

Reshma

Reshma found support from her Shakti network to negotiate with her parents to go to school



The Situation

47% of girls in India are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2013). As a girl approaches adolescence, she is pressured to drop out of school, and confined to her home or sent out to work, putting her at grave risk of early marriage, hazardous work, physical and sexual violence, and trafficking. The longer a girl stays in school, the lesser the threat of early marriage, which gives her access to opportunities for personal empowerment, which in turn positively impacts her family and community.

The Solution

Through Shakti, adolescent girls are connected to a peer network, supported and empowered to recognise risk, and develop strategies to resist pressures of child marriage, dangerous work, and being pulled out of school, to access services, negotiate for themselves, and take steps towards achieving their goals.

Twelve-year-old Reshma's parents are ragpickers, and she contributed to her family's income by working with them to sort through garbage. None of Reshma's three older sisters have ever gone to school – all of them were married as children to ease the financial pressure on their household. It looked as if the same fate awaited Reshma as well.

When Reshma joined Shakti, it was the first time she was connected to a supportive network of peers. There, she began to engage in discussions on risks girls in her community face, like child marriage and hazardous work, and shared her own experiences of working at the dumping ground.

Reshma also learnt about laws and her right to a free education under the Right to Education Act. At group meetings, she saw that other girls could read and write, and realised that this exposed them to new ideas and allowed them to express their experiences in a way that she couldn't. She realised that being educated would enable her to have a better future. This motivated her to go to school, something her Shakti group encouraged her to do.

However, when Reshma spoke to her parents about her aspirations, she was discouraged. She returned to her Shakti group to strategize on another way to go back to school. She identified one of her sisters as a support person, and together, the girls went to school where Reshma got herself enrolled. She now attends classes regularly, and is crafting a safer life for herself.

Reshma's journey is an example and a source of motivation for other girls in her community.