

'No data indicating rise in child marriages'

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Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smriti Irani, has stated that there is **no credible data available to indicate the rising number of child marriages during COVID-19 in various States, including Tamil Nadu.**

Policy changes needed

Child rights activists claim that more policy changes and empowering of village/ward level child welfare committees are needed to prevent child marriages.

Ms. Irani was answering a question by MPs Jual Oram and D. Ravikumar on whether the cases of child marriages were on the rise in several States. The MPs wanted to know if there was any action plan to prevent child marriages.

Responding to them, the Minister pointed out that Statewide data was available on the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) website.

She clarified that no credible data was available to indicate the rising number of child marriages during the

COVID-19 pandemic in different States, including Tamil Nadu.

The Minister explained that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 was in place and that the government had been carrying out awareness programmes in States and Union Territories to highlight the evil effects of the practice.

She explained the **schemes of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme in which discouraging child marriage was a focus area.**

She mentioned the role of the National Commission for

Protection of Child Rights in preventing child marriages and that of Childline -1098 to reach children in crisis and provide necessary assistance to prevent child marriage in co-ordination with the police, child marriage prohibition officers and District Child Protection Units (DCPU)

Action taken

Meanwhile, child rights activists in Tamil Nadu claimed that the DCPUs had stopped many child marriages in the State during the pandemic. "The case reflects on the

NCRB data only when legal action is taken in the incident. However, District Social Welfare Officers, who are designated district child marriage prohibition officer, will have data on child marriages stopped in their districts. Even Childline 1098 which receives distress calls will have details," said Andrew Sesuraj, convener, Tamil Nadu Child Rights Watch (TNCRW).

A Devaneyan, child rights activist, said that if many marriages had been stopped, many more would have taken place discreetly.