ENDING THE PRACTICE OF DOWRY IN BIHAR
Young People’s Perceptions and Recommendations For Action
We will ask our parents not to give or take dowry
ENDING THE PRACTICE OF DOWRY IN BIHAR

Young People’s Perceptions and Recommendations For Action
Shri Sushil Kumar Modi  
Deputy Chief Minister  
Government of Bihar

Message

As part of our journey towards more inclusive social and economic development, ending the practices of dowry and child marriage are a key priority for the Government of Bihar. To end these practices, the “Baal Vivah Evam Dahej Mukt Hamara Bihar” campaign was launched in 2017. Concerted efforts have been undertaken as part of this campaign, involving important stakeholders, like community leaders, media, young people and various government departments.

This Dowry Report is special in that it highlights the perceptions and recommendations of the young people of Bihar regarding the issue of dowry. I sincerely hope that readers find this report useful, as they contribute to the movement to end dowry in Bihar.

(Shri Sushil Kumar Modi)  
Deputy Chief Minister  
Government of Bihar
Shri Ramsewak Singh
Minister
Department of Social Welfare
Government of Bihar

Message

The “Baal Vivah Evam Dahej Mukt Hamara Bihar” campaign was launched on 2 October 2017 by the Hon’ Chief Minister, Shri Nitish Kumar, to end the practices of child marriage and dowry in Bihar. This campaign involved a multi-pronged strategy to transform community perceptions and practices on both issues. Fostering collaboration between government departments, civil society organizations, community leaders, and the media is an important element of the campaign, which aims to end the prevalence of these practices in the state.

Presenting the views of the young people of Bihar on the issue of dowry, this report is a novel endeavor, which also highlights certain key recommendations for action for community members and for policy practitioners. I hope readers find this Dowry Report insightful, and try to incorporate the learnings in their respective fields of work.

(Shri Ramsewak Singh)
Minister
Department of Social Welfare
Government of Bihar
Shri Atul Prasad, IAS  
Additional Chief Secretary  
Department of Social Welfare  
Government of Bihar

Message

During the last decade, Bihar has taken several forward strides to improve governance, strengthen infrastructure, stimulate the economy, and advance social development through gains in education and health, especially for women and girls. The Government of Bihar recognizes that the practice of dowry and child marriage are important societal concerns that require urgent remedy, and for this reason, the Honourable Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar launched the “Baal Vivah Evam Dahej Mukt Hamara Bihar” campaign in 2017.

This Dowry Report serves as an important harbinger to our efforts, since it brings forth the perceptions of the young people of Bihar regarding the practice. It also highlights certain ideas that they feel would be successful in ending the practice in the state. I hope that this report inspires policy practitioners to seek out areas that warrant urgent attention and enables them to design innovative interventions to end the practice of dowry, and advance the progress of women and girls in Bihar.

Shri Atul Prasad
“The Government should honour those who marry without giving and taking dowry”
Message from the Managing Director

The Government of Bihar is determined to end the practice of dowry and Child Marriage. Towards this goal, the campaign titled “Baal Vivah Evam Dahej Mukt Hamara Bihar,” was launched on 2 October 2017 by the Hon’ Chief Minister, Shri Nitish Kumar.

The campaign serves the dual purpose of promoting the value of the girl child as an asset as well as to prevent instances of child marriage and strengthen availability of educational opportunities for girls. The second emphasis is to promote equity with justice, by creating and fostering a change in the popular perception of the practice of dowry by ensuring cultural and behavioural changes.

The campaign is a ground level, community-driven initiative, to change social norms and strengthen systems to eradicate these practices, whereby help building a gender equal society. It involves collaborative efforts and approaches, wherein the Women Development Corporation, works closely with Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations, Faith-based Organizations, the Media and all key government departments, towards supporting the voices of change from the State right up to the Village levels.

The initiative has achieved remarkable success, including young citizens and grassroots leaders taking a public and unified stand against the practice of Dowry and Child Marriage in their community. The Government of Bihar, on its part, recognizes that it is important for young people to raise their voices and be part of the solution for this change process.

Centre for Catalyzing Change, as part of Sakshamaa or the Initiative for What Works, Bihar, conducted an opinion poll among young people in schools and colleges of Bihar to understand their perception of Dowry and seek their suggestions for action. (This was as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s support to WDC on women’s empowerment). This report presents their voices and expectations from the system and the actions that they can take at an individual level.

I hope that the information given in this report will encourage stakeholders to engage proactively with Youth in the State and work towards ending the practice of dowry and Child Marriage.

I would like to thank Centre for Catalyzing Change (C3) for preparing this report in collaboration with WDC, Bihar.

Dr N. Vijaya Lakshmi
The anti-dowry laws must be strictly implemented.
Message from the Executive Director

In order to end practices like dowry, it is imperative that we generate discourse and debate towards finding solutions to challenge and change norms related to dowry. It was with this objective that an opinion poll was conducted among young men and women in Bihar, to ask them for possible solutions. We wanted to hear from the youth of Bihar about solutions, actions that can be taken at a personal level and their recommendations for actions by the government for ending the practice of dowry.

The Government of Bihar is cognizant of the high prevalence of dowry in the state, and has initiated a comprehensive program to address the issue. This Dowry Poll is a vital assessment of the perceptions of young people across Bihar regarding the practice of dowry in the state, and we hope that the findings of this poll will provide important information to policy makers and practitioners in the state on the demands of young people on how best to eradicate this practice, and can thus, fillip the commendable efforts initiated.

This poll was conducted by the Centre for Catalyzing Change, as part of Sakshamaa or the Initiative for What Works, Bihar. Conducted in 100 schools, colleges and skills training centers across 11 districts of Bihar, reaching almost 18,000 young people, the survey consisted of an IVRS poll and paper questionnaire, and comprised four multiple-choice questions and one qualitative ask on potential policy solutions. The young people of Bihar have demanded a new comprehensive law, a robust awareness campaign and stricter penalization of both takers and givers of dowry. As such, incorporating these demands into future policy action can go far to reduce the prevalence of dowry in the state.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude, the guidance and support from our partners, the Women Development Corporation, Government of Bihar and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Dr. Aparajita Gogoi
Executive Director
Centre for Catalyzing Change
Dowry payments – in the form of cash, durable goods or property - from the household of a bride to that of her groom, are one of the most significant financial transactions made by an Indian household. Due to the size of these payments, there is significant concern regarding their impact, where households may become impoverished because of paying dowry, or engage in sex-selective abortion to avoid payment of dowry for their daughters. The Government of India considers the payment of dowry to be a major social malaise and multiple pieces of legislation and policies have been initiated to combat it, however their effect remains minimal.

Despite the poverty of many households and relative weakness of formal financial markets, the scale of expenditure at the time of a wedding in India is very large (Chiplunkar and Weaver 2018). In addition to the high cost of a wedding, a significant proportion of households’ income and savings is directed towards dowry payments. Existing research has found that dowry encourages sex-selective abortion (Bhalotra et al., 2016; Alfano, 2015), alters investment behaviour of households (Anukriti et al., 2018), and can encourage violence against wives in hopes of extracting further payment (Bloch and Rao, 2002). As such, dowry payments have a variety of adverse consequences on general welfare and development.

Existing data on the prevalence of dowry in India is limited, with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) crime registration data serving as the primary source. According to NCRB data (2016), of all the crimes recorded under the ‘Crimes against women’ sub-head in India, the majority of cases are under Cruelty by husband by husband and/or his relatives at 34%, while 2% are registered Dowry deaths. In Bihar, the highest number of cases (31%) are registered under Cruelty by husband and/or his relatives, and 8% are under Dowry deaths. Significantly, Bihar ranks 5th highest in crime rate against women in India. Moreover, Bihar performs poorly on other outcomes related to women’s empowerment – it has a low sex ratio at birth (908, SRS 2016), a high proportion of women with no schooling (47.8%, NFHS 4), high rates of early marriage (42.5%, NFHS 4) and the lowest labour force participation in the country at 9% (World Bank 2016).
Government of Bihar’s Pledge to Eradicate Dowry

The Government of Bihar is cognizant of the high prevalence of dowry in the state and has initiated a comprehensive program to address the issue. In 2017, the Government launched a social and behaviour change campaign to combat dowry and child marriage, through community level messaging and “Abhiyan Jagrukta raths” for all 38 districts of the state to raise awareness on the issues. Further, to improve the lives of women and girls in the state, the government has also invested extensively in improving girl’s education and delaying marriage. Girls’ access to quality formal schooling is being enhanced through several schemes such as the Mukhyamantri Balika Cycle Yojna, Mukhyamantri Balika Poshak Yojna, Mukhyamantri Akshar Aanchal Yojna and the recently announced Mukhyamantri Kanya Uthan Yojana. Government of Bihar has also sought to increase women’s formal employment through 35% reservation in all government jobs in the state.

In order to supplement these efforts, young people’s perception on dowry in the state can be a vital source of information for policy makers in Bihar, as they seek to lower the prevalence of dowry in the state.

Bihar Dowry Poll

Centre for Catalyzing Change, as part of Sakshamaa or the Initiative for What Works, Bihar, conducted an opinion poll in Bihar, to understand young people’s perception of dowry and actions for prevention of the practice. The opinion poll was able to identify certain policy actions that young people feel would be able to limit the prevalence of the practice in the state. Conducted in 100 schools across 11 districts of Bihar, the survey consisted of an IVRS poll and paper-based questionnaire and comprised four multiple-

What Do Young People Want?

- Young people of BIHAR demand a new comprehensive law, a robust awareness campaign and stricter penalization of both takers and givers of dowry
- 55% young people said that they would like to convince their parents and guardians to not accept or demand dowry when they get married
- Half of all respondents believe that organizing a simple wedding ceremony is a good action on the part of the bride and groom to reduce unnecessary wedding expenditure
- For most young unmarried women, improved law enforcement is an ideal response to combat dowry – 43% emphasized the need for stricter enforcement of anti-dowry laws and rules, while 40% felt that increased reporting of the crime by the community is required
choice questions and one qualitative ask on potential policy solutions.

The eleven districts covered by the poll included: Gaya, Patna, Khagaria, Sitamarhi, Saran, Purnia, Nalanda, Bhojpur, Banka, Vaishali, and Madhubani. A total of 17,378 valid responses were received, 55% of which were from young women and 45% from young men. 88% respondents were unmarried. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 15-18 years (77%), 15% were between 18-24 years, 5% were between ages 25 and 35, and 4% were ages 35 and above. (Table 1)

**Table 1: Details of Respondents**

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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>25-35 years</td>
<td>852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 years and above</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Young People Want to Convince Parents to Not Give or Take Dowry**

When young people were asked what they would do in case their parents or guardians propose or demand dowry in their marriage, **55% said that they would try to convince their parents not to do so** (Figure 1). A significant majority of unmarried male respondents agreed with this sentiment (61%), while 53% unmarried female respondents did so as well. 30% felt that reporting this crime to the police would be a viable way to prevent their parents from asking for, or giving dowry. Interestingly, more women - both married and unmarried - considered this an appropriate action (35% and 39% respectively). **15% of respondents said that they would manage their own expenses** to prevent the giving or taking of dowry by parents or guardians, with 30% of married men suggesting this as a suitable alternative. However, only 8% of unmarried women felt this would be an effective solution.
Young People Want Simpler Weddings Celebrations

Young people were also asked what the bride and groom can do to reduce unnecessary expenditure at weddings. Half of the respondents said that organizing a simple wedding ceremony, with a fixed upper limit for expenses would be a good action on the part of the bride and groom to tackle this. 29% said that the couple should refuse to accept expensive gifts, while 21% believe that limiting the number of guests, and food and drink options at the wedding is an ideal action (Figure 2). When disaggregated by gender and marital status, more than half of unmarried men and women felt that organizing a simple wedding ceremony was the best way for the bride and groom to reduce unnecessary expenditure. Responses by married men and women to this question did not show a clear trend – likely because they have already passed this milestone in their lives.

Role Model Couples Must be Celebrated & Honoured

When asked about what society and families can do to discourage this practice, respondents were almost evenly split – 34% felt that the community can do more to report instances of dowry demand to the police, 33% believe that bestowing honour on couples that do not accept dowry will be a good community action and 32% said that society and families should boycott marriages where dowry has been given or demanded (Figure 3). Both married men and women believe that bestowing honour on couples that do not accept dowry is the ideal community action. 40% of unmarried women said that increased reporting to police is required at the community level – a belief that is reflected in their previous responses as well.
**Stricter Implementation of Laws Demanded, Continued Sensitisation Drives**

Most respondents (39%) said that anti-dowry rules and laws needed stricter enforcement, when asked about what the government can do to prevent this system. A significant proportion, 36%, also felt the need for a District and Panchayat level anti-dowry campaign. **25% suggested that the government should honour couples who get married in simple ceremonies** (Figure 4). A higher proportion of unmarried women, 43%, emphasized the need for stricter enforcement of anti-dowry laws and rules, compared to 37% of married women, 36% of unmarried men and 33% of married men. A similar proportion of married men and women called for a District and Panchayat level anti-dowry campaign (40% and 39%, respectively). More unmarried men (29%) than women (21%) believe that the government honouring couples married in simple ceremonies will go far in reducing this practice. When asked about the one change they would like to see with regard to dowry practice – the need for a new law emerged as the primary qualitative ask, followed by the demand for an awareness campaign, and the stricter penalization of both giver and takers of dowry, in the third place.
The practice of dowry has a variety of adverse impacts on communities. It contributes to sex-selective abortions, early marriage of girls, and domestic violence. Further, it also affects the financial condition of households – as many families are forced to make payments that are beyond their capacity. Bihar has a high prevalence of dowry; the state government has initiated several programs to combat the practice, and institute a more enabling environment for women and girls. The Government of Bihar’s efforts can be supplemented by the insights drawn from this opinion poll. The young people of Bihar have demanded a new comprehensive law, a robust awareness campaign and stricter penalization of both takers and givers of dowry. As such, incorporating these demands into future policy action can go far to reduce the prevalence of dowry in the state.

References

• International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and ICF. 2017. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), India. 2015-16: Bihar. Mumbai: IIPS.
Centre for Catalyzing Change's, Sakshamā, or the Initiative for What Works, Bihar, aims to accelerate gender focused and evidence-based transformative policies for women and girls in Bihar.

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