

Statistical Bulletin on Incidence of Child Marriage in South India

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Introduction

Child marriage among girls is defined as any formal marriage or informal union under the age of 18 years. Although child marriage is a global phenomenon, South Asia is known as the home of child brides across the globe (285 million or 44%), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (115 million or 18%) (Paul 2020).¹ There exist disparities in the prevalence of child marriage along rural-urban, socio-religious and economic axes. However, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) targets to eradicate the practice of child marriage by 2030 (UNICEF 2018).²

Child marriage is a violation of fundamental human rights. Despite international and national legal commitments, child marriages take place due to the improper implementation of policies and laws on the ground and predominance of social customs and beliefs. Legal framework in India stipulates 18 years as the minimum age for marriage among females. Still, the practice of child marriage is rampant with around one-quarter (23.3%) of the women aged 20-24 reporting that they were married before the age of 18 (National Family Health Survey – NFHS – 5 - 2019-21).³ This was, however, an improvement from the previous round of NFHS-4 (2015-16), wherein the incidence of child marriage among the same cohort of women stood at 26.8%. In this context, we present this statistical bulletin which profiles the practice of child marriage in India with specific focus on South India based on the findings from the NFHS-5. We examine the socio-economic and geographic dimensions of child marriage among women in India in general and Southern States in particular. The performance of 120 districts in South India (depicted in the following table) is also focused on.

¹ Paul, Pintu.(2020): "Child marriage among girls in India: Prevalence, trends and socio-economic correlates." *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 14(2): 304-319.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0973703020950263>.

² Unicef. "Child marriage: latest trends and future prospects." New York: UNICEF (2018).
<https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>

³ For India and other Southern States mentioned in the current bulletin, NFHS report mentions 2019-21, except for the state of Karnataka (2019-20). NFHS-4 refer to 2015-16.

S.No.	Name of the States	Name of the Districts	Number of Districts
1	Telangana	Adilabad, Bhadrachalam, Kothagudem, Hyderabad, Jagtial, Jangaon, Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Jogulamba Gadwal, Kamareddy, Karimnagar, Khammam, Kumuram Bheem Asifabad, Mahabubabad, Mahabubnagar, Mancherla Medak, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Nagarkurnool, Nalgonda, Nirmal, Nizamabad, Peddapalli, Rajanna Sircilla, Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Siddipet, Suryapet, Vikarabad, Wanaparthy, Warangal Rural, Warangal Urban, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri	31
2	Karnataka	Yadgiri, Raichur, Bidar, Koppal, Kalaburagi (Gulbarga), Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada (Karwar), Udupi, Belagavi (Belgaum), Chikkaballapur, Ballari (Bellary), Vijayapura (Bijapur), Kolar, Bagalkote, Haveri, Tumakuru (Tumkur), Shivamogga (Shimoga), Chamarajanagar, Gadag, Bangalore Rural, Chikmagalur (Chikmagalur), Dharwad, Kodagu, Hassan, Mysuru (Mysore), Ramanagara, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Mandya, Bengaluru	30
3	Andhra Pradesh	Ananthapuram, Chittoor, East Godavari, Guntur Krishna, Kurnool, Prakasam, Srikakulam, Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore, Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, West Godavari, YSR	13
4	Kerala	Wayanad, Kasargod, Kozhikode, Kannur, Palakkad, Idukki, Malappuram, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Thrissur, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Thiruvananthapuram	14
5	Tamil Nadu	Ariyalur, Chennai, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Dharmapuri, Dindigul, Erode, Kancheepuram, Kanniyakumari, Karur, Krishnagiri, Madurai, Nagapattinam, Namakkal, Perambalur, Pudukkottai, Ramanathapuram, Salem, Sivaganga, Thanjavur, The Nilgiris, Theni, Tiruvallur, Tiruvarur, Thoothukudi, Tiruchirappalli, Tirunelveli, Tiruppur, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Viluppuram, Virudhunagar	32
Total			120

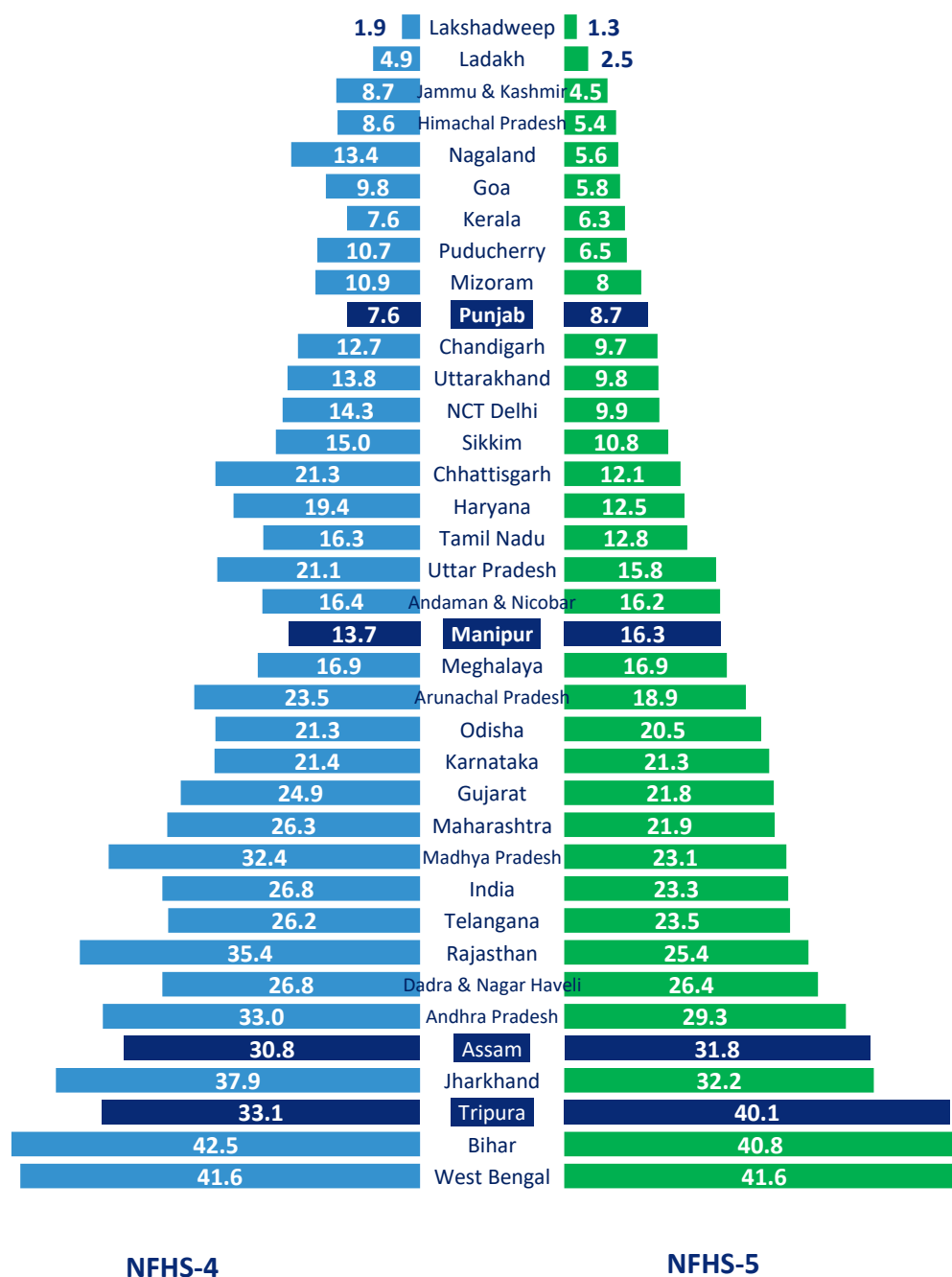
Source: NFHS-5

Incidence of Child Marriage among Women (Aged 20-24 years) across States/Union Territories (UTs) in India – Current Scenario

State and Union Territory (UT) wise incidence of women (aged 20-24) who were married before 18 years of age under NFHS-5 indicates that there are only 9 states in India which reports such incidence higher than the national level in the latest round of NFHS-5 (23.3%). The incidence is at least 15% higher than the national level in the states of West Bengal (41.6%), Bihar (40.8%) and Tripura (40.1%). The proportion was more or less similar in Telangana (23.5%) in comparison with India. In the remaining states/UTs, it ranged between 2 and 9% higher than the national level – Jharkhand (32.2%), Assam (31.8%), Andhra Pradesh (29.3%), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (26.4%) and Rajasthan (25.4%). The least incidence of child marriages was found in Lakshadweep (1.3%) followed by Ladakh (2.5%) and Jammu & Kashmir (4.5%). However, we should keep in view the fact that there are around 10 states (Uttar Pradesh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) which have more than 15% of women (aged 20-24) who reported marriage before 18 years of age, but less than the national level (23.3%).

A comparison between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 reveals that there are four states in India which registered an increase in incidence of child marriage – Tripura, Assam, Manipur and Punjab. The increase has been most pronounced in Tripura, by 7%. It should be kept in view that Tripura (33.1% in NFHS-4 and 40.1% in NFHS-5) and Assam (30.8% in NFHS-4 and 31.8% in NFHS-5) have a larger incidence of child marriage than national level in both rounds. Manipur (13.7% in NFHS-4 and 16.3% in NFHS-5) and Punjab (7.6% under NFHS-4 and 8.7 in NFHS-5) records much lesser incidence than all India level (26.8% in NFHS-4 and 23.3% in NFHS-5) in both time periods. There has been decline in the proportion of incidence of child marriage in the rest of the states/UTs in India and the decline (by around 10%) has been noticeable in the states of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. In fact, Madhya Pradesh had a larger incidence of child marriage than the all-India level under NFHS-4 while it has bettered its position in comparison with the national level in NFHS-5.

Women (Aged 20-24) Married Before 18 years of age in States/Union Territories in India (NFHS-4 & NFHS-5)



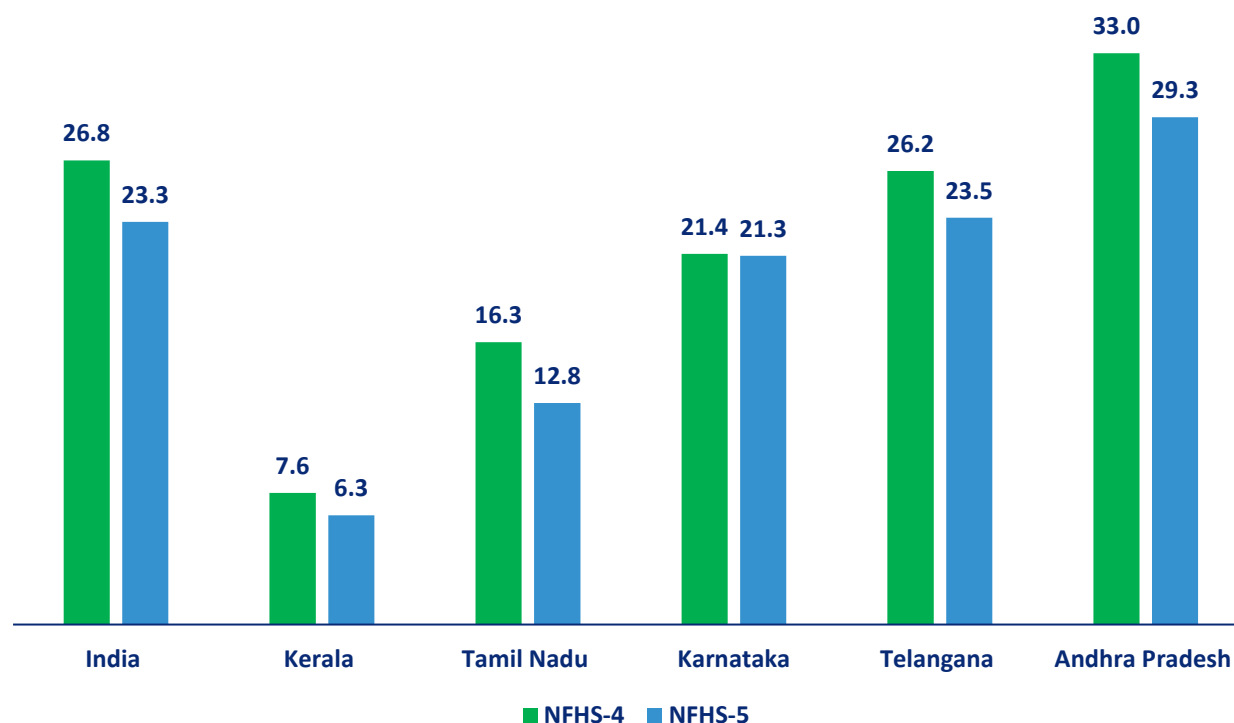
Source: NFHS-4 and NFHS-5

Note: Name of States/UTs highlighted in dark blue indicate increase in incidence of child marriage between the two rounds of NFHS

Prevalence of Child Marriage among Women (Aged 20-24 years) in South India

The comparison between NFHS-4 and 5 on the incidence of child marriage among married women aged 20-24 reveal interesting facts. At national level and in the Southern States, the incidence registered a decline. At the national level, women in the age group 20-24 who were married before the age of 18 accounted for 23.3% under NFHS-5, which decreased by 3.5% from NFHS-4 (26.8%). Similar patterns can be found across Southern States as well. In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the incidence registered the highest decline (a decrease of 3.7% and 3.5% respectively), closely followed by Telangana and Kerala (a decrease of 2.7% and 1.3%) whereas it remained more or less the same in Karnataka (a marginal decline of 0.1%).

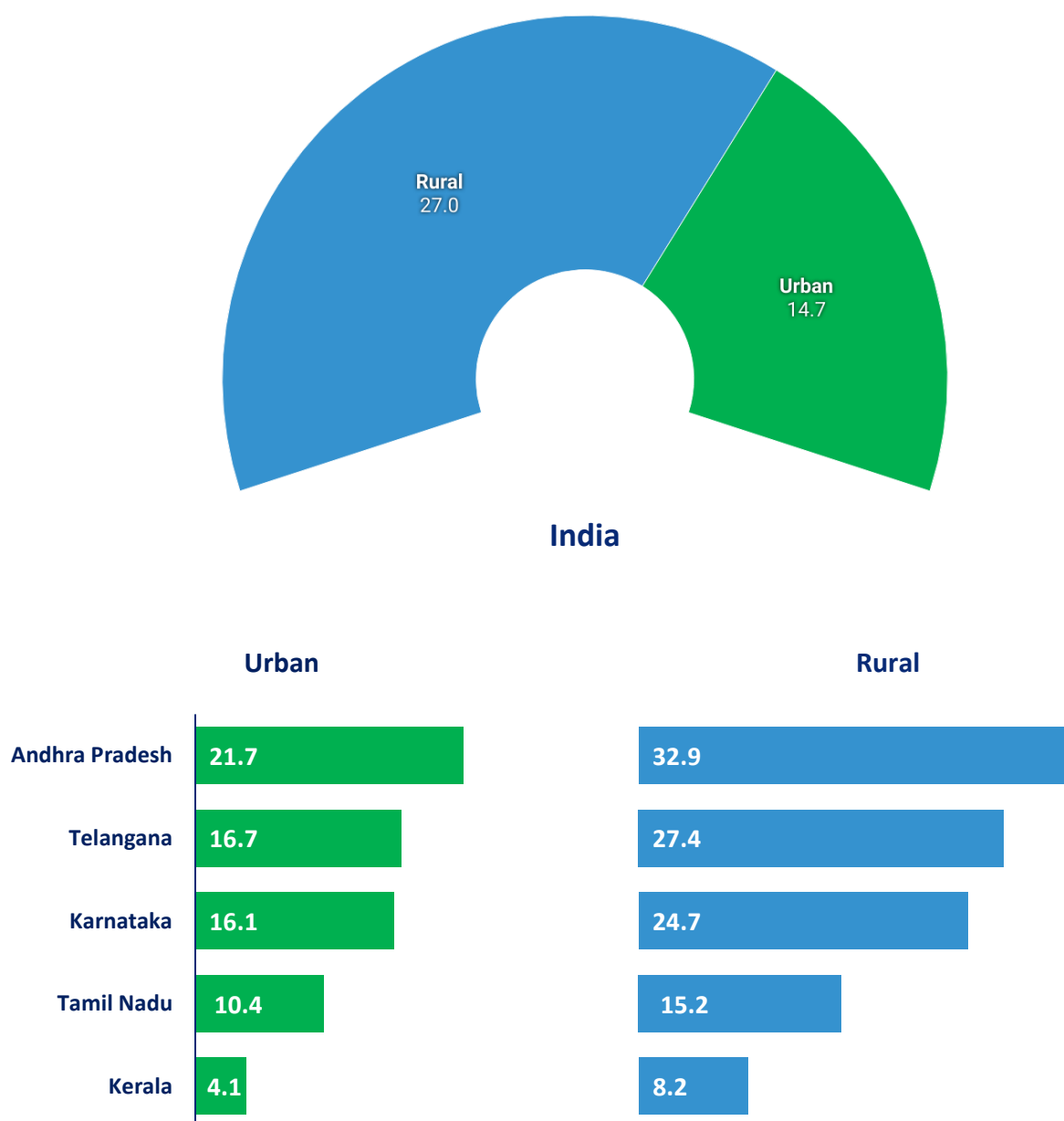
Women (Aged 20-24) Married Before 18 years of age in South India under NFHS-4 and NFHS-5



Source: NFHS-4 and NFHS-5

More of a Rural Phenomenon

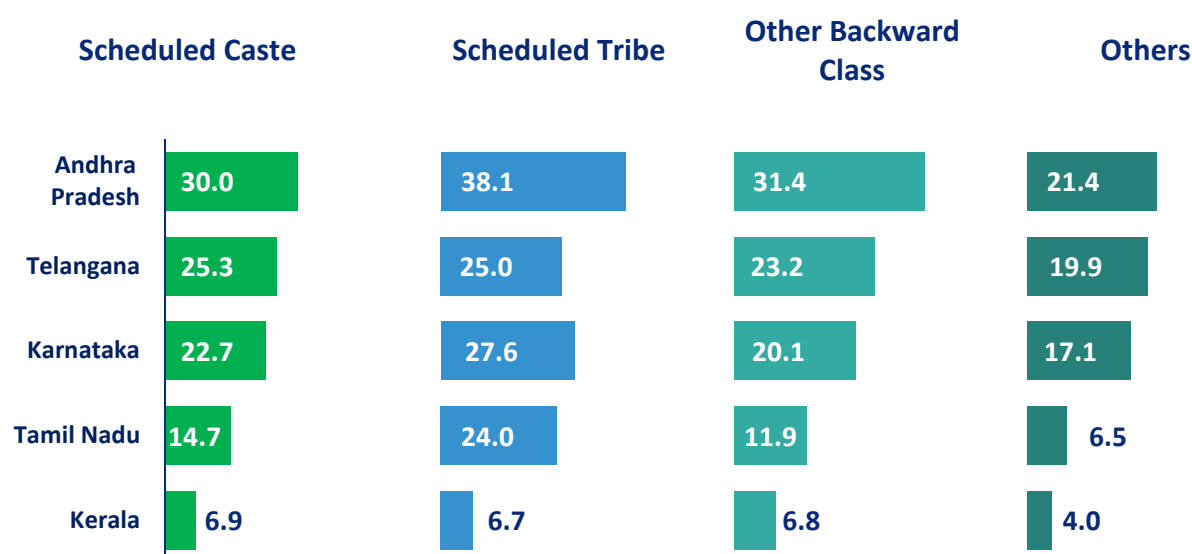
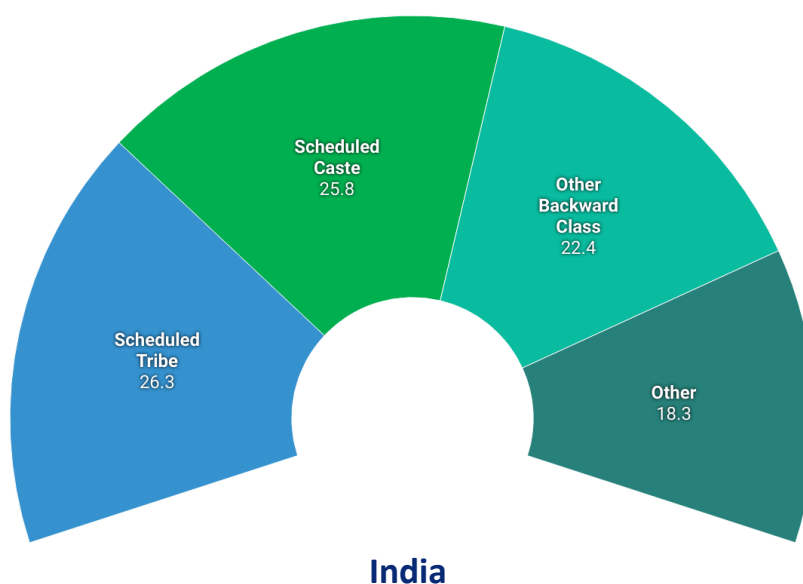
In India, more than one-fourth (27%) of rural women (aged 20-24) were married before the age of 18. The corresponding figure in urban areas, however, stood at 14.7%. Similar trends could be observed across the Southern States though the incidence was higher in rural Andhra Pradesh (32.9), Telangana (27.4%) and Karnataka (24.7%) than in Tamil Nadu (15.2%) and Kerala (8.2%).



Source: NFHS-5

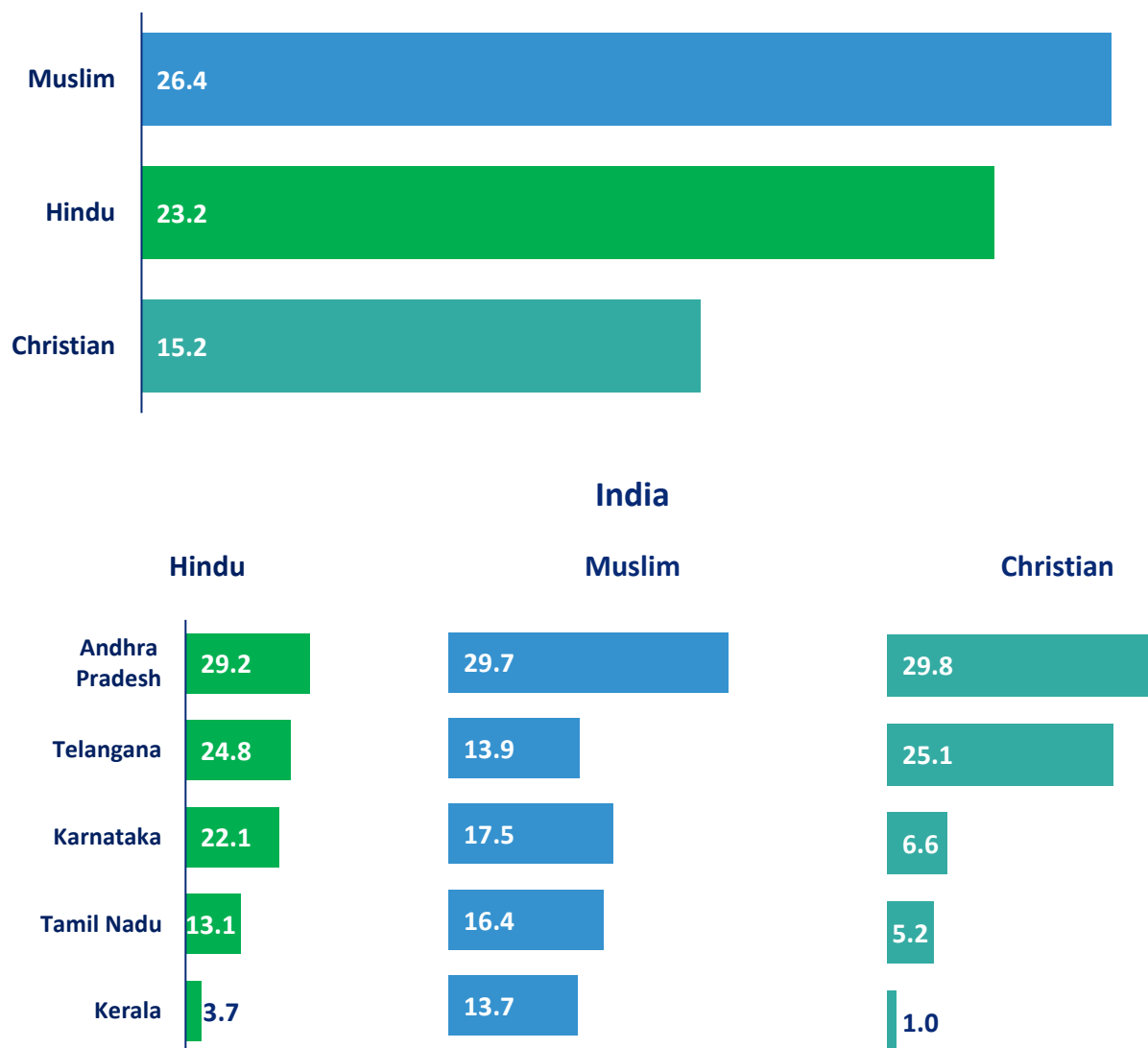
Socio-Religious Angle

The incidence of marriage below the age of 18 years was also more evident among Scheduled Tribes (ST) (26.3%), closely followed by Scheduled Castes (SC) (25.8%) and Other Backward Class (OBC) (22.4%) at the national level, while the incidence was least among Other category (18.3%). Similar trends could be seen across the states too. If we compare the low and high incidence states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh respectively, interesting facts emerge. Among STs, the incidence in Andhra Pradesh was almost 6 times that of Kerala; five times higher among Others and four times higher among SCs and OBCs.



Source: NFHS-5

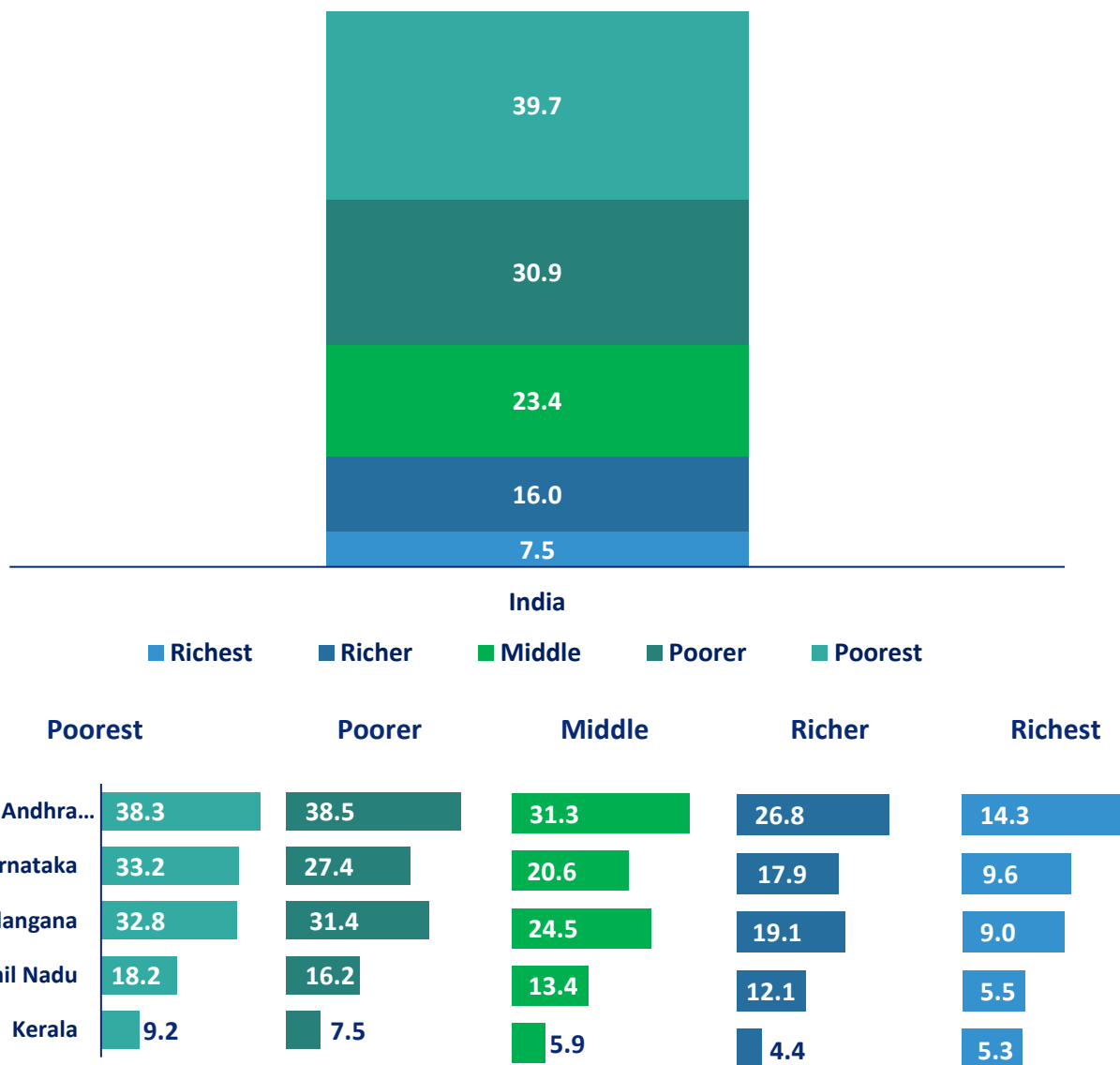
Among religious categories, at national level, the incidence was higher among Muslims; with more than one-fourth of women aged 20-24 (26.4%) married before the age of 18. Among Hindus, the proportion stood at 23.2% while among Christians it was only 15.2%. In Andhra Pradesh, among all religious groups, the proportion was more than 29%. In Telangana, only 14% of Muslim women were married before the age of 18 in the same cohort, whereas it stood at around one-fourth among both Hindus (24.8%) and Christians (25.1%). In Karnataka, however, the incidence was lowest among Christians (6.6%) and highest among Hindus (22.1%). In Tamil Nadu, it was highest among Muslims (16.4%) followed by Hindus (13.1%) and Christians (5.2%). In Kerala, the highest incidence of child marriage was seen among Muslims (13.7%) while it stood much lower among Hindus (3.7%) and Christians (1%).



Source: NFHS-5

Status of Wealth

Incidence of child marriage in terms of wealth categories reveal interesting facts. At national level, the poorest wealth quintile reported the highest incidence (39.7%). The poorer category reported around one-third incidence (30.9), while the middle wealth category reported that around one-fourth (23.4%) of women aged 20-24, were married before the age of 18. In the richer category too, the incidence is 16% while it was least among the richest (7.5%).



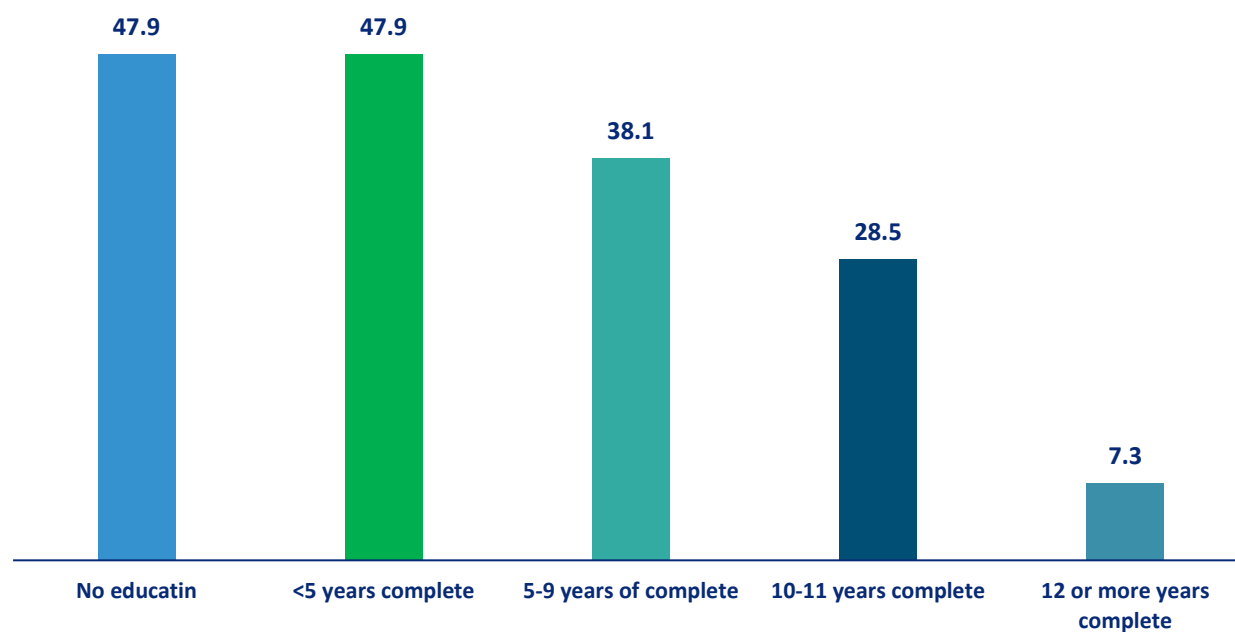
Source: NFHS-5

Across states too, one can find similar patterns, wherein the incidence is higher among the poorest and poorer quintiles. The comparison reveals interesting facts. In Kerala, only 9.2% of the poorest women reported incidence of child marriage, whereas it was twice the proportion in Tamil Nadu (18.2%), and more than thrice in the rest of the states in South India – Telangana (32.8%), Karnataka (33.2%) and Andhra Pradesh (38.3%). Similar trends could be seen across all wealth quintiles, including that of the richest. In Kerala, among richest women, only 5.3% reported marriage before 18 years, while it was almost double in Karnataka (9.6) and Telangana (9.0); and around three times higher in Andhra Pradesh (14%).

Level of Education

In terms of educational attainment, it was evident that 12 or more years of education clearly indicated an impact. Around half of the women (aged 20-24) who had no education or less than 5 years of education reported getting married before the age of 18 years in India. However, among those with 12 or more years of completed education, only 7.3% reported child marriage at all India level. Interestingly, those with 5-9 years and 10-11 years of education also reported high incidence of child marriage i.e., 38.1% and 28.5% respectively in India. In other words, 12 or more years of completed school education reduces the incidence of child marriage by more than 6.5 times in comparison with those who have no or less than 5 years of education. Similar trends could be observed across the states too. In Kerala, only 3.3% of those women with 12 or more years of completed education were married before 18 years, while in Tamil Nadu, the incidence was almost double (6.5%) and almost three times in the rest of the Southern States – Telangana (9.3%), Andhra Pradesh (8.8%) and Karnataka (8.3%). Similarly, among those with 5-9 years of completed education, the incidence of child marriage was around one-fourth in Kerala (24.1%), whereas it was one-third in Tamil Nadu (32.9%), and higher levels in Karnataka (40.1%), Telangana (44.7%) and Andhra Pradesh (52.7%). In terms of those who completed 10-11 years of education, no such divergence could be observed across South Indian States wherein almost or more than one-third were married before the age of 18. These are matters of concern and should be thoroughly investigated to find the root cause of incidence of child marriage to initiate actionable interventions.





India

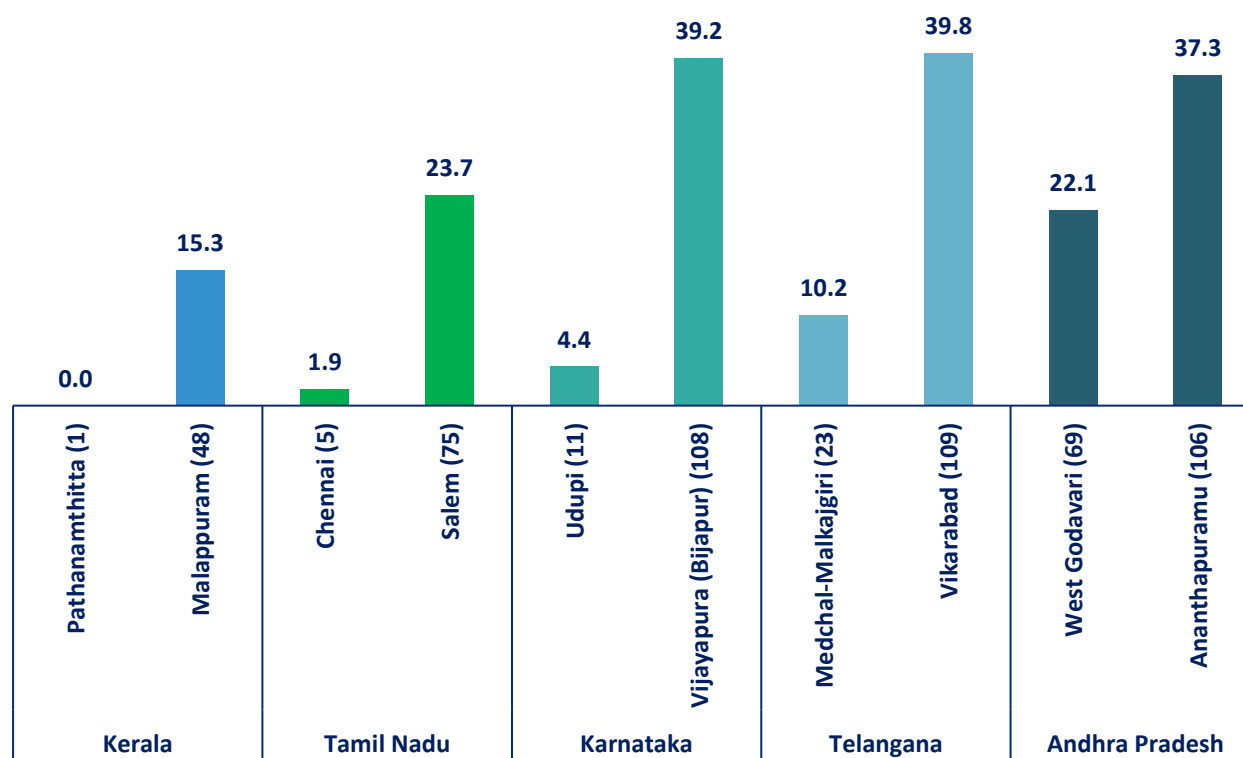


Source: NFHS-5

Prevalence of Child Marriage in the Districts of South India

District wise analysis also throws up interesting facts. There was no incidence of child marriage in the district of Pathanamthitta in Kerala whereas the highest incidence in South Indian districts was registered in Vikarabad district (39.8%) of Telangana, closely followed by Vijayapura (Bijapur) (39.2%) in Karnataka. Within states too, one can observe wide difference in incidence between the districts that reported lowest and highest incidence. In Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, the difference stood at 15%, whereas it was highest in Karnataka (34.8%), closely followed by Telangana (29.6%) and Tamil Nadu (21.8%). In terms of rank too, the divergence is stark as evident in the graph below. For example, Pathanamthitta has no incidence of child marriage and is hence the high ranked district within the state and among all South Indian States, whereas West Godavari, has lowest incidence in districts within Andhra Pradesh, but is ranked 69th among all districts from South India.

High and Low Incidence of Child Marriage in the Districts of South India



Source: NFHS-5

Note: 120 Districts are categorized into 109 ranks as some of the districts have similar values

Ranking of Districts (in Southern States)

S.No.	State Name	District Name	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	Rank
1	Kerala	Pathanamthitta	0.0	1
2	Kerala	Thrissur	1.0	2
3	Kerala	Kottayam	1.6	3
4	Kerala	Kollam	1.8	4
5	Tamil Nadu	Chennai	1.9	5
6	Kerala	Ernakulam	2.9	6
7	Kerala	Alappuzha	3.8	7
8	Tamil Nadu	Thanjavur	4.1	8
9	Kerala	Kozhikode	4.2	9
10	Tamil Nadu	Kanniyakumari	4.3	10
11	Karnataka	Udupi	4.4	11
12	Tamil Nadu	Sivaganga	4.5	12
13	Kerala	Kasargod	4.7	13
14	Karnataka	Dakshina Kannada	4.9	14
15	Kerala	Kannur	5.4	15
16	Kerala	Thiruvananthapuram	6.2	16
17	Tamil Nadu	Nagapattinam	6.3	17
18	Kerala	Idukki	7.1	18
19	Kerala	Wayanad	8.4	19
20	Tamil Nadu	Thoothukudi	8.9	20
21	Tamil Nadu	Tiruvavur	9.1	21
22	Tamil Nadu	Kancheepuram	10.0	22
23	Telangana	Medchal-Malkajgiri	10.2	23
24	Tamil Nadu	Tiruppur	10.5	24
25	Telangana	Hyderabad	10.6	25

S.No.	State Name	District Name	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	Rank
26	Tamil Nadu	Tirunelveli	10.7	26
27	Karnataka	Shivamogga (Shimoga)	11.1	27
28	Tamil Nadu	The Nilgiris	11.1	27
29	Tamil Nadu	Madurai	11.5	28
30	Tamil Nadu	Pudukkottai	11.6	29
31	Karnataka	Uttara Kannada	11.6	29
32	Tamil Nadu	Tiruvannamalai	11.6	29
33	Karnataka	Ramanagara	11.8	30
34	Telangana	Karimnagar	11.9	31
35	Tamil Nadu	Ariyalur	12.4	32
36	Tamil Nadu	Cuddalore	12.6	33
37	Karnataka	Kodagu	12.8	34
38	Karnataka	Mandya	13.1	35
39	Telangana	Rajanna Sircilla	13.2	36
40	Tamil Nadu	Karur	13.3	37
41	Tamil Nadu	Tiruvallur	13.4	38
42	Tamil Nadu	Tiruchirappalli	13.5	39
43	Telangana	Peddapalli	13.6	40
44	Tamil Nadu	Erode	13.7	41
45	Telangana	Mancherial	14.0	42
46	Karnataka	Bangalore Rural	14.1	43
47	Kerala	Palakkad	14.1	43
48	Tamil Nadu	Namakkal	14.2	44
49	Karnataka	Bengaluru	14.5	45
50	Tamil Nadu	Ramanathapuram	14.7	46
51	Tamil Nadu	Vellore	14.9	47
52	Kerala	Malappuram	15.3	48

S.No.	State Name	District Name	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	Rank
53	Tamil Nadu	Virudhunagar	15.5	49
54	Tamil Nadu	Theni	16.0	50
55	Karnataka	Hassan	16.2	51
56	Karnataka	Haveri	16.5	52
57	Tamil Nadu	Dharmapuri	16.7	53
58	Karnataka	Mysuru (Mysore)	17.5	54
59	Karnataka	Dharwad	17.8	55
60	Telangana	Siddipet	19.0	56
61	Tamil Nadu	Viluppuram	19.0	56
62	Karnataka	Davangere	19.1	57
63	Karnataka	Bidar	19.2	58
64	Karnataka	Chamarajanagar	19.3	59
65	Karnataka	Chikkamagaluru (Chikmagalur)	19.5	60
66	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	19.8	61
67	Tamil Nadu	Krishnagiri	20.3	62
68	Telangana	Jangaon	20.3	62
69	Tamil Nadu	Dindigul	20.5	63
70	Karnataka	Chitradurga	20.7	64
71	Telangana	Bhadradi Kothagudem	20.8	65
72	Tamil Nadu	Perambalur	21.4	66
73	Telangana	Adilabad	21.4	66
74	Telangana	Yadadri Bhuvanagiri	21.6	67
75	Karnataka	Raichur	21.9	68
76	Andhra Pradesh	West Godavari	22.1	69
77	Karnataka	Bellary	22.2	70
78	Telangana	Warangal Urban	22.7	71

S.No.	State Name	District Name	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	Rank
79	Telangana	Warangal Rural	22.9	72
80	Telangana	Nirmal	23.3	73
81	Telangana	Mahabubnagar	23.4	74
82	Tamil Nadu	Salem	23.7	75
83	Telangana	Nizamabad	23.7	75
84	Andhra Pradesh	Sri Potti Sriramulu Nellore	23.8	76
85	Karnataka	Tumakuru (Tumkur)	24.8	77
86	Telangana	Jayashankar Bhupalpally	24.9	78
87	Telangana	Kumuram Bheem Asifabad	25.0	79
88	Andhra Pradesh	Krishna	25.3	80
89	Andhra Pradesh	Srikakulam	25.4	81
90	Andhra Pradesh	Visakhapatnam	25.4	81
91	Andhra Pradesh	YSR	25.6	82
92	Andhra Pradesh	East Godavari	26.0	83
93	Karnataka	Kolar	26.7	84
94	Karnataka	Chikkaballapur	27.1	85
95	Karnataka	Koppal	27.1	85
96	Karnataka	Gadag	27.7	86
97	Andhra Pradesh	Chittoor	28.1	87
98	Telangana	Nalgonda	28.2	88
99	Telangana	Mahabubabad	28.3	89
100	Telangana	Jagtial	28.4	90
101	Telangana	Rangareddy	29.0	91
102	Telangana	Suryapet	29.5	92
103	Karnataka	Kalaburagi (Gulbarga)	29.8	93
104	Telangana	Sangareddy	30.6	94
105	Telangana	Kamareddy	30.8	95

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S.No.	State Name	District Name	Women age 20-24 years married before age 18 years	Rank
106	Telangana	Medak	31.8	96
107	Telangana	Nagarkurnool	32.1	97
108	Telangana	Wanaparthy	32.6	98
109	Karnataka	Belagavi (Belgaum)	32.8	99
110	Karnataka	Yadgir	33.2	100
111	Andhra Pradesh	Vizianagaram	33.7	101
112	Telangana	Jogulamba Gadwal	34.6	102
113	Telangana	Khammam	35.0	103
114	Andhra Pradesh	Guntur	35.4	104
115	Andhra Pradesh	Kurnool	36.9	105
116	Andhra Pradesh	Prakasam	37.3	106
117	Andhra Pradesh	Ananthapuram	37.3	106
118	Karnataka	Bagalkot	38.7	107
119	Karnataka	Vijayapura (Bijapur)	39.2	108
120	Telangana	Vikarabad	39.8	109

Source: NFHS-5

Note: Higher the value indicates, lower the rank.

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