

Prakash

If this (early marriage) is allowed to go through in one of our homes, how will we be able to spread awareness about child marriage and stop other people from doing so?

– A PACT worker



The Situation

According to the 2012 UNICEF report on child marriage in India, Bihar has the highest incidence of child marriage in the country at 68%. While child marriage affects girls far worse than boys, in terms of both numbers and consequences, boys are victims of child marriage too. A boy is expected to earn well, become the man of the house, and support his family, thrusting the burden of an adult's responsibilities on a child's shoulders.

The Solution

Aangan's Chauraha programme works with boys in dangerous situations, like hazardous working environments, violence and abuse. By creating community support systems and supporting and mentoring adolescent boys through individual and group life skills training, they are empowered to plan for a safer future.

The eldest of four siblings, Prakash studied in Class 12, and was doing well at school. His family survives on a small income from his father's *thela* selling *pani-puri* and *chaat*. So, Prakash supported his family by working with his father after school.

In March, Prakash's mother Seeta Devi, who is a volunteer child protection worker and part of Aangan's PACT program, shared with her fellow PACT members that her husband was determined to arrange Prakash's wedding as soon as possible. Despite Seeta's persuasion, her husband refused to change his decision.

Seeta had been unable to prevent the child marriage of one of her daughters the year before, and did not want another of her children to go through it. Moreover, Prakash had examinations coming up, but the tension at home because of his father's decision was impacting his studies. He was increasingly spending time away from home, mostly at gambling *addas*.

When they learnt of Prakash's situation, the PACT workers knew they could not let his early marriage go ahead. Not only was a child's future at stake, but as one of the PACT workers put it, "*Agar hamare ghar mein hi aisa ho jayega toh aur logon ko kaise rok sakenge, aur aware karenge?* (If this is allowed to go through in one of our homes, how will we be able to spread awareness about child marriage and stop other people from doing so?)"

Prakash is also part of the Chauraha program for adolescent boys. Part of this boy safety network, he was encouraged by his mentor and peers to focus on his goals and the life plan that he had made, and to concentrate on his examinations.

Meanwhile, PACT workers met Prakash's father and began negotiating with him to cancel marriage plans. They spoke to him about the risks early marriage posed for Prakash, and how an education would help him get a good job and better support his family.

After several meetings, Prakash's father was convinced and agreed not to fix his son's marriage till he turned 21 and had a good job. Prakash scored 62% in his exams, and has now applied for admission for a graduation course.