

## **Sambhali Trust**

### **Follow up - Report on 'Reduction of Maternal and Infant Mortality and Abolition of Child Marriages' Initiative**

#### **Introduction**

Scepticism about the issue of child marriages prompted Sambhali Trust to compile a second report. To determine if illegal marriages still happen, or if they are a thing of the past, 152 women, all under the age of 35, were interviewed.

Child marriages, defined as under age 18 for girls and under 21 for boys are illegal in India; the punishment is imprisonment for everyone who attends (priests, barbers, musicians, neighbours and relatives etc).

Sambhali Trust is a true grass-roots organisation, delving straight into the heart of these problems and working directly with those involved.

#### **Aims of this report**

1. Investigate if child marriages are still an issue in modern times.
2. Raise awareness of the key issues of the project: *Reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates, and abolition of child marriages.*
3. Document any issues found and make recommendations for progression within this field.
4. Serve as a foundation for project proposals and future volunteers.

#### **Issues found**

Some mother's lied about the age of their marriage. Their false testimonies were realized by the given age of their oldest child. Pregnancy before marriage is unlikely in many rural areas like Setrawa village; the woman would be outcast and unable to marry.

Our reports are kept anonymous and many women felt able to trust us and tell the truth. The results have been split into 3 groups based on marriage age: under age 15, 16-17, and 18+.

#### **Results**

- **Illegal marriages are still happening**
- **Awareness of health issues and available help is too low**
- **Younger mothers showed considerably more health issues than mothers over the age of 18**

## Current age range of participants

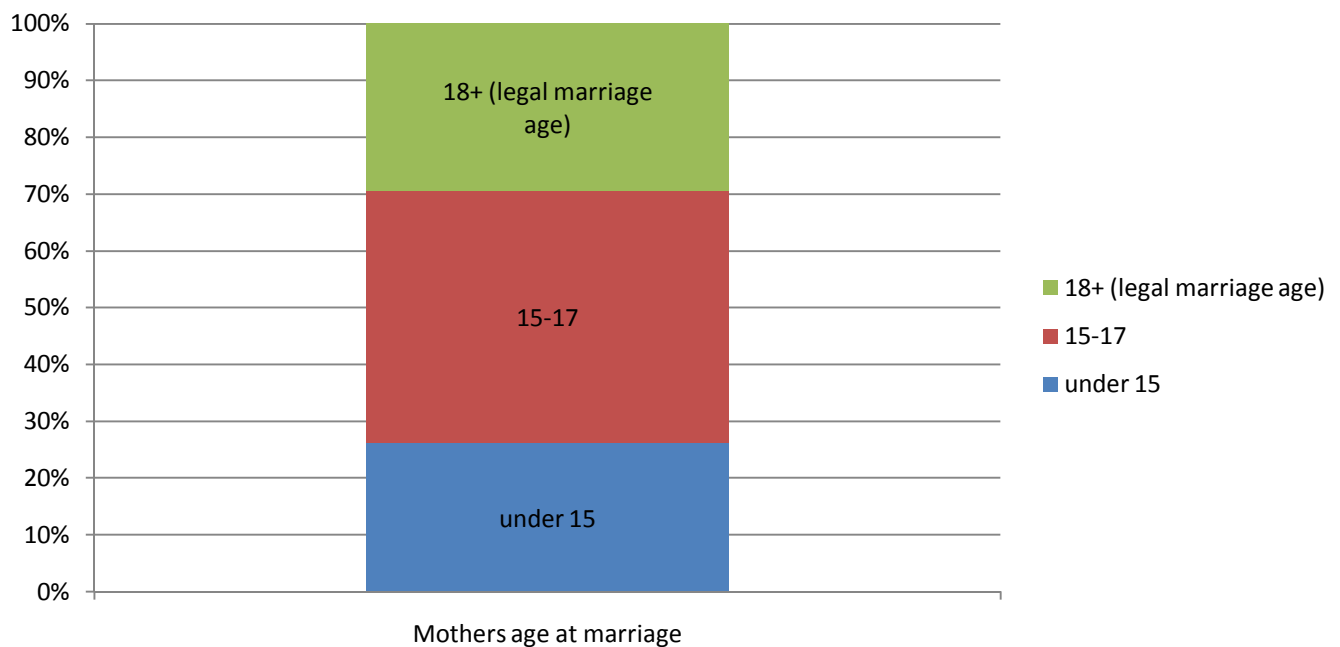
16-35 years old.

## Age at time of marriage

Female average: **15** (High:21, Low:8)

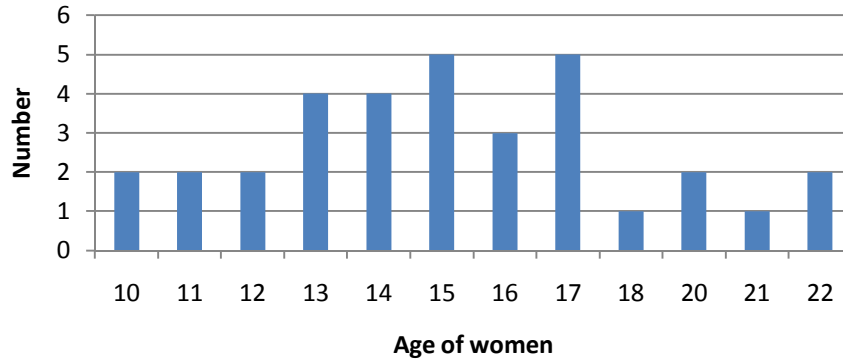
Male average: **21** (High: 35, Low 15)

The chart below shows clearly that the vast majority of marriages in the last 25 years were illegal. This chart includes the women who said they were 18 at the time of marriage, but were likely younger (see 'Issues found' section). This means that the number of legal marriages is actually slightly less than that shown.

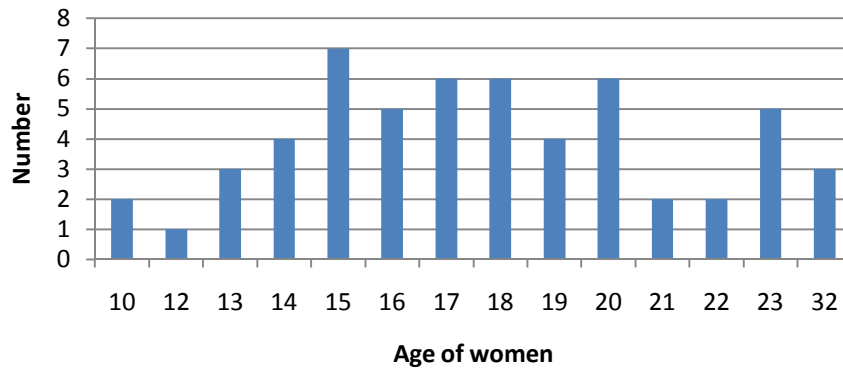


### Age of women at first birth

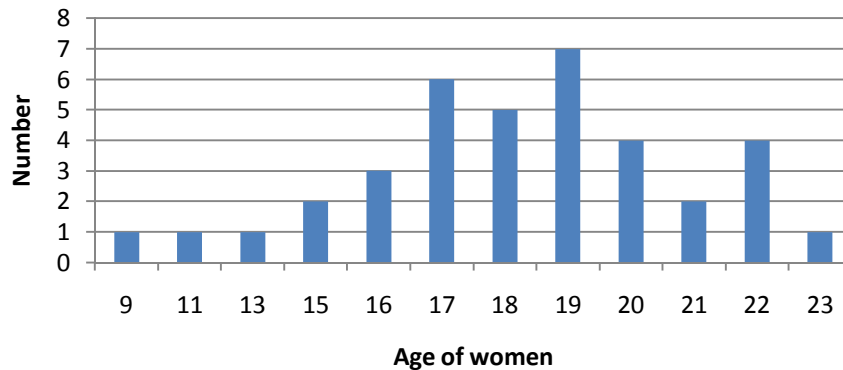
For women married under the age of 15.  
Relative ages at first recorded pregnancy.



For women married between 15-17.  
Relative ages at first recorded pregnancy.



For women married at 18+.  
Relative ages at first recorded pregnancy.



The charts show some interesting patterns; there are clearly too many underage marriages and child births. They also immediately highlight the fact that some of the women must have lied about their age of marriage (it is after all, illegal to participate in an underage marriage).

### **Home birth versus birth elsewhere**

The majority of births took place at home. A few women gave birth at a local government run centre. These women were also the ones who knew the most about vaccines for themselves and their children. The majority of mothers and children were completely or partially unvaccinated.

### **Direct Observations**

Those who married younger had children younger.

Mothers giving birth at a younger age suffered more issues with pregnancy, and also received less external advice.

Women who gave birth earlier in their lives mostly had larger households, and yet less income per month.

Younger mothers received more pressure from mother-in-laws and husbands.

### **Why do illegal marriages happen?**

Traditions are deep-rooted and it is difficult to change the mindset.

Local tradition decrees that women are a burden on the family until they are married.

An early marriage is thought by many to guarantee the virginity of the bride.

A National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) documented a low level of awareness among women about the legally permissible age for marriage.

Families with a poor and uneducated background continue to enforce the tradition of early marriage.