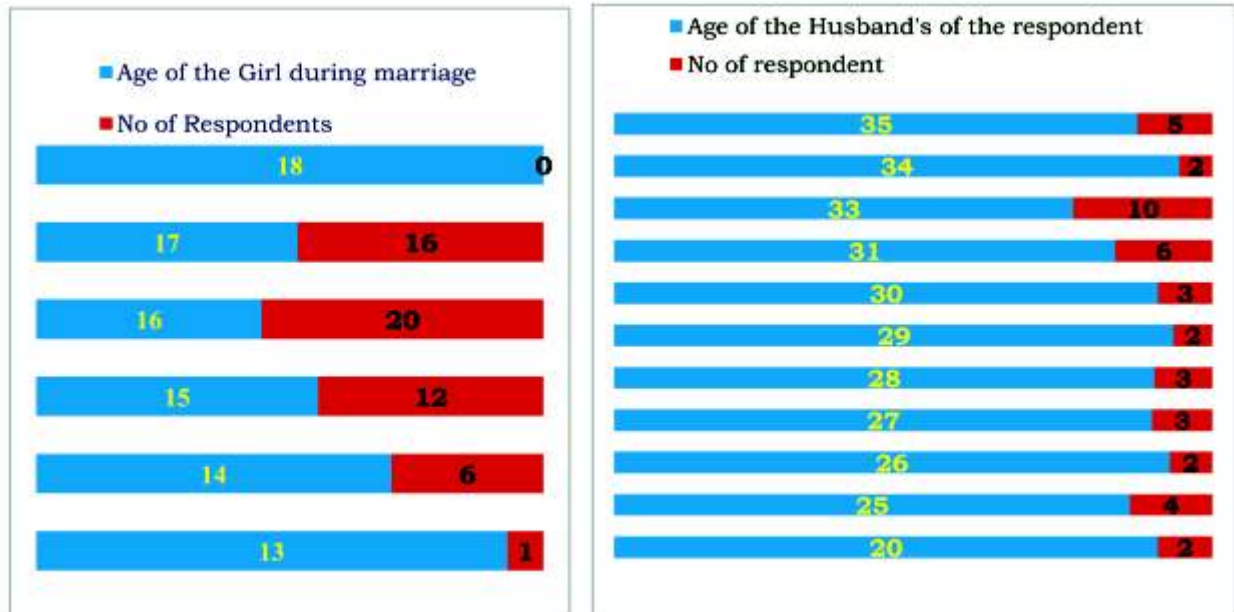
My name is Arasi. I lost my father when I was young. My mother has raised me. Once my grandmother fell sick and had to remove her leg due to diabetics. I was helping her in the household. They thought for fixing my marriage to my uncle. To strengthen relationships within the family my mother agreed to arrange my marriage with her brother. But there is no end to family burden.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Profile of the Child Marriage Survivors

Age of the girl during marriage & Age of the respondent's husband



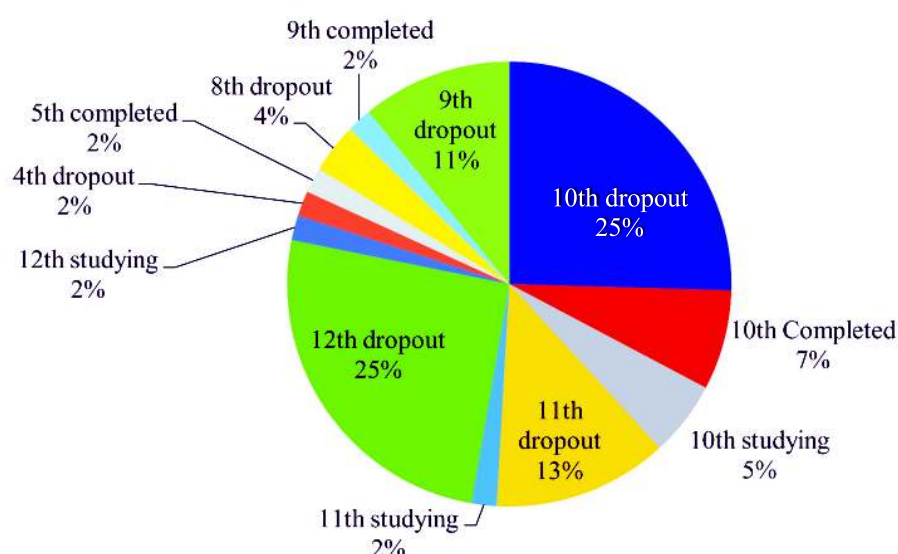
The marriages predominantly happen in 14 years to 18 years of age in girls. Whereas the marriage age of man who has married these girls varies from 15 to 48 years. It is usually double the age of the girl.





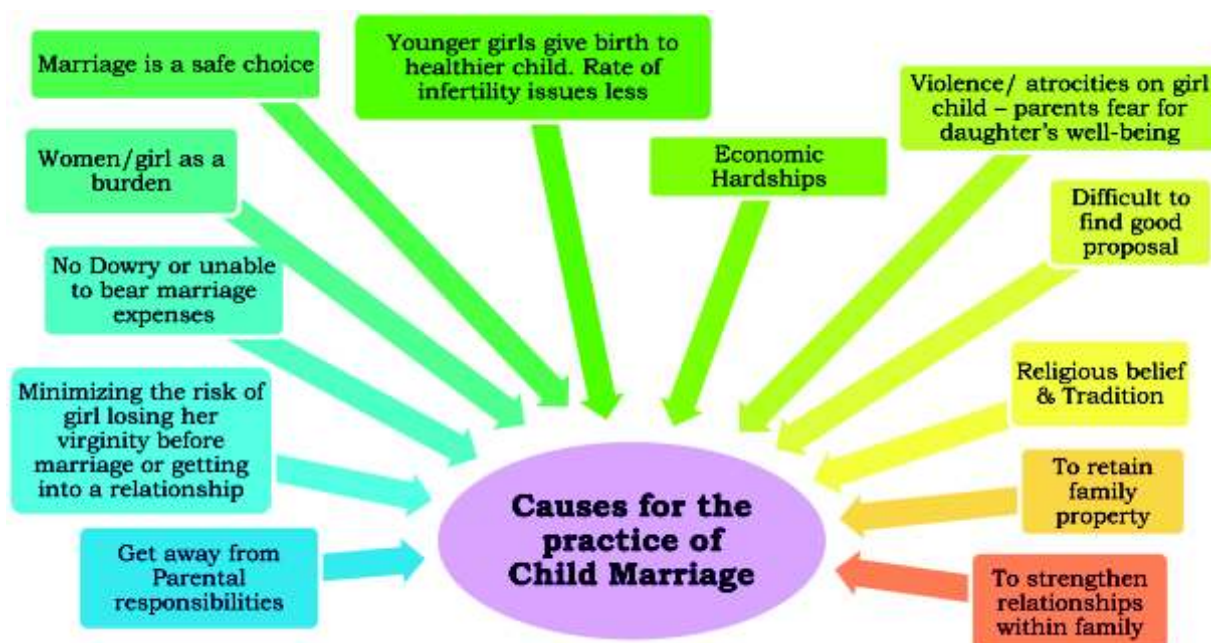
## Education Status of the Child Marriage Survivors

Majority of the respondents were dropouts of high school or higher secondary.



## Causes for the Practice of Child Marriage

The causes for the practice of child marriage in Nagapattinam district by consolidating the case studies are represented below in a pictorial format,



## **Influencers of Child Marriage**

Most of the marriages were solemnized or planned to solemnize in a Temple nearby, home of either party or at community hall. Neighbours, family & Relatives, Temple priest, Village heads and Marriage brokers have been identified as major stakeholders propagating child marriages.

### ***Situation of the Family***

Family is the primary institution in shaping young adult's lives and parents are considered as the primary persons responsible for nurturing and protecting children. Any adverse situation within the family will have spiralling effect on the lives of the children. Hence, the situation of the family is also a factor that has greater influence on child marriage.

### ***Dowry***

It is also pointed that dowry plays a major role in majority of the cases, thereby agreeing that it is a major factor influencing families' decision.

### ***Caste***

On the other hand, the parents want to ensure that their children remain in their own castes by forcefully marrying them off to a relative.

### ***Family Owe***

There are also circumstances where one of the parents or the grandparents are on their deathbeds, who insist on seeing their children or grandchildren getting married, even if it means they give up their entire future.

### ***Family Poverty***

Greater number of children in the family are denied high schooling or higher secondary schooling due to poverty. They believe families go for child marriage as the best and the secured solution to combat all the debt threats. Due to this, parents are not interested to invest in their girl child's education.

### ***Disasters Vulnerable District***

Nagapattinam is a costal district inclined to natural calamities like cyclone, flood, tsunami and other disasters which leads majority of the families to migrate to safer place.

The most vulnerable girls were those who didn't have parents and those who didn't have caretakers, are highly alarming. Their marriages are decided by relatives and these girls do not get the space to share their thoughts and are not part of the decision-making process. In few cases, the boy's family comes from a higher economic background, they give false

assurances to the girl's family and offer some money to the family too if they are in the dire need.

### ***Education of Girl Child***

If the girl is not doing too well in school or in her academics, then the parents are keen on pulling her out of school. Since the children are allowed to work after they turn 14 years old, many parents are discontinuing the education of the girl child and few are allowed to work in the farm if they have agricultural land; most of the girls sit idle at home when both the parents go to work. As their living area is also unsafe, the safety of the child remains prominent factor as a parent.

### ***Infrastructure in School Lack of Basic amenities and hygiene***

Despite the Swach Bharat mission, a large number of schools do not have toilets. Even if there are toilets, there won't be any water. When the adolescent girls were not allowed to use toilets, they are forcibly giving up their education. Thereafter the child will sit idle at home, which gives the option of getting them married to any prospective groom.

The schools in the villages are so distant from their home; those girls have to walk for hours. They have to walk alone at odd hours. So, the parents are worried for their daughter's safety.

### ***Lack of Orientation of Sex Education***

Sex Education enables minors to decide for themselves to get married or not. Physical attraction or infatuation in their young/adolescent age is often confused as love and there is no one to guide them. Schools don't have counsellors to teach them to understand the other gender and to develop healthy relationships, interactions and to make the right choices. Unless children get oriented to these issues, marriage will only be seen as a sanction for sex.

### ***Wrong Choices***

In other cases, the girl makes choices of her own which is not fruitful for her life. Sometimes they are finding it difficult to come out of a relationship and striving hard for their survival. Elopements among adolescents are a natural consequence of them exploring romantic experiences and their sexuality irrespective of class or cultural background. This puts them in a vulnerable condition. They take up 'grown up' responsibilities of bread-winning and performing household chores far earlier than they ought to. This often comes at the coast of forsaking their education. Most elopements take place around the anticipation or eventuality of parents finding out about romantic partnerships. Lacking the means to address this fear of backlash and familial abuse, adolescents are driven to take

shelter in the name of marriage. In some cases, the girls are misguided by their parents that marrying an affluent or a rich man working abroad can promise them a financially stable or well settled future.

### ***Negligence on Girl Child Health Care***

Parents are negligent in their children's health and compromise their safety in child marriage. Many cases are not taken to their logical conclusion or will not even be reported because the perpetrators may be their relatives or may be from their own caste or a neighbour or having political, religious interferences and influences.

There are a few cases where the officers counsel them but leave them back in their own village immediately. The parents easily take the girl to a nearby village or district to solemnise their wedding.

### ***Prey for Debt***

The norm in these communities is that both the families share the expenses of the marriage. In many cases those who are rich will bear the expenditure. If the marriage is stopped, later the whole expense will be charged from the girl's family.

### ***Lack of Legal protection***

None of these marriages were registered legally. This is again a violation of the rights of women as they are not eligible to get any legal protection or Social Security Schemes from the Government in future.

## **Understanding the Consequences of Marriages**



## AGENDA FOR FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

Consider strategies beyond standard programmatic interventions with convergence model, especially innovative social change mechanisms to speed up the pace of change, such as the power of 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies for effective communication, better connection, quality education and faster mobilization.

- ✿ Enforcement of the Act is weak due to lack of awareness and structural difficulties and this has to be strengthened.
- ✿ There should be clarity in understanding the Act, roles & responsibilities of the functionaries at the field level.
- ✿ Coordination and co-operation among inter-department officials designated for child marriage has to be strengthened.
- ✿ Complaints have to be sufficiently registered; penal actions have to be strictly enforced against the offenders. Delay in framing charges, compromising the situation due to local pressure has to be addressed.
- ✿ Few teenage pregnancy cases were notified and intervened.
- ✿ Sensitizing the PRI's has to be focussed on the consequences of child marriage, PCMA and their roles and responsibilities in preventing Child marriages in their locality should be highlighted.
- ✿ Collaborating with available resources in youth platforms such as, NYK's youth clubs, NCC, NSS, JRC, ECO clubs, SSA and so on.
- ✿ Sensitizing SHG women on themes such as, Positive Parenting, Child Protection and Gender Sensitivity.
- ✿ Strengthening the rehabilitation of children who have survived child marriages.

## Training Programmes:

### PHASE I

This Capacity Building Needs of SHGs, Teachers, NGOs and frontline workers have emerged from the findings of the case studies and experiential learning through programme implementation at the field level.

- a. Understanding Gender and Gender Discrimination
- b. Understanding child marriage
- c. Child rights and laws related to child rights violation special reference to PCMA and POCSO
- d. Importance of the Girl child



The Capacity Building Needs have been scoped and sequenced out as follows,

Session - 1	Introduction, Ice breaker and Ground Rules	20 minutes
Session - 2	Understanding Sex, Gender and Gender Stereotypes	90 minutes
Session - 3	Gender and Choices	45 minutes
Session - 4	Understanding Human Rights and Child Rights	90 minutes
Session - 5	Child Marriage: A Violation of Human Rights	90 minutes
Session - 6	Reasons cited for Child Marriages	60 minutes
Session - 7	Impact and Effect Discussion	45 minutes
Session - 8	Strategy planning to address Child Marriages	60 minutes

A series of trainings for various stakeholders were conducted to strengthen them while dealing with child marriage cases with following objectives in the Phase- I:

- Build a sound understanding on human rights and how it is linked with the issues of child marriage. This understanding shall also include ways in which gender roles lead to violations of women's rights, limit them in achieving their potential and hinder their holistic development.
- Create awareness on reasons that why child marriages are so prevalent in the district. The key stakeholders are able to analyse the social norms and messages from the society on the expected roles women must play, which is fundamentally linked to families choosing to get their daughters married early. With this understanding the participants were able to frame their views, ideologies against this prevalent mind-set and therefore work towards addressing child marriages.
- Encouraging participants to make clear action plans on rescue, intervention, sensitizing the communities, converge of various stakeholders (The Police, Religious leaders, Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, Parents and Panchayat members and so on) in prevention, rescue, risk mitigation and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors.

## PHASE II

- ✿ *Training/ Workshops:* On Acts related to Child Rights such as POCSO Act, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 and Guidelines for Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools by NCPCR and other similar laws
- ✿ Training/Meetings with key front liners and key stakeholders in preventing Child marriage.
- ✿ Training/Workshops/Sensitization: District Social Welfare Department, Police, District Child Protection Office, Front liners School Principal/Senior teachers, VHN, Anganwadi workers, Panchayat Presidents, Village Administrative Officers, NYKs, Volunteers from Local NGOs and SHGs.
- ✿ These trainings helped them to understand, interact with children and also help children understand abuse, teaching them good touch, bad touch, etc. Training for Women's groups, SHGs and Youth Groups 9 Unions were conducted in Phase I and Phase II. Trainings in 2 Unions will be conducted in Phase III.
- ✿ Formulating Standard Operating Procedure for key stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities in Preventing, Intervening and to rehabilitating Child marriage survivors.



# FORMULATING STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

## BACKGROUND

5 GENDER  
EQUALITY



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Indicator 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18

Child Marriage is a violation of human rights. Every Child has the right to be protected from this harmful practice, which has devastating consequences for individuals and for society. Child Marriage is now firmly on the global development agenda, most prominently through its inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) **Target 5.3** *Eliminate all harmful practices, such as Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation* which aims to eliminate the practice by 2030. Although, Indicator 5.3.1 emphasis about Child Marriage among girls, the practice occurs among boys as well. Regardless of gender, marriage before adulthood is a breach of children's rights.

*According to recent National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data of 2020, it is observed that about 50 per cent rise in the cases of child marriages have been recorded in 2020 over the previous year. It does not only mean there has been an increase in these instances but that there also has been a rise in reporting of there cases.*

## PURPOSE

Understanding all these above facts, there emerges a need to develop a district specific SOP by understanding the vulnerability of the girls, traditional practices and the invisible social norms of the district. This district specific SOP is derived based on the SOP developed in Adolescent Empowerment and implementation of End Child Marriage project implementations.

This SOP will be the guide book for the officials of Nagapattinam officials who are involved in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors. This will definitely ensure the sensitive engagement with the survivors of child marriage.

## OBJECTIVES

The major objectives for developing the district specific SOP are

- To strengthen the response of the officials dealing with child marriage survivors.
- To strengthen the multi-disciplinary team in the district.
- To establish good coordination among the multi-disciplinary approach in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors.

## SCOPE

- ☒ Familiarising all officers to know as to what is their mandate.
- ☒ To fix the role and responsibilities of the Nodal officer and multi-disciplinary team in the district.
- ☒ Identifying and finding possible solutions to the negative effects of criminalization of child marriage.
- ☒ Review and revise the existing laws related to child marriage to understand the implementation gaps, inconsistencies and loopholes.

## LEGAL SYSTEMS IN INDIA

Common law system based on the English model which is separate personal law codes apply to Muslims, Christians and Hindus.

### *Stakeholder's roles and responsibilities in implementing laws:*

The important role and responsibility of stakeholder in implementing law is participation of all major and multi-disciplinary team to ensure their full support in prevention, rescue, intervention and rehabilitation of Child marriage survivors. Evidence based advocacy and target-based awareness rising among public and in vulnerable pockets, and to mobilize support for the drafting, adoption, dissemination and implementation of the legislation from grass root level to administrative level.

## IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCING CHILD MARRIAGE LAWS

While strong legal frameworks exist, implementation and enforcement are often weak, and the reasons vary from district to district. The below table represents some of the Nagapattinam district challenges specific to and potential solutions arrived during the SOP on implementation of End Child Marriage project.

CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Age of marriage for Males and Females contradict other.	Setting the minimum legal age for marriage for both males and females by harmonizing all laws.
Birth and marriage registration are mandatory.	Strengthening the civil registration systems free and available for all and ensuring the same.

CHALLENGES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Marriages are conducted outside of formal legal structures.	Working with religious and traditional leaders on the impact of child marriages. Raising awareness through Visibility in local temples, Zamath or in vulnerable areas on legal age of the bride and the groom, importance of marriage registration etc.
Survivors of child marriage struggles to take legal actions against the perpetrators in the court, due to various reasons like fear, dependency, lack of knowledge, stigma and reprisals.	Strengthening children on legal aspects. Strengthening child friendly and gender sensitive judicial processes and procedures. Accommodating such children in a short stay home to pursue their education and other needs.
Elopement and consensual sexual activities are punished.	Consensual sexual activities and elopement among adolescents should not be criminalized and their rehabilitation should be ensured.
Children are not taking up legal action as they have to pay when are depend on their parents.	Free legal aid for children who seek to continue in the marriage, or in union divorced or widowed.

## KEY STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While drafting the district specific SOP, the primary, secondary stakeholders and volunteers were participated. This formulation of Standard operating procedure for key stakeholders were focussed on their roles and responsibilities in Preventing, Intervening and to rehabilitating Child marriage survivors.

S.NO	STAKEHOLDER	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY
1	Social Welfare	Leadership in establishing and implementing the legal & policy framework for preventing child marriage and supporting married girls by ensuring coordination with relevant actors and institutions.
2	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Incorporating Gender, sex and sexuality education for adolescent children and legislations in the curriculum.</li> <li>✿ Keeping track on attendance and strengthening the parent teacher relationship.</li> <li>✿ Activating adolescent platforms for protecting themselves.</li> </ul>



S.NO	STAKEHOLDER	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY
3	Health	Raising awareness on health and impact of child marriages through various programmes. Reaching the adolescent girls /boys through various medium.
4	Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Understanding the special acts and their implementation.</li> <li>✿ Practicing child friendly approaches when dealing with children.</li> <li>✿ Facilitating public- police discussions in an open forum in the village.</li> <li>✿ Linking with Neighbourhood / Village-level Child Protection Committee NCPC/ VLCPC to prevent, stop and handling the issue.</li> </ul>
5	Judicial System	Legal camp to public and in schools. Legal camp to police on Special Acts and its amendments.
6	Civil Society Organizations	They play an important role in legislative reform process through, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Direct advocacy with policy and decision makers</li> <li>➤ Raising public awareness of the law</li> <li>➤ Training key actors</li> </ul>
7	Youth Networks and Activists	Micro level support system for adolescents and engaging them through volunteerism in the village.
8	Child Rights Networks and Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Strengthening VLCPC /NCPC through sensitization and linkages with DCPU, DSW, SCPCR</li> <li>✿ Follow-up Support to the survivors of child marriage.</li> </ul>

S.NO	STAKEHOLDER	ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY
9	DSWO & DCPO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✿ Strengthening of government mechanisms, systems and structures at various levels such as VLCPC, BLCPC, WLCP, Panchayat level core committee - PLCC and SJPU's / CWPO/VPO'S and Grama sabha</li> <li>✿ Sensitization on issues surrounding child marriage and the handling of child marriage survivors for officials. The training would be imparted by the officials of DSW and DCPO.</li> <li>➔ Rehabilitation of the rescued child</li> <li>➔ To reintegrate in the school and in community</li> <li>➔ Claim Annulment, Rehabilitation and maintenance with the help of DSWO through court</li> <li>➔ Linking the child to the relevant department to avail the existing schemes</li> <li>➔ Counselling- physical, psychological, legal, sex education, education focusing on career opportunities</li> <li>➔ Legal assistance</li> <li>➔ Linking the adolescent girl to nutrition supplement through ICDS, SAG scheme for adolescent girls</li> <li>➔ Education - school and SSA, non-formal education</li> <li>➔ Vocational training/job placement</li> <li>➔ Sponsorship and after care</li> <li>➔ Marriage assistance in the appropriate age if necessary</li> <li>➔ Social security schemes for their family</li> <li>➔ Legal Assistance and Legal Counselling</li> <li>➔ Pre - Marital Counselling</li> </ul>

# Our Interventions .....





தினத்தந்தி

1-3-2022

# தாய்-மகனுக்கு வலைவீச்சு

நாகை வெளிப்பாளையத்தை சேர்ந்தவர் அபிவேஸ் (வயது 22). இவர் தனது தாய்க்கோமதி உதவிபுடன் 14 வயது சிறுமியை கடந்த ஆண்டு ஜூலை மாதம் 17-ந் தேதி திருமணம் செய்துள்ளார். தற்போது அந்த சைல்டு லைன் அமைப்பினர் அனைத்து மகளிர் போர்டின் பேரில் சிறுமியை புகாரின் பதையாக இருந்து புகார் கொடுத்த திருமணம் செய்த அவரது தாயார் இன் கீழ் போர்டு

## Child Marriage Bid Thwarted in Nagai District

Timely intervention of Childline officials and Kollayur police personnel thwarted a child marriage attempt in a village near Vedaranyam. A 14-year-old school girl from Vedaranyam village in Kollayur taluk, who claimed to be her guardian, that they will not repeat the offence. The family members of a 14-year-old school girl from Vedaranyam village in Kollayur taluk, who claimed to be her guardian, that they will not repeat the offence. The family members of a 14-year-old school girl from Vedaranyam village in Kollayur taluk, who claimed to be her guardian, that they will not repeat the offence.

STOP  
CHILD  
MARRIAGE



THE TIMES OF INDIA

## 16-year-old rescued from child marriage

NH | Sep 16, 2016, 05:04 AM IST



Trichy: Following an alert by Child Helpline and the District Child Protection Unit in Nagapattinam district, a 16-year-old girl who was to be married to a 37-year-old man from Vedaranyam in the district was rescued by the police.

According to the police, following an alert that a child marriage was to take place at Arayankuppam in Vedaranyam taluk on Thursday, information was conveyed to the district social welfare officer of Nagapattinam, who is the child marriage prohibition officer under the Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2006.

This apart, childline team member R Marivanan also brought the attention to the notice of the grama sevika, the mukya sevika and the district child protection officer and in turn rushed to the place and met the family members.

They found that the family from a poor background had decided to marry the second of six daughters to a 37-year-old man. With the help of the panchayat president Venkatchalam and Vedaranyam union chairman Malakodi, they talked to the family and explained to them the legal age for marriage and the consequences of violating the law. The team also persuaded the parents. Subsequently, the marriage which was about to take place was cancelled.



**Social Need Education Human Awareness (SNEHA)** has reached fisherfolk and other fisheries dependent communities (including Dalits) in Nagapattinam, and Mayiladuthurai districts in Tamilnadu and Karaikal District of Pudhuchery, South India. The main focus of **SNEHA** is Women and Children. **SNEHA** has also facilitated in the formation of Community Based Organisations such as Women Sangams, Clusters and District Level Federations and Children Panchayats for the empowerment of Women and Children.

Nagapattinam District Child Protection Unit - DCPU, Social Defence Department under Integrated Child Protection Scheme has been functioning under the Chairmanship of the District Collector. This unit is Providing Care, Protection and Rehabilitation for the children below 18 years under Juvenile Justice Act 2015. District child protection officer is the Member Secretary of District Child Protection Unit, which assures protection of children in the district.

