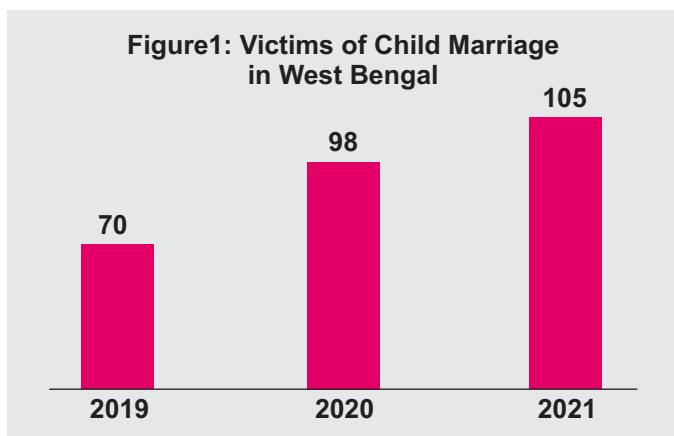


# CHILD MARRIAGE AND OTHER CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN IN WEST BENGAL

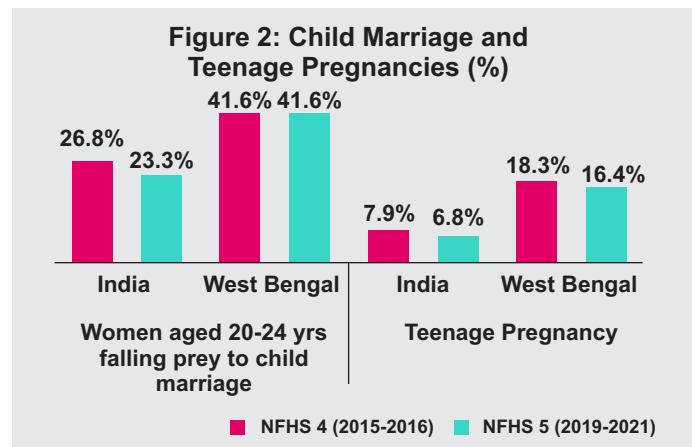
Child marriage (i.e., marriage of girls below the age of 18 and boys below the age of 21) in India is one of the most serious crimes committed against children. It is prevalent in most of the States/UTs despite a law (Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006) to root it out. Child marriage ends childhood 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, about 6 percent were from West Bengal (9,523). The state stands at the 4th position, in terms of percentage share of the total crimes committed against children during 2021 in the country.



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

A comparison with last year's reported crimes in West Bengal shows a 7 percent decrease in the total number of crimes against children (from 10,248 in 2020). On the other hand, the number of victims of child marriage increased by 7 percent (from 98 in 2020 to 105 in 2021) as compared to the national average of 34 percent increase (from 792 victims in 2020).



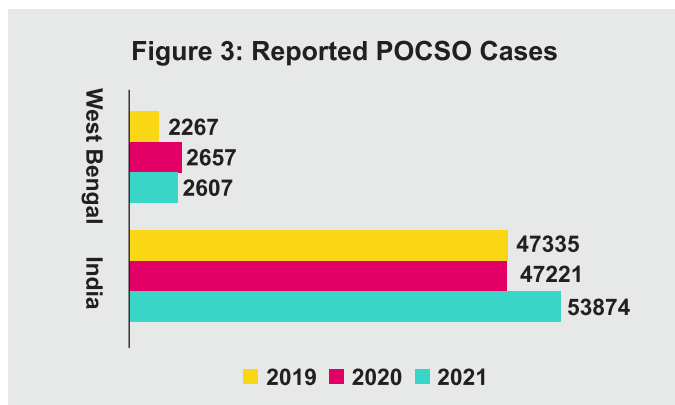
Source: NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-2021)

## Child Marriage

- During the last 3 years, there has been a continuous increase in victims of child marriage in West Bengal, from 70 in 2019 to 105 in 2021 (Figure-1).
- As against 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, in West Bengal the corresponding values remained constant at 41.6 percent during the same period.
- As per the Census 2011, in West Bengal, 9.2 lakh children were married off before the attainment of the legal age of marriage, which constituted approximately 8 percent of all married children in the country. However, NCRB data suggests that cases of only 273 children 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 (2,761 cases pending out of 2,865 cases).

## Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy<sup>1</sup>, 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. The corresponding decrease in West Bengal has been from 18.3 percent to 16.4 percent (Figure-2).



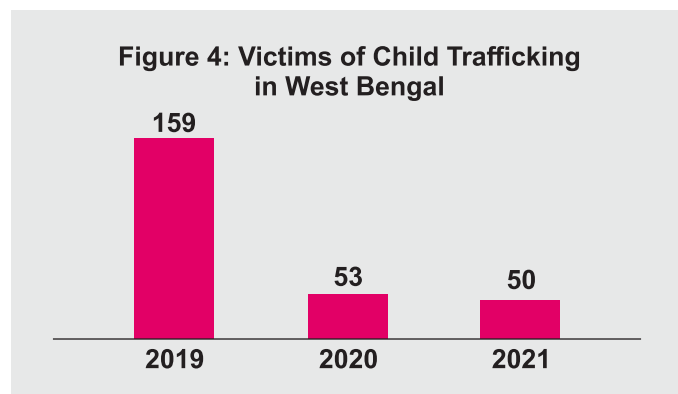
Source: Crime in India (2019-2021), NCRB, Govt. of India

## Sexual Violence

- The total number of POCSO cases in the state increased by more than 15 percent during 2019 to 2021 (from 2267 in 2019 to 2607 in 2021), as compared to a 14 percent increase (from 47,335 in 2019 to 53,874 in 2021) at the national level.
- The percentage share of child rape cases to the total POCSO cases stands at 62 percent at the national level in 2021. In West Bengal, the same is marginally lower (61%) 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 West Bengal, 29 POCSO cases reached conviction out of 204 cases in which trial was completed in 2020<sup>2</sup>.
- At the end of January 2022, a total of 2,26,728 POCSO cases were pending trial in the country, of which 19,649 cases were from West Bengal<sup>3</sup>.

## Child Trafficking



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

- In West Bengal, of the total victims of trafficking, 60 percent (50 out of 84) 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 West Bengal decreased from 159 in 2019 (148 girls and 11 boys) to 50 (44 girls and 6 boys) in 2021 (decreased by 69%). Girls constituted 88 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 increased by 22 percent during 2019 to 2021 (from 8,205 in 2019 to 9,996 in 2021), as compared to a six percent increase at the all-India level (from 73,138 in 2019 to 77,535 in 2021).

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

<sup>2</sup> 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

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