

## Ravi's story:

A profile from Young Lives in India



**Ravi comes from a lower-caste family and has had to leave school and work from a young age as a bonded labourer. His life has been a constant struggle to eat, to live and to clear the family debts. It has also been marred by violence. But now Ravi, too, is married and it seems the pattern of violence is continuing.**

Ravi went to school until he was 9, when he had to leave to help pay off a family debt. His older brother is the only one in the family who is being educated. He is now at college. His father never went to school: "Even to this day I can't sign my name; I still give my fingerprint."

It was Ravi's parents who decided that he should marry. They found a suitable wife but she wanted to continue with her education rather than marry. So they found another. His new wife has been to school up to Grade 9.

Ravi, who is now 20, says he didn't know that he was getting married, even on the day itself, and had not changed his clothes: "I just went there casually, I didn't take time to dress. If they had told me [what was happening], I would have gone well dressed. After my marriage my wife told me that I looked like a mad person."

The family didn't ask for a dowry but his bride's family gave them a gold chain – which his mother reveals has now been pawned to pay off debts from the wedding.

Ravi's mother is positive about his new wife: "She is hard-working and does everything efficiently ... Before I used to clean, wash and do other jobs and now she is doing all my work."

Ravi's life has been dominated by violence. When he was 13, he often witnessed his father beating his mother, and said: "When my mum and dad fight I feel very bad. When my dad beats my mum we try and stop him."

As he grew up, he found himself intervening in the violence committed by his brother-in-law on his sister and his nephew. This is still continuing, and in the past six months his sister and nephew have come to live with Ravi and the family, to escape her husband's violence. His mother says:

***"For the first six months of marriage it was OK, then they started quarrelling. Her husband blames her for everything and keeps accusing her. Whenever she goes to work he is suspicious. He is very cruel. Unable to bear both the physical and verbal abuse, she came to our house."***

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But then her husband came and took their son away, and Ravi's mother thinks her daughter may have to go back to him:

*"He will entice her and take her back. Everything will be OK for a couple of months. Then he will start verbally and physically abusing her again ... We wanted him to mend his ways and so we kept her here thinking that he might change. But it was of no use. He will never change. We asked some elders to mediate. We went to the police station. And finally they even thought of going for a divorce. What [else] could we do?"*

Although Ravi said when he was younger that he would never beat his wife, now that he is married himself, he says: "When she tells lies she gets a beating."

"Do you shout at her?"

*Every day. She won't keep quiet. I get angry. If I go out somewhere, she will say: 'Why did you take so long?'"*

He says that they make it up in the end: "We can't live without each other, so we talk."

His mother says:

*"Whenever there is a disagreement between them, I tell my son, 'Look, getting married is not a joke and taking care of one's wife is also not a joke. You have sisters; if they are beaten we feel very sad ... And she too is like our daughter and so we should not physically abuse her by beating her nor verbally abuse her by cursing her and using foul language. How can one talk like that? It is really disgusting.' That is what I tell them. I tell them to lead a decent life; I tell them to behave in a nice manner."*

Otherwise, she says, her son "is really good and hospitable towards others. He respects elders and listens to them. He is hard-working and wins people's confidence. Everyone wants to offer him work because he works well. He is very caring and understanding."

One good thing that has happened, says Ravi's mother, is that alcohol has been banned in the village.

*"Earlier there were frequent quarrels due to heavy drinking that would lead to violent exchanges of words and force ... Now drinking alcohol has been banned ... if someone drinks, then the children, especially the college students, tell the police and they come and take them away. It is the children who go to college, the educated ones. They started this."*

Ravi would like to get onto the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), which provides at least 100 days of waged employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work, but he can't seem to get the right papers.

*"We need to get some work from the Government ... [even] the illiterate people like me can work. They can drill bore wells. Those who are literate get a monthly salary, but people like me have to work hard to take care of our parents."*

In the future, Ravi says, he only wants two children, and his mother agrees. She says:

*"If he wants his son or daughter to have a bright future then he will educate them ... If we are still alive, we will be able to tell them that it is only when children are educated that they have a bright future. It is better to study and improve yourself than to toil and suffer. We will tell him that it is better to have an education than to suffer without it."*

“Whenever there is a disagreement between them, I tell my son, 'Look, getting married is not a joke and taking care of one's wife is also not a joke. You have sisters; if they are beaten, we feel sad... And she too is like our daughter and so we should be physically abuse her, nor verbally abuse her... That's what I tell them. I tell them to lead a decent life.'”

Ravi's mother.

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### The intergenerational cycle of violence

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As a small child, Ravi used to witness his father beating his mother and try to intervene, and then went on to try and protect his sister from her husband. At 13, he said that he would never beat his wife when he got married. But now that he is married, his brother-in-law is still beating his sister, and Ravi is resorting to violence against his own wife.

Sadly, this intergenerational cycle of violence, where children who witness violence find themselves using it themselves when they are adults, like Ravi, is all too common. It affects people across all socio-economic levels, suggesting that it is on some level seen as acceptable, and also that it is rarely discussed.

A 2007 study by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 13 states in India found that almost 70 per cent of children aged 5 to 18 reported experiencing physical abuse.

Young Lives has found that boys are more likely to experience physical abuse, both in the home and at school. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, nearly 60 per cent of boys and just over 25 per cent of girls reported experiencing physical violence from family members.

At community level, gender norms about what it means to be a man can generate a cycle of violence towards women, whether domestic violence or 'eve-teasing', as sexual harassment of women and girls is known in India. Women, too, may collude in such violence.

Children may adopt a range of strategies to try and deal with violent situations, though their options are often limited. They may remove themselves from the situation if they can. They may intervene to protect others, often using violence themselves. They may seek community support, or help from trusted adults, though it is unclear how useful this is.

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**Sources:** Virginia Morrow and Renu Singh (2016, forthcoming) *Understanding Children's Experiences of Violence in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India: Evidence from Young Lives.*

## Country Context:

### India

India is home to 1.2 billion people, of whom 30 per cent are children. The country is fast becoming an economic superpower, predicted the world's third-largest economy by 2035. Life expectancy has more than doubled, literacy rates have quadrupled, and health conditions have improved. But huge disparities remain. The caste system still affects everyday life, despite quota systems for those whom the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as Dalits or formerly 'Untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as adivasis, India's indigenous peoples). More than 400 million people still live in poverty. And many of those who have recently escaped poverty are still highly vulnerable to falling back into it. Maternal and child mortality rates remain very high and millions of children are malnourished. While most children now go to primary school, the quality of education remains low. At secondary level, many school leavers do not have the knowledge and skills to compete in labour markets.

India will soon have the largest and youngest workforce the world has ever seen. At the same time, the country is in the midst of a massive wave of urbanisation, as some 10 million people, most of them young people, move to towns and cities each year in search of jobs and opportunity. Massive investments will be needed to create the jobs, housing, and infrastructure.

Young Lives children come from the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, in India. Salman lives in a densely populated slum area in Hyderabad. Ravi lives in a poor, drought-prone rural area in the Rayalaseema region, affected by Naxalite (communist guerrilla) movements. Harika, Sarada and Shanmuka Priya live in a very poor community of around 2,000 people in southern Telangana. Deepak lives in a coastal region with a population of around 5,000.

\*<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview>

## Towards A Better Future?

### Hopes and Fears from Young Lives

Young Lives is a unique international study which has been following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam over the course of the Millennium Development Goals. As the world now moves on to the Sustainable Development Goals, attention has been drawn to the need for evidence and robust data to monitor progress at national level. The kind of data that Young Lives collects is rare in developing countries and so can be very useful for governments and international donors. The data build a story – and, more importantly, build evidence for change.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from our interviews with the children and young people. Each one is accompanied by the short description of a 'theme' that emerged from their interviews and which illustrates the issues that children and young people are having to contend with. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor communities, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children to the children within our study.



## Acknowledgements and credits

This is an extract from our updated book of 24 profiles following the same children since 2007 – *Building a Better Future: Hopes and Fears from Young Lives*, written by Nikki van der Gaag and Caroline Knowles, and available to download from our website: [www.younglives.org.uk/content/publications](http://www.younglives.org.uk/content/publications).

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