

# National Consultation on Status of Child Marriage in India Problems & Solutions

A National level online Consultation on the Status of Child Marriage in India, its Problems, and Solutions, was organized by the National Action and Coordination Group to End Violence against Children in India (NACG EVAC India) on February 16th, 2023. The meeting witnessed participation from over 350 attendees representing various states across India.

Among the prominent speakers at the consultation were:

- Sri Sanjay Gupta, Chairperson of NACG EVAC India
- Smt. Gitika Dutta Sharma, Vice-Chairperson of NACG EVAC India
- Dr. Indrani Bhattacharyya, Executive Committee Member & Thematic Lead: Child Marriage, NACG EVAC India
- Dr. Anjaiah Pandiri, Executive Director of CHILDLINE India Foundation
- Sri Vikram Shrivastava, Convener of Campaign against Child Marriage and Founder of IThought
- Smt. Divya Mukand, Associate Director at DASRA



Dr. Indrani Bhattacharyya delivered a brief welcome address, initiating the discussion by providing an introduction to NACG EVAC India and outlining the objectives of the meeting. She emphasized the aim of discussing the current status of Child Marriage, exploring diverse strategies to mitigate this issue through interactive sessions. Dr. Bhattacharyya highlighted that NACG EVAC India serves as a platform to bring together Civil Society Organizations, NGOs, Government Institutions, academicians, and Children forums to facilitate interactions, share best practices, and advocate for children's rights.

Furthermore, Dr. Bhattacharyya elucidated that NACG EVAC India has over 600 members spanning across 29 states of India. The organization addresses five major issues, including Child Sexual Abuse, Child Labour, Child Trafficking, Corporal Punishment, and Child Marriage, along with two cross-cutting issues of Participation and Children with Disability.

She underscored the urgency of addressing Child Marriage as the first topic of discussion in 2023, despite a decrease recorded in the most recent NFHS survey to 23.3%. Dr. Bhattacharyya highlighted that the prevalence of child marriage remains alarmingly high in certain states such as West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, where the incidence exceeds 40%.

Additionally, Dr. Bhattacharyya highlighted a concerning trend post-COVID, where child marriage rates have surged, as evidenced in government documents and research-based reports from global program teams like UNICEF. She specifically mentioned the "Evidence and Review on Child Marriage in India 2020 to 2022" report published in January 2023 by Girls Not Brides as an example. Following this, Dr. Bhattacharyya introduced the esteemed panelists and invited Mr. Sanjay Gupta to lead the session.

Shri. Sanjay Gupta commenced the session by emphasizing the sensitivity of the issue of child marriage and the necessity for in-depth discussion. He referenced the situation of child marriage in Assam and emphasized the collective responsibility to address this issue. Mr. Gupta also elaborated on NACG EVAC India, its roles, responsibilities, and its connections with the National Government and other South Asian countries.



Shri. Vikram Srivastava was then invited by Shri. Sanjay Gupta to expand on his Public Interest Litigation (PIL) against child marriage. Mr. Srivastava underscored how the situation in Assam has heightened the urgency of addressing the issue and highlighted the longstanding existence of laws against child marriage, yet their inadequate implementation. He brought attention to census data indicating that over 4 lakh girls in India have been widowed before reaching 21 years of age, emphasizing that the prevalence of child marriage reflects patriarchal power dynamics in Indian society, often leading to trafficking.

Subsequently, the discussion shifted towards identifying effective strategies to combat child marriage within the system. Mr. Srivastava urged stakeholders to consider various dimensions beyond legal measures, including sensitizing policymakers and implementing agencies, bolstering access to services such as Childline and Child Welfare Committees, conducting training and awareness sessions at all levels, collaborating with grassroots stakeholders and community groups, and utilizing media outreach. Emphasizing the paramount importance of education, he stressed the need for access to quality education, including life skills education, in a safe environment for all children.

Through these consultations, NACG EVAC India aims to foster collaborative efforts in combating child marriage and promoting the rights and well-being of children across the nation.