

Scorecards Enable Communities to Identify, Map, and Take Action to End Domestic Violence and Child Marriage

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG)¹ is one of the most pervasive and least recognised human rights violations across the world. Globally, one in three women experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by intimate partner. In India, though there is an 8.4 percentage point decline — from 37.2 percent in 2004-05 (NFHS-3) to 28.8 percent in 2015-16 (NFHS-4) — nearly one in every three women continue to face violence. Of the six focus states² Oxfam India works in, Chhattisgarh has seen a rise in the cases of domestic violence between the two national surveys. And this calls for immediate action.

Oxfam India has been working on domestic violence for quite some time but ending child and forced early marriages was a new component introduced in the Creating Spaces project.* According to NFHS-4, in India 26.8 percent of women (aged between 20-24 years) were married before 18 years of age. Of the states Oxfam India works in, Bihar and Jharkhand fare poorly with 42.5 percent and 38 percent women, respectively. Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh hover at about 21 percent. There are however, wide variations in district level data. An Oxfam India study based in Odisha shows that nearly 16 districts are above the state average; Malkangiri is at the top with 39.3 percent.

Though, national-level teen pregnancies have halved between NFHS-3 (16 percent) and NFHS-4 (8 percent); Bihar and Jharkhand, at 12 percent, are among the top 10 states. The numbers are higher in rural areas; trends show an inverse correlation between education and pregnancies — 20 percent of women (15-19 years) with no schooling have begun childbearing as against 4 percent of women (15-19 years) with 12 or more years of schooling.³

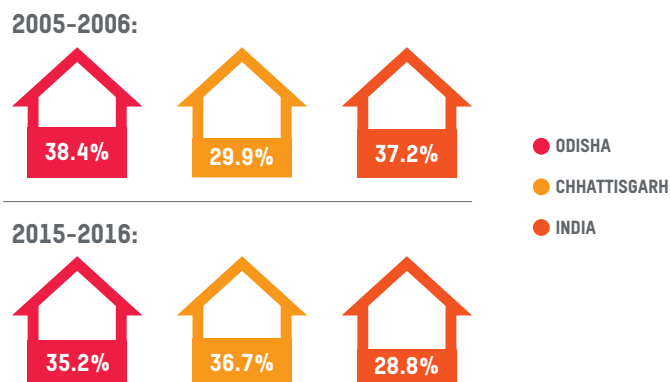
Girls are seen as an economic burden. Moreover, safety concerns, that stem from gender discrimination and patriarchy that link daughters' chastity with honour, is one of the contributing factors to the persistence in high incidence of child marriages in India. It is this social norm that the project hopes to address. The girl's health or her mental preparedness to take on the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood holds little or no consequence for these communities. For the young girls too, the deep-set social norms lead them to believe that marriage followed by children is the logical end.

CREATING SPACES

It was thus imperative that adolescent boys and girls, along with women and youth, be brought together on one platform and explained the physical, social and legal aspects of child and forced early marriage as well as domestic violence. While it was important to work with women, provide information and build a support group to identify and tackle domestic violence, it was critical to bring on board young men so they can challenge social norms that instigate violence against women. It was essential to reach out to people who are 'influencers' — leaders of traditional caste society, teachers, members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) and lawyers.

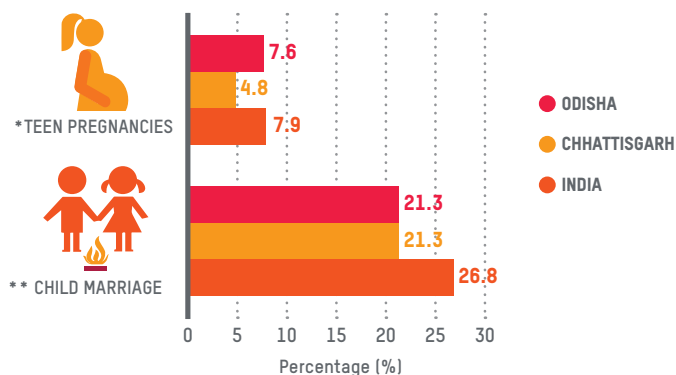
This was done through Oxfam India's 'Creating Spaces' project, which aimed at building awareness of different actors on issues

CHART 1: INCIDENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CHHATTISGARH AND ODISHA



Source: NFHS 3 & 4

CHART 2: INCIDENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN CHHATTISGARH AND ODISHA- NFHS 4



Notes: *Women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey (%)

** Proportion (%) of women (age group 20-24) married before age 18 years

Source: NFHS 4

related to gender, domestic violence and child marriage, and their existing laws. Through a well-defined curriculum,⁴ it also hopes to challenge social norms that reinforce violence against women and girls, and deprives women of their rights.

The five-year project began in November 2016 in five states; under the project, groups of women, youth, and adolescent boys and girls were formed in 20 villages in each state. On the project, Oxfam India partners with Nivedita Foundation (Chhattisgarh), National Alliance of Women (NAWO) (Odisha), Astitva Samajik Sansthan (Uttar Pradesh), Lok Swar (Jharkhand), and Sakhiree Mahila Vikas Sansthan (Bihar).

The Community Scorecard (CSC) is a participatory tool used

*Creating Spaces is undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada



Members of different girls group at a meeting in Dhurukut, in Janjgir Champa district in Chhattisgarh. Seen here is Gurbari Sidar (front row, first from left) who stopped her own marriage when she was just 16 years old.

under the project that focuses on domestic violence and child marriages; it informs the community of their perceptions on gender norms, and increase awareness, accountability and transparency between community members and service providers. It empowers communities to identify, map, and address these issues. It helps assess the delivery of services within the purview of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA)⁵ and Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA).⁶

The scorecard rating will be done every year to gauge the understanding and progress of the community in ending violence against women and child marriages, challenging social norms, and becoming a more gender-just society. **The scorecard was shared with the four groups in each village. This document pertains to Chhattisgarh and Odisha and the impact it had on the community.**

REACHING OUT

The formation of groups was the first step in the project. The women were already formed into Self Help Groups (SHGs) the challenge was to bring adolescent boys, girls, and youths on board. The youth were keen to form groups but work was likely to keep them away; some worked in the village, some migrated to neighbouring towns and cities. With the adolescent group, several factors were at play — one, school timing would make it difficult for boys and girls to come for meetings; and two, it would be difficult for girls to get permission or the time (taking care of household chores and younger siblings) to come for meetings.

“We went to each house to explain our work on women’s rights, community building, women empowerment, and child marriage. It was easier to bring women and youth together. For adolescent boys and girls, we first met with the parents. It was the men who needed to be convinced. They would fight us earlier. They attended a few of the women and youth meetings before they agreed to send their children. Women who were part of the groups played a crucial role in bringing young boys and girls on board. Since they were a part of the group, their children became a part of the adolescent groups and so did their friends,” said Kamini Dharma, a community mobiliser with Nivedita Foundation.

After groups were formed, the meetings started. The curriculum was helpful in giving a structure and method to approach issues of domestic violence and child marriage. “The meetings were an eye opener. We realised how men never helped at home, while women worked in the field and took care of all the household chores. This was wrong,” said Nagesh Kumar Banjare, a member of the youth group of Kenapalli village, in Chhattisgarh’s Janjgir-Champa district.

For the women and girls groups, the deeper understanding of what constituted domestic violence was useful. Grassroots evidence suggests that a) women and girls do not understand what domestic violence really is — it is so inherently socialized into the lives of women that there is widespread acceptance of domestic violence as the norm, b) there is lack of last mile intervention, support and knowledge of the same, and c) economic dependence of women keeps them from coming out of an abusive relationship.

For instance, a few of the girls said, that while they did see their parents fight, they never thought it was wrong. “We thought it was normal. We didn’t know that we had to stop them. Now we do. We are aware of the law,” said Urmila Mahant of the Kekraghat adolescent girls group in Chhattisgarh. Women added that after these meetings they have even threatened with legal consequences, in order to stop violence.

The fallout of child and forced early marriages were discussed at meetings. And it showed positive results. Gurbari Sidar of Chhattisgarh’s Saraipalli village stopped her marriage. She was about 16 and was being forced to marry, as her father wasn’t keeping too well. She was opposed to the idea. Gurbari stuck to her guns — she had seen her friend go through a bad marriage and a failed pregnancy, and the adverse impact on her health. She didn’t want the same fate for herself. She approached Kamini, who explained to her parents the consequences of early marriage on their daughter’s health. Gurbari’s parents finally called off her marriage; she went back to school. Gurbari could avoid an impending marriage because she was part of meetings and had access to information and help. She was a part of the adolescent girls group in Saraipalli.

The boys, too, believe that they should wait till they attain the legal age; finishing their studies and getting a job to support the family should be priority. Girls are clear on why early marriage or child marriage is bad. “We will not be free to come for these meetings. This will mean no gender equality. We will be forced into a sexual relationship and that will have health implications,” says Mamta Patel of Komo village in Chhattisgarh. The girls’ groups in Chhattisgarh perform street plays in their villages on topics of gender equality, domestic violence and child marriage.

Boys and girls are now aware of what actions to take if a case of child marriage comes up in their village. “We will first try and convince the parents. If they do not take us seriously, we will take help from members of youth and women group. If it doesn’t work, we will call 1098 (Child Helpline) or 100 (police) or Nivedita Foundation or finally 112.” By dialing 112, one can call the police, ambulance, and fire fighters. This was a new emergency number launched in Chhattisgarh in August 2018.

The project helped build linkages with the police, child development protection officer (CDPO), service providers — legal aid, medical, financial or other assistance. In fact, Kewra Patel from Chhattisgarh’s Kekraghat village rescued one such victim of domestic violence from her house, informed Kamini, took her to the protection officer, who later sent the woman to a shelter home.

The awareness that came through meetings was sharpened while rating the scorecards. While the curriculum is broad-based and talks about gender, legislations, human rights and leadership, the scorecard focus on domestic violence and child marriage.

SCORING THE COMMUNITY

The scorecard, with nearly 45 questions / statements are divided into broad categories of 'General awareness', 'Incidence of domestic violence and the awareness regarding the Act', 'Reporting of domestic violence', 'Awareness regarding child marriage', 'Reporting incidence of child marriage', and 'Community action'. The scorecard, thus, helps communities to identify and map instances of domestic violence and child marriage, assesses awareness regarding the law, and challenge deep-set social norms — that men cannot do household chores, or women cannot be economically independent — which fuel gender inequality.

When the scorecard was first shared, it evoked mixed response. The women thought that this was an attempt to slip in an adult literacy programme. "We had almost decided to not come for future meetings," smiles Kewra Patel from Chhattisgarh's Kekraghat village. Those who were lettered were not very happy with the number of statements. The youth weren't sure what to make of the scorecard, till they started reading. "We read each line, each word carefully. It helped us introspect and that is when we realised how important this was. These were life lessons," said Yagnesh Kumar Dharma of the youth group in Chhattisgarh's Komo village. The young boys and girls thought it was a storybook. But once the purpose of the scorecard was explained to all of them, the groups took greater interest.

Scoring was a collective effort. Though everyone had their own scorecards, they sat together, deliberated over each and every question and rated accordingly. Their village could be rated from 0 to 5 — '0' being not applicable; '1' indicating 'strongly disagree'; '2' do not agree; '3' partly agree; '4' agree; and '5' strongly agree.

For instance, the very first statement 'Girls in our community have elementary level of education' elicited multiple responses. Some rated it 5, believing that if girls were going to school, all of them must be. Deliberations followed. "The groups in Kabaripalli village started accounting for each child in the village. And realised that nearly 5 girls from one family had stopped going to school. They finally gave a '3' rating to themselves," said Kamini. But the group didn't just stop at scoring.

The women and youth group in this Chhattisgarh village followed up the scoring activity with a visit to the parents, in order to remedy the situation. The parents gave them a few reasons — a) 'school was far', b) 'more hands were needed in the fields', and finally, c) 'what is the point of sending girls to school'. The youngest child was a boy who was not pulled out of school. The groups persuaded the parents to send three of their girls back to school; two others were beyond school-going age.

Similarly, the statement 'women are involved in any economic activity or an enterprise' got Kamla Bai Bairagi thinking. She and the SHG she belonged to rented about an acre of land and started growing vegetables in the beginning of 2018. At the time of writing this document, they had sold their first produce— potatoes and leafy green vegetables— and earned about Rs. 800. Though thrilled with their first income, they were moving on to solving a larger problem regarding water availability. Kamla's SHG (20 women) has applied for a solar-powered tubewell. Kamla credits the scorecard and the community meetings for her transformation from a shy woman to an entrepreneur who is now raring to try other income generating avenues.

The scorecard helped groups to introspect. A deeper understanding of what constitutes domestic violence, and gender equality, led to affirmative action by the groups. Yagnesh narrates how one of his neighbours was abusive, and sometimes violent, with his wife. "Earlier we would let them be. We believed it was their problem. But this thinking changed after we rated the village on a scorecard. We realised that we should take some steps. So we went to him and asked him to come with us for some of our meetings. There was a complete makeover. He not only started paying more attention to his wife and taking her out, he started helping out in the house especially in the kitchen."

These actions are a proof of the success of the scorecards. Whether it was Kamla's decision to start farming or Gurbari's to not marry, these were triggered by the discussions that took place while rating the community on the scorecard. The scorecard, to many was an exercise in introspection and an understanding of building a more equal society.

For instance, the scorecard got girls thinking on how they were treated differently from boys in their homes — whether it was choice of schools or eating food after the men had eaten. They spoke to their parents about the same. According to a few, things were better at home. Speaking with two groups of girls, one in Chhattisgarh and the other in Odisha, marriage for most seemed to be the last thing on their mind; they wanted to be politicians, teachers, doctors, and police officers.

The boys group in Kalahandi's Dongabahal village, in Odisha, spoke of gender biases and inherent disadvantage the girls had. "We have more freedom. We can do anything and go anywhere. The girls don't," said Pradyuman Naik, a 12th standard student. He added, "We understand if men and boys respect women and girls, they too will be able to complete their studies and work wherever they want to."



Members of different women groups after a meeting in Dhurukut, in Janjgir Champa district in Chhattisgarh.



Members of the adolescent boys group of Dongabahal village in Odisha's Kandhamal district.

The scorecard helped groups to analyse roles assigned to each gender, which form the basis of discriminatory social norms, and defy them. For instance, to some boys and men, cooking or helping out mothers and sisters at home seemed inconceivable earlier; unless they were left to fend for themselves. During our interaction with an adolescent boys group in Kalahandi, some of the older boys said that while mothers and sisters always cook, they do help every once in a while. In fact, at a village lunch organised for the women's group, the boys waited upon the invitees.

Since the scorecard came in the middle of the curriculum, the question / statement that surprised the women the most was the one on District Legal Services Authority (DLSA). This was under the segment 'Reporting of Domestic Violence'. "We hadn't yet come to the point of discussing legal aspects in the meetings. So this was the first time we heard of it. This made us realise that a legal recourse was available and it was free," said Geeta Banjare of Kenapalli village in Chhattisgarh.

Though the question / statement led to an in-depth understanding of the legal aspects, the scoring for these were obviously very low. But the point of the scorecard, which will be an annual exercise, is to assess the understanding and the knowledge of the groups' year on year progress. This first round of rating has helped the community touch base with issues they didn't give too much weightage to in the past. It is expected that as the meetings proceed and strong collectives evolve, ratings and understanding will improve.

THE BIG WIN

A MEETING WITH CASTE LEADERS OF THE GOND TRIBES IN ODISHA'S KALAHANDI DISTRICT YIELDED EXCELLENT RESULTS. AMONG THE GONDS, MARRIAGE OF GIRLS AT 14-15 YEARS IS COMMONPLACE. MENU PATRA OF BHORBHATA VILLAGE AND THE SECRETARY OF THE GOND SAMAJ, EXPLAINS HOW MEETINGS WITH OXFAM INDIA AND ITS ODISHA PARTNER NAWO HELPED HIM UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS AROUND CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE PREVAILING GENDER BIASES. HE THEN PROPOSED A RESOLUTION IN HIS VILLAGE AND THE LARGER GOND COMMUNITY, CALLING TO END TO CHILD MARRIAGES.

"OUR DAUGHTERS AND SONS WILL NOT BE MARRIED UNTIL THEY REACH THE LEGAL AGE. A FINE WILL BE IMPOSED ON ANYONE WHO VIOLATES THE RESOLUTION." GONDS ARE AMONG THE LARGEST TRIBAL GROUPS AND ARE PRESENT IN LARGE NUMBERS IN ODISHA. THE RESOLUTION IS NOT RESTRICTED TO JUST MENU'S VILLAGE. "WE HAVE ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING OF THE GOND TRIBES. THIS RESOLUTION WAS PASSED IN THE ANNUAL MEETING AFTER A LOT OF DELIBERATION. THIS COVERS NEARLY 100 VILLAGES IN FIVE PANCHAYATS."

FOLLOWING THEIR FOOTSTEP IS THE KONDH TRIBES AND THE GOUD COMMUNITY, WHO TOO, WANT TO PASS A SIMILAR RESOLUTION REGARDING CHILD AND FORCED EARLY MARRIAGE. THIS IS A GREAT SUCCESS CONSIDERING THE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES ARE VERY PARTICULAR ABOUT THE RULES THEY FOLLOW.

NOTES

¹ The definition of violence against women and girls in this paper is the same as the UN definition "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." | (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/v-overview.htm>) ; As viewed on September 15, 2017

² Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh

³ <http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-4Reports/India.pdf> (Fig. 4.6 Teenage Childbearing by

State/UT; pg.84) (as viewed on Nov 27, 2018)

⁴ A curriculum is akin to a training manual. This 4-year curriculum was developed on positive norm modelling which essentially captured 4 themes such as related concepts of gender, VAWG and Laws, human rights and leadership development. This curriculum was implemented on a monthly basis with adolescent boys, girls and youth collective members.

⁵ The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 came into force in 2006; it aims to provide for effective protection of the rights of women, guaranteed under the Constitution, who are victims of violence of any kind occurring

within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Act mandates Protection Officers (PO) and Service Providers (SP) who should facilitate access to support services such as medical facility, shelter homes, and legal aid.

⁶ The object of the Act is to prohibit solemnization of child marriage and connected and incidental matters. To ensure that child marriage is eradicated from within the society, the Government of India enacted Prohibition of Child marriage Act 2006 by replacing the earlier legislation of Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929.

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