

**Push and Pull Factors Influencing Early Marriages in Krishnagiri District, Tamil Nadu****Dr. Arockiaraj K**

P.G. & Research Department of Social Work,  
Sacred Heart College (Autonomous), Tirupattur Dt. Tamil Nadu

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**Abstract**

Child marriage remains a deeply rooted socio-cultural issue in many parts of India, particularly in rural and tribal regions like Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu. Despite legal frameworks such as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) and several awareness campaigns, recent reports indicate the continued prevalence of early marriages, with families often resorting to forged documents to bypass legal scrutiny. This study explores the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of individuals involved in early marriage and investigates the predominant push and pull factors contributing to the practice. A descriptive research design was adopted using a structured interview schedule administered to 350 respondents selected through convenient sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. The findings reveal that 67.1% of respondents had no formal education, and over 88% cited family pressure, cultural norms, and lack of self-agency as key reasons for early marriage. Push factors such as social conformity, economic burden, and gender expectations were dominant, while pull factors included perceived security, peer influence, and love relationships. The study underscores the strong link between early marriage and factors like poverty, illiteracy, poor legal awareness, and traditional beliefs. It also highlights the urgent need for targeted, context-specific interventions involving educators, NGOs, local authorities, and especially social work institutions. These stakeholders must collaborate to offer peer education, family counseling, and legal literacy programs aimed at preventing early marriages. The findings provide a data-driven foundation for policy reform, community action, and sustainable social development in vulnerable regions like Krishnagiri.

**Key Words:** Child Rights, Child Welfare, Early Marriage, Child Protection**Introduction**

Child marriage continues to pose a serious challenge in many parts of rural India, including Krishnagiri district of Tamil Nadu. Despite declining trends and legal safeguards, recent reports reveal ongoing attempts to marry off adolescents, often through falsified documents and social pressure (Sivaguru, 2025). Krishnagiri has consistently recorded high child

marriage rates, especially among tribal and economically backward communities (The Hindu, 2010; State Planning Commission, 2017). Factors such as poverty, illiteracy, cultural norms, and lack of awareness about reproductive health contribute significantly to the problem. Although laws like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) exist, poor enforcement and normalization within families continue to perpetuate the practice. According to NFHS-5 (2021), 18% of women in Tamil Nadu aged 20–24 were married before 18, highlighting the need for focused regional research. This study investigates the socio-economic, cultural, and gender-related push and pull factors that influence early marriage. The goal is to inform preventive strategies and strengthen interventions by social workers, educators, and policymakers in Krishnagiri district.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Child marriage remains a pressing social issue in Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu, even as legal frameworks and awareness efforts intensify. Recent data show a significant reduction—from 182 child marriages stopped in 2022 to 57 in 2023—demonstrating the impact of enhanced intervention programs (Vijayalakshmi, 2023). However, from January to May 2025, 49 child marriage attempts were thwarted while 11 proceeded despite legal action, indicating persistent vulnerabilities and the need for ongoing vigilance (Sivaguru, 2025). Alarming, official reports reveal families falsifying Aadhaar records to conceal underage marriages and pregnancies, reflecting systemic evasion of child protection laws (Sivaguru, 2025). These troubling trends underscore the urgency of investigating underlying push and pull factors, such as economic hardship, cultural norms, and misinformation about legal age. By exploring these determinants, the study aims to support district authorities, NGOs, and educators in crafting localized, evidence-based strategies to prevent early marriages. Ultimately, this research aspires to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, protect adolescent health and education, and uphold children's rights in Krishnagiri.

### **Literature Review**

Child marriage continues to be a deeply entrenched issue in India, despite legal frameworks like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) and growing awareness. According to UNICEF (2023), India still accounts for the highest number of child brides globally. Within India, states like Tamil Nadu have made considerable progress in reducing child marriage, but certain districts remain vulnerable. The National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) reveals that nearly 18% of women aged 20–24 were married before the age of 18 in Tamil Nadu.

Notably, early marriage is more prevalent in rural and tribal regions, where economic instability, gender norms, and cultural traditions exert greater pressure on adolescent girls. These marriages often result in early pregnancies, school dropouts, and limited decision-making power, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disempowerment (UNICEF, 2023; NFHS-5, 2021).

Krishnagiri district has been consistently identified as one of the hotspots for child marriage in Tamil Nadu (The Hindu, 2010; State Planning Commission, 2017). According to The New Indian Express (Sivaguru, 2025), 49 child marriage attempts were thwarted in the district between January and May 2025 alone, with families resorting to forged Aadhaar records to bypass legal checks. Earlier reports also highlighted that illiteracy, gender bias, dowry pressures, and traditional norms were key drivers behind the practice. Adolescents, particularly girls, often lack the power to say "no" to marriage due to poor awareness and limited access to education. Community normalization of early marriage, especially among Scheduled Tribes and rural poor, continues to weaken policy enforcement. These local-level challenges demand focused, community-based interventions and legal enforcement mechanisms to curb the trend.

Studies have identified a range of push factors (poverty, gender inequality, family pressure, fear of premarital relationships) and pull factors (peer marriages, perceived security, love relationships) as leading influences in early marriages (Girls Not Brides, 2022). The present study reflects these findings, as 90.9% of respondents cited lack of self-knowledge and 88.6% pointed to family pressure as major causes. Several interventions, including peer education, school re-enrolment drives, and awareness campaigns by NGOs, have shown promise in reducing child marriage rates. However, these initiatives must be tailored to local contexts and supported by systemic changes, including better access to secondary education, vocational training, and adolescent reproductive health services. Sustainable change requires collaboration among government agencies, civil society, educators, and tribal leaders to transform attitudes and empower youth, especially girls, with knowledge and choices.

Previous studies have consistently shown that early marriage is closely linked to poverty, illiteracy, and lack of awareness about legal and health consequences. Research by UNICEF (2023) and NFHS-5 (2021) revealed that girls from rural and tribal backgrounds are significantly more vulnerable to child marriage due to socio-cultural pressures and limited access to education. Studies in Tamil Nadu, particularly in districts like Krishnagiri,

Dharmapuri, and Salem, indicate that child marriage rates remain high despite legal interventions (State Planning Commission, 2017). Family coercion, fear of premarital relationships, and dowry-related anxieties were frequently cited as major drivers (Girls Not Brides, 2022). Research also highlights that early marriage often leads to school dropout, early pregnancy, and poor maternal health outcomes. The lack of agency among adolescent girls and normalization of early marriage in many communities further exacerbates the issue. Effective interventions, such as peer education and community awareness, have shown potential when culturally adapted. These findings reinforce the need for localized, multi-sectoral strategies to prevent early marriages.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals affected by early marriage in Krishnagiri district.
2. To analyze the primary reasons behind early marriage.
3. To identify the major push and pull factors influencing early marriage.
4. To assess the level of awareness and knowledge among adolescents and their families.
5. To provide data-driven recommendations to develop targeted interventions aimed at preventing early marriage and supporting at-risk adolescents.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted quantitative method, a descriptive research design to describe the socio-economic profile, awareness levels, and pull and push factors influencing early marriage in Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu. A convenient sampling technique was used to select 350 respondents from rural and tribal areas where early marriage is prevalent. Data was collected using a structured interview schedule, which was developed in consultation with school teachers and NGOs working with adolescents and later pretested with 25 participants. The tool covered demographics, education, marriage history, awareness of laws, and influencing factors. Data collection took place during 2023–2024. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and cross-tabulations. Ethical consent was obtained from all respondents, and the study-maintained confidentiality and cultural sensitivity throughout. The findings aim to inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations to address early marriage.

## Results

**Table No. 1 Demographic Details of the Respondents**

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age in Years</b>		
Below 18 years	61	17.40%
18 to 21 years	130	37.10%
22 to 45 years	110	31.40%
Above 45 years	49	14.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	185	52.90%
Female	165	47.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Educational Status</b>		
No formal education	235	67.10%
Primary education (1st–5th)	70	20.00%
Middle school (6th–8th)	25	7.10%
Secondary school (9th–10th)	15	4.30%
Higher Secondary & above	5	1.50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Table No. 2 Reasons for Early Marriage**

Reason	Yes (n)	Yes (%)
Lack of self-knowledge about marriage	318	90.90%
Inability to say 'No' to marriage	306	87.40%
Force of family	310	88.60%
Culture of the community	295	84.30%
Fear of parents keeping girl child at home	230	65.70%
Love marriage	235	67.10%

Poor economic background of family	285	81.40%
Illiterate parents	263	75.10%

**Table No. 3 Predominant Push and Pull Factors Behind Early Marriage**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Social pressure to conform	Push	280	80.00%
Economic burden / dowry concerns	Push	265	75.70%
Fear of pre-marital relationships	Push	245	70.00%
Gender role expectations	Push	215	61.40%
Peer marriage trends	Pull	195	55.70%
Marriage seen as security	Pull	210	60.00%
Love / relationship leading to marriage	Pull	185	52.90%
Perceived prestige for early marriage	Pull	160	45.70%

## Discussion

The demographic analysis of the respondents reveals that a significant proportion (37.1%) are aged between 18 to 21 years, indicating that early marriage remains common among late adolescents and young adults. Males slightly outnumber females (52.9% vs. 47.1%), and a concerning majority (67.1%) have no formal education, highlighting education as a critical area for intervention. Regarding reasons for early marriage, the most cited factors include lack of self-knowledge about marriage (90.9%), family pressure (88.6%), and inability to say 'no' (87.4%), reflecting low self-agency and strong patriarchal control. Cultural norms (84.3%) and poor economic conditions (81.4%) also play significant roles, along with the impact of illiterate parents (75.1%). The analysis of push and pull factors further reinforces these findings—social pressure (80%), dowry concerns (75.7%), and fear of premarital relationships (70%) emerge as dominant push factors. Pull factors like the belief that marriage provides security (60%) and peer influence (55.7%) are also noteworthy. Collectively, these findings underscore the urgent need for holistic interventions focusing on education, awareness, and empowerment to prevent early marriage in Krishnagiri district.

In addition, the low percentage of respondents with secondary or higher education (only 5.8% combined) suggests a severe lack of access to continued schooling, especially for girls. The persistence of gender role expectations (61.4%) and the romanticization of marriage through love relationships (52.9%) further reflect socio-cultural shifts that require attention in youth counseling. Fear among parents about having an unmarried daughter at home (65.7%) and the prestige associated with early marriage (45.7%) reveal deep-rooted beliefs that need to be challenged through community-based sensitization. These findings not only highlight systemic gaps but also offer direction for targeted programs involving schools, NGOs, and government departments. Preventive strategies must involve peer education, strengthening adolescent health services, and empowering parents with legal literacy. Ultimately, these insights lay the foundation for formulating responsive, data-driven interventions to break the cycle of early marriage and its intergenerational impact.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy, practice, and community-level interventions aimed at eradicating early marriage in Krishnagiri district. The evidence clearly points to the urgent need for targeted awareness campaigns that address not only adolescents but also parents and community leaders, who are key influencers in early marriage decisions. Education must be prioritized, especially for girls, by ensuring retention in schools and access to secondary and higher education. Economic empowerment programs for families, particularly women, can reduce the financial motives behind child marriage. Importantly, social work institutions have a critical role to play in this context. They can act as catalysts by training grassroots workers, facilitating peer education programs, and offering psychosocial support to at-risk adolescents. Social work colleges can collaborate with NGOs, schools, and government bodies to create community-based models that promote gender equity, legal literacy, and child protection. The study calls for a multi-sectoral, participatory approach anchored by social work values to sustainably address the root causes of early marriage and support the holistic development of vulnerable youth.

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