# INDIA
# CASE STUDY

Review of Technology-Based Interventions to Address Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation

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# INDIA

## INDIA OVERVIEW

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Child marriage prevalence**[1] (girls married before the age of 18 years, as a proportion of all girls) | 23% |
| | **FGM prevalence**[2] | – |
| | **Internet users**[3] (proportions of the adult male and female populations) | 43% of men 32% of women |
| | **Mobile phone ownership**[4] (proportions of the adult male and female populations) | 84% of men 72% of women |
| | **Level of government support for digital literacy**[5] (scale 0–3)[6] | Medium: 2 |

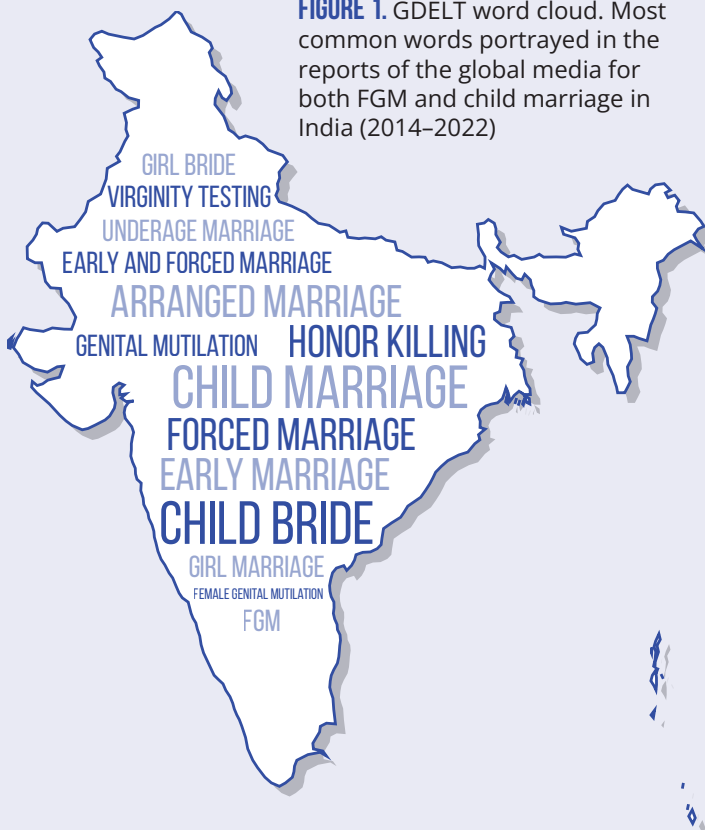## NEWS ABOUT HARMFUL PRACTICES: WORD CLOUD MAPS AND NUMBERS OF REPORTS

**FIGURE 1.** GDELT word cloud. Most common words portrayed in the reports of the global media for both FGM and child marriage in India (2014–2022)



GIRL BRIDE
VIRGINITY TESTING
UNDERAGE MARRIAGE
EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE
ARRANGED MARRIAGE
GENITAL MUTILATION HONOR KILLING
CHILD MARRIAGE
FORCED MARRIAGE
EARLY MARRIAGE
CHILD BRIDE
GIRL MARRIAGE
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
FGM

**Note:** This word cloud map was produced with data from the Event Database of the GDELT project, which monitors the world's broadcast, print and web news in over 100 languages; identifying the people, locations, institutions, topics, publications, sentiments, numbers, quotations, pictures and occurrences linked to events worldwide. After filtering the database for a comprehensive pool of keywords related to FGM and child marriage and technology in India, the most common words portrayed in the reports related to these issues are mapped in a country word cloud. The bigger the font size, the more frequently the word appears.

**FIGURE 2.** Number of reports covering the topic of child marriage in India compared with other countries (2014–2022)
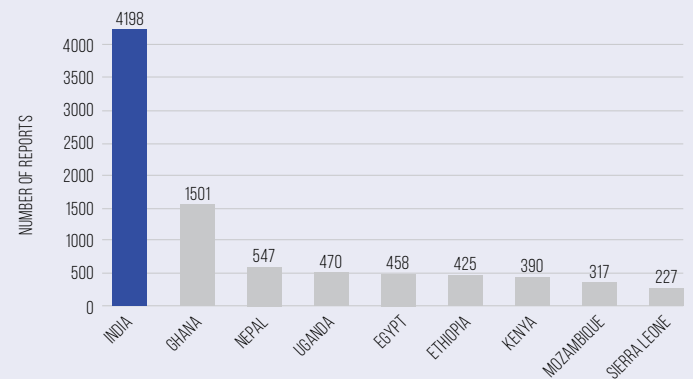


**FIGURE 3.** Number of reports covering the topic of FGM in India compared with other countries (2014–2022)
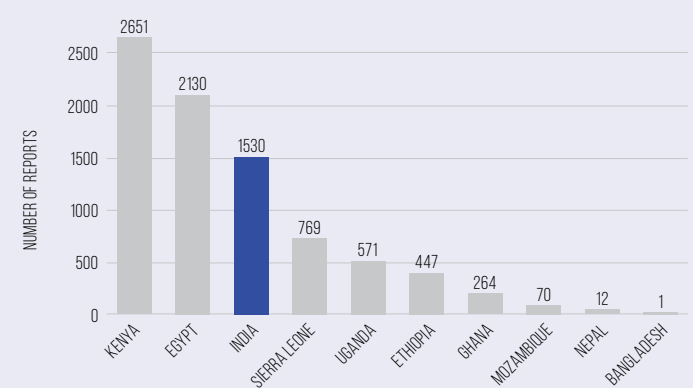


**Note:** After filtering the GDELT project database for the actors, actions, and associated reports pertaining to child marriage and/or FGM in India, it can be observed that there are a total of 4,198 reports corresponding to child marriage (see Figure 2) and 1,530 reports corresponding to FGM (see Figure 3) in the country.

## THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM IN THE COUNTRY

Although FGM is not that prevalent in India, it is still accepted and practised by certain ethnic groups in the country. According to testimonies collected by independent journalists in Mumbai, members of the Dawoodi Bohra community – a minority Shia Muslim group that accounts for around 2 million of India's population – still support the continuation of the practice, claiming FGM has the same value and importance as male circumcision.[7] Currently, there is no legal framework or legislation prohibiting and criminalizing FGM in India, and in 2017 the government declared that no data was available to confirm the existence of the practice in the country.[8] However, according to Sahiyo, an NGO working to end FGM, an estimated 80 per cent of girls from the Dawoodi Bohra community and Bohra subsects have undergone the procedure.[9]

Child marriage is widely practised among different communities in the country. While the prevalence of girls getting married before age 18 has declined from 47 per cent to 23 per cent between 2005/06 and 2019/21, it is still higher than the global average of 19 per cent.[10] Furthermore, estimates suggest that each year, at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, which makes it home to the largest number of child brides in the world – accounting for a third of the global total.[11] It is worth noting that although traditional gender norms play a significant role in the existence and continuation of child marriage, particularly in the Indian context, structural socioeconomic inequalities have a relevant weight in the maintenance of this harmful tradition. According to recent data, women who are better off financially marry much later when compared with women who are economically vulnerable (the average marrying age of women in the highest wealth quintile is 21.1 years, compared with 17.5–19.3 years for women in other wealth quintiles).[12]

## THE TECHNOLOGY ENVIRONMENT IN INDIA

India has seen a steady demand for the creation and use of technologies and digital solutions, particularly to fight problems of an environmental nature in the country, given the high levels of pollution present in its major urban areas. Consequently, the country is among the most advanced emergent economies in terms of producing and exporting information technology products and services, which has become one of the most significant growth catalysts for the Indian economy, contributing to the country's GDP and public welfare.[13] In turn, access to electricity has grown exponentially over the past 20 years, and by 2020 nearly 99 per cent of the country's population had access.[14] Additionally, considering the high demand (mainly led by young people) for social media and applications that allow them to be increasingly connected in real time, India has significantly improved internet availability, penetration and usage for its population, particularly by narrowing the gender gap in access. Approximately 36.4 per cent of households have access to the internet, with a gender gap in access to the internet at a rate of 25.6 per cent difference. In terms of infrastructure, the percentage of the population covered by at least a 3G or 4G mobile network is nearly 100 per cent (specifically, 98.5 per cent for 3G and 98.4 per cent for 4G), meaning that almost the entire population of the country is located within a range of at least a 3G and 4G mobile-cellular signal. Furthermore, the government has increased its efforts to guarantee the right to internet access to the entire population by providing public Wi-Fi access in the largest city of the country with free connectivity.[15] Finally, the latest data reveals that 83.6 per cent of Indian inhabitants have a mobile-cellular telephone subscription (i.e., subscriptions to a mobile telephone service), with 84 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants,[16] while the mobile access gap between the genders decreased to a rate of 14.3 per cent. However, India continues to perform below the global average for internet and mobile connectivity.

Internet access and usage, as well as mobile phone access and ownership, are essential parts of the new digitalized era in expansion since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To prepare for and integrate this new wave of digital transformation, building digital skills is essential, as is creating digital infrastructure, starting with a progressive focus on digital literacy. In 2015, the Indian government launched the

'Digital India' flagship programme, with the goal of transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy by investing in the development of three core areas: digital infrastructure; governance and services demand; and digital literacy for citizen's empowerment.[17] The programme has shown promising results, considering that the country has experienced a year-on-year average growth rate of 0.71 per cent in digital skills among the population during 2017 to 2019, and is ranked above the global average with 4.43 per cent.[18] Yet, challenges related to delayed infrastructure development, bandwidth availability, personal computer penetration and the capacity to scale up remain.[19] The latest available data reveals that less than half (43 per cent) of India's population was using the internet as of 2020[20] (measured by the number of individuals who have used the internet (from any location) in the last three months). Furthermore, India's score in the Gender Digital Divide Index (GDDI) is alarming (62.16 per cent), with the lack of female leadership among digital policymakers being a negative factor keeping the digital literacy gender gap high.[21] While 49 per cent of adult men own a smartphone device that allows access to mobile internet and other applications, the same is true for only 26 per cent of adult women in the country (35 per cent of women own basic or feature phones with limited or no access to internet and applications).[22] It is important to mention that India's greatest gender gap in the GDDI is in ensuring women's equal access to and use of digital payments, which constitute a "keystone to achieving women's full inclusion in the digital economy and society".[23]

## MAPPING OF TECH INTERVENTIONS

The interventions mapped in this section stem from an initial landscape exercise conducted jointly by UNFPA and UNICEF, followed by a systematic review of publicly available data and information on technology-driven and technology-enabled interventions addressing child marriage and/or FGM in India. The compiled information was curated and complemented with insights emerging from key informant interviews conducted with local stakeholders.

**CODING TYPE OF INTERVENTION**
[◉] Technology-driven intervention/solution (tech is a core element)
[◕] Technology-enabled intervention/solution (tech is secondary to the intervention, there are other non-tech components)

### ♀ FEMINIST LENSES

The seventh column of the interventions table below identifies how organizations have included feminist lenses into the design and implementation of the interventions by highlighting four key aspects:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Consultation with experts and/or community leaders | Consultations with gender or thematic experts and/or local leaders were conducted during the development, implementation, and/or monitoring and evaluation of the interventions. |
| **2** | Consultations with target group(s) | The interventions incorporated, at any stage, consultations with the populations targeted, especially girls and women of different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, classes, and other social markers. |
| **3** | Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) instruments | Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out to measure the intervention's progress and sustainability, and/or to generate disaggregated information, gender-sensitive/responsive indicators, and/or gender analysis frameworks. |
| **4** | Womenand/or girl-led organization(s) | The intervention was designed and/or implemented, partly or completely, by a womenand/or girl-led organization(s). |

Additional descriptive information about the feminist lenses and potential intersectional approach (i.e., addressing ethnicity, language, class or other aspects of the target group's identity) is provided within the table, following the general description of each intervention, which can be identified by the use of this symbol [♀]. This analysis is based on information collected during semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and/or publicly available information.

## NAUBAT BAJA / 2019 – ONGOING / ◉

| SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S) | IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S) | HARMFUL PRACTICE(S) | LOCATION(S) | IMPACT AREA | TYPES OF TECH- NOLOGIES USED | FEMINIST LENSES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Directorate of Women Em- powerment, Government of Rajasthan<br>• The Rural Electrification Corporation Foundation<br>• UNFPA | Jeevan Ashram Sansthan (JAS) | Child marriage | Rajasthan | **1.** Individual- level empowerment<br>**2.** Family and community engagement | • Radio<br>• Mobile technology | **1.** Consultation with experts and/or community leaders<br>**2.** Consultations with target group(s)<br>**3.** Women-led organization |

Naubat Baja Missed Call Radio is a cloud telephone-based radio channel in the western Indian state of Rajasthan that addresses issues related to adolescents' well-being, empowerment and health ('Naubat Baja' means an ensemble of musical instruments that were played together in earlier times to catch the attention of people). The initiative became popular among youth in Rajhastan through multidistrict outreach activities at the community level. Content related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as other well-being related questions, could be accessed through a telephone-based radio channel by calling a specific number. The user would be automatically disconnected, and then receive a call back from the operators with a 15-minute packaged capsule of free infotainment. The package provides information on government schemes particularly related to adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights (such as adolescent girls' reproductive health and menstrual hygiene), as well as child marriage, domestic violence, gender sensitization, financial awareness, COVID-19 protocols and precautions.[24] The capsule also includes popular songs, light-hearted humour, Radio Natak and Panchatantra stories.

The initiative has taken advantage of the fact that mobile phones are the main tool and accessory of the youth generation, and their favourite mode of communication, particularly in areas where people have little access to television, cable or the internet. As explained by a representative of the intervention, "most families even in rural areas own a mobile phone, even if it is not a smartphone. The missed-call strategy could therefore reach a large chunk of the rural as well as urban population [in India]."

Some of the key success factors of Naubata Baja range from the combination between information and entertainment, the simplicity with which the programme is operated, as well as linking the youth with the various schemes provided by government departments, thus supporting the uptake of such schemes and programmes.

♀ This intervention integrates an intersectional feminist approach by having carried out consultations with both target groups (youth and adolescents) and experts on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as child marriage – particularly during the project's design and piloting phases – and by offering a service to the population from all age groups (although more highly concentrated among the youth), irrespective of gender, ethnicity, caste and class. Further, a technical agency is hired to specifically to monitor the progress of the intervention and its impact on the different groups of women making use of the service.

## LOVE MATTERS INDIA / 2011 – ONGOING / ◉

| SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S) | IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S) | HARMFUL PRACTICE(S) | LOCATION(S) | IMPACT AREA | TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED | FEMINIST LENSES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • RNW Media<br>• Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation<br>• The David and Lucile Packard Foundation India<br>• Amplify-Change<br>• Ideas42 | Development consortium | Child marriage & FGM | Delhi, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Punjab, Bihar and Karnataka. | 1. Service development and strengthening<br>2. Individual level empowerment<br>3. Family and community engagement | • Social media (including Facebook, WhatsApp YouTube, Instagram and Twitter)<br>• Radio programmes<br>• Television<br>• Websites<br>• Helpline<br>• Podcasts<br>• Videos, including animation and virtual reality, as well as augmented reality | 1. Consultations with sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) experts<br>2. Consultations with survivors or target group (youth and adolescents)<br>3. Women-led organizations |

Love Matters is a programme providing sexual and reproductive health and rights information in line with young people's needs. It provides open, honest, non-judgemental and science-based information on romantic relationships and sexual education using innovative media formats. By harnessing the power of technology in combination with storytelling approaches, Love Matters seeks to deconstruct taboos and judgemental walls that separate curious young people interested in gaining knowledge on sexual education, but who are too afraid to ask basic questions often considered immoral or deviant in the eyes of extremely religious and traditional communities. The website (https://lovematters.in/en) offers information in English and Hindi and constitutes main resource hub, with comprehensive information on love, sex and relationships, the programme also runs a 24/7 online helpline to provide unbiased, reliable information on romantic relationships and sex called 'Let's Talk', where users can post questions, doubts or queries in Hindi and English, without disclosing their identities, with sex education experts answering such questions (and providing solutions if necessary) within a period of 24 to 48 hours. They are also active on several social media platforms to spread awareness and "have fun conversations", including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter.

The programme initially started in India in 2011, and has been scaled out to five other regions in the world, including online platforms in Arabic, for countries located in Africa (such as Love Matters Nigeria), *Hablemos de Sexo y Amor* (Spanish) and *Amour Afrique* (French).

The initiative aims to empower young people who seek to make informed decisions about their sexual lives, as well as their sexual and reproductive rights. The initiative has also contributed to breaking down social barriers and challenging traditional views about women's rights and roles, as well as sex and romantic relationships.

♀ This intervention integrates an intersectional feminist approach by carrying out consultations with their main audience and target group (youth), as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights and sex education experts. The project's ideation, design and piloting phases sought to understand young people's needs and concerns, as well as looking at how to bridge existing communication gaps. The idea of creating an informative confidential platform was generated by connecting different ideas with college students and high school children.

# ENDNOTES

1   India National Family and Health Survey (2021-2022), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *India country profile*

2   Statistical data not available

3   Economist Impact (2022)

4   Ibid.

5   Ibid.

6   The score on government support for digital literacy, on a scale from 0–3 (low to high), reflects a government plan or strategy to address digital literacy for students and/or teachers – through the design and development of courses in ICT skills, computer science, programming or other classes for students; and through ICT capacity-building courses for teachers. A zero score indicates that the government does not have such a plan/strategy, neither for students and nor for teachers; a score of 1 reflects a plan for student digital literacy but without including teacher capacity-building; a medium score of 2 indicates a current plan for both; and the highest score of 3 reflects a plan addressing both students and teachers, and with the courses and capacity-building starting at the primary school level.

7   Kumar (2021)

8   The Indian Express (2020)

9   Taher (2017)

10   IIPS and ICF (2022)

11   UNICEF (n.d.a)

12   International Institute for Population Sciences and ICF (2022)

13   India Brand Equity Foundation (2022)

14   World Bank (2020h)

15   Economist Impact (2022)

16   World Bank (2020u)

17   India Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (n.d.)

18   World Economic Forum (2019)

19   Sengupta and Krishnakumar (2018)

20   World Bank (2020v)

21   Women in Digital Transformation and DAKA Advisory (2022)

22   GSMA (2022a)

23   Women in Digital Transformation and DAKA Advisory (2022)

24   United Nations (2022)

# REVIEW OF

# TECHNOLOGY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

## TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

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