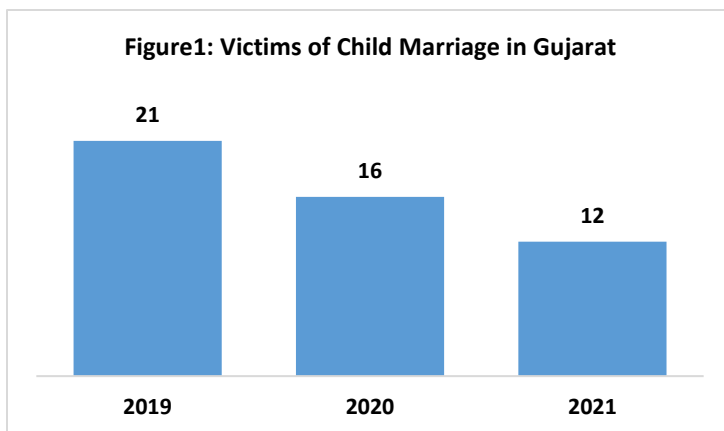


Child Marriage and Other Crimes against Children in Gujarat

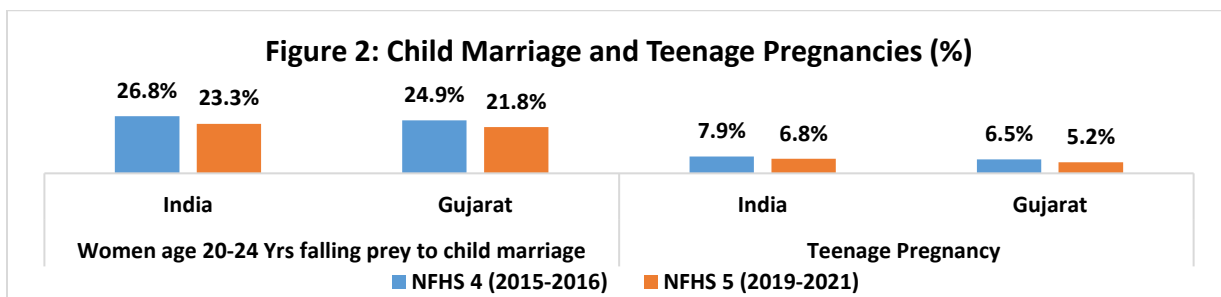
Child marriage (i.e., marriage of girls below the age of 18 and boys below the age of 21) in India is one of the most serious crimes committed against children. It is prevalent in most of the States/UTs despite a law (Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006) to root it out. Child marriage ends childhood and puts children at high risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. It also adversely impacts their rights to education, health and protection.

A total of 1,49,404 crimes against children were recorded in India in 2021, indicating an average of 409 such cases reported each day during the year. This included a total of 1,050 cases registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, victimising 1,062 children. Of all the registered crimes against children across the country in 2021, a little more than 3 percent were from Gujarat (4,515). The state stands at the 16th position, in terms of percentage share of the total crimes committed against children during 2021 in the country.



A comparison with last year's reported crimes in Gujarat shows an almost 11 percent increase in the total number of crimes against children (from 4,075 in 2020). However, the number of victims of child marriage decreased by 25 percent (from 16 in 2020 to 12 in 2021) as compared to the national average of 34 percent increase (from 792 victims in 2020).

Source: Crime in India (2019-2021), NCRB, Govt. of India



Source: NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-2021)

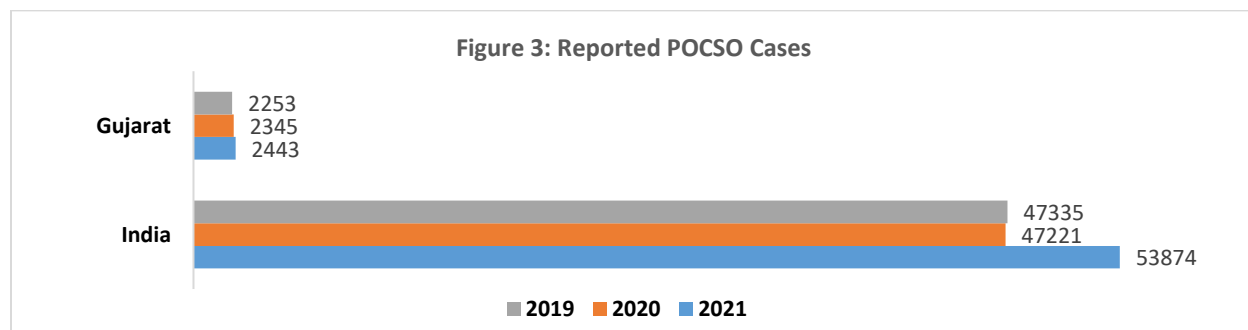
Child Marriage

- During the last 3 years, there has been a continuous fall in the number of victims of child marriage in Gujarat, from 21 in 2019 to 12 in 2021 (a 43% decrease) (Figure-1), in contrast to a two-fold increase at the national level (from 527 in 2019 to 1062 in 2021).

- While there is a 3.5 percentage point decrease in women aged 20-24 years falling prey to child marriage between 2015-16 and 2019-21 (from 26.8% to 23.3%) in India, there has been a similar fall by 3.1 percentage points in Gujarat (from 24.9% to 21.8%) during the same period.
- As per the Census 2011, in Gujarat a little more than 7.7 lakh children were married off before the attainment of the legal age of marriage, which constituted approximately 6 percent of all married children in the country. However, NCRB data suggests that only 49 cases of child marriage were registered in the state under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act during 2019-21.
- Court disposal of cases under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act:
 - The conviction rate in child marriage cases in India is extremely poor at a mere 10 percent, the lowest conviction rate of all types of crimes committed against children. In 2019, 2020 and 2021 the number of cases which ended with conviction was only 12 (out of 1,640), 6 (out of 2,092) and 10 (out of 2,865) respectively.
 - At the end of 2021, a mounting 96 percent child marriage cases in the country were pending trial (2761 cases pending out of 2865 cases).

Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy¹, which is primarily a consequence of child marriage, has come down from 7.9 percent in 2015-16 to 6.8 percent in 2019-21 at the all-India level. In Gujarat, the corresponding decrease was from 6.5 percent to 5.2 percent (Figure-2).



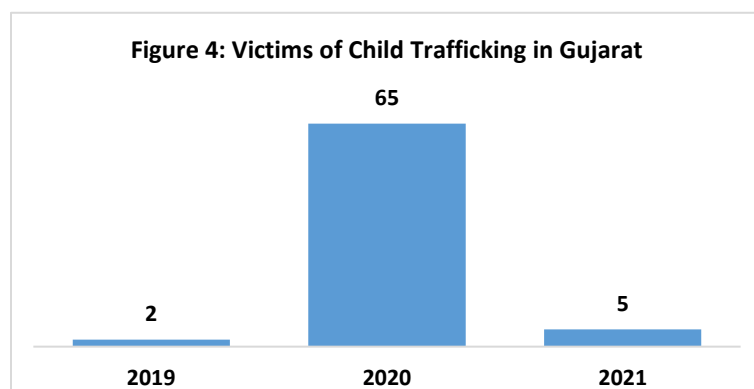
Source: Crime in India (2019-2021), NCRB, Govt. of India

Sexual Violence

- The total number of POCSO cases in the state increased by eight percent during 2019 to 2021 (from 2,253 in 2019 to 2,443 in 2021), as compared to a 14 percent increase (from 47,335 in 2019 to 53,874 in 2021) at the national level.

¹ Women aged 15-19 who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the NFHS-5 survey

- The percentage share of child rape cases to the total POCSO cases stands at 62 percent at the national level in 2021. In Gujarat, the same is alarmingly higher (84%) than the national average in 2021.
- Court disposal of POCSO cases:
 - The conviction in POCSO cases in terms of absolute numbers increased from 3,686 (out of 9,316 cases in which trial was completed) in 2020 to 5,156 (out of 15,989 cases in which trial was completed) in 2021.
 - In Gujarat, only 23 POCSO cases reached conviction out of 145 cases in which trial was completed in 2020².
 - At the end of January 2022, a total of 2,26,728 POCSO cases were pending trial in the country, of which 7,655 cases were from Gujarat³. It is the one of the few states in India, alongside Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh where the number of cases pending trial has decreased significantly over the last two years (from 10,731 at the end of 2020).



Child Trafficking

- In Gujarat, of the total victims of trafficking, 31 percent (5 out of 16) were children as compared to 44 percent (2,877 out of 6,533) at the national level in 2021.
- The total number of victims of child trafficking in Gujarat has been fluctuating widely, as seen by an

increase from 2 in 2019 (2 girls) to 65 (4 girls and 61 boys) in 2020 and again reduction to 5 (4 girls and 1 boy) in 2021. Girls constituted 80 percent of the total trafficked children in 2021, as compared to the national average of 45 percent.

Missing Children

- The total number of missing children in the state decreased by a meager 3 percent during 2019 to 2021 (from 1,439 in 2019 to 1,395 in 2021), as compared to a six percent increase at the all-India level (from 73,138 in 2019 to 77,535 in 2021).

² State-wise information on conviction in POCSO cases is not available for 2021. Relevant information for 2020 sourced from Lok Sabha Starred Question No. *294 dt.05 Aug 2022. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

³ Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3843 dt. 25th March 2022. Ministry Of Law And Justice, Government of India.