

Deepak's story

A profile from Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh



Deepak is about 6 years old, though no one is sure of his exact age. He belongs to one of India's indigenous tribal groups, and lives in a remote rural community with father, his two younger siblings, and an older half-brother. Deepak's mother died in childbirth. Deepak's father works long days as a casual farm labourer so Deepak looks after the younger children a lot. He goes to school but does not attend regularly.

Deepak's tribe is called the Jathapa. The tribal groups or *Adivasis* are India's indigenous people. They are known as 'Scheduled Tribes' by the government.

Deepak's father has had three wives but they all died, two in childbirth. He works as a casual farm labourer, leaving the house at 6am, and does not come back until 8pm, by which time all the children are in bed so they see little of him.

Deepak helps to look after the younger children and can often be seen carrying his younger sister, who is 18 months old, on his back, even in school. He says he likes her better than his brother and that he takes good care of her. He helps to fetch water from the bore well with a small plastic pot in the morning and in the evening. He and his siblings and friends wash themselves in a nearby stream.

His elder stepbrother, aged 12, does most of the household work including cleaning, washing and cooking. His grandmother, who lives just a few houses away, also helps when she can. Deepak's father says his mother died 18 months ago giving birth to Deepak's little sister "during the mango season", while Deepak says it was "when he was small". Deepak's father's second wife also died in childbirth.

Deepak says: "I have my granny. She is like my mother. All other children have a mother; but my grandmother is good. I like my elder brother too. He does all the work in the home. If I am naughty he will beat sometimes; but he is good. I like my little sister a lot too."

Deepak is a bright child but his family is very poor. He says that the family had to sell their tape recorder and he is sad about this as he liked to listen to songs while working.

Deepak's father is employed under the Government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which provides 100 days' employment a year on demand, as a right, for poor rural households whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. He receives 80 rupees a day (about US\$1.55) for this work, which leaves him little money to provide for the children. He also receives oil and lentils as part of a Government Public Distribution System (PDS) and says that it is thanks to this scheme that he can feed his children.





His father says that Deepak often has a fever: “I don’t know why – maybe due to mosquitoes or due to food. We don’t know what the problem is.”

There is no health clinic in the village so once a week a nurse comes to bring medicines and give injections. The nearest public hospital is three kilometres away. The nearest private hospital is 15 kilometres away, which is a long journey as there are few roads and little transport. Deepak has been taken to the hospital twice, as his father explains:

“We took him to the hospital because he had a fever. It was too hard to manage ourselves. We took him there as he had a high fever. He suffers with fever regularly. The doctors just gave him medicines and did not say anything. It was cured. First we went once and had to go again.”

Deepak’s grandmother thinks he is less healthy than other children and Deepak says he is bullied at school because he is so thin. His grandmother says this is because they don’t have a mother to look after them and there is only so much she can do to help. “They have no mother and so no proper care. I am old. I cannot take care of small children at my age. He is not what he should be at his age. But what can I do?” She says that the children have to bath themselves and wash their own clothes and hair and that they are too young to do this for themselves. “All this would be done by their mother if she was alive. I think that compared to other children they are not clean, there is no one to comb their hair, they are shabby. I try and do it for all of them but it is too much for me.”

Deepak says he has just started going the local school but often does not go. Free lunch seemed to be the main incentive, particularly on Wednesdays when the children are given an egg. His brother left in second grade, and this would reflect statistics which show a high drop-out rate for children from Scheduled Tribes. Neither his father nor his grandmother had any education, so he is the first generation in his family to be educated. His grandmother says: “We don’t have much knowledge as we did not go to school. We don’t have knowledge but the children are active now compared to us. They are learning.”



Deepak's school is in the village and is known as *Maa Badi* school, or 'our school'. All the children from the village go there until Grade 2. The school is paid for as part of a programme to promote education among tribal children. The community requested the school two years ago. Prior to this, there was no school building and lessons were conducted on the verandah of Deepak's house. When the building needed repairs, Deepak's father says, the whole village came to help. But the current school still has no desks or chairs and the children sit on the mud floor.

Once the children learn the basics at the community school, they are admitted to the government primary school in another village about five kilometres away. But Deepak's grandmother says this is difficult because there is no transport: "The road is a long way around. There is a track over the hill and through the forest, but the children are scared to go there."

Some children board at another school further away, paid for by the government, but Deepak's father says Deepak went there and did not like it: "I took two days off work on the farm to take him, but after one week there he came back. When I asked him what happened, he just said: 'I won't go. The food is not good. It has insects in it.' I was angry with him and beat him. Since then we have tried to convince him but he does not want to go."

Deepak's grandmother adds that she would like him to go: "We want to send him when he is older. It is good if he goes there. He will be more responsible there because he has to wash his own clothes! We also want to educate him there. He will do well. I don't think he will cry next time and I will be there to ask about him."

Deepak wants to study so that he can get a job and buy things for his sister and brother. He says he wants to stay in his home village when he is older as he has a lot of friends and neighbours. He says he doesn't know what he wants to do in the future.

"I have my granny. She is like my mother. All other children have a mother; but my grandmother is good."



Country context: India and Andhra Pradesh

India has a population of over a billion people. It is a country of huge inequalities, with the second largest number of billionaires in the world but is also home to 25 per cent of the world's poor. The poverty debate in India has been rarely extended to child poverty, which makes Young Lives of particular interest.

- One in every three illiterate people in the world lives in India.
- At least 35 million children aged 6 to 14 do not attend school.
- The country accounts for more than 20 per cent of global maternal and child deaths.
- India ranks 128 out of 177 countries in 2007/8 United Nations Human Development Report.

Andhra Pradesh, in southern India, is its fifth-largest state. It has been the role model for several new government initiatives during the 1990s to eliminate poverty and has achieved considerable progress on child development indicators since the mid-1990s. But despite this growth, significant disparities remain, based on class, caste, gender and geography. Poverty estimates for rural Andhra Pradesh are low (11.2% compared to the national average of 28%), although per capita expenditure in rural areas is only about 5% more than the national average. Only 27% of the population lives in urban areas, although the state capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the IT revolution. Consequently, the state is witnessing a shift away from agriculture (which remains important at 30% of state domestic produce) towards the service sector, which is expanding rapidly.

Sources: Young Lives Round 2 Survey Report; Andhra Pradesh; The Times of India (9 Nov 2004); Smile Foundation 'Children in India'; 2007/2008 UN Human Development Report

Tribal children

Along with *Dalits*, or 'Scheduled Castes', as the Government calls them, who are outside the caste system, *Adivasis* or Scheduled Tribes are the communities that fare least well in Indian society. They are often poorer than other households. Scheduled Tribes have expenditure levels 1.5 times lower than non-tribal households. Children from Scheduled Tribes are severely disadvantaged: 29.2% of the younger children and 18% of the older children from these groups live in absolute poverty. Young Lives also found that poor nutrition and stunting (an indicator of long-term malnutrition) were highest amongst the Scheduled Tribes. Most live in rural areas which are also found to be poorer than urban areas.

Prevalence of stunting in the Young Lives sample (by cohort, location and caste)

		Round 1		Round 2	
		Older cohort (%)	Younger cohort (%)	Older cohort (%)	Younger cohort (%)
Overall		33	31	34	36
By location	Urban	21	21	26	21
	Rural	37	35	37	40
By caste	Scheduled castes	35	37	35	39
	Scheduled tribes	34	46	39	40
	Other castes	25	19	26	24

In Andhra Pradesh, Young Lives found that drop-out rates from school are also higher for Scheduled Tribes than for other children, possibly because, like Deepak, they live in rural areas some distance from the nearest school. Child labour too is highest among the Scheduled Tribes, at 30.84%.

Source: S. Galab et al. (2008) *Young Lives Round 2 Survey Report: Initial Findings – Andhra Pradesh, India*.

Young Lives is a unique long-term research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty. By following a group of children over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty, and provide evidence to support the development of effective policies. We are working with 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The story here is one of a set of twenty taken from the interviews our researchers did with the children individually and in groups. Each child's story has a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that the children are having to contend with, but also gives a wider picture in relation to children's lives. This ranges from child work and education, to migration, health, domestic violence, inequality, gender, and individual circumstances such as being an orphan or being disabled.

The children and their families who are participating in Young Lives willing share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality. For this reason, the children's names have been changed. The accompanying photos are of children living in similar communities in similar circumstances to the Young Lives children. Photo credit: © Young Lives / Farhatullah Beig.

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Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty