



Introduction

Module 6 under Safe Childhood Programme series is based on the fact that child marriage is an open violation of child rights because owing to this evil practice, children miss out on their natural development and cannot study further. This puts them, specially girls, at risks related to physical and emotional health.

Session Objectives

At the end of the session, participants will be able to know:

- What is child marriage and what steps can be taken at village level to stop it
- How child marriage becomes a hindrance in their healthy development and takes away their childhood
- The role of parents, community and various stakeholders in curbing this practice
- How they can make people aware about issues related to child marriage with the help of village sabha and child protection committee.

Session Process

Step 1

Begin the session by welcoming all the participants and thank them for participating in it. Introduce yourself and ask them to introduce themselves. Start the session with a motivational song.

Step 2

Share with participants important steps to curb child marriages:

- ➔ Create awareness amongst village community on effects of child marriages
- ➔ Keep close watch on incidents related to child marriages and take help of child protection committee and police, if required, to stop them
- ➔ Create awareness amongst children against child marriages with support from bal panchayat

- ➔ Motivate the parents to allow children to continue their studies. Encourage and honour girls who stand up against child marriage
- ➔ Motivate school management committee and teachers to organise essay writing and painting competitions on child marriage for middle school children. They can also organise plays on the issue.
- ➔ Make ANMs and ASHA workers aware that they should talk about bad effects of child marriage with parents and families during interaction at VHND and home visits. They should specially talk how child marriage affects health of young girls. In addition, they should also report any incident of child marriage to panchayat members

Step 3

Discuss with participants that the evil practice of child marriage has been prevalent in our country for centuries and it has deep relation with thinking and attitudes of people. This practice cannot be stopped only by enforcing law, instead patriarchal thinking needs to be changed. Therefore it is necessary to make common people aware and sensitive towards the issue.

Tell the participants that village panchayat cannot stop child marriages on its own. Panchayat members need support from child protection committee, influential members of society, administration and law enforcing agencies. With cooperation from all these stakeholders, panchayat members can create awareness about evil practice of child marriage. Importantly, they can develop a monitoring mechanism so that incidents of child marriage at the village level can be stopped.

Step 4

Ask the participants to imagine that following two incidents have taken place in their village.

Incident 1

Sujata's marriage

16 year old Sujata studies in class 10th. She is good in studies. Her teachers and friends hope that she will score well in class 10th and take admission in class 11 the next year. Examinations were round the corner and Sujata was engrossed in preparation. Then one day one of her uncles visited from a neighbouring village. He had brought a wedding proposal for her. Sujata's parents were extremely happy. This was the right time to get the daughter married. She had grown up and was about to pass class 10th.

Sujata's mama told, "the boy is from my village, after completing class 12th, he now helps his father at his shop. He is twenty years old, family is well off and the girl will remain happy. I have found the boy with great difficulty, so do not reject the proposal." Sujata's father agreed to the proposal without informing Sujata. Not only this, he even sent for the boy's parents to come and see Sujata. They came along with her uncle to see the girl.

By now Sujata had come to know about what was likely to happen. She became upset to know that she will be getting married shortly. She lost interest in exam preparation.

Then suddenly, she came up with an idea. She informed her class teacher Devika madam who was also socially aware and knew about ill effects of child marriage.

When Sujata's family members were leaving for finalising wedding alliance, Devika madam reached there along with panchayat member Sharda Devi. Sujata's parents could not understand what was happening.

What should have been done by panchayat member Sharda Devi and Devika Madam?

Now ask the participants to reply in 'Yes' or 'No' for the following: Should they have:

- Informed the police immediately?
- Advised Sujata's as well as boy's parents that it is not right to get a girl married before 18 years and a boy married before 21 years of age
- Brought the matter up with child protection committee
- Said that if boy and girl are agreeing, what can we do
- Advised Sujata's parents to postpone the marriage till she becomes at least 18 and completes her studies and till the boy becomes 21 and financially stable.
- Advised Sujata and the boy separately about bad effects of marrying at a young age.



Incident 2

Effects of marriage at young age

Bhavita, who studied in village school along with Sujata, did not even come to know when her marriage was fixed. She had barely completed 15 years and was married to Rohit who was 19 years old. Rohit, was too scared of his father to protest. His father was very strict and he alone took all decisions at home. Even though Rohit wanted to study further and become a teacher, he could not do anything. He did not even know what marriage meant and what could be ill effects of marrying at a young age. Bhavita too wanted to study further but had no say so she agreed to marry fearing her parents. Bhavita's in-laws were in a different village.

After some time, when Bhavita visited her parents, she had a baby with her and she was pregnant again. She was looking very weak and her skin was looking pale. Bhavita's mother was also concerned how she will take care of two children. Village ASHA, ANM and Anganwadi worker came to see her. They advised her to visit centre immediately but Bhavita told them that all would be well. ANM told Bhavita that her body is anemic. This is

due to getting married at a young age and not taking supplementary nutritional diet. In the meantime, panchayat member Sharda Devi also joined them.

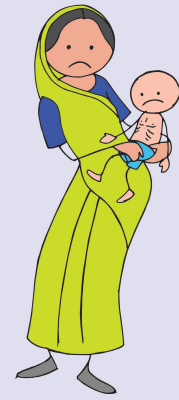
What action should have Sharda Devi taken? What do you think she would have done:

- Asked Bhavita to immediately go the health centre
- Scolded Bhavita's parents in front of all villagers

She advised Bhavita's parents, " See whatever has happened with Bhavita, that cannot be undone but do not get your other daughters married till they are atleast 18 years of age. Give them opportunity to study and take care of their nutrition".

Sharda Devi told ANM and ASHA to counsel Bhavita as long as she was in the village on how to take care of her children as well as her own self. They should also talk to her on various family planning methods so she can save herself from becoming pregnant repeatedly.

Sharda Devi advised Bhavita, " Get your delivery done at the centre and in future, do consult doctor regarding your child's health. If your children will be weak then their children will also be weak and this cycle of weakness will continue."



Step 5

Points to be considered by the participants (write them on a chart and display)

- ➔ It is necessary to create awareness amongst village community about issues related to child marriage
- ➔ As per Anti Child Marriage Law 1929, any person getting children married or participating in child marriage can be punished and people can take help from child protection committee or even police to stop child marriage from taking place.
- ➔ They should motivate people to let their daughters study at least up to class 12th and do not get their children married at young age. (Girls not before 18 and boys not before 21)
- ➔ Many families in the country get their young daughters married to much older men in greed of money or due to poverty. It is like trading the daughters. Sometimes, on pretext of marriage, men pay little money to families and take away the girls and push them into forced prostitution. Many such cases have come to light from various states of the country.
- ➔ Often it is not easy to put a stop to incidents of child marriage as families get their children engaged discreetly and quietly send their daughters off after some time. Many times, other members of community do not interfere thinking it is part of local customs. It is significant to motivate and make people aware to allow their children to continue their education in such cases.
- ➔ Taking legal course of action to stop child marriage should be the last option. It is important to advise and make the parents of the children understand at the first stage.

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Ask the participants to discuss on above points and whether they agree with them. Motivate them to add any left out points.
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Step 6

Monitoring mechanism and data collection

Share with participants that figures related to child marriage are collected on the basis of population census and health workers and panchayat collect some figures at the village level. Main Indicators at the village level related to child marriage can be as below:

- ➔ Number of girls getting married before 18 years and boys before 21 years of age
- ➔ Number of girls who have discontinued their studies in between
- ➔ Number of girls who have become mothers at young age
- ➔ Number of daughters-in-law in the village whose age is less than legal marriage age
- ➔ Number of malnourished and anemic women who had been married before 18 years of age
- ➔ Number of child marriages stopped in the village
- ➔ Number of families punished/convicted under Child Marriage Act
- ➔ Number of child marriage incidents reported with police station

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Ask the participants if above indicators are correct and they indicate situation of child marriage in some way or the other. Motivate them to add, amend or remove any point based on discussions
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Summarise the discussion as below:

These figures help the panchayat in understanding and providing monitoring mechanism for child marriages at the village level. They help in making the village free from the bane of child marriage under Safe Childhood Programme.

Repeat the key messages and end the session after thanking the participants.

