



**Report by  
C.A.C.T. Bihar**



**Covid-19**  
**A New Beginning**  
**Assessment of Impact on**  
**Marginalized Women and**  
**Children of Bihar**



**Compilation by  
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*Note- Concerned study and data is based on Random Survey conducted by various organizations & individuals. Thereby, Bhoomika Vihar shall not be responsible for any problems or consequences arising from this report. Data may be subjected to re-verification.*

***“Any Investment in a girl child can reap multiple rewards in future”***

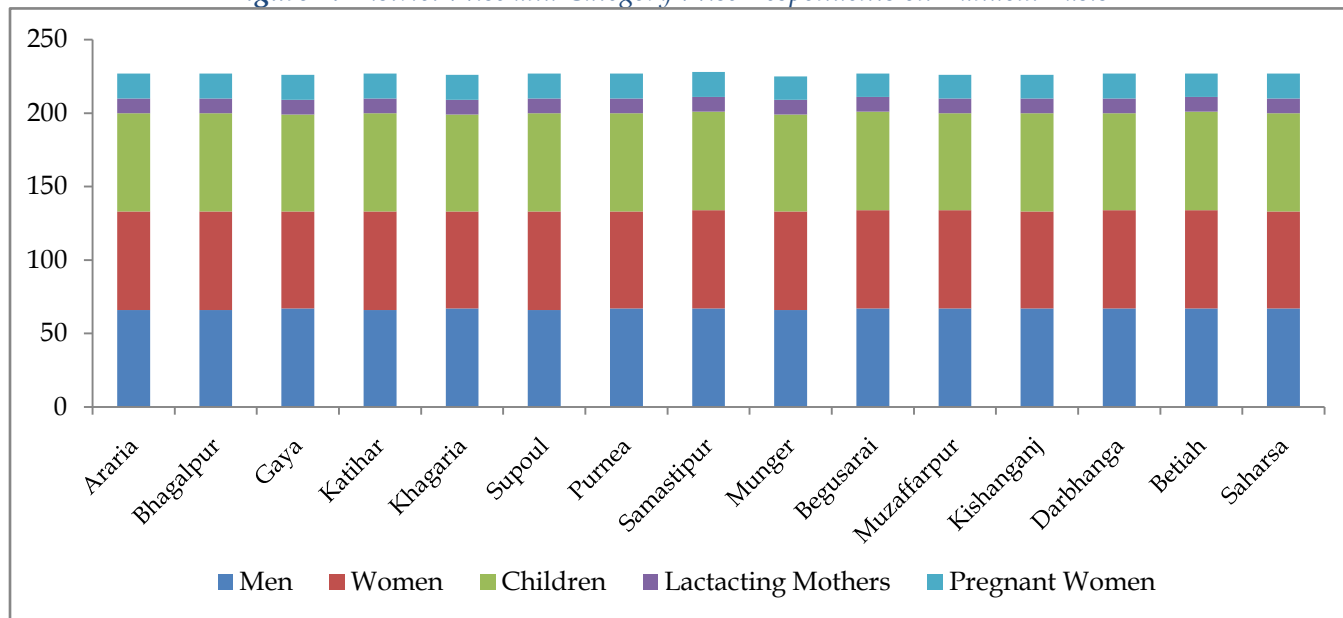
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## Executive Summary

- **Bhoomika Vihar** is a Civil Society Organization registered under the Society Registrations Act and is operating in various districts of State of Bihar. With its decades of experience as a leader among civil society organizations in the State of Bihar as well as among other national organizations in eradicating ‘fake/forced and early marriages’. The organization has been working against Bridal Trafficking of girls and women with more focus on the poorest and those from remote geographies of Bihar, especially in the districts of the ‘Kosi’ Region located along the international border of India and Nepal.
- In the month of January 2020, traces of the corona virus (CoVID-19) was first identified in Kerala, India. Soon the virus was detected across various states in the country within a matter of few days. In Bihar, the first case of CoVID-19 was reported on 23 March 2020, and as on date, confirmed cases in the state stand at 2.63 lakh with a death toll of 1548 people. The pandemic has grievously impacted the local as well as the global economy. The exodus of migrant labourers from cities to rural areas across the nation is a key evidence of the fact that all dimensions of the society and economy have been immensely affected by the pandemic, and the worst impact has been felt by the marginalized sections, women, and children.
- In the post lock-down scenario, Bhoomika Vihar has undertaken a study expecting to meet and fill the ‘data gap’ that can limit synergizing systems and resources for addressing any alarming situation with respect to women and children.
- Primary data has been obtained through personal interviews using structured questionnaire for various groups of respondents who hail from 31 Blocks, 56 Panchayats and 110 villages spread across 15 selected districts of Bihar State namely *Araria, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Khagaria, Supaul, Saharsa, Begusarai, Darbhanga, Purnea, Munger, Bhagalpur, Bettiah, Muzaffarpur, Kishanganj and Gaya*. Door-to-door survey was carried out with 1000 men respondents, 1000 women respondents, 1000 children (57% girls and 43% boys), 250 pregnant women and 150 lactating mothers.
- On an average, around 67 men, women and children, 10 Lactating mothers and 17 Pregnant women were surveyed from each district to ensure an optimum mix and accurate understanding of the scenario at district level.
- The men respondents, in terms of castes, consisted of 35% from Scheduled Caste, 1% from Scheduled Tribes, 10% minority, 38% Other Backward Communities and 16% from General Community’s members.
- Occupation wise, sample respondents were consisted of 39% wage workers, 24% agricultural labourers, 5% job holders, 4% in business, 25% migrant labourers and 3% in other occupational categories.

Figure 1: District Wise and Category Wise Respondents on Random Basis



- As children mostly hailed from the same families; caste categories and occupation categories were taken from the data shared by their parents during their response to the survey.
- The findings below are based on effort taken during the referral period that was from March 2020 to October 2020, keeping in mind the extended periods of CoVID-19 related complete or partial lockdowns. This referral period has been clearly stated to the primary respondents and probes were administered accordingly.

## Key Findings:

The changes had seen in the working conditions and arrangements since the start of the pandemic necessarily varied depending on the nature of their occupation, their working status, their caring commitments, as well as the decisions made by the livelihood and opportunity providers.

The facts and findings stated here are reproduced exactly as it was expressed by the respondents during the personal interviews and discussions with them.

Figure 2: Sources of Marital Offers received

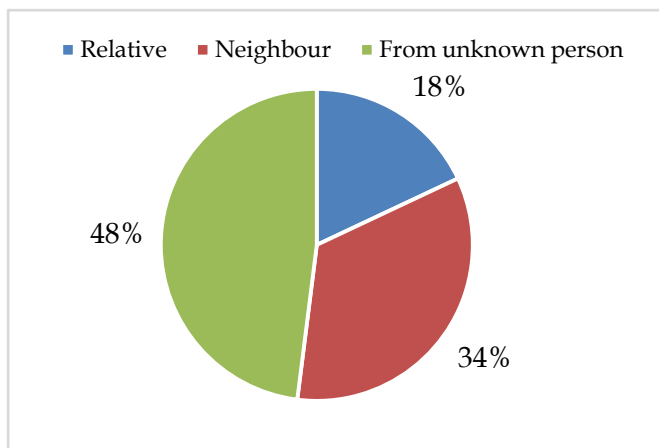


Figure 3: Preferred Marriage age for Girls by Male Respondents

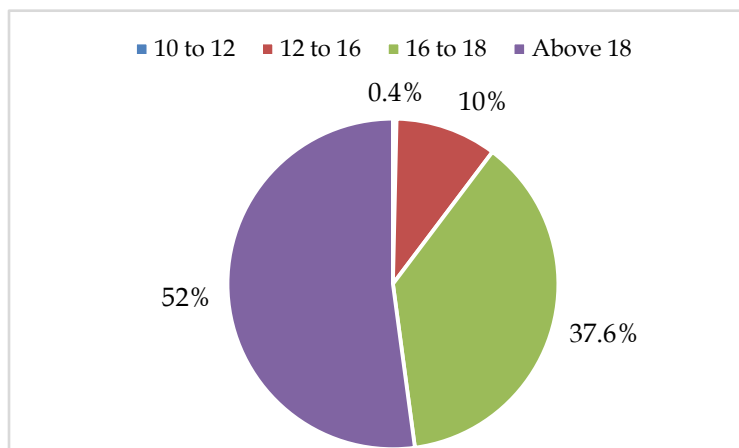


Figure 4: Occupation of Breadwinners Before Lockdown (%) Figure 5: Occupation of Breadwinners After Lockdown (%)

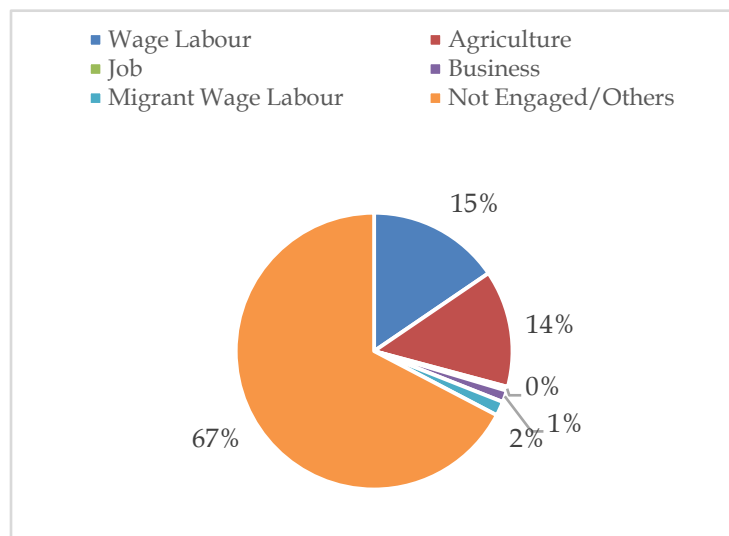
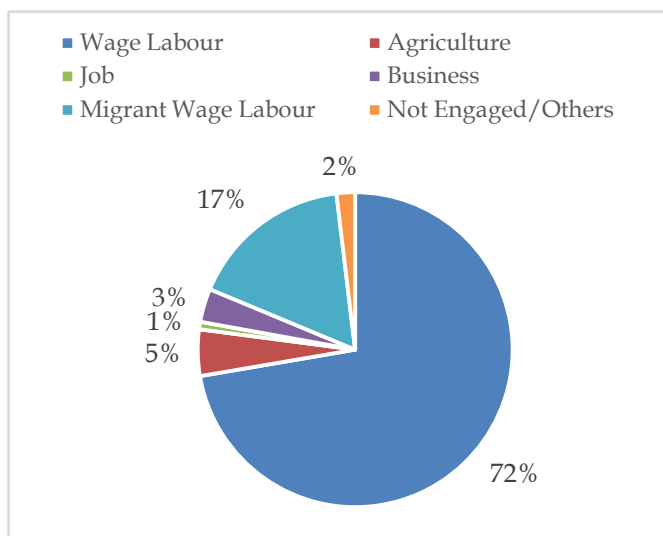


Table 1: Summary of Key Findings

Sl. No.	Study Area	Response Received
1	Economic Impact on Marginalized Women	<p>a) 67% male (Family Member) respondent stated that they are coupled to shift from employment from any other source of income.</p> <p>b) 82% male (Family Member) respondent replied that they are facing challenges in agricultural works due to lack of capital support.</p>

Sl. No.	Study Area	Response Received
2	Society and the women	<p>a) More than 50% respondents who are the father of daughter are worried about their marriage and marriage of 77% daughters got deferred due to lose of money. 83% have no saving to meet the marriage expenditure till date.</p> <p>b) 78% women showed their worry towards their girl child and marriage at right age.</p> <p>c) 79% women paid concern towards possibilities of mishaps with their daughter.</p> <p>d) 94% women replied that they are living in distress. 28% stated lack of livelihoods, 22% stating lack of wage labour, 17% stating the Corona Pandemic itself, 15% having a large families' responsibilities, 10% sudden crowding of the village and 9% low wages than normal periods</p>
3	Health and Nutrition of Children and Women	<p>a) 78% lactating mothers were unable to feed own milk to their child due to poor in-take of nutrition</p> <p>b) 47% lactating mother replied that they were in fear about how to protect their child from COVID-19 infection.</p> <p>c) 29% pregnant women replied that they were concerned about the health of their embryo</p>
4	Crisis and the Children	<p>a) 59% girl children expressed of extra burden of household chores and had no space or opportunity to play inside or outside of the houses.</p> <p>b) 68% school going children replied that they are hopeful that school will resume again.</p> <p>c) 45% children replied that they are feeling distressed.</p> <p>d) 78% children replied they have a fear of going outside their home. This fear is mainly due to arrival of many strangers in village (24%) and other male members of family (6%).</p>

## Case Studies

### 1. Reappearances of the Survivals of Fake Marriage during Lockdown

The painful story of this girl from Saharsa is of utter helplessness and lack of support our daughters have to face if they tried a comeback from trafficking. For security and privacy reasons we are not sharing any personal detail of the true person in this incident. She was so happily awaiting her marriage which was fixed before the CoVID-19 Pandemic broke out. Her family had risen whatever savings they could for marrying her off. In the wake of the CoVID-19 situation and the resultant lockdown; her family had to divert and spend all their savings on meeting the domestic expenses since they had no income during these months. The marriage which was fixed to take place during the lockdown had to be cancelled. Once the lockdown was relaxed, all the savings of the family was drained off and the girl was already crossing 18 years. The thought of having an unmarried girl of 18 years sitting at home started weighing heavily upon her parents. Sensing this opportunity; brokers persuaded the family to marry her off to a man from Rajasthan who placed before the parents a lucrative offer of waiving off the dowry and marriage related expenses. Her parents easily fell prey to this offer and the marriage was conducted secretly in a village temple. Once taken to her marital home; she was tortured and subjected to sexual abuse at the hands of different men. Somehow, she managed to flee from there to reach her maternal home. Now she realized that her situation had become even worse. She was considered a disgrace to the village as she had 'fled from her marital home'. No one tried to understand the torture inflicted upon her. Though she wanted to fight the torture she had gone through; the community around her extended no support to her.

### 2. Helplessness leads to abuse

This is a story from Darbhanga. A 14-year-old girl's father was chronically ill and mother was working as a domestic help. She lost her job due to lockdown. When people started moving around her mother went to her maternal home in search of some support. The girl was left alone at home. A neighbour exploited her starving situation. She was abused and exploited by her neighbour with the temptation of food. The girl was so afraid that she went to her maternal grand-mother's home. When she came back, she explained her story to her mother how she literally had to sell herself because of basic needs.

### 3. Existence of fake and forced Marriage

This story is from Begusarai. This girl was married off first time at the age of 12 due to the pressure made by neighbours and relatives. She was married off to a groom from another state. The man was 30 years old. She gave birth to a girl child, so she was pushed out of the marital home. Her father was a rickshaw puller in Delhi. Her own father's brother sold her to another family for 40000/-. She was tortured there. When she fled and came back home; her father took her to Delhi. In Delhi she was married off to Haryana. She was like a sex slave there. During the lockdown she became a burden to them. They pushed her out from the place where she was engaged in sex trade. When migrant



workers started returning home; she came back home along with them.

*Illustration 1: Situation of Girls with respect to marriages*



## Chapter- 1: Introduction

### i) Background

Rebuilding economies as well as societies is clearly visible on the walls as the prime focus of Governments, Development agencies, civil society organizations, philanthropic institutions and many other groups, be it local, regional or global. Apart from economists, sociologists, development experts, politicians etc., even people from all walks of life are calling for interventions focusing on rebuilding economies & building resilient societies to cope with devastating natural disasters or implementing measures that are multi-faceted, similar to ones adopted during the 2008 Post Global Financial Crisis.

#### *Illustration 2: Survey of respondents*



The experience & struggles faced by the economically backward communities in the Indian State of Bihar due to the aggravated vulnerabilities developed in the wake of the CoVID-19 Pandemic reveals that just establishing a vision of rebuilding economies alone would not be the solution; whereas every step taken had to be strategically efficient in combating various social evils which have already been impacting the livelihoods of these families.

It is true that the public health issues that we are currently grappling with are so grave that recovering from this crisis of the CoVID-19 pandemic would clearly remain the near-term priority for every Nation. But it is equally crucial to focus on mitigating the economic and social fallout of this pandemic, which is emerging as far bigger and long-term challenge.

Bihar is one of the highly populated, poorest and adversities-stricken states across India. Human Trafficking and consequent exploitation, targeting the young women and girls of Bihar has been a pressing issue & serious concern. Children and women in the Kosi-Mahananda region in Bihar, situated near to the Indo-Nepal Border, have become an easy prey for the traffickers.

Human traffickers have their own means of identifying easy targets. The trickiest strategy used by the traffickers and their agents is the route of 'Fake, Forced and Child Marriages' and ultimately resulting in 'Bride Trafficking', where the agents target a highly vulnerable family with a girl child and gradually work up in ensuring that the girl gets married, despite being a child, so as to ease the

trafficking process. Poor families fall into this trap of 'prosperity dreams and economic welfare' advanced by the racket of 'Bride Traffickers'. There are various laws that prevent human trafficking, however, it is highly vital to focus on other aspects which strengthen the local ecosystem like organizations volunteering to work with vulnerable communities, empowering and socially rehabilitating victims, ensuring their socio-economic development, driving an active transformative leadership for the victims, Creating awareness through networking, advocacy and liaison initiatives at various platforms to draw attention of various key stakeholders etc.

The area of 'Bhoomika Vihar' is identified as the source, transit and destination point for most 'Bride Trafficking' cases. In the year 2004, Bhoomika Vihar's study report “Bojh” (meaning “burden”), for the very first time, shed light on the ground realities about trafficking & how girls belonging to the deprived classes were being targeted and wooed away from the region in the name of fake marriages or jobs. The area is encircled by state and international boundaries, which aggravates the trafficking scenario, resulting in an alarmingly huge number of girl children being trafficked / sold off and taken away as 'Sold out Brides' to various places where they suffer heterogeneous exploitation.

*Illustration 3: Survey of respondents*

The CoVID-19 Pandemic had a major impact on Marginalized women and children. Women have been uniquely impacted financially, economically, and socially. Their lives and livelihoods were never affected so badly earlier, as compared to the current CoVID crisis and it has resulted in a massive psycho-social impact and regressive effect on gender equality as well.



The entire programme of Bhoomika Vihar in the State of Bihar is focused on addressing the vulnerabilities of these women/girls who are becoming the victims of various forms of human trafficking and particularly bride trafficking under the guise of fake, forced and early marriages. In addition

to other means, marriage has become an easy way to target the local girls for trafficking, as they are not economically stable, socially strong or educated enough to recognize and resist this trap. Lucrative offers make them, and their guardians blind-sided towards understanding or identifying the trap they are pulled into. Their own so-called husbands and relatives leverage these fake marriages to succeed in finally pushing these girls into the miserable life of sex trade and other varied forms of exploitation.

The aftermath of the CoVID-19 Pandemic in these already vulnerable communities, is setting the right ecosystem for social evils like Human Trafficking, Bride Trafficking, Child Marriage, Child Labour etc., to take control beyond imagination. In such critical geographies, it is equally important to think about managing the social impact along with the economic or health impact of this pandemic. If we fail to ensure sustainable livelihoods to these families that have been deprived of all their sources of income; or any delay in activating the social support and protection mechanisms; the plight of the girls, women and children of these families would be pushed to severe vulnerabilities.

We should comprehend and put this situation on priority and fundamentally rethink what kind of real economies and social systems would need to be built or re-established so that resilience to these social evils of bride trafficking, human trafficking, child labour etc. could be put under control. It is in this context that ‘Bhoomika Vihar’ designed and determined to undertake this study to bring out how the CoVID- 19 Pandemic and the nation-wide continue to impact the livelihoods of the poorest families even today with a dedicated focus on evolving or aggravated vulnerabilities experienced by women and girl children.

The Study was carried out as an effort to identify in a timely manner, any new or aggravated vulnerabilities arising out the CoVID-19 Pandemic due to which women and girls of the State of Bihar would fall subjects to Human Trafficking and also identify in time any situations arising in the wake of the CoVID-19 Pandemic that would subject women and girls of Bihar to such vulnerabilities due to which women and girls are coerced into sexual transactions by violent or manipulative methods.

## **ii) Context and Objectives of the Study**

The outbreak of COVID 19 Pandemic and the resultant lockdown enforced to contain the spread of the Corona Virus has devastated economies of the poorest and vulnerable households which are expected to further aggravate the vulnerabilities manifold and leave a highly fertile ground for bride-trafficking, fake, forced and early marriages of girls. Bhoomika Vihar is highly concerned about this dangerous situation and would want the government, civil society organizations, development agencies and all other stakeholders to take timely steps in convergence in the direction of effectively addressing this situation.

With the following objectives; Bhoomika Vihar has undertaken this study which is expected to meet and fill the ‘data gap’ that can limit synergizing systems and resources for addressing any alarming situation in this regard.

1. To study the Gender Perspectives of CoVID-19 Pandemic with central focus on women.
2. To identify in time any new or aggravated vulnerabilities arising out the CoVID-19 Pandemic for women and girls leading to violence and fake/forced and early marriages.

### iii) Study Area and Respondents

The study area consisted of 15 districts of Bihar State namely: Araria, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Khagaria, Supaul, Gaya, Purnea, Samastipur, Munger, Begusarai, Muzaffarpur, Kishanganj, Darbhanga, Bettiah and Saharsa. The respondents to this research are family members of vulnerable communities identified by the team members of CACT. The respondents to this research included 1000 men respondents, 1000 women respondents, 1000 children, 250 pregnant women and 150 lactating mothers. Further detail on the respondents is also available in various other sections of this document. In the total respondents to the study 38% hails from OBC, 35% from Scheduled Castes, 1% from Scheduled Tribes, 10% Minorities and 16% from General Caste Categories.,

Figure6: Specific Respondents Sections (Nos.)

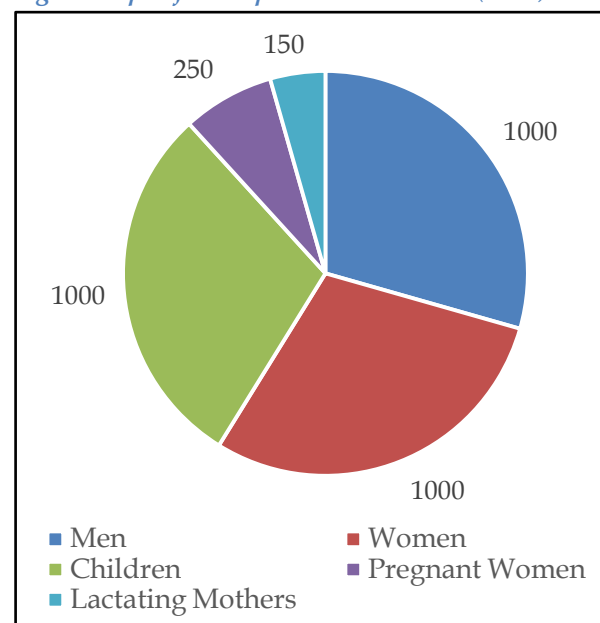
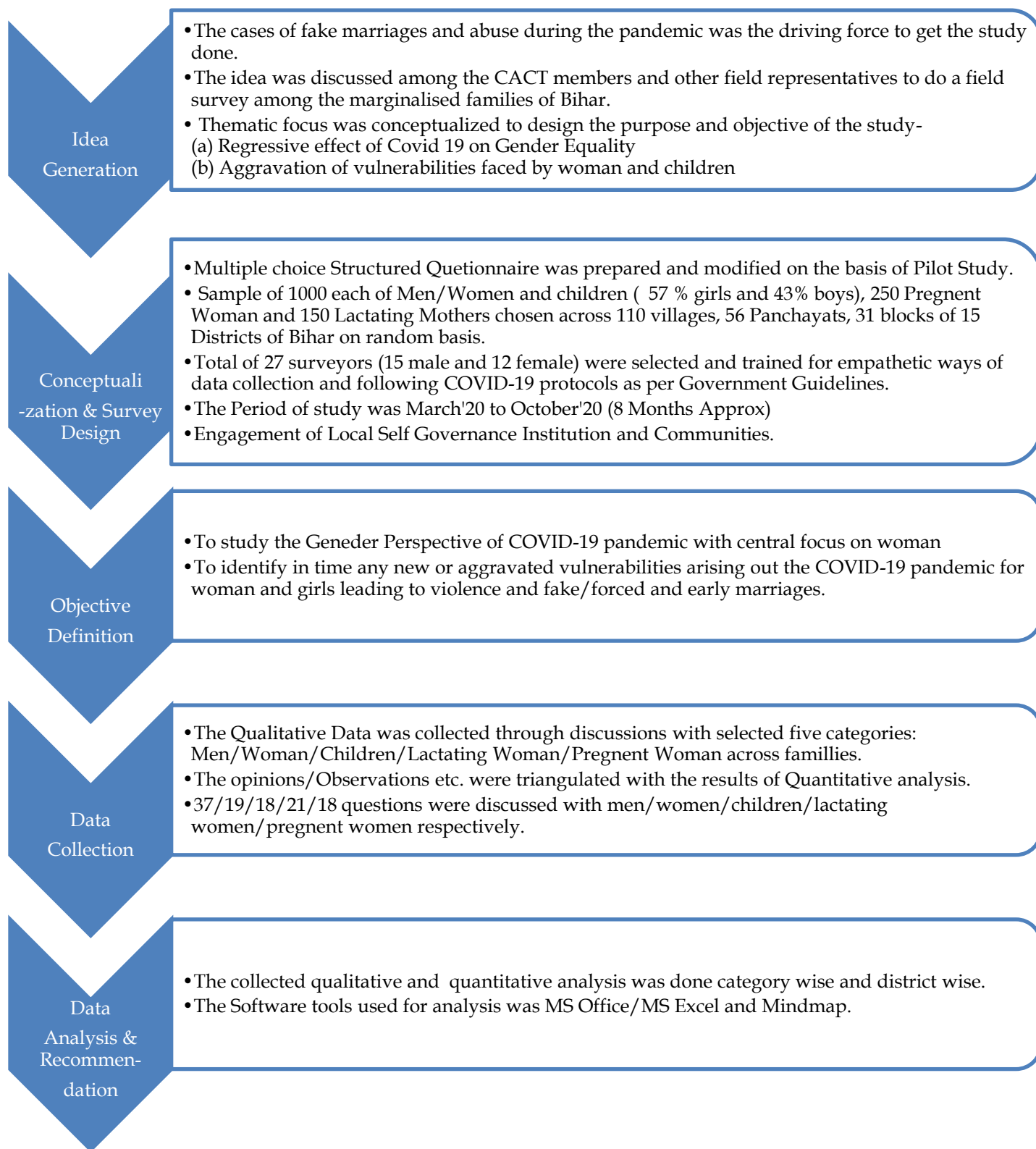


Table 2: Categorization of Respondents | District-wise

Social Categories of the Respondents District Wise (%)						
District	SC	ST	OBC	General	Minorities	Total
Araria	24	0	15	11	50	100
Bhagalpur	24	0	55	21	0	100
Gaya	40	2	35	23	0	100
Katihar	41	9	47	3	0	100
Khagaria	45	0	45	10	0	100
Supaul	46	0	34	20	0	100
Purnea	44	6	33	17	0	100
Samastipur	24	0	55	21	0	100
Munger	43	0	32	25	0	100
Begusarai	41	0	47	12	0	100
Muzaffarpur	36	0	45	19	0	100
Kishanganj	0	0	0	0	100	100
Darbhanga	40	0	34	26	0	100
Bettiah	41	2	47	10	0	100
Saharsa	38	0	45	17	0	100
<b>Total Respondents Category Wise (%)</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

#### iv) Process, Tools and Methodology of Study Report

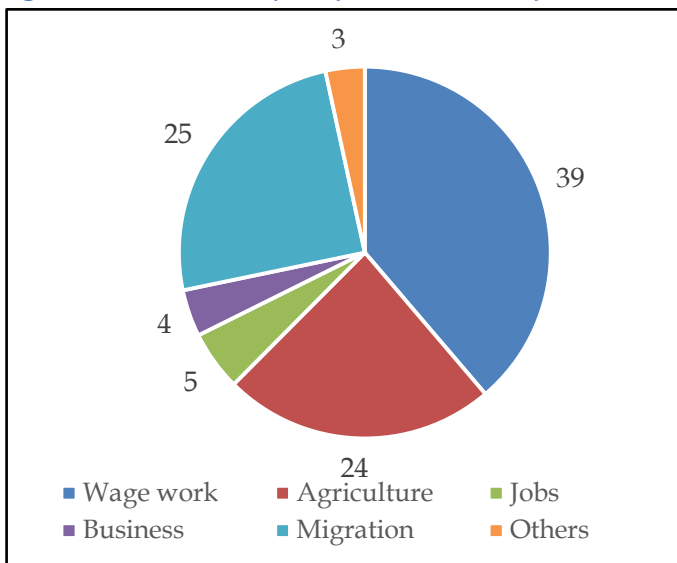


## Chapter- 2: Economic Impact on Marginalized women

### i) Socio-Economic Data on the status of the respondents

Survey was conducted considering a family as the basic unit for data collection. The male members of the families and the female members of the families were interviewed separately. Children, pregnant women and lactating mothers were interviewed from the same families wherever possible.

Figure 7: Distribution of Respondents | Occupation-wise (%)



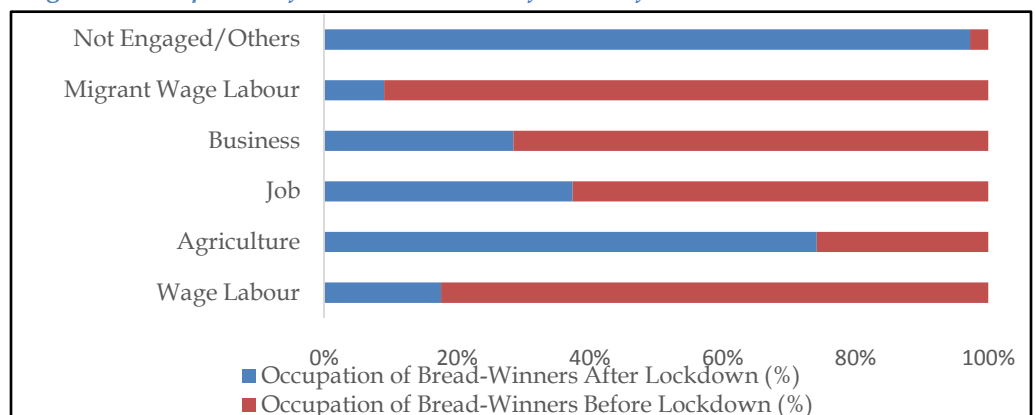
Respondent families were selected mostly from the socially and economically marginalized communities and from varied occupations as far as possible. The respondents consisted of 35% Scheduled Caste members, 1% Scheduled Tribes members, 38% Other Backward Communities members and 10% Minority Communities members and 16% General Community Members. Occupation wise the sample respondents consisted of 39% wage workers, 24% agricultural workers, 5% job holders, 4% in business, 25% migrant labourers and 3% other occupational categories.

### ii) Managing livelihood in unprecedented times

Livelihood situation of the families underwent turbulence and huge shifts during the period of the Corona Virus Pandemic. The families that were mostly dependent on migrant labourers out of the state generally went jobless with a very little percentage shifting to available agricultural and other engagements.

A comparison of income earning engagements of the respondents before and after the lockdown period clearly captures the prevailing situation of sudden loss of complete income and livelihoods that is hugely affecting the lives of people.

Figure 8: Occupation of Breadwinners | Before Vs After Lockdown (%)



The analysis of the responses of bread-winner respondents show that their occupations used to be wage labour for 72% and migration for 17% which have shifted to 15% and 2% respectively after the lockdown period. Male respondents who were not able to find economic engagement used to be 2% before lockdown which has shifted to 67% percent after the lockdown.

The analysis of the responses of female respondents shows that on an average only 12% of the respondent families were able to earn enough during the pandemic period. 88% families had to face lack of income. The female respondents have also stated that 96% of the families had to compromise essential things due to severe lack of income.

### iii) Impact on Saving/Dissaving

83% of the respondent families stated that their hard-earned savings for their daughters’ marriage has been diverted into dissaving due to the Corona Virus Pandemic. Due to diversion and dissaving of such funds the families are undergoing fear about the future of their girl children, increased stress and tension within the families. The major route of the diversion of savings by 91% of the respondent families was for meeting the domestic expenses of the families during the pandemic period.

Figure 9: Safety of Savings | Region-wise (%)

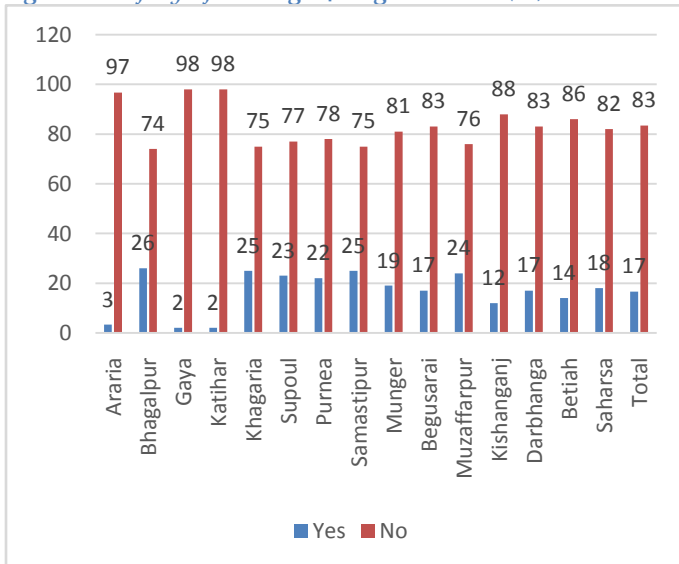
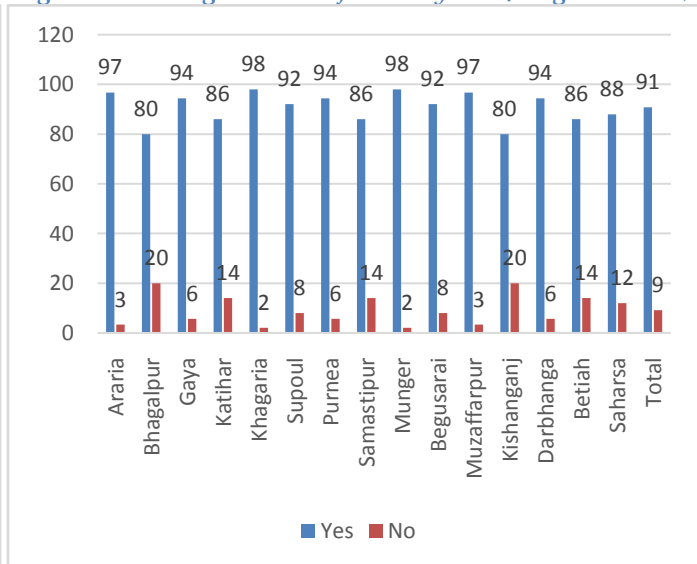


Figure 10: Savings diverted for Daily use | Region-wise (%)

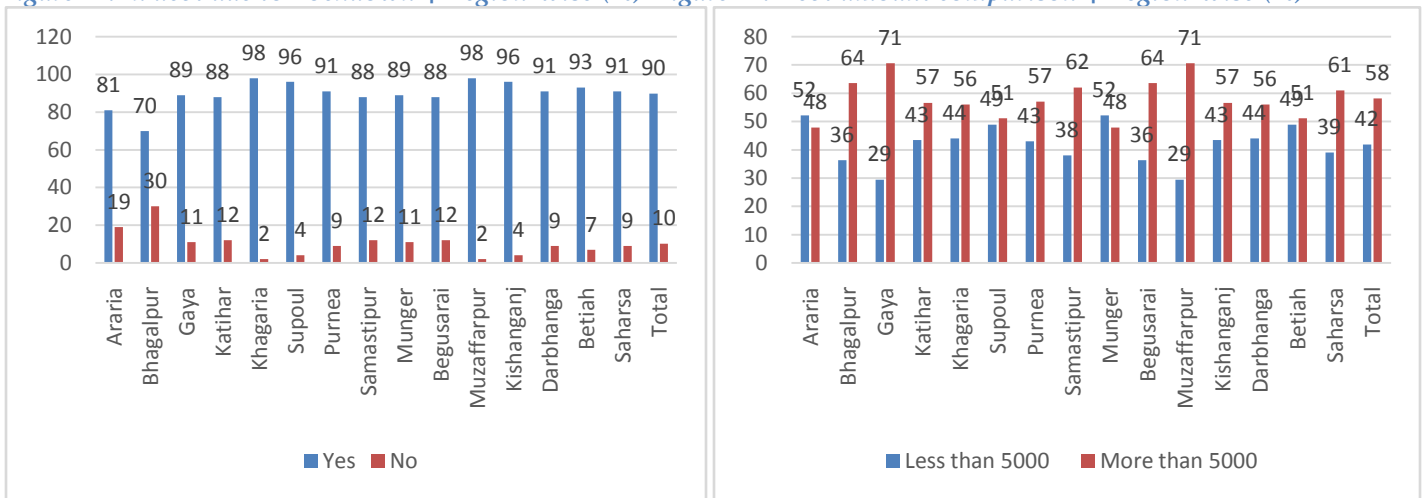


### iv) Debt Burden

The CoVID-19 Pandemic period has been a period of lack of income leading to increased indebtedness for a large portion of families responding to the study. On an average 90% of the respondents have stated that they have taken debts during the pandemic period and are facing the burden of debt amount along with interest. The extend of debt amount for 42% of the respondent families is below Rs. 5000/- & for 58% respondent families, extent of debt amount is above Rs. 5000/-

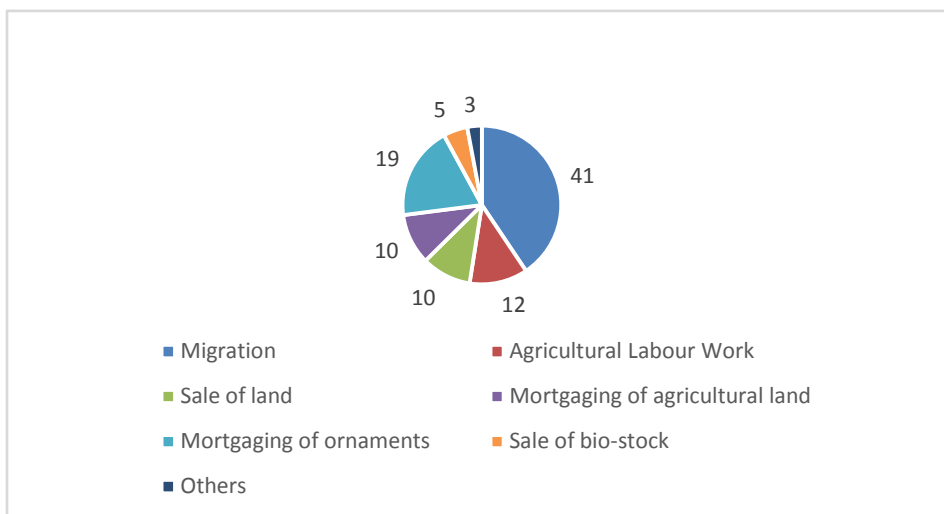


Figure 11: In debt due to Lockdown | Region-wise (%) Figure 12: Debt amount comparison | Region-wise (%)



It is also to be noted here that beyond the setback suffered by the respondent families on remittances from migrant wage work, general wage work and agricultural wage work; the hopes and plans for repayment of debt also circle around the same livelihood engagements they used to have before the pandemic. The plans expressed by the respondent families for debt repayment is depicted below in percentages of total families.

Figure 13: Plan for Debt Repayment by Respondent Families (%)



The highest priority assigned by the families in their debt repayment plan was migration with 41% families, followed by mortgaging of ornaments by 19% families. 12% families expressed they would resort to agriculture labour work and 10% respondents cited sale of land or mortgaging of agricultural land for debt repayment.

**v) Lack of economic engagement and linkages with fake Job offer**

The returned migrants including wage workers and in many cases survivors of trafficking coupled with the already existing unemployed youth face acute marginalization in the wake of the CoVID-19 Pandemic and remain vulnerable to high-risk migration and re-migration leading to further exploitation. Obviously, women and girls haplessly falling in this category would have to face added

vulnerabilities being a woman/girl child. Added to this is the already high preference of the community to migration for wage engagement. The respondents to the study have reported that their daughters and sons alike are receiving lucrative offers for jobs outside the state.

Figure 14: Tempting offers received for betterment of live (%)

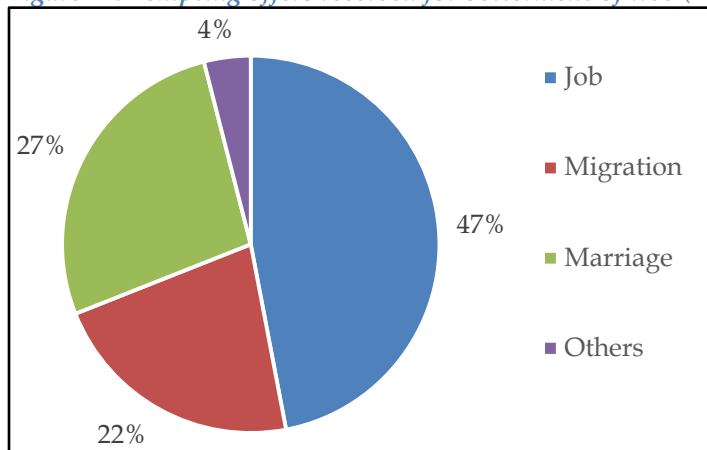
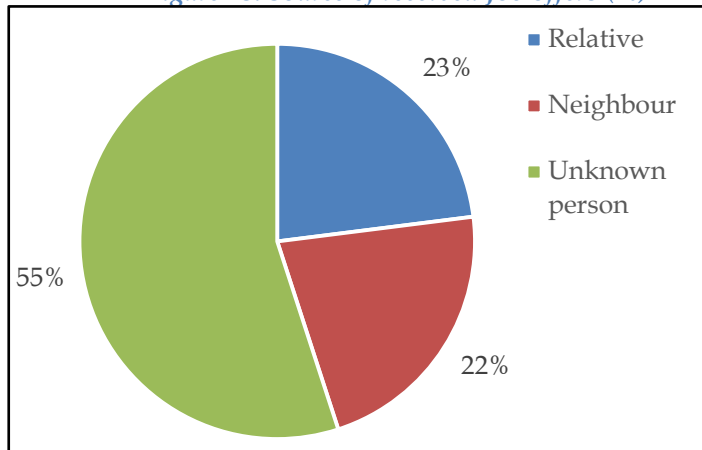
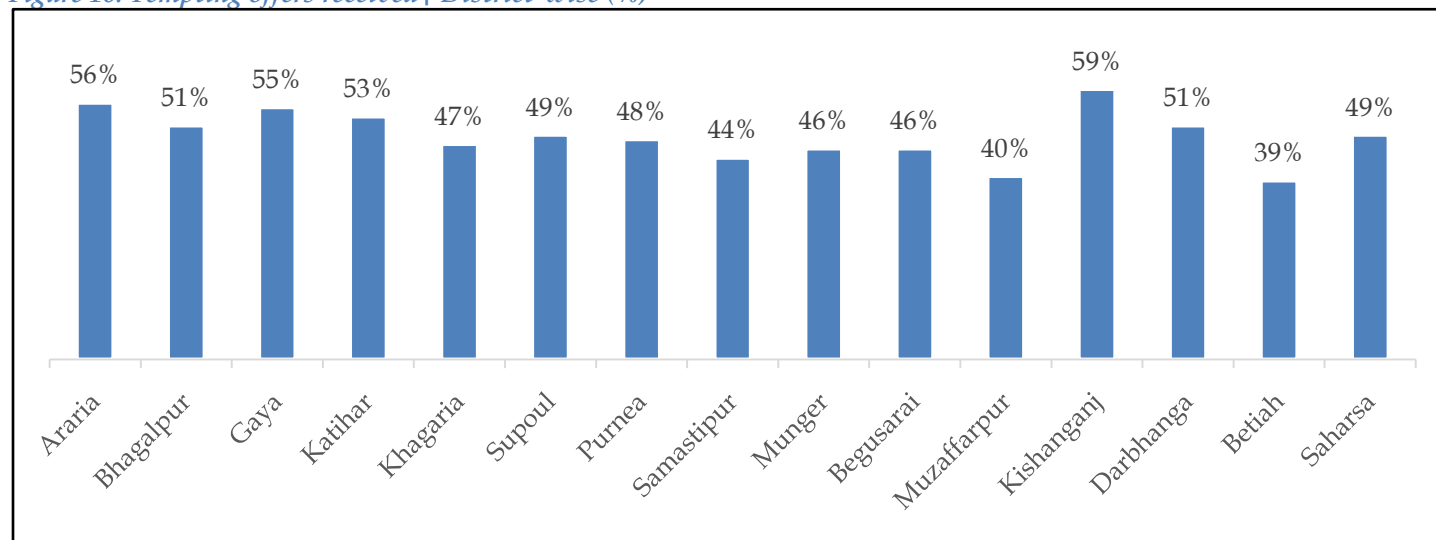


Figure 15: Source of received Job offers (%)



47% of the respondents have stated that they have been receiving fake job offers and advices from various sources promises to make their lives and the lives of their dependents better and prosperous through marriage offers (27%), migration possibilities (22%) etc. it is also to be stated that 44% of these temptations came from out of the state sources. 55% of the temptations were placed by unknown persons whereas relatives and neighbors placed 23% and 22% of such temptations respectively.

Figure 16: Tempting offers received | District-wise (%)



## Chapter- 3: Society and the women

### i) Managing Stress and Frustration (violence against women and girls)

96% women have stated that due to severe income crisis in the wake of the CoVID-19 Pandemic families had to compromise on essential expenses. The disproportionate incidence of such compromise has been highly skewed towards women having to forgo their necessities.

Since the houses got crowded all of a sudden; women had to face many severe issues.

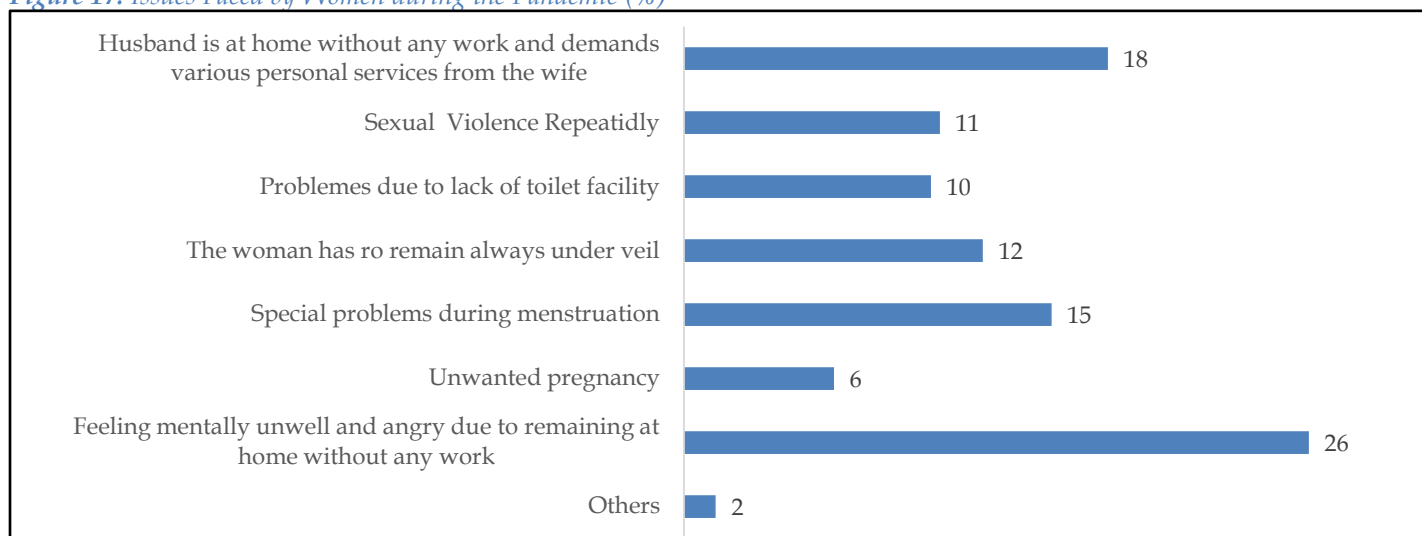
82% women stated they faced lack of space within the houses making menstrual hygiene management a serious issue. 87% women reported their houses had less than 2 rooms. The issues included in addition to lack of privacy, safe keeping of firewood, space for animals, space for feeding infants, space for serving food to children and even space for cooking or resting.

77% women have stated that violence against women have increased manifold due to men spending their whole time in the houses. The impact of such violence upon women created a situation of mistrust that 90% women stated that family members started looking at each other with suspicion.

Since the shops remained closed for a long time which made it impossible to replace the limited and worn-out clothes the women had. Once all clothes were worn-out, they had to manage with the same worn-out clothes. 69% women have stated they had managed the worn-out clothes in various ways such as using the same worn-out clothes, stitching the worn-out clothes, patching the clothes with another piece of cloth etc.

The reasons for the anger of women during the CoVID-19 Pandemic included lack of livelihoods, the pandemic itself, the house getting crowded, no space at home, sexual violence, physical violence, verbal abuse, compelled to be in veil always, lack of toilet facilities etc.

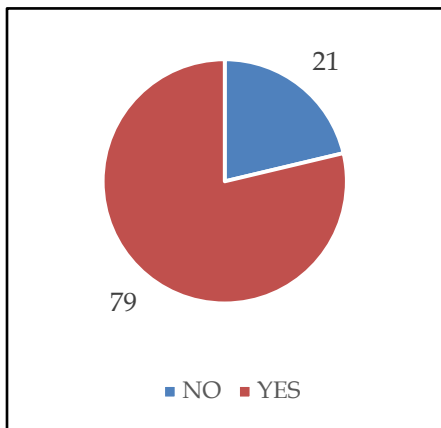
Figure 17: Issues Faced by Women during the Pandemic (%)



While stating the specific issues faced by women during the pandemic; 26% stated of feeling mentally

unwell and angry due to remaining at home without any work, 18% women respondents stated that husband is at home without any work and demands various personal services from the wife, 15% stated of special problems with respect menstrual hygiene management, 12% stated that women had to remain under veil always, 11% stated they experienced sexual violence, 10% had issues with lack of toilets and 6% stated of unwanted pregnancies.

Figure 18: Respondents Fearing Mishaps if Daughters' Marriages gets Delayed



78% women across all caste and occupation categories stated that their major worries included the delay of daughters' marriage, lack of income, having unmarried marriage able aged daughter at home and lack of livelihoods. 79% women respondents stated fear of mishaps if the marriage of their daughters did not take place at lower age.

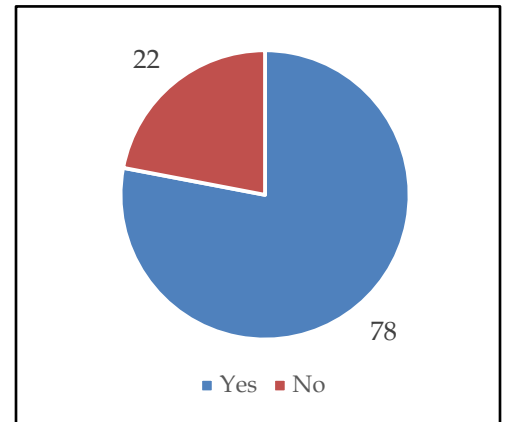


Figure 19: Women worried about the marriage of daughter at right age (%)

Reason for frustration and stress were stated by the women in the following percentages of respondents 28% stated lack of livelihoods, 22% stating lack of wage labour, 17% stating the Corona Pandemic itself, 15% having a large families' responsibilities, 10% sudden crowding of the village and 8% low wages than normal periods,

Domestic stress/tensions and domestic violence have had on a raise during the CoVID-19 Pandemic, impact of which has been negatively affecting the situation of women and girls.

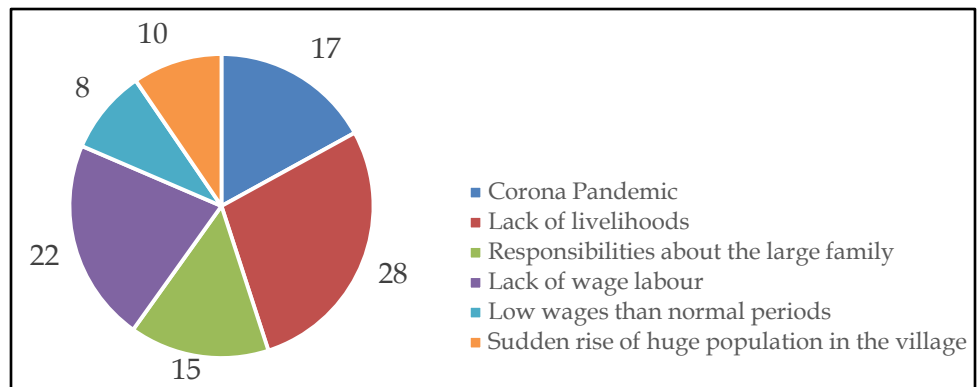
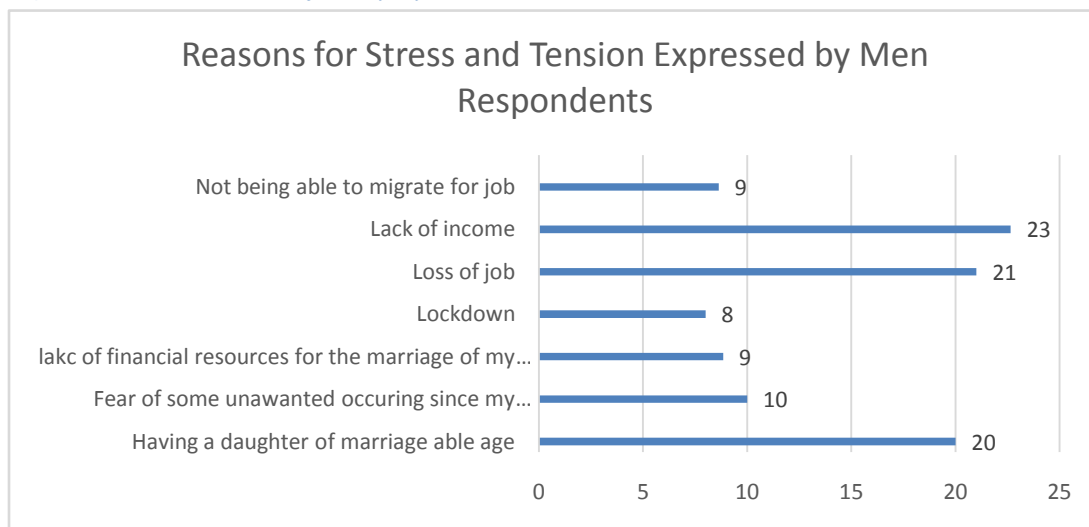


Figure 20: Reasons stated by Women for frustration & Stress (%)

Figure 21: Reasons stated by Men for frustration & Stress (%)



Entire respondents including children have stated that the instances and degrees of domestic stress and domestic violence have increased many folds as a result of various aggravated issues due to the pandemic. According to the men respondents to the study, there as on for

stress and tensions leading to domestic violence were the situation of lockdown, loss of job/wage work, lack of income, not being able to migrate for job, lack of financial resources for the marriage of daughters, fear of unwanted mishaps due to over-aged girl child remaining unmarried at home, having a daughter of marriage-able age etc.

**ii) Impact on Migrant members of families**

34% of the respondent families have reported of one or more of their family members being stuck in different locations during the lockdown. Many of the families have reported that male members of the family are stuck in other locations and obviously as a result the house remains practically a woman headed household during this pandemic period.

Figure 22: Percentage of relatives stuck out in Lockdown (%)

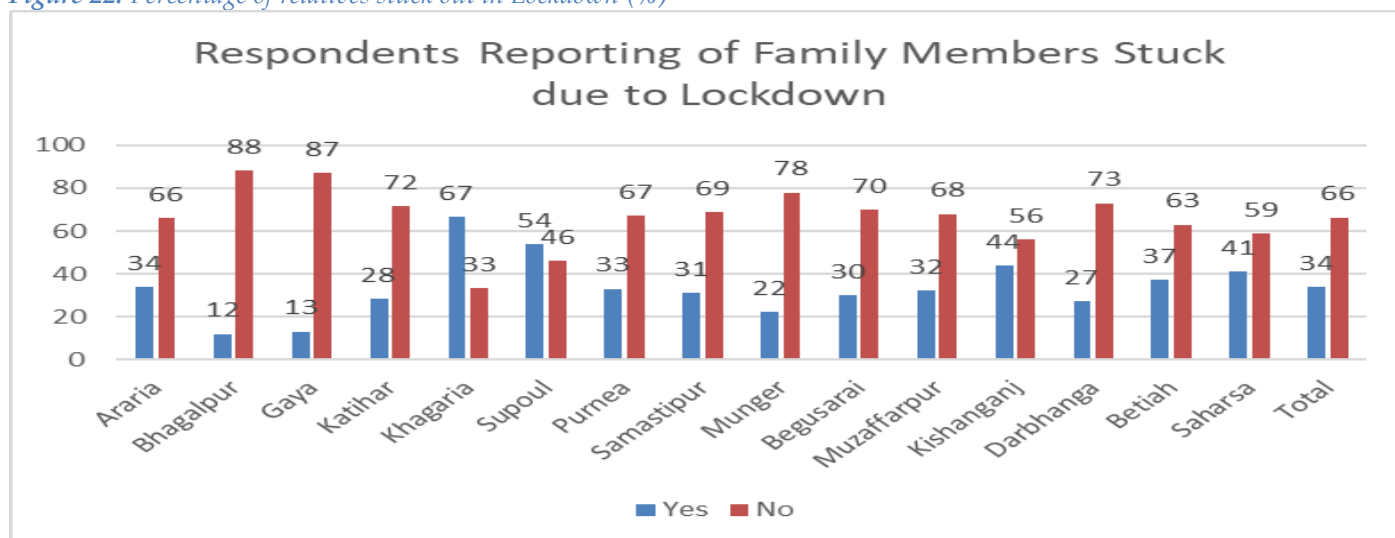
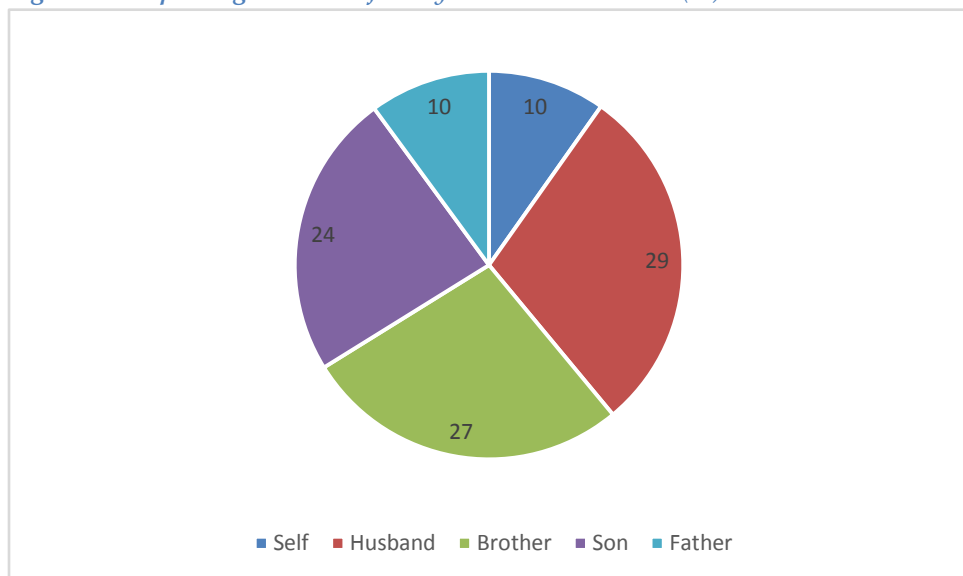


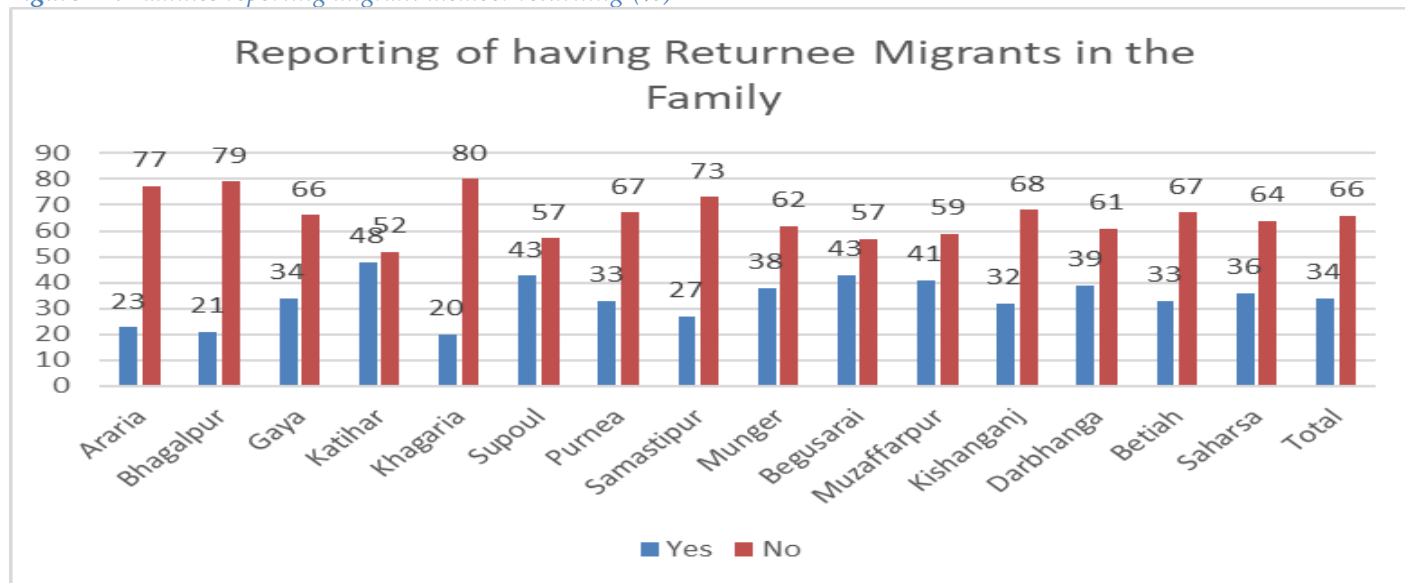
Figure 23: Reporting on which family member was stuck (%)



34% of the respondent families have stated that their family has one or more migrant labourers returning home during the pandemic period. In this reporting as well the major percentage of the returnee migrants are the male members of the family.

34% of the respondent families have stated that their family has one or more migrant labourers returning home during the pandemic period. In this reporting as well the major percentage of the returnee migrants are the male members of the family.

Figure 24: Families reporting migrant member returning (%)

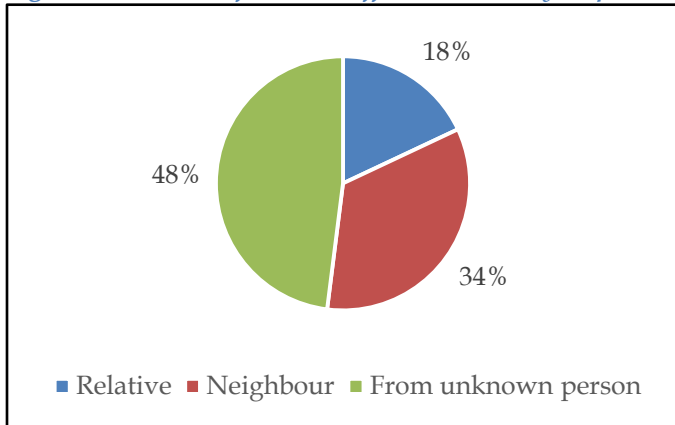


### iii) Vulnerability to Fake Marriage offers

As a result of the financial crisis at the grassroots, families have gone poorer than they used to be and for this reason, girls and young women have fallen highly vulnerable to 'Fake, Forced and Child Marriages' and resultant 'Bride Trafficking' where the agents target a highly vulnerable family having a girl child and gradually work up to getting the girl married as a child to get trafficked. In lieu of the

current acute economic crisis; families could easily fall in to the 'prosperity dreams and economic trap' advanced by the racket of 'Bride Traffickers'. The study has brought out aggravation of vulnerability to fake marriage offers in the wake of the CoVID-19 Pandemic situation.

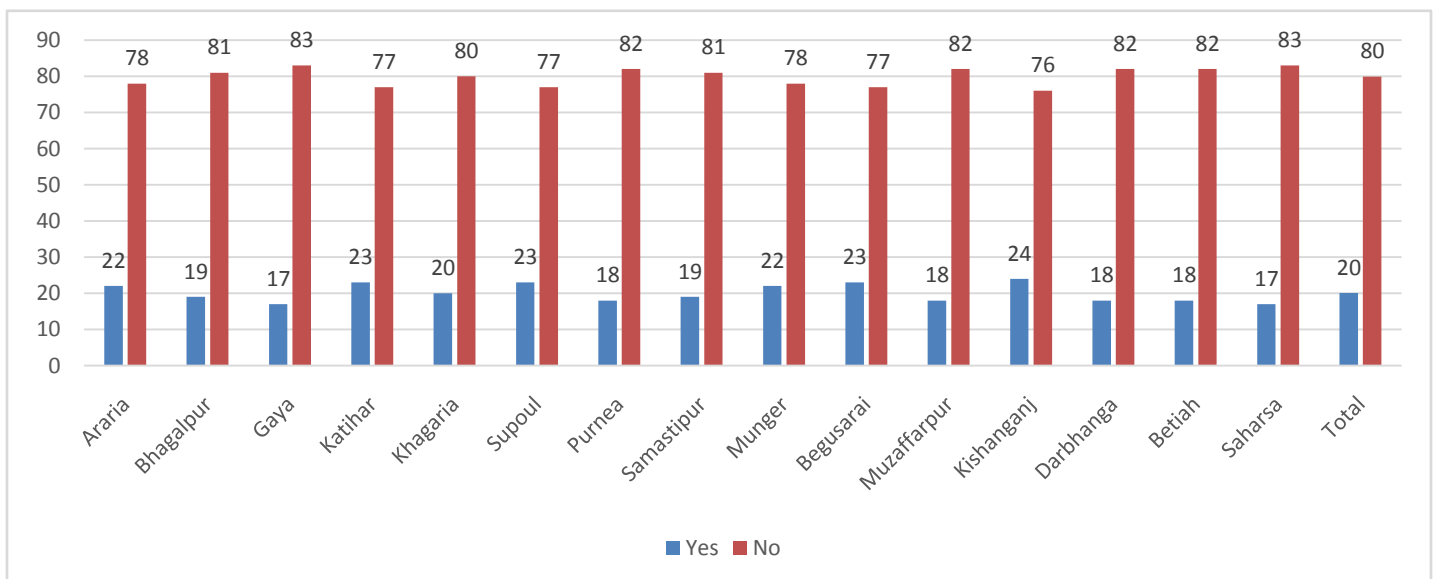
Figure 25: Sources of marital offers received by respondents for their daughters (%)



The study has tried to research into the severe and alarming situation where the acute livelihood crisis in the wake of COVID 19 Pandemic has pushed girls hailing from the poor and marginalized families to increasingly become the victims of bride trafficking under the guise of fake, forced and early marriages. 20% of the respondent families have stated that they have been receiving such marital offers during the Pandemic period. 48% of these marital offers were placed by unknown persons with 18% and 34% placed by relatives and neighbors respectively. It is

also a fact to be noticed that 23% of the marital offers received during the pandemic period came from out of the state locations.

Figure 26: Respondents receiving marital offers for their daughters



The parents state that they are afraid of unwanted mishaps if their daughters are not married off at lower ages. The profound societal norm for marriage age for a woman still remains much lower than the legal age of marriage. 34% of the mothers and 38% of the fathers who responded to the study expressed their preference of 16-18 years of age for the marriage of their daughters.

Figure 27: Preferred marriage age for girls (by Male) (%)

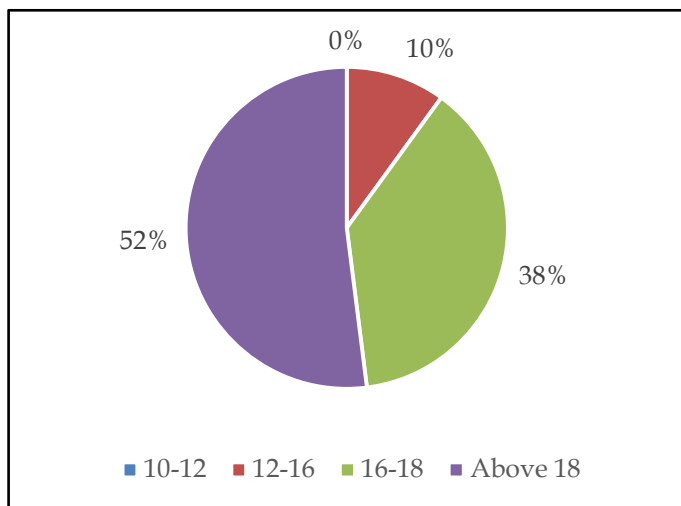
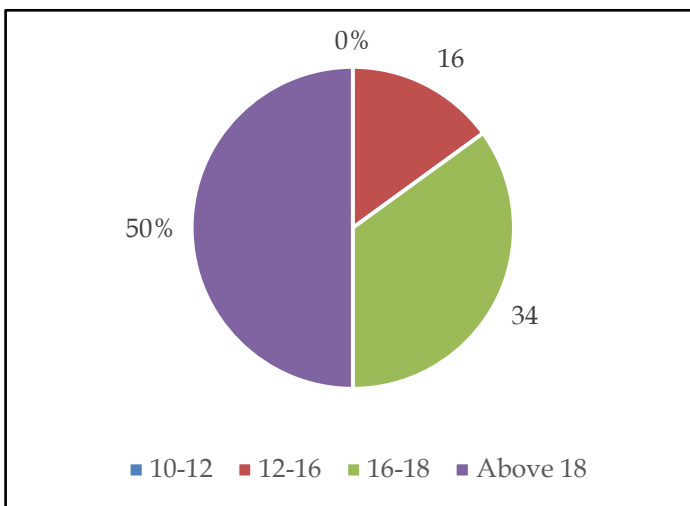


Figure 28: Preferred marriage age for girls (by Women) (%)



Though the situation and social distancing rules prohibit the conduct of any marriage ceremony or gathering, the willingness of parents to lucrative marriage offers have not reduced. 43% of the respondent families have expressed that they are willing to conduct the marriage of their daughter if a good offer is received and 52% respondents were ready to marry their daughters instantly if dowry and marriage related expenses were waived off by the grooms’ side. The situation points towards powerlessness impacting & lowering gender parity which also hikes vulnerability to fake forced and early marriages.

Figure 29: Willingness to marry off daughters if received offer during pandemic (%)

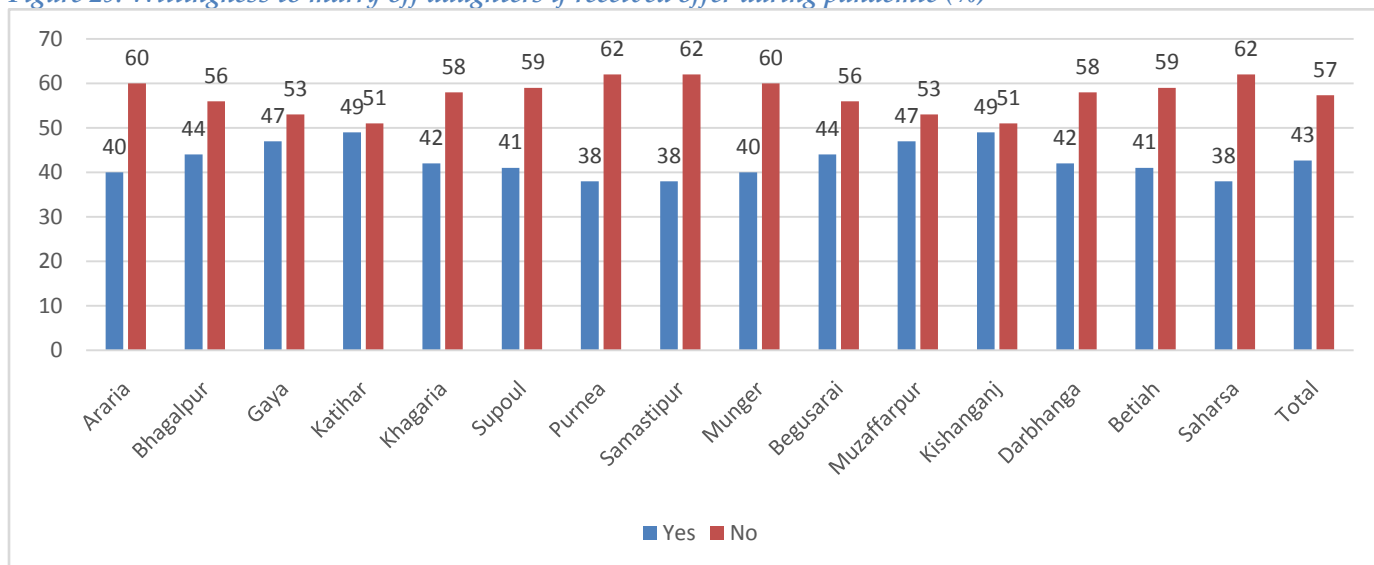
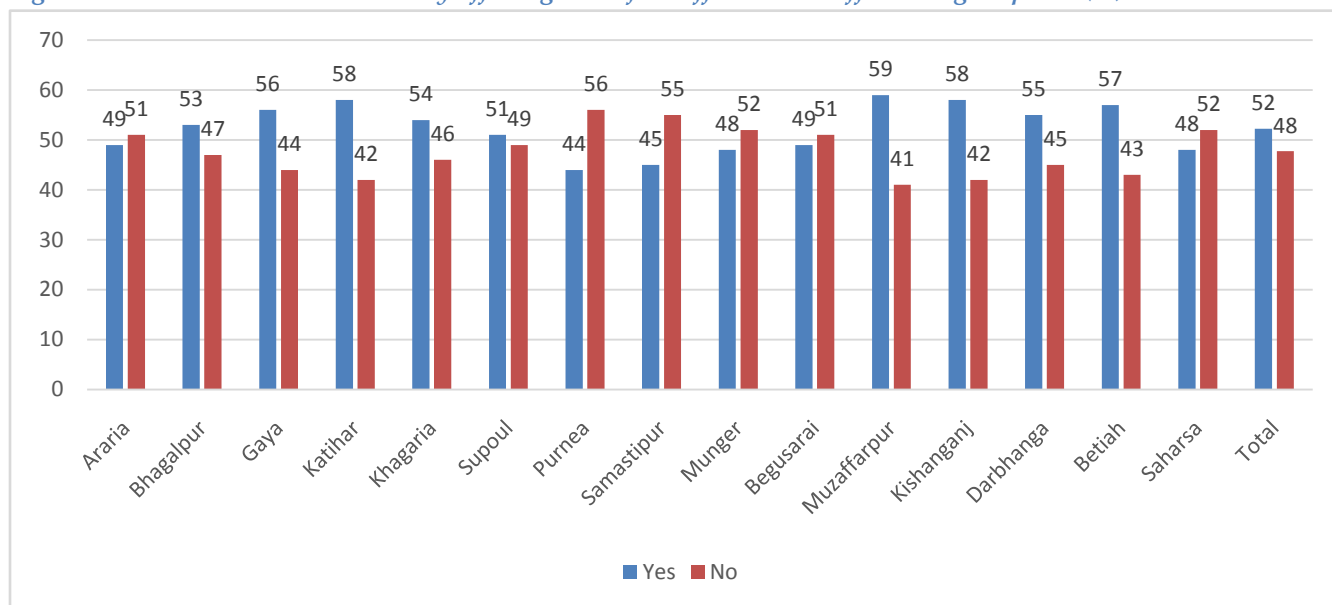




Figure 30: Parents readiness to marry off daughters if an offer waives off marriage expense (%)



On an average across the 15 districts 43% guardians stated that they were willing to marry off their daughters if they received a lucrative offer during the pandemic. Whereas 52% guardians were willing to marry off their daughters if marital expenses were waived off.

## Chapter- 4: Health and Nutrition of Children and Women

### i) Menstrual hygiene management

Women and girls hailing from the poorest families already are sufferers of poor menstrual hygiene management due to lack of resources, lack of space, lack of parental priority etc. Added to these is the increased male presence in families and villages due to the pandemic. Migrant labour families that returned from cities because of the loss of jobs and wage engagements in the wake of the Corona Virus Pandemic continue to stay back in their home villages in hope of being safe with their families and getting some wage employment in the local areas. Because of this there is additional pressure on the women members of the families and the rural society as a whole with respect to their experience of menstrual hygiene management. While discussing about specific issues faced by women and girls during the pandemic 96% of the female respondents stated they had serious issues faced with respect to menstrual hygiene management.

### ii) Situation of Pregnant and Lactating women

A number of mothers of infants stated that their husbands had migrated during their pregnancy and were not able to meet their babies after the delivery. The mothers are worried and stressed that this would impact in the future development of their infants. 87% pregnant women have stated that they became pregnant during the lockdown. 6% percentage of these pregnancies was termed by them as ‘forced conceiving’. 29% pregnant women have reported that they were afraid of their babies contracting Corona Virus in case they have to go out of the house during or after delivery and were conscious about other person getting in contact with their babies. All the respondent pregnant women had no access to nutrition and other supplies they used to receive through *anganwaris* since the *anganwaris* remained closed during the pandemic and take-home-ration was not available to them during this period.

80% women stated that their routine check-up and vaccination were happening as it used to be before.

78% lactating mothers stated that they had poor intake of nutrition resulting in lack of breast milk to feed their babies. They had to often look for cow milk and other supplements to feed their infants.

88% pregnant women respondents stated that they had more pressure of household chores even during their pregnancy due to more members being crowded in the family. The pregnant women had no rest or even space for taking rest in the mostly two-room houses they live in.

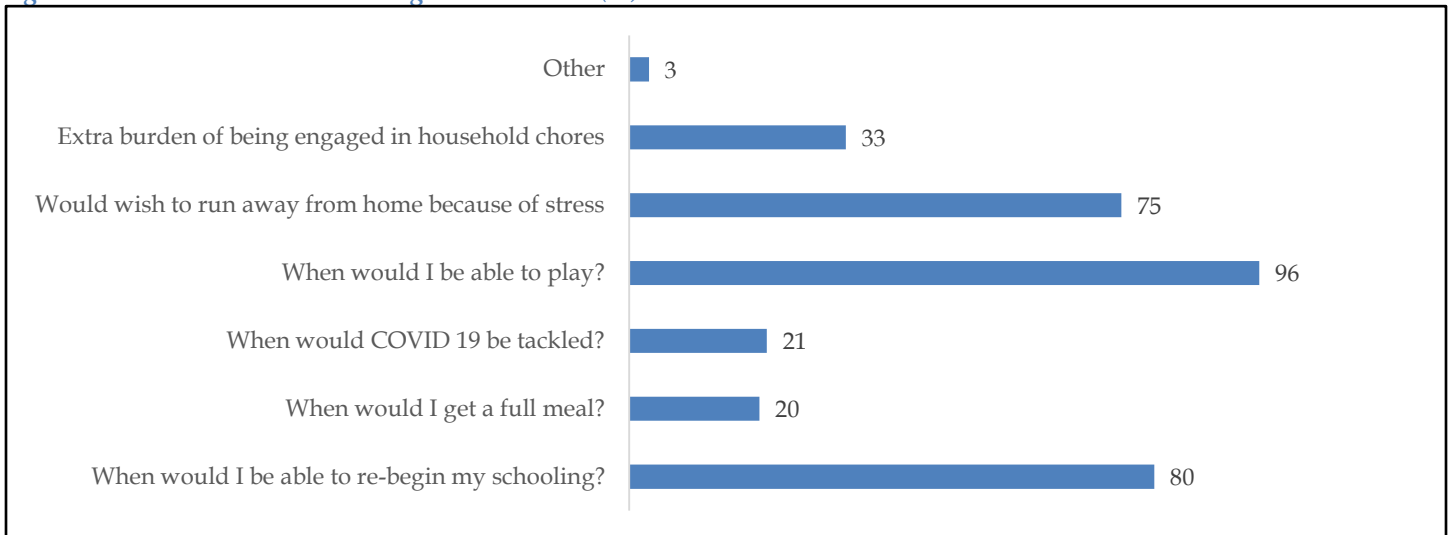
## Chapter- 5: Crisis and the Children

### i) Mobility and Recreation

The cutting-edge level agents of ‘Bride-Trafficking’ are rooted in the community and are very often a woman agent who turns out to be a close relative of the victim in most of the cases. These community-based agents act as ‘sleeper cells’ who remain unnoticed as a part of the same community. All of a sudden, she gets activated striking a bargain with the trafficking racket. Once the targeted girl is trapped off; she again remains as a ‘sleeper cell’ waiting for the next opportunity. Even if at some cases the ‘sleeper cell’ gets exposed; she gets the cover of social protection under the consideration that she is a woman and, in most cases, a close relative of the victim. It becomes so difficult for the community to believe a village woman who has been always with them to be an agent of trafficking.

75% children stated that they are experiencing stress due to not being able to meeting their friends. 80% children expressed they were worried about how to continue their studies. 96% children stated that they were not allowed to play outside the homes 33% children expressed of extra burden of household chores and had no space or opportunity to play inside the houses.

Figure 31: Children's worries during the Pandemic (%)



Recreation opportunities are nearly nil and remain not even a priority to the poorest communities highly vulnerable to human trafficking. The entry of mobile phones and later access to smart phones has opened up opportunities for affordable and easily accessible recreation media to the adults and children alike. Beyond the overall benefits to the society; the expansion of communication technology and increased access to mobile phones even in the remotest areas has also had its own negative impact on children. The access to mobile phones has been mostly such that it increased access to communication and games only.

## Chapter- 6: Major Findings and Recommendations

The changes observed in the working conditions and arrangements since the start of the pandemic necessarily varied depending on the nature of their occupation, their working status, their caring commitments, as well as the decisions made by the livelihood and opportunity providers.

The facts and findings stated here are reproduced exactly as it was expressed by the respondents during the personal interviews and discussions with them.

### What Men Responded?

- ~67% respondents stated they are compelled to shift employment to any other source of income.
- 64% of male respondents told they were unable to move for exploring new employment/livelihood opportunity with their relatives and friends due to myths & misinformation about CoVID-19.
- 88% male who were getting a monthly income Rs. 5000 and moreshifted into Rs. 1000-3000 income group.
- 67% have lost their income opportunities due to CoVID-19.
- 55% men replied they haven't had enough food-grain at home after lockdown&57% respondents are meeting their food-grains need from others' support.
- 82% men are facing challenges in agricultural works due to lack of capital support.
- Around 90% respondents have taken loan to meet the immediate need and Loan amount of 58% respondent were more than Rs. 5000.
- 45% loans are on interest which is more than Rs. 500 per month.
- 41% respondents have taken the decision of migrating to other cities for repayment of loans and 23% have started to work as agricultural labourers in others' land.
- 66% respondents are still facing difficulties to get jobs as per their skillset and 92% respondents expressed uncertainty about livelihood opportunities.

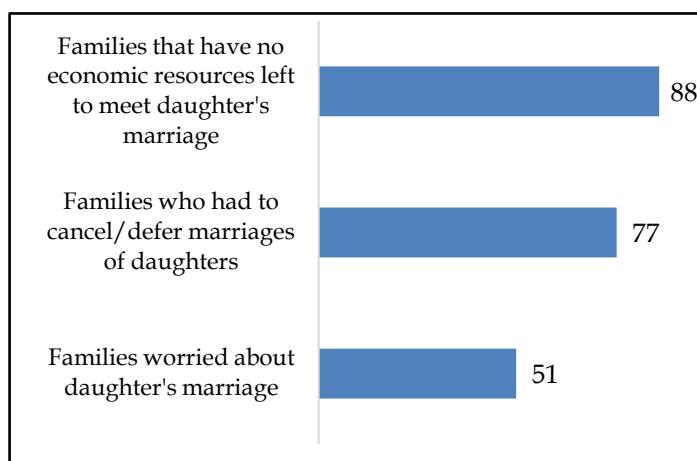


Figure 32: Dissaving Affecting Marriages of Daughters (%)

- More than 50% respondents, who is a father of a girl child, are worried about their daughter's marriage and 77% of the families which had their daughter's wedding scheduled, had to defer the same due to lose of income. 88% of the families have no savings to meet any wedding expenditure.

- 20% respondent fathers have received marriage proposal for their daughter. 48% of proposals were given by strangers and they were from outside the State.
- 52% respondent fathers are ready to marry their daughter by taking money and accepting lucrative offers from bridegroom side.

### What Women Responded?

Along with men respondents, women who were interviewed saw a decline in their household incomes since the start of the pandemic. Despite these changes in circumstances, many were able to meet their basic costs of living by cutting down on their daily expenditures. Some also mentioned about having to take a loan. While those co-habiting had other sources of income beyond their own employment, which helped them manage any losses that they faced.

- Around 96% women respondents stated that they have insufficient money to meet the household needs. 69% of them have reduced the frequency of their own personal food intake to manage their expenditures.
- 98% women noticed deterioration in economic conditions of their households due to loss of employment and increase in daily expenditure due to presence of male members in daytime.
- Women respondents described their difficulties during the lockdown period and faced multiple issues towards living a dignified life.
  - o 24% women faced trauma due to being locked indoors and 45% have witnessed domestic violence during the period.
  - o 10% of women respondents replied that they have faced issues in usage of toilets and 12% replied that they been forced to live in veil.
- 27% women faced menstruation related issues and 6% are of the witness of unplanned pregnancy. 12% have faced other issues about which they were not ready to open up.
- Due to absence of proper space in house, 87% women faced difficulties in their living area.
- Of the women who faced domestic violence, 9% women were a victim of sexual assault, 75% were abused verbally and 39% were beaten up by family members. More than 4% women have been sexually assaulted, beaten up and abused severely.
- Around 20% women replied that CoVID-19 pandemic impacted them more than male members of their family and claimed that cases of abuse and domestic violence had increased.
- Reason for frustration and stress were stated by the women in the following percentages of respondents 28% stated lack of livelihoods, 22% stating lack of wage labour, 17% stating the Corona Pandemic itself, 15% having a large families' responsibilities, 10% sudden crowding of the village and 8% low wages than normal periods.
- 78% women were worried about their girl child and getting them marriage at right age. 79% women paid concern towards possibilities of mishaps with their daughter.

### What Children experienced?

CoVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on children. Pandemic and the associated lockdown affected children enrolled in elementary and secondary school education, & children who were undergoing pre-school education in Anganwadi centers. Even after the State’s support of e-learning & online education, a large number of children in rural and remote Bihar faced difficulties in gaining access to the same.

Another impact has been on emotional well-being of children as their normal routine was disrupted with safety protocols and school closures. Signs of anxiety and stress were visible amongst different age group of children due to predominance of online classes, limited access to mobile phones and internet connectivity, lack of physical mobility, peer pressure and family situations.

- 69% were regular Primary and Middle school-going children but 24% of them were unable to learn at home due to illiterate parent and nobody was at home to teach them (82%), parents were not caring much about their child’s academics (53%), and were unable to understand course content (16%).
- 51% girl children were engaged to help in household chores.
- Only 1% school going children have access to smart phones.
- 68% school going children replied that they are hopeful that school will resume again.
- 45% children replied that they are feeling distressed.
- 20% school going children desired sufficient meal and 75% showed willingness to run away from home due to CoVID - 19 restrictions.
- 78% children replied they have a fear of going outside their home. This fear is mainly due to arrival of many strangers in village (24%) and other male members of family (6%).
- 68% children replied that they have suffered a reduction in meal size.
- 44% children replied they have been scolded by their elder family members.

### Circumstance narrated by Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers

- 14% pregnant women replied that they were in deep distress because their husband was residing out of State.
- 87% women replied that they became pregnant during the lock down period out of which 6% were forced conceiving.
- 29% pregnant women replied that they were concerned about the health of their embryo.
- 86% pregnant women replied that they missed their nutritious supplement and THR [take home ration] from *Anganwadi* Centres.
- 80% pregnant women replied that they have medical test and check-up scheduled.
- 78% lactating mothers were unable to feed own milk to their child due to poor in-take of nutrition

- 47% lactating mother replied that they were in fear about how to protect their child from CoVID-19 infection.
- 62% lactating mother replied that they are worried about the nutrition of their child.

## Recommendations

- Though vulnerability to human trafficking is a serious issue faced by women and girls of the poorest communities across Bihar State; institutions or organizations engaged in supporting reintegration, recovery and restitution are very much limited to certain identified pockets alone. There is need of expanding the institutional capacities and facilities across the state as well as roll out capacity development interventions with the goal of creating and strengthening extended support institutions within the reach of every vulnerable women/girl in any geographies within the state.
- The root cause of families getting into the trap of the trafficking rackets is extreme poverty and lack of awareness and livelihood opportunities in the poorest geographies. Trafficked women and girls are vulnerable to multiple exploitation in destinations and face further marginalization upon return. Without targeted, holistic interventions, survivors are vulnerable to re-trafficking and further severe exploitation. Area specific livelihood planning with the trafficking survivors need to be conducted and implemented with utmost priority.
- Government, development agencies, civil society organizations and any other possible stakeholders should come together to design and enact short-term assistance resources (medical, psycho-social counseling, legal aid, alternative dispute mechanisms, etc.) to be offered in concert with long-term life and technical skills training and creation of sustainable employment options.
- Local organizations acting upon preventive, curative and social rehabilitation interventions targeting vulnerable and survivors or human trafficking have to be aligned to an extensive skilling and job placement plan coordinated and monitored jointly by the government and the civil society specifically targeting the highly vulnerable and survivors. Investing in long-term efforts to increase skills at source may contribute to higher skilled and lower-risk economic engagement.
- In the absence of focused and geography wise segregated skilling plan; skill-training usually imparted would not enhance employability and ultimately fail to serve the most vulnerable populations. Persons stricken with extreme poverty are also prone to be excluded or receive subpar training that does not lead to jobs. Scalable, sustainable skilling if made possible can reduce vulnerability to a great extent.

### ***How State and Civil Society could mitigate the Impact of COVID-19 on the Low-Income Households in the Bihar: The Role of Social Protection***

- It is vital to improve end-to-end awareness and support, from pre-decision through return. Awareness generation interventions to be more effective in stopping human trafficking especially bride-trafficking in the guise of fake, forced or early marriages; awareness programmes need to commence before potential victims’ guardians have fallen prey to lucrative offers from the trafficking rackets. It would mean that the reach of the awareness programmes needs to extend to cover the entire steps and processes involved in any form of human trafficking.
- Awareness programmes should not remain just stand-alone activities. They have to be clubbed with and aligned to more effective programmes deeply rooted within the community. For example, community sensitization programs can intervene before ill-informed mistakes are made; if clubbed with Peer support groups and networks they can also help fill the gaps where authorities and civil society organizations are falling short or where survivors and vulnerable are isolated; and digital awareness tools have the potential to provide high-quality, end-to-end awareness services in a cost-effective manner.
- The Bihar Marriage Registration Rules 2006 must be made effective and every Mukhiya of Gram Panchayat and Ward Councilor of Urban Local Bodies sensitized for compulsory marriage registration.
- Let the COVID-19 be a ‘RESET’ button of life cycle and start over things as a **NEW BEGINNING**.



## **Chapter- 7: Implementation Framework**

### **Organization Linkages**

Though there are various laws for prevention of human trafficking; working with the vulnerable communities, empowering the victims, socially rehabilitating the victims, ensuring the socio-economic development of the victims, active transformative leadership by the victims, raising this issue through networking, advocacy and liaison initiatives at various platforms to draw attention of various multiple stakeholders are highly vital. A committed and capacitated network of civil society organizations aligned and equipped to act upon human trafficking with special focus on trafficking of girls/women is obviously the need of the hour. There are lot of grassroots organizations which are doing dedicated and replicable work in this regard. But their committed efforts are in limited geographies and in isolation. The situation arising out of COVID 19 Pandemic calls for immediately synergizing and harnessing these isolated efforts into a coordinated action. Bhoomika Vihar is all set and ready to take up the lead role in this direction in collaboration with the government and in cooperation with any developmental, civil society or private stakeholders.

In order to successfully act upon stopping human trafficking in general and trafficking of women and girls in particular; the local Panchayats have to become a prominent stakeholder in the entire efforts. Migration of individuals, families, the purpose, the location and all necessary detail have to be made mandatory to be documented with the Gram Panchayats. Since the Gram Panchayat members would personally know the families within their wards; child labour, fake offers and possibility of trafficking could be easily identified by them and take immediate action to stop the occurrence of such trafficking. Bhoomika Vihar with its wide experience in various successful strategies for stopping human trafficking and the reach of the member organizations of CACT could be tangible strengths to work up in this direction.

### **Strengthening existing frameworks**

Another important role Gram Panchayats need to play is in the realm of Marriage Registrations. Marriage registration provisions should be made at the Panchayat level and it has to be made mandatory to register every marriage with the respective Gram Panchayat. Because of the proximity the ward members and the Mukhiya usually have with the families residing within his/her Gram Panchayat; early marriages could be addressed before it could take place. Once a marriage takes place; it suddenly assumes a cultural sanctity and society starts considering it to be irreversible though it was an under-age marriage. If Gram Panchayats could be empowered to monitor marriages through Panchayat level mandatory registration; early marriages and bride-trafficking via that route could be easily addressed.

## Societal Awareness & togetherness

There is evident need for initiating awareness programmes and campaigns aiming at changing the mindset of the society around their notions about marriages. The mindset that blindly holds marriage irreversible should change. The communities highly vulnerable to fake forced and early marriages as well as the general society around them need to be sensitized on the issue of human trafficking under the guise of early marriages. Once such marriage has taken place; the society should show the sensitivity and responsibility to stand with the victim. The society should become supportive to legally deal with dissolution of the marriage and facilitate rebuilding the devastated life of the victim. Such a transformation in the society would call for focused awareness programmes using all possible means including folk, mass-media and so on. With the collaboration of the government and with the support of other relevant stakeholders Bhoomika Vihar and CACT are looking forward to any possible steps towards this end.

A girl child is considered a ‘burden’ to the family which the family is looking to get rid of at the earliest possible. Marriage of a girl child is considered the means to do away with the responsibility of the parents. Due to this rush for freeing themselves from their responsibility often pushes our daughters to extreme miseries and exploitation. We need to come up with focused and strategic programmes whereby the parents could feel and realize their continued responsibilities for their daughters. The ease of mind achieved by shifting the responsibility of a girl child passed on through marriage should change and responsibility should be further felt by the parents. Daughters in comparison to their male counterparts have very little visibility and recognition in the community. Married women become even more invisible and very often enter into a life of lost identity. In order to get visibility to the severe issues and social evils to which women and girls are highly vulnerable, married women in our society should attain more respect and recognition. This is possible only through a great transformation of our communities realizing in its real essence the sufferings of women and girls due to lack of societal sensitivity and prevalent patriarchal norms. For example, ‘Bride-Trafficking is enacted not only with the intention of exploiting the girl. Very often elder men showing off as eligible grooms trap teen aged girls since they could serve as cheap and safe child labour coupled with the opportunity for exploitation.

*A working male child gets registered as child labour but a ‘Working Child-Bride’ is not considered as child labour.*

*The society gives silent acceptance to the exploitation and the loads of work she does for the family as she is ‘married’. Society would be able to address such issues only if the society becomes willing to recognize and respect married women as well as distinguish between a ‘real marriage’ and ‘bride-trafficking’.*

**“Covid-19: A New Beginning: Assessment of Impact on Marginalized Women of Bihar”**

- C.A.C.T. Bihar and Bhoomika Vihar

*Bhoomika Vihar is a community-based grass root organization actively working in Bihar State, Country India, for the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of marginalized section; adolescent girls. Bhoomika Vihar was formally registered in 1996 under the Societies Registration Act, 1860; to facilitate value added Community Based Sustainable Approaches to elevate voice of girls/ children, in order to enable them to reach their full potentials.*

*Bhoomika Vihar is a woman headed organization. Most of the leadership positions are held by girls/women. Victims, survivors and vulnerable girls/women of Bride trafficking are performing actively in their leadership positions bringing change especially for breaking the cycle of victimization for them and for other girls. We especially are working with marginalized section vulnerable girls as they are the 1<sup>st</sup> Generation Learners. We lead with the exhortation “Replace Broom with Books and Pens.... Change Will Take Place.” Marginalized section vulnerable girls who were supposed to be targeted for Bride trafficking are being engaged in pursuing Graduation and are transforming their lives as 1<sup>st</sup> Generation Graduates.*

*By participating in Multi- dimensional Constructive activities, girl children exercise their rights to Participation. Traditionally accepted mute learners' girls are defending and demanding their rights as “Rights Advocates.” Bhoomika Vihar working model contributes in embodying a roadmap to achieve SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.*

**We believe**– *The girls are our present and future so there is need to involve them with the process of understanding, decision-making, responsibility and ownership.*

*Bhoomika Vihar has actively been contributing its role as Regional Secretariat of C.A.C.T {Campaign against child trafficking}. Right from the conceptualization of the idea generation, through the process and till culmination, the dedicated involvement of CACT members sustained. The tools of data collection and the framework for analysis of the data emerged through dedicated team-work among the teams of grassroots organizations working as a committed network namely 'Campaign Against Child Trafficking' (CACT) all over Bihar State on the issue of Human Trafficking especially trafficking of women, girls and children in particular. 'Campaign Against Child Trafficking' (CACT) emerged through the efforts of a number of committed organizations under the leadership and facilitation of Bhoomika Vihar and have in course of time has become a trusted network of CBOs and CSOs acting upon curbing human trafficking especially child trafficking and socially rehabilitating the victims.*

***Ideas Influence Action,  
Unless and Until the Old Conservative Ideas Are Replaced,  
The Problems Can't Be Solved.  
The Solution of Any Social Problem Lies in the Society itself  
Let's Ponder Over A New Beginning***