

Half of Bihar girls marry as kids

CHAMPARAN, NAWADA, Kaimur, Madhepura and Rohtas worst culprits

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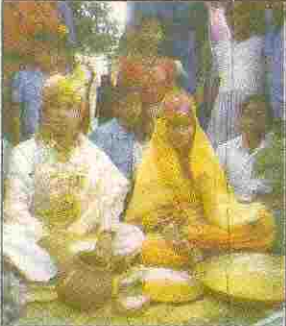
PATNA: Fifty-one per cent of all marriages in Bihar are consummated at an early age leading to higher child and maternal mortality rates.

Worried over the statistics now being reeled out by agencies monitoring the population indices, Bihar has set about cleaning its Augean stables.

A brainstorming session involving the UNICEF and the departments for Child Welfare Department, Human Resources and Social Welfare is planned here to achieve coordination and maximise the benefits under the various state and centrally aided plans for women and the girl child.

UNICEF's child protection unit chief, Mansoor Quadri informed, that child marriage is now turning out to be an obnoxious practice as evident from the National Sample Survey-3 data. Despite the laws prohibiting such practices, 80 per cent of girls in West Champaran were found to have been married by the age of 17

CAUSE FOR CONCERN



- 80 per cent of girls in West Champaran were found to have been married by the age of 17 against the legal age of 18 years
- Nawada followed with 73 per cent of the marriages being conducted below the legal age, while in Kaimur and Rohtas, it was 70 per cent, and in Madhepura, 66 per cent
- 68.3 per cent of women in Bihar are anemic and many women die at child birth

against legal age of 18 years. The national mean age stands at 19.5 years as against the data for Bihar:

Nawada followed with 73 per cent of the marriages being conducted below the legal age, while in Kaimur and Rohtas, it was 70 per cent, and in Madhepura, 66 per cent. Even this shocking data for Bihar is not complete, since in 2004, just three such marriages were reported.

The correlation of early marriage with literacy can be established for the fact, that Patna reg-

istered only 40 per cent of such marriages due to higher literacy among women at 52.7 per cent.

The statistics also point to a socio-cultural milieu, where together with low literacy and poverty ratio, the girl child is still considered to be an economic burden. The indicators also underline, that the low consciousness and awareness levels force parents to marry off their daughters early to avoid social stigma, protect them from sexual assaults or assuring her

a male guardian. Child marriage is thus both a protection and rights issue, planners feel.

Experts believe, that for progressive elimination of child marriage, it is important to adapt to an integrated approach so that the process of changing social norms is supported through the availability of alternative opportunities for girls, create an enabling environment and carry out structural improvements including effective implementation of various legislations.

The implications of allowing child marriages are many-all negative.

While child marriage is a violation of child rights since it denies the right to food, nutrition, health, security and freedom from violence, abuse and exploitation, it also acts as an obstacle to nearly every development goal: eradication of poverty, hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and improving health.

Consequently, 68.3 per cent of women in Bihar are anemic and many women die at child birth.