

WHY MODI'S PLAN FOR HIGHER LEGAL MARRIAGE AGE OF WOMEN IS ENORMOUS ECONOMIC BOOSTER

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A government-appointed panel is looking at the right marriageable age for women in India, with Modi saying a decision would be taken soon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal to raise the legal age for marriage of women carry "enormous" economic and social gains for India, according to a [State Bank of India](#) report.

"Increase in marriage age has enormous benefits on social and economic fronts for women," [Soumya Kanti Ghosh](#), an economist with SBI, wrote in a report to clients Thursday.

The report titled, "Increasing the legal age of women marriage: A dominant strategy for societal good, financially empowering women," counts benefits such as lowering maternal deaths and improving nutrition levels in the near term to putting more girls in college and enabling women to achieve greater financial independence in the long-term.

"This is clear from the data," Ghosh said. "The working age population increases with high marriage age."

A government-appointed panel is looking at the right marriageable age for women in India, with Modi saying a decision would be taken soon. This would be the first revision in more than four decades and put India in the league of Asian peers such as China, Japan and Singapore.

The marriage age for women in India might be raised to 21 years, the same as for men, according to Ghosh, who sees the number of women graduates rising as much as 7 percentage points from 9.8% at present.

"35% of females in India are married before the age of 21 years. The situation is grave in some states. Surprisingly, the situation in West Bengal is the worst across all states with the mean marriage age only 20.9 years and almost 47% of females getting married before the age of 21 years, even worse than Bihar and Rajasthan," the report states.

"The move will have other legal and psychological benefits also," Ghosh said. "Any ground-level change will only happen when the psyche of people alter."

Ghosh says that increasing the legal age for marriage is a must even legally as it should get us out of the stereotype mindset that women are more mature than men of the same age and therefore can be allowed to marry sooner.

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