

**PROGRESS TOWARDS  
ACHIEVING TIPPING POINT TO  
END CHILD MARRIAGE**

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**Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change for children (C-LAB), an initiative of India Child Protection (ICP)**

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# PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING TIPPING POINT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

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The tipping point to end child marriage is a concept coined and defined by the child rights activist and advocate Bhuwan Ribhu in his book *“When Children Have Children: Tipping Point to End Child Marriage”*. The 'tipping point' is defined as the threshold required in an ecosystem to tilt the scale of the problem towards a point of no return. In the context of child marriage, it is the critical point after which the prevalence is expected to decline without any specific interventions. The book estimated the national level tipping point to end child marriage in India at 5.5 percent. Ribhu argued that addressing the issue of child marriage in high-prevalence districts through targeted interventions is expected to yield this threshold, or 'tipping point' by 2030. To estimate the tipping point, the author has used the National Family Health Survey, round-5 (NFHS-5) data, which was conducted in 2019-2021. Post NFHS-5, no national level survey has been conducted in India which provides estimates on child marriage prevalence.

Recently, a research study entitled *“Tipping Point to Zero: Evidence Towards a Child Marriage Free India”* carried out in five states of India has been released. The study was conducted by the Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change for Children (C-LAB) an initiative of India Child Protection in collaboration with Outline India. This study throws light on the impact of targeted intervention at the village level in reducing the incidence of child marriages. Though the study provides estimates at the national and state levels, it exclusively concentrated on the Access to Justice programme implementation areas, omitting non-programme areas from the sample. This focus restricted the generalisation of the findings, as the sample may not accurately represent the study states.

This analytical piece focuses on triangulating the concept of tipping point with the observed change in child marriage incidence at the national and state levels and attempts to estimate the progress the country has made towards achieving the tipping point to end child marriage. The progress has been estimated with the assumption that the percentage reduction observed in the present study applies uniformly across the entire state and country.

The recent study conducted by C-LAB indicates a significant decline of 69 percent in the incidence of marriages of underage girls between 2022-23 and 2024-25 (3 years). Despite the inherent limitation of this study, if this decline is assumed to be true for the entire country, then the prevalence of child marriages estimated in NFHS-5 must have reduced from 23.3 percent (2021) to 7.2 percent by now (2025). Further, if it is assumed that the decline estimated for the last three years will remain constant for the coming three years, then the prevalence is likely to further decline to 2.2 percent by 2028, which is way below the tipping point of 5.5 percent targeted to be achieved by 2030, as estimated in the book *“When Children Have Children”*.

**Assam:** NFHS-5 data shows that in Assam 31.8 percent women aged 20-24 were married before age 18. The recent study by C-LAB showed a decline of 84 percent in the incidence of marriages of girls in the last three years within the state. If the level of reduction in the incidence of child marriages in Assam during the last three years is taken into consideration, then the prevalence level estimated in NFHS-5 must have reduced to the level of 5.1 percent by now (2025), which is already below the estimated tipping point of 6.5 percent, aimed to be achieved by 2030.

**Bihar:** Bihar reported the highest rate of child marriage among the five states, with a prevalence of 40.8 percent as per NFHS-5. Triangulation of NFHS-5 estimated level of child marriage with the present study findings suggest that the current prevalence rate would have reduced to 12.2 percent by now and is expected to reach 3.7 percent by 2028 given the same rate of reduction (70%). The tipping point for Bihar was estimated to be 6.7 percent which is targeted to be achieved by 2030.

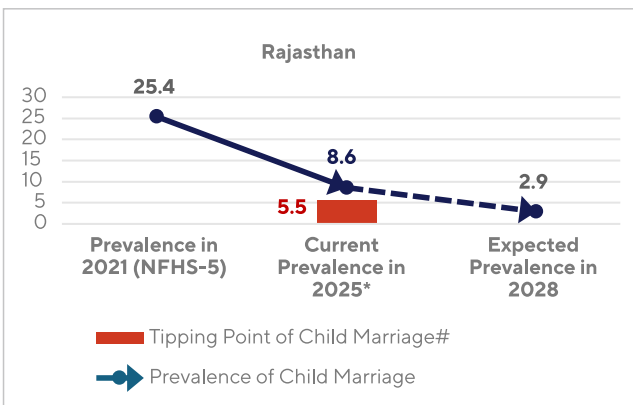
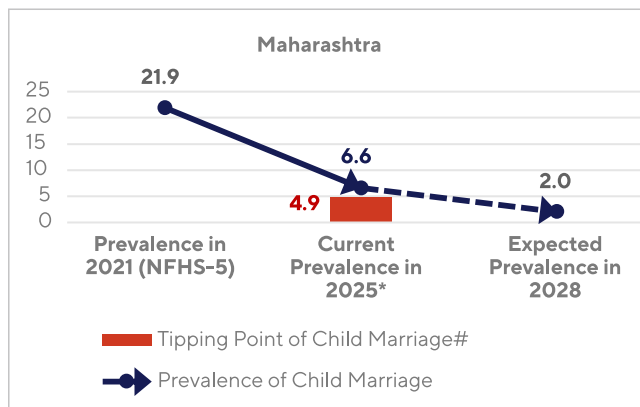
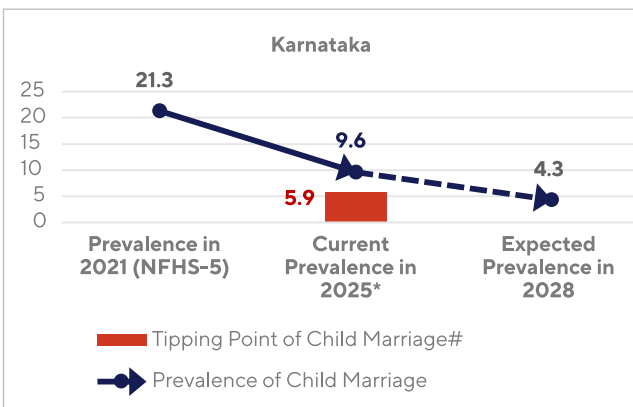
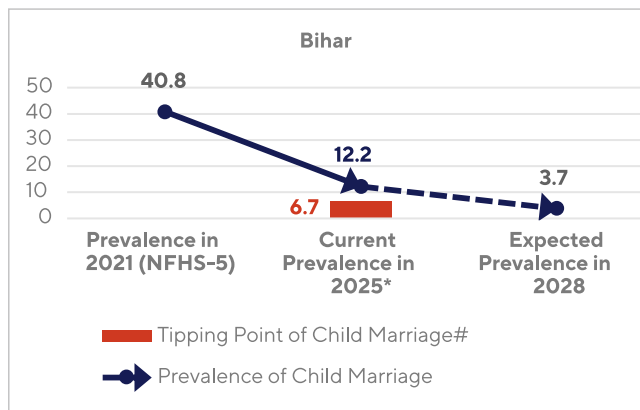
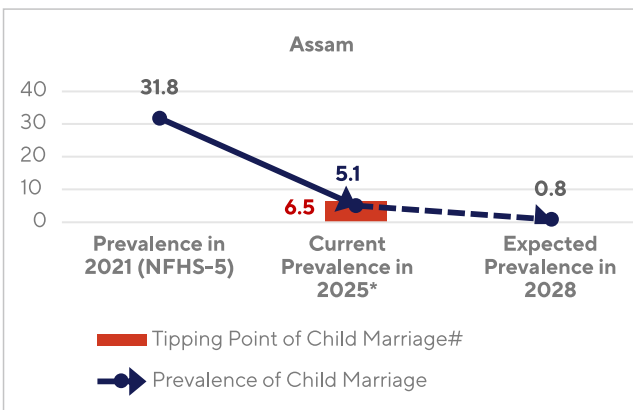
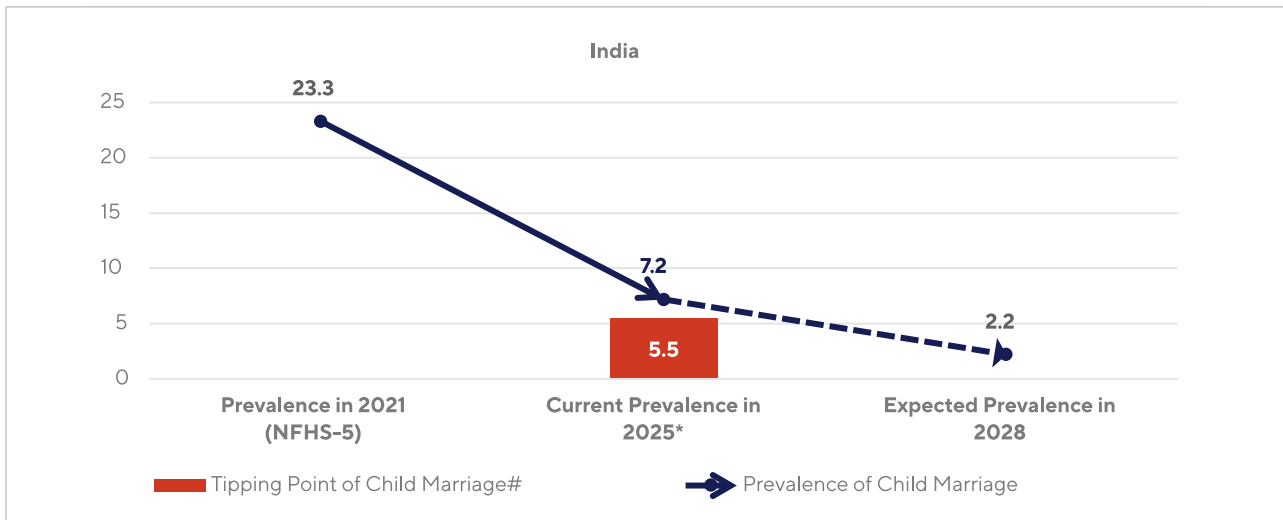
**Karnataka:** According to NFHS-5 (2019-21), Karnataka had a child marriage prevalence rate of 21.3 percent. The recent study by C-LAB showed a decline of 55 percent in the incidence of marriages of girls in the last three years within the state. If this reduction rate is representative of the entire state, it is estimated that the current prevalence has decreased by approximately 11.7 percentage points and reached 9.6 percent by now. Projected estimates suggest this level is further likely to reduce and reach 4.3 percent by 2028, which is 1.6 percent below the estimated tipping point for 2030.

**Maharashtra:** In Maharashtra, 21.9 percent of girls got married before age 18 in 2021 (NFHS-5), and this figure would have dropped to 6.6 percent (as per the findings of the current study) by now and is estimated to further decrease to 2 percent by 2028, assuming the same rate of reduction (70%), which is significantly less than the estimated tipping point (4.9%) for 2030.

**Rajasthan:** Rajasthan, with 25.4 percent child marriage prevalence, occupied the third position among all five states according to NFHS-5 (2019-21). Estimates suggest that by now (2025) the child marriage prevalence is likely to have declined by 16.8 percentage points and reached 8.6 percent. This prevalence is expected to reach 2.9 percent by 2028, assuming the constant reduction of 66 percent in the next three years. The tipping point for the state was estimated at 5.5 percent for 2030.

The analysis found that India has made significant progress towards elimination of child marriage. If the current rate of reduction as estimated in the recent study by the C-LAB continues, then India and its states are likely to achieve the estimated tipping point well before 2030. The targeted village level intervention model to end child marriage established by the Access to Justice programme needs to be adopted and implemented across the country to achieve the broader goal of complete eradication of child marriages.

# PERCENT REDUCTION IN CHILD MARRIAGE PREVALENCE IN INDIA/STATES (CURRENT & EXPECTED)



# Ribhu B. (2023) When Children have Children: Tipping Point to End Child Marriages

\* Note: The estimation of the reduced prevalence of child marriage for the years 2025 and 2028 is based on the assumption that the percentage reduction estimated in the present study applies uniformly across the entire state. The reduction level has been estimated for a period of 3 years (2022-23 to 2024-25).