
Early Marriage: A Jharkhand Mobile Vaani Campaign

August-September 2013



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Gram Vaani Community Media Pvt. Ltd.

1. Introduction

Jharkhand Mobile Vaani (JMV) has since the last one year emerged as a common platform for the people of Jharkhand to express their views, share their experiences and address their queries/questions/doubts on a myriad of issues they encounter on a day to day basis in their lives. In this capacity the callers and listeners of JMV have actively taken up issues pertaining to gaps in the service delivery systems of various government schemes, lack of awareness on social issues, better understanding of agricultural practices and others issues.

Jharkhand is extensively plagued by the problem of early marriage, also known as early marriage, where women younger than 18 years and men younger than 21 years are married. National Family Health Survey – 3 shows that the average age of marriage in Jharkhand is a little over 16 years, as compared to pan Indian average of 17 years. JMR took this up as a campaign topic in partnership with Breakthrough to generate awareness among people about the perils of getting children married at a very early age. The campaign ran on JMR from 29th August to 28th September 2013.

Statistics related to the campaign

Duration – 29th August – 28th September (1 month)

Number of calls – 97,805

Number of callers – 15,355

Number of items published on this issue – 435

Number of content contributors – 223

Districts in Jharkhand from where callers participated on JMV – Dhanbad, Bokaro, Giridih, Dumka, Hazaribagh, Deoghar, Ranchi, Latehar, East Singhbhum, Koderma, Chatra, Godda, Jamtara, Garhwa, Pakur, Ramgarh and West Singhbhum

Other states from where callers participated on JMV – Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi

This campaign saw immense participation from the grassroots communities in Jharkhand. Close to 98,000 calls were received from 15,000 callers to hear the comments on the Early Marriage campaign on JMV. From the 223 content contributors that recorded their comments on this issue, around 81 percent were men and 19 percent were women. Given the sensitivity of the topic and the patriarchal structures in play in Jharkhand, 19 percent participation from women in content contribution means a lot. This campaign saw content contributions from 17 districts of Jharkhand namely Dhanbad, Bokaro, Giridih, Dumka, Hazaribagh, Deoghar, Ranchi, Latehar, East Singhbhum, Koderma, Chatra, Godda, Jamtara, Garhwa, Pakur, Ramgarh and West Singhbhum. A few content contributors also called from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi to register their opinion on this issue on JMV.

Major objectives of the campaign were:

- To generate awareness among people regarding the hazards of early marriage, especially for the girl child
- To solicit people’s responses for the reasons of early marriage in their community
- To elicit case studies of early marriage from the community and generate a discussion on the issue of early marriage and its implication on the lives of the girl child
- To elicit the recommendations from the people to put an end to the malpractice of early marriage

2. Campaign process

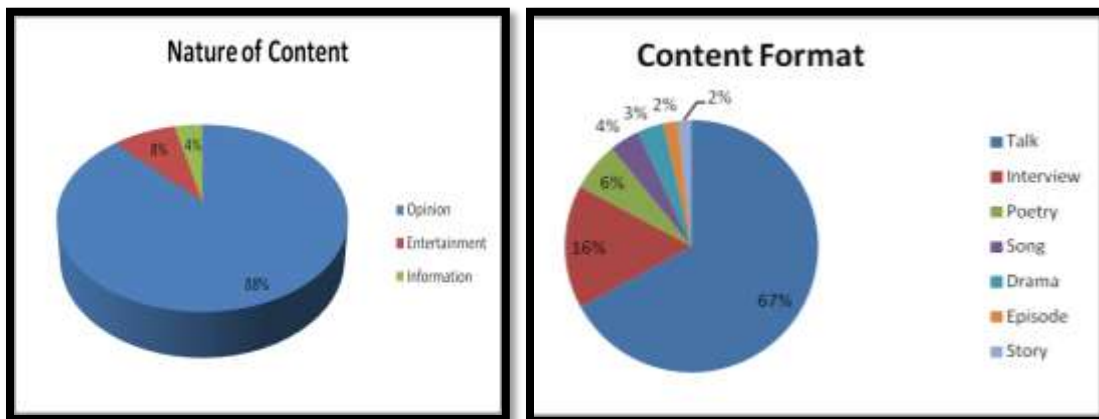
For generating discussion on the issue of early marriage, content was solicited from the people by preparing promos on the different aspects of this issue. Based on the responses received from the people, a short compilation of items (referred to as ‘episode’) was presented during the special one hour meant for airing content related to this campaign, twice a week. At all other times, the content on this issue was aired as and when received on JMV. Therefore, eight episodes were produced for the four weeks this campaign was active on JMV. Additionally, for the first four episodes quizzes were done to test the recall and recap of the listeners and for the last four episodes an in-house radio drama was created by the JMV (Gram Vaani) content team on the issue of Early Marriage named “Chhutki ki Kahaani”.

Episode Number	Episode Content
1.	Introduction to the issue of Early Marriage – Information about Early marriage and the Child Marriage Prohibition Act (2006)
2.	Reasons for Early Marriage
3.	Implications of Early Marriage on the lives of girls
4.	Implications on the lives of the people who were married early – Case Studies
5.	Case studies, experiences and opinions of people on Early Marriage and Radio Drama “Chhutki ki Kahaani” first episode where Chhutki gets married at the tender age of 14 years.

6.	People’s interviews and opinions on Early Marriage and “Chhutki ki Kahaani” episode 2 where Chhutki has to adjust with her in-laws and take up the responsibilities of being a dutiful daughter in law
7.	Dramas recorded by the community people on the issue of Early Marriage
8.	People’s recommendations to stop Early Marriage and the next episode of “Chhutki ki Kahaani” where she is forced to do household work and not allowed to play or study.

As a response to these promos, the content on JMV came in the form of opinions, information and entertainment. The people from the community also collected case studies and interviews of the people during the course of this campaign. The content contributors and quiz winners were acknowledged at the end of each episode for their participation in this campaign.

Maximum number of people (88 percent of the content contributors) left opinionated content such as their views on the reasons behind early marriage, its implications and recommendations for eradication, followed by 8 percent people leaving content that was entertaining in nature such as poetry, drama, songs, stories about the issue, followed by 4 percent content contributors leaving information about the government provisions for stopping Early Marriage.

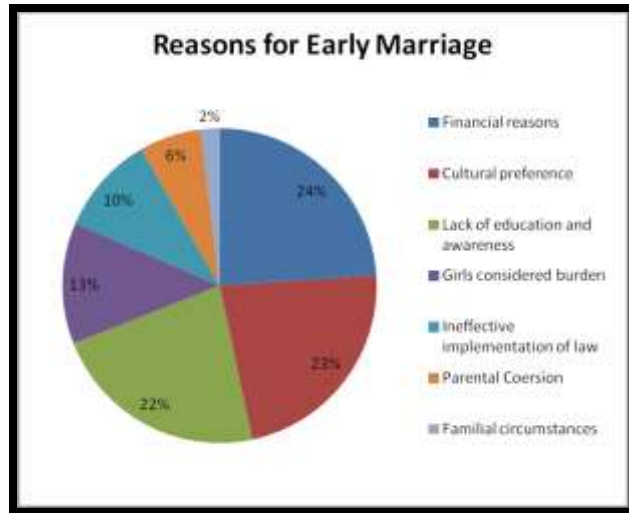


Further, a variety of content formats were received from the community that included talk, interview, poetry, song, drama, story and a compilation of all these formats – an episode was prepared out of them. However, 67 percent of the content contributions followed the ‘talk’ format, followed by 16 percent interviews, six percent poetry and four percent songs. Three percent dramas and two percent stories were contributed for this campaign. The episodic format utilized the content from all these formats with a narration and formed two percent of the total content format.

3. Community Feedback and Major Findings

1. Reasons for Early Marriage – Most of the people held financial reasons of the family such as poverty, unemployment, landlessness responsible for getting their children married at an early age. Elaborating on this, 24 percent people emphasized that since the parents have to pay huge sums in dowry for their girl child, and they are very poor often without a constant source of employment, they prefer to get her married when she is young than later for the fear of the ever-rising dowry prices.

Further, 23 percent people reported that early marriage typically happens because of cultural preferences. The people living in villages strictly follow orthodox religious rituals and the pressure created by the society forces the parents of young children to marry them off. As many as 22 percent people felt that the parents are not aware of the grave dangers of getting their child, especially the girl child married at an early age and hence get them married without a conscious thought.



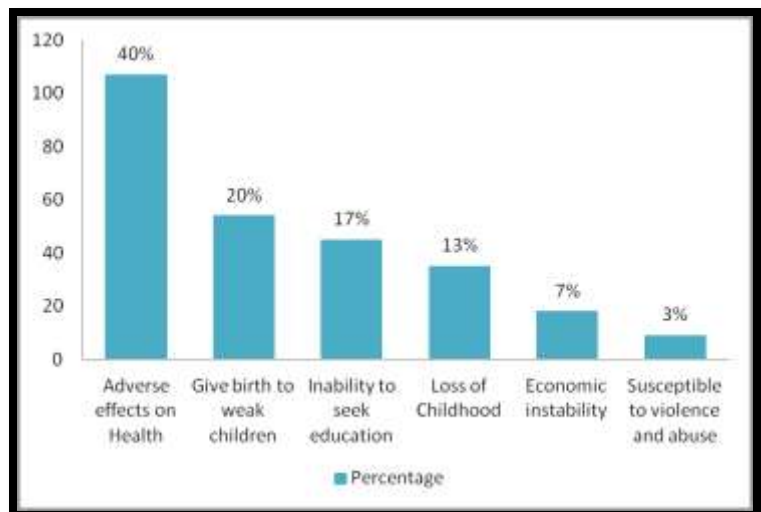
Additionally, 13 percent people felt that the parents and guardians of a girl child stress of her early marriage because they feel that she is a burden on the family whom they have to get married for her own safety. Elaborating on this people said that the society has always been unsafe for women, more so in today's time when love affairs, sex, rapes, abuse are so common. In spite of the Child Marriage Prohibition Act (1926, 2006) being in place, ten percent people felt that it is not being effectively implemented which encourages more people to get their children married without any legal action against them. Six percent people reported that the parents force their children to get married at an early age and the children lack the autonomy to refuse. Giving the families a benefit of doubt, two percent people felt that not every family gets their children married for the same reasons, there are some exceptional families that have to get their girls or boys married at a very early age due to some compulsion.

Landlessness and lack of space lead to Early Marriage

Vipul Hazari from Baghmara, Dhanbad, talks about tribals living in Bhuiyya Tola, where the people marry their children early because of the lack of space in their dwellings. According to the people, since they live in very small houses, the only solution is to marry their kids at a young age so that they can have enough space to live. In case of boys, they force them to migrate out their house so that they can earn some money and get their own space to live. Vipul Hazari, requests the Government to look into the matter and prepare policies that can help resolve the space issues of the tribals further, eradicating early marriage.

<http://voice.gramvaani.org/vapp/mnews/10/show/detail/63287/>

2. Implication of Early Marriage on Girls – As many as 40 percent people reported of adverse health effects on girls due to early marriage such as physical and mental weakness, early pregnancy leading to disability and/or death of the mother. Further, 20 percent people were of the opinion that girls married early give birth to weaker children with low birth weight, often leading to high rates of infant mortality, malnourished children or children with mental disabilities who have to live with the condition for no fault of theirs. Adding to this, 17 percent people felt that early marriage reduces girls' ability to seek education. 13 percent people felt that early marriage snatches the childhood of girls as they have to behave as a responsible daughter in law of the family thereby leading to severe depression due to adjustment issues. As marriage involves starting a family by the two individuals, it also entails that they have to sustain themselves economically. On this issue, seven percent stated that early marriage brings economic instability leaving women in a very vulnerable position in the marriage. Moreover, three percent people felt that women's vulnerable position is often exploited by her in laws and husband to abuse her and incite domestic violence.

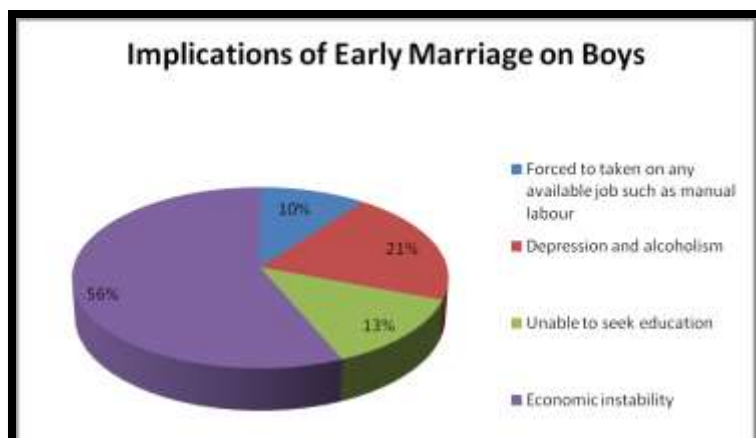


Early Marriage leads to early pregnancy and childbirth, thereby increasing the rates of maternal and infant mortality

Bipin Bihari Singh from Latehar, Manika, recounts the story of a child bride from Vishnubandh, who was married off when she was only 11. In the year 2011 she became pregnant and in 2012, she was taken to the nearby by health care centre which referred it to the hospital due to her serious condition. The doctors at the hospital performed an operation after which first the child died and after some time the mother also died. He urges the people who believe in child marriages to not to sacrifice their daughters and children as they are the one who are at loss. Instead make them an asset which can help in the progress of the society as whole.

<http://voice.gramvaani.org/vapp/mnews/10/show/detail/62164/>

3. Implication of Early Marriage on Boys – A few people also spared their thought on the implications of early marriage on boys. Among the comments left, people felt that the boys too don't have the autonomy to go against their family to say no to early marriage, hence 56 percent people felt that early marriage suddenly adds a lot of economic pressures on the boys as their parents ask them not to depend on them and be on their own. A lot of anecdotes and testimonies from the recordings tell that since the girls get pregnant at a very early age and suffer from a lot of health complications, their husbands have to shell out money for their treatment and that too adds to their economic instability, further pushing them into cycles of poverty. Around 13 percent people commented that like girls, the boys are also unable to continue with their education as they have to start working to support their families after marrying. Consequently, they are not very qualified to get good jobs and in the event of jobs being unavailable in Jharkhand, they have to make do with whatever is offered to them. Often, they have to work as daily wage manual labourers to support their families, as reported by ten percent people. 21 percent people felt that this leads to depression, paving way for alcoholism and substance abuse.



Young men are unable to realize the responsibility that comes with marriage; end up becoming depressed and alcoholic

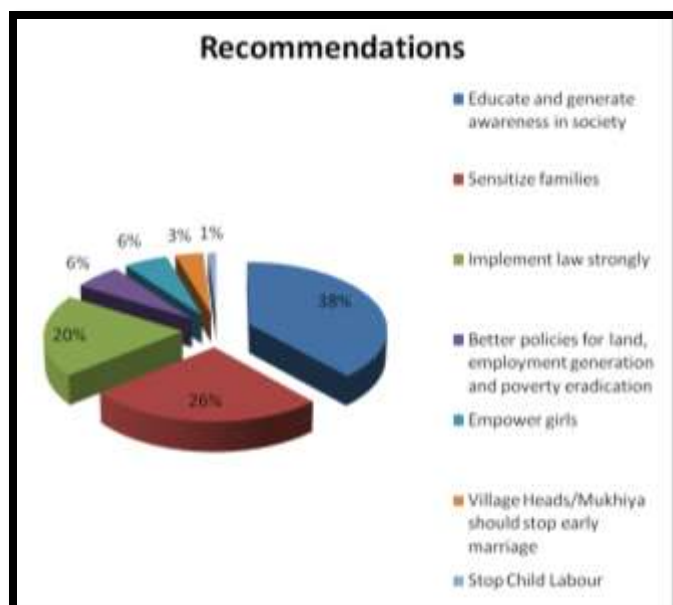
Subhrish Pathan from Chandrapura Bokaro, gives his opinion on how child marriage can destroy a person's life. He says that in his village, people don't think before getting their sons married at an early age instead of being married at the legal age. According to him, since the couple comes under a teenage category, the groom doesn't realize the responsibility that comes with the marriage. On top of that, the wife is also pressurized to bear children at an early age or if she is not able to then they are forced to go to the hospital all of which lead to a financial distress leading to the husband going in depression and finally leading to alcoholism. Thus child marriages destroy lives rather than making them better.

<http://voice.gramvaani.org/vapp/mnews/10/show/detail/62050/>

4. Recommendations

In light Among the recommendations received from the people participating in this campaign –

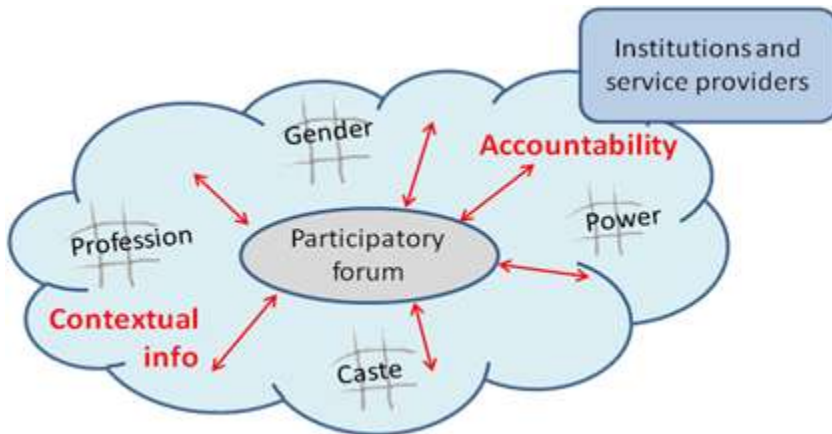
- ❖ 38 percent people felt that the society needs to be made aware and educated about the negative implications of early marriage and to move away from the malpractice of taking dowry.
- ❖ Further, 26 percent people were of the opinion that the families of the children must be sensitized to not consider their girls as burden and for bringing about a cultural change by stopping the culture of early marriage.
- ❖ While 20 percent people pushed for stronger implementation of law, six percent people voiced their opinion for better policies for land, employment generation and poverty eradication for putting an end to this malpractice.
- ❖ Six percent people asked for the girls to be empowered.



- ❖ Three percent people went ahead to say that the village heads/mukhiya should play a crucial role in taking the responsibility for stopping all the early marriages that happen in their village.
- ❖ One percent people commented that those children who start earning as child labours are married off; therefore an effort to stop child labour is a necessary precursor for putting an end to early marriages.

5. Theory of change: Bringing impact through community media

The figure below captures our theory of change of using participatory communication to enhance two community level dynamics, that is, access to **contextual information**, and sustained **accountability loops**, which leads to social change.



Jharkhand Mobile Vaani aims to enable just these information and accountability loops

We know that rural communities are segmented based on caste and power dynamics, with some segments being more aware than others, and able to avail more services than others. This becomes a vicious cycle that we claim can be broken through equitable access to community media forums. These forums allow communities to share information which helps them learn from each other by hearing stories in their own context, and thus improve awareness of their rights and entitlements significantly more than traditional forms of externally originated broadcast communication. This increased awareness helps create demand for services, which is transparently shared on the same forum and improves accountability by allowing communities to cite deficiencies and gaps in service delivery. This also helps generate critical data on service delivery that can be used by policy makers to understand problems and arrive at data-driven objective solutions.

6. About Gram Vaani

Gram Vaani [meaning 'voice of the village'] is a social technology company based in Delhi. Earlier incubated at IIT-Delhi, we started in 2009 with the intent of reversing the flow of information, that is, to make it bottom-up instead of top-down. Using simple technologies and social context to design tools, we have been able to impact communities in significant ways - more than 2 million users in over 15 Indian States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Namibia and South Africa. More interesting than this are the outcomes of what we have done: Thirty rural radio stations able to manage and share content over mobiles and the web, corrupt ration shop officials in Jharkhand arrested due to citizen complaints, Women Sarpanches in Uttar Pradesh sharing learnings and opinions, citizen monitoring of waste management in Delhi. Our work has won several awards:

- International Knight News Challenge, 2008
- National Level Manthan Award for technology for development, 2009
- Economic Times Powers of Ideas, 2010
- Profiled in the top-10 innovative companies of India by Fast Company, 2011
- mBillionth Award in the news and journalism category, 2012
- Canada Rising Stars in Health award, 2012
- Finalist in Ashoka Changemakers 2012 and Vodafone Mobiles for Good 2012 contests
- mBillionth Award in the social inclusion category, 2013

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