

And they never lived happily ever after

New research by MV Foundation shows the inextricable link between Child Labour, Child Marriage and Multiple Forms of Violence in Telangana, India



New research conducted by Stop Child Labour partner organization MV Foundation in India shows the inextricable link between child labour, child marriage and multiple forms of violence. The research “And they never lived happily ever after; the battle for justice goes on” reflects the voices of married girls in Telangana.

It becomes clear that married girls are extremely vulnerable and at high risk of becoming victims of exploitation and violence. Within a month of marriage, girls plunge into fetching water, sweeping, washing clothes and utensils, cooking and rushing to the fields, walking long distances for wage work or tending to sheep and cattle. They reach home at dusk to continue the next day with aches and pains that get aggravated overtime.

This violence of work with its deadly monotony leaves the girls with little respite or space for leisure, far less thinking or hoping for a change for the better.

Girls have no space to bargain. Even the wages they earn are not theirs. If they live with in-laws, the wages go to the head of the family. If she and her husband live apart from the in-laws, he takes away the entire wage. The girls have no say in how their earnings are spent and are hesitant to ask for anything. They dare not ask the husband to get clothes, food, or take the children out. With the passage of time, the friction in the family becomes irreconcilable that they are weakened and subjugated in every aspect.

These are some harsh figures that came out of the research:

- 59 per cent of the girls were involved in wage work before marriage while 52 per cent got into wage work only after marriage.
- 3 per cent stated that they kept the wages with themselves before marriage whereas 97 per cent gave their wages to the parents.
- 46 per cent gave their wages to the mother-in-law while 54 per cent gave the wages to the husband. None kept the wages for themselves.
- 63 per cent could refuse to work before marriage and 20 per cent could refuse after marriage.

Due to the pressure of work, hunger and starvation, ill-health, repeated pregnancy and the risks thereof, child rearing hostility in the marital home and loneliness, married girls are victims of unspeakable violence and are sunk in a black hole without redemption. Each form of violence at every sphere of her existence is part of a totality of control. In this sense the separation of body and mind, physical, sexual and mental violence is heuristic.

These narratives of child marriage tell us that it is not a social evil caused by tradition and culture. It is a form of exploitation that takes advantage of tradition and culture, forcing girls to do domestic work and drives them as fulltime agricultural labourers or workers in the informal sector. Child marriage builds an army of invisible and hidden labour which is forced to contribute to the economy.

In spite of evidence that the participation of the girl in the labour force to her fullest potential is weak and that it does not contribute to the economic growth of the communities and societies it is clear from narrative after narrative that there is a demand for girls' labour from the in-laws house and so she is forced into a marriage. They are pushed into work till they wear out. This push is socially constructed. It forms the body and mind of each of the individuals, perhaps in various degrees among all others in society. What constitutes a family, the intra household relationship of each of the members in the family, and division of labour in the household is defined in relation to her subjugation.

The structure of relations of production and exploitation of girls at home and at times on farms is aimed at reproducing the agrarian economy and sustaining the livelihoods of farmers and whatever profits earned by them. Their sacrifices and enslavement to sustain the agrarian economy and its growth goes unnoticed, unrecognised and is invisible. The suffering of these girls and their lives is seen in an isolated manner and not as integral to the life of the nation and

its underdevelopment. This has implications for the culture and moral fibre of society and the country as a whole.

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For full research report see: <http://www.stopchildlabour.eu/assets/MVF-Study-on-Child-Marriages.pdf>

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