



Meeting/Interaction of IAPPD Standing Committee Members

“Early Marriages & Mental Well-being: Implications for Adolescents and Parents (A Policy Concern)”

17th March, 2026 | Constitution Club of India, New Delhi

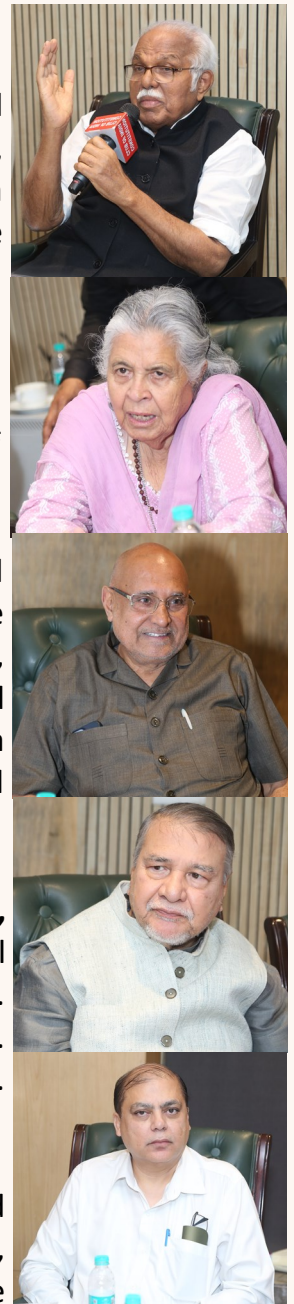
Brief Report

Early marriage continues to pose a serious challenge to India’s social and developmental landscape, with far-reaching implications for adolescents, families, and society. Despite notable progress in reducing its prevalence, a significant number of young people—particularly girls—still enter marriage before attaining physical, emotional, and economic maturity. This disrupts education, limits future opportunities, and exposes them to adverse health and psychological outcomes.

The nature of early marriages is also evolving, with a growing incidence of self-initiated unions and elopements among adolescents. These cases often intersect with legal frameworks, social norms, and family dynamics, resulting in unintended consequences such as stigma, criminalization, and mental health challenges. In this context, the theme assumes particular importance for Members of Parliament, who are well-positioned to shape policy, strengthen implementation of laws, and promote a balanced, rights-based approach to safeguard adolescent well-being. The meeting provided a platform to examine emerging trends and identify actionable policy and programmatic responses.

The meeting was convened under the chairmanship of **Prof. P.J. Kurien, Chairman, IAPPD**, and attended by Hon’ble Parliamentarians - Md. Nadimul Haque; Dr. John Brittas; Mr. Bhubaneswar Kalita; Mr. Abdul Wahab; Mr. V. Sivadasan; Mr. B.R. Wakchaure; Mr. Suresh Chandel; Mrs. Viplove Thakur; Mr. Avinash Rai Khanna; Ms. Ameer Yajnik; Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu; Mr. Pradeep Gandhi; and Mr. Lakshman Singh.

Dr. Shankar Chowdhury, former Senior Program Manager, UNESCO, delivered a thematic presentation highlighting that early marriage remains widespread, with increasing instances of adolescent-led marriages often occurring in the absence of adequate education, life skills, and social support. These situations frequently lead to school drop-outs, limited livelihood opportunities, legal complexities, and significant mental health concerns, including anxiety, trauma, and social stigma. The presentation emphasized the need for a comprehensive response integrating legal reforms, mental health



support, legal update, education, life-skills development, and community engagement.

Following the presentation, the discussion and question–answer session led to the emergence of the following key outcomes and recommendations:

Key Outcomes/Insights

- Early marriage remains prevalent despite declining trends, driven by persistent socio-economic and cultural factors.
- Increasing cases of self-initiated adolescent marriages reflect gaps in guidance, life-skills education, and family communication.
- Early marriage has serious mental health implications, including trauma, stress, and long-term psychological impact on adolescents and families.
- Strong linkages exist between early marriage, school drop-outs, and lack of employability skills.
- Legal challenges persist, particularly regarding the criminalization of consensual adolescent relationships under existing laws.
- Families face economic strain, social stigma, and limited access to support services.
- Significant gaps remain in counselling, adolescent-friendly healthcare, and legal aid services.

Key Recommendations

Policy and Legal Measures

- Review legal provisions to address consensual adolescent relationships with appropriate safeguards.
- Strengthen implementation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act with a greater focus on prevention.
- States are often not adequately informed about updated laws related to early marriage and mental well-being; therefore, there is a need to ensure that this information is effectively disseminated at the grassroots level.

Mental Health and Support

- Establish accessible counselling and psychosocial support systems for adolescents and families.
- Integrate mental health into adolescent health programmes.

Education and Empowerment

- Introduce age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
- Promote retention in secondary education, especially for girls.
- Expand life-skills and livelihood training opportunities.



Community Engagement

- Engage community and religious leaders to address social norms.
- Strengthen parental awareness and communication on adolescent issues.

Governance and Monitoring

- Promote “Child Marriage Free Constituencies” and establish local task forces.
- Strengthen data-driven monitoring of key indicators such as school drop-outs and adolescent pregnancies.
- Utilize public resources to create safe and supportive environments for adolescents.

Targeted Interventions

- Increase vigilance during high-risk periods such as festivals and school holidays.
- Identify and support vulnerable adolescents, particularly school drop-outs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all participating Members of Parliament collectively emphasized—and strongly reaffirmed—their commitment to addressing issues of early marriage at the constituency level, recognizing it as a complex, multi-dimensional challenge with far-reaching implications for mental health, education, legal frameworks, gender equality, and socio-economic development. They underscored that effectively tackling this issue calls for a decisive shift from purely punitive responses to a more preventive, supportive, and adolescent-centric approach, strengthened by cohesive policy action and sustained community engagement.

