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BBA. LL.B. (Hons.) (Amity University, Rajasthan); LL. M. (UPES, Dehradun) (Nottingham Trent University, UK); Ph.D. Candidate (G.D. Goenka University)

Subhrajit did his LL.M. in Sports Law, from Nottingham Trent University of United Kingdoms, with international scholarship provided by university; he has also completed another LL.M. in Energy Law from University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, India. He did his B.B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) focussing on International Trade Law.

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With this thought, we hereby present to you

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# **A STUDY ON THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDIA**

AUTHORED BY - SHAIK TAUFEEQ AHMED

B.COM L.LB.(Hons) 3rd year

VELS SCHOOL OF LAW

VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED SCIENCE, CHENNAI

600117

CONTACT NO: 8778386298

EMAIL ID: [shaikahmedtaufeeq123@gmail.com](mailto:shaikahmedtaufeeq123@gmail.com)

CO-AUTHOR - R. AMIRTHA

B.COM L.LB.(Hons) 2nd year

VELS SCHOOL OF LAW

VELS INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY AND ADVANCED SCIENCE, CHENNAI

600117

CONTACT NO: 9500125859

EMAIL ID: [amirtharavimohan@gmail.com](mailto:amirtharavimohan@gmail.com)

## **ABSTRACT**

Child marriage is termed as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18. A recent survey by the Times of India has reported that child marriage cases in Tamil Nadu have increased by 45% in 2020 over 2019. However, The Government enacted The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act(PCMA)2006 intending to prohibit child marriage, protect victims, and govern issues related to it. Recently there was a Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which states to raise the age of marriage from 18 to 21 years for women. The Union Minister Smriti Irani introduced this bill for Women and Child Development (MWCD). The main objective is to study the reasons and effects of child marriage in India. The research question here is Whether Indian laws are efficient in preventing Child Marriage in urban and rural areas of India? The researcher has followed the empirical research method using a

convenient sampling method. The sample size of the study is 202. The result observed from the study is that most people are aware of the recent trends of child marriage and the laws enacted by the government will help in the abolition of early marriage. The suggestion of this study is to increase awareness of child marriage and make people aware of the laws available to protect people from child marriage.

**KEYWORDS:** Child, Child marriage, Abuse, Mortality, Morbidity, India

## INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is termed as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18. The evolution of child marriage dates back to colonial rule where girls and boys are forced to marry at a very young age. The early marriage started to cope with the economic hardship. The parents will marry their daughters because they think that it will protect the purity of their children. The early marriage was very common among Hindus when compared to Muslims. They soon normalized this and changed it to a social stigma. However, the British colonial government formed a committee known as the Joshi Committee and raised the minimum age for girls to 14 and for boys to 18. This Act was known as The Child Marriage Abolition Act also called the Sarda Act. The Sarda Act was proposed on 28th September 1929 but came into effect in April 1930. This Act was not efficient as it did not affect the Princely states as the authority lay in the hands of the respective ruler. Anyone tracked down leading, coordinating, or playing out a child marriage will be imprisoned which might stretch out to two years, and will be obligated to fine which might reach out to one lakh rupees. The Child Marriage Abolition Act was amended in the year 1949 and increased the age to 15 years and in 1978 the age for girls and boys increased to 18 and 21 respectively.

The Government enacted The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act(PCMA) 2006 which replaced the Child Marriage Abolition Act to prohibit child marriage, protecting victims and governing issues related to it. Recently there was a Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which states to raise the age of marriage from 18 to 21 years for women. The Union Minister Smriti Irani introduced this bill for Women and Child Development (MWCD). The Government considered the bill as the need for changes after looking into the National Family Health Survey(NFHS) and recommendations given by the Jaya Jaitly Committee. The Jaya Jaitly Committee was set up in 2020



under the governance of Jaya Jaitly by the MWCD to focus on increasing the age of marriage for women and their health conditions. The committee recommended raising the age to 21 for women, increasing awareness so that people are aware of the legal age required for marriage educating girl children, and including sex education in educational institutions.

The factors that constitute child marriage are poverty, gender inequality, social norms, lack of education, and safety concerns of girl children. Poverty is a major cause of child marriage as the parent's financial status is low and thus can't afford the child's education as it is more likely for the child to drop out of school. Gender inequality is another cause of child marriage as girls are more vulnerable to early marriage when compared to boys. Social norms are a cause of child marriage where their parents marry off their daughters before they attain puberty as they feel their purity is protected if done so. Lack of education is another major cause of child marriage as illiterate parents force their children to get married which ends up destroying their children's education and making them illiterate too. Safety concerns are also a reason for child marriage where the parents think that marriage will protect their children from domestic and sexual abuse which is completely a wrong assumption.

The National Family Health Survey during 2015-16 evaluated and found that 27% of women were married under the age of 18, and 8% of girls were pregnant between the age of 15-18. However, NFHS's survey 2019-20 has found out that child marriage has dropped down to 23% and pregnancy rate to 7%. Child marriage has increased during the COVID-19 lockdown times when everyone faced a financial shortage. Approximately 650 million girls and women still alive were married before the age of 18. According to a recent study, 21% of the girls from their respective countries aged between 20 to 24 were married as children.

A recent survey has reported that child marriage cases in Tamil Nadu have increased by 45% in 2020 over 2019. There were 3208 cases prevented in 2020 when compared to 2209 cases in 2019. 40% of women in Odisha and West Bengal compared to less than 5% in Lakshadweep. The highest child marriage cases were reported in the northeast states of India. India is ranked 6th among all other countries. Bihar and Rajasthan are the 2 most highly ranked states in cases of child marriage. Most of the countries in the world allow and accept child marriage. Every country has its age limit for girls

and boys to marry and in some countries, parental permissions are required for the marriage. The age gap between the couples is also a threat to child marriage and Sudan is the country which has the largest age gap. The age difference between the couples has decreased in India from 7 years to 5 years.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

To study the reasons for child marriage in India.

- To know the effects of child marriage in India.
- To create awareness of the after-effects of child marriage in urban and rural areas of India.
- To suggest remedial measures to curb child marriage in India.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

[\(UNICEF,2022\)](#) has made a recent report on child marriage stating it is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. By the survey conducted, it was inferred that the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one-sixth of that among girls. Child marriage robs their childhood and threatens their lives and health. As child marriage impacts a girl's health and future, it imposes substantial economic costs at the national level too. [\(Arushi Raj,2021\)](#) evaluates the situation of child marriage in India during the pandemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a sudden upsurge in child marriage in India. Even in states such as Karnataka, [\(ARUSHI Raj,2021\)](#) Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu where the prevalence of child marriage is below 35% reported doubling in cases. This data is only from reported cases as child marriages are socially acceptable and many cases go unreported [\(Anup Karan,2021\)](#) studied the expenses and advantages of putting resources into schooling mediations and explicit child marriage projects to diminish youngster marriage in India.

[\(Pintu Paul,2020\)](#) has made a statistical report on the decline of child marriage between 1992-1993 and 2015-2016. The data used in the research was extracted from The National Family Health Survey. Furthermore, this research also states that child marriage is prevalent among girls living in poverty, lacking in education, and rural places. [\(UNICEF, 2019\)](#) reports India as a home to the largest number of child brides in the world. Child marriage violates children's rights and places them at high risk of

violence, exploitation, and abuse. Child marriage ends childhood and affects the child as well as their family and community. [\(Modak,2019\)](#) presents a study to investigate the determinants of girl-child marriage and to analyze socio-economic, demographic, cultural, and village-level characteristics that are important in determining factors. It also states that under-15 marriages have dropped over the years but 15-17 years is common in both northern and southern India. [\(Sai Manohar et al,2017\)](#) focused on the reasons for Child Marriage in India. Often girls are seen as an economic burden and so girls are often married off early to avoid responsibility, marriage expense, and dowry. Sexuality is also a factor that influences the practice of early marriage [\(Mourtada et al. 2017\)](#). The study aimed to study the factors that promote child marriage and the second aim was to create awareness on how to decrease child marriage. [\(Young lives,2016\)](#) has been following and tackling child marriages and early childbearing in India. Girls who married before the age of 18 were more likely to have left school before 15 and came from a poor background. Their parents and caregivers were not willing to educate their daughters. Their findings highlight the importance of safe, accessible education for girls and the need for effective social protection and investment in livelihoods and opportunities for young women and men so that families feel confident that they can delay their daughter's marriage and invest in their education and future. Young couples need access to sexual and reproductive health services and information to enable them to delay their first pregnancy and to space their children, although the pressure to have children soon after marriage can be intense.

[\(B.Suresh Lal,2015\)](#) studied the factors motivating Child marriages like avoiding share in ancestral property, poverty of families, and problems faced due to early marriage like early pregnancy health problems, and high difference in age between bride and groom. In his study, he also stated that child marriages still take place in India, particularly around the Hindu holy day of Akshaya Tritiya, during this day many marriages take place but most of them are child marriages. He also adds that it is a religious tradition in many places in India and is difficult to change. [\(Anita Raj et al,2015\)](#) evaluates the issue of child marriage has become a political and automatic consideration. Regardless of some advancements in various nations, worldwide rates have not declined throughout the last 10 years. Information gap stay in figuring out patterns, drivers, and ways to deal with finishing child marriage, particularly to comprehend what is expected to accomplish results for an enormous scope. [\(Pandya and Bhanderi 2015\)](#) aims to understand and find out the prevalence of child marriage in rural areas and assess health awareness among married women.

[\(The Red Elephant Foundation,2013\)](#) has focused on the prevalence and impact of child marriage in India. It has also stated that child marriage works as mechanisms that are quick income earners. This research states a practice in Rajasthan (rural parts of northern India) known as Atta Satta where daughters are exchanged for daughters-in-law, no matter what their age is. The girls are married off early sometimes just after puberty or sometimes even before to bring the family some monetary earnings. Child marriage in India is not a new phenomenon but has been in practice for a long time. [\(Nour 2009\)](#) studied that human rights have been violated as they directly impact a girl's health, education, and psychological well-being. It increases the risk of premature birth of their offspring. [\(Saraswat,2006\)](#) evaluates that Child marriage exists in feudal societies where the Nagnika concept was prevalent in parts of India. The concept where parents believed that if they didnot get their daughters married off before puberty, they would go to hell. Indian tradition places a high premium on virginity before marriage and this applies to girls and boys to some extent. Several social, health, and economic disadvantages are associated with early marriage. In his study of Child marriage, he has found out that early marriage, poverty, and lack of education have led to frequent unprotected sexual relationships. [\(Yadav,2006\)](#) has made a study on the risk of sexual health of adolescents due to early marriage. Early marriage continues to be a norm and after marriage, there is tremendous pressure on young girls to bear a child. Sexual activity at a young age also exposes adolescents to a risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases like HIV/AIDS.

[\(Aparna Bhat,2005\)](#) states that child marriage is a violation of the rights of the child as adults take the decision and children are forced into marriage without understanding what a marriage is. According to her study, there is no single cause of child marriage but several reasons such as illiteracy, patriarchy, and falling sex ratio. Poor use and implementation of law is a very tangible reason for promoting this practice. [\(Agrawal et al,2005\)](#) has contributed to their research on child mortality. The risk of child marriage is not limited to girl children but also the child that is born to her due to early pregnancy. In their survey, they found out that one in 15 children in India dies before the age of one as compared to one in 200 children across the world. [\(Verma,2004\)](#) has studied the increasing risk of maternal morbidity and mortality due to Child marriages. Adolescent and preadolescent girls in India constitute a sizeable segment of its population making it a vulnerable group on account of the practice of early marriages and maternal morbidity. [\(Bracken et al,2004\)](#) evaluates that early marriage has limited a girl's educational opportunities, social circle, and even access to mass media such as

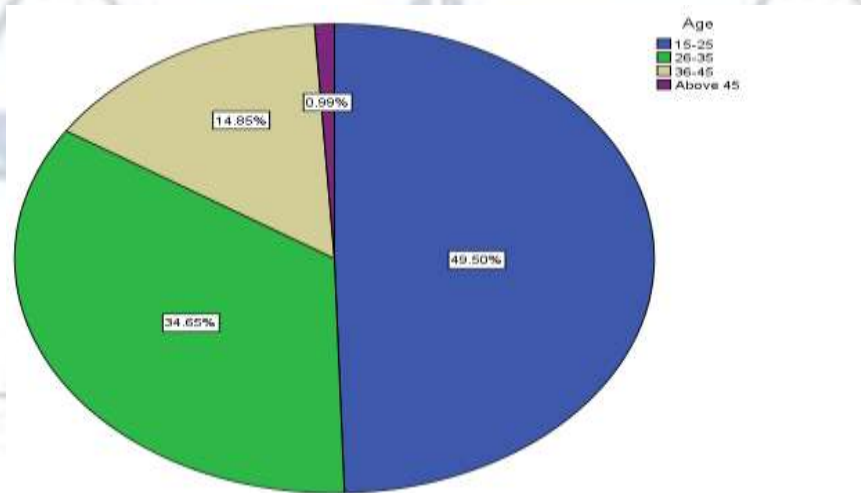
Newspapers, Radio, and TV when compared to unmarried girls.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method followed here is empirical research. A total of 202 samples have been collected out of which all samples have been collected through a convenient sampling method. The sample frame taken here is public areas in and around Chennai, Tamil Nadu like Chetpet, Thandalam, Kuthambakkam, Kodambakkam, Kilpauk, Nungambakkam, and Valasaravakkam. The independent variables are age, gender, educational qualification, and occupation. The dependent variables are child marriage and awareness of child marriage. The statistical tools used here are correlation and graphical representation such as pie-charts, graphs, and chi-square.

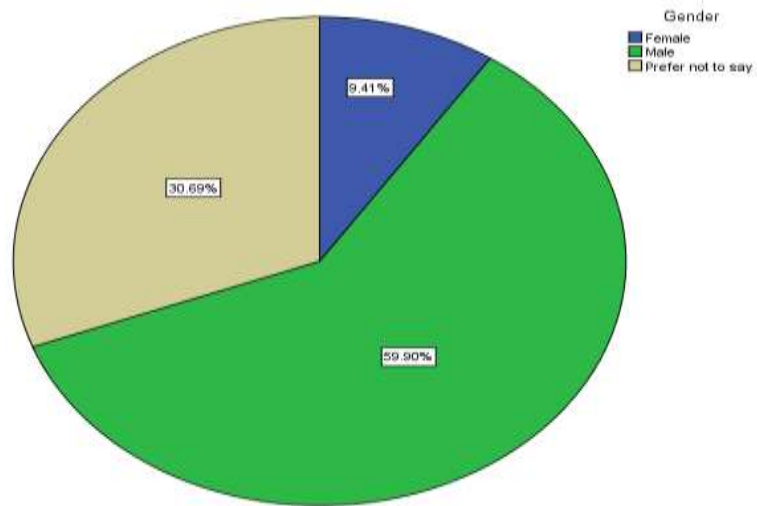
## ANALYSIS

Figure 1:



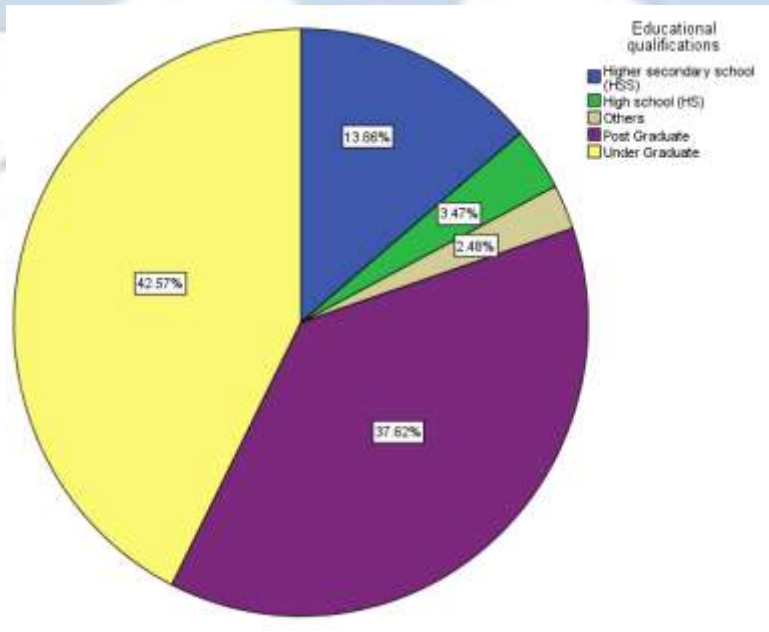
Legend: Fig 1 shows the age distribution of the respondents.

Figure 2:



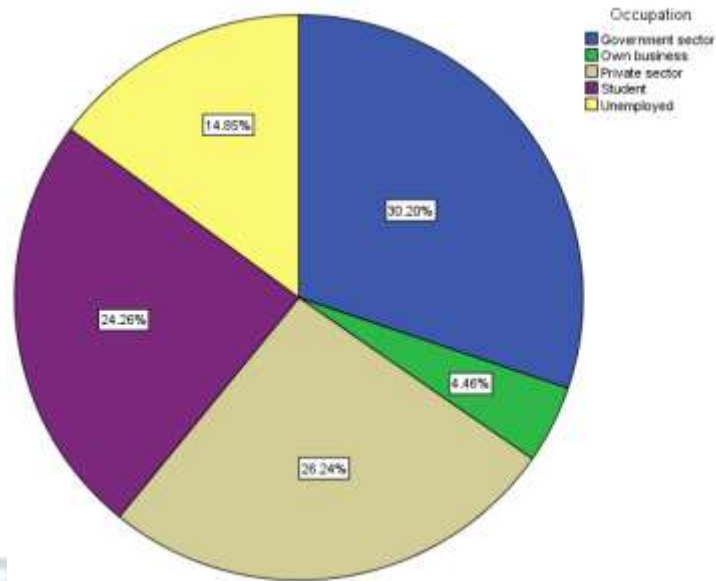
Legend: Fig 2 shows the gender distribution of the respondents.

Figure 3:



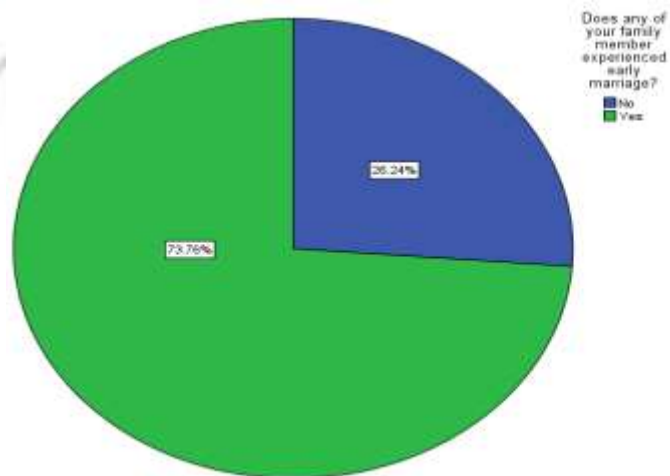
Legend: Fig 3 shows the educational qualifications of the respondents.

Figure 4:



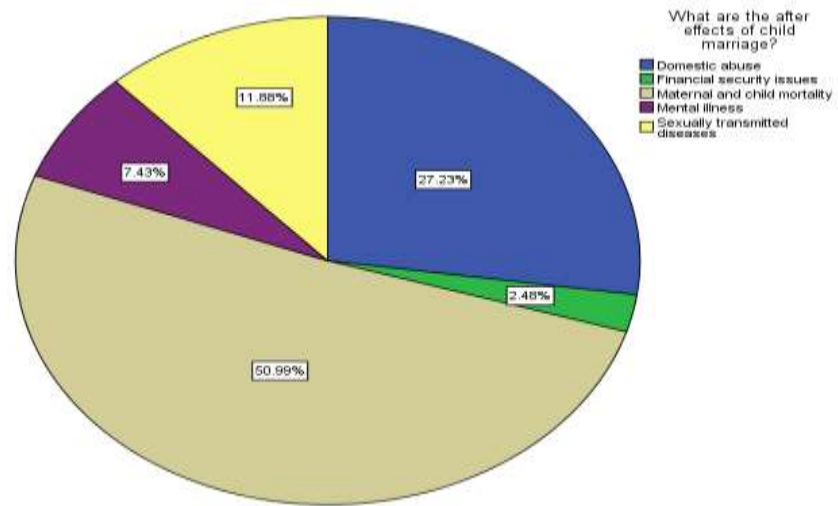
Legend: Fig 4 shows the occupation of the respondents.

Figure 5:



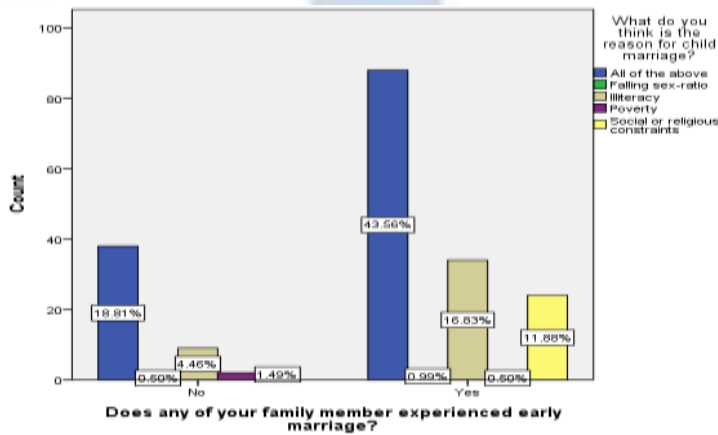
Legend: Fig 5 shows the experience of early marriage in the respondent's family.

Figure 6:



Legend: Fig 6 shows the opinion of respondents on after-effects of child marriage.

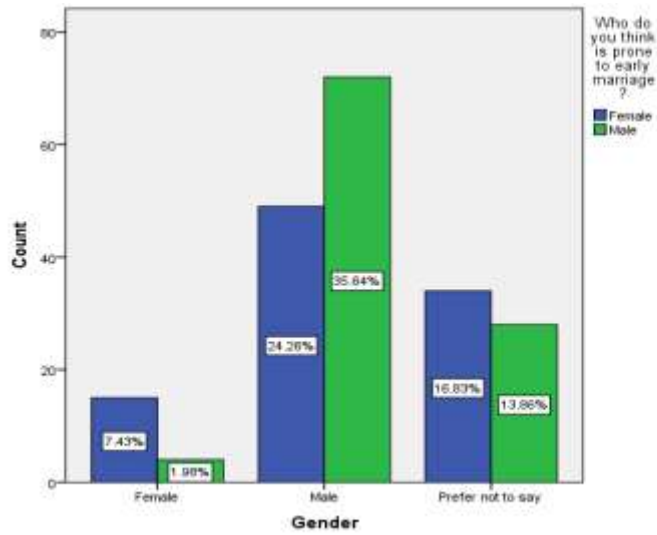
Figure 7:



Legend: Fig 7 shows the reasons for child marriage and the experience of child marriage in the respondent's family.

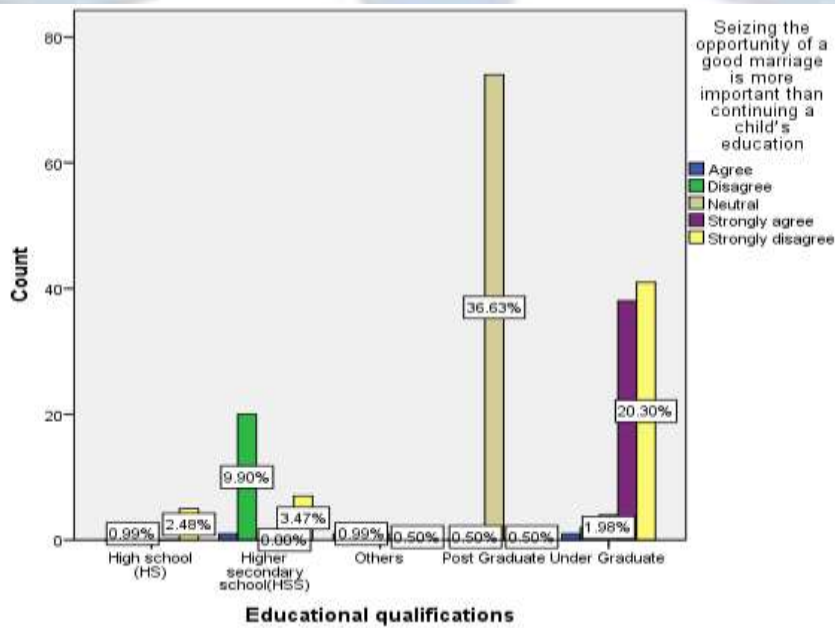


Figure 8:



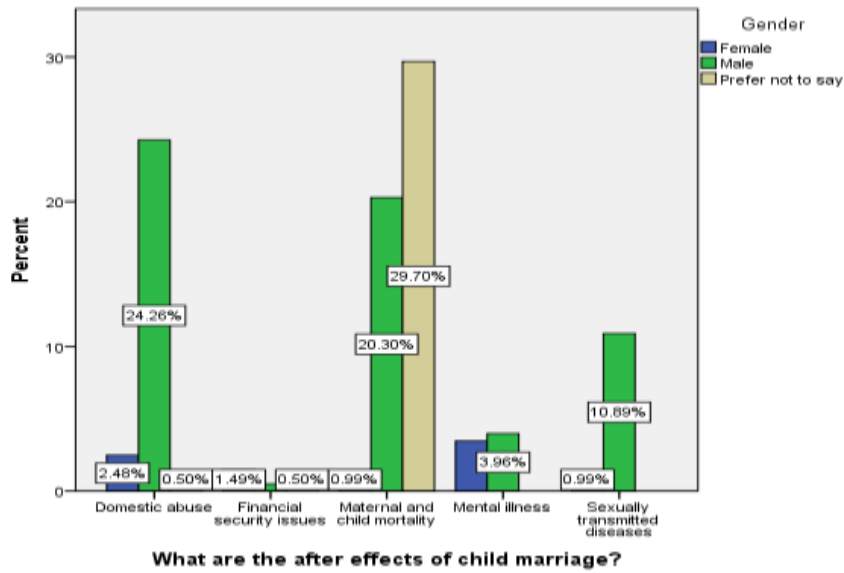
Legend: Fig 8 shows the gender of the respondents and their opinion on which gender is prone to early marriage.

Figure 9:



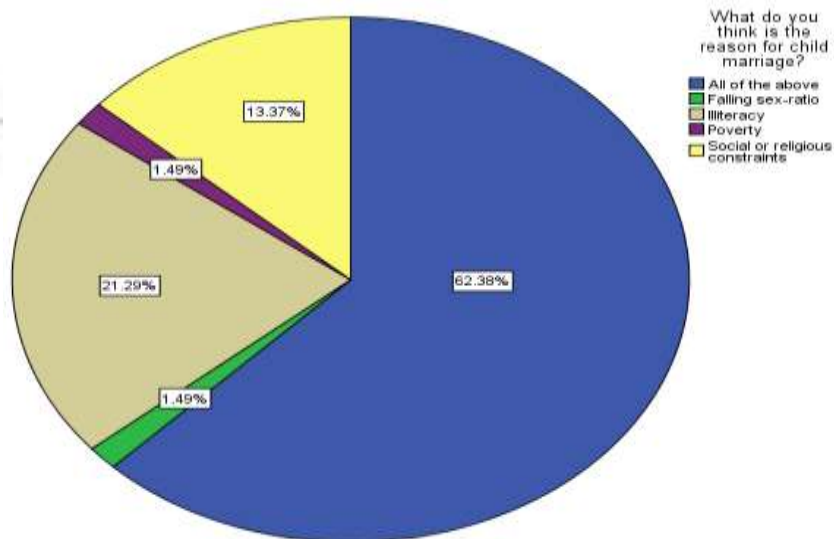
Legend: Fig 9 shows the educational qualifications of the respondents and their opinion on the importance of a child's education.

Figure 10:



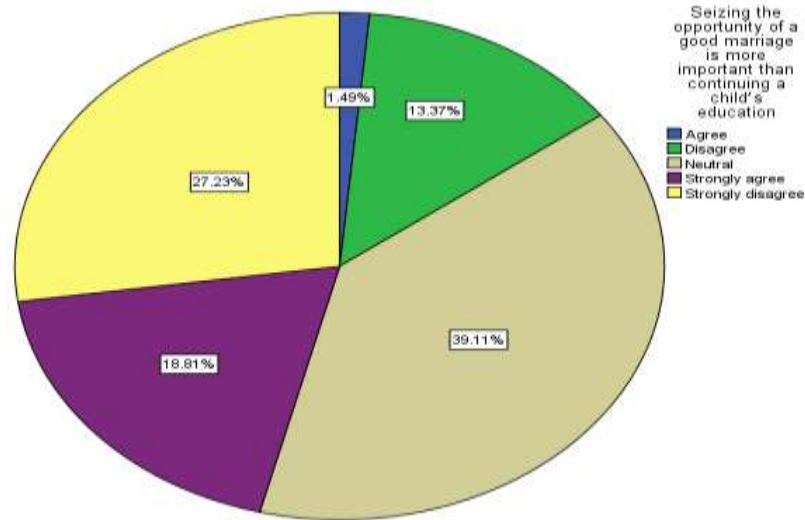
Legend: Fig 10 shows the gender of the respondents and their opinion on after effects of child marriage.

Figure 11:



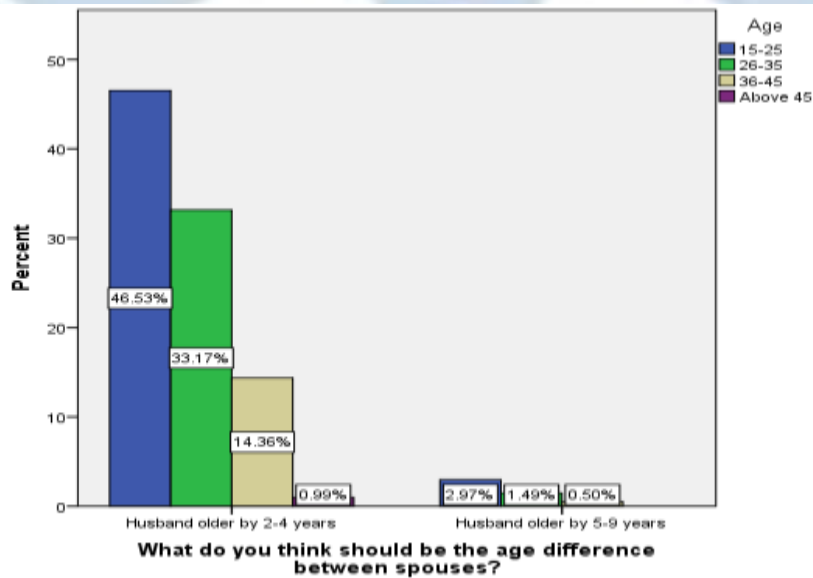
Legend: Fig 11 shows the reason for child marriage on the opinion of the respondents.

Figure 12:



Legend: Fig 12 shows the opinion of the respondents of continuing a child's education.

Figure 13:



Legend: Fig 13 shows the age of the respondents and their opinion on the age difference between spouses.

Table 1:

Ha: There is a relationship between educational qualifications and the importance of continuing a child's education over the opportunity of a good marriage.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between educational qualifications and the importance of continuing a child's education over the opportunity of a good marriage.

**Educational qualifications \* Seizing the opportunity of a good marriage is more important than continuing a child's education Crosstabulation**

Count

		Seizing the opportunity of a good marriage is more important than continuing a child's education					Total
		Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	
Educational qualifications	High school (HS)	0	2	0	0	5	7
	Higher secondary school (HSS)	1	20	0	0	7	28
	Others	1	2	1	0	1	5
	Post Graduate	0	1	74	0	1	76
	Under Graduate	1	2	4	38	41	86
Total		3	27	79	38	55	202

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	298.834 <sup>a</sup>	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	298.523	16	.000
N of Valid Cases	202		

a. 14 cells (56.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

Legend: Table 1 represents the correlation between education which is an independent variable and the importance of continuing a child's education over the opportunity of a good marriage which is a dependent variable.

**RESULTS**

Respondents belonging to the age group of 15-25 have been surveyed more regarding child marriage whereas respondents belonging to the age group of 26-35 years have been less surveyed and respondents belonging to the age group of 36-45 years have less surveyed and respondents belonging to age group above 45 years have the least surveyed (Fig.1). Male respondents have been surveyed

more regarding child marriage whereas female respondents have comparatively shown lesser preference towards answering study (Fig.2). The pie chart represents the educational qualifications of the respondents where post graduates are highly active about child marriage and high school students were least active among the respondents(Fig.3). The highest number of respondents belong to government sector and then private sector whereas the least among the respondents where having their own business(Fig4). The majority of respondent's family members have experienced child marriage while the other group hasn't experienced it (Fig.5). Financial security issues lie as the top reason, and domestic abuse and sexually transmitted diseases are the next reasons(Fig.6.). The bar chart represents the reasons for child marriage and the opinion of the respondents which show whether they agree with it or not(Fig7). The bar chart reveals that females are prone to early marriage when compared to males(Fig8). The complex chart studies the opportunity for education is more important than a good marriage and postgraduate respondents are neutral to the question whereas undergraduate respondents strongly agree that the education of children is more important than marriage(Fig9). The chart shows the after-effects of child marriage where maternal and child mortality are the main effects of an early marriage(Fig10). The figure shows the reasons for child marriage in the opinion of the respondents where illiteracy was the most common answer and falling sex ratio and poverty were equal in response(Fig11). Neutral answers were given when asked whether seizing a child's education opportunity was more important than a good marriage (Fig 12). The bar graph studies the responses given by respondents that the common age difference between spouses should be between 2-4 years(Fig13). The hypothesis assumed here is that there is a significance between education qualification and the importance of education over marriage (Table 1).

## **DISCUSSION**

The study shows that 73.76% of respondents have replied that their family members have experienced early marriage as their parents or grandparents were married at a very young age or before the age of 18 whereas the rest 26.24% of respondents have replied that their family members have not experienced early or child marriage(Fig.5). The survey has found out the after-effects of child marriage where most of these are ill effects. The main reasons stated here are maternal and child mortality due to poor health conditions of girls, domestic abuse as they fear their spouses and parents, sexually transmitted diseases due to lack of knowledge about it , mental issues, and lastly financial security issues. The maternal morbidity is a term which states the time duration of a female's health

from the time of pregnancy till they give birth to the child and child mortality refers to children who die before the age of 5 per 1000 live births. (Fig.6.) The bar graph represents the comparison of reasons for child marriage and whether the respondent's family has experienced early marriage. The main reason for child marriage stated here is illiteracy as illiterate people have no educational qualifications and have no idea about the consequences of child marriage. (Fig.7.) The bar graph shows the comparison between gender and the gender which is more prone to early marriage. These female respondents have responded that females are more prone to early marriage whereas male respondents have responded that males are more prone to early marriage(Fig.8). The complex bar graph analyses educational qualifications and the importance of education in a good marriage. The undergraduate students strongly agreed that continuing a child's education is more important than a good marriage. In contrast, postgraduate students have neutral opinions since they know the value and importance of education more than other respondents (Fig.9). The bar graph shows the comparison of gender and after-effects of child marriage. The study has shown that the main ill-effect of child marriage is an increase in maternal and child mortality as maternal morbidity and child mortality are increasing in recent times (Fig.10). The pie chart shows the reasons for child marriage. The reasons are falling sex ratio, illiteracy, poverty, and social or religious constraints.62.38% of responses stated that all of the above are the reasons for early marriage,21.29% are due to illiteracy,13.37% are due to social or religious constraints whereas falling sex ratio and poverty is 1.49%. The highest reason among all was illiteracy as most of the illiterate parents do not know the value of education and get their children married off at a very young age ending up destroying their education too(Fig.11). It was also found that 39.11% of respondents were neutral 27.23% strongly disagreed, and 18.81% strongly agreed that seizing the opportunity of a good marriage is more important than continuing a child's education. A child's education is more important as it makes them knowledgeable and helps them know more about the ill effects of early marriage (Fig.12). The common answer for the age difference between spouses was 2-4 years and 46.53% of responses were given by 15-25 years, 33.17% responses were given by 26-35, 14.36% responses were given by 36-45 years and 0.99% were given by respondents above 45 years. The age difference has reduced reasonably as people are well aware of the effects of marrying someone with a higher age gap (Fig.13) The hypothesis tested here is to find out if there is a significant relationship between educational qualifications and seizing the opportunity of a good marriage is more important than continuing a child's education. However, it was proved that there is a significant relationship between educational

qualifications and the opportunity of a good marriage is more important than continuing a child's education. (Table 1).

## **LIMITATIONS**

One of the major limitations of the study is the sample frame. There is a major constraint in the sample frame as it is limited to a small area. Thus, it proves to be difficult to extrapolate it to a larger population. Another limitation is the sample size of 202 which cannot be used to assume the thinking of the entire population in a particular country, state, or city. The physical factors have a larger impact, thus, limiting the study.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the analysis, it has been found that most people are aware of child marriage and the reasons and after-effects of the marriage. They also show a considerable amount of support towards the abolition of child marriage. However, there is a small fraction of people who do not support it due to their financial backwardness and illiteracy. The Government is conducting more awareness camps and making laws more stringent to eradicate child marriage. The suggestion given for this study is to Report any child marriage occurring around you to the legitimate specialists. Teach your companions, family, and local area about why child marriage is destructive, and vow to never be a piece of any occasion that advances child marriage.

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