

Sarada's story

a profile from Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh



Sarada is 12 years old. She lives in a village with her mother, sister and stepbrother. Sarada has been disabled since birth, and though she can walk short distances she has problems standing for any length of time. The family belongs to a low caste community that traditionally washes clothes for a living. Sarada wants to be a judge or a businesswoman when she grows up.

Sarada is a confident and outspoken girl who is in the last year of upper primary school. She does well at school and thinks education is very important. She participates in a number of extra-curricular activities and even wins prizes. She says Hindi is her favourite subject.

Her mother, who is not educated herself, thinks it is really important that her children go to school. She is aware that because she is not literate or numerate she depends on her children to help her. For example, she says: "My son will always ask about the cost of soap or coconut oil. I will be paying two or three hundred rupees without knowing the denominations. And he asks whether five rupees is more or ten rupees. We don't know. We don't know the letters and zeros in those papers. All this is because I am not educated."

Sarada's mother says that education is more important to her than making her children earn money: "Even if they pay a thousand [rupees] per head I will not send my children to work. We work in the forest in very bad conditions, night and day. But I am ready to do anything to educate them. I want to educate them." She thinks education is particularly important for Sarada because of her disability: "Education is important for her because she has to get a job and live on her own. I do not know whether she will be married or not. She will need a job."

Sarada says she is happy and loves her mother and her brother and sister, although she argues with her brother. She says she has learned many things from her mother, such as how to cook rice. The first time she tried, she remembers that she burned her fingers but now she knows how to cook.



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Sarada's mother



Sarada says she also loves her father, who has remarried and lives with her stepmother and other stepbrothers and stepsisters in Mumbai. She has visited him once: “When I went there, he took care of me. He talked nicely to me and gave me 10 rupees every day.” She says she does not want to go to Mumbai again to visit because her stepsister beat her while she was there and they could not understand her because she did not speak Hindi. Her father and his other family come to visit once a year. Sarada says she would prefer it if they all lived together in the village: “It would be better if we all lived together, children, adults, all talking to each other, playing, laughing and living happily.”

She says she doesn't have many friends in school. Her best friend was an older girl called Sabeena. She was a Muslim and was married at the age of 15 so Sarada does not see much of her now and misses her.

Sarada feels strongly that young women should not get married too early. She sees many examples of girls in the village who are married at 14 or 15 and thinks that 20 should be the age people get married. Her stepsister in Mumbai was married at the age of 12 and now has

three children. Sarada's mother says that she feels her stepdaughter's life is spoiled: “She looks very pale now and it would be better if she lived with us. My husband's second wife's daughter grew up here in my hands and now she is facing problems. She and her children don't have happiness in their lives. She has to listen to her mother-in-law and father-in-law. They ask to do this and that and she has to work in the hot sun.”

Sarada says she would like to become a judge so that she can improve society and people who are doing wrong things and harm to others. She says that she was inspired by a woman judge in a television serial. She expects to get help and assistance from her teachers, from the government and from her parents to achieve her goal.

A day in the life of Sarada

She says: “This is my daily routine; the same as many other girls in the village; nothing very special or different. I don't mind doing this work.”



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

Early marriage

Early marriage affects up to 100 million girls worldwide.

- In southern Asia, 48% (nearly 10 million) of young women were married before the age of 18.
- In Africa, 42% were married before turning 18.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, 29% of young women were married by the age of 18.

In 2006, India enacted the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act which prohibits marriage below 18 for girls and 21 for boys. As a result, according to the National Family Health Survey, the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who are married before the age of 18 has declined from 54.2% in 1992-93 to 44.5% in 2005-06. But many girls live in remote villages where such legislation has little effect and custom and the beliefs of the community are the most important influence on their lives.

The consequences of child marriage for girls can be severe. Girls between 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die for pregnancy-related reasons as girls between 20 and 24. They are more likely to drop out of school, have less mobility than unmarried girls or older married women, have less economic power, limited social networks and be at greater risk of domestic violence.

Sources: UNICEF (no date) 'Early Marriage: A Childhood Interrupted' (available at: http://www.unicef.org/india/child_protection_1536.htm); Plan (2007) State of the World's Girls; UNFPA (2005) Child Marriage Fact Sheet (available at: http://67.205.103.77/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_child_marriage.htm).

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