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# Addressing Harmful Practices in India

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Programme framework & strategies



**UNFPA** is committed to realizing SDG 5 on gender equality, especially target 5.3 on eliminating harmful practices such as gender biased sex selection and child marriage.

UNFPA's work is guided by the understanding that all harmful practices share the same root causes. They are means to the same end of exercising power and control based on gender, sexuality, age, disability, class, caste, creed, ethnicity, or other factors.



#### Data speaks:

India's **sex ratio at birth**, at 898 girls born for every 1000 boys born is far below the international norm of 952.<sup>i</sup> This has long term implications for the country's demographic landscape and for gender equality.



27 percent girls are **married before age** 18 years and 20 percent boys are married before age 21.<sup>ii</sup>



Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, the median age at marriage for girls rose from 17 to 19 years signaling a shift from **child marriage** to **early marriage**. Currently 48 percent girls are married by age 20.<sup>ii</sup>



8 percent girls aged 15-19 years had begun **childbearing** in 2015-16. More than half (52%) of currently married women aged 15-19 years had already begun child bearing.<sup>ii</sup>



#### References:

- i Sample Registration System 2014-16
- ii National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2015-16

## Addressing harmful practices: An ecological framework

An ecological framework takes into account the full range of complex drivers of harmful practices and the interplay of these forces



- Poor access to secondary and higher education- poor infrastructure (lack of safe spaces, poor sanitation facilities)
- Poor quality of health and SRH services- supply chain issues, weak capacities, lack of regard for privacy and dignity
- Limited availability of youth-friendly services and sensitivity around comprehensive sexuality education
- Limited avenues for skill-building for girls



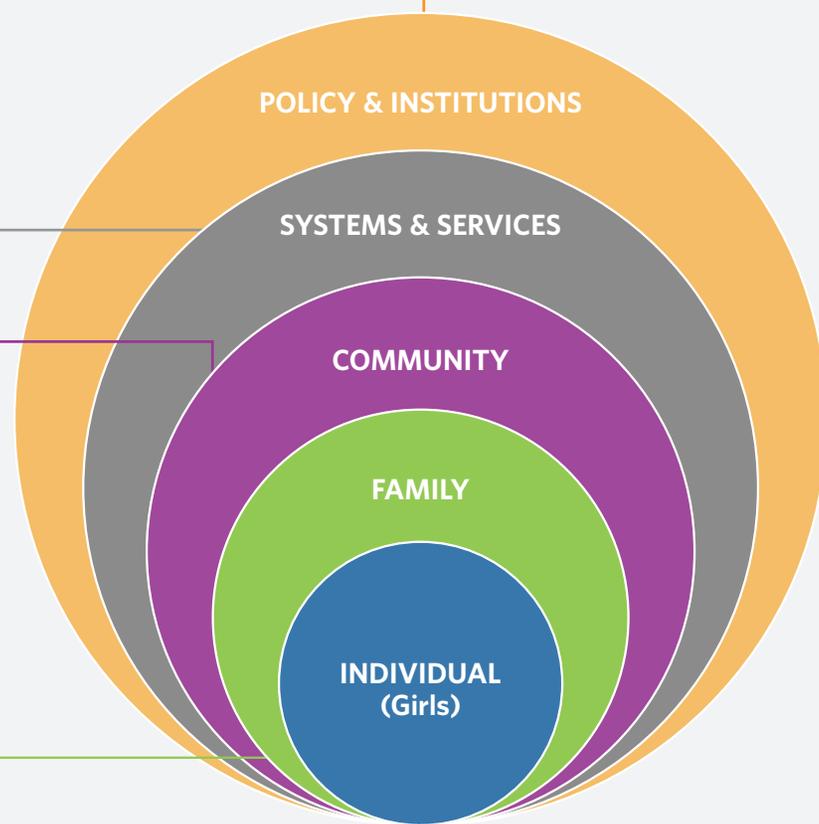
- Strict social norms about sexuality, marriage, fertility
- Negative attitudes about adolescent sexuality and sexual behavior of women and girls outside marriage
- Social acceptance for violence against women and girls
- Negative attitudes towards women's choice and autonomy
- Restriction on girls' mobility and nature of women's (and men's) professions
- Local leadership and gatekeeping largely by men and boys



- Son preference and daughter un-wantedness- burden perception of girls (patrilocal marriage, concerns over girls' safety, dowry)
- Control over girls' sexuality and mobility
- Little value to girls' education and professional skill building
- Value placed on marriage, especially early marriage and motherhood
- Girls dis-inherited from family property and assets
- Girls not perceived as source of support in old age



- Poverty, economic decline; increasing cost of living
- Poor implementation of laws and policies
- Poor representation of women in key decision making forums
- Increasing commercialization, leading to proliferation and misuse of technology for gender biased sex selection
- Demographic-declining fertility- small family size
- Humanitarian crises, disasters



- Discrimination against girls before and after birth
- Transition to adolescence-age of puberty and sexual debut
- Centrality of marriage and motherhood as only option in life
- Normalization of violence in women's lives
- Internalized gender-inequitable values for both men and women

## Gender transformative change in practice



### Gender responsive policies, schemes, programmes

- Policies that support women's asset ownership, equitable labour participation, credit access
- Women's political participation, and leadership in governance and across sectors
- Effective implementation of critical gender laws and policies that advance women's human rights including reproductive rights
- Recognition of economic and social value of unpaid care work
- Special protection during crises and disasters



### System strengthening and gender mainstreaming across sectors

- Improved quality of health and sexual and reproductive health; health insurance cover for girls at birth
- Improved quality and accessibility of secondary and higher education for girls
- Mechanisms to prevent and respond to harmful practices and gender based violence
- Mechanisms to ensure safety of transport and public spaces
- Improved access to credit and skill building opportunities for girls



### Challenging discriminatory structures and norms

- Positive community images of women, their roles and their contributions
- Community mobilization for increased rights awareness and effective enforcement of rights especially through local self governance institutions
- Freedom from threat of violence within community
- Recognition of economic and social value of unpaid care work
- Positive attitudes towards women's mobility, sexuality, choice



### Enhancing Value

- Greater sharing by household members of unpaid housework and childcare
- Freedom from threat of violence from partner and family
- Greater attention to girls' health, nutrition and education within families
- Men's involvement in reproductive health responsibilities; engaged fatherhood
- Women's equal participation in decision making within the family, and greater respect for choice and consent
- Increased asset ownership including equal inheritance for girls and women



### Voice, Choice, Agency

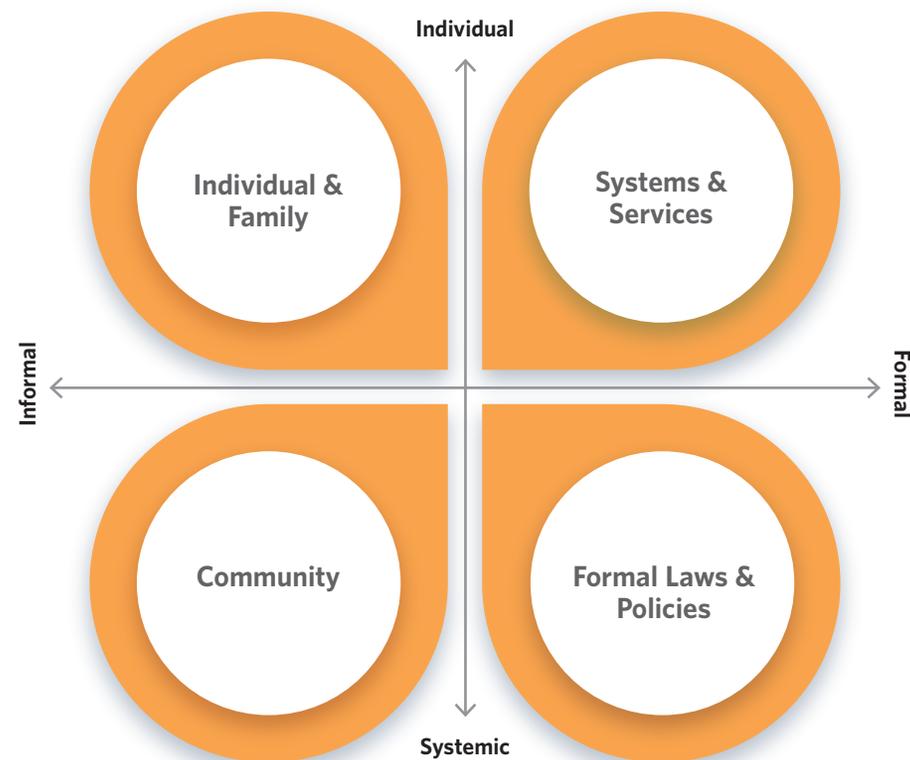
- Collectivization –supportive social and professional networks
- Women's economic independence
- Life skills- decision making, negotiation, exercising choice
- Enhanced self-efficacy, self-esteem, sense of self-worth, recognition of equal rights, autonomy, expanded aspirations, psychological well-being

UNFPA's efforts focus on transforming unequal power relations, structural inequalities, and discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours that reinforce and perpetuate harmful practices, to aim for gender transformative change.

This entails engagement at multiple levels- from the individual, interpersonal, community level, and systemic to larger public policy- enabled through strategic partnerships.

## How We Work

- UNFPA reaches out to the most marginalized and vulnerable women and girls who are at risk of child marriage, unwanted pregnancies, and violence. UNFPA seeks to collectivize, mobilize and empower them with enhanced life-skills, improved access to health information and services, and expanded life choices
- UNFPA engages with parents and families to influence and unpack norms and values that underlie differences in gender roles, relations and outcomes. This entails interpersonal communication, participatory exercises and collective reflection to promote gender awareness and equitable attitudes.
- All vulnerable population groups especially women and adolescents should have access to gender-sensitive prevention, care and protection services. UNFPA's efforts focus on quality assurance, training of service providers, development of teaching and learning materials, and introduction of innovative tools and methodologies to aid system strengthening.



- UNFPA supports meaningful community engagement by working with youth groups, community leaders, and Panchayat representatives. UNFPA also works with men and boys to motivate and enable them to challenge harmful notions of masculinity and promote gender equality.
- UNFPA engages in evidence based policy advocacy through research and data analysis on addressing son preference, child marriage and other harmful practices. We support governments and countries to generate and use data on critical issues and vulnerable populations to inform plans, policies and programmes, so that targeted investments achieve sustainable development goals.

Based on the Gender at Work framework (Rao and Kelleher, 2005)

UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

UNFPA's efforts focus on three transformative results:

- ending unmet need for family planning
- ending preventable maternal death and
- ending gender-based violence and harmful practices such as child marriage and gender biased sex selection.



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