



# Harika's story

A profile from  
Young Lives in India

*"You get better jobs if you study and you have a better life and can marry an educated husband"*

# Harika's story

**Harika is now 16. She is no longer working in the cotton fields but has returned to school, and is staying at a girls' hostel. She found it hard at first to be away from home, but now she has made friends and says she would like to continue her studies and become a doctor.**

Harika missed school in 8th grade for a couple of months, and went back for the 9th and 10th grades to finish high school. A new school building had been constructed and six new government teachers were recruited, whom she felt were much better than the previous ones.

She says it was not easy to persuade her parents to let her go back to school:

*"I wanted to study but my parents said no at first. Then when I insisted, they agreed.*

Who said no?

*Mainly my mother.*

Your father?

*He left it to me."*

She has been supported in her desire for education by her three older female cousins. "They told my parents that it would be good to send me for more schooling." Her older brother also supported her.

After she completed Grade 10, she had to go to the city to carry on with her education. So she then went to a girls' boarding hostel. At first, she says she found this difficult. After three days she and a friend went home. "We got scared and we decided not to stay there and we came back to our village." But after seeing their families they felt better and went back to the hostel. Harika says she was worried what people in the village would think if they just left school.

Now she is less homesick. She has a number of friends, and two best friends in particular. She says: "If I had gone alone, I would not have stayed there. Because I went with my friends, we could support each other."

Of the five girls who continued with her to the end of high school, two are now in the hostel with Harika, one is at home, and the other one is already married. Harika says she was determined to continue her studies because:

*"You get better jobs if you study and you have a better life and can marry an educated husband. If your husband is in agriculture, you have to go to the fields and work. If he is educated, you can be happy. We see our parents working and we feel that we do not want to be like them. They work in the fields and work hard every day."*

At the time of the last interview, Harika was 13 years old and had been missing classes to help her family in the cotton fields. This had affected her health. She was a good student and had won a national scholarship and was worried about not being in school.

Harika says she used to want to be a teacher but now she wants to be a doctor.

Her mother, however, is worried about cost. Harika's current school costs 500 to 600 rupees (8 to 10 dollars) a month. The family also had to pay an initial 3,600 rupees (58 dollars). This is a lot of money for them, particularly as Harika's brother had been ill and hospital and medical fees were expensive.

*“We wanted to stop her going on to further studies because we didn't have the money. We have to pay interest on loans. How can we afford all the expenses, my son's hospital expenses and her fees? Will she give us money once she starts working? We won't make anything from her; she is better off working here.”*

Last time we visited, Harika had won a scholarship, but apparently it never materialised because the headteacher moved to another school.

Harika's mother says the decision to continue studying was entirely Harika's: “She has gone [back to school] of her own accord. It is her decision and she is scared that we will stop paying for her if she complains.”

Harika's mother did not go to school herself. In fact, Harika is the first girl in the whole family to be educated up to 10th grade. “Girls don't go [to school] here. Only three girls went and people scold us, asking, ‘What is the point of educating girls? They will get spoilt.’”

The family is already getting marriage proposals for Harika but they have said that she will not get married for four or five years because she is studying. Harika's mother says she was married at around 18 or 19 but “Now girls are getting married earlier”. She cites a number of girls around Harika's age who are married already and one who is already pregnant despite wanting to study.

In other interviews in the community, one person said that most villagers preferred sending their children to work in the cotton fields to sending them to school. Another noted that most of the teenage girls were working in the fields. All the farmers grow cotton in the same season, which means there is a lot of demand for labour and wages rise accordingly.

But while Harika's mother is ambivalent about her education, she is also clear that it is Harika who will decide. “We have given her permission to study and we cannot cut her throat halfway through. She can study as long as she wants to study and after that it's her wish. That's all.”

*“I wanted to study but my parents said no at first. Then when I insisted, they agreed.”*

## The importance of maternal education

Our research is beginning to demonstrate what has been shown in many other studies – that having an educated mother improves a child’s chances of going to school and has a positive effect on health, nutrition and well-being.

In India, we have found that the percentage of children in school increases with each level of schooling obtained by their mothers. Children whose mothers had no education were less likely to have attended preschool (44 per cent compared to 72 per cent of children whose mothers had received 10 or more years of education), and were four times more likely to have repeated a grade by the age of 8.

Only 68 per cent of children from the older group whose mothers had received no formal education were in school, compared with 92 per cent whose mothers had received secondary education.

Maternal education also has an effect on nutrition: children whose caregivers had completed primary school were much less likely to be thin (low BMI-for-age), stunted (low height-for-age), or underweight (low weight-for-age), which are all indications of under-nutrition and malnutrition.

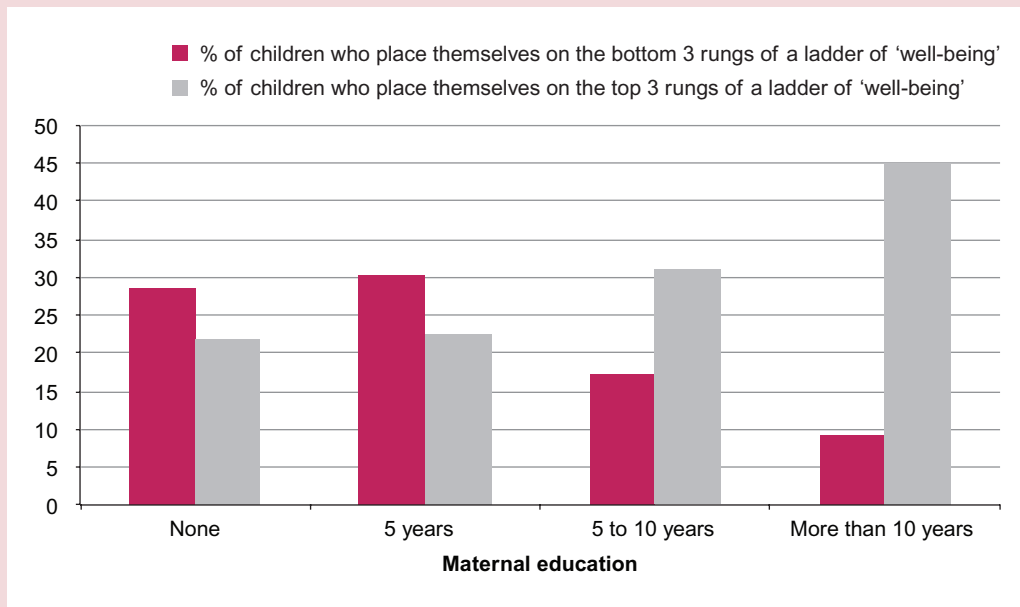
There also appears to be a link between maternal education and children working for pay. The proportion of children with uneducated mothers who were working increased from less than 1 in 10 to about 2 in 5 between 2002 and 2009, but fell from 5 per cent to zero for children whose mothers had been to secondary school. However, maternal education is also connected with other factors, including whether you live in an urban or rural area, and consumption levels, which are also likely to be important determinants of child work.

*“She has gone [back to school] of her own accord.  
It is her decision.”*

Harika’s mother

## The importance of maternal education *continued*

### Maternal education and children's perceptions of their own well-being



Children were also asked to place themselves on a 'ladder' of well-being. In Andhra Pradesh, we found that children whose mothers had more education put themselves on the top 3 rungs of the ladder, whereas those whose mothers had no education or low levels of education put themselves on the bottom 3 rungs.

**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kिर्रिली Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3.

*“If I had gone alone [to study in the hostel], I would not have stayed there. Because I went with my friends, we could support each other.”*



## Country context: India

India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. It is a country of huge inequalities, with the second-largest number of billionaires in the world but also 25 per cent of the world's poor. It ranks 134 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

Over the last five years, India has seen impressive economic growth. Even during the global recession in 2009, the economy grew at a rate of 7 per cent of GDP. But inflation is a big problem, especially for poor people.

- 76 per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars per day.
- Malnutrition is more common in India than in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More children under 5 die from preventable and treatable diseases than in any other country.

Many of India's inequalities are tied to gender and caste: women and girls still face multiple discrimination and India ranks 129th out of 187 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. The caste system, which dates back many thousands of years, is still extremely important in everyday life, with what the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as *Dalits* or formerly 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as *adivasis*, India's indigenous peoples) the most disadvantaged communities. This is despite the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is now illegal, and various measures have been introduced to empower disadvantaged groups and give them better access to opportunities.

Andhra Pradesh, in south India, is its fifth-largest state and has a population of 84.6 million. It is still largely agricultural, although its capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the technology revolution. The state was the role model for several new government initiatives during the 1990s to eliminate poverty and has made considerable progress on child development indicators since the mid-1990s.

- Rural poverty went down from 48 per cent in 1973/4 to 11 per cent in 2004/5.
- Unlike in the other Young Lives countries, poverty is higher in urban than in rural areas.
- Adult literacy went up from 61 per cent in 2001 to 67 per cent in 2011.
- But 76 per cent of men were literate compared with 60 per cent of women. And only 66 per cent of girls aged 6 to 17 attend school, compared with 77 per cent of boys.

**Sources:** [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; S. Galab et al. (2011) *Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their 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 in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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**Young Lives**   
An International Study of Childhood Poverty